

Leadership Styles

Board Management - Chapter 1
BEE Tutorials

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The President as the leader

The President is in charge of managing the Board. That means ensuring that everyone is aware of their responsibilities and feels fulfilled while working on them. It is also their task to ensure everyone feels heard and included and that everyone is cooperating efficiently.

Nevertheless, being the “leader” is a more complex concept than it seems to be as leadership is the hardest challenge any BEE Officer has to face during their term.

To start, let’s explore different types of leadership.



Types of Leaders

In general, we can find 10 categories:

- The Coach;
- The Visionary;
- The Servant;
- The Autocratic;
- Laissez-faire;
- The Democratic;
- The Pacesetter;
- The Transformational;
- The Transactional;
- The Bureaucratic.

Let's take them one by one

The Coach - “Consider this”

This type of leader aims at unlocking the potential of others. Their goal is for the people around them to develop, either by helping them set personal goals, provide feedback or motivating them.

This style is set upon the idea of supporting team members and offering guidance instead of commands.

Leaders who adopt this approach tend to be seen as coaches.

Advantages: promotes the development of new skills, free-thinking and fosters confidence.

Disadvantages: time-consuming and difficult to implement in a deadline-driven environment.

The Visionary - “Follow me”

This style is typical of confident leaders who map the way and set expectations, while inspiring people along the way.

In times of uncertainty, these leaders create the path. They take their time explaining their thinking without issuing orders and allowing for people to choose how to reach the common goals.

They are powerful in driving progress and to inspire trust in new ideas.

Advantages: good at making organisations grow, and to unite teams.

Disadvantages: lack of attention to detail, as the most important aspect for these leaders is the overall situation. They also tend to neglect day-to-day issues as, to them, the important is the future, potentially making their team feel unheard.

The Servant - “People come first”

This is the most personal approach. This type of leader firmly believes that if team members feel personally and professionally fulfilled, they are more effective. Because of their emphasis on team member satisfaction, they tend to be highly respected.

Their main goal is to encourage harmony and forming lasting bonds between everyone. This type of leadership is particularly useful in times of conflict between team members or during times of great stress.

Advantages: very good at boosting team loyalty and productivity, as well as inspiring personal growth, trust and creating future leaders.

Disadvantages: easily burnt-out as they see the needs of the team above their own. Difficulty in being authoritative when the need arises

Autocratic - “Do as I say”

Commonly believed that they are the most knowledgeable and capable person in the team. For that reason, they tend to make decisions with their own input or with a small group of trusted advisors, and with no need of their teams' feedback.

This type of leadership is also very focused on results and efficiency and expects that their decisions will be followed by their teams.

Advantages: promotes productivity through delegation and efficient in case there is a need to make crucial decisions on the spot, or when the team members are inexperienced and an urgent task demands a quick response.

Disadvantages: High levels of stress, as these leaders feel they are responsible for everything. Plus, the lack of flexibility and unwillingness to listen to the team makes these leaders resented by their teams

Laissez-faire - “Do as you say”

Extreme opposite of the autocratic style, as it is mostly focused on allowing team members to act as they prefer, with little to no feedback. As they do not focus as much time as other styles in managing their teams, they have more time to focus on other projects.

On the surface, this style creates the appearance of trust in the team. Nevertheless, taken to the extreme, this type of leader may appear lost, making it difficult for the team to understand what is expected of them

Advantages: promotes creativity and a relaxed team environment. Efficient if the team is composed of highly skilled and efficient team members.

Disadvantages: prone to create confusion in the team as to the tasks the members need to do. It is also prone to make team members feel that they are not properly supported

Democratic - “How do you see it?”

If autocratic and laissez-faire are the extremes, the democratic is the middle-ground. It focuses on the active participation of all team members, as to these leaders it is important to share all information that affects the team.

Furthermore, they listen to every member before making a final decision. This makes team members feel heard and that their input matters, creating good levels of team member engagement.

Advantages: creates empowerment and union within the team as well as increases the morale of the team.

Disadvantages: It may create difficulties for team members that find it hard to share their opinions in a group setting or if they feel their opinion is a minority. It may also be very time-intensive to organise long discussions about all topics.

Pacesetter - “Keep up”

Typical of very driven leaders, who set a high standard and push the team to work hard. It is also focused on high performance and on results.

It is a style focused on motivating and helping the team members in a fast-paced environment.

Advantages: focuses on motivating team members to achieve high goals and promotes high-energy environments.

Disadvantages: may lead to burnt-out team members if done for too long. It may also lead to miscommunication as information may get lost in fast-paced environments..

Transformational - “We can do it”

It is similar to the coach style, in as much as it focuses on clear communication, setting goals and motivating team members.

The main difference is that instead of focusing on the individual goals of the team members, this style focuses setting goals related to the organisation to make it better.

Advantages: it focuses on personal connections with the team, as well as the ethics of the organisation. It is also very team-oriented instead of purely goal-oriented.

Disadvantages: These leaders are focused on individuals, making collective wins sometimes go unnoticed.

Transactional - “This, for that”

It is very focused on performance and results, similarly to the pacesetter. The difference is that the motivation on high efficiency and achievements is based on set of incentives, like monetary rewards.

Advantages: promotes efficiency and great results.

Disadvantages: difficult to maintain when it comes to long-term goals. Also limits creativity and not fully implementable for team members who are not incentivized by monetary or other rewards.

Bureaucratic - “follow the rules”

This type of leader expects the team to strictly follow the rules and procedures defined beforehand, as well as the responsibilities attributed to each team member.

They do not put the emphasis on collaboration and creativity, as the priority is the procedures put in place

Advantages: extremely efficiency for highly regulated processes and responsibilities. Prone to separate work from relationships in order to avoid clouding the team’s ability to hit the goals.

Disadvantages: does not promote creativity, which may make some team members feel restricted. Also not recommended for an environment that needs to be dynamic.

**Which style should
you adopt?**

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Let's start by the ones you should not adopt

A President should be flexible and adapt their style in accordance with the team - collectively speaking and individually - as well as their own personality.

Nevertheless, in ELSA some styles should be avoided:

- Autocratic;
- Transactional;



Why not to be an autocratic leader?

Autocratic leadership should not have place in an ELSA Board. According to the common way our Boards are set, the President is a member on equal footing with all others, thus not having the authority to make decisions alone.

Authority does not come from a title (President) but from the trust the team puts into a person. For that reason, being elected the President does not justify taking decision alone instead of collectively as a team.



Why not to be an autocratic leader?

Furthermore, as Board members have different responsibilities from one another, it is only with time in ELSA that a President may understand the details of the other Areas. Even so, by being just a President, it will not be possible for that person to fully understand the daily tasks of their Board.

So, the President does not have more knowledge than other Board members. They have different knowledge and an overall understanding of the Association, but they lack in-depth information on how the other Areas function.



Why not to be a transactional leader?

Transactional leadership is generally not effective in ELSA. As a non-profit organisation, getting monetary compensation is not only difficult to achieve but also not the purpose of our Association.

In ELSA, we should foster work based on feeling fulfilled by what we do and how we support our communities. With that in mind, the President takes an important role, motivating their Board member in doing the projects they feel passionate about and not on the basis of compensation.



What about the other styles?

What makes Board Management so difficult? The need to understand different people and put oneself in the shoes of someone else. Unlike project managers, for example, Presidents need to engage with people, understand their feelings, motivations and making them feel fulfilled by the work they do not only individually, but collectively. The President is not only responsible for ensuring that each individual member of the Board is motivated but also that the Board is cohesive and united.

Because of that, sticking to one single style of leadership is not enough.

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The secret lies in flexibility

Each style of leadership aims at tackling an issue related to human behaviour. Some aim at uniting the team, others at achieving results and so on.

Thus, the way Presidents lead should be adapted to the circumstances they are leading in:

- Are you facing a moment of stress, where the Board does not know how to proceed? Maybe it is time to be a visionary or a democratic leader.
- Are some of your Board members exhausted and unmotivated? Maybe, they need a serving leader or even a coach.
- Is your Board not seeing results and starting to procrastinate? You can be the pacesetter or a transformational leader.

It all depends on the circumstances and the result you want to achieve.

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Listen to your Board

If that is the case, the obvious question is to know when to change and to what. For that, you need to understand:

- The people you work with:
 - What do they expect from you?
 - More than what they expect, what do they need from you?
 - How can you unite them?
- The challenges you face:
 - Is it work related or a conflict between people?
 - What can you do to help them?
- The example you give:
 - Are you more of a motivational speaker or a do-er?
 - Are you more goal-oriented or people-oriented?
 - Are you behaving the way you would like your Board to behave?



The people you work with

In a Board you have different people. So, it is important from the start of the term to understand them on a personal and professional level.

Firstly, understand what they expect from you, namely by asking:

- How do they see working with you?
- How do they expect you to help them?

Secondly, understand what they need. Sometimes people expect something but they need something else.

Let's imagine your S&Cer has been in that position for a year and is now repeating the term. You talk to them and they say they want regular feedback and assistance. Nevertheless, you know - from working with them in the past - they are experienced and mostly they are seeking reassurance that they are working well. Is what they expect the same as what they need?

Maybe not. Maybe more than giving them what they want, you could focus on giving them more confidence in themselves. An incremental laissez-faire or coaching approach could help them develop more as people and Officers.

Also, bear in mind that reaching these conclusions take time. Understanding other people is not an easy task so ensure that you do not make hasty conclusions without comprehending the people you work with. Do not assume your Board members need something if they haven't said so or if you do not have a deep enough understanding of who they are on a personal level.

The people you work with

That being the case on an individual level, you also need to understand how your Board members interact with each other, as it is important for them to enjoy working with you but also with each other.

It is normal for certain dynamics to appear within the Board. For certain smaller groups to be created and for people to get closer. It is also your job to understand these bonds and cherish them.

Board Management doesn't end when "office hours" end. The personal aspect is fundamental for the professional one to function and for the team to be united.

So, understand the small dynamics that are created within the Board and make use of them:

- Does your AAer seem tired? You ask him how you can help, but he says everything is fine? Let's imagine the SecGen is closer to your AAer than you are. Maybe the SecGen can play a role in helping your tired Boardie.
- Is your FMer always complaining that your Marketeer is always asking for more tools to design posts or to take pictures? Do you feel that they are getting on each others toes? Maybe you can get involved and try to reach a compromise between the two of them so that their issues are solved.

The challenges you face

The challenges that normally arise when managing a Board can be categorised into:

1. Work and productivity issues - lack of results, missing deadlines, etc.
2. Interpersonal issues - bad relationship with some Board member(s), difficulties in communication, etc.
3. Personal issues - burnout, apathy, etc.

Sometimes it may be difficult to fully fit one situation into one category as some issues lead to others (if your Board member is burned out, they can start having difficulties in presenting results or even lashing out at the rest of the Board).

Nevertheless, in their core, Presidents can identify the struggles of their Board members to one or more of these categories. After doing so, how to tackle them?

It very much depends on the situation and no golden rule can be found. This is a task that takes time to master, since you need to understand the people you work with, what influences them as well as the group dynamics that are created.

That is not to say that some guidelines cannot be given. Firstly, understand the person. Try to understand why they are reacting the way they are. Lack of results, bad relationship with Board members, burnout are symptoms of a problem and your first goal is to identify the source of the problem.

The challenges you face

Most of the time, these symptoms are caused by negative emotions that are being triggered. For example:

- Lack of results can be derived from lack of motivation on the work done or burnout due to excessive tasks;
- Bad relationship with Board members may be caused by a feeling of not being understood by the rest of the Board or not supported.

To solve the problem you need to identify what is causing the negative feelings and tackle it:

- Problems of motivation?
 - Inspire them. Show them they are doing a good job.
 - Or help them do better. No one is born knowing it all and having you and the Board ready to help is a good step forward.
- Problem of too much to do?
 - Divide tasks and help them. Give them the support they need to not feel overburdened.
 - Help them do a to-do list of priorities.
 - Or just let them rest for a while. No one can keep high intensity work forever.

The challenges you face

Are the negative emotions caused by interactions with the rest of the Board?

- With the Board in general? Does the person feel excluded or not represented?

Make an effort to take decisions that include that person's perspective. As a general rule, the decisions taken should be seen as a compromise between all perspectives to avoid feelings of exclusion;

Make the Board bond outside of ELSA. Do a roadtrip. Go out for dinner. Buy each other birthday presents. Make sure you unite as people and not just as a Board.

- With people in specific?

Understand the root of the problem. What concretely triggers the person to act in a negative way towards the other Board member. Then mediate the situation and help both parties adapt their behaviour;

If the problem is with you, then you are in no position to mediate. Try to understand what you do that triggers your board member and adapt.

If no results are achieved, it is advisable to involve someone else without escalating the situation. Maybe your Board member is closer to one of the others. Ask for their help. You may be the person responsible for Board Management, but the Board is a unit and the members should support themselves.

The challenges you face

Are the negative feelings caused by something personal, outside of ELSA?

If that is the case, don't be the President. Be their friend. Help them go through whatever may be affecting them. Listen and help them go through it.

Also, be human. Results are important, but ELSA is more than projects or achievements. It is its people and you are responsible for making them feel well. If a Board member is having personal problems, let them focus on those first while you take care of pending tasks.

These are general guidelines, but every situation is different. Try to first understand your Board members and then the group dynamics that are created.

From then on, its trial and error. Try to understand what affects them and respond in the way you think is best. If you do not achieve the result you expect, then adapt how many times it takes. Most importantly: listen to them! They will tell you everything you need to know, if you allow them.

Another very important rule is that people normally don't achieve results, miss deadlines or have problems with the Board because they want to or because they do not care about their work. No one wants to be a villain. There is most likely a cause for such behaviour and it is your job to find the best way to discover it and fix it.

The example you give

It is also important for you to bear in mind that you are also one of your Board members, so everything that was said before, also applies to you.

You will also have bad moments during your term, you will also miss results and sometimes have bad discussions with your Board members. All of that is normal, but it is important to fix it as early as possible.

In order for you to understand others you need to understand yourself, what affects you and how to fix it. It is also important for you to understand when you are personally affected by a problem and let someone else take your role in a specific case. This is not a sign of weakness, but of maturity.

Knowing yourself is not only important for you to “board manage” yourself, but also to understand which leadership styles you are better at.

Some are more inspirational than others and can motivate people better. Others are more do-ers and thrive on getting things done and supporting their Board members in their tasks.

It is important for you to understand what you are good at - so that you can use that to your Board’s benefit - but also to understand what you lack so that you can train it and not let your team down when they need you.

The example you give

Also, if the Board is happy with its President, then that person normally sets the tone of the Board.

This means that if you behave in a certain way, that will be seen as acceptable. If you focus on meeting your Board members outside of the ELSA environment, they will most likely do it as well between themselves.

Likewise, if you refuse to do certain things, those will often be seen as not acceptable. If you refuse to use your tie-breaking vote on an important decision, the Board will likely focus on reaching a compromise, as split decisions are not seen as good.

If this happens, that is a sign you are doing a good job. But it is also a responsibility for whatever you do will be reflected on the Board's behaviour and trust that is given can be easily taken back.

So pay attention to what you do. Give the example and treat your Board the same way you want them to treat you and themselves.

Did you make a mistake? Admit it. Did you lash out at a Board member because you were angry at something? Apologise. If you take the first step, they will take the next ones.

Chapter 1 done!

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