



Leadership Styles Exercise

Version 06_2024. Resources largely drawn from *The No-Doze Leadership Styles Class* in the [NOLS Leadership Educator Notebook](#), 2009, based on the work of Tom Carney, as interpreted by Molly Doran. As of 2024 the [NOLS Leadership Educator Notebook](#) is being revised. This exercise is adapted from the original (2009) published version and a 2022 revision provided to ADVANCEing Field Safety by NOLS.

This exercise explores different leadership styles, or the ways we as individuals lead, act, use and absorb information. This is different from the leadership roles (*designated leader, active followership, peer leadership, self-leadership*) that we also discussed as part of Module 2, though there are important connections between the two concepts. If you need a recap of the leadership roles, please refer back to Lesson 1 in Module 2.

Goals of this exercise

- Raise participants' self awareness of their default leadership style.
- Build awareness that all styles are valid and are needed as part of a functional group, but that individual styles have their strengths and weaknesses.
- Help develop an appreciation of other leadership styles.
- Learn to lead people with different needs.
- Understand other group members' default leadership styles, and how these mesh with one's own style.
- Become comfortable giving and receiving feedback.

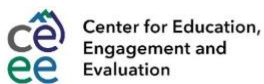
Required Materials

- This guide
- Enough space (ideally outdoor) where the group can comfortably move around with enough space between people.
- Something to delineate two axes of a 2x2 grid on the ground. A rope, lines drawn in the sand or snow, sticks... whatever suits you!

When to do this exercise

This exercise is best done when the group has worked together for a few days. The better people in the group know each other and have become comfortable being themselves, the better the outcome of the exercise. This is usually at least 3-4 days into a field campaign if people did not work together previously. This does not mean that the

This project is funded by the US National Science Foundation (NSF) Division of Research, Innovation, Synergies, and Education (RISE) within NSF's Directorate for Geosciences (GEO), award numbers 2307410, 2307411, 2307412, and 2307413.





exercise is not valuable in other contexts, since it also contains a large self-awareness component that is transferable to other contexts.

Note to the facilitator:

We recommend reading through this whole guide before guiding a group through the process. Familiarize yourself with the content and the goals of the different steps so that you can help the group explore the leadership styles.

Space

Find a good place where you have space to lay out four quadrants (see step-by-step instructions below). Make sure it's not too loud, so that everyone can hear you and participants can hear each other speak (not only the loud ones in the group), and try to find a space with environmental conditions that allow people to be comfortable, i.e. not too hot and not too cold. We really like doing this outdoors, but if the environmental conditions don't permit this, an indoor space is the better choice.

Step-by-step Instructions

Step 1:

Start by defining the first axis as a long continuum, and ask people to place themselves somewhere along the axis. Straddling the middle is not allowed.

Ask people to place themselves on the **left side** of the axis, if the following is true for them:

"I'm very flexible. It's not that I don't have a vision of what to do, it's just that hearing what other people think or want is really important to me so I ask about that before I jump in and start doing."

Ask people to place themselves on the **right side** axis, if the following is true for them:

"It's not that I don't care about what other people think, it's just that I have such a clear vision of what to do that I jump in and start. It is easy for others to know what I think, feel, and want."





Step 2:

Participants now place themselves anywhere on the continuum where they see themselves, moving to the extreme end of the spectrum if they strongly associate with the statements, and towards the middle to the degree that the ends don't describe themselves.

Note 1 to the facilitator:

Some participants might find it hard to react to such generalized statements. Use your own judgment to decide whether you want to provide a more specific scenario, such as "when I'm with my family," "when I'm with friends," "when I'm on field work".

Note 2 to the facilitator:

This continuum delineates **task versus process orientation**. Every position on the continuum is valid, it's simply different in how the goal is accomplished. The language used to describe the two ends is deliberately the inverse of the other, to keep connotations less judgemental.

Step 3:

Now ask the group this:

- *Is anyone surprised by the place where others have ended up?*

If the answer is yes, ask those who want to, one at a time, to step out of the line and move people to where they see them on the continuum. Then step back into their place in line and have someone else take a turn. They can provide an explanation if they want to, but it generally works best if people don't feel like they need to justify their action. Use silence or just a short explanation like "I am placing you here".

Note to the facilitator:

It may be helpful to name what is happening through this process. People being moved are receiving feedback about how they are perceived by others, so this is essentially a self awareness exercise in how participants are perceived by others. In the ideal world, those participating understand that feedback is neither truth nor something to be disregarded, but is a starting point for continued conversation and growth.

It might be useful to help the group realize this by asking some pointed questions ("What is happening when we move each other around?" "What can it help with?") or directly state the goal ("People being moved around are receiving feedback about how they are perceived by others").





Step 4:

Now ask the group this:

- *Under what circumstances do you change your position along the continuum?*

Step 5:

If there has been a movement of people, have them return to either their original spot, or a new one based on the feedback they received. Then ask more questions targeted to the two ends of the spectrum:

- What's good about what this style brings to group function?
- What's challenging about what this style brings to group function?

Bonus question (for mature groups willing to dig deeper):

- Name two things each of the other groups can do to better interact with your style.

Step 6:

In the next step, we will expand the continuum with a second axis. Ask participants to remain in place while you describe the second axis, and then move perpendicular to the first axis, either up or down, depending on the degree to which of the following statements holds true for them.

Ask people to move **up** if the following holds true for them:

"I am at this end if I make decisions from the neck up – all analytical, I like to have the data. I am methodical, and I don't get flustered easily. My emotions are not usually clear to those around me. If you want to know how I feel about something, you'll need to ask me explicitly."

Ask people to move **down** if the following holds true for them:

"I am at this end of the continuum if I make decisions using my gut or intuition. I wear my heart on my sleeve. I'm intuitive to the nuances of group dynamics and the emotions of others around me. If you want my input based on data, I will have to stop and think about that."





Note to the facilitator:

This continuum is a blend between both how people take in information as well as how they use information to make a decision - a subtle but important difference between the two.

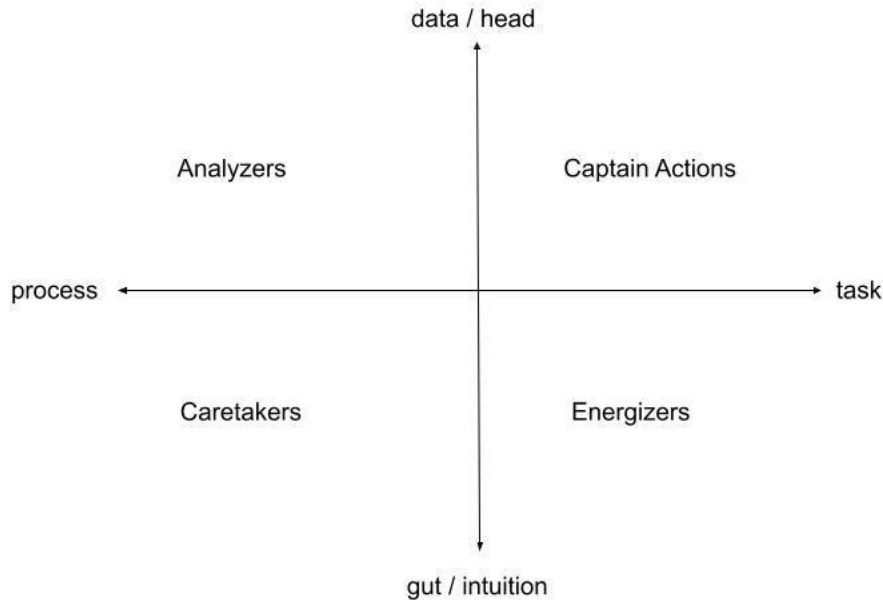
Step 7:

Now participants are standing in four different quadrants. Provide this short example to introduce the different sections:

You and your colleagues are in a new city. You arrived at your lodging just before dinner time, and gathered to decide where to go...

- Those in the **ANALYZERS** quadrant have pulled up Google, and have a list of several different restaurant options within walking or bus-riding distance pulled up and ready to share with the group.
- Those in the **ENERGIZERS** quadrant suggest, "Hey, why don't we just go this way and see what we find?"
- while those in the **CARETAKERS** quadrant say, "whatever works for the group works for me!"
- Finally, those in the **CAPTAIN ACTION** group announce that they've already made reservations at a nearby restaurant.





This pretty quickly does two things:

- 1) It gets everyone laughing about how true it is for them
- 2) Shows that every style works, they are just different

Note to the facilitator:

See the “Explanation of Leadership Styles” table at the end of this document for additional content on the strengths and challenges of the different styles. Describing the attributes of the quadrants as provided at the end of this guide often provide clarity and at times epiphanies to participants. Provide this information – in a non-judgemental way – as you see fit.

Step 8:

Now you can explore the different styles with the group. Going from one style to the next, explore them with the following questions. You can also have groups discuss in their quadrant and then report back:

- What’s good about what this style brings to group function?
- What’s challenging about what this style brings to group function?





ADVANCEing FieldSafety

Building Inclusive and Safe Field Teams

- *Is a particular leadership style easiest for members of any given group to follow, is one the hardest? In other words, what can others do to bridge the style gap.*

Ask participants to move to their "next most comfortable" quadrant and ask the following questions:

- *Identify a situation that would get you to change to this secondary quadrant. What circumstances would prompt this change? The people involved? Their role in the group? The general circumstances or the goal they are trying to achieve?*
- *What happens in a group if there is no-one representing a certain style?*
- *Does a group need all four styles?*

Step 9:
Additional exercise

If your group is highly engaged with this activity and want to further explore these concepts, consider the following deeper and more nuanced prompts for discussion:

- How do personal leadership styles mesh with conflict? After discussing the quadrants, and having participants move to their second most comfortable quadrants, ask them to move through 3rd and then 4th most comfortable. When they are in the last quadrant, ask them to think of someone in their life with whom they regularly clash. Now ask them to think about this person along the first continuum – where is that person? Now move that person along the second continuum.... Where do they end up? Frequently that person's predominant style is the 3rd or 4th least comfortable quadrant of the person taking part in the exercise. Once participants realize this, the knowledge becomes a way to start altering their own behaviors to better integrate with the other's style.
- As in the first part of the exercise, you can invite participants to move others around, based on how they perceive their colleagues.
- If you have time and resources (e.g., waiting for the weather to clear?), you can consider repeating this exercise partway through the field campaign. Have people changed their default style? Noticed a change in style by others, perhaps during a specific situation that presented a new



Center for Education,
Engagement and
Evaluation



fieldsafe.colorado.edu



dynamic (urgency, challenge, sensitive topic, etc)? Or has their perception of others changed along the way?

Concluding Remarks

Some closing remarks that can be provided to participants:

One goal of developing yourself as a leader is to be aware of your preferred (default) quadrants and your less comfortable ones. You must know your strengths to be able to work on your weaknesses. Understanding other people's styles can help resolve conflict, demystify communication misses, and clarify needs and behaviors. A key takeaway from this exercise is understanding the benefits and challenges that all the styles bring to the group, and that all styles are necessary for good group function.

Finally, we hope this activity has highlighted the need for **situational leadership**. The most effective team members and designated leaders will understand their own default style, but be adept at moving quadrants based on the needs of the team – whether that is because of a lack of a particular style within the group or because of a particular situation or challenge. Leading well always requires finding a style that fits you, fits the situation, and fits the group.

Closing the Activity

How you close this activity will be determined by your learning objectives and what you think will best serve your group. Here are a few examples of closing statements and questions:

Signature Style

- Each of us has our own signature style in leadership. Two of us can be in the same role, and use the same leadership skills, but approach it from a different style—and both be equally effective. Our style comes from our interests, life experience, personality, cultural norms, etc.
- This quadrant activity is just one glimpse into signature style.

Self-Awareness

- Knowing what quadrant you are operating from in any given situation might give you a glimpse into how a group is working together.





- Knowing what quadrant you tend to use, and understanding how to work from a mature and intentional version of that style, can give you guidance on how to lead more effectively in challenging situations while still feeling authentic to your own style.

Group-Awareness

- Using the language from this activity can provide a low-intensity, less personal way to talk about interpersonal or group dynamics.
- How might we use the language from this activity during our fieldwork to give each other feedback?
- Mature or well-developed teams may want to use this activity to bring group performance to the next level. Do we have goals for how we want to work as a group based on these styles?

Background Information on the Different Leadership Styles

Description of strengths, challenges, and function of each quadrant. It can be clarifying and contextualizing to read these descriptions towards the end of the activity, after each person has placed themselves in a quadrant.

<p>ANALYZERS <i>Emphasize meaning and conceptual functions</i></p> <p>Contributions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information and opinion seekers • good at analysis and process observation • prefer to make decisions based on facts • seek as much information as possible before deciding • can come out with totally off-the-wall solutions that work • translate feelings and experiences into ideas <p>Tendencies to be Aware Of / Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be slow in making decisions or dogged in their view of what is factual • can be overly focused on only one decision, deferring all other decisions • have to watch out for non-involvement or unrealistic ideas if they get embedded in their own perspective as the sole viewpoint 	<p>CAPTAIN ACTIONS <i>Emphasize action and directing</i></p> <p>Contributions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information and opinion givers • quick decision making • often are keepers of the vision in a group • great at taking a stand, being direct and making things happen • usually not too shaken by critical feedback <p>Tendencies to be Aware Of / Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often will push others to make a quick decision • will sometimes decide without input from others • may make mistakes when moving too quickly without adequate information • directness can come across as impersonal • have to be careful not to dominate other voices
--	---





<p>If a leader has this style, honor their need for information while also requesting they tell you how they will decide or delegate, and when.</p> <p>Some Effects on the Group Analyzers offer significant learning that comes from observation and analysis. The group may miss out on important process steps or alternative perspectives on a situation. Too much of this style in a group may stall movement because the discussion, laissez-faire attitude and analysis allow opportunities to pass.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● need to ensure they maintain connection with group <p>If a leader has this style, be as direct as possible when dealing with them. Bring problems and opinions to them: they expect this.</p> <p>Some Effects on the Group Captain Actions can help groups move forward with decision-making and task accomplishment. The group may risk “stalling out” without doers. Too much of this style in a group may alienate some group members or leave them feeling stripped of their agency and voice.</p>
<p>CARETAKERS <i>Emphasize caring and group functioning</i></p> <p>Contributions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● excellent at building and sustaining community ● work well on a team ● great at building rapport, consensus, commitment and seeking feedback ● support, praise, and feel concern ● display high regard for others’ wishes, viewpoints and actions <p>Tendencies to be Aware Of / Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● may not take an unpopular stance if it puts a relationship at risk ● can put so much emphasis on relationship that tasks and decision-making fall behind ● can forget or downplay their own needs, to their detriment <p>If a leader has this style, you may need to ask them to be more specific in outlining their expectations. Encourage them to provide feedback and identify their individual needs.</p> <p>Some Effects on the Group Caretakers hold a strong ethic of care for the group. They may avoid conflict to such an extent that there</p>	<p>ENERGIZERS <i>Emphasize emotional stimulation and motivation</i></p> <p>Contributions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● emotive ● often passionately voice their ideas ● great at motivating people as they possess a sense of mission or vision ● good at energetic dialogues with other group members <p>Tendencies to be Aware Of / Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● can be emotionally bound to their ideas; objectivity can be their biggest challenge ● can create a highly emotionally charged climate if they put too much emphasis on challenging others and confronting assumptions <p>If a leader has this style, you may need to ensure that you are being heard and understood. Encourage them to give concrete examples to back up their perspective and to consider others’ perspectives alongside their own.</p> <p>Some Effects on the Group Energizers are often the “spark plug” of the group. Their emotions and enthusiasm may</p>





ADVANCEing FieldSafety

Building Inclusive and Safe Field Teams

is lack of depth in genuine connection and innovation. Too much of this style in a group may slow down decision-making and task accomplishments.

drown out or “silence” other’s voices and perspectives. Too much of this style in a group can lead to overly reactive interactions and impassioned-driven decision-making.

Source: Gookin, J. and Leach, S., PhD, eds., (2009). NOLS Leadership Educator Notebook. Available at: <https://store.nols.edu/products/leadership-educator-notebook>.

As of 2024 the next edition of the NOLS Leadership Educator Notebook is underway. The “Explanation of Leadership Styles” table provided here is a revised version of the original table, edited in 2022, by Molly Doran, Elena Chin, Mary Breunig, Liz Tuohy, and Zach Taylor.



Center for Education,
Engagement and
Evaluation



fieldsafe.colorado.edu