In 1939, a group of researchers led by psychologist [Kurt Lewin](http://psychology.about.com/od/profilesofmajorthinkers/p/bio_lewin.htm)set out to identify different styles of leadership. While further research has identified more specific types of leadership, this early study was very influential and established three major leadership styles. In the study, schoolchildren were assigned to one of three groups with an authoritarian, democratic or laissez-fair leader. The children were then led in an arts and crafts project while researchers observed the behavior of children in response to the different styles of leadership.

[**Authoritarian Leadership (Autocratic)**](http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership/f/autocratic-leadership.htm)

Authoritarian leaders, also known as [autocratic leaders](http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership/f/autocratic-leadership.htm), provide clear expectations for what needs to be done, when it should be done, and how it should be done. There is also a clear division between the leader and the followers. Authoritarian leaders make decisions independently with little or no input from the rest of the group.

Researchers found that decision-making was less creative under authoritarian leadership. Lewin also found that it is more difficult to move from an authoritarian style to a democratic style than vice versa. Abuse of this style is usually viewed as controlling, bossy, and dictatorial.

[**Participative Leadership (Democratic)**](http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership/f/democratic-leadership.htm)

Lewin’s study found that participative leadership, also known as [democratic leadership](http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership/f/democratic-leadership.htm), is generally the most effective leadership style. Democratic leaders offer guidance to group members, but they also participate in the group and allow input from other group members. In Lewin’s study, children in this group were less productive than the members of the authoritarian group, but their contributions were of a much higher quality.

Participative leaders encourage group members to participate, but retain the final say over the decision-making process. Group members feel engaged in the process and are more motivated and creative.

[**Delegative (Laissez-Faire) Leadership**](http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership/f/laissez-faire-leadership.htm)

Researchers found that children under delegative leadership, also known as [laissez-fair leadership](http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership/f/laissez-faire-leadership.htm), were the least productive of all three groups. The children in this group also made more demands on the leader, showed little cooperation and were unable to work independently.

Delegative leaders offer little or no guidance to group members and leave decision-making up to group members. While this style can be effective in situations where group members are highly qualified in an area of expertise, it often leads to poorly defined roles and a lack of motivation.