



Developing your leadership style (BG005)

Introduction

Welcome to this short course, which will help you think about different approaches to leadership, and to apply them to your working context. The course will take you on a journey in which you will encounter some of key ideas about leadership. It will help you to think about how those ideas are relevant to your context, and specifically to your own leadership role.

The overall purpose of the course then is,

- To introduce you to different theories of leadership, and to provide opportunities for you to explore how these theories are relevant to your leadership practice in your own context.

While it is undoubtedly useful to understand the range of theories about leadership, you will get the most from this course by taking time to apply the different ideas you encounter in the material. To help you do this, there is a series of short activities for you to complete as you read. The course should take you around 25 hours to complete. We suggest you spend around six hours on each of units 1, 2 and 3, four hours on unit 4, and three hours on the work-based activity. This final activity is an optional element of the course, which you can complete and return to the OU for assessment. (See 'Where do I start?' below for further details.)

When you have completed this course, you should be able to:

- Define leadership in different ways
- Understand different theoretical approaches to leadership
- Evaluate their relevance and apply them to your own context
- Identify areas of further personal development to enhance your leadership practice
- Plan the next stages of your own leadership development, drawing on the theories you encounter in the course.

Course content

The course consists of 4 units.

Unit 1 focuses on defining leadership. You will have an opportunity to explore your own thinking on what leadership is, and what makes it effective (or not). You will be introduced to different definitions of leadership, and asked to reflect on your own leadership, in order to explore how these definitions challenge your understanding, and your own leadership practice. You will also explore how leadership differs from management.

Unit 2 introduces you to a number of different theories about leadership, which have impacted on leadership practice in organisations over a number of decades. These are trait theory, style theory, and contingency theory. These theories focus on the individual leader, but also (in contingency theory) begin to suggest that a leader's practice may need to change in response to circumstances. You will explore the relevance of these theories to your own practice.

Unit 3 begins with a question - do 21st century organisations and society require a different kind of leadership? You will be introduced here to theories of distributed and shared leadership, which seek to address an environment in which organisations are characterised less by hierarchy and authority, and increasingly by flatter structures and complex matrix arrangements. You will also think about leadership in terms of leadership processes, rather than the attributes of individuals. Specifically, you will focus on leadership as a process of influencing other people. You will explore the relevance of these theories to your practice in your current organisational context.

In **Unit 4**, you will encounter the theory of adaptive leadership which focuses on how individuals lead without or beyond authority to address complex problems. The final section of the unit directs you away from the continuing search for a single definition of leadership, and instead focuses on ways of thinking about the practice of leadership, whilst continuing to explore how you might apply this thinking to your own leadership role.

Relating your study to your context

The overall aim of the course is to help you to be more effective. To get the best out of the course, you should constantly relate what you are studying here to your practice. Your own context, the organisations you work for or are involved in within your community, and the people around you form a rich learning environment. You can learn by comparing the ideas from the course with what is happening in practice. While the actions of others are useful for learning, the most important area for reflection and learning is your own practice! Please complete all the activities – they are a further means of development for you.

Where do I start?

To get the most from your studies we recommend you follow the signposted route through the course.

The individual units are listed on the homepage. Each unit begins with the learning outcomes and is further divided into subsections that you can study as self-contained pieces of learning.

When you finish a period of study and want to close down your computer, you might like to bookmark the page you finish on so that you can return to it easily next time. Simply add the URL for that page to your favourites.

You will be asked to complete a series of activities as you work through the course. These activities will help you to prepare the work based activity at the end of the course. The work-based activity offers the opportunity to practise using the tools in your own management situation and also enables you to identify and plan how you might meet any further development areas you identify for yourself. At the end of the course, you can submit the work-based activity for assessment. A learning adviser will support you with any of these tasks and will also give you constructive feedback on your work based activity at the end of the course.

The successful completion of the work-based activity will entitle you to the Open University Certificate of Course Completion.

How much time do I need?

We recommend 25 hours to study this course, but it has been carefully designed so you can choose your own pace of learning. You have the flexibility to study at the times that suit you: you could complete the course in an intensive time frame or in short sessions over a couple of months. You will get more out of this course if you undertake all the activities relating the concepts into your own context, but we also recognise the time constraints you are under.

A key feature of the online course resource is that you can print pages out – either to study offline or to annotate the materials as you study. This can help you plan your study around your work and home life, enabling you to make the most of opportunities like train journeys.

Learning support

Expert advice is available to help you with any problems you may experience in understanding the course material, accessing the available resources or completing the work-based activity. This is delivered by our learning advisers.

Contact a learning adviser

You can contact a learning adviser at any time by sending a message to My Adviser and you can expect a reply within 24 hours. Any contact you make is seen only by a learning adviser, whose reply is confidential to you.

Send an initial message to the learning adviser now to let them know you have started the course, using the following title for your message: “Introducing (your name)” with just a short paragraph explaining a little about the sort of job you do, type of industry, role, experience in management, etc. This pen picture will help the learning adviser to set your work-based activity in context when you send it in.

Sharing your experiences with other people studying the course

My Forum enables you and other learners to exchange ideas about the course and to set up self-help networks if you wish. Professionals from different contexts can share their experience and expertise, and compare skills, learning and development.

Learners on this course can choose to start and finish at any time. Therefore the number of learners engaged with the course will vary at any one time so please bear this in mind when you send a message to the forum.

The OpenLibrary

The OpenLibrary website provides online access to a wide a range of information sources to support your studies, including full text journal articles, electronic books, reference resources, images, course-related websites and much more.

Help with computing

The OU Computing Helpdesk can help you with any technical queries you may have. It cannot assist you with course-related study or queries relating to your internet connection.

The OU Computing Guide contains useful information on using a computer for study, some of which you may find useful.

It may be helpful to make a note of the contact information – just in case you cannot access this page to find the link!

StudentHome

Your StudentHome page provides access to several features and links to help you in your study of this course. It provides access to this course website, your study record and the electronic submission system used for your work-based activity (eTMA). There are many other study resources available – go explore!

