What is Leadership?

"Leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right."
– Professor Warren G. Bennis

"Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it."
– Dwight D. Eisenhower

The word "leadership" can bring to mind a variety of images. For example:

- An army officer, leading an assault on an enemy position.
- An explorer, cutting a path through the jungle for the rest of his party to follow.
- An executive, developing her company’s strategy to beat the competition.

Leaders help themselves and others to do the right things. They set direction, build an inspiring vision, and create something new. Leadership is about mapping out where you need to go to "win" as a team or an organization; and it is dynamic, exciting, and inspiring.

Yet, while leaders set the direction, they must also use management skills to guide their people to the right destination, in a smooth and efficient way.

In this article, we'll focus on the process of leadership. In particular, we'll discuss the "transformational leadership" model, first proposed by James MacGregor Burns and then developed by Bernard Bass. This model highlights visionary thinking and bringing about change, instead of management processes that are designed to maintain and steadily improve current performance.

Leadership: A Definition

According to the idea of transformational leadership, an effective leader is a person who does the following:

1. Creates an inspiring vision of the future.
2. Motivates and inspires people to engage with that vision.
3. Manages delivery of the vision.
4. Coaches and builds a team, so that it is more effective at achieving the vision.

Leadership brings together the skills needed to do these things. We’ll look at each element in more detail.

1. Creating an Inspiring Vision of the Future

In business, a vision is a realistic, convincing and attractive depiction of where you want to be in the future. Vision provides direction, sets priorities, and provides a marker, so that you can tell that you’ve achieved what you wanted to achieve.

To create a vision, leaders focus on an organization’s strengths by using tools such as Porter’s Five Forces, PEST Analysis, USP Analysis, Core Competence Analysis, and SWOT Analysis to analyze their current situation. They think about how their industry is likely to evolve, and how their competitors are likely to behave. They look at how they can innovate successfully, and shape their businesses and their strategies to succeed in future marketplaces. And they test their visions with appropriate market research, and by assessing key risks using techniques such as Scenario Analysis.

Therefore, leadership is proactive - problem solving, looking ahead, and not being satisfied with things as they are.

Once they have developed their visions, leaders must make them compelling and convincing. A compelling vision is one that people see, feel, understand, and embrace. Effective leaders provide a rich picture of what the future will look like when their visions have been realized. They tell inspiring stories, and explain their visions in ways that everyone can relate to.
Here, leadership combines the analytical side of vision creation with the passion of shared values, creating something really meaningful to the people being led.

2. Motivating and Inspiring People

A compelling vision provides the foundation for leadership. But it’s leaders’ ability to motivate and inspire people that helps them deliver that vision.

For example, when you start a new project, you will probably have lots of enthusiasm for it, so it’s often easy to win support for the project at the beginning. However, it can be difficult to find ways to keep your vision inspiring after the initial enthusiasm fades, especially if the team or organization needs to make significant changes in the way that they do things. Leaders recognize this, and they work hard throughout the project to connect their vision with people’s individual needs, goals, and aspirations.

One of the key ways they do this is through Expectancy Theory. Effective leaders link together two different expectations:

1. The expectation that hard work leads to good results.
2. The expectation that good results lead to attractive rewards or incentives.

This motivates people to work hard to achieve success, because they expect to enjoy rewards – both intrinsic and extrinsic – as a result.

Other approaches include restating the vision in terms of the benefits it will bring to the team’s customers, and taking frequent opportunities to communicate the vision in an attractive and engaging way.

What’s particularly helpful here is where leaders have expert power. People admire and believe in these leaders because they are expert in what they do. They have credibility, and they’ve earned the right to ask people to listen to them and follow them. This makes it much easier for these leaders to motivate and inspire the people they lead.

Leaders can also motivate and influence people through their natural charisma and appeal, and through other sources of power, such as the power to pay bonuses or assign tasks to people. However, good leaders...
don’t rely too much on these types of power to motivate and inspire others.

3. Managing Delivery of the Vision

This is the area of leadership that relates to management. According to the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Model, there is a time to tell, a time to sell, a time to participate, and a time to delegate. Knowing which approach you need to use, and when you need it, is key to effective leadership.

Leaders must ensure that the work needed to deliver the vision is properly managed – either by themselves, or by a dedicated manager or team of managers to whom the leader delegates this responsibility – and they need to ensure that their vision is delivered successfully.

To do this, team members need performance goals that are linked to the team’s overall vision. Our article on Performance Management and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) explains one way of doing this, and our Project Management section explains another. And, for day-to-day management of delivering the vision, the Management By Wandering Around (MBWA) approach helps to ensure that what should happen, really happens.

Leaders also need to make sure they manage change effectively. This helps to ensure that the changes needed to deliver the vision are implemented smoothly and thoroughly, with the support and backing of the people affected.

4. Coaching and Building a Team to Achieve the Vision

Individual and team development are important activities carried out by transformational leaders. To develop a team, leaders must first understand team dynamics. Several well-established and popular models describe this, such as Belbin’s Team Roles approach, and Bruce Tuckman’s
Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing theory [19].

A leader will then ensure that team members have the necessary skills and abilities to do their job and achieve the vision. They do this by giving and receiving feedback [20] regularly, and by training and coaching [21] people to improve individual and team performance.

Leadership also includes looking for leadership potential [22] in others. By developing leadership skills within your team, you create an environment where you can continue success in the long term. And that’s a true measure of great leadership.

Note:
The words "leader" and "leadership" are often used incorrectly to describe people who are actually managing. These individuals may be highly skilled, good at their jobs, and valuable to their organizations – but that just makes them excellent managers, not leaders.

So, be careful how you use the terms, and don’t assume that people with "leader" in their job titles, people who describe themselves as "leaders," or even groups called "leadership teams," are actually creating and delivering transformational change.

A particular danger in these situations is that people or organizations that are being managed by such an individual or group think they’re being led; but they’re not. There may actually be no leadership at all, with no one setting a vision and no one being inspired. This can cause serious problems in the long term.
Key Points

Leadership can be hard to define and it means different things to different people.

In the transformational leadership model, leaders set direction and help themselves and others to do the right thing to move forward. To do this they create an inspiring vision, and then motivate and inspire others to reach that vision. They also manage delivery of the vision, either directly or indirectly, and build and coach their teams to make them ever stronger.

Effective leadership is about all of this – and it’s exciting to be part of this journey!

Did you find this article helpful?

Where to go from here:

View print friendly version [23]

Ask questions, or share your experience [24]

What members say...

Yolande wrote

Hi Tort

Welcome to the MindTools Club and to the forums as well - it's great to 'hear' your voice so soon!

Thanks for sharing your thoughts on leadership and management with us.
think your definitions of both management and leadership are spot on. I loved what you said about leadership: *If you are a one trick pony, authentic leadership will not be sustainable and acknowledging where your strengths lie and recognizing the strengths of your team allows you to be a leader and a follower.* It is indeed so that a ‘one trick pony’ will not be able to sustain authentic leadership since leadership implies flexibility and being able to act according to the here and now.

I hope you will share more of your insights with us; do have a look at the other forums too such as Career Cafe Central. The forums are where we all help and learn from one another (and sometimes we can just let off steam there too!).

Tort, if you need any help around the forums please let me know - I’d be only too glad to help where I can.

Kind regards
Yolandé

January 12, 2013

**Tort wrote**

The ability to balance leadership and management is a skill to be admired. Would it be wrong to say that management is 'managing' or the effective use of resources - physical, financial, human resources and time? Leadership is the relationship used to influence people to achieve something. That relationship may be context or circumstance based - Military style command and control or emergency services (police, fire) in a life or death situation to inspiring, coaching, mentoring and influencing in a more relaxed setting such as non-profit, political, social, community or sports.

The position of your leadership style depends on how you need to apply it. Standing out in front directing (police) or inspiring Walking alongside or standing on the sidelines (coach) Or standing back and encouraging (cheerleader) Great leaders adapt to their situation to be able to apply the most relevant style to the situation and sometimes that is following too.

If you are a one trick pony, authentic leadership will not be sustainable and acknowledging where your strengths lie and recognizing the strengths of your team allows you to be a leader and a follower.
January 11, 2013

**Yolande wrote**

Hi Abishek

Welcome to the Club and also to the forums - it's great 'hearing' your voice over here. Yes, I agree with you - it is indeed a combination of the things mentioned in the article that makes a great leader. I am interested to hear your opinion: which of these things do you think is the most important for a leader to do, or do you see them all as equal?

Kind regards
Yolandé

May 1, 2012

**abhik_shar wrote**

Yes,
For good leadership skills, one need good chemistry between above mentioned concepts.

Abhishek Sharma

April 28, 2012

**James wrote**

Hi everyone

This is to let you know that we've published a video for this topic.

Click here to watch the video:
http://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/main/videos.php#leadership

James

July 14, 2011

**James wrote**
Hi Tarek

Someone who’s an inspiring leader but a poor manager can leave a team or organization in chaos. Someone who’s a poor leader but a good manager can create an efficiently functioning machine that’s completely overtaken by events.

Leadership and management are different but overlapping skill sets, and we either need to develop both sets of skills if we’re going to be truly effective in the workplace; or we need to work with others who provide skills that we lack.

James

June 7, 2010

stasiaandtarek wrote

thank you Dianna

June 6, 2010

Dianna wrote

Hi Tarek - interesting way to look the role of manager and leader. From a practical standpoint I think it’s very difficult to separate the two concepts. They are so interrelated and I agree that the best teams will emerge when the person who leads them is a great manager as well as leader. That’s why I think it’s so important that people work on their leadership skills regardless of the position they are in. Then when a management position opens up, you have many of the skills already covered. Try to be inspirational and lead by example in all things you do. That way when the official management responsibilities fall to you, you will be ready to lead your team to great results.

Dianna

June 6, 2010

stasiaandtarek wrote

HELLO

I just want an answer and help about what me i could do thru this article
and if it is right my point of view, for me to get more understanding, and also because cause i am a little manager

\[(\text{NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE}) \text{ Manager} + (\text{NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE}) \text{ Leader} = ??\]

Team

so what i me trust is :

\[\text{[b]} (\text{NEGATIVE}) \text{ Manager} + (\text{POSITIVE}) \text{ Leader} = (0 =<) \text{ Team} (\text{NEGATIVE}) \text{ more than (POSITIVE)}\]

\[(\text{POSITIVE}) \text{ Manager} + (\text{NEGATIVE}) \text{ Leader} = (0 =>) \text{ Team} (\text{NEGATIVE})\]

\[(\text{NEGATIVE}) \text{ Manager} + (\text{NEGATIVE}) \text{ Leader} = (0) \text{ Team} (\text{NEGATIVE})\]

\[(\text{POSITIVE}) \text{ Manager} + (\text{POSITIVE}) \text{ Leader} = (0 <=) \text{ Team} (\text{POSITIVE})\]

so does it should be understood in this way?

Regards
Tarek

June 5, 2010

What is Leadership?