



people & performance

Say goodbye to “the good leader”

What you do is who you are – effective leadership in context

Good leadership is effective leadership

Poor leadership.

When trying to find a reason to challenges in a workplace, poor leadership is often the conclusion. Whether it is an unsatisfactory bottom line, high employee turnover, low job satisfaction or poor performance in general, all evidence usually seems to point to management, and more often than not, there is actually something in it. Management defines and delegates tasks, and it is management's responsibility to set a clear direction and create a sense of meaning – and to ensure that the company's objectives are met.

But what do you do about it? Action requires knowledge, and if it is not clear what “poor” actually means, then it is difficult to define what “good” leadership is.

That is why we, at People & Performance, work with the effective and contextual leadership concepts. To put it bluntly, there is no such thing as a good leader – good leadership will always be in the eye of the beholder, and you cannot boil down good leadership to a set of general competences.

Leadership is behaviour. And a good leader is an effective leader who delivers in his or her specific context. In this e-book we will delve into four categories of behaviour that characterise the effective leader.

Enjoy reading – and the best of luck with your effective leadership.

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Leadership is what you do

It makes sense to dwell on the leadership concept, because leadership is vital in any organisation – both for creating results and for the people who work there. Leadership is often defined as one or several competences, but in our opinion, leadership should rather be defined as ways of acting – as behaviour. A good leader cannot just “be” – he must “behave” in the context of his organisation. In this way he becomes effective and is better equipped to contribute to the bottom line and also to job satisfaction among

his employees. On the next pages, we will look into the different behaviour categories which an effective leader must be capable of putting into play.

We have chosen to work with the behaviour categories of **leading**, **managing**, **structuring** and **changing**. We are currently conducting a research cooperation with Henley Business School concentrating specifically on these categories.



Leading

Inspire and engage

The classic image of a good and strong leader is of a man stepping up onto a desk in an open office, giving an incendiary speech, inspiring all his employees to go back to their desks and make the extra effort required to pull the entire company out of the backwater.

In reality, an effective leader does not necessarily have to act like in the movies, but the ability to inspire and engage employees is a very central element in being a leader. And being able to convince others to move in a certain direction and behave in certain ways is essential for a leader to be able to drive an organisation and create results.

A core task for a leader is typically to behave in a way that develops and challenges the employees, making them see new perspectives. With his behaviour, the leader must create and/or nourish the foundation for an empowerment culture in which employees take

ownership and become active players in driving and developing the business.

An effective leader knows how to behave in a way that matches the culture and the context of the company. The leader must thus be capable of curbing – or completely suppressing – habits or behaviour characteristic of his personality when acting as a leader. And certainly also vice versa: Maybe the leader is not a natural inspirer or motivator, but then he will have to work on becoming one.

It may require training, but in most cases, behaving in spite of your preferences is a precondition for being able to deliver the promised results.

Managing

Plan and execute

One thing is to inspire and engage your employees – another is to ensure that the business is thriving and the tasks are being executed. An effective leader can (and should) chart the course and ensure that his employees stick to it. That requires him being able to differentiate between when to work at management level and when to work at the operational level.

Managing may for example comprise prioritising tasks, planning, setting and following up on key performance indicators and reacting to deviations from the set

goals. In other words, managing is handling tasks that involve steering the business in the right direction, and an effective leader knows how to do that.

Some find managing tasks boring, because their executing and manual nature does not represent “leadership” in the traditional sense of the word. But if the leader does not know how to bridge leading and managing, his visions and plans may never be translated into real actions.

Structuring

Structure and organise

When working with leadership styles, structuring is rarely taken into account. However, in our experience, structuring is a deciding factor in whether or not companies reach their goals.

Organisations need to have well-functioning, well-thought through and adjusted structures. They provide the employees with a well-defined framework for their work, and allow processes to be organised in a way that prevents waste of time and resources.

Structuring tasks may be concerned with making the current reality work and they may be concerned with creating the framework of a new reality. Structuring

tasks may for example comprise documenting and formalising various organisational procedures or guidelines (for example developing standard operating procedures or preparing staff manuals), workforce planning, organisational planning, preparation of job descriptions and the like.

Not all leaders are required to go down into the engine room and get their hands dirty. That depends on the size of the company, the individual leader's area of responsibility and a lot of other factors. But the leader must know where the engine room is, and he must also be aware of the urgency of the tasks being executed.

Changing

Handle – and create – changes

Are changes great or gruesome? What they are is real, and in our experience – which is supported by research – changes in companies and the leaders' ability to navigate them have only increased since the financial crisis. And there is no indication that it will change.

Changes may be brought about by internal as well as external factors, and an effective leader knows how to handle or initiate both types of changes. Regardless of the type of change that either comes from outside or inside the company, an effective leader must be capable of realising the leadership task at hand and act constructively.

Change in an organisation will always bring learning to the people in it. The better an organisation's employees

are at learning, the more effectively an organisation can change. And it is the leader's responsibility to create the possibility for each employee to learn. In short, the central point is for the leader to be able to go from change leadership to change learning.

In 1990, the American Peter Senge defined the concept of the learning organisation as an organisation which encourages and makes room for everyone in the organisation to continually enhance their ability to create results – together. That is a principle that you can hardly disagree with, but the learning organisation makes demands on leaders to be able to take in change and learn to change themselves.

Prepare to develop

The four behaviour categories; leading, managing, structuring and changing, constitute the framework within which the individual leader must find and fill his role. If a leader has the ability to apply a little from each category in the right doses, he will be very capable of doing an effective job.

However, it is essential that you as a leader do not just define your leadership behaviour and style and stick to it. As mentioned in the Changing section, the only constant is that things will change and as a leader you must be prepared to change with them.

We may look at the leadership discipline as a piano. Sometimes you need only the white keys – sometimes you need to also incorporate the black ones. The context defines the melody you need to play, and you must be willing to and capable of applying the entire scale.

Times have definitely changed, and using the “seven steps to becoming a better leader” approach is no longer an option, because your behaviour needs to be adapted to a specific situation in a specific company and that is irrespective of whether you are a leader in a global corporation or in a company with 15 employees.

Leadership is not about being either empathetic, strong or structured, it is about behaving in that way. There are numerous examples of leaders who consider themselves to be – and they may even have papers to prove it – skilled communicators, but who are not

perceived in that way. In other words, having a skill is not valuable if those you communicate with see you differently.

Accept, learn, train, act

Looking into an organisation which is not performing optimally, you will almost always find ineffective leadership. Ineffective leadership may manifest itself in high employee turnover, high absence or low performance, and the challenge will typically be a result of the leadership behaviour not matching the specific context.

All transformations start with acknowledging that something has to change. The individual leader or the organisation in general must accept that there is a need for change. Only then can the leaders start learning, training and finally acting.

In this way, the individual leader and later the entire management layer can change the factors that hamper the company’s development and performance, and when the leaders learn to recognise the mechanisms at play, they can start navigating the matrix of leadership behaviours that we have described in this e-book. An effective leader can – or can learn – to find the right balance between the four behaviour categories, thereby adjusting his leadership behaviour to a specific context.

To benefit himself, his employees, his colleagues and ultimately the bottom line.

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Leadership requires training

At People & Performance we often work with groups of leaders who are defining their company's "Why", and the strategy work itself is going really well.

But when the leaders – and this is everyone from middle managers to top executives – need to take the stage and explain the strategy, many of them fail to deliver if they haven't trained it well.

In these cases, the challenge is not defining a strategy, it is being able to communicate it. These leaders need to train and bring their communication skills to a level where they are able to communicate a message to the organisation which needs to implement the principles to benefit the business.



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Leading Business Change

People & Performance work with sales training, leadership development, strategy and business development and business analysis.

We are known for creating changes and making them stick. We create results in close and equal cooperation with our clients and we uphold our mission: "We help local and global companies maximise their business performance by mobilising their people."

People & Performance has offices in Aarhus and Copenhagen in Denmark.

Interested in finding out how we can make a difference for your leaders and ultimately the entire organisation?

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