

Behavior Matters

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What Is Leadership Anyway?

Despite decades of research and a constant search for ways to capture and nurture the essences of leadership, consistent, proven approaches to leadership development have proven elusive. The primary reason for varying perspectives and methods is that most definitions and development practices focus on selected aspects of the phenomenon. All too often, popular literature and organizations latch onto the latest “reductionistic” fad, hoping to create better leaders faster. Why doesn’t this work? In part, problems stem from the fact that leadership in organizations is the result of complex system interactions, including:

- “Leader” characteristics
- “Follower” characteristics
- Environmental factors, and
- Situational demands evolving over time

What Really Makes Leaders Successful?

While you can feel and see excellent leadership when it occurs, capturing a consistent set of characteristics is actually quite difficult. However, both formal research studies and the popular literature have defined attributes common to successful leaders at all levels within organizations (see Figure 1).

- Energizes others around a common purpose or vision
- Models key values and desired behaviors
- Focuses the team on the right things to do
- Involves and enlists others to participate
- Builds and mobilizes a network of followers
- Drives critical tasks to completion
- Generates intense personal loyalty and attachments from others
- Challenges the status quo and encourages change
- Encourages, reinforces, and influences others to contribute to key goals

Figure 1. Common Leadership Success Factors

So, why doesn’t identifying or even developing individuals to exhibit these characteristics produce consistently excellent leaders? These attributes represent the “necessary, but not sufficient” properties of excellent leaders. In other words, if a significant number of these elements are lacking, an individual probably cannot succeed in many settings. However, even people very capable of performing all these actions may not succeed. So, what are the missing elements?

Situational Demands Drive Leadership Requirements

Situational demands require leaders to align and realign their behavior to changing context.

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Three of the most critical environmental demands are related to:

- Level of the organization,
- Focus on intervention - task or person, and
- Step or stage in a process a leader needs to concentrate on at a particular time.

Our research on leadership indicates the behavior of the most successful performers divides into attributes focusing on four levels – the whole organization, an operation, a group, or an individual. In larger, more complex organizations, these levels may represent actual position levels or career bands. In smaller systems, they represent various conceptual levels leaders must address from a strategic focus to a more tactical focus. Our data also indicates that excellent leaders who motivate, align, and energize people to change have the following very strong process skills:

- Defining a focus for action;
- Clarifying and mobilizing required information and resources;
- Leading others to apply a consistent set of practices; and
- Driving initiatives to completion.

The person-task and organizational level dimensions of leadership can be combined to define 8 core leadership processes (see Figure 2).

Organization Level	Behavioral Focus	Leadership and Management Process
Whole Organization	Person ↑ ↓ Task	1. Creating a Compelling Vision for Change
		2. Executing a Competitive Strategy
Operation	Person ↑ ↓ Task	3. Generating an Integrated Network
		4. Mobilizing and Managing Resources
Group	Person ↑ ↓ Task	5. Maximizing Team Effectiveness
		6. Defining and Implementing Core Capabilities
Individual	Person ↑ ↓ Task	7. Leveraging Relationships
		8. Reaching Critical Goals

Figure 2. Core Leadership and Management Processes

The four generic process skills translated into a common set of process steps or stages can be combined with the level and person-tasks dimensions to form a leadership system (and accompanying competency requirements). (See Figure 3.)



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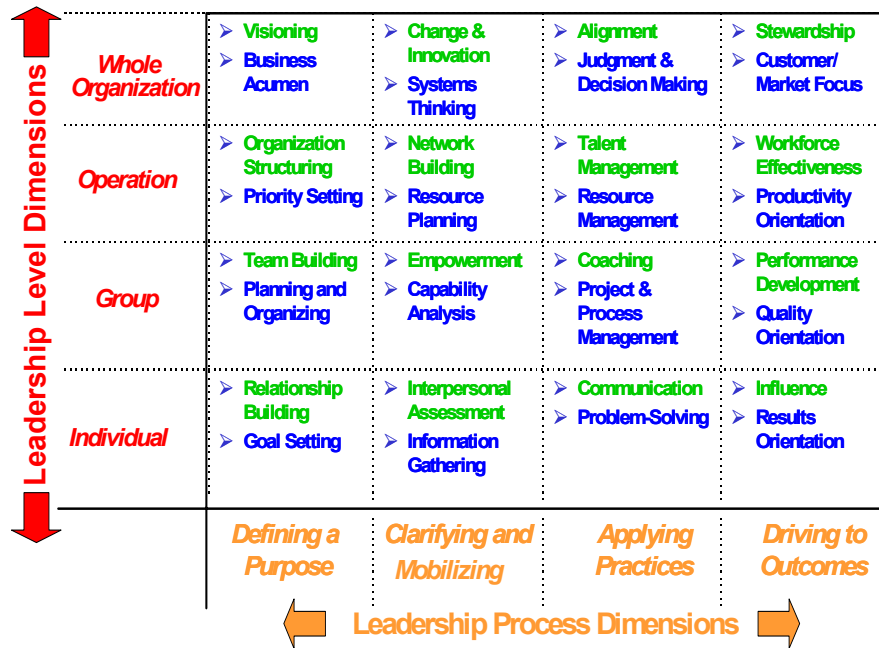


Figure 3. Leadership System

Why Does a Systems Perspective Help?

Structuring key characteristics into a framework comprised of levels and an accompanying set of core processes has some distinct advantages for assessing and developing leaders. For example, by assessing competencies, an individual, team, or even a whole organization can identify various kinds of gaps, including specific behavioral or competency weaknesses or perhaps, more important, gaps related to:

- Deficits in one or more processes or levels of leadership,
- Vulnerabilities in particular steps or stages of process implementation, or
- Weaknesses in person or task skills.

By providing diagnostic information about various dimensions of leadership, a systems framework can clarify major areas or themes requiring development (vs. selective factors). Furthermore, various dimensions of the system can be used to identify job, role, or level requirements (e.g., first level supervisor, mid-level manager, executive) and then applied to determine:

- Role-person fit by the organization (as in a hiring, selection, or succession planning process), or
- Role-person fit by an individual to seek assignments or facilitate career planning.

No matter what use is targeted, a structured, systems perspective captures and enables the rational management of a greater number of situational variables related to leadership than would be possible with traditional perspectives.

