



Effective Leadership

Introduction

Today's VUCA* world means senior leaders need to be more effective than ever, to meet the demands of their customers and staff. They require agility to anticipate and manage the ever-changing needs arising from external influences, such as political, social, environmental and major technological advances.

Out, are the clear hierarchical organisation structures and established command and control approaches of the past. In, are matrix structures, remote and virtual working, and the need for more diversity, inclusion and engagement.

This Factsheet explores the importance of leadership at all levels, what makes a successful leader and some practical steps you can take to help your leaders be the best they can be.

"Leadership will be the most important resource an organisation can possess. After all, it will be leadership that determines whether organisations successfully harness the emerging opportunities and overcome the perils that await."

Jay A. Conger

Professor, London Business School

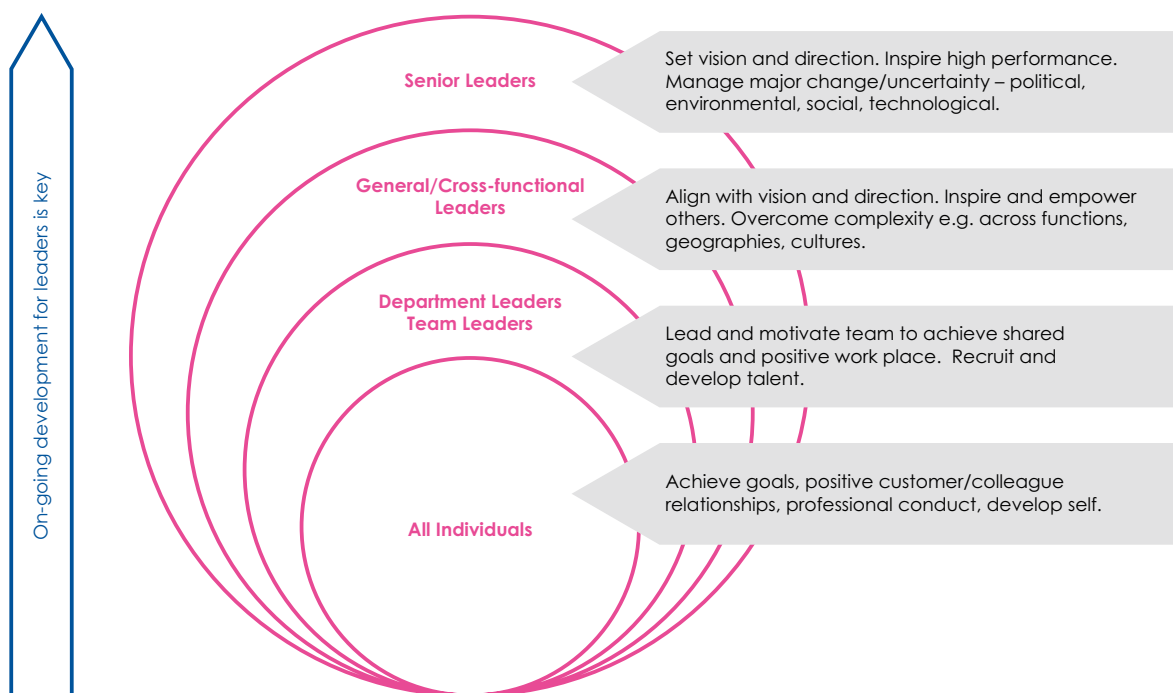


Leading at different levels – everyone is a leader

Whilst senior leaders are key when it comes to leading the way and promoting a positive work environment, all staff have an important role to play.

Great individual contributors can help inspire and motivate others to do the same, just as the poor ones can hold colleagues back, sap people's energy and squander too much of their manager's time in performance management.

The diagram below summarises the roles and responsibilities at the different levels of leadership; it underlines the importance of organisations investing in the right people and ensuring they develop good leadership habits at an early stage.



What makes a successful leader?

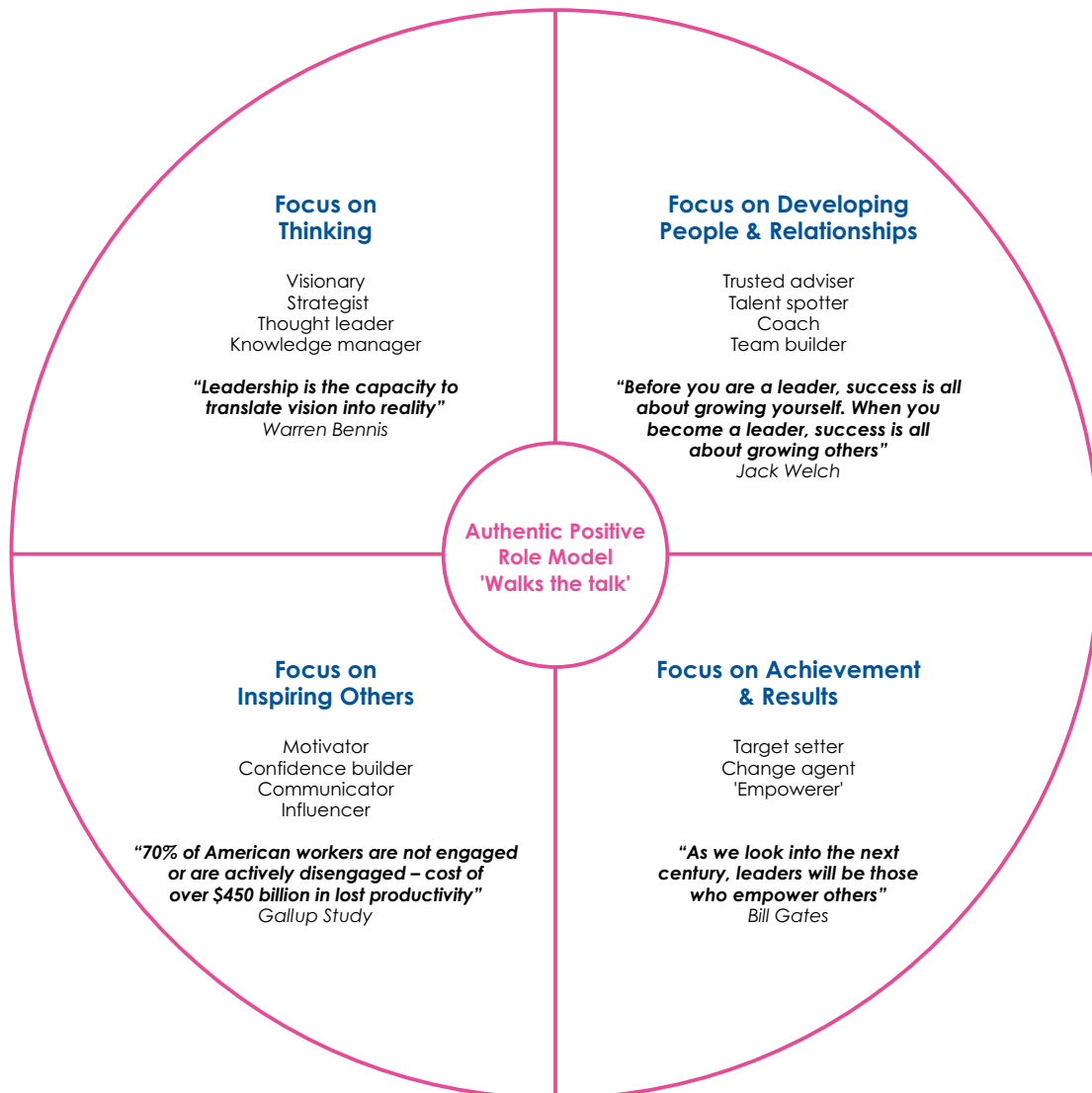
When we ask our clients about 'what good leadership looks like' for them and what helps motivation and engagement in their organisation, an overwhelming number of responses tend to relate to their leaders' positive personal characteristics and behaviours, rather than to their technical skills and knowledge.

So, what are the attributes and behavioural qualities needed to be a successful leader? Authentic? Agile? Decisive? Strategist? Visionary? There is no one single definition or set of characteristics. Different organisations and contexts have different demands, but we can identify generally where leaders' strengths support an organisation's performance and where significant gaps demand change or define development needs.

Talentsmoothie's work with clients in leadership assessment and development draws on the Schroder research and framework. Developed over twenty years, in both business and academic settings, this highly validated research concluded which behaviours were key differentiators in high-performing leaders. It continues to be used by many organisations to review and develop leadership capability.



See the illustration below for some examples of the expectations placed on today's leaders – things we typically hear that senior leaders need for their business and that staff appreciate in their managers. (The Thinking, Developing, Inspiring, Achievement category quadrants are based on the Schroder research.)



The bad news is that the demands and qualities of a leader are many and varied. BUT the **good news** is that...

- Great leaders don't have strengths in all areas
- The best leaders are self-aware, know their core strengths and how to fill the gaps (often by talent-spotting and developing their missing strengths in others)
- Specific behaviours associated with leadership success can all be described in clear and simple terms (and for different levels of leader)
- Whilst it's easier to play to your core and natural strengths, **leadership behaviours can be learned and developed**
- Negative behaviours, which always limit and affect others' performance and motivation, can all be 'developed out'



Practical steps to improve leadership effectiveness

① Understand your organisation's current leadership capability

If you don't already have a good understanding of your organisation's leadership effectiveness, the following suggestions might help you get an indication of your strengths and opportunities:

- **Survey your staff**
Get more information about the effectiveness of your leaders.
- **Run some focus groups**
Invite a cross section of people in the organisation to tell you what's working and what's missing in your leaders. (Bringing in an external facilitator can help to make sure people can be open and honest, so you get the true picture – warts and all.)
- **Profile your great leaders**
Shadow leaders, and interview people who know them well, to find out about their leadership strengths and learn about how you might hire and develop more leadership capability.
- **Run 360 reviews for your leaders**
Help your leaders be more self-aware, or identify or confirm their strengths and opportunities.

② Set expectations for leadership performance

Many organisations are good at setting and managing performance objectives around the task – the 'what' needs doing. Fewer pay attention to (or are good at) the 'why' and 'how' things should be done.

- **Review and decide which behaviours your organisation needs**
e.g. more forward planning and fewer knee-jerk decisions and changes of direction.
- **Introduce a leadership behavioural framework**, so that people have a clear view of what 'good leadership' looks like, and have a common language to help define and achieve the desired outcomes.
- **Involve your senior leaders and stakeholders as early as possible in setting expectations and leading on the leadership effectiveness agenda.** If they're not committed to improving leadership (theirs and others'), initiatives are far less likely to succeed.

③ Leadership development – invest in what will give your organisation the best return

- **Failing to invest in your people is a risk to your organisation**
This is important for your performance, and for many staff (especially the millennial generation) it can be high on their list of career motivators.
- **Use your leadership development budget wisely;** take a strategic approach to how it is allocated. Invest in your current and future talent by developing the people important to your future (and for whom development is a motivator or potential reason for them to stay).
- **Create a talent review board to decide where and how to invest in leadership development across your organisation.**



Practical steps to improve leadership effectiveness cont.

④ Agree and monitor leadership success measures

- Start with what you already measure – don't make it any more difficult than it needs to be.
- Track performance to make sure leadership effectiveness is improving.
- Metrics may include (but are not restricted to):
 - Performance review ratings (especially leadership behaviours if available)
 - Leadership-related feedback ratings from engagement surveys
 - Staff retention
 - Staff progress – promotions and progression versus expectations/development plans
 - Talent pipeline (leadership vacancies successfully filled versus numbers recruited externally)

⑤ Keep leadership effectiveness high on your strategic and 'business as usual' agendas

- Make leadership a key part of your strategic planning and investment reviews.
- Put leadership effectiveness on your 'business as usual' agenda by embedding it into your regular processes, including recruitment, performance reviews, development planning and employee engagement surveys.

⑥ Publicise and celebrate your successes

- **Don't forget to highlight and celebrate success** – when you highlight positive leadership in your organisation, you're more likely to make your successful leaders feel valued and encourage more of the same success in others.
- Remember, success breeds success.



Find out more

We'd be delighted to talk to you about how to create effective leadership in your organisation. If you'd like to discuss your challenges and think we can help you, get in touch.

Please contact Justine James on +44 (0)20 7127 4741 to find out more.



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Or if you'd like to talk through anything you've read in this Factsheet, or any business challenge you're facing right now, please email hey@talentsmoothie.com or phone +44 (0)20 7127 4741. We'd love to hear from you.



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