



Leadership or management: a questionable distinction

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“Organizations are over-managed and under-led.” How often have you heard it? Management has fallen out of fashion, and public fascination with leadership shows no sign of flagging. People yearn for good leadership, and individuals in senior roles want to lead well. Yet, relatively few organizations will claim they have the leadership they need.

In a sense, management is a victim of the times. In today’s turbulent and unpredictable environment, management theory falls seriously short. Moreover, employees are bringing new demands to the workplace: they have views, they have expectations, and they are looking for relevance and meaning. They may be willing to be led, but they are averse to being managed. In a recent session I attended, someone asked, “Is my job big enough for my soul?” In organizations preoccupied with compliance, accountability and due process, the answer is all too often no.

Managers versus leaders

Few have captured the distinctions between management and leadership as clearly as American management thinker John Kotter:

- Managers cope with complexity, while leaders cope with change.
- Managing happens in the present tense, while leadership is future-focused.
- Managers perform to expectations, while leaders create expectations.
- Managing is about controlling, while leadership is about unlocking.

Good management relates to the capacity to create and administer systems, processes and structures. It demands technical expertise and organizational skills, effective decision-making, a capacity to plan, deploy and control. It requires fairness and civility in the treatment of people, within a context of due process. Its hallmark is

competence, and it thrives in stability.

Good leadership relates to the capacity to engage, inspire and motivate people, turning on relationship rather than contract. It depends on adaptiveness, communication, and an enthusiasm for the possible. It requires an ability to enlist people’s enthusiasm and commitment. Its hallmark is vision, and its domain is change.

Underpinning both is integrity. Whether manager or leader, research tells us, employees want their superiors to be honest and worthy of trust – fair, delivering on commitments, behaving consistently with espoused values, willing to take a stand.

The new basics

Research also confirms that employees look to their superiors for qualities rarely factored into the management basics: they want them to be honest and competent, but they also want them to be forward looking, with a sense of purpose and vision. They look to them for inspiration. The message is clear. Without good management skills, even the best leaders will founder. People in positions of authority need to be capable, able to deliver results and to advance the interests of their group, or they lose credibility and trust. Yet, good management is no longer enough.

Leading in spite of it all

Canadian universities are blessed with skilled managers. The challenge to them is to be more leaderly, despite the grueling workdays most administrators face. The trick may lie in “doing differently,” rather than in “doing more.” James Kouzes and Barry Posner opened a new chapter in leadership theory in the 1990s when they published *The Leadership Challenge*. Their message? Leaders are made, not born; by adopting a set of learnable skills and behaviours, everyone can learn to lead.

Kouzes and Posner identified five practices or ‘tasks’ of effective leaders:

- *Inspiring a shared vision*: Envision an optimistic and hopeful future and enrol others in that vision. Speak to purpose. Help people see how their role links to the larger picture.
- *Modelling the way*: Live your values. Muster your own commitment and find the enthusiasm you hope to see in others. Plan for small victories.
- *Challenging the process*: Look for what isn’t working, and for opportunities to make a positive difference. Experiment, and take risks.
- *Encouraging the heart*: Celebrate accomplishment. Recognize and reward people’s contributions. Show them you care.
- *Enabling others to act*: Remove barriers and foster collaboration. Build capacity in others. Give problems away.

How leadership practices are exercised will be as varied as the individuals who undertake them. I spoke with a manager several months ago, shy rather than gregarious, with a penchant for numbers and not people. On her task list each week: “acknowledge five people for something meaningful.” Contrived though it may seem, it is a strategy that works, for her and for her staff.

The reality? This is not an either-or proposition, and failure on either front has serious consequences. The costs of bad management are often more tangible. Yet, bad leadership can exact a heavy toll, in apathy, demoralization, mediocrity and resistance to change. The challenge for good managers? To become more leaderly. Your colleagues, and your organization, will thank you. *JM*

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