

# What is Leadership?

Research Report

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Research Report

Richard Bolden  
July 2004



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## Introduction

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Welcome to the first in a series of research reports from the Centre for Leadership Studies, which gives an introduction to some of the key issues in the field of leadership, including what is it, how can it be measured and what impact does it have upon performance? This report does not claim to be the definitive guide to all things leadership, but rather to present some of the most significant concepts and debates to have emerged in recent years.

Leadership is currently one of the most talked about issues in business and organisation. It is hard to turn on the television, open a newspaper or attend a conference without coming across numerous references to leaders, leadership and leading. A search of the Amazon.com website in Spring 2003 revealed 11,686 results for the word 'leadership' alone and similar searches of the Ebsco business and management publications database reveal an exponential increase in the number of published articles on leadership, from 136 in 1970-71, to 258 in 1980-81, 1,105 in 1990-91, and a staggering 10,062 in 2001-02 (an average of 419 articles per month) (Storey, 2004).

The recent focus on leadership is an international phenomenon, as is increased investment in leadership and management development. In the US, for example, Fulmer (1997) estimated an annual corporate expenditure of \$45 billion in 1997 (up from \$10 billion one decade before) and Sorenson (2002) identified 900 college or university leadership programmes (double that of four years earlier), over 100 specialist degrees and a wide range of related activities.

Similar trends are occurring in the UK and Europe. Leadership is regarded as the key 'enabler' in the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Business Excellence Model (EFQM, 2000) and has become a central focus for numerous other public, private and voluntary sector development initiatives. Recent years have seen centres of excellence in leadership

established for nearly all parts of the public sector, including health, defence, education and police. Leadership, it seems, is increasingly becoming the panacea of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Amidst this flurry of activity, however, a number of concerns arise. There is no widely accepted definition of leadership, no common consensus on how best to develop leadership and leaders, and remarkably little evidence of the impact of leadership or leadership development on performance and productivity. Indeed, most initiatives appear to actively avoid addressing these issues and simply opt for the feel good factor of doing something about it... whatever 'it' may be!

Whilst action is frequently preferable to inaction, without at least some understanding of the underlying principles and assumptions about leadership and leadership development, it is likely that action may be misguided – at least reducing its possible effectiveness and at worst damaging what was there in the first place. The intention of this report, therefore, is to challenge some of the more popularist and stereotypical notions of leadership and to offer some insights into alternative ways of conceiving and addressing the issue.

We will continue to produce these reports on a regular basis, with each addressing a different theme of regional, national and international importance. The second, due in early 2005, will explore the issue of leadership development, comparing and contrasting a wide range of different approaches and offering guidance as how best to structure and deliver leadership development within a given context.

Should you be interested in exploring opportunities for collaboration, sharing research findings and/or networking with other leadership researchers please do not hesitate to contact us.

We hope you find this report interesting, useful and inspiring!

## Defining Leadership

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The topic of leadership has been of interest for many hundreds of years, from the early Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates to the plethora of management and leadership gurus, whose books fill airport bookshops. Seldom, however, has the need for effective leadership been voiced more strongly than now. It is argued that in this changing, global environment, leadership holds the answer not only to the success of individuals and organisations, but also to sectors, regions and nations.

*"Our productivity as a nation is already lagging behind our competitors in North America and Europe. By tackling our management and leadership deficit with real vigour, we will unlock the doors to increased productivity, maximise the benefits of innovation, gain advantage from technological change and create the conditions for a radical transformation of public services." (DfES, 2002)*

Despite recognition of the importance of leadership, however, there remains a certain mystery as to what leadership actually *is* or how to define it. In a review of leadership research, Stogdill (1974, p.259) concluded that there are "almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" - and that was 30 years ago!

At the heart of the problem of defining leadership lie two fundamental difficulties. Firstly, like notions such as 'love', 'freedom' and 'happiness', leadership is a complex construct open to subjective interpretation. Everyone has their own intuitive understanding of what leadership is, based on a mixture of experience and learning, which is difficult to capture in a succinct definition. Secondly, the way in which leadership is defined and understood is strongly influenced by one's theoretical stance. There are those who view leadership as the consequence of a set of traits or characteristics possessed by 'leaders', whilst others view leadership as

a social process that emerges from group relationships. Such divergent views will always result in a difference of opinion about the nature of leadership.

*"Leadership appears to be, like power, an 'essentially contested concept'"*  
*(Gallie, 1955 cited in Grint, 2004, p1)*

Grint (2004) identifies four problems that make consensus on a common definition of leadership highly unlikely. Firstly, there is the 'process' problem – a lack of agreement on whether leadership is derived from the *personal qualities* (i.e. traits) of the leader, or whether a leader induces followership through what s/he *does* (i.e. a social process). Secondly, there is the 'position' problem – is the leader *in charge* (i.e. with formally allocated authority) or *in front* (i.e. with informal influence)? A third problem is one of 'philosophy' – does the leader exert an intentional, causal influence on the behaviour of followers or are their apparent actions determined by context and situation or even attributed retrospectively? A fourth difficulty is one of 'purity' – is leadership embodied in individuals or groups and is it a purely human phenomenon?

In addition to these relatively theoretical contentions Grint also distinguishes between attitudes towards coercion. Some definitions of leadership restrict it to purely non-coercive influence towards shared (and socially acceptable) objectives. Within such frameworks the likes of Hitler, Stalin and Saddam Hussein would not be seen as leaders, but rather as tyrants working solely for their own benefit and depending on threat, violence and intimidation rather than the more subtle processes of interpersonal influence more frequently associated with 'true' leadership. Such distinctions, however, are always problematic as the actions of nearly all leaders could be perceived more or less beneficially by certain individuals and groups.

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*“Scholars should remind us that leadership is not a moral concept. Leaders are like the rest of us: trustworthy and deceitful, cowardly and brave, greedy and generous. To assume that all leaders are good people is to be wilfully blind to the reality of the human condition, and it severely limits our scope for becoming more effective at leadership.” (Kellerman, 2004, p45)*

The psychodynamic approach, made famous by researchers at the Tavistock Institute, adds further areas for consideration: what are the psychological factors that encourage people to become leaders or followers, and what is it about groups, organisations and societies that gives rise the perception of ‘leadership’? This approach emphasises the importance of understanding self and others and, through this, understanding the transactional nature of the relationship between leader and followers (Stech, 2004). Thus, for example, it could be concluded that the leader fulfils a role of sense making, offering security and purpose to his/her followers and it is for this reason that they choose to remain followers.

In a recent review of leadership theory, Northouse (2004) identified four common themes in the way leadership now tends to be conceived: (1) leadership is a *process*; (2) leadership involves *influence*; (3) leadership occurs in a *group context*; and (4) leadership involves *goal attainment*. He thus defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (ibid, p 3).

This is a good definition, but it still locates the individual as the source of leadership. A more collective concept of leadership arises out of a review by Yukl: “Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person [or group] over other people [or groups] to

structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation” (Yukl, 2002, p3). Even this definition, however, obscures as much as it reveals. Just what exactly is the nature of this ‘social influence’; how can it ‘structure’ activities and relationships; and when applied in a group setting who is the ‘leader’?

In short, leadership is a complex phenomenon that touches on many other important organisational, social and personal processes. It depends on a process of influence, whereby people are inspired to work towards group goals, not through coercion, but through personal motivation. Which definition you accept should be a matter of choice, informed by your own predispositions, organisational situation and beliefs, but with an awareness of the underlying assumptions and implications of your particular approach.

*“...leadership is like the Abominable Snowman, whose footprints are everywhere but who is nowhere to be seen.” (Bennis and Nanus, 1985)*

# Leadership and Management

It has become fashionable over recent years to distinguish leadership from management however increasing evidence indicates that this distinction may be misleading.

Zalenznik (1977) began the trend of contrasting leadership and management by presenting an image of the leader as an artist, who uses creativity and intuition to navigate his/her way through chaos, whilst the manager is seen as a problem solver dependent on rationality and control. Since then the leadership literature has been littered with bold statements contrasting the two. Bennis and Nanus (1985, p21), for example, suggest that managers “do things right” whilst leaders do “the right thing” and Bryman (1986, p6) argues that the leader is the catalyst focussed on strategy whilst the manager is the operator/technician concerned with the “here-and-now of operational goal attainment”.

Central to most of these distinctions is an orientation towards change. This concept is well represented in the work of John Kotter (1990) who concluded that “management is about coping with complexity” whilst “leadership, by contrast, is about coping with change” (ibid, p104). He proposed that good management brings about a degree of order and consistency to organisational processes and goals, whilst leadership is required for dynamic change (see Figure 1 for a summary of his ideas).

The distinction of leadership from management as represented by Kotter and his contemporaries clearly encourages a shift in emphasis from the relatively inflexible, bureaucratic processes typified as ‘management’ to the more dynamic and strategic processes classed as ‘leadership’, yet even he concludes that both are equally necessary for the effective running of an organisation:

*“Leadership is different from management, but not for the reason*

*most people think. Leadership isn't mystical and mysterious. It has nothing to do with having charisma or other exotic personality traits. It's not the province of a chosen few. Nor is leadership necessarily better than management or a replacement for it: rather, leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary activities. Both are necessary for success in an increasingly complex and volatile business environment.” (Kotter, 1990, p103)*

**Figure 1: Leadership and Management**  
(Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004, p 718 - based on Kotter, 1990)

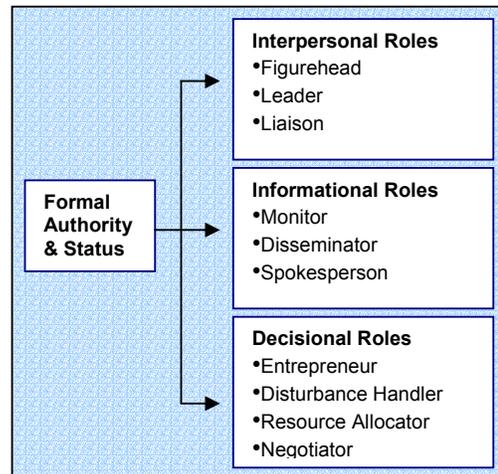
	<b>Leadership functions</b>	<b>Management functions</b>
Creating an agenda	<i>Establishing direction:</i> Vision of the future, develop strategies for change to achieve goals	<i>Plans and budgets:</i> Decide action plans and timetables, allocate resources
Developing people	<i>Aligning people:</i> Communicate vision and strategy, influence creation of teams which accept validity of goals	<i>Organizing and staffing:</i> Decide structure and allocate staff, develop policies, procedures and monitoring
Execution	<i>Motivating and inspiring:</i> Energize people to overcome obstacles, satisfy human needs	<i>Controlling, problem solving:</i> Monitor results against plan and take corrective action
Outcomes	Produces positive and sometimes dramatic change	Produces order, consistency and predictability

Despite the popular appeal of a distinction between leadership and management, however, there is some doubt as to whether they are really quite as separate as this in practice. Firstly there is increasing resistance to the way in which such analyses tend to denigrate management as something rather boring and uninspiring. Joseph Rost (1991), for example, highlights the need for consistency and predictability in many aspects of management and leadership behaviour and concludes that “down with management and up with leadership is a bad idea”. Gosling and Murphy (2004) similarly propose that maintaining a sense of continuity during times of change is key to successful leadership. Thus the leader must ensure that systems and structures remain in place that offer workers a sense of security and balance, without which it would be hard to maintain levels of motivation, commitment, trust and psychological wellbeing.

Secondly, much research evidence implies that, far from being separate, the practices described as ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ are an integral part of the same job. From detailed observations of what managers do, Mintzberg (1973, 1975) identified 10 key roles, of which one was ‘leadership’ (see Figure 2). He concluded that far from being separate and distinct from management, leadership is just one dimension of a multifaceted management role.

Much of the difficulty and confusion that arises from contrasting leadership and management is the manner in which they are often mapped to different individuals. Thus, we talk of ‘managers’ and ‘leaders’ as if they were different (and to a large extent incompatible) people – we consider leaders as dynamic, charismatic individuals with the ability to inspire others, whilst managers are seen as bureaucrats who just focus on the task in hand. Such a view, however, does not coincide well with the

**Figure 2: The Manager’s Roles**  
(Mintzberg, 1975)



lived experience of being a manager. People are generally recruited into ‘management’, rather than ‘leadership’, positions and are expected to complete a multitude of tasks ranging from day-to-day planning and implementation, to longer-term strategic thinking. None of these are done in isolation, and throughout, it is essential to work alongside other people – to motivate and inspire them, but also to know when to relinquish the lead and take a back seat.

*“Most of us have become so enamoured of ‘leadership’ that ‘management’ has been pushed into the background. Nobody aspires to being a good manager anymore; everybody wants to be a great leader. But the separation of management from leadership is dangerous. Just as management without leadership encourages an uninspired style, which deadens activities, leadership without management encourages a disconnected style, which promotes hubris. And we all know the destructive power of hubris in organisations.” (Gosling and Mintzberg, 2003).*

In conclusion, whilst the distinction between management and leadership may have been useful in drawing attention to the strategic and motivational qualities required during periods of change, the bipolar representation of managers and leaders as completely different people can be misleading and potentially harmful in practice. Indeed, if it is believed that leaders and managers are different people, one might well conclude that (a) it is necessary to change the management team regularly as circumstances change, and (b) it is not possible for managers to become leaders (and vice versa). Such a view is severely limiting and greatly underestimates the abilities of people in management and leadership roles. This is not to say, however, that all people will be equally adept at all aspects of leadership and management, nor that there is one profile that is appropriate in all situations (these are issues that will be discussed in the next section on *Theories of Leadership*) but that to achieve maximum effect we should seek to recruit and develop 'leader-managers' capable of adopting the role in its most holistic form. It is for this reason that, like Mintzberg (2004), we will use the words 'management' and 'leadership' and 'manager' and 'leader' largely interchangeably throughout the rest of this report.

# Theories of Leadership

Whilst practitioners often see theory as separate from practice, within an applied field such as leadership the two are inextricably related. Traditional and contemporary theories of leadership strongly influence current practice, education and policy and offer a useful framework for the selection and development of leaders - in other words:

*“There is nothing as practical as a good theory” (Lewin, 1935).*

Theories help shape the way we conceive the world by simplifying and summarising large quantities of data but as a result, they can also give rise to assumptions and modes of thought that become unquestioned. For example, traditional leadership theories have their roots in US organisational research and take a particularly individualistic view of leadership. Contemporary theories are beginning to redress the balance, but remain predominantly Anglo-American in origin. In this article we will discuss some of the most influential leadership theories, which offer a valuable context for the consideration of wider issues about defining leadership capabilities and development approaches.

## Leadership traits

For the first half of the twentieth century it was assumed that it would be possible to identify and isolate a finite set of traits, which could be used when selecting and promoting individuals to leadership positions. This search was strongly influenced by the ‘great man’ theory that focussed on how (primarily male) figures achieved and maintained positions of influence. The assumption was that these people were born to be leaders and would excel by virtue of their personality alone.

In an extensive review of trait studies, Ralph Stogdill (1974) found some qualities that appeared more often than others (see Figure 3). The same set of traits, however, has not been identified in other studies

(e.g. Bird, 1940; Stewart, 1963) and with the list growing ever longer it has now been widely accepted that no such definitive set of traits will ever be identified. Some weak generalizations, however, may exist. Shaw (1976) and Fraser (1978), for example found that leaders tend to score higher than average on scores of ability (intelligence, relevant knowledge, verbal facility), sociability (participation, cooperativeness, popularity), and motivation (initiative and persistence). It is clear, though, that none of these are sufficient in themselves to serve as the basis for the identification or development of superior leaders.

**Figure 3: Leadership Traits**  
(Stogdill, 1974, p81)

- Strong drive for responsibility,
- Focus on completing the task,
- Vigour and persistence in pursuit of goals,
- Venturesomeness and originality in problem-solving,
- Drive to exercise initiative in social settings,
- Self-confidence,
- Sense of personal identity,
- Willingness to accept consequences of decisions and actions,
- Readiness to adsorb interpersonal stress,
- Willingness to tolerate frustration and delay,
- Ability to influence the behaviour of others,
- Capacity to structure social systems to the purpose in hand.

## Leadership styles & behaviours

An alternative to the trait approach was to consider what leaders actually do, rather than their underlying characteristics. Interest in this approach largely arose from work by Douglas McGregor (1960), which proposed that management and leadership style is influenced by the persons’ assumptions about human nature. He summarised two contrasting viewpoints of managers in industry. Theory X managers take a fairly negative view of human

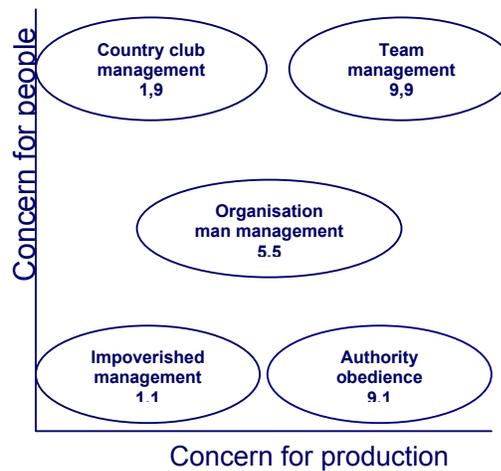
nature, believing that the average person has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if possible. Leaders holding this view, believe that coercion and control is necessary to ensure that people work, and that workers have no desire for responsibility. Theory Y managers, on the other hand, believe that the expenditure of physical and mental effort in work is as natural as play or rest, and that the average human being, under proper conditions, learns not only to accept but to seek responsibility. Such leaders will endeavour to enhance their employees' capacity to exercise a high level of imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in the solution of organizational problems. It can be seen that leaders holding different assumptions will demonstrate different approaches to leadership: Theory X leaders preferring an autocratic style and Theory Y leaders preferring a participative style.

Another influential behavioural approach to leadership/management is the Managerial Grid developed by Blake and Mouton (1964). This model focuses on task (production) and employee (people) orientations of managers, as well as combinations between the two extremes. A grid with concern for production on the horizontal axis and concern for people on the vertical axis plots five basic management/leadership styles (see Figure 4). The first number refers to a leader's production or task orientation and the second, to people or employee orientation. It was proposed that 'Team Management' - a high concern for both employees and production - is the most effective type of leadership behaviour.

### Situational leadership

Whilst behavioural theories introduced the notion of different leadership styles, they gave little guidance as to what constitutes effective leadership behaviours in different situations. Indeed, most researchers today conclude that no one leadership style is

**Figure 4: The Managerial Grid**  
(Blake and Mouton, 1964)



right for every manager under all circumstances. Instead, situational theories were developed to indicate that the style to be used is dependent upon such factors as the situation, the people, the task, the organisation, and other environmental variables.

Fiedler (1964, 1967) proposed that there is no single best way to lead; instead the leaders' style should be selected according to the situation. He distinguished between managers who are task or relationship oriented. Task oriented managers focus on the task-in-hand tend to do better in situations that have good leader-member relationships, structured tasks, and either weak or strong position power. They also do well when the task is unstructured but position power is strong, and at the other end of the spectrum when the leader member relations are moderate to poor and the task is unstructured. Such leaders tend to display a more directive leadership style. Relationship oriented managers do better in all other situations and exhibit a more participative style of leadership.

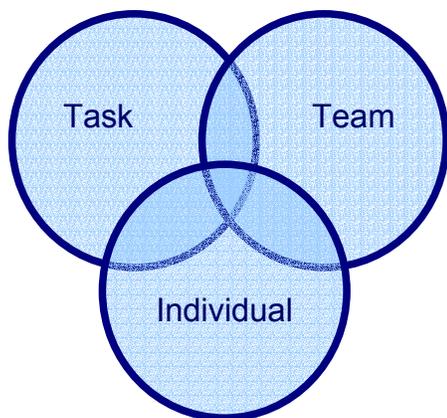
Hersey and Blanchard (1969, 1977, 1988) had similar ideas but proposed that it is possible for a leader to adapt his/her style to the situation. They argued that the developmental level of subordinates has

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the greatest impact on which leadership style is most appropriate. Thus, as the skill and maturity level of followers increases, the leader will need to adapt his/her task-relationship style from directing to coaching, supporting and delegating. A similar model was proposed by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) who presented a continuum of leadership styles from autocratic to democratic.

Another influential situational leadership model is that proposed by John Adair (1973) who argued that the leader must balance the needs of the task, team and individual as demonstrated in his famous three-circle diagram (see Figure 5). The effective leader thus carries out the functions and behaviours depicted by the three circles, varying the level of attention paid to each according to the situation.

**Figure 5: Action Centred Leadership**  
(Adair, 1973)



### **Transformational Leadership**

James MacGregor Burns was the first to put forward the concept of ‘transforming leadership’. To him, transforming leadership “is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents” (Burns, 1978). He went on to suggest that “[Transforming leadership] occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and

morality”. At the heart of this approach is an emphasis on the leaders’ ability to motivate and empower his/her followers and also the moral dimension of leadership.

Burn’s ideas were subsequently developed into the concept of ‘transformational leadership’ where the leader transforms followers:

*“The goal of transformational leadership is to ‘transform’ people and organisations in a literal sense – to change them in mind and heart; enlarge vision, insight, and understanding; clarify purposes; make behaviour congruent with beliefs, principles, or values; and bring about changes that are permanent, self-perpetuating, and momentum building” (Bass and Avolio, 1994).*

The transformational approach has been widely embraced within all types of organisations as a way of transcending organisational and human limitations and dealing with change. It is frequently contrasted with more traditional ‘transactional’ leadership, where the leader gains commitment from followers on the basis of a straightforward exchange of pay and security etc. in return for reliable work. Figure 6 contrasts these two approaches – you will note similarities with the common conceptualisation of ‘management’ versus ‘leadership’.

### **Charismatic leadership**

The concept of the ‘charismatic leader’, although introduced earlier (e.g. Weber, 1947; House, 1976), became popular in the nineteen eighties and nineties when charisma was viewed as an antidote to the demoralising effects of organisational restructuring, competition and redundancies dominant at the time. The charismatic leader was seen as someone who could rebuild morale and offer a positive vision for the future.

**Figure 6: A Comparison of Transactional and Transformational Leadership**  
(Covey, 1992)

**Transformational Leadership**

- Builds on a man’s need for meaning
- Is preoccupied with purposes and values, morals, and ethics
- Transcends daily affairs
- Is orientated toward long-term goals without compromising human values and principles
- Focuses more on missions and strategies
- Releases human potential – identifying and developing new talent
- Designs and redesigns jobs to make them meaningful and challenging
- Aligns internal structures and systems to reinforce overarching values and goals

**Transactional Leadership**

- Builds on man’s need to get a job done and make a living
- Is preoccupied with power and position, politics and perks
- Is mired in daily affairs
- Is short-term and hard data orientated
- Focuses on tactical issues
- Relies on human relations to lubricate human interactions
- Follows and fulfils role expectations by striving to work effectively within current systems
- Supports structures and systems that reinforce the bottom line, maximise efficiency, and guarantee short-term profits

This approach, in effect, combines both notions of the transformational leader as well as earlier trait and ‘great man’ theories. Researchers have taken different positions, but overall four major characteristics of charismatic leaders can be identified: (1) a dominant personality, desire to influence others and self confidence; (2) strong role model behaviour and competence; (3) articulation of ideological goals with moral overtones; and (4) high expectation of followers and confidence that they will meet these expectations (Northouse, 2004, p171).

Despite the hype, confidence in this approach to leadership is rapidly declining. A number of high profile corporate scandals, plus the tendency of charismatic leaders to desert organisations after making their changes (often leaving even more significant challenges), has highlighted that this may not be a sustainable way to lead. Because of the way in which charismatic leadership presents the leader as a saviour, it is now often referred to as ‘heroic leadership’<sup>1</sup>. There is a resistance to this view of the leader within many industries and organisations are seeking alternatives that develop quieter, less individualistic leadership (Mintzberg, 1999; Badaracco, 2002).

**Servant and team leadership**

The notion of the ‘servant leader’ has been around for some time. Like Burn’s early conceptions about transforming leadership, the emphasis is on the moral and ethical dimensions of leadership. The difference, however, is that the servant leader follows his/her path out of a desire to serve rather than out of a desire to lead.

*“The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He or she is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions.” (Greenleaf, 1970)*

The focus on serving a greater purpose has made this approach popular within the church and non-profit sector but has had limited impact in more commercial sectors. A related concept that has had wider acceptance is that of ‘team leadership’.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) emphasise the importance of leaders knowing when to follow and the importance of the leader

<sup>1</sup> See Mintzberg, 2004, p104 for a good critique of this approach.

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acting as a facilitator rather than director. They propose that the leader should ask questions rather than giving answers; provide opportunities for others to lead them; do real work in support of others instead of only the reverse; become a matchmaker instead of a 'central switch'; and seek a common understanding instead of consensus. Belbin (1993) presents a similar image of the team leader as someone who chooses to delegate and share team roles; builds on and appreciates diversity; seeks talented people; develops colleagues; and creates a sense of mission.

### **Distributed leadership**

An increasing awareness of the importance of social relations in the leadership contract, the need for a leader to be given authority by their followers and a realisation that no one individual is the ideal leader in all circumstances have given rise to a new school of leadership thought. Referred to as 'informal', 'emergent', 'dispersed' or 'distributed' leadership, this approach argues a less formalised model of leadership (where leadership responsibility is dissociated from the organisational hierarchy). It is proposed that individuals at all levels in the organisation and in all roles (not simply those with an overt management dimension) can exert leadership influence over their colleagues and thus influence the overall direction of the organisation.

The key to this is a distinction between the notions of 'leader' and 'leadership'. *Leadership* is regarded as a process of sense-making and direction-giving within a group and the *leader* can only be identified on the basis of his/her relationship with others in the social group who are behaving as followers. In this manner, it is quite possible to conceive of the leader as emergent rather than predefined and that their role can only be understood through examining the relationships within the group (rather than by focussing on his/her personal characteristics or traits).

The origins of such an approach have their foundations more in the fields of sociology and politics than the more traditional management literature and draw on concepts such as organisational culture and climate to highlight the contextual nature of leadership. It is a more collective concept, and would argue for a move from analysis and development of individual leader qualities to an identification of what constitutes an effective (or more appropriate) leadership process within an organisation: a move in focus from the individuals to the *relationships* between them; from managers to *everyone* within the organisation.

A still more radical process view of leadership encourages a different approach to the identification and development of leadership within organisations. It promotes a focus on the way relationships give rise to varying identities, each defined by how they relate to others. So we should talk of a leader/follower effect rather than 'leaders' and 'followers' per se. This draws attention to the outcomes of effective leadership rather than the necessary precursors or behaviours; and on the development and promotion of leadership skills within all people at all levels in the organisation rather than just those at the top of the hierarchy. The aim is to produce an ambience and culture that encourages high levels of integrity, creativity, imagination, care and collective ambition for 'excellence'. The process view also draws attention to the emergent nature of leadership. It is not a fixed entity, but rather a flowing and evolving process whereby different 'leaders' may become revealed over time as a consequence of group interaction.

*"Leaderless but leaderful."  
(Vanderslice, 1988)*

### **Leadership theory in practice**

Despite being presented as a chronological sequence, many of the ideas presented remain popular today and there is no

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consistent agreement between academics or practitioners as to which is preferable or most effective. Northouse (2004) offers some useful comparisons as to how leadership is currently conceived (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Key Leadership Concepts**  
(Northouse, 2004, p3)

- **Trait versus process leadership:** the trait approach proposes that leadership is a quality that resides within specific individuals, whereas the process view sees it as a phenomenon that resides in the context and behaviours of interacting people.
- **Assigned versus emergent leadership:** assigned leadership refers to situations where the leader has been formally assigned his/her role, whereas emergent leadership is where a leader becomes visible because of the way other group members respond to him/her.
- **Leadership and power:** power and leadership are related because both involve a process of influence. In organisations we can distinguish between position power (where authority is assigned by rank) and personal power (where authority is assigned by followers). True leadership tends to rely on a power that arises from relationships and a desire of followers to be 'led'.
- **Leadership and coercion:** coercion is a form of power that relies on the use (or threat) of force. Classic examples of coercive leaders include Adolf Hitler, Jim Jones and David Koresh who used power for their own aims rather than the general benefit of the group. Such methods and techniques are generally not included in models of what 'good' leadership is about.
- **Leadership and management:** leadership and management are phenomena that have a lot in common. Both involve influence, working with people, goal achievement, etc. however, it has been argued that there are some significant differences (see previous section). To be successful, these two activities need to be balanced and matched to the demands of the situation.

In truth, there is no one theory that can explain all circumstances - each has its strengths and weaknesses and the choice as to which is accepted owes as much to personal beliefs and experience as to

empirical evidence. The trait approach, for example, whilst problematic could prove useful when attempting to identify or recruit a leader. The style approach tells leaders what they should do, rather simply focussing upon which attributes they should possess. The situational approach encourages the leader to consider the nature of the task and followers and to adapt his/her style accordingly. The transformational approach offers guidance as to the most appropriate leadership style in times of change. And servant, team and distributed leadership offer alternative ways of conceiving the leadership process, the manner in which it occurs and the associated values and ethics.

Leadership is a complex phenomenon that touches on many other important organisational, social and personal issues. It eludes simple definition or theoretical representation and yet is becoming increasingly significant in all aspects of our endeavours. The theories presented in this article have made substantial advances to our understanding of the nature of leadership, leading, leaders and the led but there is still much room for improvement and a considerable degree of discretion required in their application.

*“The nature of management and managers and of leaders and leadership is highly problematic: there is no agreed view on what managers and leaders should do and what they need to do it. And there never can be, since such definitions arise not from organizational or technical requirements, but from the shifting ways in which over time these functions are variously conceptualized. The manager: as much as the worker, is a product of history.” (Salaman, 2004, p58).*

## Leadership Competencies

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Despite the fact that trait and behavioural theories of leadership have proved unsuccessful in isolating a definitive set of leader characteristics, the competency approach to leadership development and assessment is becoming increasingly widespread. Leadership standards, qualities and/or competency frameworks now form the basis of the management development and review processes within most large organisations.

The notion of management (and leadership) competence owes much of its origin to the work of McBer consultants for the American Management Association in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The aim of this work was “to explain some of the differences in general qualitative distinctions of performance (e.g. poor versus average versus superior managers) which may occur across specific jobs and organisations as a result of certain competencies which managers share” (Boyatzis, 1982, p9), with a job competency being defined as “an underlying characteristic of a person which results in effective and/or superior performance in a job” (ibid, p21).

This concept was widely adopted as a basis for management education and development in the UK following the Review of Vocational Qualifications report in 1986 (De Ville, 1986) and continues to be widely promoted. Following the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership research (CEML, 2002), for example, the UK government pledged to address the national management and leadership deficit through a range of initiatives to increase demand and improve supply of management and leadership development (DfES, 2002). As these initiatives are rolled-out across the country the emphasis on evidence-based policy, measurable performance outcomes and consistency of approach encourages increased reliance on government-endorsed models, frameworks and standards. Some of the most influential generic and public

sector frameworks currently used in the UK are shown in Figures 8 and 9.

From a review of 26 leadership and management frameworks in use throughout the public and private sectors Bolden et al. (2003) concluded that a somewhat moderated version of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1994) tends to be promoted in most frameworks. Whilst many go beyond simple definitions of behaviours, to consider the cognitive, affective and interpersonal qualities of leaders, the role of followers is usually only acknowledged in a rather simplistic, unidirectional manner. Leadership, therefore, is conceived as a set of values, qualities and behaviours exhibited by the leader that encourage the participation, development, and commitment of followers. It is remarkable, however, how few of the frameworks reviewed (only 8 out of 26) referred to the leader’s ability to ‘listen’ and none mentioned the word ‘follow’ (following, followers, etc.).

The *leader* (as post holder) is thus promoted as the source of *leadership*. He/she is seen to act as an energiser, catalyst and visionary equipped with a set of abilities (communication, problem-solving, people management, decision making, etc.) that can be applied across a diverse range of situations and contexts. Whilst contingency and situational leadership factors may be considered, they are not generally viewed as barriers to an individuals’ ability to lead under different circumstances (they simply need to apply a different combination of skills). Fewer than half of the frameworks reviewed referred directly to the leaders’ ability to respond and adapt his/her style to different circumstances.

In addition to ‘soft’ skills, the leader is also expected to display excellent information processing, project management, customer service and delivery skills, along with proven business and political acumen. They build partnerships, walk the talk,

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show incredible drive and enthusiasm, and get things done. Furthermore, the leader demonstrates innovation, creativity and thinks 'outside the box'. They are entrepreneurs who identify opportunities - they like to be challenged and they're prepared to take risks.

Of interest, too, is the emphasis on the importance of qualities such as honesty, integrity, empathy, trust and valuing diversity. The leader is expected to show a true concern for people that is drawn from a deep level of self-awareness, personal reflection and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998).

This almost iconographic notion of the leader, as a multi-talented individual with diverse skills, personal qualities and a large social conscience, poses a number of difficulties. Firstly it represents almost a return to the 'great man' or 'heroic' notions of leadership, which venerate the individual to the exclusion of the team and organisation. Secondly when you attempt to combine attributes from across a range of frameworks the result is an unwieldy, almost over-powering list of qualities such as that generated during the CEML research, which identified 83 management and leadership attributes, condensed from a list of over 1000 (Perren and Burgoyne, 2001). And thirdly there is little evidence in practice that the 'transformational' leader is any more effective with regards to improving organisational performance than his/her alternatives (Gronn, 1995).

To a large extent these difficulties are a direct result of the functional analysis methodology central to the standards approach. This method generates a list of competencies from analysis of numerous managers' jobs - the result, therefore, is not a list of activities or behaviours demonstrated by any one individual, rather an averaging out across multiple individuals. Imagine if a similar technique was used to determine the characteristics of the 'lovable man': he'd be caring, strong, gentle, attractive, kind, rich, etc. -

in effect an unlikely, if not impossible, combination!

Whilst personal qualities of the leader are undoubtedly important they are unlikely to be sufficient in themselves for the emergence and exercise of leadership. Furthermore, the manner in which these qualities translate into behaviour and group interaction is likely to be culturally specific and thus depend on a whole host of factors, such as the nature of the leader, followers, task, organisational structure, and culture (national, corporate and group).

We conclude, therefore, that whilst the development of frameworks and standards can be a valuable way of encouraging individuals and organisations to consider their approach to management and leadership development, it is in the application of these standards and frameworks that difficulties often occur. When working with frameworks and standards there is frequently a temptation to apply them deductively to assess, select and measure leaders rather than inductively to describe effective leadership practice and stimulate debate. With an increasing awareness of the emergent and relational nature of leadership it is our opinion that the standards approach should not be used to define a comprehensive set of attributes of effective leaders, but rather to offer a 'lexicon' with which individuals, organisations, consultants and other agents can debate the nature of leadership and the associated values and relationships within their organisations.

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## **Figure 8 - Generic Management and Leadership Frameworks**

### ***CEML Framework of Management and Leadership Abilities***

The Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership conducted an extensive piece of research using primary and secondary data sources to identify a key set of management and leadership abilities (Perren and Burgoyne, 2001). The resultant framework identified 83 distinct management and leadership abilities (condensed from an initial list of 1013), which were grouped into three generic categories and 8 meta-groups. The categories and meta-groups are as follows:

- **Thinking Abilities:** Think Strategically
- **People Abilities:** Manage self, Manage and lead people, Lead direction and culture, Manage relationships
- **Task Abilities:** Manage information, Manage resources, Manage activities and quality

The full report can be downloaded from: [www.managementandleadershipcouncil.org](http://www.managementandleadershipcouncil.org)

### ***National Occupational Standards in Management and Leadership***

NOS in management were first introduced in the UK in 1992 to address the relatively low level of education and training of UK managers in relation to their overseas counterparts. They act as a benchmark for effective practice and form the basis of NVQ and SVQ awards in management.

A revised framework is due to be introduced soon and divides management and leadership into six key functions: providing direction, facilitating change, achieving results, working with people, using resources, and managing self & personal skills. For each of these elements the framework defines outcomes, behaviours, knowledge & understanding and skills.

Further details are available at: [www.management-standards.org](http://www.management-standards.org)

### ***Investors in People Leadership and Management Model***

The IIP Leadership and Management Model sets out a framework for the assessment of leadership and management capabilities in relation to the new “leadership and management” dimension of the Investors in People Award. There are four main principles (commitment, planning, action and evaluation) each with associated indicators.

For further information please visit: [www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/leadership/entry/home.asp](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/leadership/entry/home.asp)

### ***EFQM Business Excellence Model***

The European Foundation for Quality Management Award is an internationally recognised quality award based around business processes, of which one is leadership. The leadership dimension is a key ‘enabler’ and covers the following four areas:

- 1a Leaders develop the mission, vision and values and are role models of a culture of Excellence;
- 1b Leaders are personally involved in ensuring the organisation’s management system is developed, implemented and continuously improved;
- 1c Leaders are involved with customers, partners and representatives of society;
- 1d Leaders motivate, support and recognise the organisation’s people.

For further information please visit: [www.efqm.org/model\\_awards/model/excellence\\_model.htm](http://www.efqm.org/model_awards/model/excellence_model.htm)

### ***Institute of Chartered Management – Chartered Management Skills***

Chartered Manager candidates need to demonstrate (and provide evidence of) learning, development and impact in the workplace against two of these six categories: Leading People, Meeting Customer Needs, Managing Change, Managing Information and Knowledge, Managing Activities and Resources, and Managing yourself.

For further information visit:

[www.managers.org.uk/institute/content\\_1.asp?category=3&id=37&id=30&id=14](http://www.managers.org.uk/institute/content_1.asp?category=3&id=37&id=30&id=14)

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## **Figure 9 – Public Sector Leadership and Management Frameworks**

### ***Senior Civil Service Competency Framework***

This framework sets out key attributes that have been identified by Civil Service Corporate Management as required for the Senior Civil Service (SCS). There are six main sets of competences, each with a series of related behaviours. The competencies are as follows: Giving purpose and direction, Making a personal impact, Thinking strategically, Getting the best from people, Learning and improving, and Focusing on delivery.

For more information please visit: [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/civilservice/scs/competences.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/civilservice/scs/competences.htm)

### ***Defence Leadership Centre Helix Model***

The Leadership Helix Model has been recently developed by the Defence Leadership Centre to act as a basis for the development of leadership attributes in the armed forces. It comprises 9 qualities: integrity, vision, communication, professional knowledge, decision making, innovation, focussed on development, humility and an unspecified quality entitled “?”.

For further information visit: [https://da.mod.uk/DLC/Research/HelixModel/document\\_view](https://da.mod.uk/DLC/Research/HelixModel/document_view)

### ***EO for Local Government – Compendium of Competencies***

The Employers' Organisation for local government's (EO) role is to help councils achieve the high standards of people management needed to ensure the continuous improvement of services. Their website includes a compendium of leadership competencies developed by and/or used by local authorities across the UK. These have been classified into 20 different categories, including: Change, Communication, Corporate Focus, Customer Focus, Decision Making, Equality and Diversity, Focus on Results, Impact and Influence, Information Management, Integrity, Leading People, Partnerships, Personal Management and Drive, Political Awareness, Project and Process Management, Resource Management, Safety, Service Improvement, Strategic Focus, and Team Building.

For more information please visit: [www.lg-employers.gov.uk/skills/leadership\\_comp](http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk/skills/leadership_comp)

### ***NHS Leadership Qualities Framework***

The NHS Leadership Qualities Framework, developed by the NHS Leadership Centre, identifies 15 key qualities (personal, cognitive and social) across three broad clusters: Personal qualities, Setting direction and Delivering the service.

- **Personal qualities:** Self belief, Self awareness, Self management, Drive for improvement, Personal integrity
- **Setting Direction:** Seizing the future, Intellectual flexibility, Broad scanning, Political astuteness, Drive for results
- **Delivering the service:** Leading change through people, Holding to account, Empowering others, Effective and strategic influencing, Collaborative working

For full details on the framework please visit: [www.nhsleadershipqualities.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsleadershipqualities.nhs.uk)

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## Leadership and Performance

Although the link between effective leadership and performance is widely taken for granted, good empirical evidence of this relationship is in short supply. In this article we review recent research and the types of indicators that can be considered when deciding whether or not leadership and leadership development have any demonstrable impact on the bottom-line. We conclude that when considering the effect of leadership within organisations it is important to take a broad view of the notion of performance and to consider the impact of contextual factors.

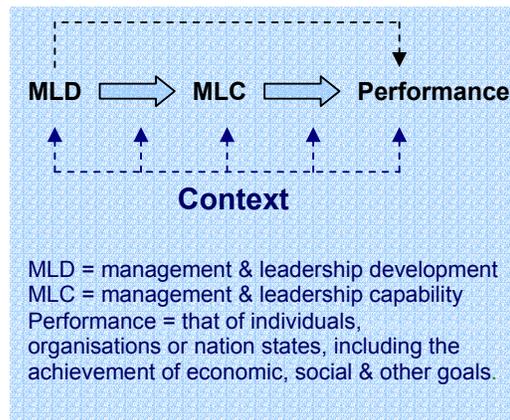
### Leadership, management and human resource management

Part of the difficulty in demonstrating the impact of leadership (or any other organisational process) on performance is the manner in which a multitude of factors interact. Traditional management and HRM (Human Resource Management) practices relating to planning, organising and controlling resources (both material and human) are closely associated with leadership practices of setting direction, aligning people - and motivating and inspiring them. Furthermore, 'performance', however conceived, is impacted by a host of factors other than leadership (many of which are intangible and can not be measured). For these reasons, when assessing the impact of leadership and leadership development it is beneficial to take a more holistic, multi-disciplinary perspective. In particular, we will consider management and management development in conjunction with leadership.

Implicit within any assumption of a relationship between management and leadership development (MLD) and improved performance is a supposed chain of causality, whereby it is argued that MLD will lead to enhanced management and leadership capability (MLC), which in turn will lead to enhanced performance – see Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Management and leadership development, capability and performance**

(Burgoyne et al., 2004)



Thus, to determine the impact of management and leadership on performance it is necessary to unpack a whole range of complex issues: what constitutes MLD, MLC and performance? We will not enter into an analysis of MLD and MLC in this article, as they are touched on elsewhere in this and subsequent reports, however, it would be valuable to briefly consider the nature of performance.

### What is performance?

When considering the likely impact of leadership and management on performance a number of different levels of effect can be identified.

The initial effect is likely to be at an *individual* level. Following development, it will be expected that the individual leader/manager will become more effective. This may be revealed through 'hard' measures, such as enhanced productivity, technical competence and/or knowledge, but is perhaps more likely to be demonstrated through softer measures, such as improved self-awareness, communication and strategic thinking.

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The next level of effect is likely to be at a *group* level, whereby an individual leaders' behaviour begins to impact upon that of his/her colleagues and subordinates. As before, this change may be revealed in hard productivity/output measures, however, it is more likely to be exhibited (at least initially) through improved communication, motivation, morale and team working. Related measures that may be affected include decreased absenteeism and staff turnover, increased willingness to work overtime, and enhanced participation, accountability and suggestions/feedback.

A third level of effect can be seen at an *organisational* level. Indeed, improving organisational effectiveness is often the key driver behind investment in management and leadership development. At this level of impact, it is intended that through development of a critical mass of effective leadership in different parts of the organisation, the organisation as a whole becomes more successful. Such impacts may well be revealed in hard measures such as improved profit, turnover and share value and reduced wastage; however a wide array of other measures could be considered, including customer satisfaction, relationship with suppliers, organisational culture and innovation.

Whilst most consideration of the impact of MLD stops at the organisational level, the commitment of national and regional government to enhance MLC indicates that the potential impact of effective leadership can traverse organisational boundaries. By building the capability and performance of organisations within a specific geographic area (be it regional, national or international) much larger scale impacts are possible (including economic, social and environmental).

In short, leadership and leadership development can have an effect at many levels and there are a host of factors, besides simple financial measures, upon which they impact.

Another key thing to consider when attempting to monitor the performance impact of management and leadership, is the likely time delay for visible improvements. Thus, for example, it will be far easier to measure the impact of an MLD initiative in terms of staff attitudes rather than changes in productivity as the latter will be slow to achieve and will be subject to a much wider range of influencing factors<sup>2</sup>.

The remainder of this article will consider the empirical evidence for a link between management, leadership and performance at different levels<sup>3</sup>.

### **The relationship between MLD, individual capability and performance**

Whilst it is widely assumed that MLD will enhance individual capability and subsequently performance, the evidence implies a more complex interaction.

Keep and Westwood (2003), for example, argue there is little evidence that the current supply of MLD is addressing the right skills, improving capability or enhancing performance. Bramley (1999) in a wide review of the evidence likewise found little support neither for the impact of off-the-job management education nor for generic management courses. He did, however, conclude that the most useful kinds of development relate to work-based activities such as giving and receiving detailed feedback, goal setting and action planning.

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<sup>2</sup> In a review of international performance indicators the DTI is considering using measures of *perceived* quality of management due to the absence of any more objective measurements (see [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/97626/productivitychs.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/97626/productivitychs.pdf) for more details). In addition, recent research at the Institute of Work Psychology, University of Sheffield has found a strong correlation between self-report measures of organisational performance and objective measures such as productivity and profit, thus supporting the use of this relatively easy-to-collect data in studies of organisational performance.

<sup>3</sup> This review draws heavily on a review conducted by the Management and Leadership Development Research Network (Burgoyne et al., 2004).

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Boyatzis (1993) revealed concerns about a possible break in the supposed chain of causality, whereby he discovered that simply having leadership competencies does not mean that you will use them. He went on to argue that MLD should thus aim to encourage and support people to take on leadership roles and responsibilities rather than simply equipping them with the necessary skills.

A recent review of the literature (Burgoyne et al., 2004) did, however, identify two key factors that seem to increase the impact of MLD on individual capability and performance: (1) the inclusion of opportunities for receiving and discussing individual feedback; and (2) the quality of management processes preceding, supporting and reinforcing development activities. Thus, it appears that providing MLD alone is insufficient to ensure an increase in individual capability and performance, rather it needs to incorporate appropriate opportunities for feedback and discussion, and be accompanied by supportive management processes.

The problem in demonstrating the relationship between MLD, capability and performance is largely the result of the difficulty in untangling a series of interwoven debates, including the appropriateness of MLD (does it address the right skills? for the right people? via an appropriate pedagogy? etc.) and the impact of MLD (does it increase capability? performance? other qualities? etc.). It is without doubt that not all MLD activity is equal and that it is more the quality than the quantity that matters.

### **The relationship between MLD and organisational performance**

In a similar vein to individual development, capability and performance, despite the tendency of many management and leadership gurus to make categorical statements about the characteristics of leaders of successful organisations based

on limited case study material, more reliable empirical evidence is hard to come by.

Two studies that do make this link, however, include a study of data from 800 Sears stores in the US, which found employee attitudes towards their job and employer to be positively linked to customer attitudes and business results, with the line manager emerging as a key link in this chain (Rucci et al., 1998), and a similar study of 100 stores of a major UK retailer that found employee satisfaction and commitment to be positively related to sales increases (Barber et al., 1999). In both these studies, the quality of line management (as perceived by staff) was an important link in the chain between capability and organisational performance via its impact on employee commitment and motivation.

In a longitudinal study of the impact of business tools and techniques<sup>4</sup> Nohria et al. (2003) concluded that none of these techniques in themselves had a direct causal relationship to superior business performance – what did make a difference was having a clear grasp of management and leadership practices<sup>5</sup>.

*“Without exception, companies that outperformed their industry peers excelled at what we call the four primary management practices – strategy, execution, culture and structure. And they supplemented their great skill in those areas with a mastery of any two out of four secondary management practices – talent, innovation, leadership, and mergers and partnerships.” (Nohria et al., 2003, p.43)*

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<sup>4</sup> Such as Total Quality Management (TQM), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Supply Chain Management (SCM).

<sup>5</sup> In this study the concept of “leadership” was only used in regards to senior management (CEOs and the Board). It is our view that all of the practices termed “management” in this study have a substantial leadership element.

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Further evidence is presented by Cockerill (1993) who found that management competence has a greater influence on performance in dynamic environments than in static environments, thus implying that effective management and leadership are more necessary in times of change than in periods of stability.

### **The relationship between MLD and organisational performance**

Despite massive investment in management and leadership development in all sectors, empirical evidence of a link between MLD and organisational performance is also limited, but does generally support a positive causal relation.

Two studies that have identified direct financial benefits of investing in MLD include a study by Lee et al. (1993) who estimated British Telecom to have saved £270 million as the result of a management-training programme (due to the reduction in errors by untrained junior managers and waste caused by missed deadlines, customer complaints, etc.). And DTZ (1998) who found that 63% of firms involved in management development activity (supported by the Training and Enterprise Council) could identify an impact of this on business performance - primarily via improved staff morale, improved response and flexibility and improvements in quality which in turn, they believe, lead to greater customer loyalty and new business.

Mabey and Thompson (2000) found that positive outcomes of management development investment could largely be attributed to the manner in which an organisation made its policy choices, with particular importance being given to the company's commitment to training activity. Marshall et al. (1993) found a clear relationship between the use of external consultants in management development in SMEs and business performance, and in a study of leadership in UK organisations Horne and Stedman

Jones (2001) concluded that where systematic implementation of leadership development existed there was a strong relationship to the perceived quality of leadership in that organisation and organisational performance. Mabey and Ramirez (2004) reached similar conclusions in a recent international study as indicated below:

*“There is strong statistical evidence that management development leads to superior organisational performance across companies of all sizes, sectors and national location. An impressive 16 per cent of variance is explained by three factors: the extent to which HR is integrated with business strategy, the degree to which the firm takes a thoughtful, long-term approach to developing managerial capability and the belief by line managers that their employer is taking management development seriously.” (Mabey and Ramirez, 2004, p9).*

In addition to this selection of studies, there are a large number that indicate a link between HRM practices and organisational performance as well as the impact of training more generally. In a synthesis of research on HRM practices, for example, Becker and Huselid (1998) identified “management development and training activities linked to the needs of the business” as one of four key HRM systems. Additional work on the benefits of HRM emphasises how managers need to implement practices through their own personal skills (e.g. empowerment, team working, and performance management) and, as concluded recently by Purcell et al. (2003), it is the quality of implementation that really affects the success of an intervention more than the nature of the initiative itself.

In a longitudinal study of over 100 UK manufacturing companies Patterson et al. (1997) found that 18% of variations in productivity and 19% in profitability could be attributed to people management

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practices. Research is increasingly indicating that HRM initiatives are more likely to be effective where they 'fit' with other HR and business strategies within the organisation and that the key to this lies in successful management and leadership (see Richardson and Thompson, 1999 for an excellent review of this literature).

Although findings are complex and it is hard to quantify in any consistent way the link between MLD, capability and performance it is now fairly well accepted that management and leadership are critical factors in the effective implementation of HRM and business strategies that, in turn, affect organisational performance.

### **The relationship between MLC and national performance**

For a number of years the UK government has believed that effective management and leadership is the key to unlocking national productivity and a series of reports have consistently argued that poor national performance is directly associated with a deficit of good managers and leaders (e.g. CEML, 2002; DTI, 2001; Handy, 1987), but is this really the case?

The recent report from Porter and Ketel's (2003) review of UK productivity questioned both whether the UK's economic performance is poor and whether management is one of the main determinants of economic performance. They concluded "there is always room for improvement" but that "efforts to upgrade management will not however be sufficient to achieve a sustained improvement in UK competitiveness".

Research into whether or not there is a national deficit in management skills tends to point more strongly to a *qualitative* shortfall (i.e. a perception of poor management and leadership within organisations) rather than a large-scale *quantitative* absence of management skills per se. The National Skills Taskforce (DfEE, 2000) and Skills in England report (Campbell et al, 2001) indicated that skills

shortages are more prevalent within technical, generic, intermediate, ICT and numeric skills areas than management, even though this was noted as an area of concern.

Horne and Stedman Jones (2001), however, found a third to a half of respondents in their survey of 15,000 managers rated leadership within their organisations as poor, with similar findings being reported by Charlesworth et al. (2003) about management in the public sector.

With regards to how the leadership and management capability of UK managers compares with that in other countries, such information is inherently difficult to gather and interpret (see Jagger et al, 2002). In a comprehensive review of the stock of UK management, however, Bosworth (1999) identified a lower level of academic qualification amongst UK managers in relation to those of competitor nations although demographic trends indicate that this situation will be redressed over time (Campbell et al, 2001; Wood, 1992).

### **Conclusions: the link between management, leadership and performance**

Despite widespread assertions about the importance of management and leadership with regards to individual, organisational and national performance, empirical evidence remains limited. Economic analyses tend to imply that whilst management and leadership may play a role in determining national competitiveness, their impact is only one of many factors. At an organisational level, management and leadership appear to have an effect on a range of outcomes, but only as part of a more general set of HRM practices. At the individual level the impact of MLD seems to be dependent on the type of intervention and the desire and opportunity of individuals to take on leadership responsibilities.

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Whilst this evidence in itself may not paint an overly positive image of the impact of management and leadership on performance a number of key lessons do emerge:

- With regards to HRM (and other business initiatives), it's not so much what you do as how you do it that is important. Thus, an integrated approach aligned with the strategic objectives of the organisation is more likely to be effective than any number of stand-alone initiatives.
- With regards to MLC, it is the leaders' influence upon employee motivation and commitment that appears to have the greatest impact, rather than any specific characteristic or behaviour of the leader per se.
- And with MLD, the development of skills and knowledge alone is not sufficient to improve performance - it requires the provision of constructive feedback, appropriate support and encouragement to take on management and leadership responsibilities.

These findings demonstrate the importance of considering leadership in the wider context of the organisation. In isolation, there is no guarantee that leadership development and/or capability will enhance individual or organisational performance, however, if considered as a key enabler within wider organisational and HRM processes its impact becomes evident. Conversely, the presence of effective leadership and management processes within an organisation increases the likelihood of further training and development being successful. Without a sense of vision, inspiration and direction, HRM and MLD initiatives will not be integrated with business objectives and employees will lack the motivation and commitment to work towards shared organisational goals.

A further point arising from this review is the pressing need for more extensive research into the relationship between leadership and management development, capability and performance. Of particular importance is an improved understanding of the manner in which these (and other) elements interact to make them effective within certain situations but not others. To this extent, it is advised that all organisations should seek to find ways of evaluating their management and leadership capability and development processes, not in a simplistic linear fashion, but as part of a holistic integrated organisational strategy. In a Leadership and Management Development Best Practice Guide developed during the CEML research, evaluation was included as one of the key elements of any initiative (Burgoyne and James, 2002) and a recent article in the Harvard Business Review (Ittner and Larcker, 2003) argued that the majority of organisations fail to take sufficient account of non-financial performance indicators.

Thus in conclusion, despite the absence of definitive empirical evidence indicating the relationship between management, leadership and performance it is now widely agreed that these are key ingredients in the effective performance of individuals, groups, organisations, regions and nation states. The difficulty in measuring this relationship in any direct linear manner indicates the need for more elaborate longitudinal research that considers performance in its widest sense. The manner in which improved management and leadership leads to enhanced performance is highly complex and thus when considering the benefits arising from interventions a much broader notion of performance needs to be embraced than one simply of enhanced productivity or profit.

## The Shadow Side of Leadership

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Whilst much is written and said about the benefits of effective leadership, far less consideration is given to the possible negative impacts of a culture that promotes 'leadership' as the answer.

It is not just where leaders turn 'bad', working for selfish or deluded aims and encouraging followers to work towards goals that are ultimately not in their own interests or those of society, where leadership can have a negative effect. In corporate scandals such as Andy Fastow of Enron and Dennis Kozlowski at Tyco it is clear how personal ambition and greed lead to disastrous consequences for their organisations and similar examples are replete in politics, religion, and all other domains of human activity (Kellerman, 2004). Of equal concern, however, is where more subtle social and psychological factors interact to undermine the very principles that good leadership is meant to address.

In an influential paper Gemmill and Oakley (1992) proposed that leadership could be "an alienating social myth" that, rather than empowering organisations, deskills employees and places excessive dependency on the 'leader'. To make this argument, they draw heavily on psychodynamic literature and propose that through a process of reification, the abstract notion of leadership is taken as representative of an objective reality – in effect, the very existence of notions such as 'leader' and 'leadership' compel us to believe that such things must indeed be real.

Within this framework it is argued "the leadership myth functions as a social defence whose central aim is to repress uncomfortable needs, emotions, and wishes that emerge when people attempt to work together" (ibid, p. 273), the implication being that followers learn to depend on figures in leadership roles to offer them a sense of meaning, direction and purpose.

*"When pain is coupled with an inordinate, widespread, and pervasive sense of helplessness, social myths about the need for great leaders and magical leadership emerge from the primarily unconscious collective feeling that it would take a miracle or messiah to alleviate or ameliorate this painful form of existence" (Gemmill and Oakley, 1992, p.273).*

This paper was written largely in response to the recurring emphasis on charismatic and inspirational leadership dominant at the time, and which is still widely pursued within many organisations. The primary concern was that "in over-idealizing the leader, members deskill themselves from their own critical thinking, visions, inspirations, and emotions" (ibid, p. 279). Such a situation, rather than empowering followers to reach their maximum potential, engenders a sense of alienation, helplessness and failure that leads to passivity and a childlike dependence on the leader. The authors conclude by proposing that leadership needs demythologising to enable all individuals, no matter at what level within the organisation, to recognise their internal drivers and abilities and thus find new ways of expressing their creativity and identity when interacting with others.

Conger (1990) expresses similar concerns, but this time from the leader's perspective, arguing that there are three main areas in which leaders can become deluded and lose touch with reality. The first of these is strategic vision. Whilst it is recognised that a strong vision has been central to the success of many well-known leaders, the strength of this vision and a personal commitment to achieving it can lead to a stubborn refusal to consider alternative and competing approaches. This conviction that the world really is – or should be – configured exactly as we see it is diagnosed by Maccoby (2000) as narcissism, common amongst leaders because it is one of the forces driving them

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to seek power: that is the power to make their vision come true. Such a situation may mean that the leader fails to detect important market changes, the necessary resources required to achieve the vision and an exaggeration of the needs of markets and constituents. In effect, the leader may become blind-sighted, seeking out only information that supports his or her vision and ignoring that which conflicts. This situation may be compounded where other people within the organisation fail to challenge the leader's vision, either due to fear of repercussions, or over-dependence and trust in the leader's judgement.

*“Others in the organisation, who tend to become dependent on a visionary leader, may perpetuate the problem through their own actions. They may idealize their leader excessively and thus ignore negative aspects and exaggerate the good qualities. As a result, they may carry out their leader's orders unquestioningly – and leaders may in certain circumstances encourage such behaviour because of their needs to dominate and be admired” (Conger, 1990, p. 291).*

A second way in which leaders can lose touch with reality is as a result of their communication and impression-management techniques. It is undoubtedly true that effective communication is a key leadership skill, however it is also one that is open to abuse. In order to make his or her vision more appealing, a leader may be tempted to distort the information that they convey – selectively presenting only those aspects that enhance their message. Whilst this may serve to deceive followers (either intentionally or unintentionally) there is evidence to indicate that it may ultimately begin to delude the presenter as well. This is particularly likely where positive responses are received from the audience, which reinforce and confirm the leader's argument.

The third issue presented by Conger that may undermine a leader's effectiveness are management practices that become liabilities. Whilst unconventional behaviour may commonly be associated with charismatic and visionary leaders, it may well give rise to difficulties in the organisation that are hard to overcome. In particular, problems may arise with managing upward and sideways, relationships with subordinates, a lack of attention to administrative detail and implementation, and failure to plan for succession. Thus, the leader's need for dominance may sour relationships with colleagues and subordinates, limit the development of future leaders, and engender an action-orientated culture that fails to take sufficient account of everyday detail.

Maccoby and Kets de Vries express similar concerns, but this time they point to an almost compulsive or pathological trend within leaders towards narcissism and an organisational tendency towards neurosis. Maccoby (2000) argues that larger-than-life leaders are almost inevitably driven by a need for recognition, power and self-promotion that is key to their success, and occasionally their downfall. Such leaders tend to express a clear vision and are capable of inspiring followers through their charisma and communication abilities. On the negative side, however, they are often sensitive to criticism, shun emotions, are poor listeners, lack empathy, have a distaste for mentoring and development, and are intensely competitive. Kets de Vries (2004) echoes these thoughts, as well as those of Gemmill and Oakley by stressing that leaders and followers are susceptible to neurosis at both an individual and collective level. The blind desire of followers to be lead can be just as harmful as the blind ambition of the leader.

So what can organisations do to eliminate or minimise these risks? Firstly it is important to be aware that such processes may be occurring – the very fact of making

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them conscious and explicit can alert people to the fact that something may be astray. Secondly, checks and controls can be put in place to minimise the potential negative impact of narcissism. Maccoby proposes a number of solutions including finding a trusted sidekick who can challenge the leader's assumptions and encourage them to consider alternatives; indoctrinate the organisation to internalise the vision and values of the leader; and get into psychoanalysis, because through self-awareness and reflection narcissistic leaders will be better placed to exploit the positive aspects of their personality and minimise the negative impacts. And thirdly, organisations can reconsider the importance that they place on designated leaders in resolving their challenges. Kets de Vries argues that greater attention needs to be paid to achieving congruence between the personal needs of employees and organisational objectives. This, he proposes, will lead to a greater sense of determination, sense of competence, feeling of community, sense of enjoyment and sense of meaning. He doesn't, however, give much guidance as to how this can be achieved and it remains likely that people will continue to be motivated as much, if not more, by their dysfunctional emotional needs as by their altruistic and rational goals.

Responsible leadership requires a deep sense of self and community - valuing diversity, ethics, the individual and the collective. In effect, at its heart is a shared emotional intelligence or, as Alan Wheelis (1975, p.15) expresses it:

*“Freedom is the awareness of alternatives and the ability to choose.”*

# The Future of Leadership

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To conclude this report we would like to consider future trends in leadership.

## Leadership Society and the Next Ten Years

To begin we will present a piece of research conducted by the Centre for Leadership Studies on behalf of the Windsor Leadership Trust (Bolden and Gosling, 2003). This work reviewed the outcomes of Initial Windsor Meetings (IWM) run from November 2001 to May 2003, which give experienced leaders from all sectors of society a week to reflect on, discuss and explore the questions and challenges of leadership. A total of 17 syndicate reports were reviewed, each compiled by 6-8 participants. The common theme during this period was “leadership, society and the next ten years”. The nature of participants means that this group offers a significant pool of expertise, constituting the views of well over 100 senior managers from a diverse cross section of organisations and occupations in the UK and beyond.

### *The changing nature of society*

All groups gave considerable attention to changes in the society in which they operate. There was a general consensus that Western society is undergoing an unprecedented period of change and that this appears to be accelerating. Technological advances are transforming communications and access to information; the retired population is growing whilst the working population diminishes; global economies are becoming increasingly interdependent; the ethnic and religious mix is transforming; the divide between the haves and have-nots is widening. There is an improved awareness of the social and environmental impacts of our actions; a decreasing allegiance to traditional power structures; an increasing complexity with regards to stakeholders and decision-making; a move from family groups to individualism; increasing customer (and employee) demands; and a climate of change and uncertainty.

### *The changing nature of work*

The changes in society are impacting significantly upon the nature of work and the workforce. There is a trend towards flexible working (including part-time, working from home and the mobile office). Decreasing job security, company loyalty and unemployment are encouraging mid-life career changes and self-employment. Demographic changes and global trade are leading to sectoral shifts from manufacturing and production to service and leisure industries. There are an ever-increasing number of stakeholders (often with conflicting demands) and an increasing pressure to work in collaboration and to establish partnerships. Private sector organisations are becoming more powerful and influential in areas previously controlled by the public sector, such as pensions, transport and healthcare.

### *The changing face of leadership*

In this climate of change, leadership is viewed as the key to organisational success. Although the core qualities of leaders may remain constant, the manner and mix in which they are exhibited needs to become more fluid and matched to the context. The leader needs to become increasingly adaptable – making sense of uncertainty and managing complexity. The qualities of openness, empathy, integrity and self-awareness are coming to the fore and demand a more participative leadership style, whereby the leader not only involves colleagues, but listens, is responsive to feedback and delegates responsibility. The leader will increasingly need to “win the right to lead”, “lead from the front”, “lead by example” and be prepared to “share in hardship”. Developing a culture of leadership in which people can excel is being seen as increasingly important, as is the need to create and communicate a shared long-term vision.

As the need for good strategic leadership becomes critical, it is proposed that further steps need to be taken to identify, develop

and support potential future leaders from an early stage. The emphasis should be on experiential and reflective learning that builds upon innate qualities and personal experiences, and enhances the ability to define and communicate a vision and to adapt to different contexts and situations.

Many groups discussed the moral 'dilemmas' facing leaders and the challenge of taking difficult decisions, often with incomplete information (see Figure 11). Leadership can be a lonely task, and all groups made explicit reference to the importance of work/life balance in alleviating stress and isolation.

**Figure 11 – Leadership, Society and the Next 10 Years**

(Bolden and Gosling, 2003)

**Key leadership qualities for the next ten years:**

- Integrity and moral courage
- Self-awareness and humility
- Empathy and emotional engagement
- Transparency and openness
- Clarity of vision
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Energy and resilience
- Decisiveness in the face of uncertainty
- Judgement, consistency and fairness
- Ability to inspire, motivate and listen
- Respect and trust
- Knowledge and expertise
- Delivering results

**Some leadership dilemmas for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:**

- Can outcomes justify the means by which they are achieved?
- When values clash how do we choose which takes priority?
- What should be done when the interests of the organisation/shareholders are in conflict with the interests of society?
- Can you lead if you don't subscribe to the core values of the organisation?
- How can we achieve consensus without negating minority views?

*constant come together true leaders flourish.” (IWM Syndicate Group, Nov. 2001)*

**What now?**

The findings from this research indicate an underlying shift in thinking about leadership, not just amongst academics but also practicing managers. We have moved a long way from the early trait and 'great man' theories, whereby leadership was considered the reserve of an exclusive few who were born destined to lead. There is a clear awareness that a far wider range of factors are involved – some to do with holders of leadership positions, some to do with others in the organisation, and some to do with the relationship between all these and wider society. Leadership can be conceived of as a social process of influence – there are things people can do to enhance specific skills and their ability to cope with situations but the processes and outcomes of leadership remain socially embedded – the result of a complex interaction between a multitude of factors. Thus, *who* becomes a leader, *how* they behave, and *what* they do are all determined as much by social and cultural factors as by any individual characteristics – Churchill, Hitler, Stalin, Gandhi and King were all products of their time, place and culture!

As we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century emphasis is turning towards the moral, social and ethical responsibilities of leaders. As corporations become increasingly powerful, so do the leaders who inhabit them – not just on a positional power basis, but also for the potential repercussions within and between communities. Consider the wider effects of leadership within a pensions company, health organisation, manufacturing plant or football club – the potential for economic, environmental and social impact (whether good or bad) is far from contained by the boundaries of the organisation.

*“To conclude, the leadership journey is a never ending one. Change is a constant. Where the journey and the*

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A series of high-profile corporate scandals, increasing disillusionment with business and political leaders, and the failure of many CEOs to deliver what is expected of them raises doubts about the capacity for individual leaders to achieve the continued change in performance sought within their organisations. To maximise the potential of all types of organisation it is essential to tap into the creative and leadership qualities of all employees, not just the senior team.

The challenges we face, however, won't just be resolved by calls for "more leadership". As discussed in the article on the *shadow side of leadership* an overdependence on leaders can ultimately be detrimental to employees and organisations in a number of ways. In the article on *leadership and performance* the evidence implies that in order for leadership and leadership development to be effective they need to form a central part of an integrated strategic, management and human resource process. In the articles on *leadership and management* and *leadership competencies* we argue that promoting leadership without reference to management (or vice versa) is meaningless and bears little or no relation to the lived experience of managers within organisations.

In response to these challenges, many organisations are beginning to re-evaluate their perception of leadership. There is a move away from the heroic notion of the leader "out in front", to a more collective concept of the "leadership process" – where leadership is a shared responsibility to which everyone makes a contribution. This view, however, should not be considered as grounds for abandoning the notion of 'leaders' and 'followers' (history has shown us that this is an important feature of human groups) but it should encourage us to reconsider the relative importance attributed to each (after all a leader is nothing without followers) and

the manner in which such relationships can both benefit and hinder success.

Looking forwards, it is without doubt that the quality of leadership will remain of central importance to organisations in all sectors, much as it has previously. It is also true that much can be done to improve both the way in which leadership is conceived and applied within organisations and how it is developed and integrated with other organisational processes.

To conclude, we would like to challenge you to conceive of alternative ways of going about leadership within any organisation with which you are involved. We also encourage you to consider the wider implications of your involvement in leadership practice and any way in which it could be modified for the wider good. Thus, if you consider yourself a leader – pay attention to how you go about it; if you work within an organisation – consider how the process of leadership occurs and your role within it; and if you an observer/advisor – then consider how leadership interacts with social and organisational cultures.

*"Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good."* Ciulla (1998)

## Further Reading and Resources

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We hope that this report has opened your eyes to some of the richness and complexity of the field of leadership studies and has offered some useful insights into your current practice and beliefs. If you would like to find out more, we recommend that you access the following resources, and/or contact us to find out about the wide range of programmes and opportunities that are on offer in the Region.

### Books

- Adair, J. (2003) *The Inspirational Leader: How to Motivate, Encourage & Achieve Success*. London: Kogan Page.
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[\[www.pfdf.org/leaderbooks/L2L/spring99/mintzberg.html\]](http://www.pfdf.org/leaderbooks/L2L/spring99/mintzberg.html).
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### Online resources

- BBC Perspectives on Leadership:  
[\[www.ncsl.org.uk/BBCModule/ncsl.htm\]](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/BBCModule/ncsl.htm)  
– includes a number of online learning modules.
- Centre for Leadership Studies: [\[www.leadership-studies.com\]](http://www.leadership-studies.com) – includes current programmes and research publications.
- Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership:  
[\[www.managementandleadershipcouncil.org\]](http://www.managementandleadershipcouncil.org) – includes the CEML report *Management and Leadership: Raising our Game, Business Improvement Tool for Entrepreneurs, and the Leadership Development Best Practice Guide*.
- National College for School Leadership:  
[\[www.ncsl.org.uk\]](http://www.ncsl.org.uk) - includes a wide range of research publications including *What Leaders Read and Distributed Leadership*.

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