

LEADERSHIP

Management Is (Still) Not Leadership

by John P. Kotter
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A few weeks ago, the BBC asked me to come in for a radio interview. They told me they wanted to talk about effective leadership — China had just elevated Xi Jinping to the role of Communist Party leader; General David Petraeus had stepped down from his post at the CIA a few days earlier; the BBC itself was wading through a leadership scandal of its own — but the conversation quickly veered, as these things often do, into a discussion about how individuals can keep large, complex, unwieldy organizations operating reliably and efficiently.

That's not leadership, I explained. That's management — and the two are radically different.

In more than four decades of studying businesses and consulting to organizations on how to implement new strategies, I can't tell you how many times I've heard people use the words "leadership" and "management" synonymously, and it drives me crazy every time.

The interview reminded me once again that the confusion around these two terms is massive, and that misunderstanding gets in the way of any reasonable discussion about how to build a company, position it for success and win in the twenty-first century. The mistakes people make on the issue are threefold:

Mistake #1: People use the terms "management" and "leadership" interchangeably. This shows that they

don't see the crucial difference between the two and the vital functions that each role plays.

Mistake #2: People use the term "leadership" to refer to the people at the very top of hierarchies. They then call the people in the layers below them in the organization "management." And then all the rest are workers, specialists, and individual contributors. This is also a mistake and very misleading.

Mistake #3: People often think of "leadership" in terms of personality characteristics, usually as something they call charisma. Since few people have great charisma, this leads logically to the conclusion that few people can provide leadership, which gets us into increasing trouble.

In fact, management is a set of well-known processes, like planning, budgeting, structuring jobs, staffing jobs, measuring performance and problem-solving, which help an organization to predictably do what it knows how to do well. Management helps you to produce products and services as you have promised, of consistent quality, on budget, day after day, week after week. In organizations of any size and complexity, this is an enormously difficult task. We constantly underestimate how complex this task really is, especially if we are not in senior management jobs. So, management is crucial — but it's not leadership.

Leadership is entirely different. It is associated with taking an organization into the future, finding opportunities that are coming at it faster and faster and successfully exploiting those opportunities. Leadership is about vision, about people buying in, about empowerment and, most of all, about producing useful change.

Leadership is not about attributes, it's about behavior. And in an ever-faster-moving world, leadership is increasingly needed from more and more people, no matter where they are in a hierarchy. The notion that a few extraordinary people at the top can provide all the leadership needed today is ridiculous, and it's a recipe for failure.

Some people still argue that we must replace management with leadership. This is obviously not so: they serve different, yet essential, functions. We need superb management. And we need more superb leadership. We need to be able to make our complex organizations reliable and efficient. We need them to jump into the future — the right future — at an accelerated pace, no matter the size of the changes required to make that happen.

There are very, very few organizations today that have sufficient leadership. Until we face this issue, understanding exactly what the problem is, we're never going to solve it. Unless we recognize that we're not talking about management when we speak of leadership, all we will try to do when we do need more leadership is work harder to manage. At a certain point, we end up with over-managed and under-led organizations, which are increasingly vulnerable in a fast-moving world.

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LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

Three Differences Between Managers and Leaders

by Vineet Nayar

AUGUST 02, 2013

A young manager accosted me the other day. “I’ve been reading all about leadership, have implemented several ideas, and think I’m doing a good job at leading my team. How will I know when I’ve crossed over from being a manager to a leader?” he wanted to know.

I didn’t have a ready answer and it’s a complicated issue, so we decided to talk the next day. I thought long and hard, and came up with three tests that will help you decide if you’ve made the shift from managing people to leading them.

Counting value vs Creating value. You’re probably counting value, not adding it, if you’re managing people. Only **managers count value**; some even reduce value by disabling those who add value. If a diamond cutter is asked to report every 15 minutes how many stones he has cut, by distracting him, his boss is subtracting value.

By contrast, **leaders focuses on creating value**, saying: “I’d like you to handle A while I deal with B.” He or she generates value over and above that which the team creates, and is as much a value-creator as his or her followers are. Leading by example and leading by enabling people are the hallmarks of action-based leadership.

Circles of influence vs Circles of power. Just as managers have **subordinates** and leaders have **followers**, **managers create circles of power** while **leaders create circles of influence**.

The quickest way to figure out which of the two you’re doing is to count the number of people outside your reporting hierarchy who come to you for advice. The more that do, the more likely it is that you are perceived to be a leader.

Leading people vs Managing work. Management consists of controlling a group or a set of entities to accomplish a goal. Leadership refers to an individual’s ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward organizational success. Influence and inspiration separate leaders from managers, not power and control.

In India, M.K. Gandhi inspired millions of people to fight for their rights, and he walked shoulder to shoulder with them so India could achieve independence in 1947. His vision became everyone’s dream and ensured that the country’s push for independence was unstoppable. The world needs leaders like him who can think beyond problems, have a vision, and inspire people to convert challenges into opportunities, a step at a time.

I encouraged my colleague to put this theory to the test by inviting his team-mates for chats. When they stop discussing the tasks at hand — and talk about vision, purpose, and aspirations instead, that’s when you will know you have become a leader.

Agree?

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LEADERSHIP

True Leaders Are Also Managers

by [Robert I. Sutton](#)
AUGUST 11, 2010

Ever have occasion to do an in-depth review of the academic and practical literature on leadership? I have — twice in the past five years. [...]

It is impossible to read it all.

[...]

In my reviews of the writings and research, I kept bumping into an old and popular distinction that has always bugged me: leading versus managing. The brilliant and charming Warren Bennis has likely done more to popularize this distinction than anyone else. He wrote [...] that “There is a profound difference between management and leadership, and both are important. To manage means to bring about, to accomplish, to have charge of or responsibility for, to conduct. Leading is influencing, guiding in a direction, course, action, opinion. The distinction is crucial.” And in one of his most famous lines, he added, “*Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing.*”

Although this distinction is more or less correct, and is useful to a degree [...], it has unintended negative effects on how some leaders view and do their work. Some leaders now see their job as just coming up with big and vague ideas, and they treat implementing them, or even engaging in conversation and planning about the details of them, as mere “management” work.

Worse still, this distinction seems to be used as a reason for leaders to avoid the hard work of learning about

the people that they lead, the technologies their companies use, and the customers they serve. I remember hearing of a cell phone company CEO, for example, who never visited the stores where his phones were sold — because that was a management task that was beneath him — and kept pushing strategies that reflected a complete misunderstanding of customer experiences. (Perhaps he hadn’t heard of how often Steve Jobs drops in at Apple stores.)

That story is typical. “Big picture only” leaders often make decisions without considering the constraints that affect the cost and time required to implement them, and even when evidence begins mounting that it is impossible or unwise to implement their grand ideas, they often choose to push forward anyway .

I am all for dreaming. Some of the most unlikely and impressive things have been done by dreamers. But one characteristic of the dreamers I respect — [Francis Ford Coppola](#), Steve Jobs, folks at Pixar like [Ed Catmull](#) and [Brad Bird](#) — is that they also have remarkably deep understanding of the industry they work in and the people they lead, and they are willing to get very deep into the weeds. This ability to go back and forth between the little details and the big picture is also evident in the leaders I admire most who aren’t usually thought of as dreamers. [Anne Mulcahy](#)’s efforts to turn around Xerox were successful in part because of her in-depth knowledge of the company’s operations; she was very detail-oriented during the crucial early years of her leadership. Bill George, one of [Jim Collins’ level 5 leaders](#), told me that, in his first nine months as CEO of Medtronic (a medical device company), he spent about 75% of his time watching surgeons put Medtronic devices in patients and

talking with doctors and nurses, patients, families, and hospital executives to learn the ropes.

[...]

I am not rejecting the distinction between leadership and management, but I am saying that the best leaders do something that might properly be called a mix of leadership and management. At a minimum, they lead in a way that constantly takes into account the importance of management. Meanwhile, the worst senior executives use the distinction between leadership and management as an excuse to avoid the details they really have to master to see the big picture and select the right strategies.

Therefore, harking back to the Bennis theorem I quoted above, let me propose a corollary: "To do *the right thing*, a leader needs to understand what it takes to do things right, and to make sure they actually get done."

When we glorify leadership too much, and management too little, there is great risk of failing to act on this obvious but powerful message.

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