

Leadership Development Briefing

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Transforming Engagements Ltd.

People are social creatures and we all have a natural appetite for connection. I think we also have an appetite for good leadership. My own career has been blessed by leaders who were deeply invested in my development. The encouragement, resources and information they shared with me were hugely empowering. I also really valued the care they took in developing well thought out plans and in building strong teams that helped our organisation thrive.

McKinsey defines leadership as “a set of behaviours used to help people align their collective direction, to execute strategic plans, and to continually renew an organization”.¹ Interestingly, this definition does not limit leadership to a particular position. As Australian management guru Peter Fuda says: “leadership is a mindset, not a position”.²

Unfortunately, most employees describe their boss as mildly or highly toxic and more than 75% say that dealing with them is the most stressful part of their day.¹ HR professionals are the first to hear when employees had bad experiences with leadership. Unfortunately, affected employees are often reassigned or just leave the company. If the underlying cause of the problem is unresolved, HR will quickly hear the same concerns again.

This briefing outlines current thinking on what good leadership looks like. It then shares some ideas on development activities that can support good leadership. It closes by suggesting first steps that HR professionals can take to help their organisations in starting a leadership development journey.

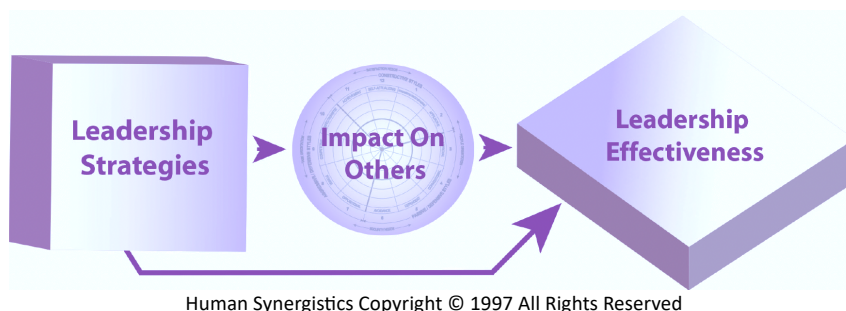
1. Understanding what development leaders need

Good leadership isn't what it used to be.

- In the past, leadership theorists associated good leadership with figures from history which was not very helpful because few of us have Mandela's charisma or Churchill's public speaking skills!
- Theorists then looked at leadership behaviours like achievement and team building. While these behaviours are easier to adopt, they focus on inputs not the results that leaders deliver.
- Leaders were then advised to be “situational”: to use different strategies for different situations. But this risked making them look inconsistent and inauthentic.
- Leadership theory now focuses on impact: the outcomes that leaders achieve through others.³

Most managers start their first leadership job with little or no leadership experience. The strategies that these managers used as successful individual contributors do not necessarily help them to lead well. In fact, the highest performing individual contributors often make terrible managers because they are obsessed with making everyone do things exactly the way they would.⁴

To understand what new leaders should be doing, it's important to understand how leadership drives company performance. Human Synergistics International (HSI) has a useful model of Leadership Impact (LI) that can help illustrate this as summarized below.⁵



The most powerful observation from this model is that leaders have impact through other people. This is an insight that I found really striking when I was given my first leadership assignment. Any work I did for myself would benefit one person, but anything I did for my team helped 12. I realized that spending time on my team was 12 times more impactful than spending time on myself!

The next question to consider from the model is what leadership strategies should leaders be spending their time on? According to HSI, there are 10 strategies that leaders use to impact others as summarised in the table below.⁶ HSI describes prescriptive and restrictive ways that leaders can use each strategy, in other words, ways that encourage desirable behaviours (prescriptive) and ways that discourage undesirable behaviours (restrictive). Research shows that good leaders encourage desirable behaviour three times more often than they discourage undesirable behaviour.

Type	Strategy	Prescriptive (3x)	Restrictive (1x)
Intrapersonal	Envisioning	Communicating goals to be pursued	Communicating goals to be avoided
	Role modelling	Personally exemplifying preferred behaviours	Actively avoiding objectionable behaviours
Interpersonal	Mentoring	Helping others to learn by sharing personal experiences and knowledge	Expecting others to learn from their own experience
	Stimulating thinking	Challenging others to break through boundaries, question assumptions, and identify new approaches	Confining others to work within boundaries, accept assumptions, and look for “proven” approaches
	Referring	Talking about the successes and competencies of other people	Talking about the mistakes and failures of other people
	Monitoring	Actively looking for things that people are doing well	Actively looking for things that people are doing poorly or incorrectly
	Providing feedback	Letting people know when they are doing things well	Letting people know when they are performing below standards
Organisational	Reinforcing	Rewarding accomplishments and excellent performance	Punishing mistakes and poor performance
	Influencing	Using reciprocal and participative tactics that increase the influence of others	Using unilateral and controlling tactics that reduce the influence of others
	Creating a setting	Structuring the work environment to promote people’s growth, development & experiences	Structuring work environment to limit people’s growth, development & experiences

The strategies above are translated into leadership effectiveness through their impact on others. HSI uses the same circumplex we explored in the Strategic HR briefing to measure impact, specifically whether leaders are encouraging others to be constructive or defensive. HSI identifies four

constructive behaviours: achievement, affiliative, encouraging and self-actualising. Defensive behaviours can be aggressive (e.g. competitive, perfectionistic) or passive (avoidant, dependent).

By reviewing leadership strategies and leadership impact, HR business partners can help leaders to identify gaps that need addressing. Examples of such gaps are summarised below:

Leadership impact survey behaviours	Possible leadership gaps	Leadership strategies to consider
<i>Constructive leadership behaviours</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement • Self-Actualising • Humanistic / Encouraging • Affiliation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient focus on performance Limited growth opportunities for team Limited encouragement for reports Poor team identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Envisaging, monitoring Mentoring Reinforcing Creating a setting
<i>Defensive / passive leadership behaviours</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval • Conventional / Dependent • Avoidant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much attention-seeking behaviour Lack of innovation / initiative Fear of giving bad news 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role-modelling (e.g. external/customer-focus) Stimulating thinking Providing feedback
<i>Defensive / aggressive leadership behaviours</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oppositional • Power / Competitive • Perfectionistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disrespectful or dismissive interactions Withholding resources / Conflict Indecisiveness, delay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the influence of others Creating a setting Role-modelling (e.g. done better than perfect)

2. Understanding how to deliver leadership development effectively

HR Directors and Business Partners must take an intentional approach to developing leadership in their organisations, with the full support of the senior leadership team. Surveys can be used to establish the baseline to improve from, using a company-wide culture survey, or a more targeted 360° leader survey. This will create shared recognition that there is a problem and assist in identifying which gaps to prioritize. Once there is clarity on where the gaps are, HR Business Partners can work with their principals to ensure that coaching and training is available to assist leaders to address them.

The best way to deliver leadership development effectively is to embed “coaching moments” in leaders’ everyday work and to integrate learning opportunities into their relationships and team-based activities. This is far more impactful than just having formalised training. Adults only retain 10% of classroom learning⁷ and most corporate training programs fail to meet expectations.⁸ Using coaching moments to train people on the job is much more impactful.

Another often-overlooked strategy for improving leadership is to encourage leadership discussions between managers and their reports. Reports often have the most accurate insights into their leader’s behaviour because they get the most unfiltered exposure to it. Likewise, most leaders care about their people & want to create an environment where they can thrive, which should make them curious about their reports’ feedback.

After a suitable rollout period (6 – 12 months), the survey can be repeated to identify improvements and areas where there are still gaps to work on.

3. First steps to addressing leadership development gaps

The first thing to think about in contemplating a new approach to leadership development is how it will contribute to your organisation's business objectives. If you introduce a leadership development initiative as a stand-alone program, it will be thrown onto the pile of other investments that the CEO and leadership team might consider "when the time is right".

Leadership development must serve the most important challenges that the business is facing right now. If the CEO wants to double revenue in the next three years, then you will need lots of good people. Do your leaders know how to retain top talent? If you need to cut costs, do your leaders have the maturity to think about the needs of the whole business, not just their own teams'? Leadership development is much easier to support when it is framed within the organisation's business priorities.

References & further reading

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