



Leadership Models – Key Points

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If you follow contemporary thinking about leadership, you hear it all. Great leaders possess courage. Leadership is being an eloquent communicator. Effective leaders surround themselves with top talent. If you want to be a great leader, you must know the art of timing. Leadership is about strategy. And so on.

The truth is that leadership is a lot of things. Leadership is also situational. It depends on the context. In one environment, it might be as simple as being a cheerleader for the team. In another environment, it might require having over 100 competencies that deal with everything from hiring to firing.

I've helped a number of organizations develop leadership scorecards and models. I have my own model that I continually refine and use in my coaching and training. There is no single right answer for all organizations. There are wrong answers though. I've seen models and scorecards that are just plain bad. You can only hope that they serve as generic platitudes and find little actual use.

Here are several points to consider when developing or evaluating leadership models:

Principles: Leadership is about employing principles, not tactics. Tactics are the specific '*how-to's*' behind the principles. Tactics and techniques are dependent on a person's style, personality, and natural abilities. The *how-to* will come with experience and coaching. Dictate the *what*. There are thousands of tactics that can be used for a given *what* and so the odds of you dictating the right one for every situation is unlikely. Define principles that offer the flexibility to use the right approach for a given situation. Great leaders and successful people follow principles ... and so do great leadership models.

Definition of Success: Leadership is about influence. It is about delivering results. It is not always about making money or being the CEO. For some, achieving results is simply doing meaningful work or furthering a cause that makes a real difference. The definition of success is different for different people and leadership models should be careful about defining success too narrowly.

Management: I have yet to see an organization, or an individual in a management position that didn't need competencies in both management and leadership. To be clear, senior leaders are usually not mired in the day-to-day details that stereotypical managers might be, but that doesn't mean that they are only focused on areas like vision and strategy. Successful leaders have both management and leadership competencies. Don't exclude management competencies just because you are focused on "leadership".

Practicality: On any given day, my team and I are either leadership coaches, trainers, consultants, speakers, writers, or practitioners. I've learned that there is a significant difference in content, approach, and style depending on the field of your focus. An experienced industry executive will have a very different view of what constitutes a leader than that of a professor in behavioral science. If you are creating a model for a university environment, seek counsel from an academician. If you are building a model for use in a corporate environment, seek counsel from a successful industry veteran. If you want your leaders to be entertaining and inspiring, seek counsel from a professional speaker. More importantly though, keep it practical. While leadership theory and research with all its paradoxes and counter-intuitive postulations are very interesting, they are often not grounded in reality.

Interdependency: There are many books, articles, and seminars on the core competencies of leadership. Some promote 10 competencies. Some promote 30+. Rudy Giuliani has his. Colin Powell has his. Jack Welch has his. Warren Bennis has his. John C. Maxwell has his and so on. The number is not that important and some would argue even the competencies themselves are not that important. I believe the competencies are important, but what can be more important is the interdependency between the competencies. It is too simplistic to promote a number of competencies without understanding their linkages and dependencies. They are not equal nor do they stand in isolation.

Order: Related to interdependency, best practice models take into consideration the order of competencies, Consider if some competencies need to be in place before others. Do some require others before they can legitimately be learned or performed well? Are some competencies applied in parallel to others or in serial progression to others? Which are mindset vs. ability? Consider the order in which competencies should be learned and applied.