



Trust me – I'm a Leader

I've a confession – I quite like models and concepts. I feel more in control if I can put a framework and a structure around a topic like leadership. If I just follow these guidelines everything will work out; plus, I can get the buzz of being on-trend with the latest leadership thinking.

I loved the military acronym VUCA – *volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous* and the way it was used to describe the situations we face in organisations. Of course, I embraced the perceived antidote VUCA prime - *vision, understanding, clarity and agility*. But let's face it VUCA is so last century; I could fill a page with post VUCA acronyms as we constantly come up with new labels.

At the same time as we are constantly bemoaning change, we are addicted to the search for something different, something that will finally 'fix' all our problems. We want the Right Answer – the way of leading or running an organisation that will be just the right fit for us and deal with every contingency now and in the future.

"The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic"
- Peter Drucker

So, is how we think about leadership a symptom how we approach the other issues that we face? This ongoing need to problem solve, to label and name something? The research seems to show that this thinking pattern is fear based and comes from a fundamental desire to predict and control.

(Great phrase *the research seems to show*; it gives a real sense of a well validated and influential perspective and lets us talk at people and impose our worldview. In this case, I hope there is data generated by the likes of Bob Anderson and Robert Keegan that does stand up to scrutiny and show a direct line of sight back to the original clinical research).

We have sought to explain and define leadership for at least 150 years. Here is a quick run through of the thinking to date:

- Great Man Theories (mid 19th century) - leaders are born
- Trait Theories (1930's-1940's) – great leaders have certain key characteristics
- Behavioural Theories (1940's -1950's) – focuses on the behaviour of leaders as opposed to their characteristics
- Contingency Theories (1960's) – no single way to lead; leadership style should be based on situations
- Transactional Theories (1970's) – introduced the concept of the leader and the follower with the need to developing a mutually rewarding environment (based on reward/punish)
- Transformational Theories (1970's) – the inspirational nature, vision and charismatic personality of the leader



And since then, here are a few of my favourites:

- Post Heroic leadership – sense making and being comfortable with conflicting views and different interpretations
- Agile leadership – able to operate in the four modes of leadership (as defined by Heifetz) technical, cooperative, collaborative and generative
- Servant leadership - coined originally by Robert Greenleaf in an essay in the 1970's:

“It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. ...the leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature”.

- Robert Greenleaf

These leadership styles are much more based on the concept of sense and respond; rather than a dogmatic problem solving approach there is an outcome focused, iterative way of leading that is more suited to uncertainty and ambiguity.

I also have a perspective on leadership and what makes a leader:

- leadership is a choice and not an appointment. You can appoint someone to be a manager, a director or a CEO; that does not make them a leader
- leadership operates irrespective of hierarchy; the personal choice to step up and to lead happens at all levels of our organisations and our communities

“Leadership is not about a title or a designation. It's about impact, influence and inspiration. Impact involves getting results, influence is about spreading the passion you have for your work, and you have to inspire team-mates and customers”.

- Robin S. Sharma

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” - John Quincy Adams

So, for me leadership is more a way of being rather than a facet of doing; any of us can chose to take personal responsibility to lead.

Of course, this does not obviate the requirement for vision, strategy and commercial guidance in our organisations. Or that we need to support and develop individuals as they develop as leaders; particularly the development of self-awareness, communication skills and a leadership 'toolkit'. Rather it challenges that fact that leadership is exclusively linked to what we do, to our capabilities or skills; rather than a blend of our values, our experiences and our capabilities in a way that is unique to every one of us.



The simplest definition of leadership is one of the best; it's about head, heart and guts.

Head - cognitive and learned skills

Heart - passion and empathy

Gut - clear decisions in uncertain situations

Our perspective in Moonstone is that leadership is fundamentally hard wired to who and how we are - particularly with respect to integrity and **authenticity**

"Authentic presence is leadership of high integrity and authentic.....this kind of leadership requires the courage to be vulnerably honest and authentic in every encounter." - Bob Anderson

It requires a step change in our thinking to operate as a modern leader. So much of our developmental focus is based on horizontal development - adding more skills, rather than vertical development - shifting our thinking to a new level. Again, to quote from Bob Anderson:

"At The Leadership Circle, we work with a model of stages of leadership. This model has three distinct stages which we call Reactive, Creative and Integral.

I've pulled this primarily from the work of Robert Kegan at Harvard University, a foremost researcher on stage-of-development, as did Steven Covey. Covey describes this in his book The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, in which he talks about stages of ego development as they relate to leadership: dependent, independent, and interdependent.

Our framework is basically the same. Effective leadership is beyond the Reactive stage....it has developed to least stage two in this three-stage model, what we call the Creative level of development."

Bob estimates eighty per cent or more of managers undergoing a thorough assessment of stage-of-development will test out at Reactive level. That's a scary thought and borne out by our recent work using The Leadership Circle™ (TLC) profile with a range of clients over the last 3 years. Irrespective of the sector of the type of organisation we often found at both an individual and at an organisational level, leadership was being conducted at a reactive, problem solving level.

We don't want to sell anyone the 'right way' to lead. We don't have all the answers; but we do have some great questions. We have access to some outstanding research and a perspective on leadership that has been tested in commercial, high risk and highly regulated environments.

We believe that it is safe to let go and trust your leader; just don't always look to the top to find them.

For more information on developing future leaders and how to achieve a step change in thinking, contact: Andrew Porter - 07958 615258