**LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The more uncertain your environment, the greater the opportunity--if you have the leadership skills to capitalize on it. Research at the Wharton school and at the authors' consulting firm, involving more than 20,000 executives to date, has identified six skills that, when mastered and used in concert, allow leaders to think strategically and navigate the unknown effectively. They are the abilities to anticipate, challenge, interpret, decide, align, and learn. This article describes the six skills in detail and includes a self-assessment that will enable you to identify the ones that most need your attention. The authors have found that strength in one skill cannot easily compensate for a deficit in another. An adaptive strategic leader has learned to apply all six at once.

**KEYWORDS:**

Anticipate, Challenge, Interpret, Self assessment.

**INTRODUCTION:**

“Leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary systems of action. Each has its own function and characteristic activities. Both are necessary for success in an increasingly complex and volatile business environment…strong leadership with weak management is no better, and is sometimes actually worse, than the reverse. The real challenge is to combine strong leadership and strong management and use each to balance the other.” *John Kotter”*

Often a distinction is made between leadership and management, although sometimes, it would seem, for the sake of it. Individuals cannot simply be classified as either one or the other – both leadership and management skills are needed for success. At times ‘leaders’ will need to manage tasks and projects, and ‘managers’ will need to influence and inspire people. Managers are not confined to management and leaders are not restricted to leadership - the critical issue is about getting the right balance for the job you do.

Management is generally seen to involve overseeing day-to-day operations, accomplishing goals and achieving tasks, while leadership spans a wider remit that includes **influencing** and **inspiring** others, generating **ideas** and defining a **strategy** and **vision**. In the table below you will see a direct comparison between leadership and management activities. An individual can be a great leader, a great manager, or both, but each area requires the mastery of slightly different skills and competencies.

By understanding each of these skills and behaviours, it is possible for you to successfully navigate the fields of both management and leadership. It is usually as simple as knowing what context is most appropriate for the situation and applying yourself in a leadership or management capacity.

**IMPORTANCE:**

Leadership is an oft-used and sometimes nebulous term, particularly in the field of health care. Although leadership is not traditionally taught in medical schools, physicians possess many qualities that are needed to excel at leadership. For example, medicine requires critical thinking skills that are analogous to those required for effective leadership, such as assessing complex problems, formulating diagnoses, and generating action plans.

For leadership to be effective, it must be built on a solid foundation consisting of a clear mission, a vision for the future, a specific strategy, and a culture conducive to success.”

As a result, health care organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of engaging physicians in their leadership teams, and this engagement will become even more important as the health care environment becomes more challenging. For physicians, leadership can provide an opportunity to strengthen their organizations and positively impact the lives of thousands of people. In this context, what does leadership mean, what are its attributes, and what tools do physician leaders have at their disposal?

**Foundations of Leadership**

A simple definition of *leadership* is the ability and willingness to take ownership of the organization (or the component of the organization that one is charged with managing), combined with an intrinsic drive to do what is best for the organization. However, for leadership to be effective, it must be built on a solid foundation consisting of a clear mission, a vision for the future, a specific strategy, and a culture conducive to success. New leaders need to understand that these concepts are essential for effectiveness and personal growth.

* **Mission.** Simply put, the *mission* is the reason that an organization exists. For a hospital, the likely mission is to provide high-quality and compassionate medical care. For an academic health center, the mission may be expanded to include producing new knowledge and training the next generation. Having a clear sense of mission is crucial for guiding leadership decisions and choosing between alternatives.
* ***Vision.*** *Vision* is a conceptualization of a future, and hopefully better, state toward which the leader navigates the organization. Vision should be systematically formulated on the basis of an analysis of demographic trends, scientific advances, and technological innovations in the field. For example, in the field of cardiology, an aging population with an increasing prevalence of calcific aortic stenosis, coupled with innovations in transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR), should motivate a prescient leader to prepare for the introduction of this new technology into the practice and to consider its secondary consequences on surgical volumes, staffing needs, and hospital finances and facilities.
* **Strategy and Tactics.** *Strategy* refers to the plans that the organization follows in order to be successful and competitive, whereas *tactics* refer to the specific steps that the organization takes to achieve and implement the strategy. In other words, strategy is what an organization will do to succeed and compete in its competitive space. A tertiary care hospital (e.g., the Mayo Clinic) may aspire to be the preferred national referral center for complex diseases. The strategy that it follows to achieve this vision may include developing a team of nationally renowned physicians who work in a multidisciplinary manner and broadly developing its reputation (brand). The tactics it may use to achieve this goal may include providing advanced training for its teams, developing cutting-edge treatments, demonstrating the best quality metrics, improving patient experience, and publishing its outcomes, among others.
* **Organizational Culture.** *Organizational culture* is a crucial component that leaders must understand to achieve maximum effectiveness. The best leaders positively impact long-term organizational culture and values through self-modeling of behaviors, creating cultural expectations, and formally communicating cultural expectations. For example, an expectation of maintaining and professing mutual respect at all times can be set and demonstrated by leadership, even in difficult situations. Effectively responding to instances of a breakdown in mutual respect, rather than letting them go unaddressed, are critically important in further solidifying a positive organizational culture.

**Leadership Skills and Attributes**

In addition to cultivating a conducive environment that is built on a strong foundation, effective leaders must exhibit [specific skills and attributes](https://catalyst.nejm.org/type-healthcare-leader-wish/) to achieve the goals of the organization. [These traits](https://catalyst.nejm.org/uclpartners-leadership-competency-framework-cooperation/) include excellent communication skills, empathy and emotional intelligence, team-building skills, an understanding of the competitive landscape, strategic thinking, and courage, although this list is by no means exhaustive.

* **Communication Skills.** The most important (some would argue the only) tool that leaders possess is communication. Effective communication ensures understanding and is not the same as simply sending out messages or emails. Communication is a two-way interaction, and the ability for the leader to listen is critical. Leaders should practice active listening, rather than just being quiet while others speak. A simple but effective way to practice active listening is to take mental notes while others are speaking or communicating. With time, a leader can become very adept at this skill and others will notice that the leader is actually paying attention. Being heard is important to others, even if final decisions are not what was initially requested.
* **Empathy and Emotional Intelligence.** Empathy and [emotional intelligence](https://catalyst.nejm.org/emotional-intelligence-important-leadership/) are key leadership traits that frequently are overlooked. Leaders regularly are called upon to deal with challenging and, at times, unpleasant situations (e.g., conflict situations, crucial conversations, and some annual performance reviews). Having a high degree of emotional intelligence will enable the leader to deal with such situations effectively and objectively while not avoiding the underlying issues. It is important to note that emotional intelligence is a skill like any other and can be developed with practice and coaching. Similarly, an empathic leader who can sense how others feel will be a much more effective communicator and team builder and will be more likely to effectively manage change. Interestingly, this same trait is critical to developing the patient-physician relationship.
* **Team-Building Skills.** The most [effective teams](https://catalyst.nejm.org/psychological-safety-great-teams/) (e.g., President Lincoln’s “team of rivals”) include talented individuals with complementary areas of expertise who are comfortable expressing their opinions. It is the responsibility of the leader not to dominate the conversation and to ensure that teams feel safe speaking up. The effective leader trusts the team members, challenges them, and lets them handle difficult situations. When difficult decisions are required, leaders and their teams will require a high degree of emotional intelligence and courage to make the right decisions for the organization, even if doing so presents challenges in the short term. Courage in leadership is yet another skill that can be developed with practice over time. What is required is a commitment to fairness, transparency, and doing the right thing.

**CONCLUSION:**

Contingency theories suggest that there is no one best way of leading and that a leadership style that is effective in one situation may not be successful in others. Proposed by the Austrian psychologist Fred Edward Fiedler, the contingency model emphasizes the importance of both the characteristics of the leader and the favorableness of the situation in which that leader operates. Fiedler relates the effectiveness of the leader to aspects of the group situation.

Although these approaches have contributed to the understanding of leadership, none of the approaches have provided a completely satisfactory explanation of leadership and leadership effectiveness.

“A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.”- Lao Tzu