

LEADING AND MANAGING – confuse them at your peril

Dr Ivan Robertson and Professor Cary Cooper are world-renowned business psychologists and their company Robertson Cooper advises government, leading public sector bodies and industry. They have joined Public Servant to present a regular Management Clinic and in the first Dr Robertson looks at leadership

As Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones put it in the title of their very readable book *Why Should Anyone Be Led By You?* leaders cannot be effective without the positive involvement and commitment of followers. Whatever other strengths they may have, leaders who fail to build a strong working group around them will inevitably fail.

It is not just politicians and media commentators who are preoccupied with leadership at the moment. Most organisations in the public and private sectors are very interested in leadership and there is a strong feeling that improved leadership is one of the keys to better organisational performance.



ROBERTSON: emeritus professor of work and organisational psychology, UMIST, and author of more than 30 books

When problems within any organisation are raised, it will not be long before someone will attribute many of the problems to “poor leadership”. That’s fine – and is probably true in some cases – but there is often a worrying lack of clarity about what poor leadership involves and, in particular, confusion between leadership and management.

A recent conversation with an HR manager was alarming. When I explained that I could not be at a meeting because I was running a leadership development day, he responded “Oh yes, leadership development; that’s the new word for management training, isn’t it?” Why was I alarmed? Read on.

Although leadership and management overlap, essentially, management involves getting results through others by exercising control over how they spend their time and how they direct their effort. At its heart, management is transactional and rational.

Leadership operates at a more affective, emotional level. Leading is more concerned with finding direction and purpose in the face of critical challenges.

There are many formulations of the key ingredients in leadership but one of the simplest and most direct is Kouzes and Posner’s (1995) classic statement of leadership as five fundamental practices:

- Challenging the process
- Inspiring a shared vision
- Enabling others to act
- Modelling the way
- Encouraging the heart

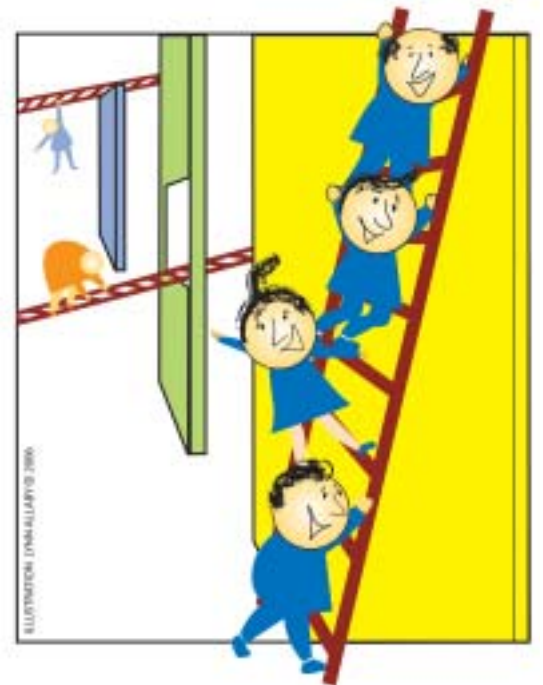
As Stephen Covey put it: “Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall.” By combining the two quotes it is possible to produce a good definition of leadership: “Leadership involves ensuring that the ladder is against the right wall and then getting people to climb up it enthusiastically.”

So why am I worried if leadership development and management development are not seen as different? I worry because both are important for the success of an organisation – but in distinctively different ways.

Going back to the first fundamental practice from the Kouzes and Posner list – “challenging the process”, I often use photographs of outstanding leaders to illustrate each of these practices. Nelson Mandela depicts “challenging the process”. This makes the point that effective leaders are generally uneasy about the status quo. They not only see the need for change, they challenge and seek to move in a new direction. They want to get the ladder against the right wall.

How does this play out in a real organisation? It often means that leadership involves pushing against current ways of doing things – or more specifically current ways of managing.

Management is about delivering a result and if somebody seems to be getting in the way of that, they become a problem.



Of course not all situations are the same as Mandela’s famous struggle but the tension between the management role of delivering a result and the leadership role of ensuring that it is a worthwhile result would be the same. It highlights the fact that true leadership, in any organisation, may be unpopular, lonely and dangerous. It also shows that anyone can show leadership – if they see the ladder against the wrong wall – but they will not be popular with those who are already half way up!

Managers in any organisation usually have both management and leadership roles. They confuse these roles at their (and the organisation’s) peril – and this is why leadership and management development are not the same. Any senior manager needs to be as clear as possible about the leadership function, especially when the management and leadership goals are in conflict – and he or she is responsible for both.

Management often takes an even bigger chunk of time than leadership functions and that is why it is so important it is focused on delivering the right results. It is also why it is important to be clear about diagnosing problems in organisations – are they really due to poor leadership (getting the ladder against the right wall, or energising followers) or is it actually a failure of management (getting results out of others)?

The interventions and solutions for poor leadership and poor management are not the same. Poor management may need to be remedied by better goal-setting and monitoring of performance. However, improving performance management will produce no benefit if it is really leadership that is at fault – except even more efficient ways of delivering the wrong outcomes.