

Towards a better understanding of clinical leadership

The effectiveness of leadership is important to everyone, yet leadership is often misunderstood and represented as undesirable. There are many theoretical models of the virtues which make a good leader, but comparatively little practical advice. How well do you understand your ability to influence others? How could you improve?

Clinicians are best placed to understand the needs of health-care systems, yet it is unusual for clinicians to take leadership positions within organizations in the UK, compared with elsewhere in the world. Management often has negative connotations and appears removed from caring for people. The Care Quality Commission (2014) has found hospitals with good care, but inadequate leadership. The NHS is organized in a way that inevitably causes leadership to be hierarchical. Disconnect between senior management and front-line clinical services has highlighted inadequate governance procedures, requiring the implementation of special measures (Hawkes, 2014). Current medical leaders are concerned about who will succeed them (Hay Group, 2014). Moreover there is a general perception among junior doctors that being a director, executive, specialty lead or commissioning chair is not a positive career move (Limb, 2014a). Doctors need to reflect on their ambition to help improve the health of the maximum number of people possible (Moberly, 2014).

Effective leadership has long been known to improve care outcomes; for example, the bystander effect (failure of groups to respond to others who are in difficulty) is significantly reduced in groups with a leader (Baumeister et al, 1988). Consequently leadership has been given more prominence by the creation of the Faculty of Medical Leadership and Management in 2011, and the consultation to establish standards for medical leaders (Faculty of Medical Leadership and Management, 2014). There is a drive to foster a culture of positive leadership attitudes and behaviours for staff at all levels from 'ward to board' (Department of Health, 2014). Quality of care correlates with having clinician engagement, stable top leadership, strategies for improvement, supportive learning cultures, accountability frameworks and regular performance review. To achieve this it is now clearly recognized that

investment is required at an institutional level (Limb, 2014b). Apart from optimizing the working environment, effective clinical leadership requires the application of emotional intelligence at the personal level (Table 1).

Know what leadership is

A coordinator organizes and communicates, while a manager makes decisions and delegates so as to allocate resources. In contrast, a leader successfully initiates and motivates change in the activity of others so as to achieve a vision (Figure 1). To initiate change you must identify an opportunity, decide to take a risk, and act upon it; while to motivate others, you must engender trust and incentivize. To engender trust you must act as an example and cultivate a reputation which people will respect, while having a shared vision, accepting responsibility for your decisions and owning the changes you promulgate. It is necessary to protect and nurture the team. However, it can be difficult to choose between the vision and the team when their needs conflict. If the success of one is at the expense of the other then which to prioritize depends on their relative impacts. To incentivize you must provide feedback, the effectiveness of which can be maximized by a combination of both constructive criticism and reward.

Understand the theoretical approaches to leading

Temper your natural strengths according to circumstances to adopt the most appropriate leadership style (Schaeffer, 2002). In a crisis it is necessary to be authoritarian, when a consensus is required be democratic, and when empowering team members it is appropriate to delegate decision making among the group (Lewin et al, 1939; Van Wormer et al, 2007). For any given situation a leader will be either task-orientated to focus on clarifying the work which needs to be undertaken by different individuals to achieve the goals of the team, or relationship-orientated to focus on supporting the social interactions and concern for satisfaction of the team (Fleishman, 1953; Griffin and Ebert, 2010). Similarly, a leader's intervention can be either transactional when the leader has the authority to reward and punish, or transformational when team members are cared for, stimulated and devel-

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oped (Burns, 1978; Bass et al, 1996; Bass and Riggio, 2005). Team cohesion can also be improved by adopting a functional approach which compensates for weaknesses by monitoring conditions, directing, motivating, teaching and coaching team members, and actively participating in the team's work to maximize achievement (Hackman and Walton, 1986; House, 1996).

The health-care model (NHS Leadership Academy, 2011) postulates nine dimensions to effective leadership:

1. Inspiring shared purpose
2. Engaging the team
3. Holding to account
4. Influencing for results
5. Evaluating information
6. Sharing the vision
7. Connecting service
8. Developing capability
9. Leading with care.

Achieving effective leadership

A pragmatic approach to achieve effective leadership is to attempt to distil the essence of what needs to be applied from all of the above. With this in mind, it is necessary to consider how to optimize teamwork, support team members, solve problems, introduce changes, communicate effectively, act with equality, manage authority, set an example, avoid known delusions and undertake regular evaluation.

Optimize teamwork

Foster pride in the distinctiveness of the team identity as greater than any individual (i.e. be elite, not elitist). This improves a sense of belonging and motivates individuals to reflect on their contributions and improve performance. Successful teamwork requires sharing the same vision and this in turn often involves recruiting team members with the same values. Team members should be selected judiciously (Hackman, 2009). Roles need to be transparent, aligned to strengths and weaknesses, and the limits of authority for independent decision making must be clear. Conflict resolution requires constructive democratic discussion allowing team members to be empowered to take responsibility and lead if necessary. Where success has occurred then opportunities should exist to congratulate and further empower members.

Support team members

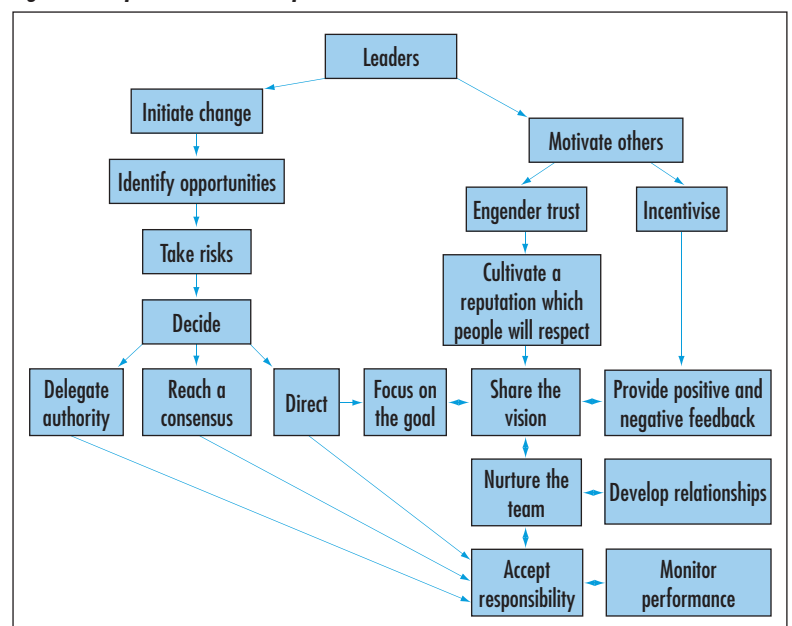
It is crucial to have an approach which facilitates learning from mistakes and the ongoing development of professional competence. A leader should be a committed advocate for the team. Credibility depends on being engaged in understanding the conditions affecting the team so as to better tailor solutions to needs (McKimm, 2004). A good leader understands the needs of the team, is able to delegate responsibility for tasks to team members, empowering them to achieve goals, and intervening to lead by example when necessary.

How one leads a team depends on the qualifications and experience of team members. An established cohesive team often only requires instructions to achieve a goal, deputising roles if necessary, while a relatively new group will require

Table 1. Suggestions for leaders to maximize success

Need	Value	Behaviour
Optimize teamwork	Pride	Promote team identity and vision, carefully select team members, align roles to needs, clarify priorities and degrees of autonomy, elicit feedback from all individuals, resolve conflicts openly
Support team members	Committed advocate	Always put needs of team first, empower team, ensure cross-cover and succession, identify problems (e.g. fatigue, disengagement), intervene to reconcile burdens, involve and inform those most affected first, give genuine and targeted feedback, provide meaningful training and teambuilding opportunities
Solve problems	Resolve	Encourage initiative and improvisation where appropriate, seek advice, evaluate risk-benefits, consult team, decide
Introduce changes	Confidence	Encourage challenge, ensure change is necessary, model effects, identify resistance and motivate, resource appropriately, act with conviction, re-evaluate
Communicate effectively	Integrity	Be transparent and honest, foster a 'no blame' culture, ensure complaints go up and not down, act on evidence, dispel uncertainty, deliver news personally
Act with equality	Humility and respect	Treat others as you would wish to be treated, value everyone equally
Manage authority	Loyalty	Be loyal to the team, encourage dissent before deciding and solidarity afterwards, do not undermine the authority of others
Set an example	Moral courage	Always act in the best interests of the team, be even-tempered, envisage success, use failure constructively
Avoid known delusions	Selfless	Guard against all forms of self-interest and exploitation
Undertake regular evaluation	Reflective	Determine the effectiveness of team performance in achieving the vision

Figure 1. Properties of leadership.



more guidance from the leader, often supported by mentoring. Ensure cross-cover and succession planning to avoid single points of failure, sharing experience to enable contingency and continuity in case of losing a team member.

Being conferred responsibility without also having control can cause stress. In individuals it is possible to identify problems of fatigue through avoidance of responsibility, regression to earlier goals through aggressive violation of rules, or disengagement through attempts to justify inappropriate actions (by diminishing consequences or undermining opposition). When necessary intervene in workload and work relationships to reconcile burdens, but ask their consent where appropriate, and inform those most affected first. Feedback needs to be genuine so as to not be devalued, and targeted to have maximum benefit. Be aware of support networks and refer onwards if beyond your own capacity to handle. Training should be realistic and relevant for practice and experimentation, to reduce unfamiliarity and stress. Team building by away day training and competitive activities can be used to appraise capabilities, optimize team interactions, and promote retention and recruitment. It is also possible to gauge individuals' work capacity and problems during opportunities for relaxed conversations unrelated to work. Overall, be proactive and compassionate in your support (Burr and Leung, 2013; O'Sullivan and McKimm, 2014).

Solve problems and introduce changes

The role of a leader is to clarify direction and goals, and this requires both confidence and resolve. Confidence is needed to seek the initiative, project inspiration and be assertive. Resolve is needed to take reasonable risks and be sufficiently assured for robust constructively debated planning.

Problem solving requires logical and sometimes innovative thought processes which are adaptable according to circumstances and scenarios. Permutations of potential obstacles to the goals should be predicted, with contingency planning for possible alternative solutions. Perfection should be aimed for but there should be an understanding that it may not be achieved.

Ensure that you understand the mechanisms of decision making so that you are able to improve your choices (Leung et al, 2011). Leaders should then ask questions, seek advice, and ask for help as necessary (Offerman, 2004). When consulting the team, allow the most junior member to speak first to encourage honesty and discourage 'group thinking'. Hidden disagreement can undermine implementation later on (Offerman, 2004). After all have contributed, the leader should summarize options, determine any consensus, and decide a course of action.

If most decisions are negotiated, cooperatively planned and explained, there will be greater ownership and likelihood of success, as well as a greater probability of acceptance on the rare occasion that a direct order is needed. Circumstances requiring direct orders to be unquestioningly obeyed should be exceptional, reserved for handling unexpected dangers. Understanding the leader's vision

empowers team members to use their initiative if a situation changes. Team members should only relinquish responsibility to make a decision when the leader has more expertise in the matter (Chomsky, 1999; Dannhauser, 2007).

Ambiguity and challenge provide freedom for change and opportunity for innovation. Discouraging challenge can perpetuate errors (Money Penny et al, 2013), stifle innovation, cause disenfranchisement and damage morale. Know the hierarchy of authority and processes for change, in particular who is entitled to debate, take responsibility for making a decision and disseminate information. Before introducing change, consider why the thing you want to change was set up the way it was originally. Is change necessary, and what needs must be met? Don't reinvent the wheel, or act for the sake of being seen to act.

Nevertheless, when change is necessary then welcome and direct change while maintaining or improving standards. Prepare for change by planning and investing in research and development wherever possible before taking action. When the need for change is uncertain then, as Nelson Mandela said, 'may your choices reflect your hopes not your fears'. Beware that comfort of certainty and effort of change will cause scepticism, and vested interests will cause resistance. Resistance to change needs to be recognized and any potential for conflict proactively managed. Individuals who are reluctant will go through the well-established stages of change (denial, anger, bargaining and depression, before acceptance).

Engagement can be leveraged by identifying the motivations of different individuals, such as financial (e.g. one-off bonus or consolidated reward), status (e.g. bestowing authority or enhancing reputation), or moral obligation (e.g. repayment of personal debt). It is often necessary to use a combination of example, persuasion and compulsion to get others to do what you want. Avoid micromanagement by devolving leadership of elements. Set targets and leave implementation to the team in order to disseminate ownership. Individuals should be autonomous within clearly defined parameters (of who, what, where, when). To set these parameters it is necessary to understand the resource implications of decisions. By ensuring that you are not fully occupied with routine work it is possible to protect a reserve in capacity which can be used to exploit opportunities. In any case, be prepared to incorporate changes as new information, or a new perspective on old information, comes to light. As required, this should lead to recalibration of the vision and purpose of the team so as to maintain momentum and quality.

Communicate effectively

Leaders behave with integrity, being honest and fostering an open 'no blame' culture. Ensure that complaints are dealt with appropriately by those who have the ability to bring about change within the hierarchy. Any changes should be based on available evidence and not rumour. The vision should be clearly established and not subject to unjustified change as this will engender distrust among the team.

Act with equality

Treat all people equally as you would wish to be treated yourself (Luke 6:31). Leaders should act with humility and respect for others, suffering the same privations as the team. Full transparency discourages sycophantic behaviour (which in itself can foster distrust and decrease team cohesion). Additional benefits and detachment associated with being a leader can be resented, although transparency can lead to an appreciation that additional responsibility deserves recognition (Berkowitz, 1953; Stewart and Manz, 1995).

Individuals will vary in the type of exchange that they develop with their leader (Graen et al, 1982), and it is important not to undermine the status and confidence of any team member. The development of 'in-group' members who have high-quality exchanges with the leader at the expense of other 'out-group' members who have low-quality exchanges with the leader (Howell, 2012) should be avoided. Supporting and relying on individuals perceived as being more experienced, competent or willing to assume responsibility will disenfranchise other members of the team, although their input should be recognized and appreciated. Empathize with the aspirations and concerns of all team members to understand how best to influence their commitment.

As team members develop, each individual's contribution to any debate evolves, increasing team empowerment. In turn, value those who express individuality as they are more likely to hold themselves accountable for their actions. Avoid generating a perception of leaders and non-leaders (i.e. them and us), and don't use information to hold power over others (e.g. claiming that they don't need to know). Successful leadership is not established by exerting power over people, but by sharing power with people in a reciprocal relationship between the leader and all other team members (Forsyth, 2013). It can be helpful for leaders to think of themselves as serving the team, by ensuring all individuals have the means to realize their potential and improve collective performance. Remember that all individuals in a team including the leader are interdependent.

Manage authority

By acting with integrity and thinking flexibly, a leader gains respect and loyalty from his/her followers and thus authority to direct the team to achieve a vision. Fear of failure and thus risk aversion promotes the adoption of behaviours not in keeping with being a good leader (e.g. concealment of shortcomings by ill treatment of team members). By recognizing and understanding one's own weaknesses, a leader can delegate certain tasks to people who are best suited to resolve those problems. This promotes attainment of the vision by the appropriate use of team resources without detriment to morale.

Set an example

A leader requires the moral courage to always act in accordance with appropriate values, and be resilient in the presence of adversity. So as to not undermine morale, an even

temperament should be maintained under all conditions. Thus feedback should not be responded to emotionally. Nevertheless feedback should be provided in an empathic manner. Success should be recognized and celebrated, while mistakes should be dealt with in an open and non-discriminatory manner with proportionate sanctions.

Avoid known delusions

Leadership requires intelligence, trustworthiness, humanness, courage and discipline. Excessive reliance on intelligence leads to rebelliousness, humaneness to weakness, trust to folly, courage to violence, and discipline to cruelty. To maximize effectiveness a leader requires all five virtues together, each appropriate to its function (Sun Tzu, circa 500BC). A leader also requires selfless commitment to place the collective interest of the team before his/her personal interests. It is necessary to guard against self-interest and exploitation (Kellerman, 2004). A self-important leader will undermine team performance. A leader should avoid:

- Thinking that he/she is worth more than those he/she works with (egocentric)
 - Aligning the team's interests with his/her own to exploit the team (narcissistic)
 - Believing that he/she knows and sees everything (omniscient)
 - Believing that he/she is clever enough to achieve whatever he/she wants (unrealistic optimism)
 - Believing that he/she has the power to do whatever he/she wants (omnipotent)
 - Believing that he/she can get away with doing whatever he/she wants, because he/she is either too clever to be caught or too important to be punished (invulnerable).
- If the achievement of the team deteriorates because of any of these delusions then the leadership has become toxic.

Undertake regular evaluation

Encapsulating the essence of leadership is elusive, but it is possible to recognize limitations and identify opportunities for improvement for yourself and others by undertaking reflective appraisal. Contemplate your involvement with clinical leadership in the workplace (e.g. undertaking quality improvement projects, facilitating service transformation, rota redesign), and take opportunities for further training (e.g. 'Darzi' fellowships in clinical leadership, postgraduate courses such as a MSc in professional leadership). Regular anonymised 360-degree feedback improves self-awareness (Atwater et al, 1995; Walker and Smither, 1999). Appraisal can be augmented by using a managerial grid model (Blake and Mouton, 1985) and/or an attribute pattern approach (Zaccaro, 2007) to assess concern for people (relationship-orientated leadership) *vs* concern for production (task-orientated leadership). Team performance needs regular audit to evaluate the alignment of practice with purpose. Leadership performance should be measured by the success of the team relative to key outcomes of the vision, rather than by the success of the leader or whole organization.

Conclusions

This article has explored a greater understanding of leadership by providing insights and advice to help maximize team effectiveness in order to achieve a vision. To lead, different aspects of communication, interaction and action need to be judiciously used with varying degrees of emphasis so as to initiate and motivate change in the activity of others. A reputation of respect and trust is developed through conviction to a shared vision, and by taking responsibility for accepting calculated risks and learning from mistakes while striving to achieve that vision. Key is the establishment of values within the team, being an advocate for the team, and reflecting on outcomes to bring about improvement. Above all else, the vision needs to be clear so that leadership can provide focused direction. **BJHM**

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KEY POINTS

- Staff-sensitive, patient-centred leadership is an opportunity to magnify your values and improve outcomes for more people.
- Leadership gives you the authority to make decisions, delegate, initiate and motivate change to achieve a vision.
- Leadership requires being a committed advocate for the team, and exhibiting confidence, resolve, integrity, humility, respect, loyalty, moral courage and pride.
- Leadership can be improved by learning how to optimize teamwork, support team members, solve problems, introduce changes, communicate effectively, act with equality, manage authority, set an example, avoid known delusions and undertake regular evaluation.