

chapter 2

what kind of leader am I?

*I start with the premise
that the function of leadership
is to produce more leaders,
not more followers.*

Ralph Nader,
consumer advocate and politician

Congratulations! Just like Max, you have taken that all-important first step on your personal journey into improving your leadership abilities. Actually, you take steps along that journey of discovery every day. You have probably asked yourself the question, “What kind of leader am I?” This is a valuable question, one that has two very different questions buried within it.

The first question that probably comes to mind relates to the *quality* of leadership you provide. The second, less obvious question relates to the leadership *style* you use within your organisation. In this chapter, we will explore both aspects.

Theory

Now that you have met our cast of players, you must be thinking, what do they have to do with being a good technology leader? These characters can help us delve into some of the painful leadership realities that we all face.

Understanding leadership is almost like asking, “What is the meaning of life?” We know that’s a mammoth question, but we often try to find the answer in bite-sized wisdom. So we run around looking for easy answers by attending conferences, listening to leadership seminar tapes, attending university classes, and reading books and articles. But none of these seem to provide the quick fix we were seeking. Some of us take an alternate route: Having decided there are no easy answers, we decide not to ask the big questions.

Now, before you despair and toss this book into the fireplace, let me say it *is* possible to learn how to be a highly effective leader who can have a positive and powerful influence in your organisation. It does take a lot of work and very specific skills and intentional strategies. Success is not usually achieved through accident or trial and error. True, you can learn lessons through those methods, but they are slow and costly. It’s better to have a plan.

Let’s begin by exploring the ideas behind the Leadership Continuum Model (LCM) to see what we can learn. In our fable, we saw three leadership archetypes: the *sage*, the *sensei* and the *oracle*. These three leadership types make up the Leadership Continuum Model, illustrated in Figure 2.1. In the fable, the types were portrayed in the extreme to emphasise a particular aspect of the archetypes.

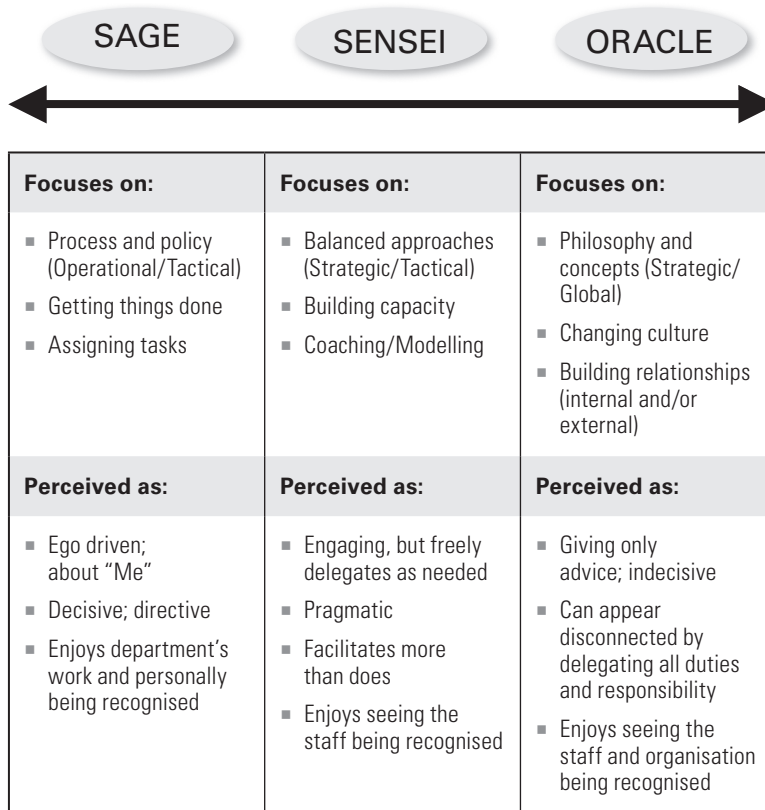


Figure 2.1. Leadership Continuum Model featuring the three leadership archetypes

It is important to note that each leadership type is neither negative nor positive within its own right. Each is merely different from the others. The LCM shows the *sage* and *oracle* as the extremes in the continuum with the *sensei* being the balance between the two.

The Sage

The *sage* represents the authoritarian type of leader whose motto might best be described as “I want you to do this specific task”. Often they even prescribe the specific way the task is to be done. The sage usually sees a project’s goals as more important than maintaining a sense of shared ownership or a positive climate. Sages want the right to provide input on nearly all decisions and often have final say on most of them. Although sages are directive, it is not necessarily because they are blind to the need for the involvement of others; it is more that they are driven by the need to ensure the success of the established goals. Sages have an intrinsically high degree of focus and often get frustrated when others do not exhibit this behaviour. When working with direct reports, a sage may seek some input, or may not seek any at all. Sages generally give team members specific actions to perform.

Application

In many organisations, moving from the abstract exercises of creating vision and goal statements to institutionalising them can be daunting at best. As a result, the process often is left undone. The following section will explore simple ways you can take your guiding principles and make them a living part of your ongoing operations. Then they will begin to have a visible impact.

Developing Your School's Vision

When developing a vision, make sure the organisation's employees:

- understand and embrace the vision
- use the vision to guide the way they set their goals for the year
- see the vision's effects in their work every day
- see the vision reflected in their behaviours and decision making

As discussed earlier, there are two distinct aspects to the technology vision that must tightly align:

1. The school's global vision for technology use as a strategic tool to impact teaching and learning
2. Your vision for the IT department/team as you support the broader school vision

Many documents can be found outlining the planning processes for creating vision statements. Therefore, I will not spend much time on that subject. However, several key ideas should be covered before moving on to developing the departmental vision, which usually receives less attention.

Feedback and Ownership

Most leaders know that strategic organisational visions must have broad-based support and ownership regardless of their content focus – technology or otherwise. Yet it is interesting how many times I review the technology committees for schools and find a narrow stakeholder list. This is a deadly first step for developing any type of strategic vision and should be avoided at all costs. There are numerous techniques for engaging stakeholders without assembling a committee of thousands.

Activity 6 ■ Shaping Goals for Results

In the previous chapter, we talked at length about the importance of aligning the IT department's vision with the broader vision of the school. In this chapter, we spent most of our time discussing the pivotal role the IT department must play in using instruction as a filter for shaping the activities and strategic direction of the department. We also talked at length about how you as the leader must assume a very visible presence in that discussion regardless of the background you bring to the organisation.

In this exercise, you will begin to see how you can use this knowledge to shape and drive your goal-setting process in terms that may be very different from what you are accustomed to. In this activity, you will focus on developing a goal-setting process around a results-oriented approach with a strong focus on instruction. Activity 6—Worksheet 1 outlines key areas for you to consider as you identify your department goals – areas that force you to go beyond a project, process or service delivery model.

This introspection may feel uncomfortable at first, and it may cause some leaders to stretch themselves and their teams into new directions. I encourage you to take the risk and push through – the end result will be worth the effort. You will find that your team's work will be more meaningful for them professionally. Additionally, your school will be able to recognise the value of your department more readily. You can show them that IT is not an endless black hole that simply drains resources!

Instructions

1. Assemble your IT leadership team or your IT staff (depending on the size of your school) and distribute a copy of Activity 6—Worksheet 1. If your relationship is such that you can bring in department representatives from outside IT, this exercise will be even more powerful.
2. Begin your discussion by reflecting on the IT goals currently in place. Use the worksheet to evaluate them on the various characteristics. You are looking for trends and gaps. This is not an exercise that implies you are doing everything wrong, but rather, one that identifies where you can improve.