The Six Domains of Leadership: A New Model for Developing and Assessing Leadership Qualities

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Introduction

The six domains of leadership represent our attempt to capture the full range of leadership action and effect. When we began to design our own leadership course, it became evident to us that various scholars and popular authors were often describing and analyzing quite different aspects of leadership. It seemed to us that leadership scholars were not unlike the six blind men in the famous poem by John Godfrey Saxe:

It was six men of Indostan, to learning much inclined,  
who went to see the elephant (Though all of them were blind),  
that each by observation, might satisfy his mind.

In the poem, each of the blind men touches a different part of the elephant, and each believes that his own experience with the beast captures its essence. Thus one blind man touches the elephant’s trunk and proclaims that elephants are like snakes, another touches the leg and concludes that elephants are like trees, and so forth. The six blind scholars fall into endless academic arguments about who is right:

And so these men of Indostan, disputed loud and long,  
each in his own opinion, exceeding stiff and strong,  
Though each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong!

We wanted to do something more than just contribute another limited view of leadership, so we decided to step back and try to generate, from work on leadership in organizational behavior, social psychology, sociology, and political science, a picture of the whole of leadership. As we read and thought about what it is that makes a person a leader or that makes a leader effective, six distinct areas of leadership action emerged, each with its own behaviors and its own effect on followers. We have labeled these six domains “personal leadership,” “relational leadership,” “contextual leadership,” “inspirational leadership,” “supportive leadership,” and “responsible leadership.” In this paper we will describe briefly each of these concepts, behaviors, and skills associated with the domain, as well as the effects that one can expect if one is effective in each type of leadership.

As we pursued our studies, it became evident that the six domains of leadership were interrelated in particular ways, so that some were founded on others. Three of the domains—personal, relational, and contextual—are so much involved in the successful execution of the other three that they seem to us to be the necessary foundation of the rest of leadership. Two of the remaining three domains—inspirational and supportive, build on the foundational domains to provide additional aspects of leadership, and the sixth domain—responsible—builds on all five of the others. This pattern of interrelationships among the domains led us to portray our six-domain model as a triangle or pyramid, as shown below. As we describe the domains, we will comment on their relationship to the domains upon which they are based. In the end, a picture of the whole of leadership will emerge.

Leadership versus Management

Before we begin to describe the six domains of leadership and their interrelationships, we need to clarify what leadership is and what it is not. There is a longstanding distinction in organizational studies between “leadership” and “management”. The distinction began with the observation that there is something fundamentally different between the sort of authority that one sees, for example, in a charismatic social or religious movement (such as the American civil rights movement in the 1960’s under Martin Luther King) and the sort of authority that one sees in successful bureaucratic institutions (such as IBM under Thomas J. Watson).
We view the distinction between leadership and management as turning on different motivational bases for these two forms of authority. On the basis of our own research and that of other scholars, we believe that leadership works through the connection that people feel to social groups (i.e., to the team, the organization, or the institution within which the leadership is being exercised), while management works through the reward and punishment or other behavior- and attention-channeling systems. In other words, leaders exert their authority by using their words or actions to convince people to accept their vision of where the team or organization should be going, while managers exert their authority using incentives or other control systems that make individuals do what the manager wants as they follow their individual self-interest.

These differences in how leadership and management work make each type of authority better for particular organizational functions. Leadership tends to be especially important at times of creation and change, and it tends to be critical in times of crisis, while management tends to be more important in the day-to-day functioning of procedures and processes that systematize and sustain organizations.

Our view is that effective management is as important for modern organizations as is effective leadership (we teach our students that they need to master both forms of authority). But management alone can lead to serious problems in any organizational context. Management systems tend to resist change, and they make people focus on individual rather than communal interests. For this reason, using management alone makes it difficult or impossible to create new organizations, change existing organizations, inspire exceptional accomplishments, or shepherd organizations through crises. All of these situations call for leadership more than management.

One thing to understand from the outset is that, since leadership is about persuasion and influence rather than authority and control, it is possible to lead without being in a position of power within a team,1 organization, or institution. Leadership can, and certainly should, flow down the organizational ladder, but it can also flow sideways (toward peers) and up (toward bosses). One can and should lead direct reports, but one also can and should lead peers and teammates and even supervisors. “Leading up” can be difficult because it flows against the lines of managerial control, and leading laterally can be difficult because of status and identity challenges, but both are possible. Indeed, for an organization to be at its best, it needs leadership on all levels and in all directions, so that it has a pool of leadership ready to be energized when innovation, change, exceptional effort, or response to crisis is needed.

The six domains provide a framework to talk about and teach leadership. They address the full range of skills that are needed to exercise leadership. These skills include knowing how to build a leadership persona from your own personality and values (Personal Leadership), how to forge sound relationships with those you lead (Relational Leadership), how to provide coherence and team identity (Contextual Leadership), how to motivate high expectations and enthusiasm (Inspirational Leadership), how to engender confidence in the ability to take action (Supportive Leadership), and how to make sure your leadership works for balance and ethical conduct (Responsible Leadership). Now let’s turn to a description of each of the domains in turn.

**Personal Leadership**

Personal leadership begins with the leader’s own particular personality. For leaders to have credibility, they must be seen as having a persona, a character, an identity—they must help others see the kind of person they are. For example, do the people you lead have a sense of what you really believe in and what you value? Some people anger easily, while others always see the humor in a situation. Some make a specific practice or value their ‘personal mission’ such that others can anticipate how they will react to particular events. When a leader is effective in projecting his or her persona, we hear ‘in our mind’s ear’ the leader’s tone of

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1 In this paper we use the term “team” most often to refer to the group being led, but we believe that the same leadership processes apply whether one is leading a three-person learning team in an MBA class or a multinational corporation. The way these processes are executed might differ (so that one has to find, for example, symbolic ways to express concern to tens of thousands of employees in leading the multinational corporation, whereas one could show concern more directly to two colleagues in a small team), but the concepts are the same.
voice, verbal expressions, or favorite expressions. When this occurs, the leader has developed personal leadership.

But the personality must be real. One can only lead through the attributes, social skills, and personal values that one brings to the leadership role. We often tell our students that they have to be themselves as leaders. This is because people want to be led by real people, not by organizational roles or offices. Followers are extremely sensitive to any indication that the leader is not who he or she pretends to be, so it is critical to find a style of leadership that you are comfortable with and to build your leadership efforts on this personal style.

On our survey instrument for leadership, the Six Domains Leadership Survey, one of the key areas of personal leadership is authenticity.

This is not to say either that one has to be born a leader to lead or that one can lead simply by doing the first thing that comes into one’s head. Leaders have to use their personalities as a foundation of their leadership, but there are many different leadership styles that can be developed and be successful. Your personality is one of the resources that you have to work with as you seek to develop as a leader, but it is the starting point, not the end of the journey. You need to develop those aspects of your personality that enhance your leadership and work to control those aspects that harm your leadership, but always you must form your leadership from your own personality, not someone else’s.

Thus, there is a caution to be found in the need for authenticity: It is seldom a good idea to model your leadership style too closely on anyone else’s, even someone who is a wonderful leader. It makes sense to learn from others’ successes or methods as a leader, but to try to copy someone else’s leadership style too closely risks having people see you as phony or contrived as a leader, and this can undermine everything else you try to do.

There is another corollary of authenticity that is important to every aspect of leadership. People tend to believe that actions are more authentic than words, and there is little doubt that we are more effective in what we do as leaders than in what we say as leaders. We often think of moving speeches when we think of great leaders, but the reality of the situation is that moving speeches have little credibility, little authenticity, unless they are backed up by action. It is hard to imagine more moving words than the famous “I have a dream” speech that Martin Luther King delivered in Washington in 1963, but we must remember that the speech derived much of its meaning from King’s prior actions, including allowing himself to be imprisoned for his belief in social justice.

Once personal authenticity is established, the personal domain of leadership turns on how well the leader can convey his or her vision for the future of the team. The core of the leadership role is to give direction to others’ actions, and those being directed need to feel sure that the leader knows where the team should be heading. For this reason, followers want their leaders to show that they have used their expertise to assess and act effectively in the situation and that they have thought creatively about where the team should be going. Let’s take these factors that contribute to vision—and to showing that one has the capability to lead—one or two at a time.

Expertise involves, of course, understanding what the team is doing and what its environment is like. The leader needs to be “mindful”—to have thought consciously about the options and issues facing the team. Most people go through life on “autopilot,” but leaders don’t have this luxury. They must be questioning assumptions and thinking ahead of events to be ready to give guidance whatever situation arises.

Creativity and innovation arise from this mindful approach to thinking about the team’s situation and its problems, because this sort of thought involves applying knowledge in innovative ways to find the best path for the team. The leader has to think in new ways about old problems. Like most of leadership, the innovative approach to old challenges called for here is not an in-born skill; it can be learned. All of us can be creative if we spend more time reflecting on how things work in our team and in its line of work, and if we work hard on a critical, mindful analysis of whether “standard operating procedure” is in fact “optimal operating procedure.” “Thinking outside the box” involves nothing more, or less, than pushing ourselves not to accept the limits that our usual mindsets create. This takes some real effort, but if that effort is expended—on regularly thinking about how things do and should work—it results in the creative insight and innovative solutions that will fuel our leadership efforts and that allow us to be the sort of decisive leader that people look to for answers and direction.

Once the leader has a good understanding of the team and its challenges, as well as innovative ideas about how to meet those challenges, he or she has to shape that idea into goals for the team. These goals
for where the team should go need then to be articulated as a convincing vision. In contrast to a plan or a program that we might present when we wear a managerial hat, a vision gives a goal and provides a view of how the team will benefit from reaching that goal. The importance of vision for leadership is captured in a quote from Rosalynn Carter, the former First Lady of the U.S.: “A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go but ought to be.” We look to our leaders to tell us where we ought to be and to convince us of the value of going there.

A final aspect of personal leadership involves dedication to the team. We are more willing to accept leaders when we believe that we are being led somewhere that is good for the team rather than somewhere good only for the leader. We will address the issue of personal trust in leaders in the next section, but there is an element of generalized distrust that arises when we think the leaders are persuading us to do things that are not in the best interests of the team. Fit and personal engagement are two ways that people judge whether or not they should accept the vision proffered by the leader.

Leaders must be seen to fit the team in terms of their values. If most of the team holds one set of values with respect to their work and the leader holds another, the leader’s influence is likely to be diminished and his or her leadership position may be challenged. When people are unsure that their leaders share their values, they become suspicious that they may be led to some end that they will not value and that they will end up feeling duped and used. On the other hand, if a leader epitomizes what the people value, his or her personal leadership will be enhanced. The best leaders go beyond paying lip-service to the fundamental values of the team or organization and act in ways that epitomize those fundamental values. A leader who is seen as the ideal member of the team, in terms of how he or she lives the team’s values, will have a strong foundation for his or her leadership.

A particular aspect of this need to see that a leader is likely to lead us where we want to go arises in the question of whether the leader makes personal sacrifices for the good of the team. We use the term “personal engagement” to refer to the extent to which a leader shows that he or she values the team by investing time, effort, and resources in it. Leaders who forego personal gain in the interest of the team provide a powerful argument for why others should follow them. There is good evidence that this sort of investment, in and of itself, enhances a leader’s influence and potential for future leadership. In contrast, leaders who seem more interested in their own well-being than in the good of the team will find their influence much reduced.

Taken together, these elements of personal leadership provide the foundation of persona and credibility that a leader needs for the rest of his or her leadership. Personal leadership engenders a personal credibility on the part of followers because the leader is seen as an authentic human being whose knowledge and insights are respected, whose values are admirable, and whose dedication to the team is clear. Credibility makes others more willing to accept the leader’s direction simply because the leader says this is the right way to go, and this is a powerful force indeed when it comes to giving direction to team efforts.

Relational Leadership

Relational leadership emphasizes the importance of forging strong ties with others in the team or organization. The key to relational leadership lies in actions that convey that the leader cares about and understands those he or she leads and in actions that allow followers to feel that the leader “gets” them. Relational leadership rests on a sense of interpersonal ties that feel honest, accessible, and human.

Leaders do not exist in isolation—leadership is just half of the relationship between the leader and those who follow. The major elements of relational leadership involve ways that a leader can show others that he or she views them as real people whose interests, needs, and viewpoints are important. Relational leadership complements personal leadership by making it clear that followers too are viewed as real people. Relational leadership establishes this when the leader shows concern for others, gives respect regardless of position in the hierarchy, seeks to understand the needs and capabilities of others, and makes sure that everyone feels he or she has and will receive fair treatment at the hands of the leader. Let’s consider each of these aspects of relational leadership in a bit more detail.

Just as basing one’s leadership style on one’s own personality gives leadership a personal touch, showing concern for the well-being, interests, and life events of followers gives a human component to the other side of the leader-follower relationship. If
your people believe that you are concerned about them as individuals, if they see that you understand that they have their own lives and that they merit consideration in your decisions, then they will feel that they can rely on your leadership.

Respect is very important in relational leadership because many people have a healthy fear of the hierarchical nature of traditional supervisor-subordinate relationships. That is, when people give over some part of their decision making freedom to a leader—and every leader-follower relationship must involve some sacrifice of freedom on the part of the follower—they worry that they might be treated as “pawns” to be used for the leader’s own purposes. But if the leader shows respect for everyone, regardless of their formal position in the team or organization, this fear is diminished. Acknowledging the importance of each member, as a leader does when he or she treats everyone with dignity and respect, provides evidence that the leader-follower relationship is not one-way, and this makes followers more willing to accept the leader’s decisions.

Taking the time to achieve a good understanding of each member of the team is another key aspect of building good leader-follower relationships. In ordinary, non-leadership relationships, one of the things we seek is to be understood in all of our individual uniqueness, and things are no different in leadership settings. The importance of understanding leadership is evident when one considers the negative case: would you be likely to follow a leader who did not demonstrate an understanding of what you could do, what you cared about, or how you felt about the team and its tasks? A leader, however well-intentioned, who does not understand his or her followers can be dangerous because he or she might, out of ignorance, ask followers to do things that are beyond their ability or in opposition to their preferences. The conversations necessary to achieve understanding also enhance followers’ belief that the leader respects them and is concerned about them. (Of course, leaders can seldom say they understand everything about those they lead, but at a minimum a leader must convey an awareness of what is and is not well understood and an interest in developing a deeper understanding.)

There is a great deal of research showing that fair treatment is critical to building good relationships of all types, and it appears to be especially important to leader-follower relationships. Fair treatment involves a number of things. It involves listening to what people have to say about decisions and events that affect them. It involves being even-handed and unbiased in the way people are treated. It involves leaders explaining their decisions and their perspectives on team issues. All of these elements are important, but the most important of all is listening. When people feel a leader will listen to them—and hear what they are saying—they become comfortable in their relationship with the leader. Indeed, just as reflection and critical analysis are key skills in personal leadership, effective listening is a crucial skill in relational leadership. If you listen before making decisions, in a way that shows people that their views have value and are worthy of consideration, if you listen even when people are saying things you do not enjoy hearing, then relational leadership will flourish. Listening, if done right, can be a way of enhancing all of the elements of relational leadership.

When relational leadership is strong, leaders reap what is perhaps the most important of all the effects of good leadership: the trust of those they lead. Trust is the natural reciprocation of concern, respect, understanding and fairness. The trust that is built through good relational leadership will help to sustain confidence in the leader and continued efforts to accomplish the goals he or she has set, especially when adversity arises. In addition, there is a growing body of evidence that relational leadership and the trust it engenders has the effect of enhancing other leadership effects.

**Contextual Leadership**

The third foundational domain of leadership involves two related types of leadership action. One part of contextual leadership is building team identity by providing meaning and a sense of uniqueness and importance to the team, organization, or institution that is being led. The other part of contextual leadership involves the leader as architect, translator and implementer of new ways of accomplishing the task at hand. This part of contextual leadership involves bringing coherence to the team—helping team members to understand how the team and organization works—and assisting each member in achieving optimal focus to enable good work even in the context of complex tasks and environments. In all of these actions, the overall goal is to construct a context for leadership that fits your (and the team’s) values and that facilitates your goals as a leader.
There are leadership scholars who argue that the power, the persuasive force, of leaders comes from a natural human proclivity to belong to groups and accept leaders as part of what it means to belong to a group. That is, we are a species that evolved in bands and tribes, and we have always recognized headmen or matriarchs who give direction to our collective actions. If this is so, and a growing body of research evidence supports this view, then one of the most effective ways to increase the effectiveness of your leadership is to increase the extent to which your people feel a sense of belonging to the team you lead. To build team identity, you need to give meaning to the team’s efforts, to point out how the team is special and how its work will accomplish something of real importance. As members come to invest more and more importance in the team, coordinated action will bring success for the team as a whole, and this will increase even more the team’s spirit and your leadership potential.

Good contextual leaders build their teams not only by giving the team’s work meaning, they also build their team’s effectiveness and success by providing coherence to the task and the environment. A key function of leadership is to help create sense, or coherence, out of the natural confusion. Today’s organizations are complex, confusing and rapidly changing – making it harder and harder for members to understand what the organization stands for, why it is organized and functions the way it does, and how they and others fit into the larger picture. In short, many people lack a sense of the organizational world in which they live and they need leaders to help infuse the organization and its members with a shared understanding. To accomplish this, leaders need to work to convey the “big picture” and to help the team come together with a clear, coherent view of the complex issues with which it must deal. By helping each team member gain a good sense of the team’s challenge, the team’s approach to that challenge, and his or her own contribution to the team’s task, the leader builds confidence that the team can accomplish its goals.

Another part of contextual leadership involves explaining the team’s structure and work process and focusing the activities of the team members so that everyone feels that they are part of a smoothly running, effective team. Do people understand why the organization is structured as it is, or why existing rules or norms are in place? If not, there is a contextual leadership gap to be filled. Team processes need to be understood in terms of how they are consistent with the team’s central values and tasks. Care should be taken to ensure that everyone knows not only his or her own task, but also how others’ tasks fit in the larger picture of the work of the team or organization. Most of us at one time or another have been part of a well-focused team where every action seemed to be consistent with the goal and where the force and special skills of every member are brought to bear.

Bringing coherence to the team is a critical aspect of leadership, yet our research shows it is one of the most neglected. Leaders need to work to help those they lead understand what is more and less important. Simplifying the often confusing demands of the job and the environment and helping team members focus on what is truly important for success is another critical, but often neglected, aspect of leadership. Without focus, people tend to respond to the most recent demand for their efforts, not the most important. Good contextual leaders help their team members understand what is truly a high priority task (and why) and they provide explanations that bring sense to the often confusing “buzz” of events surrounding the team.

If contextual leadership is strong, the team will coalesce as a coherent, coordinated whole with people who identify strongly with the team and find comfort in it. This sense of community will serve both the team and the leader well. For the individual, this means they understand what community they are part of, what their place is in that community, and how those they interact with fit into that community. For the team, a sense of community gives everyone assurance that they are not facing their challenges alone. For the leader, a sense of community gives additional force to his or her leadership and helps to get everyone moving and working toward the leader’s vision.

Inspirational Leadership

Inspirational leadership involves building a desire for greatness or excellence by raising expectations and encouraging the team or organization to accept challenges, and by simultaneously raising enthusiasm and confidence. It is this domain of leadership that is most associated with the idea of some sort of in-born, charismatic personal quality on the part of leaders, but we believe that what really counts is encouraging the adoption of high expectations, and instilling enthusiasm for the importance of pursuing difficult ends and optimism for the team’s endeavors.
Inspirational leaders encourage innovation, so that people can develop new approaches to tasks that in the past might have seemed impossible. Thus inspirational leadership is not based on charisma or charm, but on the effectiveness of the leader in engendering greater aspirations and enthusiasm among those who follow. It is about behavior that creates changes in others, not about the greatness of the leader’s own traits. Inspirational leaders, in this sense, see things as they could be when others do not, and get others to buy into and vigorously pursue the leader’s sense of the possible by articulating persuasively how the seemingly unrealistic and unattainable is, in fact, possible and worth pursuing. Inspirational leadership involves helping others to raise the bar and creating a sense of enthusiasm for reaching it, for embracing the challenge, for taking the risk, and for winning.

Leaders inspire their teams by facilitating the setting of difficult goals and by getting their people to do their best, to be their best selves. If the leader makes it clear that he or she holds high expectations, then the team will exert exceptional effort to find creative solutions to problems it encounters as it strives to meet or exceed the leader’s expectations. By expecting excellence, by conveying that average performance is simply not good enough for this team and this leader, the leader serves notice that the team deserves high engagement on the part of all of its members and can accomplish great things. Effective inspirational leaders do not simply assert their own standards, requirements and demands—they convey a set of expectations that their followers wish to strive for so as they seek to surprise and delight, rather than disappoint, the leader. General Electric’s celebrated CEO, Jack Welch, no stranger to imposing high standards, commented that he believed that when left to their own devices, people set goals for themselves that are far, far higher than those that others would set for them.

In addition, leaders need to foster enthusiasm and optimism for the team and its task. The leader’s high standards must be matched with clear indications of his or her confidence in the capacity of the team to meet these high standards, so that the overall message is that the goal is attainable. Leaders should use their words and actions to convey that not only do they expect great accomplishments; they believe that these demands will be met because they believe in their people. Followers look to leaders for both their goal and the confidence that they need to reach that goal. The message, in the leader’s words and actions, must be “we (and perhaps only we) can accomplish this exceptional undertaking.”

There is something contagious about raw excitement—if the leader is excited about what the team is and does, then team members will be enthusiastic as well. In addition, each team member who is enthusiastic is another source of enthusiasm for others. It is important to recognize, however, that—as with any leadership domain—actions will speak louder than words. Exhortation to be enthusiastic or frequent use of enthusiastic slogans will have little effect, while genuine, heartfelt enthusiasm that is put into every leadership action and decision, even if never spoken, will have much greater effect.

Optimism and enthusiasm can be a springboard for new, innovative solutions to problems. Just as strong personal leadership requires creativity in examining the road ahead and coming up with solutions that will avoid potential pitfalls; strong inspirational leadership involves engaging the team in this process. Inspirational leaders find procedures and team process that foster innovation, and they encourage and praise those who come up with new ideas, products and procedures.

Note that inspirational leadership rests on the foundation of good personal and relational leadership. High expectations for others will not be effective unless you show through your own behavior your personal engagement with and dedication to the team and its work. Your enthusiasm will fuel the team’s confidence and excitement, but only if that enthusiasm is authentic. If your personal leadership has established your credibility, then your team will accept your high expectations because they believe you have thought ahead and seen what they can accomplish. In addition, your people will take the risk of pursuing “audacious goals” only if they see your concern, respect, and fairness. They will trust you to inspire them only when it is for the greater good and merits the investment of self and team — in other words, only if you have been successful in building trust through attention to your relational leadership.

When inspirational leadership works, those you lead will start to expect more from themselves and to look for opportunities to accomplish exceptional things. These high aspirations will result as followers step up to challenges on the basis of your standards and confidence, and as they learn they can do more than they had ever thought they could. The dynamic of confronting challenges and succeeding
will build additional confidence, so that people will be taking on (and succeeding at) things they never dared attempt before.

Supportive Leadership

Supportive leadership involves making others aware of pressing organizational problems while at the same time making them secure in their own capacity to see the problem, act realistically, take appropriate action. Supportive leaders provide the resources necessary to foster a sense of acceptance, security, and efficacy—both in one’s own ability and in the team or organization as a collective. Supportive leadership does not imply ‘sugar-coating’ tough feedback or failure, but it does involve the provision of the developmental, emotional, financial and political support for the team. A key element of good supportive leadership is controlling natural human tendencies to deny, blame, and scapegoat, tendencies that arise especially when things go wrong. Whereas inspirational leaders ‘raise the ceiling,’ supportive leaders ‘raise the floor’ (or provide a ladder or springboard). Specifically, supportive leadership involves ensuring that employees have the training, resources and encouragement needed to make reaching that new and higher ceiling possible and have the confidence in themselves and their peers to be willing to try.

Supportive leadership includes efficacy, security, and blame-control. Together these three elements of supportive leadership give the team the protection it needs to accomplish its tasks. Each of these elements produces part of the “safety net” that allows team members to take the exceptional risks demanded by inspirational leadership. Thus, inspirational and supportive leadership work together to motivate creativity, appropriate risk-taking and innovation, and to give both reality-based confidence and challenge in appropriate proportion.

By instilling a sense that the team as a whole—and each person within the team—can accomplish the tasks and meet the challenges they face, supportive leaders help each team member do his or her best without concern that those efforts might be wasted if the team as a whole fails. A supportive leader works with the team and its members to increase the total capacity of the team and the recognition of that capacity by all team members. When all team members share a clear understanding of their own and the team’s ability to function as a whole and to accomplish what it is capable of accomplishing, then you will have instilled the proper sense of personal and collective efficacy. Effective leaders must give individuals and the team an understanding of what they can accomplish realistically as individuals and as a team.

Security and protection help team members to get on with their work with assurance that the leader will take care of them. It is often the leader’s job to secure external support—the resources and time needed to complete the task—and to provide internal support—encouragement and moral support during times of personal difficulties. Followers look to the leader to be their representative to the wider organization and to the outside world, and they expect the leader to provide protection from political distraction that can interfere with work. In this respect leaders not only have to point the way, through a clear vision, but also do some of the work of clearing the way, through intervention with authorities outside the team.

Finally, good supportive leaders need to work hard at blame-control. Few things undermine the work of a high-performance, creative team faster than team members’ fear that they will be blamed if something goes wrong. If an atmosphere of blaming is allowed to develop, then team members will turn on each other at the first sign of problem, looking for a scapegoat and spending most of their efforts not on fixing the problem but instead on pointing fingers at each other over its origin. Perhaps the most pernicious form of blaming arises when people see the leader him- or herself take credit for successes and blame followers for failures. The most effective leaders turn this expectation on its head, taking blame themselves for failures but passing on credit for successes … and they reap huge benefits from their team by doing so.

Note that supportive leadership rests on a foundation of relational and contextual leadership. When relational leadership is strong, leaders have the trust that gives team members confidence the leader will protect them. When contextual leadership is strong, then the established team identity, coordination, and coherence make it easier for people to believe in the efficacy they and their colleagues can bring to the task at hand.

Good supportive leadership leads to followers who become better and better at exhibiting appropriate initiative. The connection between supportive leadership and initiative is easy to see if you consider the consequences of poor supportive
leadership. If team members do not feel secure—if they have little sense of their own effectiveness, and little support or protection in terms of resources and corporate politics, and if they think they are likely to be blamed for any problems that arise—they will dodge any demands for initiative, opting instead to do the minimum, the safe, and the easy and to protect themselves by avoiding the tough, the visible or the risky. This will, of course, undermine any effort to achieve more ambitious goals, and it will ultimately “poison” the team as a whole. On the other hand, if followers feel protected when they take intelligent risks, feel a sense of personal and team efficacy, and feel freedom from blame – all elements of good supportive leadership --they will be more willing to step up, exercise appropriate initiative, and undertake meaningful action.

**Responsible Leadership**

Firms are institutional ships and require symbolic leadership at the helm, with the leader acting as steward of the organization. In smaller teams, the symbolic role of the leader is no less important. Leadership involves a personal realization that a team or organization involves deeply held, even treasured, community values and that the highest calling of the leader is to honor and protect those values. The responsible domain of leadership also involves two other functions: balancing competing interests and personifying the team or organization. The multifaceted nature of organizational life and leadership makes it important for leaders to play the role of chief integrator and balancer, ensuring that the multiple elements of leadership described here are drawn together and effectively balanced for a particular situation. Thus, for organizations to achieve work/life balance, or to appropriately balance the community’s interests and the firm’s, it is essential that the leader take responsibility for making this happen. It is also important for the leader to imbue in others a sense of personal responsibility (ethics, values, and commitment to the broader community good) and a level of actionable understanding for what is needed, so that each member has the ability and desire to act in a way that advances a greater good.

Good responsible leadership involves three elements: making decisions that balance the various interests affected by the team and its work, taking responsibility for ethical conduct, and taking on the public role of leadership. Responsible leadership sits at the top of the leadership pyramid—it rests on the leadership effectiveness provided by all of the other domains, but it alone separates leaders who are truly great from those who are merely effective.

Every team, however small, has to contend with competing demands and interests. Indeed, even within a single individual tensions can exist between different aspects of the person’s job. It is the leader’s job, and the hallmark of a good responsible leader to help balance these demands for the individual follower and for the organization in a way that works for all involved. Whether the balance in question involves work/life balance, balancing competing demands within the team, balancing demands between the team and other parts of the organization or community, or balancing long-term and short-term interests, it is the leader’s job to make the decisions that achieve balance and bring synergy among competing needs and interests. This balance is best accomplished in action, as well as words. Few followers will feel free to stop work and attend to family issues if their leader is a workaholic, and few team members will understand the need to consider the interests of other parts of the firm if the leader regularly disregards or derogates such considerations or forces followers to defend their fiefdom.

There is a grander “balance” that is involved in ethics and in an appreciation of the responsibility that goes along with leadership. Here the balance to be achieved is one between the immediate interests of the team and the moral climate and values that surround every action. There is a maxim about management and leadership that says that management is “doing things right” while leadership is “doing the right thing.” Being a responsible leader means thinking about what—and doing—what is right for the team, encouraging followers to talk about ethical issues and ethical behavior, and modeling behavioral adherence to sound ethical values. Teams go bad, and leaders ultimately fail in their promise, if ethical considerations are pushed aside in the interest of immediate gain.

The final element of responsible leadership is the public role of leadership. Leaders represent their team—people tend look to (and look at) the leader as the personification of the team’s values, whether the leader occupies a formal or an informal role. It is difficult to escape this aspect of being a leader, and must be taken into account for successful responsible leadership. Leaders need to behave in ways that enact the team’s values and bring credit to the
individual leader and to the team and organization. In doing so, leaders have the opportunity to raise important issues and make leadership have an impact not only within the immediate team, but also more broadly.

Satisfying the stewardship requirements of responsible leadership leads team members to take on their own stewardship roles. They will imitate and then internalize the leader’s attention to balance and ethics, and they will model his or her public responsibility. As Duke basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski has said, once people feel it is their organization, not someone else’s, then they will always do their best to act in the best interest of the whole. In short, they will have become stewards. In the end this is the ultimate tribute to outstanding responsible leadership.

Conclusion

Together the six domains of leadership cover the whole range of what it takes to be an accomplished leader. Each domain has its own set of concerns, behaviors, and skills, and each has a particular effect on those being led. A successful leader will find a way to incorporate into his/her actions initiatives from each domain, paying particular attention to the leader-follower relationship and his/her impact upon it. Approach this activity systematically, and with energy and enthusiasm, and you will find yourself on the road to becoming a great leader.
The Six Domains of Leadership

Leadership domains and effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Develop and project your leadership vision; be real; demonstrate your dedication and your capability to lead.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Show that you understand and respect your people and are sincerely concerned about their best interests.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>Build team identity; build coherence in a complex world by clarifying mission, roles, and practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspirational</td>
<td>Cultivate excellence and innovation; be a source of optimism and enthusiasm for your people; encourage savvy risk-taking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Protect your people; fight for resources; give feedback, not blame.</td>
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