Leaders and the Leadership Process

by Joel DiGirolamo

Everyone wants a high performance team. Many of us think this takes an outstanding leader. I say maybe, maybe not. It does, however, take outstanding leadership. So let's talk about the difference between:
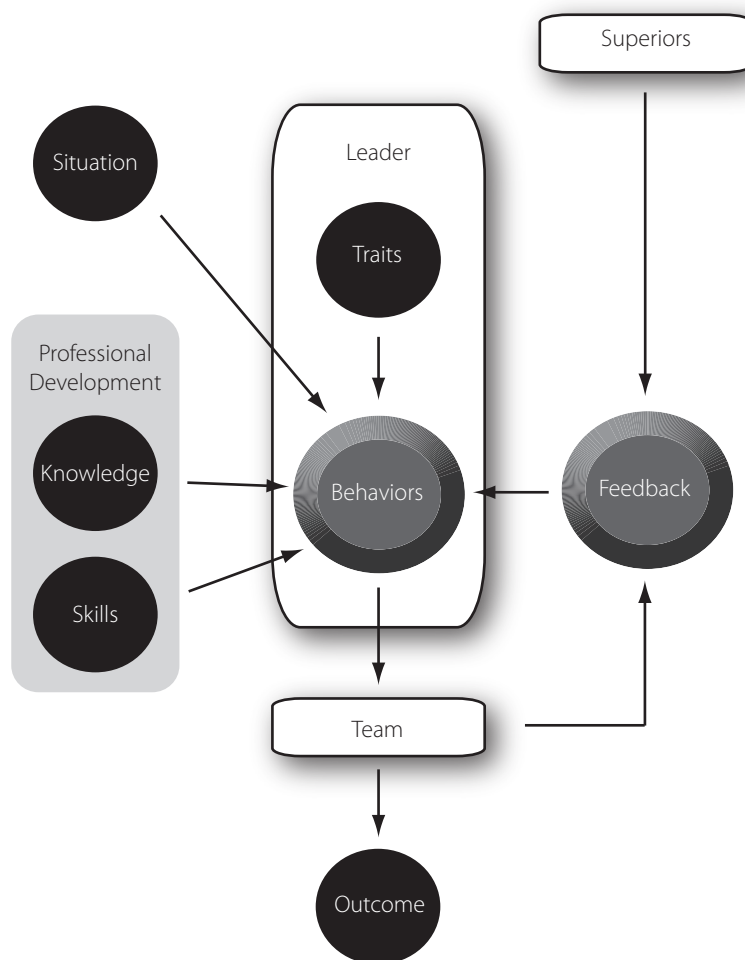
- High performance leadership
- A high performing leader
- A high performance team.

Leadership, at its core is a process that serves five functions:

- Creating a vision and continually focusing the group energy on the vision
- Building a high performance team
- Motivating team members
- Ensuring alignment with superiors and the environment and gathering necessary resources
- Maintaining the satisfaction of all members in order to minimize dropouts.

A high performing leader performs all of the necessary activities of the leadership process in order for his or her team to consistently perform at a superior level. This leads us to the question: what makes a high performing leader? This question has been studied by academics at great length for the last century and a half and we still don't have an unequivocal answer, but we do know a lot about it.

Initially leaders were thought to have a specific set of unique traits, however, after many decades and much debate, scholars came to the realization that it is the behaviors that leaders exhibit that promote action by the group. And — it was found that the best behaviors are dependent

A Leader and Leadership Model

on the situation. So, a person who is a good leader in one situation might not necessarily be a good leader in another.

We also know that leaders are no different from other workers, that their knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) will affect their behavior, and thus their ability to effectively lead in a given situ-

ation. This is where leader training comes in. It is generally very difficult for someone to change their traits, however, with appropriate training their behavior can be changed, hopefully making them a more effective leader.

Finally, a high performing team will be the result of high performance leadership. The assumption of course is that the high performance leadership chose superior team members. Now let's briefly come back to the question of the necessity for a leader. My view is that a high performance team can exist without a singular leader, however it cannot exist without leadership. To be successful all team members must contribute and be a part of this process. In essence you would have distributed leadership. Since we know that the most effective teams generally have from 6 to 12 members, this is a tall order. And so I doubt that many high performing leaderless teams exist, but I believe that it is possible.

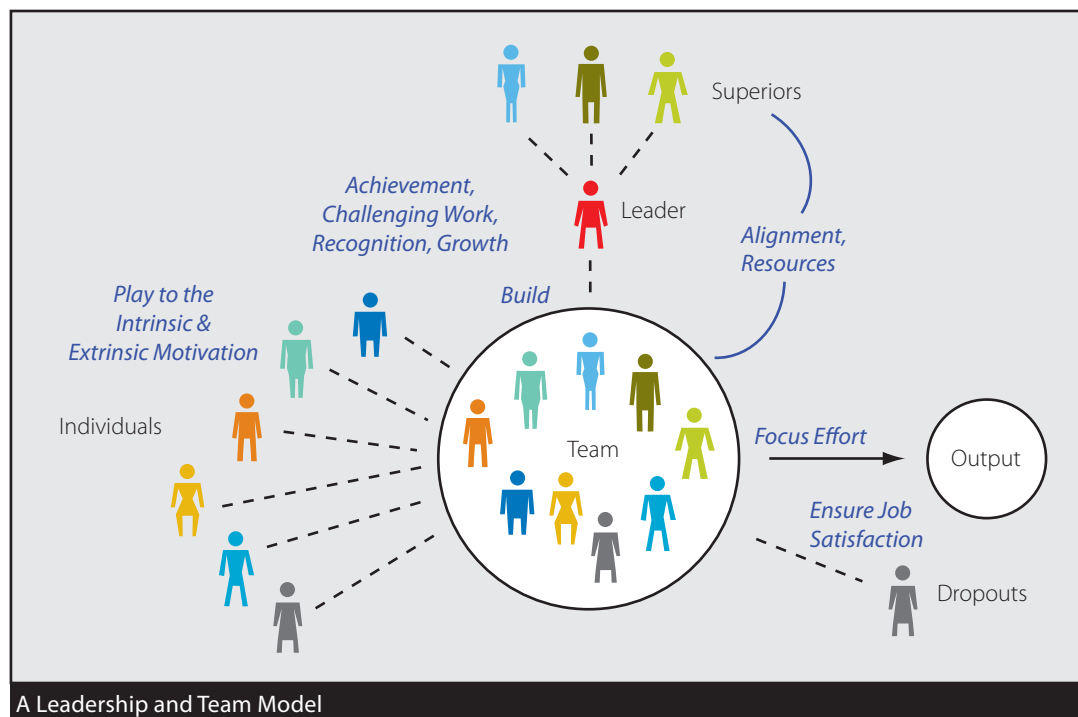> _Creating this specific vision or outcome is the single most important element of the leadership process._

Now let's take a look at each one of these elements in more detail.

Create a Vision

Think of a few leaders you admire and ask yourself, what was it that they wanted? John F. Kennedy wanted a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s. This fueled profound advances in technology and motivated many to study math and science. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream of racial equality. His energy, emotion, and ideals stimulated individuals to perform courageous acts.

Both of these men had simple, yet powerful visions of what they wanted us to attain. Not they to attain — us. We knew what specific outcome they wanted and they continually reminded us of this and kept our energy focused on that outcome.

As part of the vision it is very important

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to have goals. There is overwhelming evidence that the existence of goals will improve group performance. The goals should be challenging to team members but not be so difficult that they seem un-achievable and therefore not worth trying to attain. Team members should be com-mitted to the goals. If they are not then it's time to have a discussion and understand the reason for this. It has been found that team members may be committed to goals even if they did not participate in their creation, but they may have greater satisfaction with them if they participated.

In an organizational setting it is also good to have a mission. In this case the vision is what you want to be, what you want to become. The mission is what you want to do. A vision state-ment will consist of many nouns whereas a mis-sion statement will contain many verbs.

Creating this specific vision or outcome is the single most important element of the leader-ship process. When conflict occurs or confusion arises, you can always ask the question, "What is the goal? What are we trying to achieve?" That will frequently get everyone back on track.

Build a High Performance Team

You need individuals on your team who will have a good balance of working toward the desired outcome and keeping a watchful eye on new ideas that might improve your product or service or lower your cost. Good team members will ask probing questions, challenge your as-sumptions, and bring up alternative ideas.

A good leader will be open to these ques-tions and thoughts. Even if your organization has "done it this way for years" doesn't mean there might not be that next idea that provides you dramatic savings or some other benefit.

Personnel research has shown that there are two elements consistently related to job per-formance — general mental ability (g or GMA)

> *Good team members will ask probing questions, challenge your assump-tions, and bring up alter-native ideas.*

and conscientiousness. While the statistical correlations are not high, they are consis-tent contributors.

A few pitfalls exist, however. In some jobs, leadership for example, higher intel-ligence does not necessarily lead to higher job performance. If you have a leader with very high intelligence and the team mem-bers are closer to average intelligence they may not relate well to the team members. Their minds might be going too fast for the team members who become confused. The leader may not be able to communi-cate well since he or she is having to slow down considerably and may become frustrated.

The ability to attract good team members is a function of the overall perception of your team and organization. Like it or not, everyone wants to work for a winner. If you have done a good job promoting your team or organization, individuals will want to come work for you.

Once team members are onboard they will need maintenance. You don't expect your car to go 100,000 miles without maintenance, and people won't either. Sustain a good rapport with team members so that you know how to keep them happy and motivated. Which brings us to the next topic — motivation.

Motivate Team Members

Considerable research has been carried out to determine what motivates people, yet con-troversy remains. The general consensus is that individuals are either intrinsically motivated, ex-trinsically motivated, or amotivated, that is, not motivated at all. The latter are the easy ones — they don't have a place in your organization.

Intrinsic motivation is the inner desire that drives us to achieve. We thrive on the challenge of solving a difficult problem or feel satisfied upon the completion of a task. In general, these are the people you want in your organization. They take less care and feeding.

Extrinsic motivation is the desire to achieve so that you will get some reward. Think salesmen here. They are the group most frequently motivated in this manner. Use of extrinsic motivators may be fraught with peril. Studies have shown that once you introduce an external reward, such as money, you may destroy the intrinsic motivation. In other words, once you use extrinsic motivation you can't go back. Verbal praise has been shown to be effective and to retain intrinsic motivation, however I would have to ask if verbal praise is really an extrinsic reward.

A considerable body of work was undertaken by Frederick Herzberg in the 1950s and 60s. He determined that many of the workplace elements fall into one of two buckets, either a motivator or a hygiene factor. I think we all know what a motivator is, but what's a "hygiene" factor? A hygiene factor in Herzberg's world is one which maintains employee health. It's one of those things you just have to do.

This research identified elements that motivated individuals to work hard and those that acted to keep them in their job. The latter group is related to job satisfaction, which I will discuss later.

> *When employees become dissatisfied with some of these elements they generally don't work less, they just leave.*

Herzberg found that individuals were generally motivated by achievements and being recognized for the achievements. He also discovered that challenging work assignments and growth opportunities were important. Not surprisingly, these elements are consistent with intrinsic motivation. So make sure that you are recognizing individuals and teams as well as identifying growth opportunities for them.

Ensure Alignment

All groups must operate in harmony with their environment to be successful. This is true on any scale, from a team inside an organization to the actions of all human beings on our planet. In an organization you must ensure that the vision and goals are congruent with those of the organization as a whole. This is an important function of an advisory board or superiors to your team.

Further, each group must have the necessary resources to meet their goals. In lean times this can become difficult when organizations prefer to cut so-called discretionary spending before cutting people. The result is often a group with a task but no money. Resources can take many

Through detailed job satisfaction surveys, Frederick Herzberg discovered that events during job careers can lead to either job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction. Further, he found that events leading to extreme job satisfaction in general were intrinsic to the individual and would motivate them to higher performance levels. Events leading to extreme job dissatisfaction were extrinsic and led to low job satisfaction. This fits well with other studies showing that low job satisfaction does not necessarily lead to low performance, but rather to higher turnover and absenteeism. Herzberg's motivators and hygiene factors are as follows:

- Motivators
  - Achievement
  - Recognition
  - Work itself
  - Responsibility
  - Advancement
  - Growth

- Hygiene factors
  - Company policy and administration
  - Supervision
  - Relationship with the supervisor
  - Work conditions
  - Salary

Herzberg's Motivation and Hygiene Factors

forms: people, money for training materials, software, hardware, etc.

Maintain Job Satisfaction

Employee job satisfaction is an important topic but frequently not well-understood. Many people believe that satisfied, happy employees will be productive employees. Unfortunately that's not what research has shown us. The evidence shows that job satisfaction affects turnover.

Let's get back to Herzberg. Remember those funny things called hygiene factors? These are elements such as company policies, supervision and relationship to the supervisor, work conditions, status, and security. Think of these as the minimum criteria to keep your employees in their seats. When employees become dissatisfied with some of these elements they generally don't work less, they just leave. To reiterate, job satisfaction does not generally affect job performance but will affect turnover.
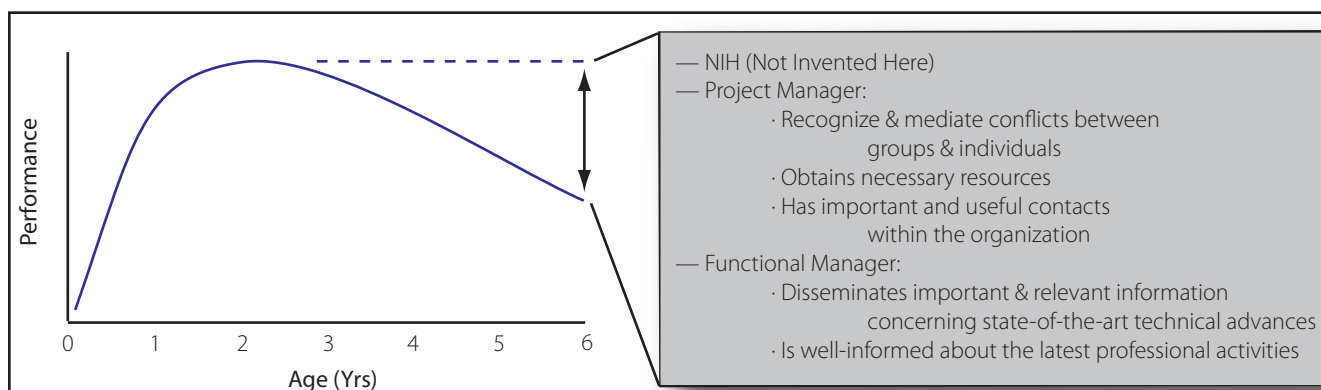
Leaders

Now that we've slogged our way through the leadership process elements let's get back to leaders. A good leader must do all of those things I've talked about above, or at least most of them. Sadly, research indicates that somewhere between 25% and 70% of managers or leaders range from toxic to ineffective. There are many reasons for this, which would be a good topic for another paper.

There are many leader models, beginning with those built on traits in the mid-1800s, to behavioral and situational models. While I will not take the time here to go into these models I will say that we should distinguish between what I call constructive models and deconstructive models.

Constructive models are similar to archetypal models such as those highlighted by C. G Jung, the Enneagram, and the DISC model. I call them constructive because they use specific elements to build individual archetypes. Conversely, deconstructive models break elements or personality facets apart so that we can study their individual effect. Models in this realm include the popular Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Five Factor Model (FFM, also known as the Big Five). While archetypal models are useful to the general business community they are not generally helpful as a diagnostic tool.

And so, we do know that a leader's personality will affect their performance. The Five Factor Model is the most popular personality model currently used by Industrial and Organizational (I/O)

— NIH (Not Invented Here)
— Project Manager:
· Recognize & mediate conflicts between groups & individuals
· Obtains necessary resources
· Has important and useful contacts within the organization
— Functional Manager:
· Disseminates important & relevant information concerning state-of-the-art technical advances
· Is well-informed about the latest professional activities
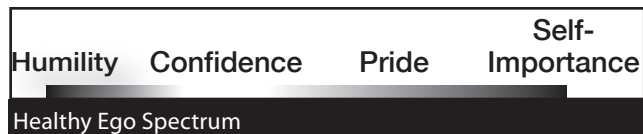
Team Productivity Over Time

Psychologists. The personality elements in this model are:

- Openness
- Conscientiousness
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Neuroticism.

Studies have shown that leader performance is related to all of these elements with the exception of agreeableness. I'd like to highlight one point on extraversion. Leaders in an organization may be extraverted because they are naturally social or they may be extraverted because they view it as a way to get promoted or make it easier to achieve their goals. In fact, one vendor of I/O assessments breaks these two elements apart and reports them individually.

This brings us to the seminal work of Fred Luthans. His study of managers revealed that they could be broken into two groups — successful managers and effective managers. The successful managers are those who have been promoted quickly, while the effective managers are those with satisfied, committed subordinates, and high performing work units. The behavior of the different managers was distinct. Analysis showed that for successful managers networking was statistically related to success and that human resource management activities made the least contribution to their success. On the flip side, communication and human resource activities were more closely related to manager effectiveness.

Humility	Confidence	Pride	Self-Importance

Healthy Ego Spectrum

Luthans gives an example profile of a successful manager, "I find that the way to get ahead around here is to be friendly with the right people, both inside and outside the firm. They get tired of always talking shop, so I find a common interest — with some it's sports, with others it's our kids — and interact with them on that level. The other formal stuff around the office is important but I really work at this informal side and have found it pays off when promotion time rolls around."

High performance leaders are also knowledgeable about their subject area. They quickly grasp changes in their environment, new issues or ideas team members bring up, and have a good "BS" filter.

Continuous learning and self-improvement is key for them. One study of teams showed that many reach a zenith in productivity after about two years of existence. They found, however, that some maintained a high level of productivity for many years beyond this. Upon examining the inner workings of these long-term, stable teams a consistent theme revealed itself. Project Managers would:

- Recognize & mediate conflicts between groups and individuals
- Obtain the necessary resources

Job Performance		Work for Money Extrinsic Motivation		Work for Meaning Intrinsic Motivation	
	High	Stay, Miserable High Turnover High Absenteeism	Stay, Happy	Quit	✓
	Low	Dismissed	Dismissed	Quit	?
		Low	*High*	*Low*	*High*
			Job Satisfaction		

Job Performance, Job Satisfaction, and Motivation Dynamics

- Have important and useful contacts within the organization

Further, Functional Managers would:

- Disseminate important & relevant information concerning state-of-the-art technical advances
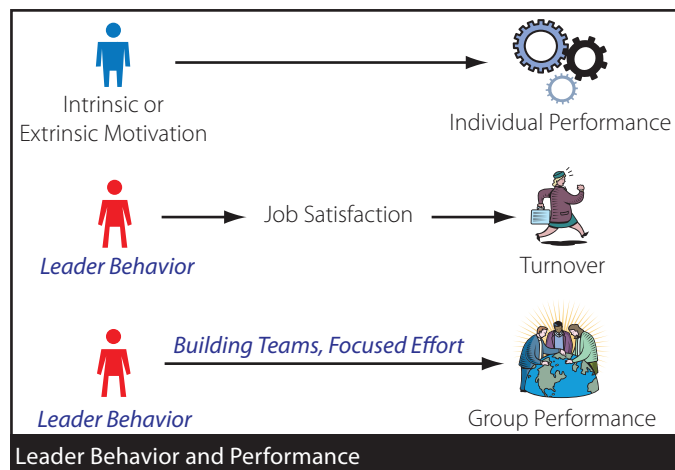- Remain well-informed about the latest professional activities.

Quite frequently I see leaders with an inability to observe their own behavior. This low self-awareness inhibits development. If you are not aware of weaknesses or failings it is very difficult to remediate them. A tool which I have begun using to raise self-awareness is a mindfulness assessment. This tool measures five facets:

- Nonreactivity to my feelings or emotions
- Observing, noticing, or attending to my sensations, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings
- Acting with awareness
- Describing and labeling my feelings with words
- Nonjudging of my inner experiences.

I also see and hear a lot about leaders' inflated egos. Keep in mind that we all must have some level of ego. It seems to me that for each of us, our ego involvement lies on a spectrum:

- Self-importance
- Confidence, healthy ego
- Humility.

Feeling self-important can clearly get us into trouble, as can pride. We close ourself off when the ego takes charge. At the other end of the scale, if we have no ego, or total humility, we would have a difficult time moving forward. Our ego evolved as we developed through childhood. Based on our genetic make-up or environ-

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ment it may have not developed as it should or grew bigger than is beneficial. Those fortunate individuals who have a healthy ego will find that it gives them the confidence to move themselves and others forward in a caring and compassionate manner.

Summary

So let's summarize this up. I've discussed the leadership process and how it is different from a leader. Keep in mind that the most important element is to stay focused on the goal and work outward from there. Hire the right people and keep them focused on the task. And remember:

- Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation drives individual performance
- Leader behavior drives job satisfaction which drives turnover
- Leadership behavior drives group performance

And now I'll leave you with a few thoughts... hunter-gatherer societies often do not have formal leaders and — in the words of Lord Acton (1887), "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority..."

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