

Polaris Digest – July/August 2008 - Text

Leadership Assessment . . .

Without doubt, the most prevalent topic among business leaders, relating to the art/science itself, involves a precise assessment of leadership. If this can't be done successfully we're likely to experience significant difficulties in recognizing, selecting, orienting, developing and even in relating to leaders.

In recent articles we addressed just one of these aspects – that of [personal development](#). Under this heading I proposed three distinctive differences between management and leadership – information usage, perspective and investment, and how to recognize and evaluate each of these.

Several readers have raised the critical issue of how we might measure leadership effectiveness overall.

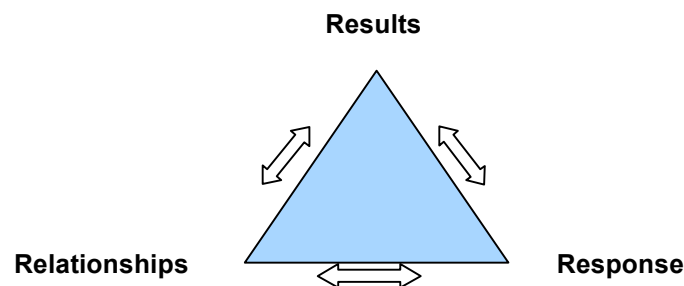
Assuming that you're seeking to develop yourself to meet emerging demands, you'll need to know your point of departure, some milestones along the way and your destination.

Let's see what we can discover about *measuring leadership*.

A point of departure . . .

First our definition of a leader is **“one who focuses the desire for change that's resident in others and who then facilitates the creation of a sustainable new reality”**.

The next challenge is to decide what aspects of leadership to measure. There are three popular schools of thought:



Results – the product or outcomes of a particular event or overall leadership interventions - are the traditional approach to determining leadership effectiveness.

In today's turbulent market where there's been an extremely short-sighted scoreboard – the next ninety days – a results-based measurement strategy has distorted performance in many undesirable ways.

We're all familiar with Enron's dark history. There's a good case for the conclusion that pressure from the Board for consistently increasing quarterly dividends helped fuel an executive climate of short-term focus and lowered ethical concerns. Such pressures also contributed to a focus on so-called charismatic leadership styles, very few of which have had any lasting and positive impact, and a good few of which have led to disasters.

The basic point though is that results or outcomes cannot be attributed *solely* to leadership style.

There are so many variables that influence both top and bottom lines and which have a durable yet inconsistent impact. General economic conditions, regulatory influences and market fads and fashions are just the tip of a very sizeable iceberg.

A similar case can be made for **Relationships** – the residual feelings and attachments that enable, sustain and survive the interventions. They are certainly important factors in any leadership intervention, but it is reasonable to deduce that they are largely independent of specific events. We all experience conflicts wherein we depend on the overall quality of a relationship to help us survive temporary setbacks with other persons.

There might be some merit in measuring the residual impact of a particular event or intervention on any ongoing relationship – what particular difference has it made and is this positive (contributing) or negative (detracting)? There has to be a way to measure this specifically but it would seem to be unduly complex to me.

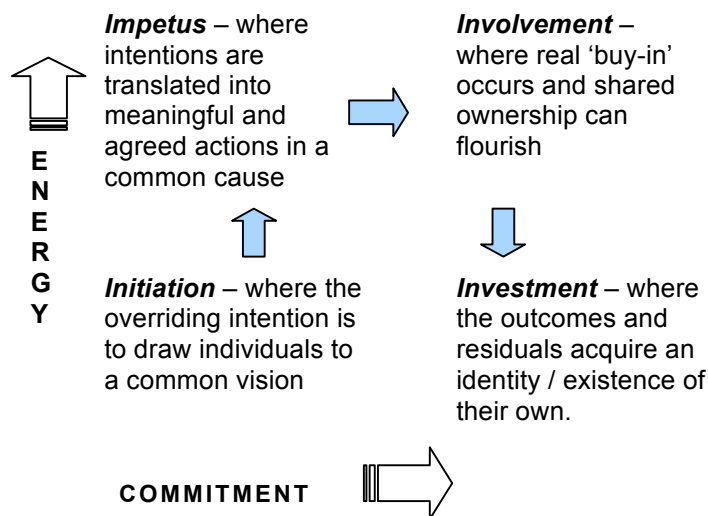
Let's acknowledge too that there are, and will continue to be, many leadership situations where there is no permanent relationship, either before, during or afterwards. We come together for a reason, a season or a lifetime, but rarely for all three.

Our hope rests, it seems, with the third option – that of **Response** – the extent (footprint) and impact (intensity) of leadership influences that empower action. The premise here is that every leadership intervention is an interface between a leader and follower(s). Something special has to occur between the two interest groups and this can be detected, influenced and tracked, therefore it can be measured.

A four-fold path . . .

Response requires two fundamental, independent forces – the investment of **effort or energy** and an emerging sense of **commitment**. When I consider the manner in which these two factors will operate, both alone and together, there is, I believe, a pattern in the unfolding of leadership response, the evolving behaviors between leader and follower.

This pattern follows a sequence of four distinct phases:



The path is natural; it can be traced in almost every successful leadership intervention and support for it is mainly intuitive. Consider, as my leader you must first earn my attention; then you need to convince me that meaningful results are indeed possible; after that I will assume responsibility for my actions and contributions; finally, the results and outcomes are mine / ours and can exist independently of you and me, the leader and the led.

So, we begin with **Initiation** and before we're ever asked for commitment we're expected to invest effort - **Impetus**. Once effort has been invested there emerges a growing awareness of and escalation in commitment. This often results in different quality, and perhaps level, of invested effort – **Involvement**. The increased nature of our commitment changes our perspectives and attitudes towards accountability and ownership – **Investment**.

Within each phase there are sub-phases. For Initiation these could be "identification", "intervention" and "integration" each with its own typical and progressive behaviors. For the Impetus phase I've selected "critical mass", "coherence" and "response time". In the third phase, Involvement, where there's a

transfer of ownership from leader to follower, I'd select "role clarity", "affiliation" and "cohesion", and lastly, in the Investment phase I suggest "accountability", "trust" and "legacy".

In every sub-phase there are constituent sequential behaviors which are observable and measurable. I've developed a composite schematic of the entire process – the **Leadership Response Model** - which you're invited to review (attached).

Each phase has its own integrity and the actual pathway can be traced from a start point through progressive steps eventually linking to the subsequent phases. The course appears to be a rational one but, more important, it is also supportable from an experiential / emotional vantage point. Ask yourself, "Does it make sense? Does it feel right? Does it hang together in action?"

How is it applied . . .

It's rather like walking a labyrinth. Given a map or schematic, we can sit together and trace a pathway to success before we begin our actual experience. We would explore together each of the options and assess the probabilities of a successful journey. I can see where your personal strengths and cognitive competencies are advantageous and you can access the impact of mine.

We might use it to set priorities and detail a plan of action, how we will work together and also allocate our limited resources in the most effective and efficient ways. We can also use it to define opportunities for discovering synergies and potentials difficulties and so to configure our joint strategies accordingly. This knowledge can also help us to identify longer-term developmental and personal growth needs.

Through the application of a simple 7-point scale to each of the phases and/or identified behaviors we can create a useful scoring system which will support our choices and allow for meaningful comparisons between people and events. Using this scale

7 point scale						
-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
behavior is diametrically opposed			behavior has no impact		behavior is entirely supportive	

we can rapidly determine those areas where the leadership has been/will be challenged and/or enhanced. The phase in which any anomaly occurs and the specific causative behaviors will become obvious, as well as their likely impact 'down-stream'.

The Leader's path . . .

It's a dialogue tool!

The greatest impact of such an assessment process, whether it be applied before, in the course of, or following any leadership intervention, is through constructive dialogue. The leader and follower(s) would use the model as a discussion guide, actively exploring each behavior in sequence in terms of individual perspectives and the impact on the relationship, applicable standards and on specific results.

Where the scoring process is to be applied, there's an option for weighting either the particular phase or the sub-phases within them to reflect the needs of the situation.

The resulting scores describe the situation; they do not prove anything in that they are subjective – one or more person's opinion. The internal distribution or pattern will be most helpful in assessing relative merits though, and given that a consistent approach is adopted, comparisons between different people and different times will be revealed.

The ultimate purpose for the use of this, or any other assessment device is to stimulate focused development. This is truly its best contribution.

So, what's the bottom line . . .

The leader, devoted to excellence, needs all help available to enhance the quality of shared actions and outcomes. This dialogue agenda has the potential to contribute - significantly.

Focusing on process or Response is a fair, credible and professional strategy for bringing out the very best in all those involved. When this can be achieved through use of a device which is both rational and intuitive a more durable consensus will emerge.

It all comes down to sharing awareness and understanding – a first step towards wisdom – and to building both results and relationships by upgrading the quality of response.

It's surely well-worth a try.

LEADERSHIP RESPONSE MODEL

