



## Professional reconversion to ensure a better professional future

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### Chapter 5 Leadership



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## Information

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## Introduction

Leadership is a critical skill that is in high demand in today's rapidly evolving job market. In an era of constant change and disruption, the ability to lead and adapt is essential for success in any profession. Regardless of the industry or field, employers are looking for individuals who can lead and inspire others to achieve common goals. Whether you are a recent graduate or an experienced professional, possessing leadership skills can give you a competitive edge in the job market and help you achieve your career aspirations.

In this text, we will explore the importance of leadership as a cross-cutting skill in the new job market. We will examine the key characteristics and the values connected to this transferable skill and provide practical strategies for developing and honing these skills. We will also look at the role of leadership in the context of modern workplaces, including the challenges and opportunities that arise in diverse, global, and rapidly changing environments.

## Learning Objectives

- Defining the concept of leadership and its role as a cross-cutting skill in the modern workplace.
- Identifying the key attributes and competencies of effective leaders and explaining their significance in different organisational contexts.
- Describing the challenges and opportunities associated with leading in diverse, global, and rapidly changing environments.
- Assessing your own leadership skills and identifying areas for improvement and development.
- Developing practical strategies for enhancing your leadership skills, including seeking feedback, learning from others, taking on leadership roles, and investing in professional development.
- Evaluating the impact of effective leadership on organisational performance and employee engagement and retention.

## 5.1. What is Leadership?

### 5.1.1. Definition

Leadership is an essential aspect of human society and has been extensively studied by scholars from various fields, including psychology, sociology and management. It is a complex and difficult phenomenon to define, but a commonly cited definition of leadership is that provided by Northouse (2019), who defines it as *"a process in which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal"*.

This definition emphasises the role of the leader as an influencer and recognises that leadership is a dynamic process involving both leader and followers. The common goal in this definition emphasises the fact that leadership is not only about achieving individual success, but also involves ensuring that the group as a whole succeeds.

Another important aspect of leadership is that it entails a certain level of responsibility. A leader must not only guide and influence his or her followers, but also take responsibility for the results of the group's actions. This may involve making difficult decisions, taking risks and being accountable for the results. A good leader is willing to take responsibility for successes and failures, using them as opportunities for growth and learning.

Furthermore, leadership is often associated with certain traits or characteristics that are considered essential for effective leadership. These traits may include communication skills, emotional intelligence, integrity, creativity, adaptability and a strong sense of vision. However, it is important to note that not all leaders possess all these traits and that different situations may require different leadership styles and traits.

Leadership is a transferable skill because it transcends job titles, sectors or specific functions. Leaders can be found in any organisation, from large corporations to small start-ups, and in any role, from entry-level to executive management. Effective leadership requires a combination of cognitive, emotional and behavioural skills that can be applied in a wide range of contexts and situations.

### 5.1.2. Characteristics and values

As described above, leadership is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon and there are many different characteristics associated with effective leadership. Effective leaders possess a number of unique characteristics and values that enable them to connect with and influence those around them including:

**Integrity:** leaders of integrity demonstrate ethical behaviour and uphold moral values. They are honest, transparent and accountable, and inspire trust and respect in their followers. Integrity is critical in the workplace because it creates a culture of honesty and trust that fosters collaboration, innovation and productivity.

**Empathy:** Empathetic leaders are able to understand and relate to the emotions and experiences of others. They are compassionate, supportive and inclusive and create an environment of psychological safety in which people feel comfortable expressing ideas, concerns and feelings. Empathy is essential in the workplace because it promotes teamwork, communication and a sense of belonging.

**Adaptability:** Effective leaders are able to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to new challenges as they arise. They are also able to make quick and decisive decisions when necessary.

**Vision:** Leaders with a strong vision are able to articulate a compelling and inspiring picture of the future. They have a clear understanding of where they want to go and how they will get there, and they communicate this vision to their team in a way that inspires and motivates them to act. Vision is crucial in the workplace because it provides direction, guidance and purpose and enables people to see the big picture and the possibilities for growth and success.

**Resilience:** resilient leaders are able to adapt to change, overcome obstacles and recover from setbacks. They are persistent, tenacious and determined and inspire their team to persevere through challenges and move forward. Resilience is essential in the workplace because it helps people deal with uncertainty, cope with stress and learn from failures.

**Emotional intelligence:** Leaders who can understand and relate to the feelings and perspectives of their team members are more likely to build trust and relationships. This creates an environment where people feel comfortable expressing their ideas and concerns, leading to more effective communication and problem-solving. Empathetic leaders also prioritise the well-being of their team members and strive to create a supportive work culture.

**Self-awareness:** Effective leaders are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and use this knowledge to improve themselves and their team. They are also aware of their impact on others and strive to create a positive environment in which everyone feels valued and supported. Through self-awareness, leaders can identify areas for growth and develop strategies to overcome challenges.

**Accountability:** Responsible leaders take responsibility for their actions and decisions and strive to hold themselves and others to high levels of performance. They strive to achieve results and promote continuous improvement and are willing to take responsibility for successes and failures. Accountability is critical in the workplace because it fosters a culture of excellence in which people are motivated to do their best work and are held accountable for results.

**Communication:** Effective leaders also possess strong communication skills. They are able to clearly convey their vision and inspire their team to work towards a shared goal. They actively listen to the feedback and concerns of their team members and use this information to improve their strategies and approach. Clear and open communication also creates a culture of transparency, where team members feel empowered to contribute and collaborate.

By cultivating these values in ourselves and others, we can be prepared to become effective leaders who inspire and motivate others to reach their full potential.

### 5.1.3. The Importance of leadership in modern life

A key aspect of leadership in modern life is its role in managing complexity and uncertainty. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing, leaders must be able to make sense of complex situations, develop clear strategies and communicate them effectively to their teams. In a study published in the Journal of Leadership and Organisational Studies,

researchers found that effective leadership is essential for navigating uncertainty and driving innovation in dynamic environments (Dinh et al., 2014).

Another important aspect of leadership is its role in promoting team member engagement and motivation. Research has consistently shown that leaders who are able to create a sense of belonging and purpose among their followers are more likely to foster high levels of involvement and commitment (Gardner et al., 2010). This is particularly important in modern life, where individuals increasingly seek meaning and fulfilment in their work and personal lives.

Leadership also plays a crucial role in driving social progress and positive change. In a study published in the Journal of Business Ethics by Brown, Smith, and Johnson (2020), researchers found that ethical leadership is associated with higher levels of corporate social responsibility and positive social impact. Leaders who are able to inspire and mobilise people towards a common cause or vision can have a profound impact on society as a whole, driving advocacy, influencing policy and producing change.

Moreover, effective leadership is essential to foster innovation and drive change. In a study published in the Journal of Applied Psychology, researchers found that transformational leadership - a leadership style that focuses on inspiring and empowering followers - is positively associated with innovation (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Leaders who can create a culture of experimentation, creativity and risk-taking are more likely to drive innovation and promote positive change in their organisations.

## 5.2. Teaching Approaches to Leadership

### 5.2.1. Teaching leadership

Teaching approaches to leadership are essential for developing the knowledge, skills, and values required for effective leadership. There are various approaches, each with its strengths and limitations:

1. **Experiential learning** emphasises practical experiences and reflection, often involving activities such as simulations, role-plays, and outdoor challenges.
2. **Case-based learning** involves analysing real-world situations and discussing leadership strategies and decisions. This approach, commonly used in business schools and executive education programs, promotes critical thinking and decision-making skills in leadership.
3. **Theoretical learning** emphasises the study of leadership theories and models, promoting conceptual understanding and critical thinking.
4. **Mentoring and coaching** offer individual guidance and support from experienced leaders, promoting self-awareness, skill development, and career advancement in leadership.

(Jowett, S., McCann, J. Kline, R., & Liguori, E. (2018); . Journal of Leadership Education. Williams, A., et al. (2016). Journal of Management Education)

### 5.2.2. Challenges / Barriers

Teaching leadership as a transferable skill presents several challenges and barriers that need to be overcome to ensure effective learning outcomes like:

**Lack of consensus on what constitutes leadership** - There are many different theories and models of leadership, and educators must decide which ones to teach. Additionally, there is often a lack of agreement on which skills and traits are most important for effective leadership. This lack of consensus can make it difficult to develop a cohesive curriculum and ensure that learners receive a comprehensive education in leadership skills.

**Difficulty in measuring leadership skills** - Unlike other skills, such as maths or reading, there is no standardised test or objective measure of leadership ability. As a result, educators must rely on subjective assessments, such as self-assessments or peer evaluations, which may not accurately reflect a learner's true leadership potential. This can make it difficult to assess the effectiveness of leadership education programs and to ensure that learners are developing the necessary skills.

**Lack of opportunities for practical application** - Leadership is a practical skill that requires opportunities for application and practice. However, many educational institutions do not provide learners with sufficient opportunities to apply their leadership skills in real-world contexts. This can limit the effectiveness of leadership education programs and make it difficult for learners to develop their skills in a meaningful way.

**Lack of resources** - Teaching leadership transferable skills requires resources, such as specialised curriculum materials, trained instructors, and opportunities for practical application. However, many educational institutions do not have the resources necessary to develop and implement effective leadership education programs. This can limit the quality of leadership education and make it difficult for learners to develop the necessary skills.

**Lack of role models** - Learners may struggle to develop leadership skills if they lack role models who demonstrate effective leadership. This can be particularly true for learners who come from underrepresented groups or who have not had access to leadership opportunities in the past. Educators must work to provide learners with access to diverse role models who demonstrate effective leadership, and who can inspire and mentor learners in their own leadership development.

**Lack of focus on emotional intelligence** - Effective leadership requires emotional intelligence, the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others. However, many leadership education programs focus primarily on technical skills and neglect emotional intelligence. This can limit the effectiveness of leadership education and make it difficult for learners to develop the necessary skills to lead effectively.

### 5.2.3. The role of the educator

Effective educators play a crucial role in shaping future leaders. They go beyond simply teaching skills; they cultivate leadership potential. This involves demonstrating strong leadership within the classroom, setting a positive example.

Educators also equip students with a solid foundation in leadership theory, introducing them to different styles and their strengths and weaknesses.

Furthermore, they create opportunities for students to practise leadership skills in real-world scenarios, fostering their confidence and practical application. This doesn't stop at just providing the experience; educators also offer ongoing support and feedback to help students refine their skills.

Additionally, they cultivate a growth mindset in the classroom, encouraging students to take risks and learn from mistakes. Recognizing individual needs and adapting teaching styles are also crucial for educators to ensure all students can develop their leadership potential.

Finally, educators play a role in fostering social responsibility, helping students understand the impact they can have and encouraging them to use their leadership for positive change.

### 2.2.4. Characteristics of a Leadership classroom

A leadership classroom is one that cultivates learners who are not only capable of leading, but also capable of thinking critically about the leadership process and their own abilities as leaders.

**Encourages active participation** - students are encouraged to engage with the material, ask questions, and participate in discussions. By actively participating, learners can develop their critical thinking skills and learn to apply them to leadership challenges.

**Fosters a collaborative learning environment** - students are encouraged to work together in groups to develop their leadership skills and learn from one another. Through collaboration, learners can gain different perspectives on leadership and develop the ability to work effectively with others.

**Emphasises self-reflection** - students are encouraged to reflect on their own leadership strengths and weaknesses, as well as how they can improve their leadership skills. By engaging in self-reflection, learners can develop a deeper understanding of themselves as leaders and identify areas for growth.

**Provides opportunities for experiential learning** - this may include simulations, case studies, or other activities that allow learners to practise leadership in a safe and supportive environment. Through experiential learning, students can develop their problem-solving and decision-making skills, as well as learn from their mistakes.

**Embrace diversity and inclusion** - Students should be exposed to a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, allowing them to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges associated with leading diverse teams. By embracing diversity and inclusion, learners can develop the ability to work effectively with individuals from different backgrounds and cultures.

**Provides opportunities for feedback** - This may include peer feedback, instructor feedback, or self-assessment. By receiving feedback, learners can identify areas for improvement and refine their leadership skills over time.

### 5.2.5 Assessment

Assessment is a fundamental component of any leadership class. It allows educators to assess learners' understanding and application of leadership concepts and skills and helps them monitor their own progress and identify areas for improvement. There are several types of assessment that can be used in a leadership class, each with its own strengths and weaknesses:

**Formative assessment:** is designed to provide continuous feedback to students during the learning process. It may include quizzes, self-assessments, peer assessments and class discussions. Formative assessment helps students identify areas where they need additional support and provides educators with valuable information on students' progress and understanding of the material.

**Summative assessment:** aims to evaluate students' mastery of a particular concept or skill. It may include examinations, projects, presentations and case studies. Summative assessment provides students with a clear understanding of their performance and achievements and allows educators to assess the effectiveness of their teaching strategies.

**Performance-based assessment:** can be used in a leadership class. It involves assessing students' ability to apply their leadership skills in a real-world context, such as a group project, community service activity or internship. Performance-based assessment helps students develop practical leadership skills and provides educators with a more accurate assessment of their abilities.

**Diagnostic assessments:** are designed to identify students' strengths and weaknesses in specific areas of leadership. Diagnostic assessments can be used at the beginning of a course to help educators tailor teaching to student needs, or during the course to help students track their progress and identify areas for improvement.

**Self- and peer assessment:** can be powerful tools for evaluating students' leadership skills. Self-assessment involves students reflecting on their strengths, weaknesses and growth and setting goals for improvement. Peer assessment involves students evaluating the work of others and providing feedback and support. Self and peer assessment can help learners develop critical thinking and communication skills and provide educators with valuable insight into learners' perspectives and learning experiences.

### 5.3. Good practices/applications in adult education

Developing leadership skills is an essential aspect of adult education. As adults, we bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the table, and developing our leadership skills can help us become more effective learners, collaborators, and problem solvers. In this paragraph we will explore some good practices and applications for developing leadership skills in adult education.

**Embrace a growth mindset** - One of the foundational principles of developing leadership skills is embracing a growth mindset. This means recognizing that your abilities and skills can be developed through hard work, dedication, and perseverance. As an adult learner, it is essential to approach new challenges with an open mind and a willingness to learn from your mistakes. Adopting a growth mindset can help you overcome self-doubt and fear of failure and become a more confident and effective leader.

**Engage in collaborative learning** - Collaborative learning is a powerful tool for developing leadership skills in adult education. Working with others to solve problems, generate ideas, and achieve common goals can help you hone your communication, teamwork, and decision-making skills. Collaborative learning can also provide opportunities for constructive feedback and self-reflection, allowing you to identify areas for improvement and growth as a leader.

**Participate in experiential learning** - Experiential learning involves learning through doing, and it can be a powerful tool for developing leadership skills. Participating in simulations, role-playing, and real-world projects can help you develop your problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making skills in a safe and supportive environment. Experiential learning can also provide opportunities for feedback and self-reflection, allowing you to identify and address areas for improvement and growth as a leader.

**Seek out mentorship** - Mentorship can be a valuable tool for developing leadership skills in adult education. A mentor can provide guidance, support, and feedback as you navigate new challenges and opportunities. They can also serve as role models, sharing their own experiences and insights to help you develop your own leadership skills. Seeking out mentorship can be especially valuable if you are transitioning into a new field or industry or if you are looking to advance in your career.

**Invest in professional development** - Investing in professional development is another critical practice for developing leadership skills in adult education. Attending workshops, conferences, and training programs focused on leadership and management can help you deepen your knowledge and skills and provide opportunities to network with other professionals in your field. You can also seek out online resources and courses that are tailored to your specific needs and interests.

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