

7 LEADERSHIP



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All organisations need leadership to stay on track, strive for a better way, and to tackle adversity. Leadership is the collective responsibility of those responsible for governance and management of an organisation.

Good leaders generate results from a team by providing consistent direction and guidance.

Leadership is not about charisma, having the best public presence, or taking control in every situation.

It is about people stepping up, making decisions, deciding on a course of action, and taking people with them.

Every person in a governance team can show leadership.

“Management is about doing things right. Leadership is about doing the right things” - Peter Drucker

The process

The governance and management teams of any organisation provide leadership by developing a vision for the future and communicating that vision. The leadership team will also lead processes to articulate the values of the organisation and will demonstrate those values to others.

The process of leadership is a combination of all the organisational processes which provide clarity and direction.

What sets good leadership apart is the ability to communicate a consistent message to keep people on track at all times.

Consistency is important when things are not going well. Reminding the team about the purpose and the plan will help you to overcome the challenges that you may have to face. Inconsistency creates confusion and perceptions of “shifting goal posts”, which can result in loss of focus and lack of progress.

Some organisations will have a strong figurehead, usually the Chair or CEO, who is the visible leader. This person will be the one who frequently leads public events, makes media statements and runs meetings. However, leadership is a group responsibility.

Everyone in the leadership team (governance and management) must actively participate in the processes that lead their organisation.

To participate in those processes the leadership team should ensure they:

- Are fully prepared for meetings in order to make timely and robust decisions
- Attend functions as appropriate to talk to staff and stakeholders about the organisation
- Demonstrate integrity and adherence to the organisational values in all their communication and actions.

Attributes

Are people born with leadership traits or can they learn them? Think about the good leaders you know. Many will seem to be natural leaders, with charisma and people skills that make it appear easy. Others will be reluctant leaders, uncomfortable with the public aspects of leadership.

The reality is that you can learn the skills and attributes required of good leadership. Leadership is about stepping up and providing consistent direction to your organisation. It is common in not-for-profits for people to rise to a leadership role because they have a passion for the purpose of their chosen organisation. A good leader is able to demonstrate that passion and harness it for the collective good.

People skills can be learned. Don't worry if you are not a natural people person. People will respond if you are honest and genuine in your interactions with them. A good leader cares about others and shows a genuine interest in people.

Good judgement and decision making comes with knowledge, and knowledge comes with information and work. If you are in a leadership role, it is your responsibility to learn about the organisation, its purpose and the environment you operate in. This is to ensure you can show good judgement and guide the organisation through the next phase of development.

In many not-for-profit organisations there is a need to influence others in order to achieve your goals. You may need to influence funders, sponsors, government agencies, or clients. Community leaders develop circles of influence and relationships that help them to advocate for their organisation or cause. The ability of your organisation to influence others will be a combination of your individual networks and the processes you use to communicate.

The good leaders that you know will have worked hard to develop the attributes needed to become respected leaders, irrespective of their natural talents.

Outcome of good leadership

It is worth investing time and effort in developing the leadership capabilities of any organisation. The result will be an organisation that runs smoothly and can weather any storms.

1. **A strong team** is the result of leadership that provides consistency of purpose. A team with a clear sense of direction is able to get on with the job. A team that has been well led will not let personality differences get in the way. They will understand their individual and collective responsibilities and will want to strive to achieve organisational goals.
2. **A clear purpose** is the result of leadership that focuses on the organisational vision and brings people back on task when they lose their way. In not-for-profits (as for many organisations) it is easy to be side tracked by financial constraints, individual needs, funding requirements, and other external challenges, and move away from the core purpose of your organisation. Good leadership will help everyone to focus on why you are there and how best to achieve your purpose in a sustainable way.
3. **Timely decision-making** is the result of leadership which is prepared to make a decision based on good information in a planned and considered way. Timely decisions occur in organisations that have a good plan and where the risks of the decision are understood. Plans and risk analysis provide confidence to the leadership team which enables them to be decisive.
4. **Resilient organisations** are those that can weather the storms. Organisations face adversity in many ways – a drop in funding, change in government policy, economic conditions, staffing challenges and so on. Effective leadership will help the organisation manage their way through these challenges.
5. **Succession planning** and leadership development. If you are a good leader others will readily want to follow you as they will be taking over the reigns of an organisation in good order.

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