

The Leadership Management Scale

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I often get into conversations in my Leadership courses about the difference between leaders and managers. This article suggests a visual scale that can help you understand your natural tendencies and how you like to operate.

Most of us have heard the old adage (first uttered by Peter Drucker, I believe) that "Managers do things right, and Leaders do the right things." In leadership classes, I work with groups to develop a list of characteristics that typify managers and leaders. Generalizing the lists, I find that pure managers and pure leaders have completely different mindsets as follows:

The Pure Manager

The manager wants everything to go smoothly. He or she wants every process to run the way it should to get the maximum productivity. There must be no waste. The manager wants everyone to follow all the rules and be there every day motivated to do good work. In essence, the manager wants to *stabilize* things and clone everything to be exactly right. The manager is all about **doing things right**, and is most closely associated with the **mission** of the organization (what they are trying to accomplish today). The manager works with the process, the equipment, the schedule, and the people in terms of what they *should be doing*. Managers are **now** oriented.

The Pure Leader

The leader is often a *destabilizing* force. He or she is most interested in where the organization is going rather than optimizing today's processes. That may mean making people unhappy for some time in order for the greater good. It often means balancing the needs of different constituencies with opposing needs. For example, satisfying social responsibility needs may mean a short term hit for shareholders, or working to optimize shareholder needs may require unpopular actions for the workforce. If people are too complacent and do not see the dangers, the leader is there to create a burning platform. Leaders understand the need to sometimes be unpopular, or as Colin Powell likes to say, "Being responsible sometimes means pissing people off." The idea is to **do**

the right things, which may mean some pretty difficult decisions. The leader is all about the **vision** of the organization (where they are *trying to go*). The leader works with the balance sheet, the strategic plan, the product line, and the people in terms of what they *can become*. Leaders are **future** oriented.

The Leader/Manager

This person is able to combine the best of both worlds and act in both roles. All of us act as leaders and managers at times, but each of us favors one mode or the other. A good balance between the two extremes is often the best place to be. In general, the world has far more competent managers than competent leaders, so if you have leadership tendencies, that is a good thing to have. Really great leaders do not mind being average managers. They recognize their limitation and surround themselves with outstanding managers to handle the details.

I think of the leadership - manager issue as a kind of sliding scale. On one extreme is pure leadership, and on the other extreme is pure management. We all operate somewhere on the sliding scale every day. Based on our personal style, we move from one point on the scale to another depending on current needs. Let's be more specific with the metaphor. Suppose pure leadership is a 10, and pure management is a 1.

I may be writing an e-mail encouraging people to pay attention to our future vision in the actions we take today. While I am writing that note, my mind is operating at about 8 on the scale. I am having a bit of management thought because I am referring to current actions, but the thrust of my note is about following our vision, which is pure leadership.

I finish the note and look up to see a supervisor at my door with an issue. There is an employee with a significant attendance problem that is out of control. I discuss what the supervisor wants to do. He asks for my opinion, and I offer my advice. Here I am operating at about 1 or 2 on the scale because maintaining control and following the rules is pure management.

All day I do things that are partially leadership and partially management. I will share that my personal comfort zone is about 7-8 on the scale. That is where I would naturally spend most of my time if given the chance by circumstances. This metaphor has two important things that can help you:

1. Pay attention to where you are on the scale in any conversation or action. That will help you clarify your role.
2. Learn where your "Sweet spot" is on the scale. If you are a natural 2, then you need someone who is a 7-8 to balance you. If you are a natural 8, then get a 2 to help manage the place.

When coaching other leaders or managers, try to help them see where they are operating at the moment, because it can aid in the dialog. If someone is too near the

edges of this scale for too long, that person may be operating with blinders on. Consider mental exercises to bring the person closer to the center of the scale for at least part of the time. Try to align the work you are doing most of the time to play to your strengths, and you will end up doing a better job.

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