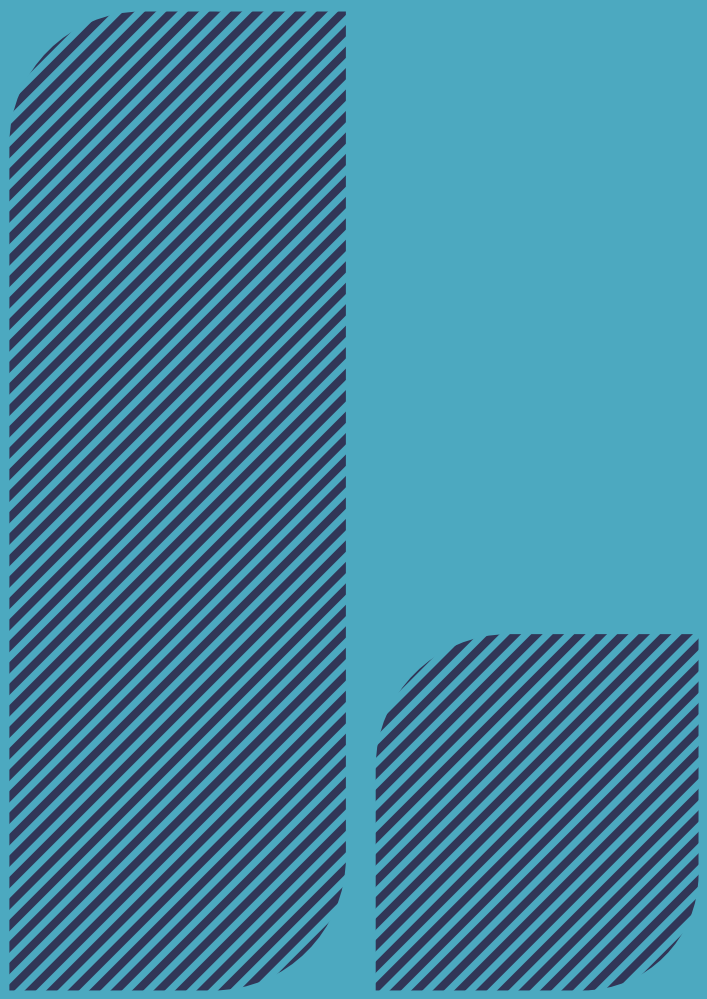

# The Five Dimensions of Leadership:

# VISION

THE INSTITUTE OF
**LEADERSHIP**
& MANAGEMENT

# Introducing The Institute of Leadership & Management's

# Dimensions of Leadership

**Leadership and thinking about leadership continue to evolve. We have captured the often elusive dimensions that contribute to great leadership. Our dimensions are not intended to be a static representation but an evolving description of what we understand great leadership to be.**

We based the development of our dimensions of leadership on extensive research into the knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours and values that enable leaders to achieve successful outcomes in any private, public or voluntary sector organisation. Although we recognise that research into and expert discussion about leadership has been going on for decades, our focus is leadership for the 21st century. We draw on 15 years of our own on-going research into leadership and what people in organisations have been telling us about the experience of leading, being led, studying and witnessing leadership in a wide range of contexts. We identify five separate dimensions of great leadership, namely: *vision achievement ownership* and *collaboration*, with *authenticity* at the heart and centre. We endorse management philosopher Charles Hampden Turner's definition of authenticity as being "what lies between people": a recognition of the importance of relationships to everyone who leads or aspires to lead.

We also recognise that every leader has knowledge and experience specific to their own leadership situation. This 'sixth' dimension we describe as expertise or *occupational competence:* the context in which leadership takes place and is fundamental to how leaders understand and enact the five dimensions.

Each dimension has many component parts and we appreciate there is much overlap between them, several areas of interdependency, and on-going debates about the extent to which leadership differs from management. Even those most inclined to see leadership and management as separate activities, accept that there is no single definition of each. We also recognise that ideas about what leadership is and what management is have changed over time. Our dimensions highlight the complexity of leadership, and also recognise that great leadership is always a work in progress.

Most recently, The Institute of Leadership & Management surveyed over 1200 employees in the UK to research their experience of what leadership looks like, and the particular leadership styles and behaviours that are linked to high performance.

This research provided insight into how the five dimensions are experienced in the day-to-day practice of leadership.

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## How we define great leadership

### Authenticity

Authentic leaders understand the contribution they make and the impact they have on those around them. They understand the power of conversation and how to listen, recognise what underpins ethical decision making, and know their inner values and act in accordance with them. They create a culture that is supportive, enjoyable and empowering, understand their own values and how they align with those of the organisation, challenge themselves and others, and earn trust.

### Vision

Visionary leaders inspire people to action and achievement by defining the destination and the journey to get there. They recognise the need for change and constantly adapt, identify and evaluate risk, link the present to the future, and encourage people to build that future. They encourage idea generation, inspire those around them, recognise and nurture technological and other innovations, and have an entrepreneurial mindset.

### Achievement

Achieving leaders recognise the importance of a healthy workplace. They set clear expectations, monitor performance and give feedback, are resilient, adapt to changing circumstances, and are mentored and mentor. They focus on outcomes, understand the HR frameworks within which they operate, have coaching conversations, contribute to the sustainability of their organisation, and succession plan by encouraging talent and helping people grow and develop.

### Ownership

Leaders demonstrate ownership by identifying and taking opportunities. They take responsibility and are accountable for their decisions and the decisions of their team, build trusting relationships with all colleagues, delegate appropriately, and take a positive approach to mistakes and apportioning blame. Leaders demonstrate ownership by managing their time to maximise impact, by knowing when to make decisions, by being solution focused and by encouraging reflective practice. They are socially responsible in all of their activities, take responsibility for their own learning and understand the role of their personal brand in developing their credibility.

### Collaboration

A collaborative leader understands the dynamics of all teams including distributed ones and the value of internal and external networks. They build great project teams, are emotionally intelligent and sensitive to the needs of others, take a proactive approach to managing stakeholder interests and views, and are culturally intelligent and manage diversity. A collaborative leader invests in relationships with customers, aims for win:win outcomes, runs productive meetings, recognises the importance of formal and informal communication, and deals effectively with conflict.

# Vision

**"The companies that survive longest are the ones that work out what they uniquely can give to the world – not just growth or money but their excellence, their respect for others, or their ability to make people happy; some people call those things soul "**

**Charles Handy CBE**

author and philosopher specialising in organisational behaviour and management

## Why vision?

Vision is a significant aspect of leadership. It includes the inclination and skills to look ahead, innovate, and cope with the unknown. Vision involves spotting when change is required and putting it on the organisational agenda. Vision is essential for leaders to respond effectively to business environments that continue to transform at a rapid pace.

Many experts identify the ability to formulate a broad vision and translate that into workable detail as being essential for successful leadership (e.g. Westley and Mintzberg, 1989; Handy, 1992; Deering et al, 2002; Alimo-Metcalfe and Bradley, 2008). Change requires a direction to be set – in response to a vision of a possible future – and the creation of strategies to produce the change which will put the vision in place. It is necessary to enable people to understand the vision and become fully committed to making it happen. "Achieving a vision requires motivating and inspiring – keeping people moving in the right direction, despite major obstacles to change" (Kotter, 2001, p.86, emphasis in original). Also, "substantial change both demands and will lead to culture change" (Carnall, 2009, p.43).

Leaders are responsible for shaping and sharing visions. And strategy makes vision explicit. Having pieced together a vision of how the future might look a broad strategy to achieve it is required. The vision has to be convincing to others. When other people hear the vision it needs to make sense – creating what Handy calls the 'Aha Effect'. "[T]o make sense it must stretch people's imaginations but still be within the bounds of possibility" (Handy, 1992, p.10). "The vision needs to be both highly ambitious and realistic. It also needs to appeal to everyone in the organisation, as it can be key to getting the organisation aligned" (Deering et al, 2002, p.128).

Developing vision requires an ability to look at data of all kinds to seek out reasons that indicate the right way to go – broad-based, strategic thinkers and risk-takers are required (Kotter, 2001). Building a shared vision with pertinent stakeholders is seen as a way of moving forward together, making a vision more appealing (e.g. Kotter, 2001; Alimo-Metcalfe and Bradley, 2008; Carnall, 2009). When a vision is created jointly it can become compelling, creating trust and sustaining the exhilaration that comes from recognising the 'Aha Effect' – helping ensure that people have the courage to do what needs to be done (Senge, 2006).

Closely associated with vision is innovation. The importance of leadership for innovation and organisational development is widely recognised (e.g. Bennis, 2009; Jansen et al, 2009; Nemanich and Vera, 2009; Yukl, 2009). Indeed, the need for innovation within any organisation, in any sector, is well-established (O'Brien, 1994). "The rapid rate of technological development has led to an increase in the pace of change, and globalization and deregulation have led to increased competition. To survive, organisations need to be continuously creative and innovative" (Henry, 2001, p.xi) – and ready for the future.

Around 70% of intended changes do not achieve their goal (Higgs, 2003). So, if change is to be successful and sustained, and if organisations are to continually grow and develop, as required by their changing circumstances, they need to be led by people who know how to embed success and deal with the unknowns and uncertainty that any change brings (Pugh, 1993; Torbert and Associates, 2004; Kotter and Rathgeber, 2006; Carnall, 2009). This will include having listening conversations, risk taking, experimenting, taking time and being open (Senge, 2006), as well as paying attention to how a shared vision with wide appeal can be created.

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The Institute of Leadership & Management (2017) "Vision", available from www.InstituteLM.com/resourceLibrary/Vision.html

## What does the everyday practice of vision in leadership look like?

**We don't know what the future will look like, but we do know it will be different from today. Vision is about being 'future-ready'. Leaders need to be alert to make the right moves to get an organisation where it needs to be. The dimensions of vision considers the eight practises associated with the ability to deliver a vision that will deal with whatever comes in the future.**

Leaders can show vision by being creative and innovative, and adapting in response to the need for change. Visionary leaders also realise that a clear strategy is required and that it is vital to inspire those around them. Such abilities and behaviours will increase the likelihood of a vision being successful. This report provides insights into visionary practices associated with leaders in our survey.

## How do leaders show vision?

More than three-quarters of leaders frequently (48%) or sometimes (37%) listen to new ideas and suggestions, which is an encouraging start (Figure 1). By increasing this behaviour, leaders can become more in tune with what matters to their organisation and and enable their team to contribute to the vision. By having listening conversations and being collaborative, leaders can build a joint future with their team.

While leaders in our survey do listen to other people's ideas and suggestions, they are less comfortable encouraging ideas that are different from their own. This negative behaviour limits what can be achieved as innovative and different ideas will be lost. Almost one third (29%) of leaders rarely or never encourage ideas that are different from their own (Figure 2). Only one quarter (25%) of leaders in our survey are doing this well. Encouraging different ideas is associated with creativity and also suggests that a leader is inspiring those around them to participate in defining change.

Leaders can keep on top of the need for change by being alert to ideas, opinions, technological and other innovations, and organisational data. When change is needed it is often expressed as a vision and this message needs to be clearly communicated. Our survey shows that only 40% of leaders frequently set clear goals, with one fifth (19%) doing this rarely or never (Figure 3). Too rigid a goal can stifle innovation and restrict adaptability, but no certainty about overall direction is disempowering. Leaders are constantly balancing the need for direction and clarity of intention with a requirement to adapt to changing circumstances. Leaders who become excellent at setting clear goals and do this frequently are expected to be better able to communicate vital messages about Vision.

Communication is also vital when implementing strategy. Our survey asked if leaders define and explain requirements clearly to their team. Again, one fifth (19%) of leaders do this rarely or never, whereas 42% do so frequently (Figure 4). Leaders cannot deliver strategy on their own, so improving how they communicate requirements and especially taking a collaborative approach to developing a workable and realistic strategy are likely to be beneficial.

Figure 1: Listen to new ideas and suggestions

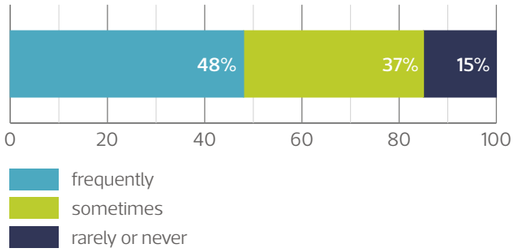



Figure 2: Encourage ideas that are different from their own

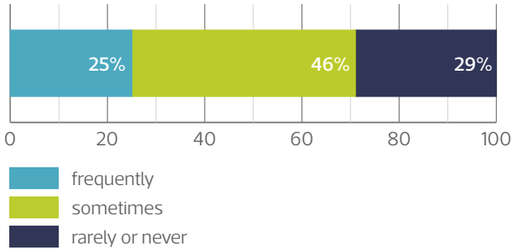



Figure 3: Set clear goals

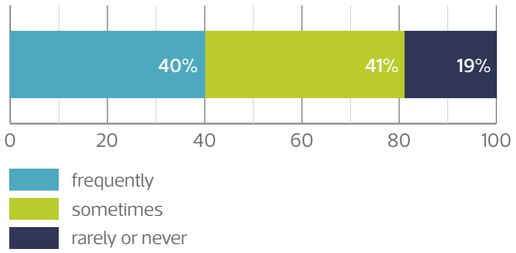
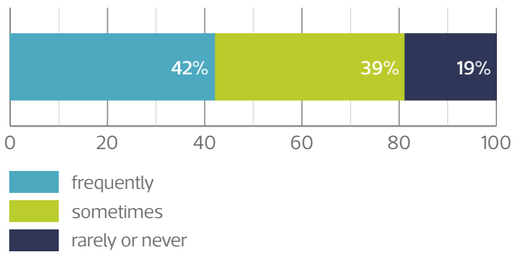



Figure 4: Define and explain requirements clearly to their team




> **He is a young entrepreneur with a growing business and as such he is growing with it.**

> **Ideas that I have come up with are considered non-viable by a senior manager, but later he tables them as his own ideas.**

> **My current line manager is excellent at strategic vision.**

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> **It's the lack of strategic lead and the seeming inability to work as a team that continues to eradicate morale and self-esteem.**

> **The leaders lack direction – decisions are made which are not followed through, without explanation.**

> **The leaders use visionary and democratic styles often, but are also pace-setters and are coercive when required, with impact. The leaders really inspire me.**

> **It's certainly lacking leadership and is spiralling out of control.**

> **I sometimes feel like I have ideas I think would work but you're tied to following the company footprint.**

In one way, delivering strategy requires leaders to stick to plans that have been set. We found that 41% of leaders in our survey frequently do this (Figure 5). This means that the other 59% of leaders do not stick to plans. The reason for not sticking to plans is unclear. Though in changing circumstances leaders do need to be willing to adapt plans in response to new information, it is still critical for them to communicate changes to their team. Our results indicate that leaders need to work harder to provide clear communication on plans, while recognising adaptations are likely.

Adaptability is a requirement of visionary leaders. Our survey indicates that leaders might benefit by showing greater flexibility about organisational policies. Flexing or not flexing is a judgement call but this might be indicative of policies that constrain rather than empower. We found that one quarter (26%) of leaders do flex frequently (Figure 6). Being confident to show flexibility may mean a leader has greater awareness of the context in which they work. Leaders may also recognise that adaptability is important during change. All the same, it is wise to provide feedback if an organisation's policies are too rigid or even unhelpful. The result that one quarter (24%) of leaders rarely or never flex regarding organisational polices is of concern. Over-rigidity could be symptomatic of failing to recognise the need for change.

Figure 5: Use mistakes by team members as learning/ development points

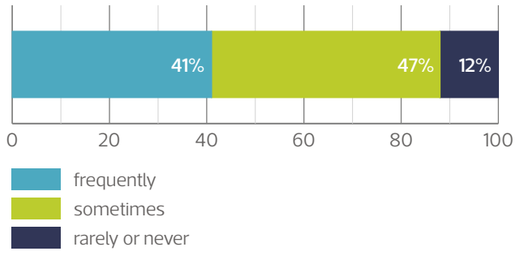
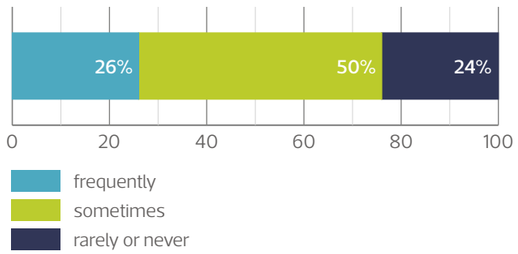



Figure 6: Recognise the need for work/ life balance

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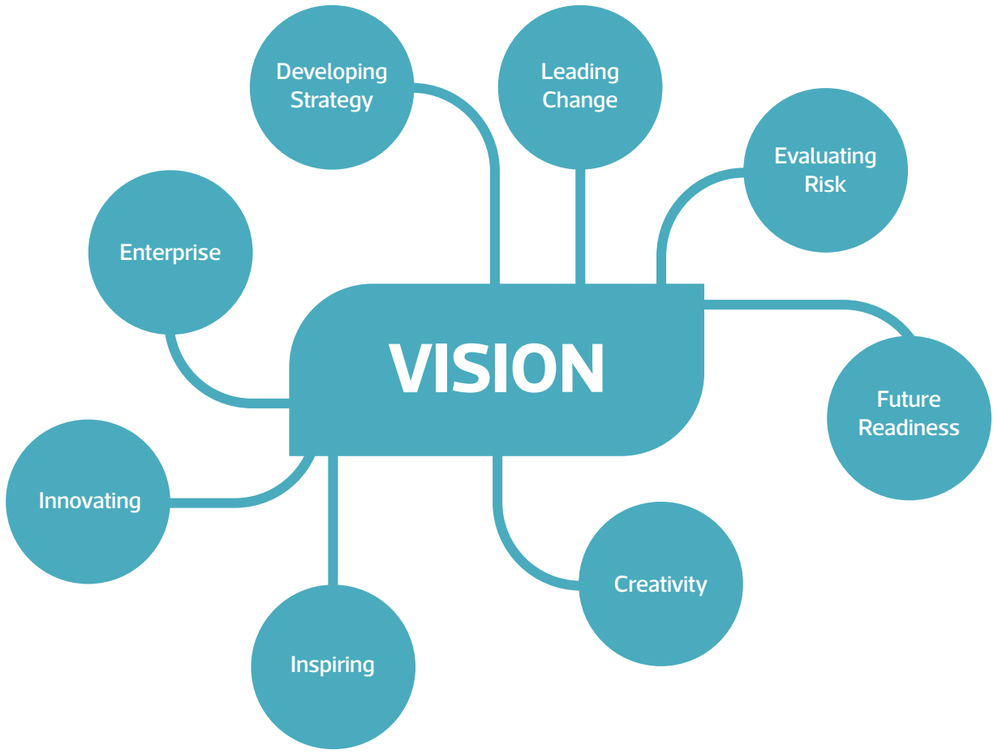


## Recommendations

This research shows that leaders undoubtedly recognise the importance of generating ideas but there appears to be a lack of confidence when it comes to encouraging and accepting ideas which are different from theirs.

Leaders need to combine the ability to plan for the future with articulating a strong sense of direction, the ability to communicate the plan, and to develop a shared understanding and ownership of the vision . They need to balance the achievement of goals with being responsive to changing circumstances. To survive and flourish in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment is a constant challenge for both existing and aspiring leaders. This means being increasingly alert to what may be around the corner, what we can control and what we need to adapt to.

The dimension of vision is separated into eight components, encouraging individuals to develop their visionary capability by looking at various constituent parts. Practices such as being entrepreneurial, inspirational and taking risks sit alongside the need to be innovative and creative as part of a strategic approach to leading change. The key focus is to make the organisation future-ready.

### Developing Strategy

Visionary leaders inspire people to action and achievement by defining the destination and the journey to get there

### Leading Change

Visionary leaders recognise the need for change and constantly adapt

### Evaluating Risk

Visionary leaders identify and evaluate risk

### Future Readiness

Visionary leaders link the present to the future and encourage people to build that future

### Creativity

Visionary leaders encourage idea generation

### Inspiring

Visionary leaders inspire those around them

### Innovating

Visionary leaders recognise and nurture technological and other innovations

### Enterprise

Visionary leaders have an entrepreneurial mindset

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## Our methodology

A questionnaire was devised based on an extensive review of the leadership literature. The survey was conducted for The Institute of Leadership & Management by YouGov during the Summer of 2016.

1201 people completed the survey, all working in a UK organisation. For analysis purposes, respondents were asked a number of questions about themselves and their employment. 52% described themselves as being in a leadership role and 48% not. 49%were aged between 34 and 51. 46% identified as male and 54% as female. The leaders were employed in a number of industries including education, medical and health services, manufacturing, retail and construction. 46% were employed in the private sector, 42% in the public sector and 11% in the third/voluntary sector. 75% were educated to at least foundation degree level. Most of the questions were closed rating scales but the respondents had the opportunity to add additional information and commentary.

The survey was conducted in line with the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct. All responses were anonymous but respondents were asked if they would be willing to be contacted for PR purposes, and were also incentivised to take part in the survey.

# Introducing our Vision Ambassador

## Professor Kiran Trehan

**Kiran Trehan is Professor of Leadership and Enterprise Development, Director of External Engagement, and Co-Director of the Enterprise and Diversity Alliance [EDA] at Birmingham University Business School.**

Kiran is a key contributor to debates on leadership, enterprise development and diversity in large and small firms. She has led a number of enterprise and business support initiatives, and published a number of journal articles, policy reports, books and book chapters in her field. Professor Trehan's work has been supported by grants from a range of research funding bodies; including the Economic and Social Research Council, Arts and Humanities Research Council, government departments, regional and local agencies and the private sector. Professor Trehan has also held national advisory roles that shape debates and policy in diversity, enterprise and leadership development. She is Vice President at the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship [ISBE] and visiting professor at a number of external institutions

**"Leadership vision requires imagination, innovation and ingenuity. It's not simply about survival but thriving to make the impossible possible. Vision requires emotional engagement, passion, creativity and criticality. It is exciting to be a vision ambassador and part of an institute that is setting an inspiring agenda for leadership, is bold in its vision and commitment, is informed by research and practice, turns vision into reality, and engages with a range of organisational contexts to make a difference economically, politically socially and culturally"**

**Professor Kiran Trehan**

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Published by the Institute of Leadership & Management September 2017 © Institute of Leadership & Management
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