



Leadership – What are the key attributes for success?

Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme
Course 37 2018

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1. Executive Summary

Leadership is one of the many fundamental components of a successful business. Understanding and appreciating what makes up leadership can ultimately drive success. No matter what the business size, sector or turnover, a successful business requires great leadership.

To be a great leader requires a particular skill set; not everyone is naturally a leader. However, research has shown that successful leadership is a process and can be learned; there are definable skills that you need to possess to succeed.

What are the key skills that a successful leader needs to possess? Do leaders draw more on soft or hard skills? As generations change in character will the leaders of tomorrow need to draw on an alternative skill set? These are the key questions that have been researched in the following study.

Two approaches were used to investigate these questions. A literature review was completed looking at three studies with a focus on leadership skills. In addition a survey and six in person interviews were conducted with a group of agricultural leaders in the Marlborough region.

From the literature, survey and interviews key skills were highlighted that were critical to being a successful leader. Communication and listening ranked highly and when used effectively these skills build trust and inspire loyalty. Once trust is established a culture of safety develops allowing an environment where people are free to innovate. Kouzes and Posner (2012) stated that people who are perceived as trusting are more sought out as friends, more frequently listened to, and subsequently more influential. The most effective leadership situations are those in which each member of the team trusts the others.

The key recommendations that have come from this report for leaders are;

- **Good Communication** and effective skills are essential. If done effectively and genuinely it allows people to feel closer to their leader building trust, teamwork, engagement and ultimately results.
- **Support and develop others.** In showing commitment to growth, people are motivated to reciprocate by often going the extra mile. Leaders need to recognise that great things cannot be achieved all by themselves.
- **Relationships.** To be an effective leader you must first understand the people you are leading; building a relationship takes effort. By adopting a relationship-driven approach leaders

can earn the trust and confidence of an increasingly diverse workforce and improve long-term retention.

- **Integrity.** Getting this right is fundamental for success. Integrity is consistently rated as one of the most important character traits of a respected leader. After all, if you cannot count on a leader to consistently operate with high ethical standards, and with honesty, how can you trust them.
- **Leadership style.** If you try to simply adopt a company's style or try to copy someone else's style your lack of authenticity will show through. It is about being self-aware, knowing what you stand for and what is important.
- **Soft skills** are now becoming increasingly important for the future workforce, as a leader being aware that you need skills such as listening, creativity, agility, and problem solving are becoming as important as expertise and technical competency.

The following study presents the findings and discussions that have resulted in the above key recommendations.

2. Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank my wife Anna for all of her encouragement during the last six months. Having such amazing support at home has allowed me to fully commit to this course.

To Scott, Patrick, Anne and Lisa thank you all for the time, dedication and passion you all bring to the Kellogg Program.

To my employer FMG, thank you for encouraging me to apply, I appreciate all the support you have shown me in particular the time to complete this leadership program.

To all the people who have provided information, time and for those that I interviewed I am very grateful.

This past six months has been a fantastic journey and I have thoroughly enjoyed the program especially meeting my fellow course participants. I look forward to keeping in touch in the future.

3. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of leadership.

Some assume that the smartest and most likeable person is often the best leader and this leader will get the results. If you have university qualifications does this make you a great leader? Or are those who possess strong people skills or practical experience in a particular field more likely to succeed as a leader? Before investigating these questions further, the term leadership first needs to be defined.

Gary Yukl (2006) defines leadership as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives”

Peter Northouse (2010) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”

These definitions suggest several components are central to leadership;

- (a) leadership is a process
- (b) leadership involves influencing others
- (c) leadership happens within the context of a group
- (d) leadership involves shared goals and
- (e) these goals are shared by leaders and their followers.

By defining leadership as a process it suggests that it is not just a trait or bunch of characteristics which only certain people might possess, more that it is a transactional event between leaders and their followers. Being a process also indicates that it is available to all and not some special gift you inherit, it infers that leadership skills can be developed over time with some hard work and commitment. Leadership is not just about a formal person who assumes the position at the top but great leadership requires a two way relationship.

Over the years there have been many studies analysing and determining the definitive leadership styles or personality traits that drive success and enable individuals to be successful leaders.

The following study examines into what these key attributes are and how they can be applied to be a successful leader with information sourced from both literature and interviews of leaders in the agricultural sector.

4. Objectives

The research focused on answering the following question;

What makes a successful leader and what key attributes and skills do they require the most?

Supplementary questions researched included;

- 1) What leadership styles are the leaders of today following to as they look to the future?
- 2) As generations change (e.g. more millennial population into the workforce) will there be a change of hard vs soft skills required to be a successful leader?

5. Methodology

The methodology used to answer these questions is based on literature reviews, personal interviews and surveys.

- Three literature reviews focussing on behaviours, skills and themes
- Five in person interviews
- Five survey questionnaires using a quantitative approach with pre-formulated questions

6. Limitations

The survey and interviews did have limitations in the numbers of interviews conducted and the geographical area. From a statistical basis, the sample size was small and therefore these results should be considered as indicative. It would have been advantageous to see a larger pool of data to further validate the results. The leaders were all from the rural agribusiness sector it would have been advantageous to observe what other business sectors results might have looked like. Would the skills selected have been different or perhaps the order of importance may have changed?

7. Literature Review

This literature review will focus on three studies looking at the concept of “leadership” and the behaviours, skills and themes that are important for success.

7.1 Leadership Behaviours

Detailed research undertaken by Feser, Mayol, and Srinivasan (2015) came out with a list of 20 traits. These are presented in Figure 1 below. This research focused on surveying more than 180,000 people from a wide range of organisations and countries worldwide to see how frequently certain behaviours were applied.

What they found was that leaders with high quality leadership teams (McKinsey’s Organisational health index, Feser et al (2015)) displayed four types of behaviour; solving problems effectively, operating with a strong results orientation, seeking different perspectives and being supportive, these types of behaviour are highlighted in figure 1.

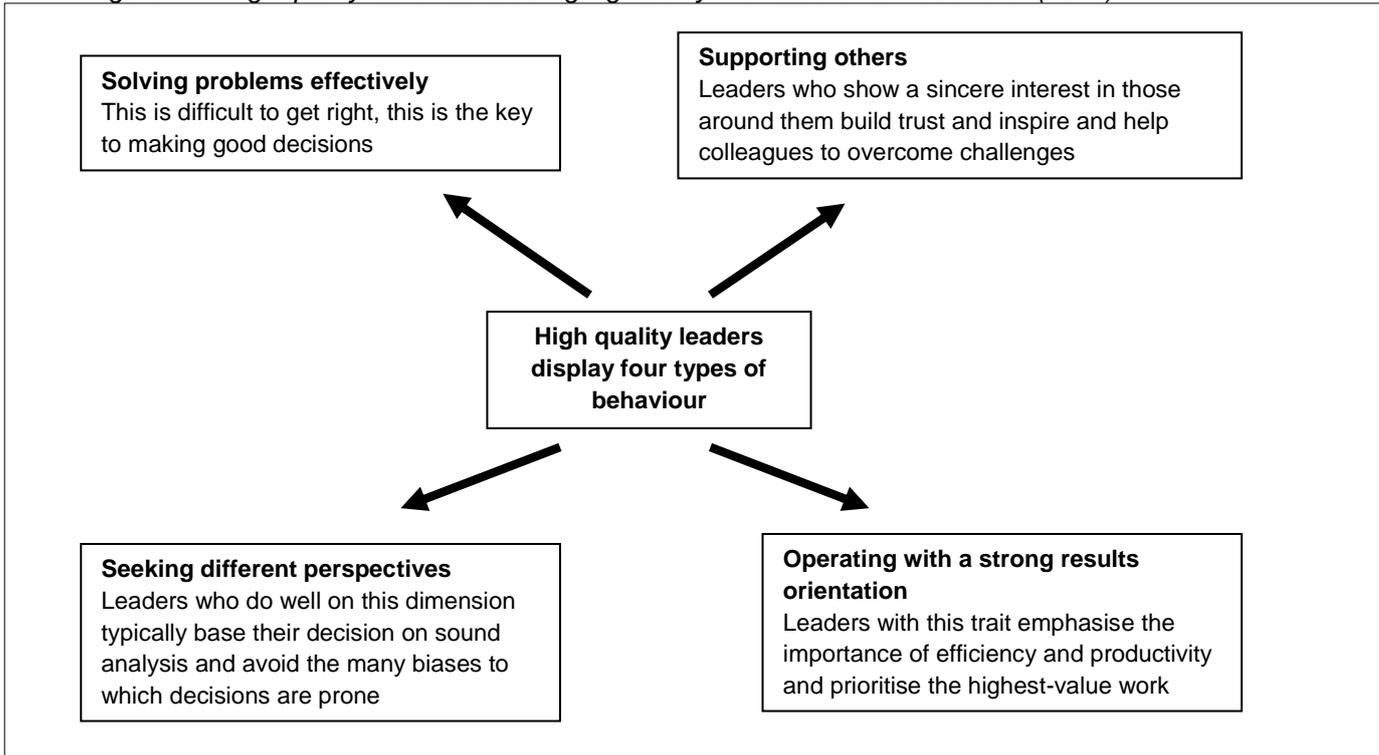


¹Based on a survey of 81 organizations that are diverse in geography (eg, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America), industry (eg, agriculture, consulting, energy, government, insurance, mining, and real estate), and size (from ~7,500 to 300,000 employees).

Source: McKinsey’s Organizational Health Index

Figure 1. Top kinds of leadership behaviour - sourced from Feser et al (2015)

Figure 2. – High quality behaviours as highlighted by the research of Feser et al (2015)



The four types of behaviour highlighted in this study are further expanded in figure 2. These show a core leadership skill set which is proving relevant to most companies today. We hear often from leaders that investing in the development of their people is of great importance and this research indicates four areas to give priority. Good leaders are very mindful of context and will not see the above as the only behaviours that could be relevant in certain situations.

7.2 Leadership Themes

Giles (2016) completed a study of 195 leaders from 30 organisations where people were asked to select competencies and then grouped them together into five main themes.

The leaders were asked to choose the most important leadership competencies from a list of 74. Figure 3 shows the top 10 competencies and the percentage of respondents against each.

The Top 10 Leadership Competencies, Grouped Into Five Themes

When 195 global leaders were asked to rate 74 qualities, these rose to the top.



SOURCE SUNNIE GILES

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Figure 3. Leadership Competencies - ranking the top 10 in order of priority on the right and grouped into themes on the left.

The theme of strong ethics and safety is rated important as it combines two of the three most highly rated attributes, “high ethical and moral standards, with a score of 67%” and “clearly communicates expectations, with a score of 56%”.

Giles (2016) says that leaders who operate in this space convey a commitment to fairness and that they and employees will honour the rules of the game. Similarly, when leaders clearly communicate their expectations they avoid blindsiding people and ensure everyone is on the same page.

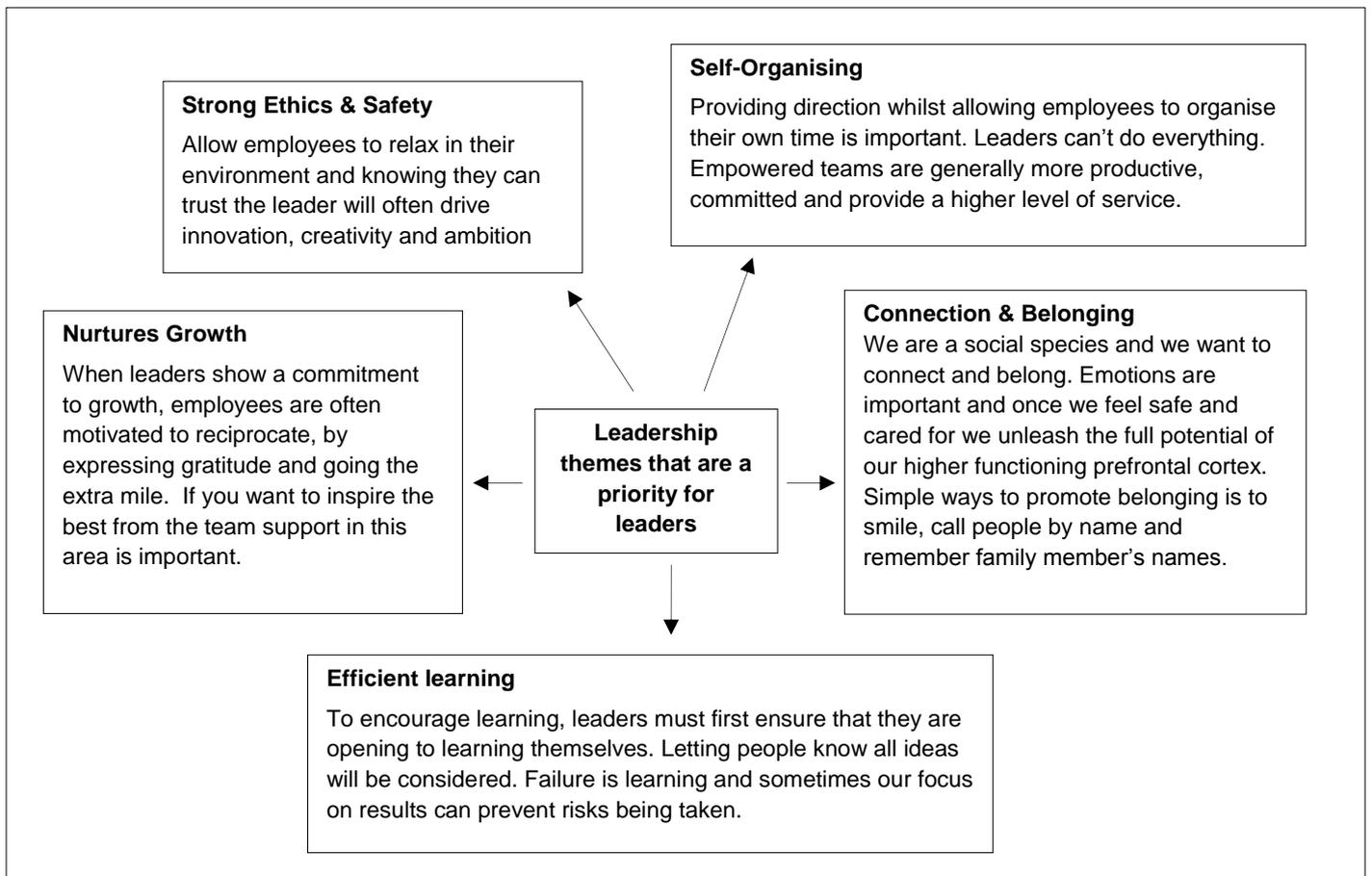


Figure 4. - Leadership themes that are a priority for leaders. (sourced from Giles 2016)

As suggested by Giles (2016) the five areas developed further in figure 4 present significant challenges for leaders. There are enormous opportunities for improving others performance by leaders first focusing on their own. Leaders should therefore always be seeking perspective and it can be advantageous to engage a mentor or coach to help with this.

7.3 Leadership Skills

Zenger and Folkman (2014) surveyed more than 330,000 people from a variety of positions and companies with the aim of identifying the skills leaders need to succeed in their positions. The most important 16 skills highlighted from this research are listed and ranked below in figure 5.



Figure 5 – What leadership skills do you need the most – Source Zenger and Folkman (2014)

This research sampled leaders from across four levels within an organisation and career stages. From this sample pool it highlighted that different skills depend on at which level their job was at. The skill set of a middle management leader could be different to that of an executive leader. However, the research also showed that many of the same skills were important for middle management and for executives.

This suggests the fundamental skills will not change dramatically as you move up just the order of priority may adjust. By recognising what is important at the next level and demonstrating the skills in the present increases the ability to be successful in the future.

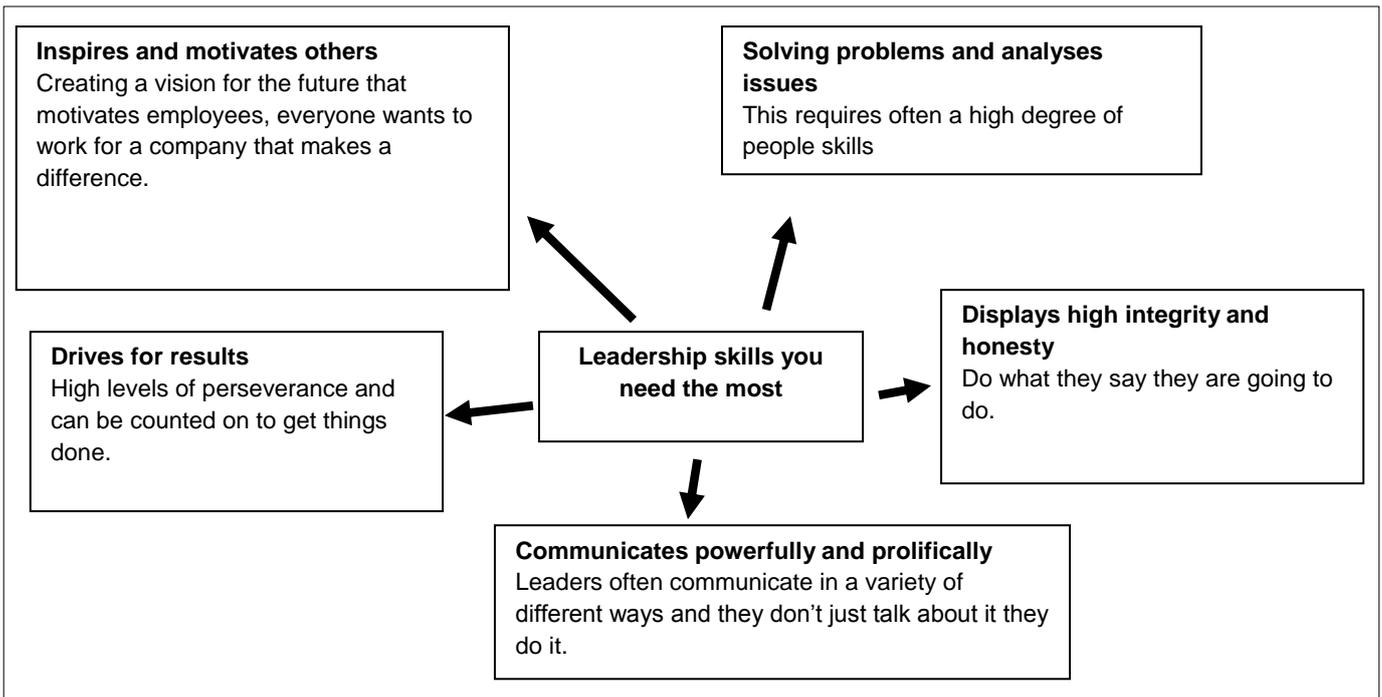


Figure 6 – The five leadership skills you need the most, information sourced from Economy, P (2014).

Figure 6 shows the top five ranked skills from the research of Economy (2014) and expands briefly on each competency. As the leader you must be able to communicate a vision of the future that will get people excited and motivated to achieve it. Connecting your team with what they do and how this impacts customers and communities is extremely powerful. Go forward with integrity; this is about doing what you say you will do. Teams will respect the leader if they know you are being honest and transparent.

8. Leadership Survey

A series of interviews and surveys were conducted with the aim of expanding the understanding on what makes a successful leader in today's environment.

A simple survey was constructed with eight key questions. This survey is included in appendix 14.1.

The aim of question one of the survey was to focus on what style of leadership best describes their approach; transformational, transactional, democratic or other. Transformational leaders set a vision and empower others to achieve that vision. Transactional leaders reward performance and provide support or corrective action when standards are not met. Democratic leader's value input from the team but the final decision rests with the leader (The Executive Connection, 2015).

Questions two, three, four and five focused on what skills they as leaders determine to be the most critical. The selection of skills that were included in the survey were sourced from the three research papers discussed earlier. The importance of hard and soft skills to be an effective leader was presented in question six of the survey. Finally questions seven and eight looked at the thoughts on why the balance of these skills may need to change in the future.

The Collins English Dictionary defines the term "soft skills" as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude. Hard skills are any skills relating to a specific task or situation. These skills are easily quantifiable unlike soft skills which are related to one's personality".

The final question of the survey introduces the concept of generational change and the requirement of the potential change in skills a leader will draw on to be successful.

Through presenting this survey to five leaders in conjunction with interview discussions the following information was gathered.

9. Survey Results

9.1 Leadership Style

Survey results showed a preference for the transformational leadership style (50%) followed by (40%) and democratic (10%) as highlighted in figure 7.

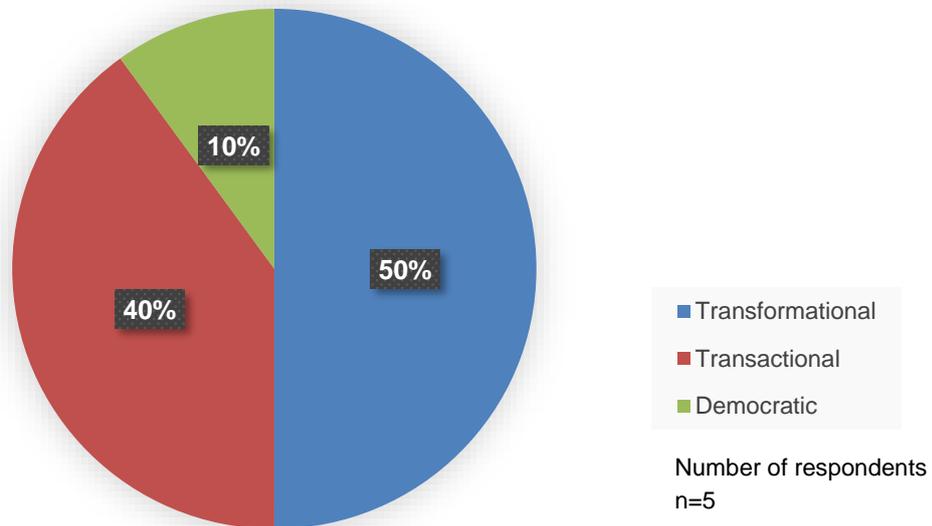


Figure 7. Showing the survey results of leadership style. Transformational (blue), transactional (red), Democratic (green).

Although survey results showed a strong preference for transformational leadership style; setting a vision and empowering others to achieve that vision, interview discussions provided further insight. Leaders felt it was important to often find a balance in styles. In their experience as leaders they required their managers to be able to shift from the transactional style, which many managers are accustomed to and move to transformational when required. The reason behind this is that transactional is considered a very good leadership style for completing short term tasks but not sustainable if you want teams to reach their full potential.

9.2 Survey results: Leadership skills that are critical to be a successful leader

The leadership skills the survey participants valued for success are presented in figure 8. There were three clear skills that all the participants valued above the others; effective communication, listening and relationship building.



Figure 8. Survey results showing skills critical to being a successful leader. The skills are ranked on the left based on the respondents' selection counts shown on the right.

It is not surprising that both communication and listening are ranked highly as they often go hand in hand. One leader emphasised that without good clear communication, messages can often be delivered out of context and certainly lack the accuracy needed to be effective. There is the risk of often placing too much focus on talking rather than listening. A leader commented that listening well means not just understanding the words but watching out for the emotion the person is trying to communicate, which is often displayed in the body language. Relationship building also rated highly and was explained as an important foundation in building trust. Both internal and external relationships were mentioned as a critical factor in the success of business.

9.3 Survey results: Key leadership skills when implementing business decisions

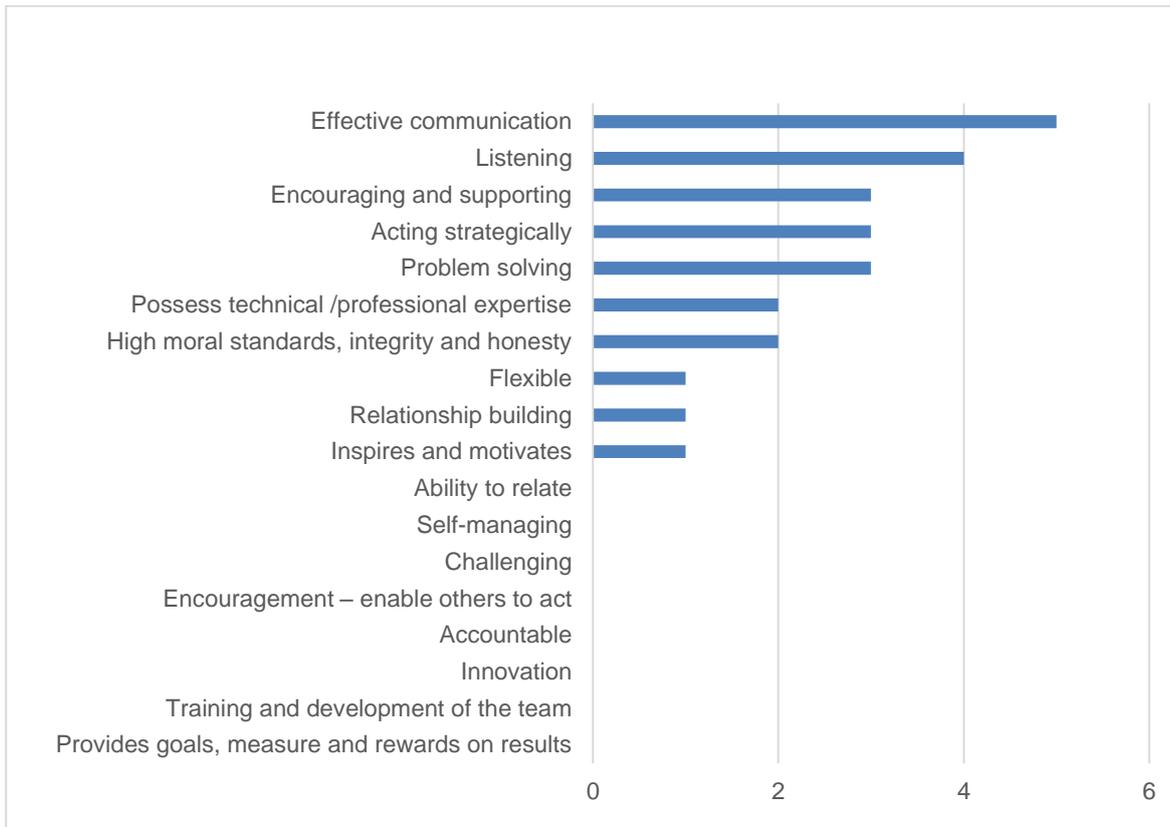


Figure 9. Survey results showing skills critical to implementing business decisions. The skills are ranked on the left based on the respondents' selection counts shown on the right.

As with the earlier question, communication and listening are the two most important skills leaders selected when making a decision and the order of importance has not changed as shown in figure 9. What does come forward is the skill of acting strategically and problem solving. The introduction of this skill is not surprising as the leaders all started to apply the context of the question and looked for the skills they would draw on to get the right outcome. One of the survey participants said that in his experience he felt in certain situations one must prioritise which skills are best suited to delivering results, the other skills are still helpful to possess just not as important.

9.4 Survey results: Key leadership skills when overcoming business hurdles

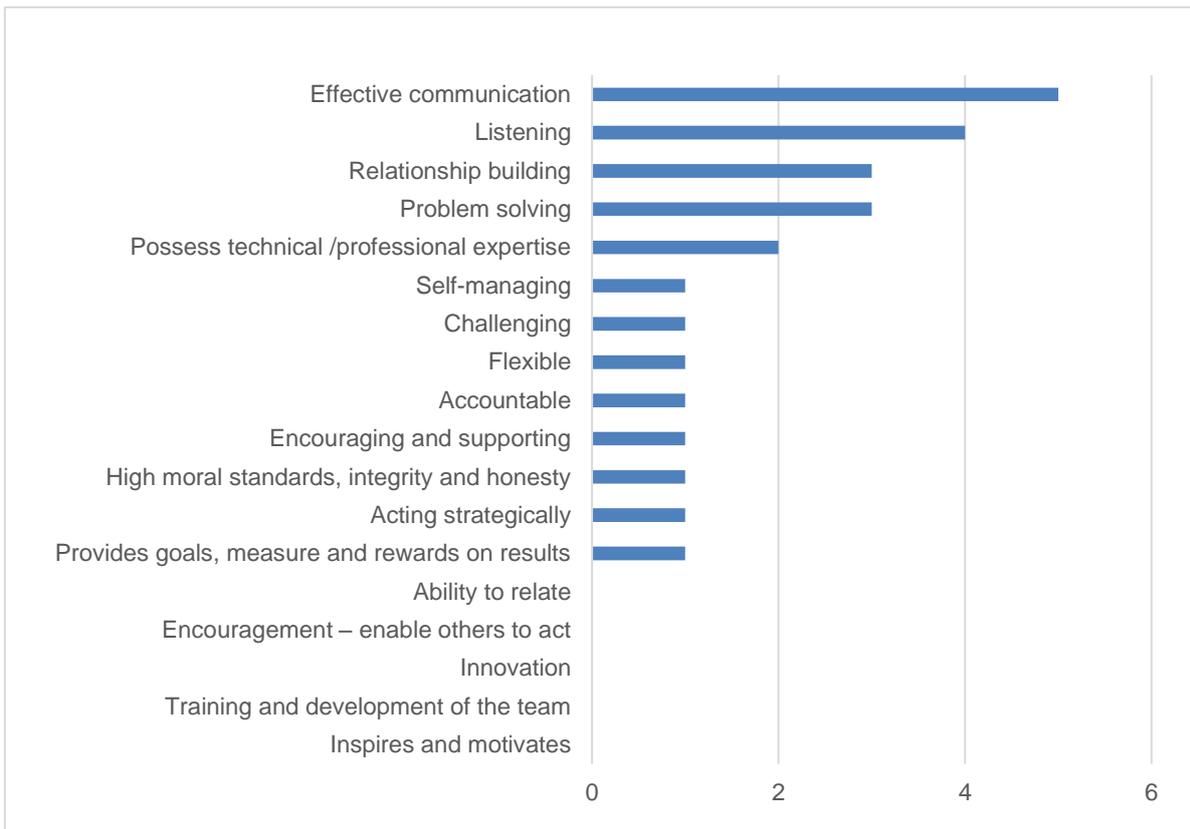


Figure 10. Survey results showing skills critical to overcoming business hurdles. The skills are ranked on the left based on the respondents' selection counts shown on the right.

When presented with a business hurdle leaders selected a new skill (technical/professional expertise) in the top five for the first time as shown in figure 10. This was interesting as it was the first hard skill that participants had selected and placed importance on. During the interviews it was raised that if a leader did not possess a particular technical skill then they would seek advice on where to obtain it, this could come from within the business or externally. The advice from the interviewees was that as a leader you must not be afraid to acknowledge any gaps in technical skills and show a commitment to learning.

9.5 Leadership: Hard vs. Soft Skills

A focus of the survey was seeking the views of the importance of hard and soft leadership skills. To be an effective leader all respondents ranked soft skills as the most important as shown in figure 11. When asked why, the main response was that the future workforce of tomorrow will not remain engaged and feel valued if leaders do not reward and motivate them. Having a good range of soft skills is therefore a must for any future leader.

When asked of the importance of hard skills in being an effective leader there was not such a strong emphasis. For this question 60% of respondents rated it a 4 and 40% rate it at 3 as shown in blue in figure 11. This result clearly indicating that more importance was to be given to soft skills rather than hard. Comments from the surveyed leaders were that to be effective hard skills can be learned where knowledge gaps exist or the business may have specialists that fill this role and advice can be sought.

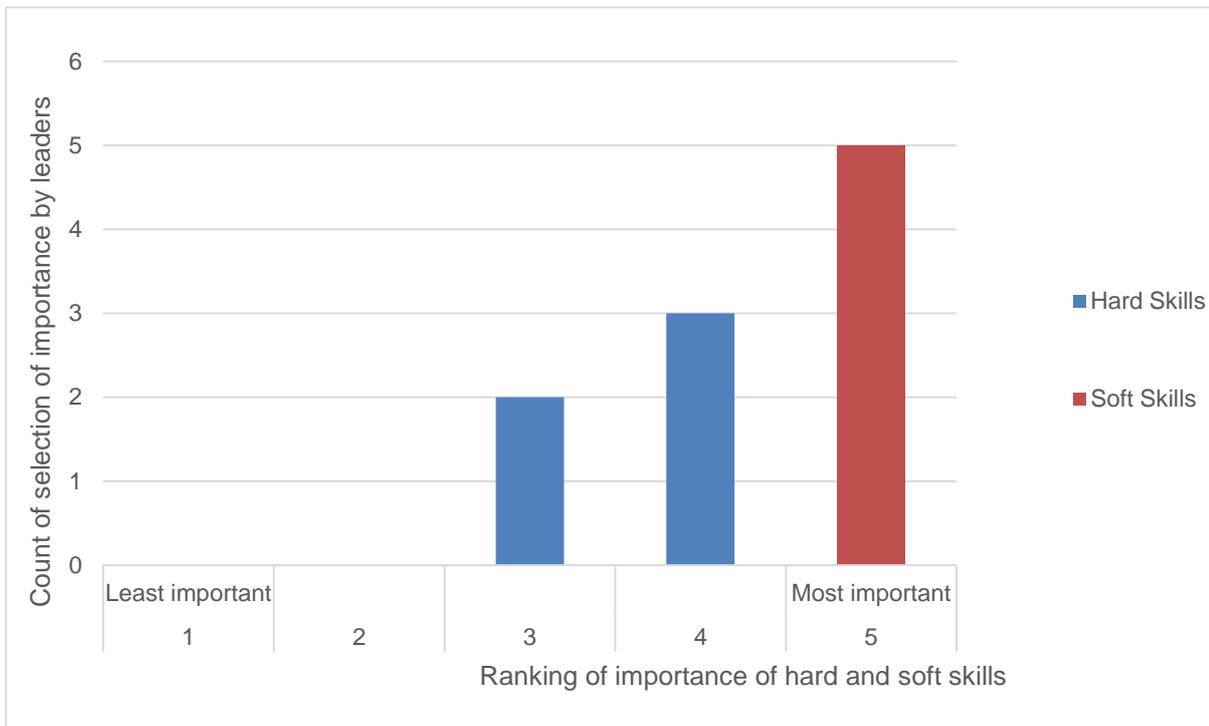


Figure 11 showing the ranking of importance of hard and soft skills

Having a clear message from leaders that soft skills are important, the final survey question focused on the future and whether the balance of skills needed to change with the introduction of millennials into the workforce? 80% of the participants said yes they agreed a shift in skills would be necessary. The research of Howe and Strauss (2003) that confirmed the characteristics of this generation is generally marked by an increased use and familiarity with communications, media and digital technology. They may carry a sense of entitlement and an expectation of frequent positive feedback. With an emphasis on producing meaningful work they are motivated, goal oriented and confident in themselves. The millennial mindset is very drawn toward moving up the corporate ladder quickly so using engagement which builds stronger bonds between leaders and employees will improve retention and drive company performance. When asked if the shift would be towards soft or hard skills, 100% of the response was that soft skills will be important to be a successful leader.

10. Discussion

All three literature studies had a large representative sampling pool providing meaningful results.

The language used in all three studies was slightly different in what they focused on. Feser et al (2015) talks about leadership traits and behaviours. Giles (2016) refers to competencies and themes. Zenger and Folkman (2014) focus on skills. Figure 12 presents the definitions of these words showing in principle they are all focusing on what makes a great leader.

Trait A characteristic feature or quality distinguishing a particular person or thing	Behaviour The way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially towards others
Competency Level of skill or knowledge in a field	Attribute A quality or feature as a characteristic or inherent part of someone or something
Skill The ability to do something well; expertise	

Figure 12 – Definitions of key terms using in the literature studies. (Collins English Dictionary 2nd ed. Collins. London)

Communication was the most common leadership skill that appears across all three literature reviews. While it was described in different ways the underlying principle was the same. Great leaders will use a variety of methods to get the message across and best if it is open and often. Further evidence was provided in the leaders surveys with communication the skill that was selected as the top one in every question. When pressed on why they felt it was so important the responses were very clear around that fact that many of the other skills would not be able to be acted upon without effective communication. It was described as the key skill and when used is a building block for successful leadership.

Integrity came through strongly in the research and not surprisingly this links to being honest. For people to willingly follow someone they must believe that the leader's word can be trusted. Kouzes and Posner (2012) in their extensive research found that when people perceive their leader to have high credibility they are significantly more likely to feel proud of their company, feel a high degree of team spirit, a strong sense of ownership and commitment to the company. Simply put the more people trust their leaders and their organisations, the more the positive outcomes for everyone.

Conversely if the leader lacks credibility they may start looking for other jobs, feel unsupported and underappreciated. As mentioned earlier in the review (figure 6) the most common phrase many people refer to when assessing credibility is "they do what they say they will do". People listen to

the words and then watch for the action. One of the surveyed leaders was quick to point out that there is absolutely a place for getting on and getting things done, once you have the vision set you must learn when the time is right to execute.

For leaders the 'developing and supporting others' is also a key pathway to building better capability within teams and organisations. This also came through in the survey questions with relationship building being selected in two of the three questions. All leaders were very interested in developing their staff and it was interesting to hear coaching and future success being spoken about a lot. When this was done well leaders found those they helped were showing higher levels of commitment in their work.

Developing and supporting others can take many forms, one example provided was that of how recognition has the ability to build a relationship. Personalised recognition of a person's efforts can translate into productivity and loyalty. By making feedback genuine and real people will form stronger relationships. Relationships are about trust and this is very powerful, you build up trust by being open and honest.

Listening was also rated highly during the survey, which is a positive skill to be emphasised. This infers that the best leaders are great listeners. They listen carefully to what other people have to say and how they feel. They ask questions and are open to ideas other than their own. A leader who listens and shows interest will build trust and inspire their colleagues.

The response around the generational change question was interesting and generated good discussion. All of the leaders that were interviewed agreed that the balance of soft vs hard skills would need to change in the future. When asked why? The comments were made that the younger generation do think and approach situations in a different way and traditional methods of leading them must be therefore adapted. Leaders do recognise that a transformational style is the way forward with this group.

Further support of the earlier research was backed up by the Workplace Trends millennial leadership survey (2015), which stated that the skills leaders and companies need to focus on with this group are developing others and communication. To do nothing would be short sighted, they are a large part of today's workforce and it is inevitable they will be the ones who influence future leadership.

As Sean Graber, Co-Founder and CEO, Virtuali said *"Millennials embody the shift in today's workplace. They are motivated by a desire to transform themselves, their colleagues, and the world around them. Millennials respond and aspire to this type of transformational leadership. If*

companies want to build engaged and productive workforces, they will need to find a way to tap into the Millennial outlook.”

11. Conclusion

It is evident from this research that leadership is an identifiable set of skills and attributes that are available to anyone. There are of course certain situations and context that can change what importance we place on the skills and when a leader might choose to use each one.

The parallels between the literature review and the interviews have supported the thinking that there are some common attributes that are important to be successful. To actually be successful it is about recognising the style of leadership needed, when to change, when to adapt and being self-aware.

Leadership is about relationships, about credibility, about what you do and how you do it. Often people are looking up or thinking it is someone else who will step up. However, there are massive opportunities for improving ones performance by first focusing inward. Any skill can be learned, improved, strengthened and with coaching and development people do get better over time.

Although leadership can be learned, not everyone wants to learn it and those who learn it may not master it. To become the best you have to have a strong desire and belief that new abilities can be learned. Research has proven that the best leaders are the best learners.

To quote James Humes – author & former US presidential speech writer *“One secret of leadership is that the mind of a leader never turns off. Leaders even when they are sightseers or spectators, are active; not passive observers”*

Finally, leadership is not just about a formal person who assumes the position at the top but great leadership is about a two-way relationship. Often the most significant contribution leaders make is not to a company’s bottom line it is to the long term development of the people around them through their relationships.

12. Recommendations

Leadership is not something that should only be limited to your career or within your company, the skills are relevant in every sector and community.

The key recommendations that have come from this report for leaders are;

- **Communication** is essential. If done effectively and genuinely it allows people to feel closer to their leader building trust, teamwork, and engagement and ultimately results.
- **Support and develop others.** In showing commitment to growth, people are motivated to reciprocate by often going the extra mile. The leader needs to recognise that great things cannot be achieved all by themselves.
- **Relationships.** To be an effective leader you must first understand the people you are leading, building a relationship takes effort. By adopting a relationship-driven approach, leaders can earn the trust and confidence of an increasingly diverse workforce and improve long-term retention.
- **Integrity.** Getting this right is fundamental for success; integrity is consistently rated as one of the most important character traits of a respected leader. After all, if you cannot count on a leader to consistently operate with high ethical standards, and with honesty, how can you trust them.
- **Leadership style.** There was not one style that stood out above any other. However if you try to simply adopt a company's style or try to copy someone else's style your lack of authenticity will show through. It is about being self-aware and applying the style that best fits the situation.
- **Soft skills.** Are now becoming increasingly important for the future workforce, as a leader being aware that you need skills such as listening, creativity, agility, and problem solving are becoming as important as expertise and technical competency.

13. Next steps

Improve survey

- Increase the sampling pool of surveyed leaders
- Survey different business sectors
- Develop a survey focusing on the impact of generational change on leadership style

Knowledge share

- Present research and key learnings with peers

Future personal development

- To develop personal leadership, look at training opportunities available focusing on those areas highlighted in the recommendations
- The Kellogg program and this research study has highlighted that there are many industry experts that are willing to share their experience and knowledge. There is a wealth of relevant information readily available. Reading more and engaging with industry peers and leaders are positive actions that will assist with personal development

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15. Appendix

14.1 Future leadership, style and critical skills Questionnaire

All information collected during this interview will be strictly confidential, your identity will be protected.

1. Which style of leadership best describes you?

Please circle one option below.

- A. Sets a vision and empowers others to achieve that vision
- B. Rewards performance, provides support or corrective action when standards are not met.
- C. Values input from the team, but assumes responsibility for the final decision
- D. Other – please elaborate

2. What are the skills you believe are critical to being a successful leader?

Please tick your top five.

- Problem solving
- Effective communication
- Provides goals, measure and rewards on results
- Inspires and motivates
- Training and development of the team
- Acting strategically
- Relationship building
- Innovation
- High moral standards, integrity and honesty
- Encouraging and supporting
- Listening
- Accountable
- Flexible
- Possess technical /professional expertise
- Encouragement – enable others to act
- Challenging
- Self-managing
- Ability to relate

3 What skill of your selection above do you believe is the most important?

3b Why?

**4. Of the skills below what would be the top five you use the most when making and implementing decisions?
Please circle your top five.**

Problem solving

Effective communication

Provides goals, measure and rewards on results

Inspires and motivates

Training and development of the team

Acting strategically

Relationship building

Innovation

High moral standards, integrity and honesty

Encouraging and supporting

Listening

Accountable

Flexible

Possess technical /professional expertise

Encouragement – enable others to act

Challenging

Self-managing

Ability to relate

5. Of the skills below what would be the top five you draw on when overcoming a business hurdle?

Please circle your top five.

Problem solving

Effective communication

Provides goals, measure and rewards on results

Inspires and motivates

Training and development of the team

Acting strategically

Relationship building

Innovation

High moral standards, integrity and honesty

Encouraging and supporting

Listening

Accountable

Flexible

Possess technical /professional expertise

Encouragement – enable others to act

Challenging

Self-managing

Ability to relate

6. Some leadership skills can be grouped into soft and hard skills.

Soft skills describe the way individuals relate to and interact with people eg communication, problem solving, empathy

Hard skills are specific abilities or capabilities that an individual can possess and demonstrate in a measured way eg, technical expertise, qualifications

- a. To be effective leaders how important do you think having a high level of **soft skills** is?
 - Please rate on the below scale. 1 being the least important, 5 the most.

1	2	3	4	5
Least important				Most important

- b. To be effective leaders how important do you think having a high level of **hard skills** is?
 - Please rate on the below scale. 1 being the least important, 5 the most.

1	2	3	4	5
Least important				Most important

7. As generations change (eg introduction of millennials into the workforce) do you think there will be a change in the balance of soft and hard skills required to be a successful leader?

Please circle YES NO

Why? _____

8. If you answered yes to the above, do you think soft or hard skills will be more important to have to be a successful leader?

Please circle SOFT SKILLS HARD SKILLS

Why? _____

THANK YOU
Sign your name here if this is not an interview