

[Developing, Leading and Engaging People]



Lecture Title:

9. [Leading People: Traits and Development]

Lecturer: Paul Gauci

Date: 8 June 2026

9.00hrs-13.00hrs



**Masters in
Human Resources Management**

Learning Objectives

Following this session students will be able to:

- *Demonstrate the traits of effective leadership with practical application.*
- *Understand how leaders are developed formally and informally.*



Learning Method

- **Lecture focused on learning objectives and core content** as a key instructional process.
- **Formative assessment through participative learning tools and activities** will be utilised evaluating students' comprehension and academic progress throughout - with respect to understanding and applying HRM concepts.



Key Traits of Effective Leaders

- Vision & Purpose

- **Visionary:** Ability to articulate a compelling future and inspire others to pursue it.
- **Purpose-Driven:** Understanding "why" the work matters and connecting it to the larger mission.
- **Practical Application:** Crafting a clear vision statement, communicating it frequently, aligning team goals with the vision.



Reflection Exercise

- What are in your view some key traits of Effective Leaders?



Key Traits of Effective Leaders

- Integrity & Authenticity

- **Integrity:** Honesty, strong moral principles, doing the right thing even when difficult.
- **Authenticity:** Being genuine and true to oneself; building trust through transparency.
- ***Practical Application:*** *Leading by example, admitting mistakes, fostering an open and honest communication environment.*

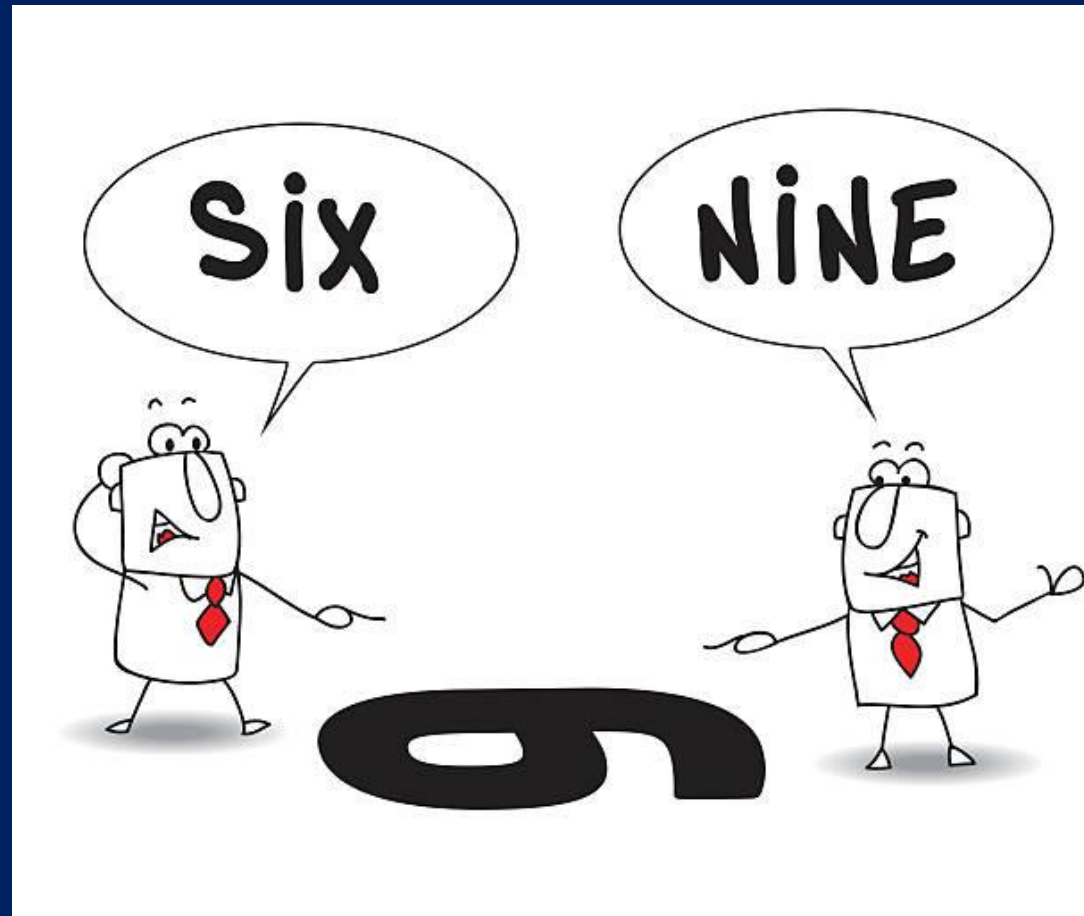


Key Traits of Effective Leaders

- Communication & Empathy

- **Clear & Concise Communication:** Active listening, providing constructive feedback, tailored messages.
- **Empathy:** Understanding and sharing the feelings of others; building strong interpersonal relationships.
- ***Practical Application:*** Regular one-on-one meetings, active listening exercises, conflict resolution through understanding perspectives.





Key Traits of Effective Leaders

- Decisiveness & Accountability

- **Decisiveness:** Ability to make timely and well-informed decisions, even under pressure.
- **Accountability:** Taking responsibility for actions and outcomes; holding oneself and others responsible.
- ***Practical Application:*** Establishing clear decision-making processes, owning successes and failures, delegating with clear expectations.



Key Traits of Effective Leaders

- Resilience & Adaptability

- **Resilience:** Bouncing back from setbacks, maintaining composure during challenges.
- **Adaptability:** Embracing change, adjusting strategies, continuous learning.
- ***Practical Application:*** Developing coping mechanisms for stress, fostering a growth mindset, encouraging experimentation and learning from failures.





Key Traits of Effective Leaders

- Empowerment & Development

- **Empowerment:** Delegating authority, trusting team members, fostering autonomy.
- **Talent Development:** Identifying potential, providing growth opportunities, mentoring.
- ***Practical Application:*** *Delegating meaningful tasks, providing stretch assignments, offering training and development programs.*



Simon Sinek's Top 3 Leadership Traits

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxS5n_gP4PM



Practical Application of Leadership Traits - Scenario 1: Project Management

- Scenario: Leading a complex project with diverse team members.
- Traits in Action: Vision (articulating project goals), Communication (regular updates, feedback), Decisiveness (making critical path decisions).
- Outcome: Timely completion, high-quality deliverables, motivated team.



Practical Application of Leadership Traits - Scenario 2: Crisis Management

- **Scenario:** Navigating an unexpected organizational crisis.
- **Traits in Action:** Resilience (staying calm under pressure), Decisiveness (quick, informed decisions), Communication (transparent updates to stakeholders), Empathy (addressing employee concerns).
- **Outcome:** Minimized damage, restored confidence, strengthened team cohesion.



Practical Application of Leadership Traits - Scenario 3: Team Building

- **Scenario:** Fostering a cohesive and high-performing team.
- **Traits in Action:** Empathy (understanding team dynamics), Empowerment (delegating and trusting), Authenticity (building genuine relationships), Communication (open dialogue).
- **Outcome:** Increased collaboration, improved morale, enhanced productivity.



Application in Practice – Groups Work

Case Study: Navigating the Storm at TechSolutions Innovations

- **Background:**
- TechSolutions Innovations (TSI) is a mid-sized software development company known for its agile and collaborative work environment. Historically, TSI has experienced steady growth, largely due to its innovative product line and a strong company culture.
- However, in the past six months, TSI has faced significant challenges. A critical new product launch, "Project Phoenix," designed to be a game-changer in the market, is severely behind schedule and over budget.
- Morale among the development teams is low, with reports of burnout, finger-pointing, and a general lack of direction. Key talent has started to quietly explore opportunities elsewhere.

Formative Assessment



- Maria Rodriguez, the Head of Product Development, a seasoned leader with a reputation for empathy and strong technical skills, has been tasked with salvaging Project Phoenix and restoring team morale.
- She understands that this isn't just a technical problem; it's a leadership crisis.



The Situation:

- Maria's initial assessment reveals several contributing factors:
- **Unclear Vision:** While the initial concept of Project Phoenix was exciting, the specific features and market positioning have shifted multiple times, leading to confusion among developers.
- **Lack of Accountability:** There's no clear owner for various components of the project, leading to duplicated efforts and missed deadlines.
- **Poor Communication:** Information silos have emerged, with teams not sharing updates or challenges effectively. Rumors about the project's impending failure are rampant.
- **Team Burnout:** Developers are working long hours with little recognition, feeling their efforts are not making a difference.
- **Erosion of Trust:** Past promises of additional resources or simplified scope were not met, leading to a general distrust in management.



Maria knows she needs to act decisively, but also thoughtfully, to address these issues. She believes that by demonstrating specific leadership traits, she can turn the situation around.

- **Case Study Questions:**

1. **Identify Key Leadership Traits:** Based on the situation described, what three to five key leadership traits do you think Maria needs to exhibit most prominently to address the challenges at TechSolutions Innovations? Justify your choices.
2. **Action Plan Development:** For each trait identified in Question 1, describe specific, actionable steps Maria could take to practically apply that trait in the context of Project Phoenix and the team's morale.
3. **Potential Obstacles and Mitigation:** What potential obstacles might Maria face in implementing her leadership strategy? How can she mitigate these obstacles?
4. **Long-Term Impact:** If Maria successfully applies these leadership traits, what are the likely long-term positive impacts on Project Phoenix, the development team, and TechSolutions Innovations as a whole?
5. **Reflection:** How does this case study illustrate the importance of leadership traits being applied practically rather than just being theoretical concepts?



1. Identify Key Leadership Traits

- Maria needs to exhibit the following key leadership traits prominently:
- **Visionary Leadership:** The project suffers from an unclear vision. Maria needs to re-establish a compelling and clear vision for Project Phoenix that inspires and aligns the team. Without a clear "why" and "where are we going," individual efforts will remain fragmented and ineffective.
- **Communication:** Poor communication is a root cause of many problems (silos, rumors, missed deadlines). Maria needs to foster open, transparent, and consistent communication channels to ensure everyone is on the same page, understands challenges, and receives feedback.
- **Accountability & Ownership:** The lack of clear ownership and accountability is leading to duplicated efforts and missed deadlines. Maria needs to model and enforce a culture where individuals and teams take responsibility for their work and commitments.
- **Empathy & Support:** Team burnout and low morale suggest a lack of understanding and support for the developers' struggles. Maria needs to demonstrate genuine empathy, acknowledge their hard work, and actively support their well-being and development.
- **Decisiveness (with Agility):** The situation requires quick and firm decisions to get the project back on track and address immediate issues. However, given the past shifts, Maria also needs to be agile enough to adapt if new information arises.



2. Action Plan Development:

- Here are specific, actionable steps for each identified trait:
- **Visionary Leadership:**
 - **Action 1:** Organize a "Phoenix Reset" workshop with key stakeholders and team leads to collaboratively redefine Project Phoenix's core objectives, target market, and critical success metrics.
 - **Action 2:** Communicate the refined vision clearly and repeatedly through various channels (all-hands meetings, internal newsletters, project dashboards). Explain *why* these changes are being made and how they benefit the company and the team.
 - **Action 3:** Break down the vision into manageable, measurable milestones, making progress visible and celebrated.



- **Communication:**

- **Action 1:** Implement daily stand-up meetings for each sub-team and weekly "Phoenix Sync" meetings for all team leads to ensure consistent information flow and problem-solving.
- **Action 2:** Establish a dedicated, easily accessible communication platform (e.g., Slack channel, project management tool) for quick updates, questions, and open discussion across teams.
- **Action 3:** Practice active listening during all interactions, encouraging feedback and creating a safe space for team members to voice concerns without fear of reprisal. Provide regular, constructive feedback herself.



- **Accountability & Ownership:**

- **Action 1:** Clearly define roles and responsibilities for each team member and sub-team within Project Phoenix. Use a responsibility assignment matrix (e.g., RACI matrix).
- **Action 2:** Establish clear performance metrics and regular progress reviews for individual contributions and team deliverables.
- **Action 3:** Empower team members to make decisions within their areas of responsibility and hold them accountable for the outcomes, both positive and negative. Celebrate successes publicly.



- **Empathy & Support:**

- **Action 1:** Conduct one-on-one meetings with individual team members to understand their challenges, listen to their concerns about burnout, and offer support (e.g., adjusting workloads, flexible hours if feasible, mental health resources).
- **Action 2:** Recognize and acknowledge the team's hard work and sacrifices, even when milestones are not yet fully met. Institute small gestures of appreciation (e.g., team lunches, public recognition in meetings).
- **Action 3:** Advocate for additional resources or scope adjustments if genuine constraints are identified, demonstrating her commitment to the team's well-being and success.



- **Decisiveness (with Agility):**
 - **Action 1:** Review current project plans, identify critical path items, and make immediate decisions to unblock progress (e.g., reassigning resources, escalating issues to senior management for faster resolution).
 - **Action 2:** Establish a rapid decision-making process for Project Phoenix, clarifying who has the authority to make what types of decisions.
 - **Action 3:** Be prepared to pivot or adjust plans based on new data or unforeseen challenges, communicating the rationale behind any changes clearly to the team.



3. Potential Obstacles and Mitigation:

- **Obstacle 1: Resistance to Change/Cynicism:** Team members might be cynical due to past broken promises and burnout, making them resistant to new initiatives.
- **Mitigation:** Maria must build trust gradually through consistent actions, not just words. She should involve team members in problem-solving and decision-making where appropriate, demonstrating that their input matters. Small, visible wins will also help rebuild confidence.

- **Obstacle 2: Continued Resource Constraints:** Despite her best efforts, Maria might not get all the resources she needs (e.g., more developers, extended timeline).
- **Mitigation:** Maria needs to be realistic and transparent with the team about resource limitations. She should prioritize ruthlessly, focus on essential features, and explore creative solutions like cross-training or temporary assignments from other departments. She must also be prepared to escalate genuine, unsolvable resource gaps to senior leadership with a clear justification.



- **Obstacle 3: Lingering Inter-team Conflict/Blame:** Past finger-pointing might continue, hindering collaboration.
- **Mitigation:** Maria should facilitate open discussions about past issues in a structured, non-blaming environment, focusing on lessons learned rather than assigning fault. She should emphasize shared goals and interdependence, reinforcing that success is a collective effort. Team-building activities focused on collaboration, not competition, could also help.



- **Obstacle 4: Pressure from Senior Management:** Senior management might still demand rapid results, putting immense pressure on Maria.
- **Mitigation:** Maria needs to manage expectations effectively with senior management. She should provide regular, transparent updates on progress and challenges, present realistic timelines and recovery plans, and clearly articulate what is needed from them to succeed. She must be prepared to defend her team's needs.



4. Long-Term Impact:

- If Maria successfully applies these leadership traits, the likely long-term positive impacts are:
- **Project Phoenix:** The project is more likely to be completed, albeit potentially with adjusted scope, and delivered to a higher quality standard. It will serve as a successful case study of turnaround, rather than a failure.



- **Development Team:**

- **Increased Morale & Engagement:** Team members will feel valued, heard, and re-energized. Burnout will decrease.
- **Improved Collaboration & Communication:** Teams will work together more effectively, sharing knowledge and solving problems collectively.
- **Enhanced Skill Development:** Through clear responsibilities and potential new challenges, individuals may grow their professional skills.
- **Reduced Turnover:** Talented individuals will be more likely to stay, fostering institutional knowledge and stability.



- **TechSolutions Innovations as a Whole:**
- **Stronger Company Culture:** The company culture will be reinforced, characterized by trust, transparency, accountability, and support.
- **Enhanced Problem-Solving Capabilities:** The organization will learn valuable lessons from this crisis, becoming more resilient and adept at handling future challenges.
- **Improved Reputation:** Internally and externally, TSI's reputation as a well-managed and effective organization will be restored or even enhanced.
- **Future Innovation:** A healthier, more collaborative environment will foster future innovation and product success.



5. Reflection:

- This case study vividly illustrates the importance of leadership traits being applied practically rather than just being theoretical concepts.
- Maria didn't just *know* about vision or communication; she had to actively *redefine* the vision and *implement* new communication channels.
- Simply possessing the traits mentally would not have solved the problems at TSI.



- *The case demonstrates that effective leadership is about:*
- **Action, not just intention:** Traits only manifest their value when translated into concrete behaviors and decisions.
- **Contextual Application:** The specific traits needed, and how they are applied, depend heavily on the unique challenges and environment of the situation. Maria's empathy was crucial given the burnout; a different crisis might demand more immediate assertiveness.
- **Interconnectedness:** No single trait works in isolation. Maria's vision needs to be *communicated* effectively, and accountability must be balanced with *empathy* to avoid alienating the team.
- **Impact on People:** Ultimately, leadership traits are about influencing people. Maria's success hinges on her ability to inspire, motivate, and support her team through her practical actions, transforming a demotivated group into a high-performing unit. The case shows that addressing human elements (morale, trust) is as critical as addressing technical issues (project delays).



Leadership Lessons From Mandela

- **Invictus Movie Analysis | The Life of Nelson Mandela**
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DC0mm-Fm-As>





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Formal Leadership Development - The Structured Path

- **Definition:** Organized programmes, courses, and certifications designed to develop leadership skills.
- **Examples:** MBA programs, leadership academies, corporate training workshops, executive coaching programmes.
- **Benefits:** Structured learning, theoretical frameworks, networking opportunities, recognised credentials.

e.g. <https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/executive-leadership-programs/>



Formal Leadership Development - Key Components

- **Leadership Theories & Models:** Understanding different leadership styles (e.g., transformational, servant).
- **Strategic Thinking & Planning:** Developing long-term vision and execution plans.
- **Financial Acumen:** Understanding business financials and resource allocation.
- **Human Resources Management:** Talent acquisition, performance management, employee relations.



Formal Leadership Development

- Designing Effective Programs

- **Needs Assessment:** Identifying specific leadership gaps within an organization.
- **Customization:** Tailoring programs to organizational culture and strategic goals.
- **Experiential Learning:** Incorporating simulations, case studies, and practical exercises.
- **Measurement & Evaluation:** Assessing program effectiveness and ROI.



Informal Leadership Development

- Learning in the Flow of Work

- **Definition:** Unstructured, organic learning experiences that contribute to leadership growth.
- **Examples:** On-the-job challenges, peer learning, observation, self-reflection, volunteering.
- **Benefits:** Practical application, real-world context, adaptable to individual needs, often cost-effective.



Informal Leadership Development - Key Avenues

- **Stretch Assignments:** Taking on roles or projects outside of comfort zone.
- **Cross-Functional Collaboration:** Working with diverse teams and perspectives.
- **Observational Learning:** Learning from effective (and ineffective) leaders around you.
- **Seeking Feedback:** Actively soliciting input on performance and development areas.



Informal Leadership Development - Fostering a Learning Culture

- **Psychological Safety:** Creating an environment where people feel safe to experiment and learn from mistakes.
- **Encouraging Initiative:** Empowering employees to take ownership and lead from any level.
- **Promoting Reflection:** Encouraging self-assessment and continuous improvement.
- **Celebrating Learning:** Recognizing and rewarding efforts in personal and professional growth.



The Role of Mentorship and Coaching

- Guiding Growth

- **Mentorship:** Long-term relationship focused on overall career and personal development.
- **Coaching:** Short-term, goal-oriented process focused on specific skill development or challenges.
- **Benefits:** Personalized guidance, accelerated learning, increased confidence, broader perspectives.



Mentorship in Action

- **Finding a Mentor:** Seeking out experienced individuals who align with your values and goals.
- **Setting Expectations:** Clearly defining the purpose and scope of the mentorship.
- **Active Engagement:** Being prepared for meetings, asking insightful questions, acting on advice.
- **Giving Back:** Eventually becoming a mentor yourself.



Coaching for Performance

- **Types of Coaching:** Executive coaching, leadership coaching, peer coaching.
- **The Coaching Process:** Goal setting, active listening, powerful questioning, action planning, accountability.
- **When to Seek Coaching:** Navigating career transitions, overcoming specific challenges, enhancing particular skills.



Sustaining Leadership Effectiveness - Continuous Improvement

- **Lifelong Learning:** Committing to continuous personal and professional development.
- **Seeking Feedback:** Regularly soliciting input from peers, superiors, and subordinates.
- **Self-Reflection:** Taking time to assess strengths, weaknesses, and areas for growth.
- **Building a Strong Support Network:** Connecting with other leaders and mentors.



Sustaining Leadership Effectiveness

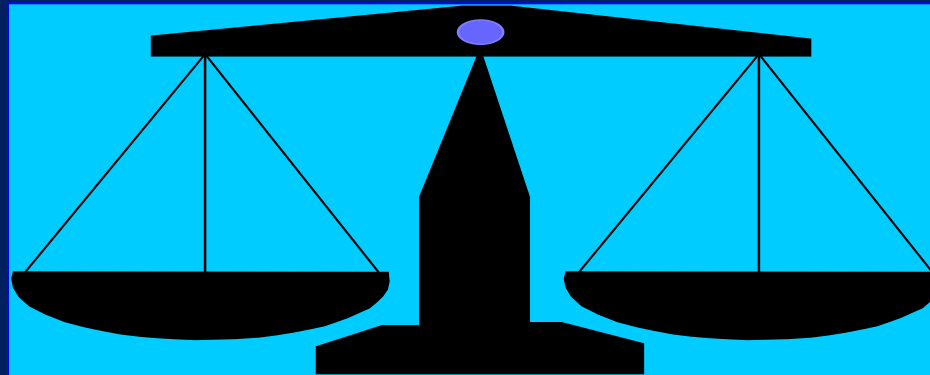
- Building a Legacy

- **Succession Planning:** Identifying and developing future leaders within the organization.
- **Mentoring Others:** Passing on knowledge and experience to the next generation.
- **Creating a Positive Culture:** Shaping an environment where leadership thrives at all levels.
- **Leaving a Lasting Impact:** Contributing to the long-term success and well-being of the organization and its people.



Discussion Exercise

ARE LEADERS BORN OR MADE?



Form your own opinion by
becoming better informed.

LEADERSHIP : NATURE vs NURTURE

the debate

From:

“MAN (*sic*) IS MARKED FROM BIRTH
WHETHER TO RULE OR TO BE RULED.”

and

“LEADERS ARE BORN NOT MADE.”

To:

“LEADERS CAN BE DEVELOPED.”



Conclusion - The Journey of Leadership

- Leadership is not a destination, but a continuous journey of learning, growth, and impact.
- Effective leaders are developed through a combination of inherent traits, formal training, and informal experiences.
- The commitment to continuous development is paramount for sustained leadership effectiveness.



- Many modern experts agree that both nature and nurture play a role.
- People may be born with traits that support leadership, but effective leadership requires development, practice, and learning from experience.



Key Takeaways

- Identify and cultivate core leadership traits.
- Embrace both formal and informal development opportunities.
- Actively seek mentorship and coaching.
- Learn from challenges and setbacks.
- Continuously strive for improvement and impact.



Leadership Has To Be Learned | Simon Sinek

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOXrpW-rotE>



References

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