

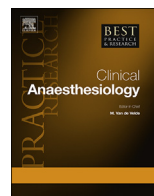


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Leadership in 2022: A perspective

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Leadership is an infinite and tremendously complex journey along with paradoxes that cannot be captured comprehensively. Over the past decades, key dimensions of leadership have caught the attention of practitioners in the field of management sciences. Yet, leadership education in healthcare is still limited. This personal perspective aims to summarize key aspects of leadership, ranging from managing people to managing systems and oneself.

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Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as [Sigmund] Freud believed, or a quest for power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning. The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life. Viktor E. Frankl.

Leadership is a dedicated position. Leadership is about oneself. Leadership is about people. Leadership is about processes. Leadership is about enterprises. Leadership is about individuals. Leadership is about societies. Leadership is about demanding. Leadership is about serving. Leadership is about learning to trust oneself and others. Leadership is about conflict. Leadership is about followership. Leadership is about change. Leadership is about purpose. Leadership is straightforward. Leadership is full of paradoxes. Leadership is a tremendously complex and pressure-loaded quest that cannot be captured comprehensively.

Over the past decades, key dimensions of leadership have caught the attention of practitioners in the field of management sciences. A growing body of evidence provides guidance for self-management,

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managing people, driving results, and shaping corporate, social, and environmental responsibility and sustainability.

The aim of this narrative is to put these dimensions into perspective and provide tips to consider during this challenging journey through an ever more complex world. The narrative is based on my personal journey as a clinician leader and focuses on the interconnected dimensions of managing people, systems, and oneself.

Managing people: adjusting styles to circumstances

In manufacturing, the output can be doubled by doubling human resources in economies of scale. This is not true for expert-led organizations such as healthcare institutions, where growth depends on symbioses between clever people [1]. Because experts are usually averse to rules, hierarchical organigrams, and being led, organization of experts primarily involves relationship management [1,2]. With the aim of achieving consensus in often paradoxical situations, leaders must focus on providing simple rules of cooperation and a psychologically safe environment to support the experts' intrinsic motivation and quest for choice, context, and connection [1,2]. While intelligence and technical skills obviously are important in acute care medicine, the setting and everyday dynamics also require people to have a high level of emotional intelligence and non-technical skills [3,4].

While it has been advocated to assess potential employees for emotional intelligence as early as during the recruiting process, emotional intelligence can be trained and coached throughout a career [3]. A coaching leadership style (“try this”) that considers experts' desire to choose their approach is often successful in improving both emotional intelligence and performance. As Boyatzis, Smith, and Van Oosten put it, coaching in the leadership context is about helping another person to learn, change, and grow sustainably by guiding their development of a realistic action plan [5]. Importantly, a leader of experts must resist the temptation to coach for compliance [5]: Specifically, leading in expert organizations such as healthcare divisions implies that a significant share of work is not “instructable” but rather requires followers to decide for themselves. Thus, leadership must focus on “non-instructive” behavior rather than following the temptation to instruct. People change if they want to change; therefore, it is essential not to try to correct a problem or try to fix people [5].

Coaching leaders are mindful to engaging in inspirational and supportive conversations which facilitate discovery and the pursuit of dreams and passions [5]. Thus, coaching supports the articulation of a vision, the change in behavior needed to realize this vision, and the building of resonant relationships with supporters [5]. As Buckingham observed, managing people involves recognizing employees' strengths and translating unique talents into performance [6]. While a coaching leadership style is key to leading experts, leaders must also be skilled in approaches that will enable them to quickly adapt to changing interpersonal, entrepreneurial, or socioeconomic circumstances [7]. Daniel Goleman describes six definite leadership styles that derive from a leader's emotional intelligence and directly impact performance (Table 1) [7].

Given the complex interplay between personalities, values, and interests, hot (i.e., visible) and cold (i.e., invisible/suppressed) conflicts are inherent in organizations [8]. One key task of leadership is to consciously mediate when there is conflict and transform differences into opportunities [8]. As Mark Gerzon states, leading through conflict means believing in the possibility of what does not yet exist beyond any either/or dichotomy [8]. Gerzon advises to aim toward catalyzing “connecting communication” to build alliances and bridge differences toward alliances of winners [8]. If you see two opposing sides, he says, create a third [8]. When emotions are removed from conflicts, the latter become simple negotiations that involve dealing with differences and seeking mutual agreement through dialog [9]. The leader's tasks thereby are to ensure that everyone sees the big picture and the other person's point of view, as well as establishing trust and providing an equal level of information to all parties since the lack of either can be a considerable barrier in reaching consensus [10].

In her book about training a wild hawk to hunt, Helen MacDonald beautifully describes falconry (and by extension, leadership) as a balancing act between wildness and tamedness, in which a human (aka a leader) and bird (an expert follower) become hunting partners with one heart and mind [11]. She recognizes that such hawks may initially be afraid of the world they do not understand, with their feathers frequently smelling of trouble and being fluffed up due to a mixture of defensiveness, fear,

Table 1
Leadership styles [7].

Style*	Aim	Setting/circumstances	Tonality
Coaching	To develop people for the future	To help employees to improve performance/to develop long-term strength (risk: develop and change-resistant employees).	“Try this!”
Coercive	To demand immediate compliance	For turnarounds, problem employees, emergencies (risk: impact on climate!)	“Do this now, how I tell you!”
Authoritative	To mobilize toward a vision	When clear direction is needed during change (risk: when experts are more experienced than leader).	“Come with me!”
Affiliative	To create emotional bonds and harmony	To heal rifts in a team and motivate a team during stressful circumstances (risk: people may perceive that mediocrity is tolerated).	“Come out for a drink with me!”
Democratic	To build consensus through participation	To buy-in consensus, to get inputs from, to build trust, commitment, and respect (risk: does not work with incompetent employees).	“What do you think?”
Pacesetting	To foster excellence and self-direction	To get quick results from a highly motivated and competent team (risk: impact on climate).	“If I have to tell you, you are the wrong!”

Goleman advises that a leader’s executive team contains members possessing these skills if a leader is severely lacking one style.

defiance, anger, and aggression [11]. Since birds of prey are not sociable, they have no understanding of either coercion or punishment and will always decide for themselves to sit on a falconer’s fist or to escape into the woods [11]. Establishing an enriching culture and shared purpose that meets personal expectations for personal growth and meaningful contribution is key.

To be remembered and considered, the personal growth of any professional starts early [12]. Everyone brings along their past, including family dynamics experienced in early life [12]. These dynamics are the foundations for attitudes toward authority, identity, and mastery [12].

Managing systems: establishing purpose, communication, and culture

Many young professionals in modern societies have developed a competitive spirit. Yet, developing intrinsic motivation and finding personal meaning has become increasingly complex over the past decades. Progressive environmental destruction, political upheaval leading to global tensions, and an affluency of material wealth that is widespread in Western cultures have left large parts of our societies disoriented. More and more often, the search for meaning affects both private and professional life. While organizational or departmental mission statements may offer some context, extrinsic demands carry the risk of personal exhaustion and burnout [13]. A clear vision and sound purpose beyond simple mission statements have thus become powerful leadership tools in expert organizations. Knowles et al. define the “purpose of your purpose” as the triad of cause (the social good aspired to), competence (product/service functionality), and culture (the intent with which the business is run) [14].

While early pioneers recognized the psychological impact of people’s quest for pleasure (Sigmund Freud) and power (Alfred Adler), the psychiatrist and holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl taught that “focusing on purpose in order to create a positive future” is an effective way to develop sustainable personal and professional resilience [13,15]. Thus, a leader is well-served by offering a consistent system of values and clear rules for framing the organization’s purpose. While it is hard to change characters, such value-based systems help leaders earn trust and gain followers as well as change the behaviors of people who have less power, authority, and influence [16]. A key task for leaders is to foster an environment in which everyone knows how to contribute to the shared vision [17].

Effective interpersonal and communication skills, such as the ones practiced by experienced Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) providers [18], might, therefore, be a leader’s most critical competence [17]. Different communication experts provide different advice on how to best

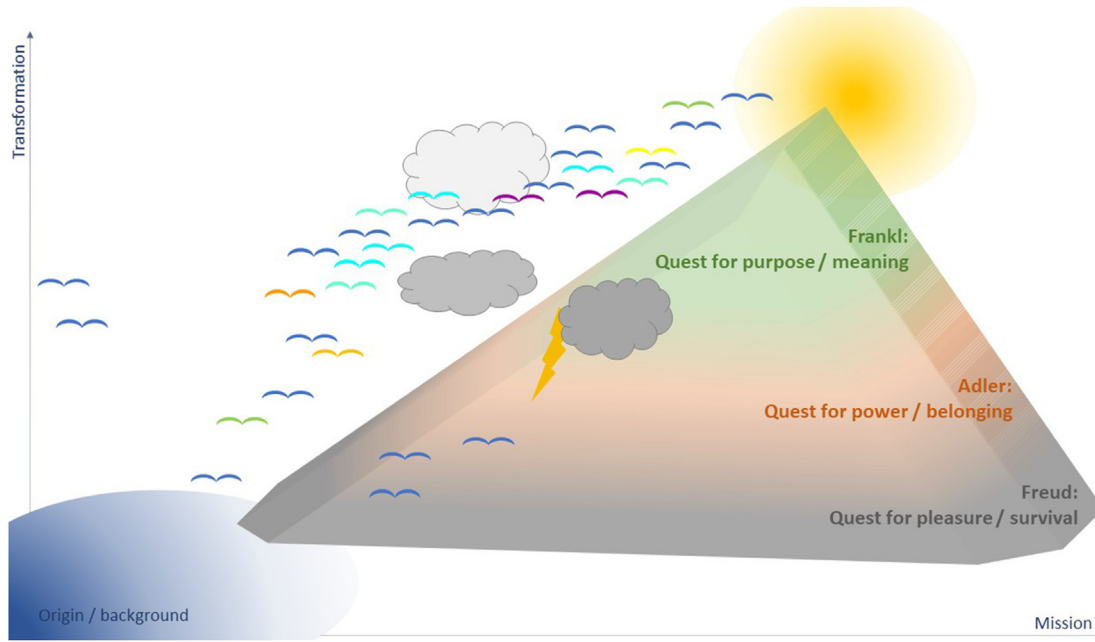


Fig. 1. Leadership displayed as birds' journey from their initial origin toward the sun. Leadership is much more than compliantly completing a mission (figure's x-axes). It is about defining reality as a transformative power (figure's y-axes) moving toward a shared vision, illustrated by the sun. Thereby, the art is to compassionately balance the interests of individuals (birds) and the collective. Transformative leadership invites individuals to enhance their quests for pleasure and power to a quest for purpose and meaning.

communicate explicitly and implicitly. Yet, all styles focus to meet the audiences' needs of learning by being entertained. Morgan suggests beginning at the level of very personal emotional impulses to ensure authentic explicit and implicit communication with a focus on “why you speak” rather than the exact wording [19]. Similarly, Mark Gerzon advises to embrace the full range of interaction and make the way we speak and listen a mindful act, moving beyond either/or, thereby always aiming to bridge conflicting differences and move toward collaborative innovation and trust [8]. Fig. 1 illustrates the transformative dimensions of leadership.

As a law of nature in changing systems with different stakeholders, the conflict will always exist [8]. Gerzon advises that a commitment to the big picture offers the possibility to unite all sides and create a shared “we” that involves all partners [8]. Thereby, a key leadership task is to understand that the personal growth of any professional started early and everyone brings along their past [12]. Mastering these dynamics are the foundations for attitudes toward authority and identity [12]. To effectively manage conflict, however, successful leaders must also be able to manage themselves by honestly overcoming psychological barriers such as defensiveness, fear, tension, and pride [8].

Managing oneself: mastering the inner game

Leading people starts with a positive adaptive capacity and the search to find meaning in and learn from even the most negative events, emerging from such adversity stronger, more confident, and more committed [20]. Two decades ago, Daniel Goleman’s research revealed that effective leaders may vary in leadership styles, but all embody a high level of emotional intelligence (Table 2) [21].

However, a leader with emotional intelligence and empathy can also suffer from avoidance and become a barrier to action [22]. Hougard and Carter, therefore, advise to “lead compassionately” and see reality clearly [22]. They remember to keep the big picture in mind and act for the greatest good, even if this is discomfoting to individuals [22]. As pointed out by IBM’s former CEO and president, Ginni Rometty: “Comfort and growth never coexist!” [22].

An organization’s inherent paradoxes, the fact that no day will ever have enough hours, exponential change, and complexity are constant challenges faced by a leader [23]. These challenges also offer the opportunity for personal transformation to become “the leader you want to be” [23]. To achieve this, Amy Jen Su advises grounding one’s purpose in passion, expanding the finite capacities of one’s external world by optimizing processes and raising one’s own game by raising the games of others [23].

While process optimization can be learned in courses and seminars, presence and peace are concepts that dig deeper. Although contemplative practices have become more well known in Western cultures, presence and peace might be difficult to grasp at a glance. Victor Frankl beautifully verbalized the essence of presence: “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” [24] The primary goal is to learn to pause between stimulus and response and quietly observe oneself to uncover patterns that would usually

Table 2
Emotional intelligence defined by self-management and relationship skills [21].

Dimension:	Description:	Hallmarks:
Self-awareness	Conscious understanding of one’s emotions, drives, strengths, weaknesses, values, goals, and impact on others.	Self-confidence, desire for constructive criticism, self-deprecating sense of humor
Self-regulation	Ability to control and redirect disruptive emotions and impulses.	Comfort with ambiguity and change, integrity, trustworthiness
Motivation	Being driven to achieve for the sake of achievement, beyond monetary incentives.	Passion for challenges, unflagging energy to improve, optimism even in the face of failure
Empathy	Ability to recognize and respond to the feelings of others, especially when making decisions.	Expertise in developing others and sensitivity to cross-cultural differences.
Social skills	Building rapport with others to move them in the desired direction.	Effectiveness and persuasiveness in effecting change and leading teams; extensive networking.

trigger an immediate unconscious reaction [23]. Ancient Asian meditators describe these moments as “not biting the hook”, i.e., not following the behavioral urge of being bothered [25]. Peace, as taught in many spiritual traditions, aims at emotionally detaching from mental constructs by recognizing, e.g., the limited time and impact of one’s existence, thereby deepening inner confidence and strength. Su defines the power of peace as living in the moment and accepting it without any resistance [23]. Leadership is mainly about “mastering your inner game”, based on robust values and personal integrity [26]. Bryant and Sharer highlight the importance of attaining this sense of peace and self-awareness and understanding who you really are [26]. Or, in Victor Frankl’s words, “learning to pause between stimulus and response” [15,24] is a great way to master the inner game, i.e., to bridge the paradoxical gaps between freedom and structure, numbers and humans, and confidence and humbleness.

In summary, leadership is a tremendously complex process that can never be captured in its entirety. Becoming a leader requires a passion for lifelong learning and self-development. In order to earn trust, respect, and support, a leader must forget “one-size-fits-all” solutions [26]. Integrity is key to solve any leadership-born dilemma. Finally, leadership involves collaboration between leaders and followers, as well as between people and systems constantly adapting to challenges.

Practice points

- Leadership is an infinite and tremendously complex process involving people, systems, and oneself.
- Leadership requires a passion for lifelong learning and self-development.
- Integrity is key to solving any leadership dilemma.
- Learning to pause between stimulus and response is a good way to bridge the paradoxical gaps between freedom and structure, numbers and humans, and confidence and humbleness.

Research agenda

- Leadership is marginally trained in medical schools. Future research must focus on effective leadership training in healthcare systems in order to replace the share of “accidental” with well-trained reflective leaders.
- While management sciences have adopted key dimensions of leadership, these are only marginally studied in the setting of acute care medicine.
- How to focus on purpose as an effective approach to sustainable personal and professional resilience remains unclear
- Leadership training offers a promising avenue to reduce overwhelming burnout rates in acute care medicine globally.

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Declaration of competing interest

Markus M. Luedi reports no conflicts of interest.

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