



Leader or Manager - The Enigma

Is it time for a fresh look at these words and the modern-day requirements?

One of the challenges in defining the word “leader” is that there are so many different definitions. And given that the ones shown below, and most others, come from people, this suggests that the root of the challenge is that we all have varying views of what each means. Even AI comes up with variations on the theme because it feeds on the words humans have used to describe it over many years.



Here are some popular quotes that have been presented to me over the years:

1. **“a person who manages or controls other people, especially because of their ability or position.”** (Cambridge online dictionary).
2. **“a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”** Peter Northouse's definition of leadership.
3. **“Leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less.”** John C. Maxwell.
4. **“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”** Warren Bennis.
5. **“Leadership is the process of influencing and enabling others, through trust and shared purpose, to achieve outcomes they could not achieve alone.”** Unknown.

In my opinion, and that of many others, most of the above are what we would want from modern-day managers as well. But those opinions are based on personal preferences, biases, and beliefs. I would suggest that it is the same for us all. So how do we solve this age-old enigma? Even the origin of the word has been debated strenuously.

From my own research, I believe that “leadership” once meant “out front,” a person who leads others into battle or a person leading the way on a journey. But I confess I am almost uninterested in its history (please excuse me) because I want to establish the meaning of the words “leader” and “manager” today. I think what we used to expect from people with these titles has changed a lot. I believe they have come to mean so much more.

I discovered research conducted by Ralph Stogdill. He was known for his research on leadership and organisations and, until his death in 1978, was Professor Emeritus of Management Science and Psychology at Ohio State University. He is said to have found that leadership traits varied widely, and that just because a person was a good leader in one situation, it did not follow that they would be a good leader in others.

Attempting to distinguish the difference between leadership and management would appear almost impossible. So my question to you is this: do we need to start moving away from the terms “leader” and “manager” and create a more modern way of thinking about how we engage with those who report to us? Do we need to use a different word or create a new one? Do we need to define the workplace leader and manager specifically, or simply agree that most of the skills required by both are interchangeable, depending on the situation and context?

In any case, we must recognise that times have changed. We need to be more flexible in how we view the skills required to work with those who report to us and resist the urge to treat leadership and management as separate roles that require distinct skills and attributes.



Leaders and managers: same person, different moments

In most workplaces, we have long used the terms “Team leader”, “Line manager” or “Team manager” interchangeably; does this not evidence that we have unconsciously realised the roles are now so similar? They are two sides of the same role, called for at different moments as situations and people change and problems arise.



Some food for thought:

1. Does a football “manager” not motivate, inspire and drive the team forward by envisioning their success?
2. Given that the “leader” of the House of Commons in the UK is responsible for “managing” government business, scheduling legislation, and directing parliamentary business in the Commons, does this mean they should really be called the manager?
3. Is the word “Leader” now being used to signify the seniority that the person has in their role, rather than the activity their title suggests?

The skills required for each are highly transferable, and the most effective people switch fluidly between them, sometimes in a single meeting.

This handout draws together the LaPD Solutions ingredients to help create the fluency needed to build high-performing teams, including: The Moccasin Approach®, psychological safety, trust, altrocentric leadership, emotional intelligence, empowerment, delegation, inspiration, motivation, influencing and many more. Most leaders and managers employ a blend of skills.

The Moccasin Approach

LaPD Solutions’ flagship concept is The Moccasin Approach®, drawn from Mary T. Lathrap’s 1895 poem Judge Softly. The discipline is simple to state and yet quite challenging to live. Never criticise, conclude or correct another person until you have walked in their moccasins.



Used by either a manager or a leader, it is the difference between assuming someone is being awkward and asking what extra weight they are carrying in their world. It is the difference between dictating to people that change **will** happen and selling the reasoning and benefits of change to the stakeholders who it impacts, inspiring and motivating them to the point that they **want** the change and help others get on board with it, too.

Trust: The consistency of reliability

LaPD defines trust simply as: “the consistency of reliability”.

People trust those whose words and behaviour line up over time, especially under pressure. It is not built by grand gestures; it is built by small, repeated decisions to do what was promised.

Putting the words “leader” and “manager” aside for the moment, **any** great relationship is built on trust. Just think of a person in your



life that you go to for those critically important decisions you have to make. Yes, you go to them for many reasons, but most of all, because you trust them. Why? Due to the consistency of their reliability. Whether we are a leader or a manager, this is a foundational necessity we can’t do without.

Empathy and emotional intelligence

EI is the ability to sense, understand and respond to the emotions of another person without losing yourself in them.

It is a core ingredient, not the whole of emotional intelligence.

LaPD uses Daniel Goleman's four-quadrant framing, which they call the four ingredients of EI and which they say can be developed through close attention and prolonged effort.



1. Self-awareness – knowing how our own emotions impact others.
2. Self-management – managing our emotions and our follow-on behaviours.
3. Social Awareness – knowing and understanding those around us really well.
4. Relationship management – The ultimate goal: to have strong, trusted relationships.

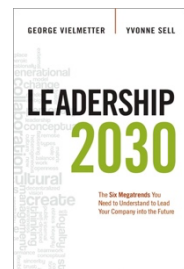
EI can be developed once we know and fully understand each area. We can work to improve. But, for self-awareness, we need honest feedback from those around us, because we are often unaware of how we impact others. Social awareness requires discovering as much as we can about those around us. Relationship management begins as we get the others right.

Altrocentric leadership

“Altrocentric leadership” was introduced by Georg Vielmetter, PhD, and Yvonne Sell, PhD, in their 2014 book Leadership 2030.

In the book, they say many important things. I have copied a few below.

1. “The era of alpha leadership is over. Leaders who place themselves center stage and lead predominantly by coercing and pacesetting have a misguided understanding of the nature of leadership.”
2. “Leadership is a social practice. Leadership is not a set of fixed attributes possessed by certain people. It is a relationship, the nature of which depends on its context. It is a shared activity that results in shared knowledge, understanding, and meaning. Being a leader or a follower is not a dichotomy but is subject to constant flux: An individual can be a leader in one context and a follower in another.”
3. “Two-thirds of the many thousands of leadership books and papers published neglect to even define the term (leadership). There is little or no consensus in the literature on what leadership actually is, beyond the fact that it entails influencing others. In which case, why not just call it influencing?”
4. “The truth is that leadership is a social interaction, a context-dependent relation between individuals. It is, in effect, a social practice, which for our purposes is defined as a shared activity that results in shared knowledge, understanding, and meaning.”



Altrocentric leadership is the deliberate opposite of egocentric leadership: it places others at the centre. The altrocentric leader-manager first asks what the team, the colleague, or the beneficiary needs, and then how their own role can best serve that need.

- It is not self-effacing; it is self-aware.
- It treats power as a resource to give away, not a possession to hoard.
- It listens twice as much as it speaks and asks before it tells.
- It sits well alongside servant leadership, but with a greater emphasis on outcomes.



Other ingredients worth bringing into the kitchen

LaPD's wider handout catalogue offers a rich shelf of complementary ingredients. The most useful for joining leadership and management together include:

Active listening	Challenging conversations	Influence (Cialdini)
Allyship	Constructive communication	Johari Window
Assertiveness	Delegation	Managing bias
Belief creates reality	SAS Feedback	Situational leadership
Body language		Tuckman on tea

A final thought

I believe that to help others perform at their best, we simply need a great relationship with each person based on trust, honesty, values and purpose.

When I served in the army, our team was extraordinary. It would go through the most arduous of situations, push themselves to the point of physical and mental exhaustion, to be there and support those beside them, regardless of the cost to themselves.

Although I was the person in charge of the team, I was not labelled "leader" or "manager". It was not my seniority or rank that brought this cohesion and unity; it was the approach I took to help them all get to know each other inside out. That included the insistence on and provision of psychological safety, the praise and recognition not just from me but from each other, the respect, motivation, and almost accidental inspiration, and, most importantly, that genuine desire to be the best we could be **for each other**.

It was all about the ingredients I used and the recipe we stuck to that produced far more than a high-performing team; it went much deeper than that. We became family, we fought to defend the person next to us and ensured their safety and well-being above our own.

In the truly great teams I have met in organisations, it is the person responsible for that team's performance who has helped bond them by insisting on the use of EI, the Moccasin Approach, psychological safety, and the other ingredients mentioned above.

Today, leaders and managers are not that different from each other. They are, at most, different titles for people trying to get the best from their teams / direct reports by helping them work together with a common purpose to achieve the best results in support of the wider organisational goals.

