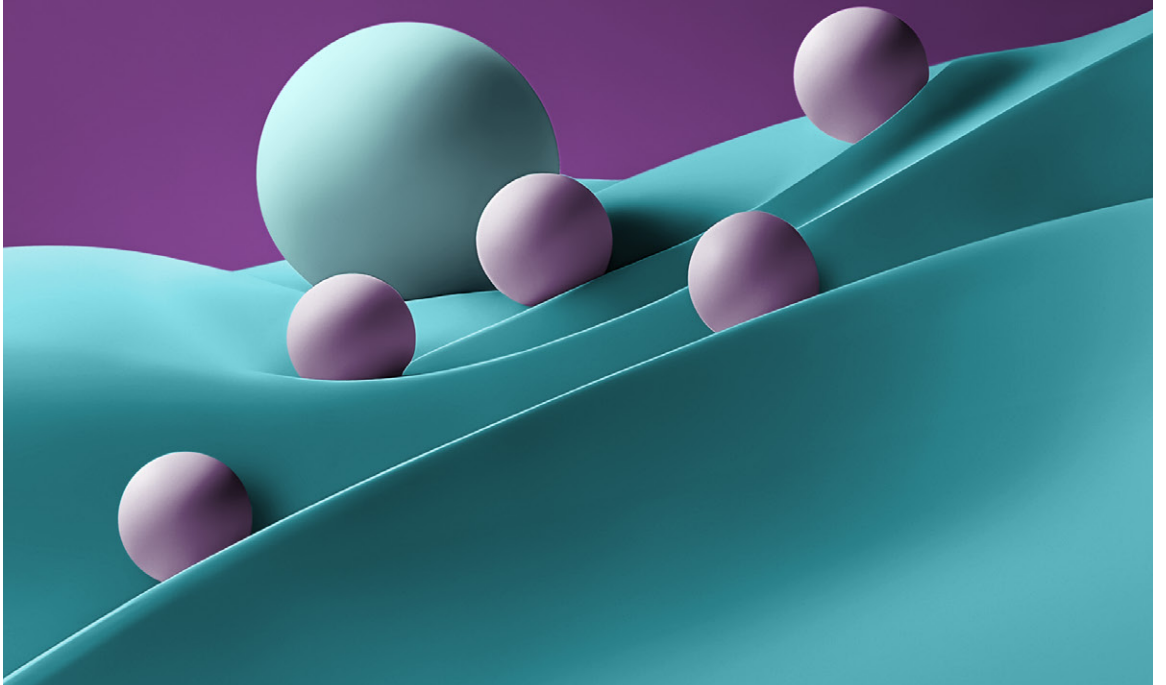


# Psychology of Leadership

5 ways to improve leadership  
effectiveness



# What is leadership?

To help us answer “What is leadership?” let’s start with what it’s not:

It’s not management.

At least, not according to John Kotter, Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership, Emeritus, at the Harvard Business School. He says there are three common mistakes people make when talking about leadership:

1. People use “management” and “leadership” interchangeably. This shows that they don’t see the crucial difference between the two and the vital functions that each role plays.
2. People use “leadership” to refer to the people at the very top of hierarchies. They then call the people in the layers below them in the organization “management.” And then all the rest are workers, specialists, and individual contributors.
3. People often think of “leadership” in terms of personality characteristics, such as something they call charisma. Since few people have great charisma, this leads logically to the conclusion that few people can provide leadership, which gets us into increasing trouble.<sup>1</sup>

Kotter writes that leadership “is the creation of positive, non-incremental change, including the creation of a vision to guide that change—a strategy—the empowerment of people to make the vision happen despite obstacles, and the creation of a coalition of energy and momentum that can move that change forward.”

With this dynamic definition as a starting point, we can explore some differences between leadership and management—and then see why psychology plays a critical role in the leadership of people and organizations.

## What is a leader?

Dr. Martin Boulton, team development expert at Boulton Executive Psychology, describes the difference between managers and leaders.

“To put it in the simplest or easiest terms to understand, managers are really focused on coordinating things in an organization or business,” he says. “Coordinating plans of what needs to get done, and how, is usually done by managers. They’re putting systems or policies in place or designing job roles and structures that people then fit into and work with.”

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1. [John P. Kotter, “Management Is \(Still\) Not Leadership.”](#)

“And management, really, is a discipline. Its origins started in the first military organizations. So, as the Industrial Age emerged, people were building organizations to try and work out the most efficient way of getting things done. They adopted a lot of military management principles, and even today that stands as the main practice of management.

“Manager is actually a role,” Boulton continues. “You get appointed, assigned, and that management role fits within the structure of an organization or a business. Leadership is something that’s been around since human beings have been on the planet. It’s ancient and it’s part of human existence. Humans have always lived and worked and done things together in groups, and because of that, leadership has been there from the very beginning.

“But leaders need to have followers,” he says. “You can’t be a leader unless you’ve got people who are willing to follow you. And to do that, people in leadership roles are finding ways to motivate and inspire people to do something, to take action, or to move in a particular direction.”<sup>2</sup>

This notion aligns with Kotter’s writing: “Management is a set of processes that keep an organization functioning. They make it work today—they make it hit this quarter’s numbers. The processes are about planning, budgeting, staffing, clarifying jobs, measuring performance, and problem-solving when results did not go to plan.

“Leadership is very different. It is about aligning people to the vision and that means buy-in and communication, motivation, and inspiration.”

Leadership coach Doc Norton, writing in Forbes, says, “Manager is a title. It’s a role and a set of responsibilities. Having the position of manager does not make you a leader. The best managers are leaders, but the two are not synonymous. Leadership is the result of action. If you act in a way that inspires, encourages, or engages others, you are a leader. It doesn’t matter your title or position.”<sup>3</sup>

## Who has the authority to lead?

These definitions of leadership and management are bound up in authority, which can potentially complicate things.

“When a person is appointed manager of a team,” says Boulton, “there is no guarantee that team members see that manager as their leader. I have seen some teams who actually trust, or are more connected to, another member of the team who isn’t the manager...they are essentially the psychological leader of the group. The team, or the manager, has to be aware of that.”

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2. Martin Boulton, “Connecting with the People You Lead,” Myers-Briggs Company Podcast, September 28, 2022.

3. [Doc Norton, “What Makes a Good Leader? Key Differences Between Management and Leadership” \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com)

One way to make sense of this is to consider the source of a person's position in the workplace.

"One of the things I get managers to think about is who appoints you the manager," Boulton says. "Essentially, it's the organization—someone senior. But where do you get your authority to lead the team? It actually comes from the team. If they don't see the manager as their leader, they will potentially authorize the 'unofficial' leader."

Here we start to see the importance of connection. Without connection, a person has only the authority they've been granted, and this goes only so far. But we'll hear much more from Boulton in the "Connection" section of this ebook.

## The case for psychology in leadership

We see from looking at these definitions that the very essence of leadership is about motivating, persuading, and inspiring other people to act in accordance with a particular goal, direction, or outcome. It's about behavior and people—and that's the realm of psychology.

"A leader needs to be an amateur psychologist if they want to be effective and successful," according to Ronald E. Riggio, Professor of Leadership and Organizational Psychology at Claremont McKenna College. Riggio says it's so obvious to him that leadership is a psychological topic that he's surprised anyone would ever question that.<sup>4</sup>

But what about the leaders you work with—do they know it? Or is psychology, in their view, something for other people?

If leaders want their own people to be inspired and invested in their work, they need to know two things:

- What—exactly—fires people up (bearing in mind it's different for everyone)
- How to help people harness their motivations to be fully engaged with their roles and teams

The following sections guide leaders through some key considerations in the psychology of successful leadership.

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4. [Ronald E. Riggio, "How Psychology Helps Us Find Leadership."](#)



## Active self-awareness

Self-awareness—knowing yourself—is the first step in any development journey. Not only does it provide a benchmark for knowing who you are as an individual and what your typical behaviors are right now; it also opens the door to understanding other people.

And, of course, it highlights where individuals can develop themselves further.

When asked, “What makes a great leader?” Cameron Nott, Managing Director of the Asia Pacific region of The Myers-Briggs Company, puts self-awareness at the top of the list of leadership qualities—but it’s self-awareness with a twist.<sup>5</sup>

“If I were to synthesize it down into five key areas,” he says, “I would say that to be a great leader, the first quality you probably need to have is **integrity**.

“And that’s about being honest and being authentic with yourself. It’s a really important foundation for building trust with those you lead.

“The second area would be **influence**, and I think I’d build communication into this as well. Having effective interpersonal networks and strong communication skills really helps leaders gather the resources to support their team. It also helps them remove roadblocks so the team can be more effective in terms of how it operates.

“**Agility** is next on the list. Innovation is a popular word, but underlying this, I think, is having a mind that’s open to learning, that’s open to change...being flexible in terms of how we go about our work and looking at new approaches. It’s about knowing how to switch towards the right direction to make the right bet in terms of which way to direct the team.

“A fourth factor would be **empathy**,” he continues. “Understanding others, understanding your team—that’s really important to being an effective leader. We also know that empathy is a key building block towards being an inclusive leader.

“Lastly, and perhaps the superfood of great leadership, is what I like to call **active self-awareness**.”

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5. Cameron Nott, “*The Psychology of Leadership*,” *The Myers-Briggs Company Podcast*, November 7, 2023.

## The superfood of great leadership

This is where we go beyond self-awareness. Knowing yourself is an essential start, but it's not the whole story.

"It's not only about understanding our strengths and development areas," says Nott, "but also about having the motivation to act upon them. It's about having that drive to be better. It's about looking to continue to find ways to improve ourselves as leaders."

Nott uses a recent client as an example of leadership gaining awareness and putting knowledge into action.

"We were invited in by the independent board of a fairly commercially oriented government agency," he says, "and asked to work with the executive team because their latest climate survey had revealed a real spike in disengagement.

"The feedback from the employees wasn't positive. They were unclear about the vision of the organization. There were complaints about lack of opportunities for development. There were complaints about bullying leadership styles, too."

The organization's leaders decided they needed help acting on such difficult information. It was too big to negotiate themselves.

"The climate survey was a diagnostic in terms of what was happening in the organization at that point," says Nott. "And then it was a case of our coming in with an intervention to help improve what was happening. So, we implemented an assessment and development program at all levels of the organization, taking everyone through the MBTI®. We also took the leaders through some additional layers of the insight, through the FIRO® assessment, which looked at interpersonal style, and through a 360-degree feedback assessment tool.

"The CEO reported as having preferences for INTP—Introversion, Intuition, Thinking, and Perceiving. He happened to be a very strategic leader and had a brilliant mind.

"He was supported by an executive team that collectively had preferences for ESTJ—Extraversion, Sensing, Thinking, and Judging.

### A quick MBTI refresher

**Extraversion (E)**—gains energy from the outer world of people and things

**Introversion (I)**—gains energy from the inner world of thoughts and reflection

**Sensing (S)**—prefers information that is real and sensory

**Intuition (N)**—prefers information that is theoretical, conceptual, and future focused

**Thinking (T)**—makes decisions based on logic and objective truth

**Feeling (F)**—makes decisions based on people and subjective values

**Judging (J)**—approaches life in a planned way

**Perceiving (P)**—approaches life in an open, less structured way

“The middle management cohort collectively had preferences for ENTJ—Extraversion, Intuition, Thinking, and Judging.

“And when we looked at the staff level, their collective preferences were for ENFP—Extraversion, Intuition, Feeling, and Perceiving.”

## Type differences between leaders and other groups

These were collective preferences, but the differences between the groups reveal why staff-level employees were dissatisfied.

“The CEO was great in strategic terms of setting the direction for the organization and working in the halls of government to get support,” says Nott, “and he was supported by an executive team and middle management team that were very strong on execution. This is shown through those last two letters: the TJ preferences.

“The problem, however, was that the majority of employees’ preferences were for NFP. So, it was quite a difference. These FP employees tended to experience the TJ leadership behavior in ways that, certainly in times of stress and pressure, might be perceived as bullying.”

It’s been said that the last two letters of MBTI type are the conflict letters—that is, they’re the preferences most likely to generate tension between people. And this has an impact on leadership style and followership style.

An employee with FP preferences, for example, probably wants some FP behaviors from their leader. Opposite behavior, that of a person with TJ preferences, will tend to be the greatest source of tension for them.

“It was really interesting to take everyone through the MBTI. We found that if you’re looking at the MBTI profile of the organization, you get some great psychological insight in terms of the climate survey results. This exercise also gave us insights into the needs that NF employees have in terms of wanting opportunities for development and wanting to have that sense of connection with their leaders and vision.”

Identifying the MBTI types of different groups provides a way of understanding those types’ priorities and how that comes across to other types. The things that mattered most to staff were not the natural focus of the ESTJ executive team. ESTJ teams tend to be very strong on efficiency and execution.

The MBTI profiles also helped uncover some misunderstandings between the leader and the executive team.

The leader was very strategic and clear in his vision. But because he had a preference for Introversion, he wasn’t very visible. He didn’t feel the need to “walk the floor” to connect with people because that’s not where he got his energy or directed it.

But an organization preferring Extraversion overall wants visibility and direct connection. Even employees preferring Introversion appreciate some direct connection with their leader.

## Use your opposite type

As soon as a person knows their MBTI type, they know that preferences tend to correlate with strengths (which are also potential biases). Meanwhile, the less preferred modes are marked as areas for development. But consciously using their less preferred modes is a great way for a person to keep biases in check.

“I find the MBTI model is really helpful day-to-day,” says Nott, “particularly for decision-making. My preferences are for ENTJ, so I try to be very conscious of the opposite of my preferences when making decisions. For me, this is Introversion, Sensing, Feeling, and Perceiving—ISFP.

“I’m aware that I have the NT characteristics that can be a strength in terms of being strategic and looking at the big picture, but they can be a bit of a bias as well,” he explains. “The leadership team I work with is very self-aware, and I’m working with employees who have preferences for Sensing and Feeling, Intuition and Feeling, and Sensing and Thinking. I try to be very conscious of that, tapping into different people who are subject matter experts in those preferences and who have different perspectives in terms of viewing how a decision needs to be made.”

It’s a simple tip that any leader can try: when making decisions, consider the perspective of the opposite type. Doing so will often introduce angles that have been overlooked.

Better still, involve people with different type preferences in the decision-making process. But if that’s not possible, the opposite-type tip is a useful start.

## The need for objectivity

In his *Developing Great Leaders* white paper, Robert J. Devine, author of the CPI 260® Certification Program and the CPI 260® Client Feedback Report Guide for Interpretation, defined four building blocks of great leaders:

- Vision
- Interpersonal style
- Communication
- Problem-solving/Decision-making<sup>6</sup>

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6. [Robert J. Devine, \*Developing Great Leaders: A Measured Approach\*.](#)

This is how he defined them:

The Four Building Blocks of Great Leadership	
Building Block	Definition
Vision	<p>Has a vision of what is important for future direction, communicates this with urgency in meaningful ways, and can persuade others to align their efforts to drive for results.</p> <p>Is assertive and self-confident in working with others and takes the initiative to get things done.</p> <p>Can gauge and vary authority and impact on others.</p>
Interpersonal style	<p>Shows an appropriate level of comfort with others and builds lasting relationships and connections.</p> <p>Is socially perceptive, modelling consideration and tact while maintaining a focus on tasks at hand.</p> <p>Can objectively give and receive candid performance feedback. Is comfortable with managing conflict and differences of opinion.</p>
Communication	<p>Is skilled in sending and receiving/interpreting verbal, nonverbal, and written messages.</p> <p>Uses appropriate grammar and vocabulary, as well as eye contact, gestures, and inflection.</p> <p>Shows comfort and poise in presenting ideas to (large) groups and can readily respond to ideas and questions.</p>
Problem-solving/ Decision-making	<p>Uses analytical, fact-based, logical, and impartial methods to decide what needs to be done.</p> <p>Balances this deductive approach with the use of speculation and intuition to recognize information gaps in forming judgments and opinions.</p> <p>Is curious and broad minded and uses inference and intuition to solve complex business problems.</p> <p>Links short-term planning with strategic thinking to anticipate future consequences of current tactics.</p>

Source: Developing Great Leaders , Robert J. Devine

But beyond the experience that comes from doing the job, how do leaders develop these areas?

Devine talks of a “three phases, one loop” approach to developing leadership skills. The three phases are “What?” “So What?” and “Now What?”

- **“What?”**—the assessment phase. Use the four building blocks to guide what data to collect. There is no evaluation at this stage; it is purely a data-collection phase.
- **“So What?”**—interpreting the data. This phase needs to be a give-and-take conversation between the individual manager or leader and a guide, practitioner, facilitator, or coach. Consider the “What?” proposals in terms of their validity, accuracy, importance, relevance, and potential against articulated business and career goals.
- **“Now What?”**—learning the skill. This phase needs to be led primarily by the individual manager or leader. After considering their “What?” and “So What?” conclusions, they formulate a concise plan for action.

A development plan like this stays true to the concept of active self-awareness. Devine writes, “The first step is an objective assessment of the manager or leader’s ability to use the building blocks of leadership. Once the strengths and growth opportunities are clear, the manager or leader can work with a guide to determine how to improve in areas that require growth.”

Empirical evidence and objectivity are key criteria that assessments can provide.



# Inclusion

Inclusion has become a prominent topic in recent years, especially when it comes to leadership.

If inclusion can be described as how much each person feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued in an organization and as a team member, what are the leadership qualities that encourage this to happen?

Sherrie Haynie, Director of US Professional Services for The Myers-Briggs Company, lists eight components that make up a working definition of inclusive leadership attributes. They are:

- Seeking diverse perspectives
- Flexibility
- Empathy
- Emotional intelligence
- Openness/transparency
- Awareness of personal bias
- Leading for team trust and engagement
- Leveraging the value of differences to support effectiveness

“Inclusive leaders display these behaviors and traits on a daily basis,” she says, “and actively work to reduce or eliminate actions that detract from them.”<sup>7</sup>

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7. Sherrie Haynie, “To Be an Inclusive Leader, You Must Understand and Respect Personality Preferences,” The Myers-Briggs Company ([themyersbriggs.com](https://www.themyersbriggs.com)) blog, posted March 17, 2023.

## Why be inclusive?

Research by McKinsey & Company found that:

- Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams are 25% more likely to have above-average profits than those in the lowest quartile.
- Companies in the top quartile for ethnic diversity on their executive teams are 36% more likely to have above-average profits than those in the lowest quartile.<sup>8</sup>

But, in its 2019 study, Gartner found that:

- Only 31% of employees agree that their leaders promote an inclusive team environment.
- Only 36% of diversity and inclusion (D&I) leaders report that their organization has been effective at D&I initiatives.
- 80% of organizations rate themselves as ineffective at developing a diverse and inclusive leadership bench.<sup>9</sup>

Two other points for leaders to consider:

### Decision quality

Research shows that the more diverse the input is during decision-making, the better the eventual decision will be.<sup>10</sup> Note that this is not about making more “right” decisions or fewer “wrong” decisions. It’s about making better-quality decisions consistently. It’s about making better-informed decisions.

With a greater range of perspectives and experiences to draw from, a diverse group provides richer data with which to make a decision—but this only works if the leader or decision-maker elicits those diverse perspectives and listens to them.

In other words, the benefits of diversity materialize only when those diverse perspectives are fully included. The mere presence of diversity is not enough. This is why inclusion has become a core leadership quality.

### Generational impact

Generation Y and Generation Z value workplace inclusion very highly. For many of them, inclusion isn’t a tool to be used calculatingly for economic gain—it’s a moral imperative, something that should be practiced regardless. People who have been raised in a highly connected world want or expect more empathy from leaders. They’re more likely to seek workplaces where everyone has a voice. It’s a message that leaders must respond to if they are to attract and retain top talent from these generations.

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8. [McKinsey & Company, “Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters.”](#)

9. [Gartner, “3 Steps to Sustainable Diversity and Inclusion Strategies.”](#)

10. [Cloverpop, White Paper: Hacking Diversity with Inclusive Decision-Making.](#)

## Five challenges of inclusive leadership

What else do organizational leaders need to be aware of on their journey toward inclusion? Here are five challenges to inclusive leadership from Dr. Rachel Cubas-Wilkinson, Head of Consultancy in US Professional Services at The Myers-Briggs Company.<sup>11</sup>

### 1. Biases and predispositions

Everyone has biases. They're unconscious, and it's impossible to remove them completely. But biases draw people toward those who think similarly, especially in pressured situations. Biases push people toward easier processes and working methods. Diversity is more difficult because it brings differences into play.

In addition, in times of change, stress, or difficulty, many of us tend to revert back to what we know. And that includes leaders. The problem is that leaders often deal with high stress and high-stakes change, which pulls them further into their preferred ways of working and thinking. It pulls them away from divergent or diverse approaches.

### 2. Misunderstanding of diversity of thought

Diversity of thought is complex, there's no escaping that. Diversity of thought is about recognizing diversity of thinking styles, lived experiences, personality types, and values. These are all elements that are harder to see, and harder to get to know. Further, harnessing this level of diversity requires a sense of safety and belonging. Employees need to trust the leaders enough to feel comfortable sharing vulnerable parts of themselves without the risk of being hurt or dismissed or fielding other negative reactions. Understanding how people approach things and how they think takes a long time. Then, seeing how it manifests in a team at work requires an extra level of understanding. It's not the easiest undertaking, but it has great all-around benefits longer term.

### 3. Lack of specific skills

Inclusive leadership is a sought-after skill set, one that's becoming a critical capability. Not every leader has it, and it's far from being a given. But research by Werder shows that only one in three organizations has a strategy for training leaders to be inclusive.<sup>12</sup> Training and development are the best ways to teach leaders these essential inclusion skills.

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11. Rachel Cubas-Wilkinson, Nurturing Diversity of Thought Through Inclusive Leadership webinar, The Myers-Briggs Company ([themyersbriggs.com](http://themyersbriggs.com)).

12. [Claude Werder, "Developing Inclusive Leaders Is the Secret to Future Success."](#)

## 4. The self-perception trap

In addition to the statistics shown above, 33% of leaders lack confidence in the area of inclusion. This means that they do less than they could to make things more inclusive. According to Cubas-Wilkinson, the perception that they lack inclusive leadership skills robs some leaders of the confidence they need to get started. This perception also stops leaders when they need to take action to challenge the status quo, to seek out and integrate multiple perspectives, and to model behaviors that drive inclusion and inclusive cultures.

And for other leaders, the challenge is different again. Research shows how some leaders rate themselves more highly for inclusion than others rate them.<sup>13</sup> This complexity of leader self-perception challenges shows that a one-size-fits-all approach to developing inclusive leaders may not work. It would fail to account for the unique perceptual, attitudinal, and behavioral challenges leaders face.

## 5. Organizational constraints

Still another challenge is that leaders, even when well-intentioned and oriented to being more inclusive, often don't operate in a vacuum. They operate within an organization of systems, processes, and priorities. The culture and processes of an organization (what it rewards and what it neglects) can feel like insurmountable barriers when they don't support inclusion.

Take, for instance, an organization that says it supports inclusion but is known internally to heavily reward and expect rapid decision-making. A leader can feel the pressure to have all the answers and to make most, if not all, of the decisions quickly. Without the proper tools for helping diverse teams share problem-solving and decision-making more efficiently, a leader may simply choose not to seek out and invite others' input or share decision-making.

## Competencies for inclusive leaders

How can leaders become inclusive?

At the heart of inclusion is interest: leaders taking an active interest in, and having compassion for, the people in their group or team.

To understand what each team member or follower can bring, leaders must be able to ask questions and listen actively. This is why curiosity, openness, and empathy are among the core competencies identified by The Myers-Briggs Company for practicing inclusive leadership.

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13. [Juliet Bourke and Andrea Titus, "The Key to Inclusive Leadership."](#)

## 8 Core Competency Model for Inclusive Leadership



Source: The Myers-Briggs Company, Inclusive Leadership: Harnessing Diversity of Thought virtual workshop, 2020.

### What should leaders do?

Awareness of the challenges discussed above is a starting point. Inclusion is a people skill, as is leadership itself. Many leaders and managers have reached their positions without necessarily going through people-skills training, instead relying on technical or role-specific skills and experience.

But for someone to become effective in a leadership role, especially with respect to inclusion, specific training is critical. It's an area that's especially susceptible to unconscious bias. Our recommendation is to:

- Invest in training for all leaders and managers.
- Train for inclusive competencies and behaviors.
- Increase self-awareness.

Inclusive leadership comes from a highly developed skill set. It's not just an approach or an attitude.



# Connection

In the same way that diversity needs inclusion for it to work, inclusion is bound up in an understanding of, and connecting with, other people.

And leaders need to connect on multiple levels.

There is one-on-one connection with individuals within the team or group. There is communication to and connection with groups and teams. Senior colleagues require yet another type of connection. And last, outside stakeholders and community members often require connection as well.

Differences in personality and leadership styles will ultimately affect the quality of those relationships and connections, so making the effort to understand and act on those differences will pay dividends.

## Extraversion and Introversion

If we consider Extraversion and Introversion in the context of the MBTI® framework, people with a preference for Extraversion are likely to be more practiced at connecting than people with a preference for Introversion. It goes some way to explaining common perceptions that leaders prefer, or need to prefer, Extraversion.

This doesn't mean that those preferring Introversion can't connect. Nor does it mean that the quality of connections made by those preferring Extraversion is necessarily better. No type or preference has the monopoly on good connection, but some will certainly find it more natural to connect.

Additionally, many people find it easier to connect with people who share their personality preferences. Two people with the same third and last letters of their MBTI personality type (remember the conflict pairs mentioned earlier) are likely to connect more easily than people with one or two letters different in their MBTI type preferences.

One way to explore the complexity of connection from an E-I perspective is through the MBTI Step II™ assessment. The five facets within each preference show exactly where a person displays, for example, behaviors associated with Extraversion and where they show behaviors associated with Introversion.

“There’s been a lot of research into using type, and the basic statistics say, as a generalization, that about half of what we do or say in terms of our personality is essentially genetic,” says John Hackston, Head of Thought Leadership at The Myers-Briggs Company.<sup>14</sup>

“Half is our inborn type, and half is about our upbringing, the situation, organizational pressures on us, all those other things. What the MBTI Step II approach tries to do is to get into all that by looking at the flavor of your Extraversion or Introversion.”

The same is true for all the preferences and, therefore, whole type. The Step II assessment shows the unique ways a person expresses their MBTI type.

## Initiating connection

If we’re talking about connection and the impact of Extraversion and Introversion on a leader’s ability to connect, the E-I facet of Initiating–Receiving is a useful illustration of what can happen.

“People with an Initiating score, whether in a group of people or meeting new people for the first time, will go and initiate most conversations,” says Hackston. “They’re generally comfortable introducing themselves to new people and introducing other people to each other.

“People with a Receiving preference tend to wait to be introduced. They’re usually more comfortable with others initiating that contact. If they need to meet new people or they meet people at an event, they tend to go and talk with the people they know rather than people they don’t know, at least to begin with. They might not necessarily enjoy small talk, although they will do it when they need to.

“Most, but not all, extraverted people score on the Initiating side of the Extraversion preference,” he continues. “And most, but not all, introverted people have a Receiving score. But some Introverts are Initiating Introverts. They’re similar to Introverts in most ways, but they’re actually different in terms of initiating,” explains John. “In this way, when it comes to introducing or being introduced, their behaviors are actually more similar to those of people with extraverted preferences than those of their fellow Introverts. Initiating is considered ‘out-of-preference’ for someone with introverted preferences.”

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14. John Hackston, *World Introvert Day: Introversion In-Depth* webinar, The Myers-Briggs Company.

Such people preferring Introversion will feel comfortable striking up a connection and might even come across as quite extraverted. But one difference between connecting by those who prefer Extraversion and connecting by those who prefer Introversion is not so much “who does it better” but “what happens afterward.” For the person who prefers Introversion, the interaction will usually be more draining.

This could partly explain why leaders often have a preference for Extraversion. Leaders can expect many person-to-person demands on their time, and someone who prefers Extraversion has more energy for this volume of activity.

This isn't to say that those preferring Introversion should steer clear of leadership because of the volume of interaction. However, leaders who prefer Introversion should be aware of their preference so that they can strategically prioritize those interactions and actively create space to “recharge” with quiet time between face-to-face interactions where needed. Again, it comes back to active self-awareness.

## Completing a connection

Just because a person prefers Extraversion or feels comfortable connecting doesn't guarantee that a connection is meaningful or even complete. This is a learning point for leaders who need to make many connections.

“I've done a lot of work with leading faculty of universities,” says Martin Boulton, in “Connecting with the People You Lead,” “and if a leader is too extraverted in that kind of environment, a lot of followers who are academics and faculty members might be suspicious of the leader because they're too outgoing. They make environments very introverted. I have seen some highly outgoing, extraverted faculty leaders struggle to engage their introverted faculty members.”<sup>15</sup>

To be meaningful, a connection must work for both parties. It must satisfy some sort of need or preference on both sides.

“To flip it the other way,” Boulton continues, “I worked with a marketing organization where the leader was exceptional in problem-solving and decision-making strategy and understood where the business was heading and what it needed to do. But the rest of the organization was highly extraverted, and they almost felt like the leader was disconnected from them, even though they accepted or agreed with a lot of the ideas the leader had.

“That leader was almost shortchanging their own capacity because they weren't willing to flex out into being a bit more extraverted. It really comes back to ‘Who am I?’ ‘What's the environment that I'm leading in and who am I leading?’ and ‘What does this situation call for?’”

There's also an argument for active listening here.

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15. Martin Boulton, “Connecting with the People You Lead,” *Myers-Briggs Company Podcast*, September 28, 2022.

Those preferring Introversion may well listen more readily and then value being listened to when it's their time to say something. A person who prefers Extraversion and connects quickly with someone who prefers Introversion but moves on rapidly or doesn't pay attention in the moment risks not making a connection (even if they think they are making that connection). This is because the idea of a quality connection can be very different for those who prefer Introversion and those who prefer Extraversion.

Being a more effective, unbiased communicator is also a skill that leaders can develop and grow with training. The MBTI® Virtual Live Series, for example, includes training on understanding the Myers-Briggs® psychological framework and an add-on module for specifically using these insights actively for more effective communication.

## **Interpersonal relationships and situational leadership**

Leadership, then, is an interpersonal activity. A leader must be able to engage others and build awareness of interpersonal styles and needs.

Those needs can be assessed through a framework like the FIRO® (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation™) assessment, which explores interpersonal relationships and how people interact (for a quick FIRO overview, see the "Motivation" section).

"When you bring that together with the understanding of psychological personality, you're a lot more conscious and aware of what people naturally do," Boulton says. "There's a well understood model of leadership that's been around for decades called situational leadership, which is where leaders are not using one style or one approach. They think about what style works best for the situation, are aware of what they would naturally use as a style, and recognize when it is appropriate and when it is not.

"That level of understanding helps leaders or a new manager think, 'Okay, what do I bring to my management and leadership role? What might I overdo or not do enough of?'"

## **Dismantling unhelpful beliefs around leadership**

Also covered in the "Connecting with the People you Lead" podcast episode are underlying beliefs (or assumptions or preconceptions) about leadership. Whatever you call them, it makes sense to probe beliefs early in a leader's career to stop them hindering a leader's development or compromising the quality of their leadership. Here are three examples.

## **Belief #1: I must have all the answers**

“A common one I see in younger leaders,” says Boulton, “is, ‘If I’m the manager, I really should know the all the answers.’ And it’s like the belief: ‘If I don’t know the answers, then either I’m doing it wrong or I’m not up for leadership.’”

“No one person can have all the answers. And in fact, good leaders tap into their followers to help them get clear about what are the best answers and choices to make. Spending time with those new managers and asking, ‘What are the beliefs you bring and how do they shape what you’re doing? What do you value? What’s important in your life and career and how does that shape you?’ helps them get clear about how they will best lead.”

## **Belief #2: Being invulnerable is a strength**

“If you’re the manager, you can’t really show any vulnerability—this is another one,” Boulton says. “And by that, I mean looking concerned about something or looking puzzled without an answer. Or if a manager confronts a really challenging situation, like a restructure, or something in their personal life, I found, they will often feel they have to wear a shield that doesn’t show they are suffering or feeling vulnerable because followers will think this person’s not up for it.”

“In actual fact, it’s the opposite. Many followers will connect with the leader if the leader is human.”

## **Belief #3: I need to have charisma**

This was on John Kotter’s list of mistakes people make about leadership (see the “What Is Leadership?” section). He said: “People often think of ‘leadership’ in terms of personality characteristics, usually as something they call charisma. Since few people have great charisma, this leads logically to the conclusion that few people can provide leadership, which gets us into increasing trouble.”<sup>16</sup>

Boulton notes that people often think of a charismatic leader as a stereotypical Hollywood character who stands out front and rallies the troops.

“I remind people that there are many successful leaders throughout history and business who were more behind-the-scenes...I think some people almost discount themselves, not stepping into a leadership role because they assume you’ve got to be this very outgoing, flamboyant, entertaining leader. That’s not the case in every situation. In some situations, that can work against a leader.”

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16. [John P. Kotter, “Management Is \(Still\) Not Leadership.”](#)

## Connection is a two-way tango

There's no doubt that leaders are responsible for shaping organizational culture, creating inclusive environments, and building trust through psychological safety. It starts with them.

But leaders, by definition, need followers. And if there's one thing we've been promoting, it's the need for understanding and relationship building—which requires effort from both parties. After all, we want to create the conditions where employees thrive, seek to improve, and can develop their careers.

"If someone wants to stay [in their job and organization], I'd say, 'Okay, if you want to be successful with this leader, you've got to understand your leader psychologically,'" says Boulton. "You've got to observe them, study them, and see how they like information presented to them. What are their preferences when they're making decisions? What do they pay attention to when you want to interact or meet with them? How do they prefer to interact? Do they want to do it spontaneously, or do they want to have a meeting booked?"

"If you are willing to move in the direction of your leader's psychological needs, and they're doing the same for you, you actually have a very harmonious and cohesive way of a leader and a follower working with each other."

This is where developing self-awareness and sharing the results of self-awareness can yield incredible results.

When people know their own and each other's preferences and styles, there are no excuses. Awareness moves people from "I didn't know this," which can easily be defensive and involve finger pointing, toward "I know this, so what am I going to do with it?"

Self-awareness training provides the tools for people to take ownership of their part in the relationship with their leader. It's empowering and promotes responsibility.

"To expect the leader to do all the flexing," says Boulton, "might be nice for the follower but could mean that the leader hasn't really connected. The power dynamic in that relationship is that the leader has more influence as to what will happen with the follower's career."



# Motivation

In this section Lucy Bellec, Trainer with The Myers-Briggs Company, explores why it's essential for leaders to understand what motivates the people they lead.

## What is motivation and why does it matter?

We probably all have days at work when we feel energized and driven to get things done. We have a sudden burst of productivity, tackling projects small and large, and the fruits of our efforts leave us with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

And yet there are other days—hopefully less often—when inspiration just doesn't strike. We drag our feet, loath to get started on some uninviting task, perhaps putting it off for another time.

What we're experiencing here are the highs and lows of **motivation**, a natural human phenomenon with which we can all identify to some degree. Psychologists have defined motivation as “a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate behaviour.”<sup>17</sup>

In other words, motivation is what drives us to act. It is inherently goal-directed in that we're always motivated to do something, whether our end goal is to achieve a desirable outcome or indeed avoid an undesirable one.

As the definition above suggests, motivation can come from both within and outside ourselves. We call these two kinds of motivation “**intrinsic**” and “**extrinsic**” motivation. In extrinsic motivation, the outcome we seek is an external one: perhaps we want a bonus, a promotion, or just recognition from our boss. In intrinsic motivation, the outcome we seek is instead an internal one, like that feeling of enjoyment or achievement we get when we tackle a challenging project or learn a new skill.

In principle, psychologists generally believe that intrinsic motivation is more powerful than extrinsic motivation. In practice, we often do things out of both types of motivation. Almost all of us work to earn money to pay our bills, but in an ideal world,

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17. Craig C. Pinder, *Work Motivation in Organizational Behavior* (2nd ed.) (Hove, Sussex: Psychology Press, 2008).

we also enjoy what we do and go home feeling fulfilled at the end of a busy day. Importantly, the more motivated we are, the harder we work, the more satisfied we feel in our jobs, and the more committed we are toward our employers.

For leaders, knowing how to motivate followers is a crucial skill to boost performance and engagement. Leaders can't hope to gain influence and drive progress if they're unable to motivate followers to get behind a shared goal.

The problem, though, is that not everyone is motivated by the same things.

Some motivators are universal. For example, we all need money to pay for food and shelter. But beyond these bare necessities, what is desirable or enjoyable for one person might not be for another. Perhaps Luisa is driven by targets and KPIs, while Dan cares more about building relationships with his colleagues. Maybe Ravi is energized by spreadsheets and complex formulae, whereas Sara can't think of anything worse. Given this diversity, a one-size-fits-all approach to motivation simply won't work.

To make matters worse, even if we focused on just one person at a time, we still might not be able to figure out exactly what motivates them and how. It's probably a complex interaction of many different factors, ranging from the person's genes and upbringing to their current needs and goals. Motivation is a kind of "black box" where these varied inputs contribute to produce a person's behavior, but we never get to see the inner workings.

To put it another way, we might see that Ravi is energized by spreadsheets, but we can't see where that motivation is coming from, or how it gets translated into action.

The question becomes, how can a leader effectively motivate followers when they're all driven by different things and it isn't clear what works for who?

While we might never know the specific inner workings of motivation for each individual person, an understanding of personality differences can give us some insight. Research by The Myers-Briggs Company has found that different kinds of people are motivated by different things (the "what") and in different ways (the "how").

To delve into this deeper, we'll start by looking at the "what."

## What motivates different people?

Psychologists have proposed many different theories of what motivates people. These theories are often called content theories in that they relate to the content or object of motivation. Several of the most prominent content theories focus specifically on **needs**: they argue that we all have certain needs that we are motivated to satisfy. The stronger the need, the more motivated we are.

### Motivation and needs

Perhaps the best-known needs theory of motivation is **Maslow's hierarchy of needs**. Maslow suggested that we all have five universal, instinctual needs arranged in a hierarchy of importance. At the bottom of the hierarchy are basic physiological needs (such as those for food, water, and shelter) as well as safety needs. Above those are higher-order needs for belonging, esteem, and ultimately self-actualization.<sup>18</sup>



Importantly, Maslow believed that each of the lower-order needs must be satisfied before the higher-order needs can motivate. In other words, a person won't be motivated to seek belonging or esteem if they can't even meet their needs for food and safety.

In practice, what this might mean is that workers won't be motivated to excel in their jobs and strive for a shared goal if they're not earning enough money or are worried about their job security. Already this suggests an important starting point for leaders to reward followers: to ensure they're paid appropriately and treated fairly.

However, the practical usefulness of Maslow's hierarchy is quite limited if we want to understand what motivates people beyond these broad strokes. Maslow believed that the order of the hierarchy is the same for everyone, but what if belonging,

18. Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954).

esteem, and self-actualization are actually more or less important—or even mean different things—to different people, depending on their personality?

The FIRO® framework, developed by Will Schutz, offers an alternative perspective of human needs, rooted in these personality differences.<sup>19</sup>

According to the framework, all of us have certain physiological needs, but also three social needs that are just as essential: **Inclusion** (the need to belong and be involved in groups), **Control** (the need for influence and authority in decision-making), and **Affection** (the need for closeness and intimacy in one-on-one relationships).

Like Maslow’s hierarchy, the FIRO framework holds that these social needs are universal. We all have them to some degree. Crucially, however, this degree can differ from person to person, such that one need is more important than the others.

Put another way: different people might rank the needs differently in their own personal hierarchy.

We call the dominant need the **core driver**. This is what drives and motivates each person the most. It’s what we work hardest to establish and would be least willing to give up. For example, perhaps Dan’s core driver is Affection and he feels less motivated by Inclusion, and even less by Control. However, Control is what motivates Ravi the most. For Sara, it’s Inclusion.

Dan’s needs	Ravi’s needs	Sara’s needs
<b>Affection</b>	<b>Control</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>
<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Affection</b>	<b>Control</b>
<b>Control</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Affection</b>

Let’s explore what might this look like in real terms:

- Dan (core driver: Affection) would be most motivated when he can nurture close relationships with colleagues founded on mutual praise and support. He would likely be demotivated in a very formal, businesslike environment that prioritizes task completion at the expense of personal connection.
- Ravi (core driver: Control) would be most motivated when following well-defined structures and processes, with high standards of competence and clear lines of accountability. He would likely be demotivated in an environment where there is no clear agenda, too much ambiguity, or too little influence over decision-making processes.

19. Will Schutz, *FIRO: A Three-Dimensional Theory of Interpersonal Behavior* (New York: Rinehart, 1958).

- Sara (core driver: Inclusion) would be most motivated by team-oriented work that offers frequent opportunities for collaboration, consultation, and social contact. She would probably be demotivated by siloed working, where colleagues are largely independent with diverging areas of expertise.

What does this all mean for leaders? In an ideal world, leaders would know the core driver of each follower to make sure they're meeting followers' most important needs.

In practice, this is very rarely the case. Nevertheless, a valuable starting point is at least being aware that different people will be motivated by different needs—and that a leader's own personal needs will likely influence their leadership style too.

## Motivation and preferences

Another approach to understanding the content of motivation considers preferences.

The MBTI® framework says that we all have certain preferences for how we approach the world:

- How we get our energy (Extraversion [E] or Introversion [I])
- How we gather information (Sensing [S] or Intuition [N])
- How we make decisions (Thinking [T] or Feeling [F])
- How we organize our lives (Judging [J] or Perceiving [P])

Importantly, we are most intrinsically motivated when we can approach tasks and people in a way that aligns with our preferences. This helps us feel energized, engaged, and fulfilled.

In contrast, we might feel drained, disengaged—even stressed—if we're pressured to act in a way that doesn't align with our preferences.

For example:

- People with an **Extraversion** preference would be more motivated when they can collaborate with colleagues and dive into action on a variety of tasks. Yet this might feel overwhelming for those with an **Introversion** preference, who would rather be absorbed in a solo task requiring deep concentration.
- People with a **Sensing** preference would be more motivated when they can focus on tangible facts and data relating to practical problems in the present. This might fail to inspire those with an **Intuition** preference, though, since they're more engaged by the imagination and a big-picture vision for the future.

- People with a **Thinking** preference would be more motivated when they can employ logical reasoning and objective analysis to achieve optimal performance of a task. But this might leave cold those with a **Feeling** preference, who care more about using values and empathy to make a difference in people's lives.
- People with a **Judging** preference would be more motivated when they can draw up plans to tackle their projects in a methodical, structured way. In contrast, this might feel constraining for those with a **Perceiving** preference, who thrive off spontaneity and flexibility, working in an emergent way to get the job done.

A key takeaway here is that motivation might look different from the outside compared to how it's experienced on the inside.

Our definition of motivation above emphasized goal-directed action: motivation is about *doing things*, to achieve a predetermined goal. But within the MBTI framework, we can see the picture is a bit more complex.

Someone might not dive straight into action on a task or speak up much at a team meeting, but this doesn't mean they're not motivated or engaged. Perhaps they just have a preference for Introversion and want to spend time in reflection first to work out the right way forward.

Likewise, someone might not organize their projects methodically, scheduling subtasks in their diary, but this doesn't mean they're lazy or disorganized. Maybe they have a preference for Perceiving and want to keep open different possibilities for how to achieve the end goal.

So far, we've considered single preferences in isolation. Let's explore some examples where we put the preferences together to consider whole types:

- Imagine Ravi is an **ISTJ**, with preferences for Introversion, Sensing, Thinking, and Judging. Ravi would be more motivated when he can work by himself in a quiet, organized environment. He would especially enjoy using his Sensing preference to pay attention to detail, spot inaccuracies that others may overlook, and draw on his wealth of experience to improve practical processes.
- Imagine Dan is an **ENFP**, with preferences for Extraversion, Intuition, Feeling, and Perceiving. Given these opposite preferences, what is motivating for Ravi would likely be demotivating for Dan. Dan would thrive more in an open-plan, collaborative environment that offers variety and flexibility. He would especially enjoy drawing on his Intuition preference to explore different ideas and possibilities, finding creative solutions to people problems.

- Imagine Sara is an **ESFJ**, with preferences for Extraversion, Sensing, Feeling, and Judging. Like Ravi, she would be more motivated in an organized environment where she can draw on her past experience to improve practical processes. Yet, like Dan, she would also value opportunities for open discussion and collaboration with others. She would be especially motivated when she can use her Feeling preference, implementing her plans to bring the most positive impact to others.

In practice, it's unlikely a leader would know the MBTI preferences of all their followers. Even if they did, it wouldn't be possible to perfectly tailor each individual's tasks and environment to their preferences, such that they were all maximally motivated.

Nevertheless, what leaders can do is give them as much freedom as possible to work in a way that suits them, sometimes called "job crafting." Psychologists have found that when people are able to craft their jobs to suit their personalities, they are usually more motivated, more satisfied, and more productive.

## How to motivate different people

So far, we've looked at content theories to consider what motivates different people. But leaders also need to know how to motivate different people, despite their diverse needs and preferences.

Psychologists draw on **process theories** to explain this process of motivation. Think back to the black box we considered above, with all its varied inputs that somehow interact to produce behavior. Process theories seek to explain what's going on inside the black box—even if we'll never get to see its inner workings directly.

Many process theories share the idea that motivation is essentially a decision about whether to invest effort toward a particular goal. This decision might be quite straightforward if we've chosen the goal ourselves, since we'd presumably choose one that already aligns with our needs and preferences.

The problem, though, is that we're not always able to choose our goals for ourselves. Instead, goals are often dictated by the organization's broader strategy for what it wants to achieve. So, how can leaders inspire followers to invest in the organization's goal, such that it becomes a shared goal?

## How to inspire motivation

Hoping to address this question, one of the most prominent process theories is Porter and Lawler's **expectancy theory**.<sup>20</sup>

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20. Lyman W. Porter and Edward E. Lawler, *Managerial Attitudes and Performance* (Homewood, IL: R. D. Irwin, 1968).

In its simplest form, expectancy theory argues that people will decide to invest effort toward a goal if they (a) believe the goal is attainable, (b) expect their performance to lead to certain outcomes, and (c) find those outcomes desirable or rewarding. Put another way, motivation comes down to three key questions :



If these are the questions followers are asking themselves, then this suggests an analogous set of questions that leaders must ask themselves:



Importantly, motivation can fall at any one of these hurdles. If leaders set far-fetched goals that are exciting at first but impossible to achieve, then they likely won't sustain motivation for long. Followers will quickly see their effort is futile. Similarly, if good performance doesn't lead to outcomes in the way that followers expect (e.g., exceeding targets doesn't lead to a bonus), again they might decide to withdraw their effort.

For our purposes, the third question is perhaps the most pertinent—and the most challenging because we've seen already that different followers will find different outcomes rewarding. For some, just working on a task might be rewarding enough in itself if it aligns with their preferences and is therefore intrinsically motivating. Others might need a bit more influencing to see the value in a goal and therefore invest their effort.

Within the MBTI framework, the preference pairs of Sensing–Intuition (SN) and Thinking–Feeling (TF) are most relevant to this challenge:

- **Sensing–Intuition** relates to the information people need to see the value of a proposed goal. People with a Sensing preference will want to know the facts, see the evidence, and understand how the goal will meet the organization's present, practical needs. On the other hand, people with an Intuition preference will want to see the big picture, consider different ideas, and understand how the goal fits in with the broader conceptual vision of the organization's work.

- **Thinking-Feeling** relates to the factors people consider when deciding whether to invest effort in a goal. People with a Thinking preference will employ logical principles and objective reasoning to understand the cause-and-effect relationship between the goal and its expected outcomes. On the other hand, people with a Feeling preference will employ personal values and empathy to understand the subjective impact the proposed goal will have on themselves and others around them.

Understanding these differences suggests some practical influencing tips for leaders to motivate followers to invest effort in their leader's goals. For example:

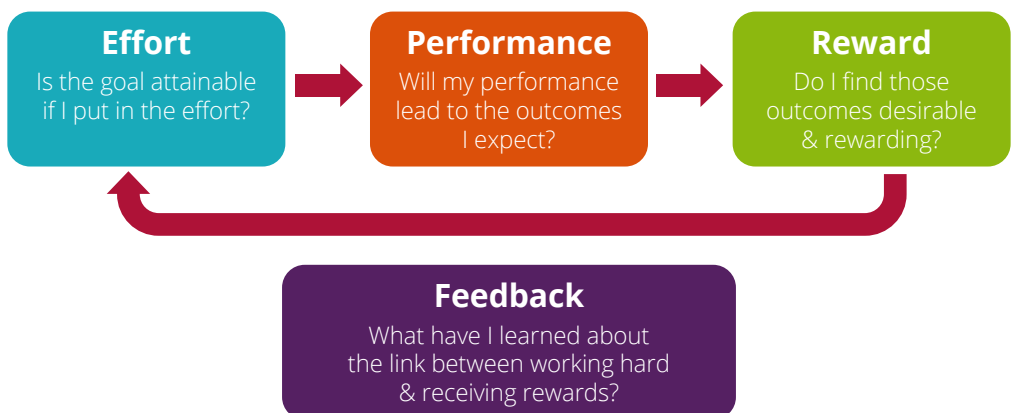
- When influencing someone like Ravi (who has preferences for Sensing and Thinking), be sure to state the facts, speak in clear, specific language, and present logical arguments to show how the goal will bring tangible benefits.
- This approach probably won't work as well with someone like Dan, who instead has preferences for Intuition and Feeling. With him, be sure to present the big-picture thinking, create space for him to share his ideas and concerns, and appeal to values to show how the proposed goal will have a positive impact on people.

As we saw above, leaders probably won't know the preferences of all their individual followers. But being able to adapt their influencing style to appeal to different preferences is essential for inspiring people to invest effort toward leaders' goals—even if followers don't find them intrinsically motivating.

## How to sustain motivation

A final important element for us to consider is the process by which to sustain motivation over time. It's all very well motivating followers to work hard toward a goal, but what about the next goal, and the next?

To address this question, when Porter and Lawler proposed their expectancy theory, they included a feedback loop where positive messages and rewards that employees receive for their performance will reinforce future motivation. In other words, each time we receive recognition for the effort we've invested toward a goal, the more likely we are to work hard on the next goal.



What this means practically is that taking the time as a leader to recognize followers' hard work and give feedback on their performance will help reinforce their motivation over time. Yet, again, this might look different to different people depending on their personality.

Within the MBTI framework, the preference pair of Thinking–Feeling is most relevant here:

- People with a Thinking preference typically want recognition only at the end of a project when they've delivered the final output and excelled in their performance. They're especially motivated by tangible, extrinsic measures of success, such as a pay rise, bonus, or promotion. Yet they're also intrinsically motivated by a desire for mastery and expertise.
- On the other hand, people with a Feeling preference usually want appreciation throughout a project, to be sure that their efforts and contributions aren't going unnoticed. While they wouldn't turn down monetary rewards, they are more motivated by intrinsic rewards—especially by knowing they've made a difference to others' lives.

Again, this suggests some practical tips for how to show recognition and give feedback to different people:

- With someone like Ravi (who has a Thinking preference), wait until the end of the project to give him recognition. Don't praise him simply for doing his job, as this might feel insulting. Instead, acknowledge his competence and where he's excelled while also giving specific, constructive criticism so he knows what he can improve to perform even better next time.
- With someone like Sara (who instead has a Feeling preference), give support and encouragement throughout the project, so she knows her contribution is valued. Small tokens and gestures can go a long way. Don't be too task focused or critical when giving her feedback, but instead show how she's valued as an individual, and praise her for the positive impact she's had on others.

While leaders won't always know for certain whether someone has a Thinking or Feeling preference, it is possible to spot clues over time and see how well they respond to different kinds of recognition and feedback.

It's important to think of this feedback stage as part and parcel of a project—not just an optional add-on. After all, rewarding followers for their effort will be crucial to reinforcing their motivation for the next goal.



# Change

In her *Psychology of Change in the Hybrid Workplace* webinar, Dr. Rachel Cubas-Wilkinson explores how change has itself changed.<sup>21</sup>

She notes that although change has always been with us, the nature of change is different now—and it has a greater impact.

“Change is coming at us at a faster speed than before, and it’s requiring us to adapt and to change at faster speeds than we used to,” says Cubas-Wilkinson in the webinar. “There’s an entire body of research out there that talks about the fact that, originally, organizations were built and management was designed to bring about scalability and stability, and that no longer works in the modern organization because we can’t just make small incremental changes and expect to keep up.”

People and organizations are now living and working with:

- Increasing amounts of change.
- Increasing speed of change.
- Increasing uncertainty.

This is being described as disruptive change.

## Disruptive change

John Kotter puts it like this: “We are in ‘disruptive change,’ a more rapid and complex changing environment. As a result, there is a growing gap between the amount, rate and complexity of change, and our human capacity to keep up.”<sup>22</sup>

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21. Rachel Cubas-Wilkinson, “Psychology of Change in the Hybrid Workplace,” *The Myers-Briggs Company* (themyersbriggs.com) blog, posted March 22, 2022.

22. [John P. Kotter, “Management Is \(Still\) Not Leadership.”](#)

This “human capacity” is a key consideration. Change—specifically, disruptive change like what we’re encountering now—has a psychological impact on people, which leads us to two points:

- How can leaders respond to change?
- What can leaders do for their people in times of change?

## The case for well-being

Here are four factors that have an impact on the human capacity for change:

- Uncertainty
- Burnout
- Well-being challenges
- Change fatigue

Gallup found that fewer than one in four US employees feel strongly that their organization cares about their well-being.<sup>23</sup>

And yet, well-being has a significant impact on key performance indicators. This means that low well-being contributes to fatigue, stress, demotivation, reduced morale, disengagement, absenteeism, and quiet quitting.

For this reason, developing employee well-being strategies is one of our four recommendations for dealing with disruptive change. Such well-being strategies include:

- Raising awareness of what constitutes well-being.
- Normalizing mental health discussions.
- Offering flexibility at work (location, times).
- Providing self-awareness training (to learn about stressors, for example).
- Developing human-centered leaders.

The last of these points is shown to have disproportionately positive results regarding employee well-being.

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23. [Jim Harter, “Leaders: Ignore Employee Wellbeing at Your Own Risk.”](#)

## The shortcomings of “vision”

One quality that people often use to define a leader or leadership is vision. And though vision is necessary to prompt a direction, a heavy reliance on vision is something leaders need to be wary of.

In an article for Harvard Business Review, Gianpiero Petriglieri writes, “This enchantment with vision, I believe, is the manifestation of a bigger problem: a disembodied conception of leadership. Visions hold our imagination captive, but they rarely have a positive effect on our bodies.”<sup>24</sup>

The problem with vision is that it’s abstract. It’s distant and remote, which might excite some people—but not everyone. Drawing on MBTI® type theory, we’d say that people with a preference for Intuition are more likely to think in vision terms than those with a preference for Sensing.

But more people in the world have a preference for Sensing (67.5%) than Intuition, which means most people broadly depend on concrete data and information.<sup>25</sup>

And remember, this is true for regular situations. A major change or crisis that undermines stability and increases stress may well reduce the capacity for abstraction of even types who prefer Intuition.

“When a leader’s appeal rests on a vision alone,” Petriglieri continues, “leadership is not whole. And the limitations of such visionary leadership become painfully obvious in times of crisis, uncertainty, or radical change. Take the coronavirus pandemic. No one had anything like it in their ‘Vision 2020.’ Crises always test visions, and most don’t survive. Because when there’s a fire in a factory, a sudden drop in revenues, a natural disaster, we don’t need a call to action. We are already motivated to move, but we often flail. What we need is a type of holding, so that we can move purposefully.”

If change is becoming more disruptive, challenging, and maybe even more crisis-like, the visionary model will lack the human-centred element that positively affects well-being.

## Empathy and holding

Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott developed the concept of “holding” in his paediatric work and it is this concept that Petriglieri referred to.<sup>26</sup> In times of change or crisis, leaders “contain and interpret” the situation to support their people. It’s a form of psychological holding.

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24. [Gianpiero Petriglieri, “The Psychology Behind Effective Crisis Leadership.”](#)

25. Isabel Briggs Myers, Mary H. McCaulley, Naomi L. Quenk, and Allen L. Hammer, *MBTI® Manual for the Global Step I™ and Step II™ Assessments* (4th. ed.), (Sunnyvale, CA: The Myers-Briggs Company, 2018), 108.

26. [Donald W. Winnicott, cited in Petriglieri, “The Psychology Behind Effective Crisis Leadership.”](#)

Such holding can happen only if leaders are tuned in to the emotional needs of their followers. And this can happen only if they understand how people react to change.

A leader's response to change can't be based just on what that change means for the organization. Their response must account for what change means for people, too—and people's priorities will probably be less about the organization than their own personal situation, even though they're obviously connected. In times like that, people want reassurance more than vision.

## Openness and trust

Agility is one of the five qualities that Cameron Nott believes make a great leader (see the "Active Self-Awareness" section).<sup>27</sup> Change is perhaps where agility comes to the fore most obviously. But how can a leader improve agility?

Being open to new information and points of view that challenge the leader is one way of achieving this. The dangers of a closed-minded approach are highlighted by research into business failures.

In *The Strategic Advantage of Effective Conflict Management* white paper, conflict management experts Kenneth W. Thomas and Dr. Gail Fann Thomas cite a study of business failures conducted by Dartmouth professor Sydney Finkelstein and his team.<sup>28</sup>

The failures—51 in all—came from highly unsuccessful strategic decisions. Professor Finkelstein and his team found that the organizations had stifled dissenting views, allowed bad decisions to be made, and dismissed the evidence that things were going badly.

But the biggest surprise was that the organizations and CEOs all had strong track records of success—and this was precisely the problem. The leaders were so used to being successful that they shut off dissenting information in new situations that didn't fit their preconceptions. Riskier situations featuring change, mergers, innovation, surprise competitor moves, and so on were especially problematic.

Finkelstein recommends a culture of openness and open-mindedness to prevent this from happening. He encourages an organizational culture where people can safely tell each other the truth, as well as creating multiple arenas for debate, feedback, and critical thinking.

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27. Cameron Nott, "The Psychology of Leadership," *The Myers-Briggs Company Podcast*, November 7, 2023.

28. Kenneth Thomas and Gail Fann Thomas, *The Strategic Advantage of Effective Conflict Management* white paper, The Myers-Briggs Company ([themyersbriggs.com](http://themyersbriggs.com)).

## Summary

In this ebook, we've explored why psychology is a must for leadership development and seen five areas that are key to helping people become better leaders.



### Active self-awareness

- The superfood of great leadership
- The need for objectivity



### Inclusion

- Why be inclusive
- 5 challenges of inclusive leadership
- Competencies for inclusive leaders



### Connection

- Extraversion and Introversion
- Interpersonal relationships and situational leadership
- Dismantling unhelpful beliefs
- Connection is a two-way tango



### Motivation

- What motivation is and why it matters
- What motivates different people (needs and preferences)
- How to motivate different people (process theories)



### Change

- Disruptive change
- The shortcomings of "vision"
- Empathy and holding
- Openness and trust

If you want more information, resources, or help with developing leaders, or you want to talk about any of the leadership topics or assessments covered in this ebook, get in touch today.

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