

# The Ambiguous Relationship between Leadership and Management

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## Abstract

The relationship between leadership and management is often described as a contrast, but this clear division is becoming less suitable in today's organizational context. This article examines the specific roles and characteristics of both areas, highlighting their connections and the need for an integrated approach. Leadership is seen as the ability to guide change, inspire people, and encourage innovation, while management focuses on operational efficiency, resource organization, and process stability. By analyzing established theories, the article shows that it is possible to move beyond the traditional separation, emphasizing the importance of developing professionals who can combine strategic vision with managerial skills. It argues that the success of modern organizations depends on their ability to integrate leadership and management in a balanced way, promoting a flexible, resilient, and forward-thinking organizational culture.

## Keywords

Leadership, Management, Organizational Culture

## 1. Introduction

In today's fast-paced and highly competitive business environment, the ability to seamlessly blend leadership and management skills is more important than ever. Organizations face unprecedented challenges that require both the visionary and motivational aspects of leadership and the structured, process-oriented approach of management. By understanding and leveraging the strengths of both, organizations can create a more resilient and adaptable framework that not only meets current demands but also anticipates future needs.

Effective leadership goes beyond merely guiding teams; it involves fostering a culture of innovation, trust, and continuous improvement. Similarly, effective

management is not just about maintaining order and efficiency but also about strategically aligning resources and processes to support the organization's long-term goals. The synergy between these two functions can drive significant improvements in organizational performance, employee engagement, and overall competitiveness.

As we delve deeper into the concepts of leadership and management, we will examine various theories and models that highlight their unique characteristics and interdependencies. We will also discuss practical strategies for developing and integrating these skills within organizational contexts, ensuring that leaders and managers are equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern business landscape.

## 2. Leadership and Management

The terms leadership and management are often used interchangeably. However, there is a need to clarify the differences and better define the peculiarities of each concept. Studies by R. Kreitner, A. Kinicki, and M. Buelens highlight the importance of a clear distinction between leadership and management for various practical and strategic reasons within an organization. According to the authors, this distinction allows for better selection of candidates with skills suited to specific roles, optimization of group dynamics and productivity (as the leader focuses on instilling motivation and vision, while the manager focuses on organization and efficiency), and addressing changes and uncertainties with the support of the leader to inspire adaptation and innovation, and the manager to implement changes systematically and controlled (Kreitner et al., 2004). A study by J.P. Kotter on successful American companies found that a large percentage of respondents believed there were too many managerial skills compared to leadership skills, leading to the conclusion that many companies were over-managed and under-led, emphasizing the importance of a balance between practical skills and strategic vision (Kotter, 1990). R.L. Daft argues that today, organizations need effective leadership more than ever, which requires leaders to develop significant personal qualities alongside basic skills, such as planning, organizing, directing, and controlling (Daft, 2002). According to H. Mintzberg, these two concepts are not separate. Leadership is seen as a crucial aspect of management and as a skill that managers can use to improve organizational effectiveness. This approach not only challenges the conventional view that considers management solely based on processes and procedures but also elevates the importance of the manager's personal qualities and relational skills. Furthermore, leadership should not be considered a separate skill but an integral part of effective management, capable of enriching managerial practice, making managers not only administrators of resources but also inspirers and motivators of their teams. Therefore, effective managers are those who integrate the strategic vision of leadership with the organizational and operational skills of management. This integration allows them to manage not only daily operations but also to inspire and guide teams towards achieving broader objectives

(Mintzberg, 1973). It becomes clear then that leadership cannot replace management but should be considered complementary to it. This consideration occurs in parallel with the need to balance the emphasis placed on leadership with adequate attention to managerial skills, which deserve recognition and appear indispensable for proper organizational functioning.

## 2.1. Leadership

Leadership is defined by G.P. Quaglino as the ability to influence and motivate others towards achieving common goals, emphasizing the importance of interaction and the relationship between leaders and team members, and highlighting the responsibility of leaders in creating an environment conducive to the personal and professional growth of group members (Quaglino, 2004). According to W. Bennis, good leadership is also characterized by having a clear vision and the ability to communicate it effectively, transforming the leader into someone who gives meaning, capable of guiding towards the achievement of goals. The fundamental skills that define this form of leadership include the ability to establish a clear direction, create meaning through communication, build trust, and promote personal authenticity. Leadership is characterized by mutual and multidirectional influence among individuals who share a common goal and aspire to substantial changes (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). The process just described is active and collaborative, not unilateral or coercive, allowing leaders and team members to influence each other in an interdependent organizational environment (Daft, 2018). In every organization, even in highly hierarchical organizations where top-down communication is prevalent, leaders can effectively create meaning and build trust by leveraging several strategic practices. The leaders can foster trust by demonstrating consistency between their words and actions, aligning individual roles with broader organizational goals, and showing integrity even within rigid structures. Regular opportunities for feedback can make a significant difference in how trusted and valued people feel, even if decision-making remains centralized. Moreover, symbolic gestures of openness, such as recognizing contributions across all levels and encouraging informal dialogue, help humanize leadership and reduce psychological distance. These actions, although small, can help reshape organizations into more engaged and meaningful workplaces (Heyden et al., 2016). People involved in leadership dynamics orient themselves towards significant changes rather than maintaining existing conditions, with goals that are shared and not imposed. A key element of leadership is the belief that the qualities required to be a good leader are the same as those needed to be a good employee, with frequent role exchanges demonstrating that leadership can emerge at any level of the group. Effective leadership, therefore, is characterized by a collaborative process where the responsibilities for change are shared, generating increased commitment and mutual involvement towards common goals. The combination of behaviors, skills, and traits is often what can define a successful leader in the modern practice of management and organizational development. Gary Yukl highlights some main

categories: task-oriented, relationship-oriented, and change-oriented behaviors. Task-oriented behaviors include actions aimed at completing tasks efficiently and reliably, such as assigning specific tasks, maintaining determined performance standards, encouraging adherence to standardized procedures, emphasizing the importance of meeting deadlines, and coordinating activities among different team members. Relationship-oriented behaviors focus on increasing mutual trust, cooperation, job satisfaction, and group identification. This happens by listening to employees, consulting with them on important issues, accepting suggestions, and treating team members as equals. Finally, change-oriented behaviors focus on understanding the environment, seeking innovative ways to adapt, and implementing significant changes in strategies, products, or processes (Yukl, 2012).

The key competencies for effective leadership, according to Peter Northouse, are problem-solving skills, social judgment skills, and knowledge. Problem-solving skills are essential for a leader in addressing new and complex organizational challenges. These skills include identifying relevant problems, gathering data, re-interpreting situations, and developing plans to find solutions. Leaders must consider various factors in problem-solving, such as the timing of implementation, short- and long-term goals, and external implications that may affect the effectiveness of proposed solutions.

Social judgment skills are essential interpersonal competencies for understanding people and social systems, important for addressing unique problems in organizations. These skills include perspective-taking, which allows leaders to understand others' attitudes towards problems or solutions, increasing sensitivity to different perspectives. Behavioral flexibility enables leaders to adapt their behavior based on these understandings, remaining open and ready to change to respond effectively to evolving situations (Northouse, 2015).

In the competency model, knowledge is essential for using problem-solving skills in organizations, integrating the accumulation of information and complex mental schemas. Knowledge comes from experience and allows leaders to tackle complex problems and adapt strategies for organizational change. Effectiveness depends on the leader's ability to combine these three skills. Finally, regarding personality traits related to an effective leader, we highlight some of these. A high level of energy and good stress tolerance help managers handle the fast pace and long working hours, as well as facilitate the management of stressful interpersonal situations. Self-esteem drives leaders to undertake difficult tasks and set challenging goals, showing greater initiative in solving problems and promoting changes. People with a strong internal locus of control believe that the events in their lives are more a result of their own actions rather than chance or uncontrollable forces. This trait is associated with greater managerial effectiveness, as such individuals take more initiative and are more proactive in planning and solving problems. Emotional maturity includes self-awareness, self-control, emotional stability, and a lower tendency to be defensive. Emotionally mature people tend to maintain more cooperative relationships and are less self-centered, showing greater consid-

eration for others. Personal integrity implies consistency between behaviors and stated values; people with integrity are honest, ethical, and reliable (Yukl, 2013). Integrity is crucial for maintaining the trust of team members and for obtaining cooperation and support. Peter Drucker also emphasizes the importance of possessing the trait of effectiveness, which is the ability to identify and pursue the right actions, rather than merely focusing on efficiency, which is about the method of execution. He also emphasized the trait of personal management, promoting the importance for leaders to develop and capitalize on their strengths and values to effectively guide their groups (Drucker, 1954). Changes in societies, markets, customers, competition, and technology worldwide force organizations to clarify their values, develop new strategies, and learn new ways of operating. Often, the most difficult task for leaders in implementing change is mobilizing people throughout the organization to perform adaptive work. Adaptive work is required when our deep-seated beliefs are challenged, and we need to modify our mental models, thinking patterns, and behaviors to adapt to organizational changes.

Mobilizing an organization to adapt its behaviors to thrive in new business environments is a capability importance of the leader, difficult to apply but necessary. For most senior executives, providing leadership and not just authoritative competence is extremely difficult. To achieve change, executives must break a long-standing behavior pattern, providing leadership in the form of solutions, and using their authority and expertise in problem-solving, when the focus should actually be on people. Solutions to adaptive challenges do not lie in the hands of the executive but in the collective intelligence of employees at all levels, who must be seen as interdependent resources. Adaptive change by its nature is accompanied by a sense of distress for those going through it, but rather than meeting the expectation of providing answers, leaders must ask difficult questions. Instead of orienting people to their current roles or protecting them from external threats, leaders must disorient them so that new relationships can develop. Instead of placating conflicts, leaders must bring issues to the surface with the goal of resolving them (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997).

Organizations within this complex landscape should adopt and develop new leadership models, focusing on creating new professional figures capable of performing the functions of designing, educating, and supporting, which outline the role that future leaders should assume. Traditionally, leadership is seen as a characteristic of those in command positions, capable of exerting influence over others. However, an innovative view of the leader identifies them as a designer, a figure who, while remaining in the background, possesses a systemic understanding of events and designs the tools and strategies that the organization will adopt. A common belief about leadership is that being an expert in a specific field can facilitate leading other specialists, but this is not necessarily true, as expertise in a particular field does not automatically ensure the ability to effectively guide others in learning. To build a highly effective system, it is not essential to have leaders who master every aspect of the system, but who are motivated to develop others'

abilities and are not obsessed with proving they are always the best, as this attitude can paralyze the overall effectiveness of the system (De Dominicis, 2009). When leadership is no longer associated with greatness and public visibility, it becomes easier to see leadership opportunities and recognize the leadership of the people you interact with every day. Often, many true leaders operate behind the scenes. Leadership that produces great results often starts small. In fact, the true impact of a leader often does not lie in the visible exercise of power, but in the ability to subtly manage dynamics and highly skilled people. The leader, therefore, transforms from a directive commander to a wise facilitator, who knows when to intervene and when to leave room for personal autonomy. Leadership becomes a subtle art of balancing between guiding and allowing self-management, between influencing and leaving autonomy (Quaglino, 2004). Henry Mintzberg highlights that the conductor, a professional figure he uses to explain these modes, although in a prominent position, works best when he can infuse direction through an almost invisible impact, allowing the orchestra members to fully express their potential. This covert or hidden leadership style is remarkable not only in the world of music but in all organizations where professionals require respect for their autonomy and competence. In these situations, an effective leader must be able to guide without seeming to guide, to influence without oppressing, and to inspire without overwhelming (Mintzberg, 1998). Thus, following this approach, a leader must not only be an excellent communicator and a skilled decision-maker but also a deep connoisseur of human and organizational dynamics; they must know when it is time to step into the spotlight and when it is better to remain in the shadows, allowing others to take credit for shared victories. This ability to manage from behind the scenes, while maintaining an influential presence, is the essence of leadership that truly values and promotes the potential of each member of the organization.

A compelling historical example of leadership that successfully applied the qualities described above is that of Adriano Olivetti, who led the Italian company Olivetti during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Olivetti envisioned a model of leadership that integrated economic performance with social responsibility and promoted a workplace culture grounded in mutual respect, trust, and shared values. Rather than relying only on top-down authority, Olivetti implemented cooperative management structures, created internal publications to facilitate open communication, and involved workers in the company's strategic direction. He also invested heavily in education, culture, and welfare systems for employees and the broader community, demonstrating his belief that leadership was not only about guiding an organization, but about elevating human potential. His leadership was characterized by emotional intelligence, vision, integrity, and a strong sense of purpose, aligning perfectly with modern theories of transformational and servant leadership. The Olivetti case shows how it is possible to balance hierarchy with empowerment, and how meaningful, trust-based leadership can drive both innovation and social progress (Gallino, 2014). To be effective leaders, it is essential to have a

genuine interest in the growth of people and the development of their potential. Rather than imposing methods or explaining reality, a true leader should accompany others on a shared journey of discovery and understanding. Curiosity is essential in this process: a leader who thinks they already know everything leaves no room for discovery, both personal and collective. Finally, a truly effective leader is one who acts as an assistant, building shared visions and ways of interpreting the world together with others, seeking the truth in a way collaborative, rather than asserting it unilaterally. This approach to leadership is significantly more challenging and allows for mutual enrichment. The true satisfaction of leadership is achieved when focusing on the growth and development of the organization. Through the functions of “designing, educating, and assisting,” an essential service is provided to the organization, allowing it to thrive and avoid stagnation (De Dominicis, 2009).

## 2.2. Management

Management can be defined as the process of achieving organizational goals effectively and efficiently, which includes planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling organizational resources (Daft, 2018). According to A. Zaleznik, management is an approach oriented towards rationality and control, with a focus on problem-solving and operational efficiency. Managers are seen as professionals who coordinate and balance resources, structure organizations, and maintain internal order, aiming to optimize the execution of processes and the management of daily activities (Zaleznik, 1977). Management is defined by J. P. Kotter as the set of processes that maintain order and stability within organizations. These processes include activities such as planning, budgeting, organizing, controlling, and problem-solving. The goal of management is to ensure that daily operations are carried out efficiently and according to established rules and plans. The manager is responsible for organizing resources, personnel, and capital, with the aim of achieving predictable and measurable results. Their work is oriented towards creating stability and order through the effective management of daily operations; a task that can be best accomplished through the use of certain skills that the manager must possess. Managerial skills have a direct impact on organizational performance, highlighting their importance in ensuring organizational effectiveness in an increasingly dynamic and unpredictable environment (Kotter, 1990). In this context, we can outline three main pillars: interaction with others, information processing, and decision-making. Effective managers develop and maintain robust relationships that positively influence their leadership and ability to motivate the group, and by analyzing and synthesizing collected information, they can make informed strategic decisions. The decision-making process involves careful evaluation of options and risk management, followed by the implementation and monitoring of selected strategies. Excelling in these areas allows managers to successfully guide their groups through organizational complexities (Ramzi et al., 2021).

The role of the manager is to be a proactive facilitator in innovation and adaptation, essential for guiding the organization through changes and uncertainties, with an emphasis on both reactive and proactive approaches to management for success in the modern business environment (Ulrich, 2020). Strategic flexibility is crucial for effectively adapting to changing market conditions, allowing leaders to modify strategies in response to new information or external changes. These dynamics not only fuel innovation but also ensure that it is effectively integrated into the organization's overall strategy, significantly contributing to sustainable growth and long-term competitiveness (Burgelman & Sayles, 1986). Henry Mintzberg describes the role and skills of a manager through five different "managerial mindsets" that he uses to highlight the mental approaches or ways of thinking that a manager must adopt to manage effectively in various areas of their work. Managing Self indicates the reflective capacity of the manager who must be able to self-assess, reflect on their experiences, and learn from them to identify areas for improvement, recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and develop greater self-awareness. Managing Organizations indicates the analytical mindset of the manager who must have the ability to analyze and deconstruct complex organizational issues into more manageable processes, using data, analytical tools, and conceptual models to understand and effectively organize work. This also includes the ability to identify trends, foresee the implications of different strategic choices, and make informed decisions. Managing Context emphasizes the importance of the ability to operate effectively in different cultural and environmental contexts, understanding and adapting to diverse realities. Additionally, they must be able to adapt and react strategically to local and global conditions, integrating a holistic view of the world into their plans and strategies. Managing Relationships highlights the collaborative ability of the manager in creating and managing effective relationships within and outside the organization, facilitating an environment where information flows freely and people feel valued and involved. Finally, Managing Change involves the ability to promote, manage, and balance change within the organization, balancing innovation and continuity. These characteristics represent, for Mintzberg, the key areas in which managers must be effective to lead their organizations to success. Initially, we defined them as mindsets to indicate that a good manager is not only characterized by a series of behaviors and actions but also by a way of thinking and systematically approaching organizational challenges. H. Mintzberg describes the complex role of the manager who integrates various dimensions of human and organizational behavior (Gosling & Mintzberg, 1998). He developed a theory that categorizes managerial roles into ten specific types: the figurehead, the leader, the liaison, the monitor, the disseminator, the spokesperson, the entrepreneur, the disturbance handler, the resource allocator, and the negotiator. These roles are grouped into three major categories: interpersonal, informational, and decisional. The first category is that of interpersonal roles, which include being a leader, maintaining relationships, and acting as a representative figure of the organization. The manager serves as a link between the

internal organization and the external world, as well as a motivator and manager of personnel (Mintzberg, 1989). The manager is the reference figure, representing the company and acting as the formal and legal symbol of the organization. They are also a leader when they motivate and inspire employees, manage group dynamics, assign tasks and responsibilities, and develop human capital through training and coaching. Leaders should act as facilitators, enabling group members to take initiative and experiment with new ideas (Ulrich, 2020). Leadership should also be ambidextrous, characterized by the ability to manage both incremental and radical innovation, promoting an environment that supports both induced and autonomous strategic initiatives. The manager acts as a link between their group and the rest of the world, both internal and external to the organization. Maintaining a network of contacts, facilitating cooperation, and ensuring the flow of information is part of this role. Moving on to the second category, that of informational roles, Mintzberg outlines the roles of the manager, which include the monitor, the disseminator, and the spokesperson. The monitor is responsible for collecting relevant information from both inside and outside the organization, monitoring performance and market trends. In the role of disseminator, the manager shares this information within the organization to ensure that everyone is informed and can make decisions based on updated data. As a spokesperson, the manager communicates externally, representing the organization and conveying policies, plans, and results to external stakeholders (Burgelman & Sayles, 1986). The third category is that of decisional roles, which begins with the role of the entrepreneur, where the manager acts as an agent of change, identifying opportunities and driving innovation. This is followed by the disturbance handler, who intervenes in crisis situations, and the resource allocator, who decides the distribution of personnel, capital, and other essential resources. Finally, the negotiator role involves the manager in crucial negotiations for the organization's interests. Mintzberg emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to management, which integrates the management of people, information, and decision-making responsibility. He considers management not only as the execution of mechanical functions but as a complex practice that requires intuition, adaptability, and a deep understanding of organizational dynamics. This model is crucial for understanding how managers can be effective in complex and dynamic environments, highlighting that management is as much an art as it is a science, with a strong emphasis on personal and interpersonal skills (Mintzberg, 1973).

### 2.3. An Integrated Vision between Leadership and Management

In this paragraph, we will compare the two concepts of leadership and management, previously analyzed in their characteristics and peculiarities, highlighting the points of contact and differences to arrive at an integrated vision. According to Bennis, the manager is someone who has a focused vision, deals with the “how,” aims for control, manages stability and the present; they administer, maintain, control, and have a short-term perspective. On the other hand, the leader is some-

one who has a broad vision, deals with the “what” and the “why,” thinks in terms of innovation and development, and has a long-term perspective (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). For J.P. Kotter, the distinction is between management, as the ability to deal with complexity, and leadership, as the force to tackle change. Management focuses on managing complexity, and establishing order and predictability through planning, organizing, and controlling. Leadership deals with managing change and preparing the organization to navigate through it (Kotter, 1990). J.C. Rost highlights the need to reconsider some commonly accepted “myths” regarding leadership and management. Firstly, he criticizes the “myth of leadership superiority,” which tends to overestimate the role of leadership compared to management. At the same time, the author challenges the negative perception of management as a function that would be totally ineffective without the significant contribution of leadership. Additionally, he contests the idea that management is an obsolete process, especially when compared to the growing importance attributed to leadership in modern organizations (Rost, 1991). In truth, the functions of management and leadership are complementary. Both are necessary for the success of an organization, especially in a complex and volatile business environment. Therefore, professionals who can effectively integrate management and leadership skills are particularly valuable in modern organizations, as they can navigate both daily complexity and promote innovative change. This highlights the importance of a balanced and integrated approach between management and leadership for the success and sustainability of an organization in a rapidly changing environment (Kotter, 2001). According to A. Zaleznik, it becomes vital for the organization to implement an integrated vision of leadership and management, as it combines the need for control and order with that of innovation and growth. This balance is fundamental for the success of organizations (Zaleznik, 1977). Finally, according to Mintzberg, the clear distinction between leadership and management is not only artificial but also potentially harmful to organizational effectiveness, highlighting how these two functions are both fundamental and closely intertwined. Mintzberg criticizes the idealization of the leader as a charismatic and visionary hero, separate and distinct from the manager, who is often seen as a mere executor of administrative and routine tasks and proposes a new model he defines as “holistic management,” where the effective manager is one who integrates leadership skills into their daily management practice (Kotter, 1990).

Managers, according to Mintzberg, should develop the ability to see beyond processes and routines, incorporating a strategic vision that motivates and inspires their groups, while maintaining a clear focus on operational efficiency and effectiveness. The integration of these two dimensions creates a synergy that enhances human potential within organizations, promoting a culture that is both high-performing and innovative (Mintzberg, 2009). This integrated vision challenges the tendency to compartmentalize leadership and management into separate compartments, instead proposing that leadership skills are an intrinsic component of good management. This integration not only increases managerial ef-

fectiveness but also facilitates smoother navigation through change processes, essential for survival and success in an ever-evolving global market.

### 3. Conclusion

In an ever-evolving business environment, the interplay between leadership and management is not a question of opposition but one of integration. The analysis presented highlights that while leadership provides vision, inspiration, and the ability to navigate change, management ensures stability, operational efficiency, and the structured execution of strategic objectives.

Experts such as Kotter, Mintzberg, and Bennis have shown how the most effective professionals are those who can fluidly transition between leadership and management roles, depending on the needs of their organizations. The modern leader is no longer just a visionary figure but must also possess the managerial skills necessary to translate strategy into tangible results. Likewise, the manager must embrace leadership qualities, fostering innovation and adaptability within structured processes.

The integrated vision proposed by Mintzberg emphasizes that organizations should move beyond a rigid distinction between these two concepts, instead cultivating professionals who embody both perspectives. By balancing strategic foresight with practical execution, organizations can enhance their resilience, foster sustainable growth, and successfully navigate the complexities of the contemporary business landscape.

Ultimately, the most successful organizations are not those that merely have great leaders or efficient managers, but those that cultivate a culture where leadership and management coexist harmoniously. This integrated approach ensures not only short-term efficiency but also long-term innovation and adaptability, key factors in thriving in today's competitive and uncertain global economy.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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