



Developing distributed leadership

Imagine for a moment an organisation in which the motivation of everyone is high; everyone is highly engaged with the business of the organisation; everyone is highly focused on achieving priority goals; differences between individuals and functions are valued, and very rare disputes are dealt with quietly and in a civilised way, without management intervention; performance is good and focused on delivering strategic growth and security as well as short term results. Critically, imagine an organisation in which top management has the time and freedom to concentrate on its own role and contribution to the success of the business, as there is little, if any, need to intervene in the operation of the organisation at large.

A pipe dream? Such a state of affairs may be unusual, but it is the defining characteristic of an organisation that successfully develops and practices distributed leadership.

Leadership styles

Leadership is one of those concepts about which there is much confusion – and a serious lack of definition. There is much contradictory information on leadership styles – see the list below. Perhaps most importantly, there is also a lack of practical advice on how to be an effective leader.

- The bureaucratic leader
- The autocratic leader
- The laissez-faire leader
- The task-oriented leader
- The transaction leader
- The environment leader
- The charismatic leader
- The democratic leader
- The people-oriented leader
- The servant leader
- The transformation leader
- **The delusional leader**

That last one, by the way, is a more recently observed phenomenon – this is the media-hungry 'leader' with the over-sized ego, who practices exhortation to try to change behaviour; shouts at people when things do not work out as intended; and grabs the media spotlight whenever (occasionally) results have the appearance of being good. Not recommended!

With the exception of that last style, (which is clearly only appropriate for individuals with big egos, little skill and a certain detachment from organisational reality), in the original definitions, none of the styles was labelled as inadequate – yet they all are, in different ways.

Part of the problem is that there is far too much focus on leaders at the top of organisations, and too little on the fact that leadership is required by many people throughout the organisation. Moreover, leadership is a not a fixed characteristic that attaches to only some people, all of the time. Many people move into and out of leadership roles, on different topics, and as circumstances change. This is distributed leadership.

This raises the question of how to develop leadership for all who need it, and how to tackle the lack of advice on how to perform as an effective leader. MTL research completed during 2007 and 2008 demonstrates that there is actually a set of skilled behaviours that leaders can deploy as and when they are needed, that will drive enhanced performance. This is the **highly-skilled, situational leader** – the leader who selects and applies behavioural patterns appropriate to different or changing circumstances.

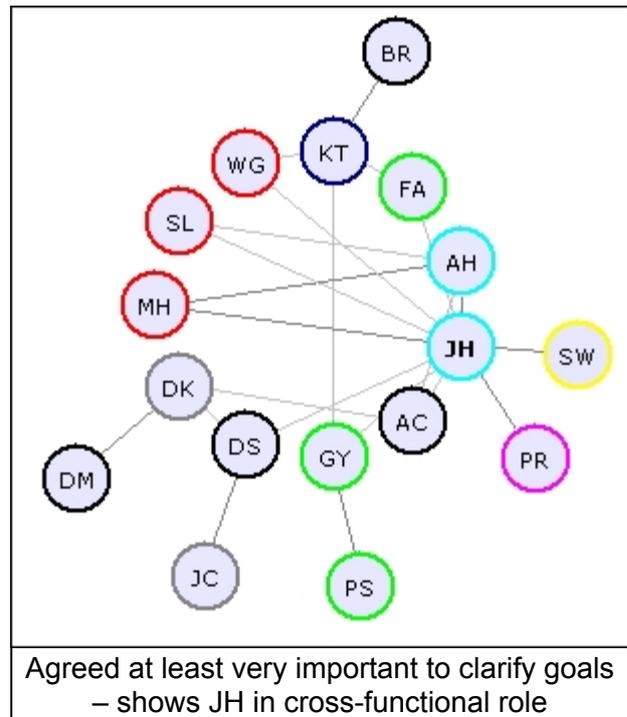
Assessment and development – and fixing the context

MTL research also shows that in addition to required specific leader-behaviours, there is an issue with the organisational context within which individuals are trying to adopt leadership roles. Any methodology that is applied to develop distributed leadership necessarily needs to deal with three challenges.

The first is assessing in a cost-effective, non-controversial way where leadership behaviours are being deployed and where they are not, avoiding data contamination and political responses along the way. The second is to provide a platform where new skilled behaviours can be developed, specific to the needs identified. The third is to provide an environment in which organisational constraints on effective leadership can be identified and actioned - producing changes in management practices that will enable people throughout the organisation to be more effective in leading performance improvements.

Magus Networker is part of a complete methodology for resolving organisational problems. It handles complex data sets with ease, providing powerful insights into the nature of the problem, and its causes. It does this through graphical reports presented as network charts, that illuminate all the complex relationships, formal and informal, that actually drive organisational performance. The Magus Networker process enables many people to be engaged, through open dialogue, with their attention focused on the issues, causes and actions illuminated through the network charts.

Conventionally, Magus Networker is custom-configured by the user for each problem resolution / organisational development application. Now the developers of Magus Networker have designed an application specifically targeting the issue of leadership. This is in the form of a template that can, however, still be adapted to the specific needs of each organisation. The Magus Networker process includes front-end analysis to enable this adaptation, and the design of the sample to be used.



Magus Networker enables hidden leaders to be located – those individuals who are the unsung heroes of developing improved performance for the organisation. It will identify where and how their leadership skills can be further developed. Magus Networker will also locate the people who should be in leadership roles – and who are not. It will also identify precisely why they are not yet performing successfully as leaders. As the Magus Networker leadership application is built around a thoroughly-researched model of leadership skills, the 'results workshops' that are used to enable people to review the results automatically begins a process of changing leadership behaviour. The workshops also enable an analysis of issues stemming from the organisational context that need to be tackled to improve leadership and performance – and the actions needed to deal with them.

As with all Magus Networker applications, the process is fast, requiring weeks, not months. Developmental action flows automatically from the analyses for cause. These actions include those taken by delegates to the Magus Networker workshops, and by the people in management roles who sponsored the process. By default, priorities are determined according to the goals agreed at the start of the process.

For more information, please contact Magus Toolbox Limited at enquiries01@magus-toolbox.com