

DESIGN LEADERSHIP SELF

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Module 1 begins where all leadership begins—with you, the leader. There is a lot to know about you. And like all subjects, the more you know, the more effective you will be. Understanding yourself as a leader starts with how you perceive leaders and leadership. Everyone has had a variety of experiences with leaders—parents, teachers, coaches, siblings, friends, bosses—and those experiences form your values, expectations, assumptions, and behaviors as leaders. Some of the personal characteristics modeled by your early leaders are very effective for leadership, but unfortunately, many are not.

The chapters in this section explore those personal attributes that characterize effective leaders, with a focus on understanding yourself—how you see leaders and leadership, your strengths and style, and the values and ethics that will shape your decisions. As you work your way through the three chapters of the Design Leadership Self module, keep the key question in mind: *How can I design myself as a leader?* Purposeful attention to *you* will be the most useful guide through the process of applying what you learn to your growing leadership capacity.

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DESIGNING YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, the reader should be able to

- 2.1 State your expectations for learning about leadership
- 2.2 Explain how conceptions and perceptions guide leaders
- 2.3 Identify common misconceptions about leaders and leadership
- 2.4 Critique the characteristics of leaders based on research and your perceptions
- 2.5 Contrast leadership skills with management, expertise, and established competencies
- 2.6 Appraise your leadership credibility
- 2.7 Interpret identity as an often-hidden variable in how you perceive leaders and leadership

Leadership by Design Model

Design Self

HOW CAN I DESIGN MYSELF AS A LEADER?

Design Relationships

As leader, how can I design my relationship with others?

Design Others' Success

As a leader, how can I design success for others?

Design Culture

As a leader, how can I design the culture of my organization?

Design Future

As a leader, how can I innovate?

INTRODUCTION

This chapter, *Designing Your Perceptions of Leaders and Leadership*, introduces the notion of leader and leadership by exploring *your* ideas and experiences with leadership, and it examines what others have thought and found about the leader in leadership. As a leader, you have a choice: You can act as a leader in whatever way *feels* right and then try to explain why you did what you did later, or you can understand your options for action *before* you act, using your leadership knowledge to *design* your leadership activity.

Leadership That Makes a Difference

When you think of great leaders, those who make a *big* difference, the names that arise are usually famous politicians, military or business leaders, or maybe social entrepreneurs. This chapter is all about perceptions and misconceptions, and what counts as a *big* difference may not be very accurate. Yes, there are indeed many individual leaders who have famously influenced broadly. The missed conception, in this case, lies in the considerable (a.k.a. big) difference made by tens of thousands of leaders at the local level. Indeed, when asked to describe who has most influenced their idea of leadership, nearly all students described parents, colleagues, teammates, coaches, or immediate supervisors. Why? Because leadership is the process of influencing others toward a common vision—not just *any* others—but others with whom you have built a relationship. Those individuals are the most influential in your life. So, cumulatively, the big difference in leadership is made by a sea of individualized relationships that impact who you are and how you see the world. The following student example could likely be anyone’s story:

The best leader I have ever had is my grandfather. He taught me virtues through his stories and showed me the compassion and empathy needed to be a good leader. My grandfather truly had a love for all of those around him and wanted to see and help others to succeed. My grandfather saw potential that I could not see myself, and he taught me that anything less than my best is simply cheating myself. As a man who worked his way out of poverty, served in World War II, and became a successful entrepreneur, he had more to teach me about resilience and work ethic than anyone else I have met. He taught me never to quit and to set my goals high. He has helped me to understand how to have a vision and follow it, and I would not be the person or leader that I am today without him. —Matthew Divis, Undergraduate

Take a moment to consider who you would identify as a leader who has made a big difference. What matters most about that difference—how broadly it influences others or how deeply it influences a few? Both matter, just in different ways.



Some of your first lessons on leadership will come from members of your own family.

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YOU: STUDENT AND DESIGNER OF YOUR OWN LEADERSHIP

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

2.1 State your expectations for learning about leadership.

Leadership is a dynamic, personal, situation-specific, context-dependent, multidisciplinary process. With so many variables, learning leadership requires a more carefully considered, reflective, individualized approach. As the designer of yourself, you will be the designer of your own learning. Before you continue your leadership journey, there are a few things you should know about your own learning.

Learning Leadership

What did you learn today? Most people would answer that question by recalling some new bit of information or new skill they acquired, but what they are really describing is new information they were exposed to. *Exposure* to a new idea is only the starting point of learning, and that exposure quickly fades unless revisited and reinforced. The acquisition of new knowledge happens as you engage with information over and over again. Remember the leadership definition introduced a few pages back? You read: *leadership is the process of influencing others toward a common vision*. And then you read it again and again. Every single time you interact with information, you reinforce your recall (and often enhance your understanding) of that information. Designing your leadership learning means *thinking* about and *planning* all the various ways in which you can engage with the topic, each time reinforcing and refining your understanding.

Right now, you have some knowledge about leadership and leaders. You also may have some experience serving in a leadership position. How did you learn to do that? Most likely, you learned by watching others who were in leadership positions or some position of power and authority. Think back on all those in leadership positions with whom you may have interacted—parents or guardians, grandparents, teachers, coaches, priests or pastors, club/organization leaders, managers or bosses, or perhaps a babysitter. Whether they had formal training or not, they did their best to fulfill the position, and in the meantime, they unknowingly served as a role model for you. That is how most individuals initially learn leadership—by interacting with and observing others.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Who were your leadership models? Does your approach to leadership look like any of theirs?

The second way many learn leadership is through experience—by serving as a formal or an informal leader. Generally, without any notion of what leadership is or entails, individuals are tasked with a position that requires influencing others toward a goal such that the organization succeeds. If you have had a leadership position, you undoubtedly learned a lot. If you had some significant challenges that you had to work through while in that position, then you learned even more. Bennis and Thomas (2002) called this a **crucible of leadership**.¹ A crucible is a vessel used to subject substances to extreme heat in order to fundamentally change them. You might have heard the term used to describe medieval alchemists trying to transform metal into gold. For a

leader, the analogy describes a difficult challenge that has the potential to transform their values, assumptions, and future capabilities. As Bennis and Thomas (2002) explained, “The crucible experience was a trial and a test, a point of deep self-reflection that forced them to question who they were and what mattered to them.”² As you focus on designing yourself as a leader, we will find out from Bennis and Thomas what leadership skills help you learn the most from a crucible experience.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Learning through experience is of great value but only if you reflect on the experience and are aware of the impacts and outcomes. What leadership experiences have you had? What were some of the greatest challenges? How did those experiences change your leadership and self-perception?

Of course, there are also many leadership courses, programs, and workshops—all purporting to impart the knowledge and skills that will make you the successful leader of tomorrow. Learning leadership is partly about knowledge and skills, but it is more so about developing dispositions—defined as habits of mind that are often seen as tendencies or characteristics, even a personality. As introduced in the previous chapter, both design thinking and CORE™ are great examples of dispositions. Optimism and pessimism are very clear examples of dispositions you see every day. Some of your peers habitually see situations as positive and possible, while others see the pitfalls and worst-case scenarios. For leaders, another useful disposition might be the tendency to empathize (i.e., to habitually consider the perspective of your followers). You will learn even more about dispositions in Chapter 3 on building your leadership capacities.

Learning comes with every encounter you have with information. Consider the full range of where your learning can come from and how you can access those sources. Sometimes, that information comes in the form of a professor or a textbook, and more often, information comes in the form of engaging with others—discussing ideas, internships, student organizations, asking questions, interviewing leaders, and working through problems together. Information also comes from observing role models and the experiences of others. But that is just the start. Insight and consequent learning come from your *reflection* and taking the time to integrate that information into your current understanding. For example, researchers have found that reading about leaders in action *and then* critically reflecting on the events, causes, and perspectives in the story helped participants formulate stronger leadership visions.³ To that end, a word of encouragement and caution from economist John Kenneth Galbraith: “Faced with the choice between changing one’s mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof.”⁴ As you learn more about leadership you will be asked to change—change your behavior, change your mindset, change your understanding. Change is at the heart of learning. In Chapter 10, you will learn more about change as you design others’ success (facilitating the learning of your followers).

What to Expect as You Learn Leadership

As you learn leadership and discuss your learning with your peers, you will find that everyone has their own unique significant learning moments—events or situations when a big insight changes the way you see the world. While the moment is unique, there are some common themes and lessons that developing leaders tend to experience. Here are some insights you might encounter

while learning leadership. Of course, they will not seem as consequential to you now just reading them, but seeing them will prime your brain to spot these lessons in action later. Here are six very important lessons (Figure 2.1), shared by leadership students in their own words, which you can expect to learn again and again:

1. Leaders develop real relationships with each individual.

There was a specific point in my life when I took a step back and saw the person in everyone. I was home during vacation when my mom walked into the room. She started talking about why she was stressed and how it was affecting her, and for the first time, I looked at her and didn't see my mom. I saw who she was, and I responded how I would if a friend had come to me in a bad place . . . I don't know why it took so long for me to notice everyone individually and the importance of taking into account the personal thoughts, experiences, and feelings of every person . . . —Daniel Clark, Undergraduate

2. There are many ways to solve a problem.

There are so many different ways of tackling an issue . . . think of ways that are different and something that you'd never expect to do. —Tyler Saltiel, Undergraduate

3. Leadership and the concepts and aspects of the process are deeper and broader than you think. You will find that some things you do well, that you seem to do naturally, are actually explained by leadership theory and best practices. Learning more about leadership concepts will help you use those strengths more effectively.

For a long time, I have led best by seeking to help those struggling around me and have found it to be incredibly rewarding. It was not until we learned about empathy's role in leadership, however, that I realized it was what I had been doing and found so rewarding. . . . Only after learning about it, did I realize that I could reflect on, and improve, my empathy for others. —Matthew Divis, Undergraduate

4. The leader and the followers are both important.

The greatest “aha” moment for me in learning about leadership was learning that the leader is no more important than his or her followers. When learning this, it really made me stop and think. People have been subconsciously trained to believe that the most important person in a situation is the leader. A leader wouldn't get anything done without loyal followers. If Abraham Lincoln didn't have any followers, he would not have won the presidency or gone on to be one of the greatest leaders of all time. Yes, Abraham Lincoln is the big name, but he is no more important than his followers. They are the ones that made his successes possible. —Marina Wells, Undergraduate

5. Anyone can be a leader.

My greatest “aha” moment in learning about leadership came from a seven-year-old at a day camp. This boy was one of my campers, and he wanted to win Color Wars (the day camp version of the Olympics) extremely badly because he didn't win the past two summers. Formally, his role was very small because there were more than 100 campers on our team ranging from three to twelve years old; however, he was a leader and motivator. Throughout the week, he was involved and got others who were sitting out of activities to participate. He would strategize activities, including who would go in the front during tug of war and who would be better in the back. He screamed his head off (spirit points were considered the highest point bracket) the whole week, and I was not surprised when he had no voice during the last week of camp. In Color Wars, he was

a true leader. I realized that anyone can be a leader and at any age. He was passionate about the activities, and I could see how his passion rubbed off on my other campers. He led for a reason, and I realized that anyone (even a seven-year-old) could influence others toward a common vision. —Daniel Auerbach, Undergraduate

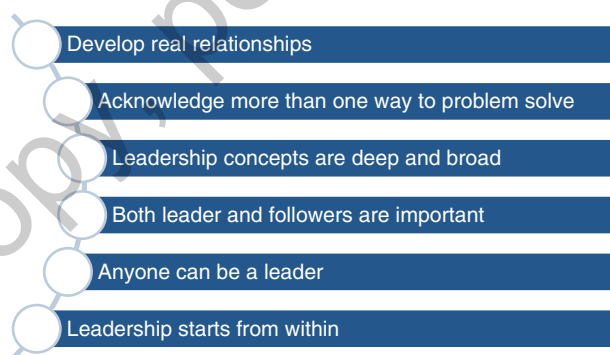
6. Even quiet people can lead. Leadership starts from within.

For me, the greatest “aha” moment was when I realized that you don’t need to be loud or extroverted to be a leader. I am not a loud person whatsoever and used to be extremely small. This discouraged me, but when we talked about creativity and resilience, it made me realize that the power comes from within, not the physical presence. Leaders come in all shapes and sizes; it’s the influence you hold from the traits and skills you obtain. —Maxwell Gold, Undergraduate

The examples are just a few of the more common themes that you can expect to encounter as you design your leadership. Earlier, you were introduced to the notion of mindfulness—the concept of being as fully aware of your present learning and moment as possible. Did you notice a common theme across the six lessons you just read? They all required the developing leader pay attention to what was happening. These students needed to pay attention to their context, the situation, the interactions between individuals, and the personal characteristics of everyone. The most important thing they needed to be mindful of, however, was their own understanding of leaders and leadership. If you don’t know what you know, how will you learn what you do not know? You should probably read that sentence again—it is a bit confusing, but it is very important.

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Lessons on Leadership

Leadership Lessons



YOUR BRAIN IS A LEAN, MEAN, PATTERN-MAKING MACHINE: YOU CONSTRUCT YOUR WORLD

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

2.2 Explain how conceptions and perceptions guide leaders.

Have you ever kept doing the same wrong thing over and over? How did you know when to make an adjustment in your thinking and behavior? In the introduction chapter, you learned about

the concept of mindfulness—being aware of the full, present moment, and you learned about the importance of taking moments of awareness and being mindfully engaged. However, there is more to mindfulness if you are going to design your leadership, it will require disrupting your way of thinking. Behaviors are repeated, even when there is an awareness of them, because “it’s a habit.” Peter Bregman, author of *Four Seconds*, notes, “It doesn’t take long to change a habit, but it’s hard. Really hard.”⁵ Bregman writes, “we have no hope of changing anything that we’re not aware we’re doing. A moment of awareness allows us to pause (that’s the four-second part of *Four Seconds*).” You will see this valuable technique employed again in Chapter 6 as it relates to decision-making and emotional intelligence.⁶

Your brain is a lean, mean, pattern-making machine.⁷ Do you remember where you read that funny phrase earlier in the text? Repeat it a few more times: My brain is a lean, mean, pattern-making machine. Can you feel the pattern forming? Every interaction you have with the world influences the connections your brain has made about the world, culminating in your mental model. A **mental model** is your mental representation of things in the world—not just the picture in your head but how you understand things and even how you process information. Your mental model guides your behavior and your thinking. For example, everyone *knows* what a classroom looks like, right? But what if you attended a nature-based school where every class was held in the forest? Or what if you were part of a culture that educated their young through apprenticeships without formal schools? Or perhaps your grandchildren will meet their classmates in a virtual space. These conceptions of classroom are formed by experiencing something over and over.⁸

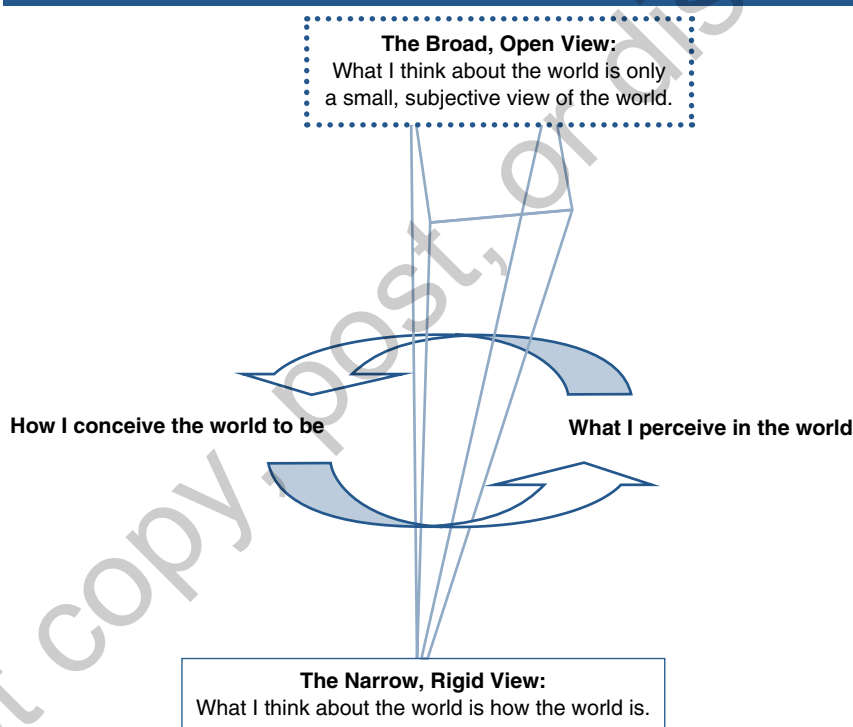
Have you ever heard traditional Hawaiian folk music? Surely a rush of images just filled your head as your mental models about Hawaii were triggered. If you have never been to Hawaii, then your mental model is likely filled with clichés from media—palm trees, hula dancers with grass skirts, coconuts to hold your drink, beaches. This is the case for everyone who has limited experience and/or exposure to a phenomenon. But if you have lived in Hawaii, those mental models are far more detailed and accurate. More interesting, mental models built from first-hand experience go beyond information and visuals and include multiple senses and emotions. For example, when you think about *home*—whatever that might mean to you—your mind fills with far more than just an image. That is the power and strength of mental models—a strength you must both recognize and utilize. The legendary Hawaiian folk singer Israel “Iz” Ka’ano’i Kamakawiwo’ole created a record entitled *Facing Future*. For the aspiring leader, facing the future means addressing the mental models built from the past—mental models in the deeper sense—models of feeling and reacting, habits of perceiving and processing others and the world, and the personal challenges interwoven with your sense of self.

Mental models are very useful—they help you remember details, categorize new information, and generally navigate the world effectively and efficiently. But that construction comes with two great cautionary warnings: (a) the illusion of validity (My ideas about the world are true.) and (b) the illusion of verification (What *I see* in the world is true.). Mental models are constructed from your experience, and that experience may or may not be accurate, complete, or even true. In many ways, they are like an illusion, *your* illusion of the world. The only way to know if your conception of the world is accurate is to first be aware of your conception and then to question, test, and revise that model. The second caution is that mental models influence *what you see* in the world. If you conceive that all leaders are out to get you, then you will perceive leaders through that lens, interpreting a leader’s behaviors as somehow negative and nefarious and emphasizing negative outcomes, while overlooking anything to the contrary. What you see includes *who you see* (and how you see them). That is how your brain works—how you think

about the world primes and influences what you see in the world, which reinforces how you think about the world.⁹ The model in Figure 2.2 illustrates this reinforcing relationship and how it ultimately influences your conception.

For aspiring leaders, the key question is how to continue growing in your conception of the world versus narrowing to a rigid, single-view perception of the world. The answer: Leaders must understand that their brain constructs and interprets the world, and then knowing, this they must explore and verify their conceptions (and misconceptions). The next section explores the common misconceptions about leaders and leadership. As you work your way through the next section, keep your lean, mean, pattern-making machine of a brain in mind and be open to exploring new ways of thinking about leadership.

FIGURE 2.2 ■ What You Think About the World Influences What You See in the World—That Can Ultimately Be a Broader Set of Perspectives . . . or Just *Your* Perspective.



MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP

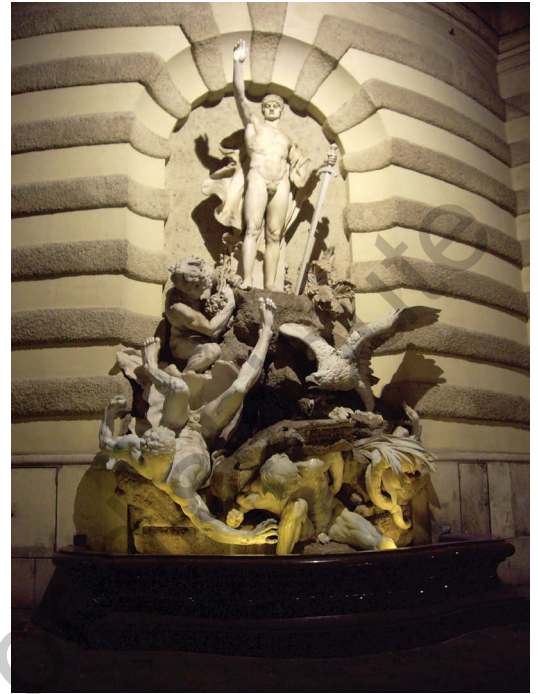
LEARNING OBJECTIVE

2.3 Identify common misconceptions about leaders and leadership.

You already have a mental model of leadership, one that you have built from all your interactions with the world—leaders you have observed, worked with and for, heard about, seen

on television and the Internet, and even your experience and feedback from being the leader. Perhaps the accompanying image represents your idea of leadership—the conquering hero, the individual at the top, perhaps inducing fear or asserting dominance, receiving accolades for victories that many others worked hard to achieve. Who looks like a leader within your mental model? How do they act? How should they be treated? Start with your mental model and then look outside that model to see who and what you are missing.

Once again, recall the definition of leadership from the introduction chapter—the process of influencing others toward a common vision. It should sound more and more familiar because you continue to repeat it, forming and reinforcing that connection. Using the definition of leadership, this section introduces important distinctions in leadership by exploring common misconceptions. As you make your way through this textbook, you will find that many of the most common leadership theories and approaches explain away these misconceptions. However, for now, the focus is on expanding the definition. As you learn more about leadership, the terms within the definition will take on greater meaning for you—that is you building a mental model about leadership.



Heroic leadership and the many faces of followers

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What terms from the leadership definition can you identify in the image of the heroic leader statue? What could the leader do to more effectively influence each of the other individuals in this photo?

Leadership Is . . . a Process

The *leader* is a person. The person has characteristics you can identify, which may or may not be effective in each situation and may change but only with time. *Leadership*, on the other hand, is a process. A process consists of a series of steps or activities over time. When you consider leadership as a process, many possibilities emerge. First, the positional leader becomes the facilitator of the process versus the person in charge. Thus, the task of moving the individuals and organization toward the goal is more accurately seen as a dynamic, situational, and context-dependent adventure. Second, leadership as a process means that mistakes can be made, and that is okay. Too often, leaders believe any mistake is a setback. In fact, making minor mistakes helps the organization learn and better orient toward the goal relative to the ever-changing context. Third, the person in the leadership position does not always need to be (nor should be) the person taking the lead. Quite often, there are others within the organization that are better suited, better skilled, or simply available to take the lead for a time or for a specific project.

Although leadership is a process, there are still individuals who hold the responsibility to facilitate that process. For those individual leaders, there are two simple rules:

Rule #1: It's about you.

Rule #2: It's not about you.

The first rule is clear to most aspiring leaders. *It's about you* means you have the responsibility and accountability for the success of the organization and its followers. But it also refers to your designing your leadership self. Leaders must know about themselves, and the more they know, the more effectively they can respond to situations, facilitate the process, and further design their leadership.

The second rule is a little less obvious, particularly given the assumptions many have about leadership. *It's not about you* means exactly that; the activities of leadership should be focused on the success of the organization and the followers, they should not be focused on calming *your* fears, addressing *your* needs, or pumping up *your* ego. Making leadership not about you when you are in the leader position is more difficult than you might think, but the benefits are extraordinary. "What the research shows consistently is that leaders who are secure enough in their strengths to admit their weaknesses and vulnerabilities actually get better ideas from the people around them, they learn more, and that ultimately enables them to lead more effectively. I think the balance of confidence and humility is to say: These are not opposite ends of a see-saw. These are actually states that can go hand-in-hand. Confidence is believing that you can do great things. Humility is knowing that you don't always have the knowledge and skills to do them yourself."¹⁰ You might call this the paradox of confidence: Effective leaders must simultaneously be confident and humble. Yet that pairing is not as contradictory as it may first appear. A most compelling illustration of the idea that true confidence results in humility is captured by the many stories of leadership guru Jim Collins.¹¹

The pinnacle of leadership development found in Collins' research, which he calls **Level 5 leadership**, consists of high-level resolve coupled with compelling personal humility. In other words, leaders who are so confident in their abilities and sense of self are more interested in putting all their focus on the success of the organization and its people. You can be a highly capable individual (Level 1 in Collins' model) all the way up to an effective leader (Level 4), but to move from *good to great* (the title of his book), you need to get your own ego out of the way. Humility—making it not about you—is the true measure of confidence and can build confidence.

If you are still doubtful about this connection, try the following: The next time you have to give a presentation, write yourself a large prompting sign and place it where you can see it often while you speak. The prompt should say, "Do they get it?" You will find that when you shift your focus from how *you* feel about your presentation (Did *I* say that right? Do *I* sound ok?) to how well the audience understands your message (Do *they* get it? What more do *they* need to know?), you not only feel more confident, you perform the task far better, which was to help the audience learn in the first place. Confidence with humility; it's about you; it's not about you.

These rules will be revisited throughout the text, just as you should revisit them throughout your leadership journey as they underpin numerous misconceptions about the individual leader. Throughout this section, you can read the voices of students as they debunk these mistaken assumptions.

Misconception: Leaders Are Born

Well, technically everyone is born. And yes, there are obvious differences between persons. But the reality is that most of those differences were developed over time and can be altered if so desired.¹²

One of my biggest misconceptions about leadership is that people are born to be leaders. Ever since I was a little girl, I have always heard people say “so and so is a born leader,” and to me that meant that I could only be a leader if I was born to do so. However, after growing up and taking a few leadership courses (I realized) that you do not have to be a born leader or that is even a real thing. Sure there are qualities that a leader possesses, but more often than not, these traits are acquired. I have learned that people can be successful leaders if they are good people and have the ability to understand what people want and need. —Aubrey Seeley, Undergraduate

Misconception: Leaders Need to Have a Specific Set of Traits, Particularly Extroversion

Some traits are pretty much always helpful to leaders, while other traits are helpful in some circumstances. But there is no specific set of traits. What is a trait anyway? You will learn more about traits later in the chapter, but for now, **traits** can be defined as well-habituated, stable, and consistent personal characteristics.

I always thought leaders needed to be extroverts. However, learning about the trait theory, one of its weaknesses is that there is not a specific set of traits that qualifies someone to be a good leader. You need different types of leaders for the different types of situations. —Melissa Cabrero, Undergraduate

Leadership Is . . . a Process of Influencing

Leaders influence others in a variety of ways. The most important thing to understand is *how you* most effectively influence others and *with whom* you are most influential, under what conditions, or in what situations. Sometimes influence is grandly inspirational, and other times it is simple and subtle to the point of being nearly invisible. There are a great many techniques and tools that leaders can learn to influence others—build your influence toolbox. Consider a few more misconceptions.

Misconception: Leaders Do the Talking and Take Charge

Sometimes leaders influence by taking charge, and acting in a directive manner is necessary, but sometimes listening and observing are more effective. And, yes, even introverts can be effective leaders.^{13, 14} Your strengths and style, explored in Chapter 3, are adaptable enough to address a variety of needs.

I always thought that the leader leads the discussion and comments on everything. A leader should be aware of everything around them and put the pieces together without saying a word. A leader who listens gains credibility and trust because they give a fair chance for everyone to share their thoughts and feel they are in a safe environment. —Brandon Bellina, Undergraduate

A big misconception that I held about leadership was that to be an effective leader you only had to be able to “take charge” of a group. I viewed it as a very individualistic

concept, but I now know that leadership goes far beyond having authority within a group or team setting. It requires a willingness to motivate/inspire followers to the point where you're not just making the plan, delegating tasks, and telling them what they have to do but instead working collaboratively to come to the best solution. —Jamie Fisher, Undergraduate

Misconception: Leaders Do the Influencing

Every human interaction results in reciprocal influence, and leaders are no exception. As a leader, you are constantly influenced by many things, particularly your followers. For example, consider a time you presented to a group. As you noticed the reaction of the audience to your talk, did you find yourself making slight changes in your delivery or explanation? You are in a constant process of interacting with your world, constructing and reconstructing your understanding, and reacting accordingly. Acknowledging the influences around you is both honest and accurate. So while you are building your influence toolbox, note also what influences you and how.

Growing up you are constantly surrounded by leadership figures such as your teachers, but you never hear about who helped them get there. For me, that realization came with maturing and realizing that everyone, even the leaders throughout your life, are just people. —Daniel Clark, Undergraduate

Leadership Is . . . a Process of Influencing Others

At the heart of all leadership lies the relationship between leader and follower. If there are no *others*, then you are not leading but simply acting alone. Considering the individual followers is critical to how effectively you are able to influence and move them and the organization toward the common vision.

Misconception: There Is Only One Specific Way to Be an Effective Leader

Your leadership approach may be consistent at this stage in your leadership design, but expert leaders can shift their style to complement and meet the needs of different followers.

A misconception about leadership is that there is one way to be a good leader. What I learned is that there are so many ways to be an effective leader. It all depends on who you are leading and what they react to positively. —Trevor Cox, Undergraduate

Misconception: A Leader Cannot Be Friends With Their Followers

This misconception might really surprise you. After all, how can you tell a friend what to do? How can you be their boss? (Are you seeing all the misconceptions in those questions already?) There has been a lot of research on the leader–follower relationship, called leader–member exchange (LMX), which will be explained more fully in the Intro to Module 2, when you focus on designing your leadership relationships. The truth is that close relationships, even friendships, generally enhance the organization.¹⁵ Consider this . . . would you work harder and be more committed to the success of a friend or a stranger? Researcher Adam Grant explains, “When friends work together, they’re more trusting and committed to one another’s success. That means they share more information and spend more time helping—and as long as they don’t hold back on constructive criticism out of politeness, they make better choices and get more done.”¹⁶ While it might seem difficult to supervise a friend, especially if you must assess them or be critical, the benefits of building strong relationships far outweigh that possible momentary discomfort.

Leadership Is . . . a Process of Influencing Others Toward

Leaders move their organization toward success. They do not influence others to keep the status quo, do nothing special, stay the course, or just live with it. Leadership dynamically advances the organization.

Misconception: Effective Leaders Are Always Collaborative

After reading all the previous misconceptions, you are likely noticing a pattern: As a facilitator of the leadership process, leaders need to effectively navigate the ever-changing sea filled with unique waves, weather, sea creatures, and crew. In other words, the dynamic nature of leadership requires that leaders be equally flexible to meet needs as they arise, whether predictable or not. Sometimes, the best approach is collaborative, and sometimes, it is directive, and sometimes, it will be entirely different. This student sums it up well:

One of my greatest misconceptions about leadership was that leaders had to pick only one leadership style/concept to stick with to live and lead by. For example, while I was leading in my roles and facilitating meetings, I am naturally transformational, supportive, and understanding; however, there were some moments where it was necessary to be more firm and structured, and it was essential to assign due dates and specific assignments or roles. —Brooke Hofmann, Undergraduate

Whatever set of behaviors, skills, and actions moves your organization toward the vision is ultimately the right set of leadership tools for the job (provided they are ethical, of course). As you design your leadership, you will find a number of tools that can do more than one job, such as confidence, optimism, resilience, and engagement—the CORE™ attributes. Remember to utilize the CORE™ Attribute Builder activities at the end of each chapter to build your most versatile tools.

Leadership Is . . . a Process of Influencing Others Toward a Common

Rule #2 states that leadership is not about you. The vision of your organization will be most successful if you craft a *common* vision. Not common in the sense of indistinguishable, but common in that everyone has a stake in and supports the vision.

Misconception: Confident Leaders Who Celebrate Their Success Are Arrogant and Selfish

Maybe, but probably not. Quite often, you see leaders taking credit for the success of their organizations, but what you do not see are the relationships and interactions between the leader and followers—celebrating individual and organizational success, passing along acknowledgments and words of thanks, and continuing to inspire others around the common vision.

I always thought leaders were cocky/over-confident. I have learned that as a leader you can acknowledge your success to a point without being greedy. It's important to be able to pat yourself on the back because you need to congratulate yourself at times—you earned it. I learned the difference between confidence and arrogance. It's vital to have confidence so that you believe in your abilities. I found this quote, "Confidence isn't walking into a room with your nose in the air and thinking you're better than everyone else. It's walking into a room and not having to compare yourself to anyone in the first place." —Erin Grady, Undergraduate

Yes, some may mistakenly see arrogance in your confidence, but that is not a reason to discount accomplishment or discontinue celebration for yourself and your followers.

Misconception: Explaining the Vision More Clearly Is the Best Way to Acquire Follower Support

The power of a common vision lies in the connections between leader and follower. While the elements of the leadership definition can be independently explained, those elements work together. For example, in this case, how you—as a leader—influence others will determine the extent to which followers feel part of the vision. Influencing others through intimidation, reasoned argument, or appeal to your position of authority is far less effective than connecting with followers' emotions, values, and their stake in the vision.

A misconception I had about leadership is that the leaders are the boss and the system is a hierarchy. However, I learned that there are leaders who influence followers to accomplish more by being concerned with followers' emotions and values. The leader serves to help their followers grow. —Becca Estes, Undergraduate

A common vision entails more than general agreement on the vision; rather, it requires a sense of shared contribution and emotional connection. Leaders skilled in emotional intelligence, discussed back in Chapter 1, excel at designing relationships.

Leadership Is . . . a Process of Influencing Others Toward a Common Vision

Extensive research on the nature and power of goals positions this element of the leadership definition as perhaps the most powerful.¹⁷ If you do not know where you are going, what are you facilitating? How can you influence others toward nothing? More than simply a goal, a **vision** is a picture of the future you seek to create.¹⁸ The organizational vision serves many purposes and has great power. A vision can be inspirational, aspirational, a means by which individuals in the organization connect, a way of assessing progress, and a guiding light for leaders and followers to navigate the day-to-day challenges without getting sidetracked. A common vision provides meaning and purpose to the work of the organization, and ultimately, it reflects the values of those sharing the vision. Highly effective leaders utilize the power of the common vision.

Misconception: Leadership Education Is Not Really Applicable to the Real World

The benefits of learning leadership and designing your leadership are often difficult to measure and may in some cases be more long term than immediate. This often results in the final misconception of this section, namely, the usefulness of learning leadership in the face of so many ineffective leaders. The real misconception, in this case, is that individuals in leadership positions believe they are effective leaders simply by holding the position or title. Typically, individuals are promoted to leadership positions because they excel in the technical aspects of their job (e.g., you are an excellent accountant, so you are now promoted to manager). This is the equivalent of saying, “Hey, you’re really good at fixing cars, so you are now promoted to quarterback for the football team.” Huh? Exactly. Leadership is an entirely different field of expertise, requiring specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. And that is primarily why so many leaders are ineffective if not downright detrimental to the organization.

I think one of the greatest misconceptions about leadership is that people always wonder why it is a college major and how learning about leadership can help you later in life. I agree; when I first enrolled in a leadership class I wasn't really sure what to make of it, it made me think differently and how there was often no single right answer. Now to me

this kind of sounded like a joke, but I was entirely wrong. Over the last two years, I have learned so much about leadership and that in the future when you have an “adult job” (is how I put it) being a leader and knowing how to influence others to reach a common goal is very beneficial. You are considered a trusted individual, and you understand the way people think and what they need to succeed. My respect for leadership as a study has changed dramatically, and I believe those lucky enough to learn about it will be better off in their futures. —Jessica Szymanski, Undergraduate

Table 2.1 provides a summary of the misconceptions discussed in this section but stated as a more accurate conception for your use in (re)designing your leadership self.

Misconception	Instead . . . Consider That
Leaders are those who have the position or title of leader.	You are a leader when you influence others toward a common vision, which does not necessarily require a title or position.
Leaders are born.	You can learn the skills and habits of effective leadership.
Leaders need to have a specific set of traits, particularly extroversion.	Leadership is dynamic and situational—your characteristics may be effective in some cases and not in others.
Leaders do the talking and take charge.	Leaders need to sometimes talk and sometimes listen, sometimes take charge and sometimes observe or encourage others to take charge.
Leaders do the influencing.	Leaders are also influenced.
There is only one specific way to be an effective leader.	There are many different ways to influence others toward a common vision.
A leader cannot be friends with their followers.	A leader depends on close, authentic relationships, and that often defines friendship.
Effective leaders are always collaborative.	Effective leaders are sometimes collaborative, sometimes directive, and sometimes other behaviors are necessary.
Confident leaders who celebrate their success are arrogant and selfish.	Confidence is not arrogance, and celebrating success is key to effective leadership.
Explaining the vision more clearly is the best way to acquire follower support.	Followers, like all people, are driven more by their values and their emotions than a rational argument.
Leadership education is not really applicable to the real world.	Leadership is a distinct field of study, and applying it in the real world makes a big difference.

This chapter began with explaining how you construct ideas with your lean, mean, pattern-making machine brain and then examined many of the most common misconceptions about leaders and leadership. At this point in the chapter, you should feel a little skeptical about what you thought you knew about leadership, and you should be ready to dig deeper into what makes an effective leader. Before you continue, revisit the definition of leadership as seen on the card in Figure 2.3 Make a copy of this card, cut it out, and put it in your phone case or workbag so you have a ready reference and reminder to access when you are facing a leadership challenge.

FIGURE 2.3 ■ Leadership Definition Reference Card

Leadership is . . .

Process . . . beyond person, over time, dynamic

Influencing . . . explicit and implicit, ethical

Others . . . building and developing relationships

Toward . . . advancing and improving

Common . . . socially just, all voices heard

Vision . . . creative, clear, shared, sustainable

Rule #1: It's about you.

Rule #2: It's not about you.

Leadership by Design

Design Principle: Comparison

Definition: A method of illustrating relationships and patterns in system behaviors by representing two or more system variables *in a controlled way*.¹⁹

In Other Words: To accurately understand and assess something, you must look at it next to things that relate.

For Example: If you want to assess the quality of an apple, what you use for comparison must be related to what you want to assess. An apple is great as a healthy food compared to a donut. An apple is not so great as a weapon compared to a spear.

For Leaders: To what do you compare aspects of your leadership? How can you use an appropriate comparison that makes it easier for others to understand? Think about ways to highlight different parts of your leadership compared to others. Leaders can use comparisons to illustrate relationships between values, between different people, or between themselves and others by presenting information in a controlled way. What do you want at this moment or for the organization . . . compared to what?



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Who in the photo is the happiest? Are these individuals friends? Without being able to compare this moment to other times, you can only guess. What else would you want to know before you made any deductions?

EFFECTIVE LEADERS ARE LIKE _____: CHARACTERISTICS AND TRAITS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

2.4 Critique the characteristics of leaders based on research and your perceptions.

When you read the title of the section, what word did you want to put into the blank space? Early leadership researchers asked that same question, seeking those individuals in leadership positions whose organizations were successful or who appeared to emerge as leaders in groups. Effective leaders are tall, imaginative, and agreeable. Maybe some individuals fitting that description are indeed effective . . . in some contexts . . . in some situations. But so too are others with different characteristics.²⁰

The trait approach to leadership asserts that a specific set of personal attributes (initially including physical characteristics) enable and explain effective leadership. Recall, traits can be defined as well-habituated, stable, and consistent personal characteristics. At first glance, this appears to make sense—everyone can describe leaders with whom they’ve worked, and there seem to be similarities between effective and ineffective leaders. Not only did researchers agree and pursue many studies trying to identify those specific traits, but other researchers studied those studies (this is called a meta-analysis, and it provides a big summary of many prior related studies). A scholar named Ralph Stogdill did a meta-analysis on leadership traits—twice.²¹ His latest, in 1974, looked at 163 different trait studies. Table 2.2 displays the common traits he found, but after all that research, even Stogdill said there is no evidence for a single set of effective leader traits.

TABLE 2.2 ■ Common Traits and Skills From Stogdill’s Meta-Analysis—Which Ones Do You Have?

Traits	Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptable to situations • Alert to social environment • Ambitious and achievement orientated • Assertive • Cooperative • Decisive • Dependable • Dominant (desire to influence others) • Energetic (high activity level) • Persistent • Self-confident • Tolerant of stress • Willing to assume responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clever (intelligent) • Conceptually skilled • Creative • Diplomatic and tactful • Fluent in speaking • Knowledgeable about group task • Organized (administrative ability) • Persuasive • Socially skilled

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The list of traits and skills noted by Stogdill in Table 2.2 are from the period 1949–1974. A lot has changed in the world since then—in how people communicate, structure of organizations, and view of leaders and leadership. What traits and skills from the list seem relevant today? Which ones feel outdated? What might you add?

Presently, five major traits have been highlighted as those most closely tied to effective leadership: intelligence, determination, sociability, self-confidence, and integrity.²² You probably have a few questions right at this moment:

- *If I possess all five, will I be an effective leader?*
- *If I lack all five, does that mean I will never be an effective leader?*
- *I have lots of other great things about me—a good sense of humor, outgoing, creative, focused—do these not count for anything in leadership?*

Maybe; no; and yes, are the answers to the three questions. Trait approaches provide valuable information about the range of attributes you can draw from, develop, and highlight as situations or context requires. The five traits noted also provide insight on what you should consistently work to develop in yourself and in your followers (because followers today will be the leaders tomorrow—it's your job to help them get there).

Leadership is a process, and traits, like all useful tools, must be used for the right project in the right setting. What traits do you possess? You likely could describe yourself pretty well, but you are far more complex than you realize. That complexity takes time and tools to understand. The Skill Builder Activity at the end of this chapter prompts you to discover more about your traits and attributes.

The traits you possess are like a set of tools. They are only as handy as your ability to use them. Sometimes, you have tools buried in the toolbox that you discover later. Sometimes, other people give you new tools by modeling their use or direct instruction. And sometimes, you focus on a single tool just because you're good at using it. As the common saying goes, everything looks like a nail to the person holding a hammer. Here are some suggestions as you design your leadership:

1. Identify your traits and learn about them
2. Find out what others see as your traits
3. Consider what contexts and situations best fit your traits
4. Note traits you aspire to acquire and then create opportunities to do so
5. Know that traits are quite stable, so it takes time and effort to change them

One trait often associated with leaders is charisma. **Charisma** can be defined as the personal quality that commands attention, respect, and attraction. Charismatic leaders are described as inspiring, charming, and confident—powerfully alluring to their followers. Charisma would seem to be the ultimate trait to possess, yet an elusive treasure for most. And indeed, it is a

powerful tool.²³ However, the charisma tool can be misused if, for example, the leader inspires followers in the wrong direction or toward unethical ends.²⁴ The leader must also possess the competence to back up their charismatic approach—even though the lure of appearance is so strong.²⁵ The following story illustrates this phenomenon:

Who is the leader? That was the question we asked the group. We had been together as a group for only a short time—three orientation meetings, each a couple hours long. Now we were three days into a month-long study abroad trip. There were 30 students on this trip, all focused on leadership and creativity but coming from a variety of majors. While all were highly engaged, some were clearly more outgoing and charismatic than others. But one stood above the rest—literally and in personality. Jake was tall, dark, and handsome with a constant, winning smile and nonstop energy to talk, explore, and meet people. He was the personification of charisma, and the students loved him. So, it was no surprise when we asked our question (write your answer in confidentially and anonymously) that Jake was deemed the leader. But an interesting thing happened over the course of a month together. At the end of the trip, we asked the group to again write down on a slip of paper who they thought of as the leader of the group. Jake's name was nowhere to be found among the votes. Instead, the group deemed another student the leader—a student who had a valued set of traits and skills and had used those tools to build relationships and facilitate others toward the common vision of the trip. For this leader, charisma was not part of their leadership toolbox but that just meant taking a bit more time. As for Jake, he didn't change a thing, and was still the happy, charismatic person throughout the trip; but he did realize the limits of charisma for leaders. —Tony Middlebrooks, Leadership Professor

Charisma used well and appropriately is a very useful trait to cultivate, although perhaps it needs to be reframed to focus on its great value as *initiating*—the very important person with the courage, tenacity, enthusiasm, willingness, and wherewithal to start something that others look to and follow. Sounds like leadership. But before you get carried away with the charismatic excitement, remember that leadership is a process. Jim Collins asks with what do we replace the charismatic leader because organizations are not sustainable long term when they are based on an individual. In other words, once you and your charisma and competence as a leader are gone, will the organization survive and thrive without you? Collins notes,

Building mechanisms is one of the CEO's most powerful but least understood and most rarely employed tools. Along with figuring out what the company stands for and pushing it to understand what it's really good at, building mechanisms is the CEO's role—the leader as architect.²⁶

The skill of building mechanisms and systems transitions the design of leadership self from what leaders *are* to what leaders *can do*—what skills do effective leaders wield to success?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Many would argue that organizations and history are shaped by a few extraordinary individuals. Do you agree or disagree that this was the case? Should it be the model in the future? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a *hero* as leader?

EFFECTIVE LEADERS CAN DO _____: SKILLS, PRACTICES, AND EXPERTISE

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- 2.5 Contrast leadership skills with management, expertise, and established competencies.

The **skills** approach to leadership focuses on what leaders can do—their competencies. Unlike traits, skills can be more readily acquired and in turn seem to be more teachable. Similar to traits, the list of important, useful, and relevant skills is very long. One early attempt to simplify skills that has stood the test of time is Katz’s three-level model of skills focus.²⁷ The three-level approach categorizes skills into technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. As individuals move up in an organization, the requisite skills needed shift accordingly. For example, imagine you are a skilled portrait artist recently hired by a company that does just that—produces high-quality portraits for customers. On the job, you are judged on your technical skills, in this case, your ability to paint the portrait. There are likely some human skills needed as well—working with clients and colleagues—and at some point, perhaps mentoring new artists. Over time, the boss notes what an excellent artist you are, and so you are promoted to division manager, overseeing the portrait making of ten other artists. With this change in role comes a change in skills. Now, the big focus is on human skills—motivating, inspiring, solving conflicts, training, communicating, recruiting, and retaining. Your technical skills still come in handy for training others, but you simply don’t have time to do portraits. At this level, you also start to consider the success of the overall organization but mostly as it intersects with your artists. Finally, after many successful years as division manager, you become the big boss, the CEO. Now, the success of the organization as a whole—big picture, long term—is your focus, and you need conceptual skills, such as strategic planning, market forecasting, and fostering innovation. You clearly will need those human skills you have developed, but you are now far removed from needing to know how to paint a portrait.

Katz’s model of shifting technical, human, and conceptual skills is an important moment for all individuals within an organization as it explains why certain roles focus on what they need to, as well as what specific skills need emphasis and development (and which can and should be ignored, which is no small thing given that you can’t focus on everything). More important, this model exemplifies that skills, while specific in practice, need to be considered categorically when applied to developing leaders. In other words, many specific skills represent human skills—you can acquire some and not others and still have human skills. This notion is of great importance as the field of leadership matures and is tempted to frame itself too constrictively with required competencies.

In Competency Terms

As you design your leadership and others’ success in future chapters, it is tempting to grab for a set of very concrete competencies—easy to list out, easy to measure and assess, but not necessarily appropriate or mindful. In an analysis of leadership models and competency frameworks, the Center for Leadership Studies stated the following about competencies:

The “leader” (as post holder) is thus promoted as the sole source of “leadership.” . . .
Fewer than half of the frameworks cited refer directly to the leaders’ ability to respond

and adapt their style to different circumstances. . . . This almost evangelistic notion of the leader as a multi-talented individual with diverse skills, personal qualities and a large social conscience, however, poses a number of difficulties. Firstly, it represents almost a return to the trait theory of leadership, just with a wider range of attributes. Secondly, when you attempt to combine attributes from across the range of frameworks, the result is an unwieldy, almost over-powering list of qualities. . . . Personal qualities of the leader are undoubtedly important but are unlikely to be sufficient in themselves for the emergence and exercise of leadership.²⁸

Although dated, the ideas critical of competencies are timeless, just as the call for an easy-to-assess checklist persists to this day. An organized list of attributes and skills can be useful as a menu from which to identify useful and necessary characteristics as well as provide guidance for further development. But recall the two rules from earlier in the chapter: Leadership is about you, and leadership is not about you. As a process (and as Kellerman argues, a system²⁹), leadership goes beyond you to include followers and context. Developing and applying your leadership based solely on a checklist of competencies is contrary to mindful leadership design.

Management? Leadership? Both

You have no doubt heard leader and manager used synonymously, likewise leadership and management. The good news is that the person in the position must be both leader and manager and consequently possess (or develop) some of the skills for both. The better news is that a skilled leader and manager will know how to discern and address leadership problems with leadership and management problems with management. The concepts are separate but complementary—like eating and drinking—same players, same ends; different means, different processes; and some overlap, which is what everyone argues about.

Leadership is the process of influencing others toward a common vision. Classic **management** activities include forecasting, planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling.³⁰ Many leadership scholars have weighed in on the distinction between leadership and management, with Jon Kotter providing one of the most prevalent distinctions: Management produces order and consistency, while leadership produces change and movement.³¹ You will find there are many quick and quirky ways to differentiate the two concepts, generally making management and the manager appear to be the less appealing role (e.g., The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is their own person.³² Who would *not* want to be their own person?).

The practical reality is there are a variety of activities, skills, and roles necessary for an organization to succeed. Some organizations are highly complex and require a great deal of organization and coordination, while others may be more dynamic and require adaptability and continual strategy readjustment. This situational and contextual nature means that sometimes you need leadership skills and activities, and sometimes you need management, and usually, it is a combination of both. The flexible leadership model proposed by Yukl and Lepsinger outlines a number of critical activities where leadership behaviors and management programs and systems must work together.^{33,34}

The Expert Leader

The ultimate end of any skill development effort is to achieve expert status. Expertise has been carefully studied much the way leadership has—find experts, observe them, interview them, identify what makes them experts (and others not). Experts—in chess, tennis, firefighting, and so forth—are characterized by how they think and what they perceive. Table 2.3 lists the characteristics of experts found by two researchers.

TABLE 2.3 ■ Characteristics of Expertise

Bransford, J., National Research Council. (2000). <i>How people learn: Brain, mind, experience and school.</i> ³⁵	Klein, G. (1998). <i>Sources of power: How people make decisions.</i> ³⁶
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice features and meaningful patterns of information not noticed by novices • Have acquired a great deal of content knowledge that is organized in ways that reflect a deep understanding of their subject • Knowledge that reflects contexts of applicability, not just simple facts • Ability to flexibly retrieve important aspects of their knowledge with little attentional effort • Possess varying levels of flexibility in their approach to new situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice patterns that novices do not notice • Notice anomalies—events that did <i>not</i> happen and other violations of expectancies • See the big picture—context and situation • Understand the way things work • Notice opportunities and can improvise • See differences that are too small for novices to detect • Deeply understand their own limitations

Based on the dynamic, situational, and context-based nature of leadership, the idea of an expert leader seems implausible.³⁷ How could you possibly know/be able to do/be like every known trait and skill related to effective leadership? Take another look at the characteristics of experts noted in the table. Positional leaders who have mindfully practiced their role for many years display these abilities. As a developing leader, you can benefit from knowing what you do not know as well as the *how to* of what you do not know. In a dynamic field like leadership, expertise may be rooted in one's ability to excel adaptably. For example

- Recognizing other people's emotions and regulating your own
- Connecting and working with a wide diversity of individuals
- Seeing the big picture of how things interact and impact a situation
- Learning new things and adjusting how you learn to meet new conditions
- Generating unique ideas that are of value and facilitating others to do the same

What other skills or capacities will enhance your leadership no matter what the context or situation?

As you design your leadership, the skills you choose to develop will often overlap and work in a complementary way. For example, skills as a systems thinker enable you to see underlying variables, which will enhance your ability to solve conflicts. Thinking creatively enhances your ability to make great decisions by helping you see more options, which would also help solve conflicts (more ideas for compromise).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

If you could possess one extraordinary trait, what would it be and why? Have you ever met someone with a trait you thought could never be useful and then were surprised when that person proved you wrong?

THE CREDIBLE LEADER

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

2.6 Appraise your leadership credibility.

The broad palette of traits and skills offer you many possible design options. Yet underlying every effective leader is an effective person, regardless of what combination of skills and traits they possess. The effective person can be seen from two perspectives: internally and externally; it's about you, and it's not about you. Internally, effective individuals have developed a strong CORE™—confidence, optimism, resilience, and engagement—attributes that work in unison to maximize success in any situation. Externally, you are only as effective as others perceive you to be. For some, this effectiveness is initially rooted, in charisma. For all, effectiveness is known as your credibility and reputation.³⁸ *Your reputation as credible is your most valuable external asset.*

Credibility is the quality of being believed and, in practice, doing what you say you are going to do. Kouzes and Posner consider credibility as the foundation of leadership and fundamental to their First Law of Leadership: “If you don’t believe in the messenger, you won’t believe the message.”³⁹ Without credibility, a leader has no positive relationship with followers, and without a positive relationship, there is no positive influence. “When people perceive their *immediate* manager to have high credibility, they’re significantly more likely to: be proud to tell others they’re part of the organization, feel a strong sense of team spirit, see their own personal values as consistent with those of the organization, feel attached and committed to the organization, (and) have a sense of ownership of the organization.”⁴⁰

Credibility comprises the foundational external attribute for a leader—external because it is based on the perceptions of followers. You cannot possess credibility without the approval of others. You cannot develop it within yourself. You can, however, learn ways to build your credibility—a task that must begin the very moment you meet a follower, if not before by reputation. Research has found that individuals judge you within microseconds. And knowing that people construct knowledge and form mental models, your first impression (no matter how professional, humble, relatable, and so forth) may run headfirst into followers’ past negative mental models of leaders. So step 1 of establishing your credibility is simple—talk to followers, find out what they know, want, need, aspire to, enjoy—and do so with genuine interest and enthusiasm.

What would you “most look for and admire in a leader, someone whose direction (you) would *willingly* follow?” asked Kouzes and Posner.⁴¹ According to their research, individuals noted four characteristics: honest, competent, inspiring, and forward-looking. Now turn the question around: Why should anyone be led by you? That is the question Goffee and Jones posed, highlighting four qualities effective leaders employ: showing their humanity, intuitively sensing timing and actions, managing with empathy, and capitalizing on their uniqueness as the leader.⁴² The Graham Jones Credibility Pyramid indicates that 50 percent of a leader’s credibility comes from the perception that they care (and another 25 percent is—based on their enthusiasm about the organization and its people). Together these studies highlight the key to credibility: building a trusting relationship—one where followers believe you can and will facilitate success.

Focus on small wins because people pay attention to the little things, especially when it directly relates to them. The perception of leaders and leadership brings forth what you might call the gray matter. Not the stuff between your ears, although directly relevant, but rather the situation where ambiguity lies. Many things in leadership are rife with those “it depends” situations. This includes your credibility as a leader. When there is no clear black and white, when

the answer is not readily apparent, then you are in gray territory. And when it comes to gray matters, the little things matter because followers are still trying to decide your credibility. “Respect is carried not in great, bold proclamations, but in small moments of surprising intimacy and empathy.”⁴³

Table 2.4 lists a number of other actions you can take to establish and build your credibility. Consider each one and the actions you might take to display these attributes.

TABLE 2.4 ■ Credibility Actions

How you treat people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With respect, honesty, and accountability Trust in follower capability and intentions Staying loyal to followers and backing their success Seeking to inspire With humility, gratitude, and confidence Celebrating and recognizing others' strengths and accomplishments
How you treat the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staying focused on goals and vision Fully engaging and leading by example Bringing current expertise to the table Admitting what you need to learn more about
How you treat yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authentically—be true to your genuine self With respect and honesty Continuing to learn and grow Seeing mistakes as learning opportunities Being resilient in the face of critics and setbacks

Leaders need to understand more about why people work, what matters to them, how they can support them more effectively, and what might motivate them to perform better. Credibility with followers means connecting with followers, and the nature and means of connecting will continue to change with evolving technology, organizational structures, and conceptions of leadership and work by new generations: “Many firms are moving toward a coaching model in which managers facilitate problem solving and encourage employees’ development by asking questions and offering support and guidance rather than giving orders and making judgments.”⁴⁴

Just as important as knowing how to build your credibility, you must also be aware of what will tarnish, if not destroy, it. Not doing something you said you were going to do, without explanation or apology, will crush your credibility. Withholding information and not being transparent in your decisions and actions communicates to others that they don’t matter, that they are unimportant, and that you don’t care. When followers ask themselves whether they can trust you, the answer is a deafening no. Even if a leader is a brilliant expert and wildly successful, followers will know they are working *for* a leader, not *with* and will invest themselves accordingly.

Other ways a leader can diminish or destroy their credibility include trying to fake any credibility-building activity, all of which then appears dishonest. Leaders who try to earn *likes* rather than respect and demand respect because of their position (versus through building a relationship and demonstrating care and expertise) also risk loss of credibility. Lastly, many leaders continue to operate under a top-down, hierarchical mindset. When a problem occurs, the top blames the next level down, who blames the next level, and so on to the bottom. Credible leaders accept personal responsibility and build that mindset into the organization. When a problem occurs, the first questions at the top should be the following: How have I created the conditions

such that this problem occurred? Did I not train someone effectively? Did I delegate too much, too quickly? Did I not provide sufficient resources? There certainly are times when a problem lies with a follower, but far more often, leaders inadvertently set others up for that problem. The credible leader admits mistakes, learns from them, and is willing to say, “I don’t know.”

How, then, can you become someone others desire to follow? Establishing your credibility in a specific leadership role or context is critical to your success, and it is something you will need to attend to every time, all the time. The next chapter continues your design of leadership self, looking at the dynamic needs of tomorrow’s leaders and how you can build the capacity to meet those unknown challenges.

Leadership by Design

Design Principle: **Closure**

Definition: “The principle of closure applies when we tend to see complete figures even when part of the information is missing.”⁴⁵

In Other Words: What you do not show people, they will make up on their own.

For Example: *Skimming* a chapter that is due tomorrow (although not recommended) can be beneficial if you are already familiar with the material because you will automatically fill in missing information in order to understand something.

For Leaders: Use closure to think about how you can best design yourself as a leader and what might be missing. What is lacking from your personal leadership brand that your followers will have to fill in for themselves? Are you being clear with your goals, values, and expectations or leaving room for interpretation? Are there facets about yourself that you *do not* want perceived as a single element, which you would rather stand alone? When conveying a vision, use closure to reduce complexity and increase interest—let groups fill in the gaps that lead up to the common goal.

The streams of water in this photo that you perceive as fluid are simply many tiny droplets, but you subconsciously use closure to make them seem like one cohesive element.



Many or one?

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DEI BY DESIGN

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- 2.7 Interpret identity as an often-hidden variable in how you perceive leaders and leadership.

This chapter began by considering your mental model of leaders and leadership. In developing perceptions of leadership and what it means to lead, consider the role of identity in leadership. What are your perceptions of *you* as a leader? Conceptually, **identity** is the mental picture of yourself that you carry with and update as you change and grow.⁴⁶ However, this self-portrait is made up of a variety of different elements. Parts of your identity are individually unique to you—your **personal identity**. Personal identities might include coffee-drinker, board game enthusiast, stamp collector, amateur podcaster, or aspiring magician. Conversely, **social identities** are human-made groupings based on shared characteristics. For example, your race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation are all forms of social identities. One interesting menu of identity elements is captured by the Four Layers of Diversity model, which extends out from the self, starting with personality (openness, agreeableness, etc.), to internal dimensions (physical ability, age, gender, race), to external dimensions (income, religion, educational background), to organizational dimensions (such as seniority, work location, union affiliation).⁴⁷

Right now, inside of you and everyone else lies a multitude of personal and social identities. How do different parts of your identity help or hinder you to do or achieve specific things? For example, what parts of your identity help you connect with new people? You will get to explore this further with an activity in Chapter 4. The impacts of those identities are not seen or felt at the same time or in identical ways. As your awareness is drawn to how your various identities help and harm you across interactions with others, their relative prominence, or salience, changes. For example, your identity as someone in a leadership role might help you connect with other leaders but might harm you in connecting with, say, workers who distrust their boss. Usually, multiple social identities are salient at the same time. This crossroads of identity elements, where different identity elements are relevant all at the same time, is referred to as **intersectionality**.⁴⁸ Each person brings their intersectional identities to leadership. These overlapping and intersecting identity elements constitute the foundation upon which you build your perceptions of yourself and others as leaders, attitudes and behaviors of leading, and the social and emotional processes of leadership.

Consider a group with which you associate. Who in your group is the most trusted? Who would you guess will be successful? To what extent are your answers influenced by a shared or favored identity? Society and thus organizations are built on social dynamics that advantage some members at the cost of others. These advantages and disadvantages are bestowed, in large measure, based on intersectional social identities. **Agentic identities** are based on factors you share with others that reward you with unearned privileges based on membership in those groups.⁴⁹ **Targeted identities**, by contrast, result in arbitrary challenges for belonging to certain groups.⁵⁰ The prizes or penalties you accrue may not be the result of your efforts but rather from the hidden influence of the unique constellation of agentic and targeted identities you embody. This is called your **positionality**.⁵¹

Your identity as a leader both impacts and is impacted by other intersectional identities. In some cases, positionality will grant special leadership advantages, while in others, it will hinder the ability to lead. Take some time to consider the following:

1. What are all the different ways you would describe yourself? Distinguish between personal and social identity elements.
2. Which identity elements do you tend to emphasize with others (salience)?
3. How do some of your identity elements relate? Do they overlap in some cases?
4. For each identity element, consider if (and with whom) it buys you privileges (agentic) or results in burdens (targeted).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Your brain is a lean, mean, pattern-making machine that loves to construct mental models of the world as you interact with the world. Those interactions and experiences have helped form your conception of leaders and leadership . . . some of which might be mistaken. But the more you become aware of your own conceptions, the more broadly you can perceive the world, including leadership.

Misconceptions about leaders and leadership can be more easily understood within the framework of the definition: Process of influencing others toward a common vision. Rule #1 (It's about you.) and Rule #2 (It's not about you.) provide additional guidance.

Effective leaders possess specific traits—the challenge lies in identifying what specific traits fit a specific situation, context, challenge, and group of followers. Nonetheless, as you design your leadership, it is important to know what traits you possess, where they are best utilized, and what traits you aspire to develop.

Likewise, effective leaders have a menu of skills that can be learned and developed as tools for a variety of leadership activities—influencing others, developing relationships, crafting vision, facilitating others' success, and so forth. Skills can be very specific or fall into general categories. One helpful way of organizing skills is by technical, human, and conceptual skills. Leaders need to shift their emphasis to different skills as they move to different roles and levels within an organization.

The list of what effective leaders could or should know, be able to do, or be like is quite vast. Some have tried to make sense of these by creating competencies, distinguishing between leadership and management, and envisioning what an expert leader might look like. Your personal and social identity informs and influences your efficacy, through both internal and external forces. Whatever combination of personal attributes you possess, developing your credibility and CORE™ provide you with transferable assets for effective leadership.

KEY TERMS

Agentic identity (p. 74)

Charisma (p. 66)

Closure (p. 73)

Comparison (p. 64)

Credibility (p. 71)

Crucible (of leadership) (p. 51)

Identity (p. 74)

Intersectionality (p. 74)

Level 5 leadership (p. 58)

Management (p. 69)

Mental model (p. 55)

Personal identity (p. 74)

Positionality (p. 74)
 Skills (p. 68)
 Social identity (p. 74)

Targeted identity (p. 74)
 Traits (p. 59)
 Vision (p. 62)

CORE™ ATTRIBUTE BUILDERS: BUILD NOW FOR FUTURE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Attribute: Optimism

Builder: Send a thank you

Studies have shown that expressing gratitude increases happiness and optimism.⁵² Take a moment right now to consider someone you could thank for something. The something could be big (thanks for helping me get into college) or small (thanks for showing me how to solve that math problem). Send that someone a thank you right now. You could simply email a thank you, but to get the maximum impact—for them and yourself—try writing and sending a note. Try doing this on a regular basis. Not only will you build your optimism, but you will further develop relationships that may someday be helpful.

CORE™ ATTRIBUTE BUILDERS: BUILD NOW FOR FUTURE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Attribute: Confidence

Builder: Reflected Best Self

This activity is based on the Reflected Best Self (RBS) exercise out of the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan. Utilizing the idea that self-awareness and focusing on your strengths are two very important facets of your development as a leader, the RBS seeks to provide you with a more objective sense of what your *best* self entails. Here is your task:

1. Identify five to eight individuals who know you very well. Consider who will provide honest feedback for you and who will take the time to provide a thoughtful answer.
2. Email those individuals and tell them you are taking a class that requires you to find out more about yourself and your potential as a leader. Ask them to provide three examples of when they have seen you at your best. Ask them to think carefully, provide you with a detailed answer, and then thank them.
3. Ask those individuals to complete the following:
 - a. One thing you (the student) do very well, one of your most valuable attributes is
 - i. For example, the time you:
 - b. One situation that really brings out the best in you is
 - ii. For example, the time you:
 - c. One way that you add value/make an important contribution is
 - iii. For example, the time you:

4. Create a table with the following categories:

Best Attributes	Example Noted	My Interpretation
<i>EXAMPLE</i> 1. Honest	1. Found and returned that big pile-o-cash	I am very empathetic to how others feel, and my honesty follows from that perspective.

5. Using the data from the table, craft a single page (1-page) summary portrait of your Reflected Best Self—reflected from others and reflected upon by you.

SKILL BUILDER ACTIVITY

Leadership Either/Or

How do you perceive leaders and leadership?

Following you will find some contrasting choices. Pick the one with which you most agree. No, you cannot say *both*, even if that is what you think.

Then choose the other option and try to justify your (second) choice to a friend.

A leader

1. Is inspirational or instructional
2. Is a model or a teammate
3. Is a friend or a boss
4. Is an expert or a good problem solver
5. Knows themselves or knows their followers
6. Is born or learns and develops
7. Has fun or assumes responsibility
8. Dresses to impress or dresses to fit in
9. Produces winners or wins
10. Makes it happen or facilitates a process
11. Challenges and critiques or maintains the current success
12. Decides based on their values or decides based on others' values
13. Achieves through their own initiative or achieves through creating conditions for others to succeed
14. Motivates others or removes barriers to allow others to pursue their motivation
15. Creates vision or allows vision to emerge

SKILL BUILDER ACTIVITY

Who Are You?

Understanding yourself is key to leadership. There are many ways to describe oneself, some of which are very specific to an individual and others that describe general traits and tendencies shared by many. Many self-assessments have been created to help define you. None of them are the full picture, but *all* of them provide some interesting insights for you. Find a few new ways to describe yourself and how that personal insight relates to you as a leader. Here is the assignment:

1. Start a new folder or file that is all about you. Have you previously taken any personality or other assessments, such as Myers-Briggs or True Colors? Find those results and revisit them.
2. Find three other personal assessments online (or elsewhere) and assess yourself (take the test, etc.). You might start with a general search, but dig a little deeper and find some interesting aspects that you assess about yourself.
3. Using the results from #1 and #2, answer the following—in a personal journal or in a conversation with a friend
 - a. Describe your assessments: What did they measure? What are the different ways in which the assessments describe people? What are the different categories or types of people described by each assessment?
 - b. Describe *your* results: What characteristics would you describe as defining you (based on these assessments)? What characteristics are definitely not you?
 - c. Explain two things you need to know about yourself as a leader based on the results of these assessments.