

The \$64,000 Question

By

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Susan Anderson was the deputy general manager in a large insurance company when she created a major change program.

It was a clear move from management to a leadership role, but at the time the now Melbourne-based consultant didn't really feel like she had taken a major role switch overnight.

“It is not like I woke up and thought ‘I’ve become a leader’,” says Anderson. “But I did recognise quickly that I needed to use different, although complimentary, skills.

“The biggest hurdle towards becoming a visionary was letting go. I managed 250 staff and created a major change program. What I realised was that the team developed the change; once I had articulated the vision to everyone from the receptionist to the chief executive, they came up with the ideas of how to make it happen.”

While Anderson, a registered psychologist – and a facilitator within the Australian Institute of Management’s Managing, Leading and Developing People training course – agrees she had certain personality characteristics of a good leader, she learnt other skills from her ‘visionary’ chief executive and people within the organisation.

“One of my strengths is being able to listen to others, another is to articulate clearly, but I was able to learn how to truly empower others and facilitate,” she says.

Anderson's view on leading and managing is that, yes, someone will have greater strengths as a leader or manager, but it is possible to have elements of both, and to develop both.

Strengths and weaknesses

“It is impossible to be strong in every area. Surround yourself with people who are strong in your areas of weakness,” says Anderson. “The organisation as a whole needs to have managers and leaders, not necessarily just the individual. It is more important to understand yourself and know what your strength and weaknesses are.”

Scientific research has revealed characteristics associated with effective performance as leaders, and as managers. Anderson says these skills, attributes, beliefs and behaviours that underpin leadership and management can be identified and diligently developed.

“Leadership and management development requires an understanding of yourself and others,” she says.

“It requires a critical self-reflection to better understand yourself, your motivations, preferences and goals, and their impact.”

Anderson believes that, ultimately, leadership and management complement one another.

“For example, leadership is required to produce change; management skills can assist in ensuring this change is not chaotic. Both sets of skills are required for a successful organisation. One without the other is problematic for any organisation.”

Leadership tasks

Ian Lees, a Principal of Leadership and People Development at management consultants The Nous Group, believes it is a “false dichotomy” to say that leadership

and management are completely different things. “Whatever your title is, leadership and management capabilities are both required to get results. Being a good leader is being a good manager, and a good manager is a good leader,” he says.

Like other things, while elements of leadership can be learnt, some people are inherently better than others. According to Lees, leadership tasks include:

- Setting a vision for the future
- Setting and living the mission and values
- Good listening
- Providing purpose and meaning
- Tapping into people’s individual strengths
- Helping people develop.

Lees says a manager’s role include goal setting, organising, planning and controlling. “An effective strategic leader has to be able to do all these at the same time.”

He also believes it is unhelpful to split the roles to get outcomes within some organisations. “In practical reality, roles that have to achieve outcomes will need both leadership and management.”

Lees says that in the current “ambiguous and uncertain times”, and with the future becoming increasingly complex in key areas such as financial markets, geopolitical shifts, climate change, and the patterns of doing business under constant change, strategic leaders need to be developing new mindsets and perspectives about what is going on and what is possible.

“Strategic leadership is about taking action in the present moment, informed by the view of the big picture. They must solve today’s challenges while working towards tomorrow’s emerging opportunities.”

Lees says for individuals embarking on leadership, the personal journey starts with

their own integrity and intensity. “The transition to strategic leadership involves making the best decisions possible for the future of the business with limited and often conflicting information. The ultimate challenge is developing the capacity and personal resilience to excel in an environment of ongoing ambiguity. It may take leaders into an uncomfortable space, but it is essential they go there,” he says.

Christopher Shen, an organisational psychologist, distinguishes clearly between leadership and management.

“Leadership is the ability to set, motivate and inspire others to achieve a desired vision and direction. It is strategic and requires visionary beliefs and behaviours. Management is the ability to achieve outcomes and targets with, and through, other people. It is operational and involves orderly beliefs and behaviours,” says Shen.

Shen does believe an insightful individual can develop the knowledge, skills, experiences and attitude to be both an outstanding leader and manager of people, however “very often, good managers are not always good leaders. Moreover, good leaders may not be good managers.”

Skill sets

Effective leadership	Effective management
Creates a compelling vision	Planning
Engages people’s aspirations and talent	Organising
Brings new perspectives	Controlling/ monitoring
Focus on big picture	Coordinating
Self-awareness	Uses data to inform decisions
Develops people	Uses sound HR administration

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Based in Melbourne, Australia, Christopher Shen Consulting brings organisational psychology solutions to workplaces, helping people become stronger leaders and teams become better performers.

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