



PSDP—Resources and Tools: What makes an effective leader?

Introduction

Leadership plays a part in the workplace, politics, the worlds of celebrity and sport, in local communities, social groups, and in families – most of us are affected by it in some way.

It is also a topic of popular debate within social work and this is reflected in the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2016), recognising that social workers can be leaders at all levels, whether this is as a student, an experienced practitioner or senior manager.

This learning tool will provide you with an overview of some ideas about leadership, specifically focusing on leadership within social work. You can use it to review and reflect on how you want to develop your leadership skills as a practice supervisor.

The tool considers the qualities of great leaders, ideas for developing leaders in social work, and the differences between management and leadership, with some reflective questions throughout these sections.

There are then a range of leadership development tasks you can work through to further apply some of your learning.

Qualities of great leaders

Do leaders have innate characteristics that make them naturally adept at leading others? If so, what might these characteristics be?

Early theorists tried to answer those questions by looking at individuals who were viewed as great social, political and military leaders of the time, such as Mother Theresa, Abraham Lincoln, Napoleon Bonaparte and Mohandas ‘Mahatma’ Ghandi.

This became known as the ‘Great Man Theory’ or ‘Trait Theory’ due to its focus on the traits of individuals. Do you think leadership is primarily linked to a person’s personality traits? What other factors might influence whether or not someone is a great leader?

The image on the next page was created by a health sector professional and was shared on Twitter by [@leighakendall](#). It is interesting to consider the attributes which may transfer to leaders in social work.



The first point, 'introduce yourself', is something that health colleagues have been challenging themselves on recently, to ensure health professionals always explain who they are when treating patients.

As a practice supervisor, this may be linked more deeply to the importance of relationship-based practice, getting to know your supervisees and making sure that other stakeholders, such as children and families and the wider professional network, know who you are.

Some useful sense checks for leaders are to think, 'What do I value in my managers and leaders?' and, 'What are the skills, knowledge, values and behaviours of a good leader?'

Using the diagram above as an audit checklist, think about:

- > what you do well and what you could develop in your own leadership attributes
- > what you need to consider in terms of managing a diverse workforce
- > how these leadership attributes help you to do this meaningfully.

Developing social work leaders

Great leadership qualities in social work are arguably more pertinent now than ever before, given increasing public expectations about moral responsibility and accountability.

The renewed emphasis on compassion for staff, and for children and families, also underlines the importance of such developments in leadership thinking.

Whilst these concepts are viewed in the literature as interesting areas of potential investigation, the study of them is still at an early stage of development. This means that more work is needed to help us know with any certainty whether these approaches to leadership make a difference in the way we might instinctively think they would.

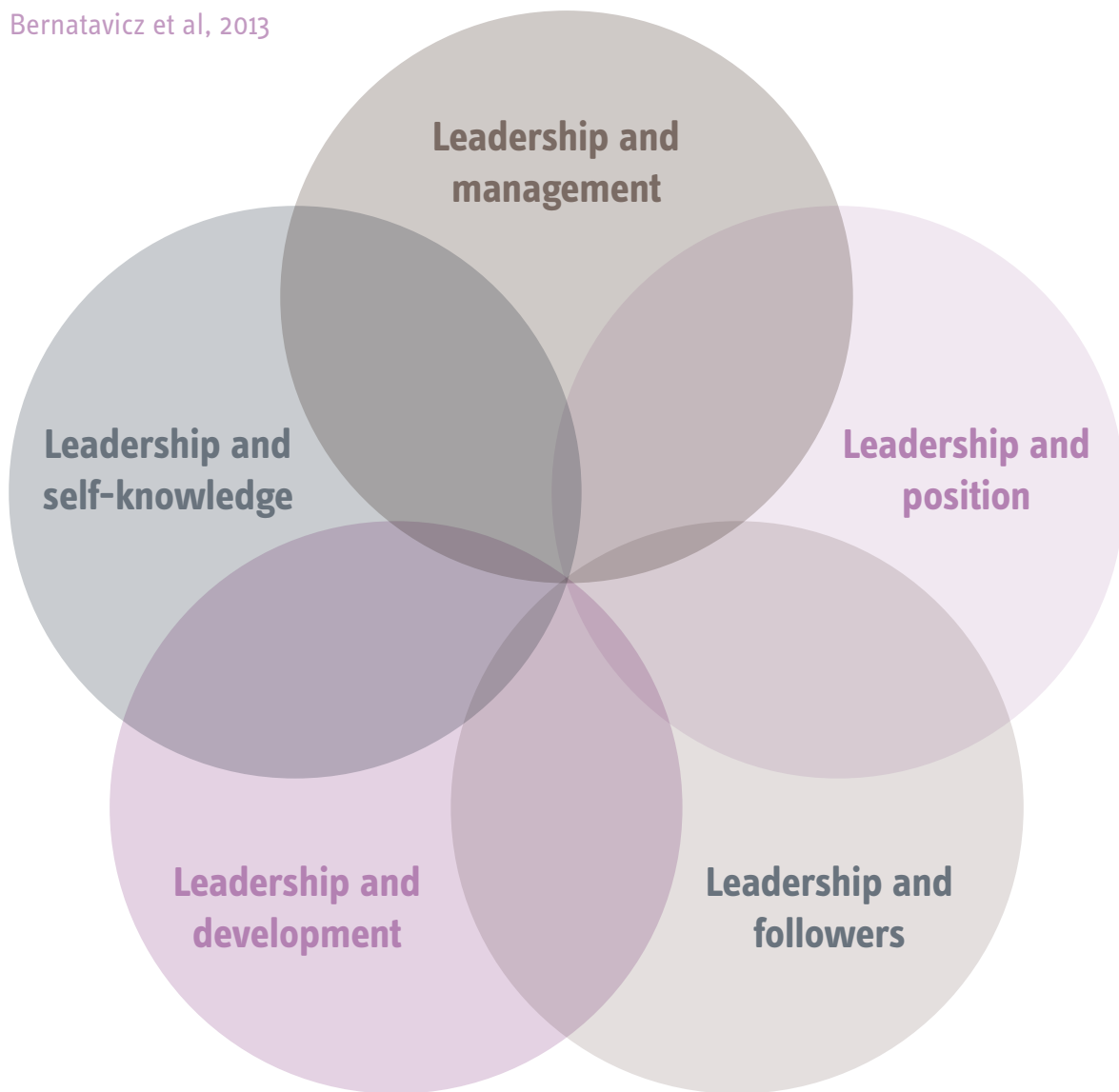
Generic management and leadership frameworks are helpful. However, it must be acknowledged that social work management and leadership have some specific considerations.

The literature on social work leadership and management highlights the importance of the profession's value base. The value of social justice is also at the heart of sound social work leadership and management, and Webster (2010, p501) writes as follows:

‘How do managers advocate for social justice in organisational terms? How does management serve the values of the profession? Social work ethics apply as much to management as they do to the profession's commitment to challenging the structures in society that contribute to social exclusion, marginalisation and disempowerment.’

Bernotavicz et al's (2013) review of management theory conceptualised the specific learning requirements in social work leadership and management programmes (illustrated on the next page).

Bernatavicz et al, 2013



This model sets out five core domains for developing social work leaders, as follows:

Leadership and self-knowledge

Leadership is based on self-awareness providing the basis for transparency, authenticity, integrity, and trust (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002).

Leadership and management

The concepts of leadership and management are interdependent, overlapping, complementary, and vital to organisational success, and the terms should be used interchangeably.

Leadership and position

Leadership is not reserved for positions at the top of the organization, but may be exercised by people at all levels of the organization, including by 'informal leaders.

Leadership and followers

Leadership does not exist in a vacuum. Leadership exists only with the consensus of followers (Bennis, 2007). Leaders need to balance order and stability with adaptive and constructive change.

Leadership and development

Since leadership is not an innate ability, it can be developed through careful training and coaching.

The next section breaks down some of these ideas in more detail and leads to some reflective prompt questions. Before you move on, perhaps spend a few minutes thinking about your reaction to this information. Which ideas resonate with you the most?

Management and leadership - what's the difference?

It is absolutely critical that we understand the difference between being a manager and being a leader, which can be defined as the key tasks that fall to each role. This has been defined by Rodd (2006, p20) and is illustrated in the table below.

Managers	Leaders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Plan Set objectives, forecast, analyse problems, make decisions and formulate policy. > Organise Set objectives, forecast, analyse problems, make decisions and formulate policy. > Co-ordinate Inspire the staff to contribute both individually and as a group to achieving the organisation's objectives. > Control Check performance against plans, develop people and maximise their potential to attain agreed outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Give direction Find a way forward and communicate a clear direction, identify new goals, services and structures. > Offer inspiration Through ideas and articulate thoughts that motivate others. > Build teamwork Use teams as the most effective form of leadership, spending time building and encouraging collaboration. > Set an example Model what leaders do and how they do it. > Gain acceptance Act in ways that inspire acknowledgement of leadership status in followers.

Some people fall into the trap of thinking that leadership is superior to management. As a practice supervisor, you need to be both an effective manager and an effective leader, and draw on these depending on the situation and context. Compared to the leadership functions of being a

visionary and inspiring others, it might seem reductionist to think about the management functions of being organised and ensuring objectives are met. However, these functions are essential to any team, and may be the things that children and families experience directly.

One main difference in the tasks of leaders and managers is that leaders do not necessarily hold or occupy a management position. The distinction between the two positions first emerged from work by James MacGregor Burns (1978). He identified two different approaches to leadership - transactional and transformational.

Transactional leadership is characterised as being grounded in a series of exchanges or transactions between a leader and their followers, normally rooted within a hierarchical organisational structure. However, transformational leadership is not dependent on hierarchical seniority, but rather something that happens when followers choose to be led by a particular person, regardless of the formal relationships between them.

The transformational model of leadership views leaders as agents of change, who inspire people in relation to what they are trying to achieve by gaining trust and commitment from others.

Transformational leaders typically appeal to the needs of others and connect with them in a way that engages their interest and energy separately from task-related transactions.

In relation to leadership across every level of social work practice, transformational leadership characteristics are helpful aspirations to adopt. The questions below invite you to reflect on your role. These kinds of reflections are really important, so you could invest at least 30 minutes working through them:

Using Rodd's list of management and leadership tasks above as an audit, how might you analyse your role within your team or organisation? How does your identity, impact on undertaking these tasks?

Thinking about the transactional leadership approach of your hierarchical role as a leader, what might others notice about your approach as a practice supervisor? How do you manage your power in relation to your followers? How might different people perceive this from their own positions?

Considering the attributes of transformational leadership, how do you see yourself and what might others see in you? Which leaders within your professional network demonstrate great transformational leadership qualities? How might you model these to your team?

Thinking about the individuals that you supervise, what needs to happen to encourage them to demonstrate leadership qualities? What do you need to consider in relation to equality and diversity? What do individuals need to encourage them to reach a level playing field?

Leadership development tasks

The following tasks are designed for you to further evaluate your leadership attributes from a number of perspectives, by means of a tailored 360 degree feedback process. You may find it helpful to do some or all of the tasks, in addition to your own evaluation, based on the ideas shared in the tool:

Observation of other leaders

Look out for examples of leadership within your workplace which may illustrate some of the ideas and theories discussed. Do you notice any patterns in the types of leadership you observe? If you pay particular attention to difference and diversity, what patterns do you see?

Arrange a meeting with a trusted peer

Have a conversation about a situation where you have demonstrated great leadership qualities and invite them to do the same. Consider together what you might do differently if you dealt with the same situation again? What observations did you make of each other's leadership approach? What advice might you give each other about your areas for learning and development?

Arrange a meeting with your manager

Share some examples of learning from reading this tool. Invite them to comment on your leadership attributes. Share some examples of your leadership approaches and talk about how comfortable or uncomfortable you feel adopting transactional and transformational leadership styles. Invite them to suggest how you may become more effective in your leadership role.

Seek feedback from your team

Take the opportunity to invite individuals from within your team to give feedback on your leadership style. Perhaps ask specific questions related to the attributes of great leaders and say what their experience of your leadership style is. Invite them to comment on the areas that you could develop and seek their advice on what this might look like.

Other ways you can use this tool

Leadership skills can be developed at all levels of the workforce, so you could introduce these ideas to your team and invite them to have group discussions about the various attributes of a great leader.

You could use the tool for individual supervisions and appraisals and challenge your supervisees to complete some of the tasks at the end.

You could bring this tool to your own supervision and discuss the concepts with your manager and explore your areas of strength, learning and development needs.

You could share these ideas with peers within a management meeting or action learning set, and invite them to work through the questions and tasks.




We want to hear more about your experiences of using PSDP resources and tools. Connect via Twitter using #PSDP to share your ideas and hear how other practice supervisors use the resources.

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