Ten practical lessons for modern leadership



Modern organisations need leadership that can inspire and motivate individuals and transform teams into successful organisations that positively impact the world. Here are ten lessons from my own practice on how to develop (your) leadership.

With 16 years of experience as a director and over 30 years as a manager, I know that managing a high-performance team is an intensive job. It demands quite a bit from you as a manager. In the first instance, it's about letting go and having faith in (and giving confidence to) the group. Where the natural reflex of many managers is to steer and control from above, in my experience, a modern leader trusts the group process and strengthens the team's innovative power.

Transformational

Perhaps 'transformational' leadership comes closest, although I do not favour strict classifications. Transformational leaders can inspire, empower, and motivate people and transform teams into successful organisations with a positive impact on the world. They are adaptive, innovative, and collaborative. Connecting is an integral part of their leadership. They also have an eye for the individual development of their employees: talent development and learning & development in general are of paramount importance. Such qualities are crucial for organisations in this complex and dynamic world and the challenges they face.

Connection and trust

Connection is the common thread in modern leadership, with trust as a prerequisite.

The top 5 challenges in our dynamic world are currently:

1. AI and big data
2. Climate change
3. Labour market shortages
4. Political uncertainty
5. Geopolitical tensions

Trust is necessary for there to be credible and connecting leadership and enthusiastic employees and successful teams. Connection and trust ensure that people work with passion, show ownership, want to develop, are collegial and committed, work well together, communicate openly, are willing to resolve conflicts among themselves, and are open to change and innovation. If there is a lack of trust, then there is a lack of connection, and you get neglected teams, mutual friction, wavering policies, resistance to change and staff leaving.

The five most important competencies for modern leadership:

1. Connecting and collaborative
2. Innovative
3. Ability to adapt
4. Talent development
5. Ethical

Ten practical lessons for the development of your leadership

1. Provide structure and a vision

Freedom is joy, but there is no freedom without bondage. Even if you offer your team a lot of freedom, there is always a need for structure and direction and certainly also for vision. That is also what people ask of you as a manager and what they expect from you: a consistent way of leading within clear organisational structures and a clear view of the board and the future of the organisation. Such a framework also provides security and creates trust.

2. Create free play

The most important lesson is that too much control stifles. As a manager, you must, therefore, create free latitude within which your employees have the autonomy to carry out their work as they see fit, without fear of reprisals for mistakes. Also, let people experiment with new procedures or working methods that they have devised themselves and with solutions that they have come up with themselves. This creates an enthusiastic and innovative team and committed employees.

3. Ensure open communication and transparency

Make sure there is open communication about decisions you make as a manager, the (strategic) goals you want to set, and also about possible opportunities and threats for the organisation. People like to know what is going on in the context of their work and want to participate in the discussion and think about it, which ensures involvement. By including them in your considerations, you involve your colleagues in the policy and give them the confidence that you are in control.

4. Help where possible

As a manager, you are not on an island. Authority also comes with service to the group you work with. That starts with an open door of your office as an invitation to your team members to walk in if necessary. Your job as a leader is also to help your people realise their task, let them learn by coaching them, assist them when they have problems, and encourage them to explore their own limits and surpass themselves. Servant leadership makes it easier for people to come to you with problems, and that trust grows.

5. Organize your own opposition

It may be difficult in the beginning, but give criticism and criticism within your team space, even if it concerns yourself. Also, keep this in mind when recruiting new employees: Don't hire clones of yourself or yes-men. Remember, too, that most criticism is constructive in nature and task- and role-oriented and not meant to be personal.

6. Embrace diversity

Make sure every voice in the team is heard and given attention. Diversity counts. Differences within the team should not only be respected but also used and celebrated as much as possible to achieve the goal of the organisation and inspire each other. That one quiet colleague can be a source of ideas if you give him or her the opportunity and strength to stand up and speak up. Also, steer this line when recruiting new staff: a team that is too homogeneous cannot think out-of-the-box and thus loses innovative capacity.

7. Reward initiative

Inspire and encourage your team members to take the initiative alone or jointly for new ways of working, for example, or have someone take on a new project. 'Can I do that?' you will sometimes get back because not everyone is equally sure of themselves. But with some extra support, it is often possible to make people rise above themselves and be proud of themselves. Then give recognition to this and celebrate the successes. If it fails, don't worry; that's a valuable learning opportunity. Above all, respect the ownership of ideas that emerge from the group and certainly do not appropriate your good ideas from others!

8. Provide protection where necessary

As a leader, you also offer protection to the team and the individuals in the team. The group needs to know that it is safe. This can be done in various ways, for example, by acting as a buffer between the team and the outside world or the rest of the organisation. But also by knowing what is going on in the world and acting accordingly in the event of threats and opportunities, and sometimes by protecting or supporting individual people, for example, in the event of personal problems.

9. Encourage learning and development

Learning and development (L&D) is crucial in modern leadership. You want your team to be able to adapt quickly to new developments and act innovatively. In addition, L&D ensures more employee satisfaction and better retention. L&D also allows you to steer talent and leadership development within your team. In short, L&D is a critical factor in building resilient, innovative and successful teams.

10. Know yourself and acknowledge your mistakes

Actually, I should have started with this: know thyself. It is said to have been written above the gate of the temple of Apollo in Delphi: 'Know thyself', a wise advice. Self-knowledge is a prerequisite for authenticity and good leadership. Critical reflection on your own actions is essential in this. Don't spare yourself; acknowledge your mistakes, and say sorry if you need to. Leaders are not infallible beings but people of flesh and blood who also dare to be vulnerable, empathetic and involved. Paradoxical, perhaps, but it requires quite a bit of self-confidence to be able to do that and admit and fix

your mistakes. The latter is, of course, just as important: *'if you talk the talk, you have to walk the talk'*, or *'practice what you preach'*.

Example of modern 'transformational' leadership

A contemporary example of transformational leadership is Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft. Since taking over in 2014, Nadella has driven significant transformation within the company, both in terms of company culture and business strategy.

Charisma & vision
Nadella has positioned herself as a leader who strongly believes in empathy, continuous learning, and the importance of a growth mindset. His leadership style, which contrasts sharply with that of his predecessors, earns him respect and admiration both inside and outside Microsoft.

Inspiration & motivation
He has recalibrated Microsoft's vision around the concept of "mobile first, cloud first", and later to advancing intelligent cloud and intelligent edge. His ability to communicate this vision and his enthusiasm for it make for inspired and spirited employees.

Innovative
Nadella encourages his team to think innovatively and challenge the status quo. Under his leadership, Microsoft has reinvented itself in the rapidly changing world of technology, with significant investments in cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing.

Focused on personal development
He is known for his approach of individual attention to the development of his employees. Nadella has transformed Microsoft's culture into a more open, inquisitive environment where mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and grow, as opposed to something that needs to be punished.

What can Van Eijck & Partners do for you?
For the success of an organisation, the focus is often placed on governance, the organisation chart and the allocation of tasks, powers and responsibilities. Although all correct, it mainly starts with the connection and trust in the people who make up the organisation. How to get there is a beautiful road, and we are happy to help you with that, by mirroring, testing and connecting with you and your goals. It takes guts to take the next step from this approach. Fortunately, there are many examples of organisations that have been able to thrive by growing from connection and trust.

Want to know more about how to get there? Feel free to contact us. We can be reached at 085-3330001 or secretariaat@vaneijckpartners.nl.