

H4 Consulting Brief

Managership

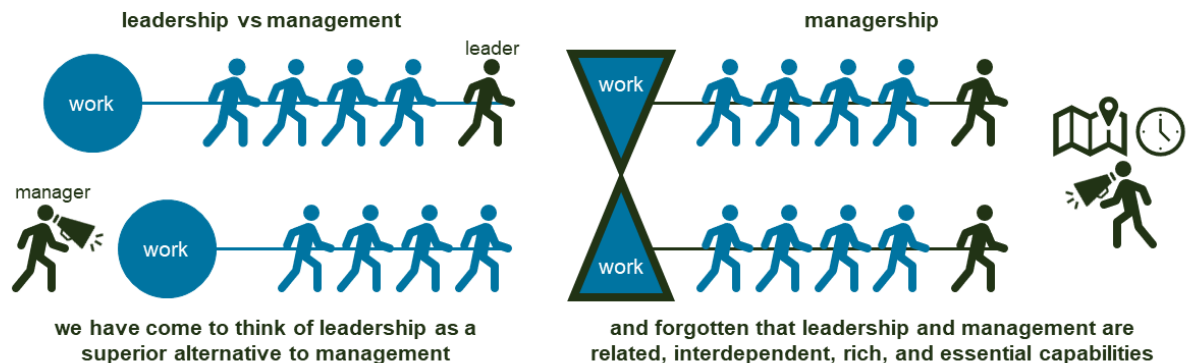
Management was once the celebrated discipline by which humans built and maintained structures, processes, and systems that made big ambitions and big organisations possible. Recently, management has been overshadowed and often displaced by its more charismatic sibling: leadership. Leadership enthusiasts have derided, dismissed, and devalued management as a controlling and bureaucratic black sheep, until nobody wants to manage anything.

Management, particularly in publicly funded organisations, has a tarnished reputation as inefficient, controlling, and ideally unnecessary in modern organisations. Many narratives that emphasise the primacy of front-line workers seem to suggest that public value can be maximised by simply unshackling skilled and intrinsically motivated workers from their meddling overseers.

The attraction of leadership rhetoric in publicly funded organisations has, in part, been a reaction against the perceived limitations and failings of management. Even definitions of leadership are often framed as flattering comparisons with management, such as inspiration vs coercion, encouragement vs control, creativity vs compliance, and influence vs power.

Most publicly funded organisations need to coordinate effort across large workforces efficiently, consistently, and to high standards of quality and transparency. That takes some capacity for management, not just leadership, no matter how motivated the workers or how inspirational the leaders. If everyone is leading, but nobody is managing, then a lot of energy, expertise, and time will be misdirected or wasted.

Emphasising the skills and language of leadership, while ignoring or minimising the skills of management, is attractive to many workers and prospective workers. Aspiring leaders can be rapidly demoralised, however, when they discover that most 'leadership' roles require a lot of management work, for which they are often not adequately prepared or supported by the organisation.



Publicly funded organisations need to cultivate both great management and great leadership skills, often in the same individuals. That starts with recognising and clearly communicating the mix of capabilities and behaviours they really need from workers, managers, and executives, not just the capabilities and behaviours that seem most exciting or attractive.

For most publicly funded organisations, that includes a lot of management skills to build and maintain efficient, effective, and consistent structures, processes, and systems to deliver important outcomes equitably. School principals, for example, are not just educational leaders, but also managers of large budgets, facilities, and workforces. Leading a school system similarly includes, but is not limited to, inspiring principals, teachers, students, and other workers.

Managers need leadership skills, like strategy, innovation, humility, and a focus on people, but leaders also need management skills, like planning, administration, coordination, and oversight. A fair and accurate narrative that values both sets of skills can help to close the gap between expectations and reality for current and prospective managers and leaders, improving both their morale and their performance.

Both management and leadership have an interest in understanding how things really are and making them better. That should extend to understanding the nature of the work required for publicly funded organisations to make the world better. It is, finally, time to acknowledge that leadership and management are siblings, not rivals, and bring the management 'black sheep' of the family back into the fold.

To find out more about how you can use this approach in your organisation, contact us: info@h4consulting.com.au
Find additional resources at www.h4consulting.com.au/resources