

What is a leader?

If you inspire people to follow you then you are a leader, Emma Brooks explores

There are many complex definitions of leadership, The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) explains it in simple terms. Leaders have followers, and that's it. If you inspire people to follow you then you are a leader. Much research has been carried out to argue that leadership and management do not go hand in hand, and that leaders are born and not trained.

Dr Keith Grint¹ of the University of Oxford believes it's time to call a halt to the search for a scientific solution to the leadership question and suggests an alternative stance. 'I believe that the most useful way for organisations to view leadership is as an art not a science, as a collective process not an individual achievement, and that the most successful leaders lead through negotiation not logic.'

Grint believes that an organisations' philosophy should be leaderful and not leader-led; many people within organisations lead, but are not recognised as formal leaders. Collective or deep leadership programmes nurture the potential for all employees and not a select few. He argues that 'Subordinates need to be given as much exposure as possible to leadership and the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them. Simply pushing leadership responsibly out to subordinates who are unprepared and untrained, are bound to fail.'

According to the CIPD UK global comparisons leadership forecast 2005-2006², only 27% of UK leaders (versus 37% of the global sample) had developed their skills before being put into a leadership position. 59% of UK leaders dismiss the importance of formal management training to their success. They are also less enamoured of reading and computer-based learning, and favour observation, on-the-job training and a trial and error approach to development. There is a marked shift

from formal training and a significant growth in executive coaching. Are UK companies doing enough to prepare and sustain successful leadership?

Less than 50% of leaders have a development plan. The research shows that organisations with high-quality leader development programmes and formal succession management programmes have superior business performance.

The report concludes that leaders in the UK, though resilient, often lack dedicated attention from their superiors to help them develop in a planned fashion through continuous learning, both from job experiences and more formal training activities. As a consequence, they tend to arrive in leadership positions less well prepared than their colleagues elsewhere, and they inspire less confidence in their ability to execute strategies successfully.

Leadership skills in procurement

Negotiation is a key skill amongst Purchase and Supply Management (P&SM) professionals and Grint argues that it is fundamental to leadership. 'The cultural assumption (supported by the UK's entire educational system) is that problems and disputes can only be resolved through logical debate and argument', Grint points out. 'Yet all the evidence suggests that people's minds are not changed by appeals to logic or rationality but by appeals to their interests. For example, however logical the business case for making someone redundant, they are unlikely to be persuaded it is a good idea. However, they may still be persuaded by a negotiated settlement that satisfies their interests. People can be trained to negotiate rather than argue and the ability to deploy negotiating skills, as and when necessary, is key to a leaderful organisation.'

The challenge for procurement managers and CPOs is nurturing their teams to become future leaders. Providing them with the skills set needed and empowering them to utilise it. By implementing a programme of continuous professional development (CPD) not only to professionals and managers (perceived leaders), but for all procurement personnel will encourage thinking, questioning and innovation to take the department to a new level. Through a combination of both formal training and space to flourish natural managers/coaches and leaders will evolve, and will raise the bar for the procurement profession by adding impetus to the body of knowledge and continued value throughout the supply chain.

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¹ *Leaders are trained and not born. Dr Keith Grint. The Edge Economic and Social Research Council.*

² *Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development UK global comparisons leadership forecast 2005-2006 'Best practices for tomorrow's global leaders'*