

The third edition of the bestselling leadership manual

Leadership Matters 3.0

How leaders at all levels can create great schools

Andy Buck

Now organised into 40 practical topics

‘Much more than a how-to guide. Impressive synthesis of evidence-based theory and down-to-earth advice’
Dame Alison Peacock

Leadership Matters 3.0: How leaders at all levels can create great schools

Andy Buck

This book is just one element of a suite of resources designed to help improve the educational outcomes for all children by empowering educational leaders in national, regional and local contexts to examine, refine and develop their leadership skills.

In this revised and updated edition, the author takes an in-depth and diagnostic approach, encouraging leaders at all levels in schools to think about their own personal qualities; their specific situation; their own leadership actions; and their own overall leadership approach.

Developed alongside the book, the Leadership Matters website gives school leaders affordable access to high quality online diagnostic tools, videos and other leadership resources. Everything on the website, including the 40 exclusive videos, is designed around the same 40 topics from the book (known as the LM40), making it really easy for busy school leaders to find what they need.

Also available from John Catt Educational:
The Leadership Matters reflective journal, based around the LM40 topics.
A series of Leadership Matters case-study books, written by serving school leaders, which exemplify the LM principles in action.

‘*Leadership Matters* is one of the books I return to most frequently. It’s a text for our time – an epoch when leaders need, more than ever, to know what they stand for, what their non-negotiable principles are, how to communicate in a range of forms to a range of audiences, and how to sustain ourselves emotionally, morally, when times turn grim.’

Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders



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Since then, Andy has founded two organisations: Leadership Matters and #honk. Both aim to improve the educational outcomes for pupils by supporting great leadership development. Leadership Matters is a web-based membership organisation that offers school leaders affordable access to high quality online diagnostic tools and other leadership articles, videos and blogs. #honk is the organisation through which Andy works directly with educational leaders on executive coaching, team development, training and conference keynotes.

Andy was invited to become a Fellow of the RSA in 2015 and is a Founding Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching. He is also Honorary Vice President at the Geographical Association and Honorary Education Adviser to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

He has also served on the boards of the Teacher Training Agency, the National College for School Leadership, Partnerships for Schools, the Teacher Development Trust and the Teaching Awards.

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Praise for *Leadership Matters*

'Andy's latest book is a masterpiece, combining the vast expertise and experience he gained as a teacher and school leader with his extensive knowledge of the most useful theory and research into leadership.' Brian Lightman, former general secretary of ASCL

'A very powerful tool in the hands of school leaders who are determined to do the best for young people.' Chris Husbands, Vice Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University and former Director of UCL Institute of Education

'This book is an important contribution to the mission we all need to commit to: developing school leaders of the present and the future.' Emma Knights, Chief Executive, National Governors Association

'I cannot think of a more useful book on school leadership. It is full of good sense and practical suggestions, with a strong theoretical underpinning.' John Dunford, former general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders

'Alive with real examples, this book is – unusually – both an easy-to-apply practical guide and a stimulus for new thinking and fresh possibilities.' Jon Coles, Chief Executive, United Learning

'Rarely will you see the complexities of leadership and management made this clear and translated into a book this useful. Each school leader and would-be leader should pick up a copy.' Alex Quigley, Director of Learning and Research, Huntington School, author of *The Confident Teacher*

'A must read for school leaders. Comprehensive and packed full of evidence and practical wisdom on the characteristics of successful leaders.' James Toop, CEO, Ambition School Leadership

'Typically accessible, with practical advice and some excellent analysis and personal insights it is a useful resource for reading in chunks as and when or in one sitting as you prepare for a new challenge. It made me wince and nod within the same chapters as I recognised my traits, successes and mistakes.' Professor Toby Salt, CEO, AQA

'This is an invaluable resource for school leaders not only in the UK but from further afield – highly recommended.' Susan Douglas, Senior Adviser, Schools, British Council and CEO, Eden Academy

'Andy Buck has created an easy-to-read yet immensely powerful guide for every school leader, a book filled with wisdom, humour and practical guidance. He manages to reach a perfect balance: a mix of inspiration with occasional uncomfortable truths to confront. This is a must-read.'
David Weston, Chief Executive, The Teacher Development Trust

'A clear and compelling argument that collaboration within our schools and across schools fosters strategic thinking and healthy reflection.' Jill Berry, Leadership Consultant, author

'Andy Buck has been there and done it and this book is evidence of that, bringing together a range of leadership thinking and practical in-school experience that delivers a practical, useful handbook for school leaders everywhere.' John Campbell, Executive Director, Growth Coaching International, Sydney, Australia

*For Jo and Wendy
My loving, funny and adorable twin sisters.*



*Thank you for being my pupils when
I taught my very first lesson!*

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Foreword

I am delighted to recommend this book to you. Leadership is complex, demanding and of vital importance. Within this book Andy Buck offers boundless practical strategies, resources and tools for reflection, always written with a tone of humility and gentle humour. He reflects on the journey towards achieving great leadership, drawing on his own experience of the 'Good to Great' programme of the London Challenge, headship and the evidence that exists within the literature about ways of building and sustaining a positive high performing culture and climate of shared values. We are provided with a rich seam of solutions to the ever challenging aspects of leadership in a manner that is fuelled by the importance of evidence-informed strategy.

As the Chief Executive of the Chartered College of Teaching, I am all too aware of the necessity of building leadership opportunities across the education system that enable our teachers to thrive. Leaders who can build organisations driven by shared ambition imbued with positivity and emotional intelligence are likely to be those that create the best possible environment for both colleagues and young people to achieve success. There are currently many pressures upon school leaders, one of which may be to reach for the solution that appears to offer a quick-fix. Within this book we are reminded of the vital importance of building and sustaining a culture that enables us to recognise the importance of key development areas such as alignment of vision that enable others to flourish. These approaches take time, but the advice and strategies

offered ensure that every step taken will contribute to the ultimate aim of building a resilient, principled team capable of achieving their goals.

We are offered sensible down-to-earth practical advice throughout. It is particularly helpful to read the distilled findings of establish academics and to hear from many thought-leaders in the field of leadership both within and beyond the field of education. Each chapter begins with an inspirational quote followed by detailed examples that support what Andy Buck describes as 'leadership habits'. Many chapters contain a useful synthesis of theory about particular aspects of leadership such as change management, dealing with conflict, building alignment and self-knowledge. The importance of developing trust through organisational listening and coaching skills is emphasised throughout.

This is not a 'how-to' guide. It is much more than that. Within these pages the reader is at times both inspired and challenged. No-where in this book is there an expectation that leadership should be simply instinctive or that it can easily learned. Recognition is given throughout of the complexity of skills needed to lead with heart and head. Wherever you are in your leadership journey, this book will help you reflect, take stock, and move forward with professional courage. Keep reading, we need you, our children need you and our teachers need the kind of leadership that Andy Buck shows us it is possible to achieve.

Dame Alison Peacock,
CEO, Chartered College of Teaching

Introduction

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
concerned citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

When I started teaching geography in a north London comprehensive school back in 1987, I was passionate about my subject. I had been in training for a year at the Institute of Education in London and had learned a huge amount from my inspirational tutors, Frances Slater and David Lambert. I loved the pupils in my school and I loved my job. But even then, I knew how my own success depended upon others around me. There were times when I needed to draw on more experienced colleagues in the school when dealing with difficult pupils. If our pupils were to have a coherent and challenging educational experience that enabled them to achieve great things, there needed to be proper planning and organisation of the curriculum as a whole. If I was to continue to grow and develop as a teacher, I needed the chance to work with others in a productive and focused way that enabled me to reflect on my practice and improve. In other words, even then, I knew that I needed to be working as part of a well-orchestrated team: that leadership mattered.

These days, of course, it is pretty widely accepted that second to the quality of teaching itself, the single thing that makes the biggest difference to outcomes for pupils is leadership. So this book isn't about

why leadership in schools matters. It is about what great leadership *looks like* at all levels, both within schools and beyond them. It unashamedly aims to cover leadership in a huge range of contexts. As a school leader reading this, you may be at the beginning of your own leadership journey, taking your very first steps into middle leadership. You may be a senior leader or the head of a school. You may even be a system leader with a role working across more than one school, leading a trust, federation or an alliance of schools.

From my experience, while the focus of your work as leader will undoubtedly shift according to your role, many of the key elements of great leadership are present at every level, regardless of your experience or sphere of influence. All that differs is your context. To say otherwise, in my view, is to over-complicate the issue. Great leadership is the same, however senior you happen to be. What matters most is how you apply that understanding of your situation to be able to focus your leadership actions and approach to suit your context. For example, a brand-new head of English or leader of literacy across a school needs to quickly assess the capacity of the teachers delivering this important curriculum area before deciding what the team needs to do next as well as how, as a leader, they should approach making this change happen. If capacity and expertise is low, the right approach may very well be quite directive. On the other hand, if the team is more experienced and highly competent, such an approach is likely to backfire. This is no different from a headteacher taking over a new school, working out what the strategic priorities need to be over the next three to five years and how best to implement them. The only difference is the scale.

So the approach of this book is to take an evidence-based look at what great school leadership looks like and allow you to translate this into the context you are working in. My own experience has shown me the power of this approach, particularly in recent years, where my work has given me a privileged insight into hundreds of schools. Where a school or group of schools see the potential of leaders collaborating, with a shared set of values, goals and ways of working, there is no limit to the outcomes for pupils, so long as leaders can take their agreed shared approaches and modify them to suit their situation.

In thinking about what makes a great school, I have drawn heavily on my learning from the time I was leading the London Challenge *Good to Great* (G2G) programme. This book aims to synthesise that learning with my knowledge and experience of school leadership more generally, drawing on examples from the schools I have worked in and had the pleasure to work alongside over the last 30 years. It aims to break down this learning into discrete, easily digestible chunks or topics. For each topic, I will map out the opportunities and challenges you may well be facing right now in your current role, providing you with useful theory and background to help you bring out the best in yourself and those around you.

To allow you to apply this learning in your context, I will use the terms team, colleagues or staff quite a lot. These can mean different things, depending on your situation, so feel free to apply these as appropriate depending on your own role:

Middle leaders: when I use these terms, I am usually referring to those staff that are in the team you lead or upon whom you rely for delivery if you have a whole-school responsibility.

Senior leaders: when I am talking about your team, colleagues or staff, I am usually referring to those you line-manage or upon whom you rely to deliver your whole-school responsibility. This may include all staff at times.

Heads (and for heads, read principals or heads of school): I am usually referring to the members of your senior team. It may sometimes also refer to middle leaders and the wider staff team.

System leaders: someone who is running a group of schools. In this context your colleagues are likely to be the heads of each school and sometimes the senior teams in each. Occasionally it will refer to all the staff in all your schools.

Governors and/or trustees: depending on your context, these terms may relate to the single governing board of your school, the board of trustees of your multi-academy trust or federation or the 'local' governance for one school within a multi-academy or federated group of schools. In whichever context, these references are about the important oversight and vital contribution such governance provides.

Similarly, when I talk about **schools**, I am using the word generically to include all schools, academies, free schools, special schools and colleges who are educating pupils from early years to aged 19.

It is also worth mentioning that, while I have just separated out the five different levels of leadership, I wish to make it quite explicit that the book is written with all five in mind. In my view, the more that a school thinks of its leadership capacity existing within a single leadership team, the better. It may sound like I am contradicting myself, but my point is this: all leaders in any school need to feel they are part of a single leadership effort, with a shared set of values and ways of working. Otherwise, you end up with frequent misunderstanding and unproductive tensions. You also lose the opportunity for more senior leaders to coach and mentor their less experienced colleagues with the same goals and ambitions in mind. It's why, when I work with schools on leadership development and team building, I won't work with groups of middle leaders unless all the senior leaders in the school are involved too. Experience has taught us that if senior leaders aren't part of this shared experience, the process has significantly reduced impact, not just because senior leaders don't have access to the language and concepts discussed, but because there is a 'them and us' culture that just seems to get in the way.

Topic 1

Leadership Matters overview

Leadership is a choice, not a position.

Stephen Covey

Section A: Personal qualities

Section A of this book provides an opportunity for you to reflect on your personal qualities. What is the moral purpose and motivation that sits behind your approach? Who are you as a leader? How do you tend to respond in certain situations? How well do you know yourself and how able are you to manage your emotions? How do you respond when the going gets tough? These personal characteristics will have a strong influence over your effectiveness every single day. School leaders are not immune from basic things going wrong. When you have a tough day and, if you teach, one of your own lessons has been a bit of a disaster or you have had a really challenging and unsuccessful meeting with a difficult member of staff, how you manage your own emotions and remain positive is important. Your staff need you to remain optimistic in such situations, even when there appears to be absolutely no reason to do so!

For all leaders, having a strong sense of one's own personal characteristics is a hugely powerful and affirming base from which to lead, particularly when the challenges of a school leadership role have the potential to become all-consuming.

Section B: Your situation

Section B of the book is all about the importance of context. This is probably the moment to consider what I have named the ‘giraffe concept’. From an early age you have probably learned that the reason giraffes have evolved to have long necks is so they can reach the leaves on trees that other animals can’t. The long neck is the key thing that enables them to be successful and it’s the same for them all. But a quick look at giraffes across the world reveals that, while they may all share similarly long necks, their markings can vary considerably. Some are dark, some lighter. Some have large patches of colour, some smaller. The markings vary according to their environment and the age of the giraffe. They have evolved to suit their context. For me, the same principle applies to school leadership. As a leader, you need to be clear what the leadership *long neck* issues are: the things about leadership you need to know and understand to ensure success. But you also need to understand your context, your own predispositions and be able to adapt to them to suit your situation, both in terms of what you need to do and how you do it.

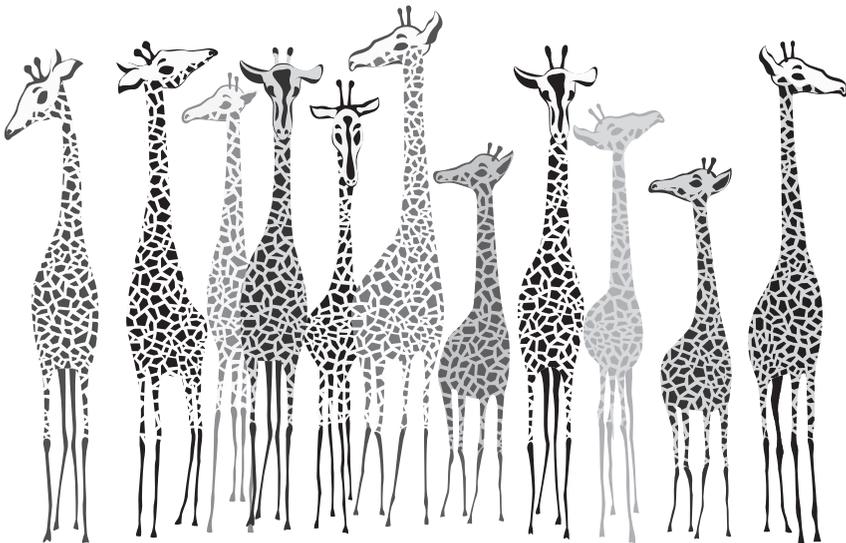


Figure 1: The giraffe concept

Of course, the giraffe concept doesn't just apply to leadership. It is equally relevant when it comes to other facets of education, for example teaching strategies. As Dylan Wiliam (2015) argues, 'In education, "*what works?*" is not really the right question because everything works somewhere and nothing works everywhere. So what's interesting, what's important in education is: "*under what conditions does this work?*"' School leaders, with their staff, need to use the very best evidence to make sure they are using approaches that suit their context.

Section C: Leadership actions

Whether you are running a group of schools or have just taken on your first middle leadership role, the job is basically the same. Steve Radcliffe, in his brilliantly intuitive *Leadership: plain and simple* (2012), argues that leadership is really only about doing three key things well, which he summarises as Future-Engage-Deliver or 'FED'. As a former school leader myself, the simplicity of his framework is immediately appealing. The more we keep things simple, the better!

In the FED model, the first key area focuses on the future you envisage for your organisation as a whole or your individual team. It relates to your shared vision: what you want your team or organisation to achieve together. Of course, this needs to be backed up with a clear approach to managing those changes in a way that makes the best use of your resources, both financial and human. Ideally, the overall strategy will be based on what research and evidence tell you are most effective, and the degree to which you are keen to try out and evaluate new ideas for yourself. For those of you in system leadership roles, this is about the strategy underpinning how a group of schools can work together successfully. For a middle leader, it's about translating wider organisational goals into something tangible and ambitious for your front-line team.

Importantly, Radcliffe argues that for you to be most successful as a leader, you really need to care about your vision or goal. In other words, to use his delightful turn of phrase, you need to be 'up to something'. Getting a powerful match between what you are good at and passionate about, and the goals of your team or organisation can make a huge difference to how successful you will be. Without this, he argues, there's no guarantee of achieving meaningful progress.

Once you are clear on your vision for the future and your strategy for getting there, the next key area of work is to build and sustain great relationships. Only if you engage effectively with others can you as leaders at any level make change happen. For heads, having a team of staff who are committed to your shared goals and work effectively together to support one another in achieving them, is at the heart of what makes a great school. In other words, this is all about getting a collective buy-in to what you want to achieve, and inspiring and enabling others to lead with you. As Radcliffe puts it, whatever role you are leading in, you need to make sure ‘the relationships are big enough to get the job done’. Never was that maxim truer than in a school.

The third stage in the model is focused on making sure you deliver. Leadership isn’t just about strategy and inspiring others. It’s about making sure things happen when you want them to and to the standard you expect. Great schools are the result of great delivery, day-in, day-out. We know that one of the biggest challenges facing schools all over the world is how to create consistent delivery for every pupil, regardless of the curriculum area, their teacher, or their age. The degree of variation of pupil outcomes within schools is still greater than the difference that exists between them.

In a school context, great delivery comes from clear systems, processes and support, based on the evidence of what works. This enables your staff to be great at their jobs, especially your teachers. It’s also about monitoring outcomes and progress in a way that ensures consistent delivery and promotes pupil learning.

The beauty of Steve Radcliffe’s model is its absolute simplicity. But there is another leadership framework, created by David Pendleton (2012) which is very similar to FED and does, in effect, consider how each of the three elements interact with one another. For me, with a school context in mind, breaking leadership into slightly smaller chunks in this way is useful and certainly resonates with the reality of the job at any level. Figure 2 shows how the model works.

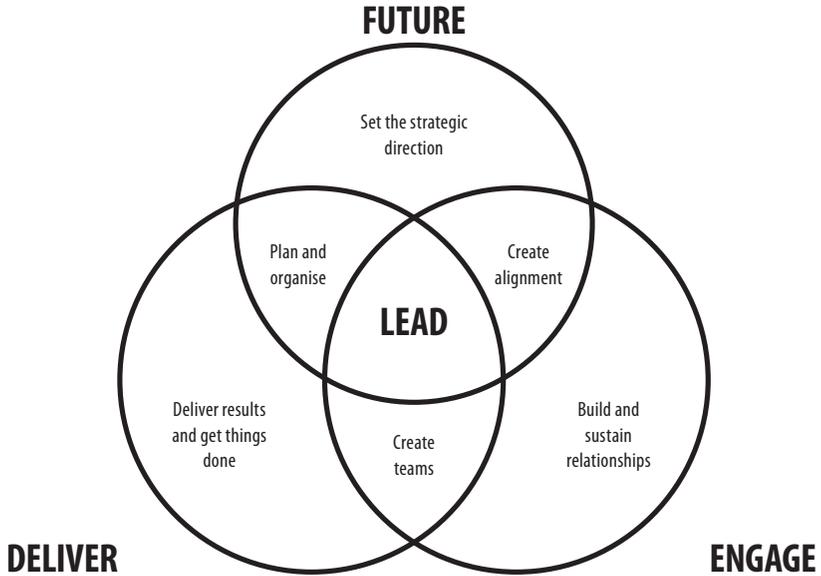


Figure 2: Six key areas for leadership action

Adapted from David Pendleton's Primary Colours model (2012) combined with Steve Radcliffe's Future-Engage-Deliver (2012)

As already mentioned, there are some important inter-plays between the three FED leadership areas. It's no good having a great strategy unless you have **planned and organised**. Planning ahead comes more easily to some leaders than others but is critical for us all. No school achieves excellence if the leaders that are responsible for bringing out the best in pupils and staff are poorly organised. Apart from the obvious confusion and inefficiency that results, the negative effect on individuals' motivation can also be very detrimental.

Secondly, you can lead the most harmonious and motivated team in the world, but if the individuals in it aren't clear on the shared direction in which you are headed, you won't achieve the ambitious goals you are striving for. Creating strong **alignment** is therefore critical and good communication is essential. Whatever level you are leading at, your staff will be much more effective if everyone is clear on where you are headed and has bought into the vision.

Finally, school leadership at any level is about leading a team of staff, not doing everything yourself. While it can be very tempting to take on tasks, partly because you know you can usually do the job quicker and better than others, great leaders **create teams**, delegating tasks and decisions to others. Empowering colleagues in this way, so long as it is done well, has the capacity to significantly increase the quality of delivery overall.

Leadership and management

Distinctions are often made about the difference between leadership and management. Both are critical for the success of a team, school or group of schools. As Peter Drucker (2007) helpfully suggests, 'Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.' But in schools there are times when the distinction between the two can feel rather artificial. Where, for example, does a good coaching conversation sit? In my view, it is both. You are *leading* by asking great questions that are helping a colleague to develop and empowering them to lead too. You are *managing* by engaging in a conversation that is usually about improving delivery, performance and, ultimately, pupil impact.

Which is why David Pendleton's Primary Colours model and Steve Radcliffe's Future-Engage-Deliver model work so well. They both avoid making this distinction while at the same time covering the critical elements of each. If leadership is about doing the right things, then there are key elements that relate to strategy. But both also give proper attention to delivery and making things happen, and happen well. The link between the two is great engagement with those who will make this all happen. This book takes the same approach. The focus is on providing models and guidance that leaders at all levels can apply to their context, rather than providing technical descriptions of management techniques such as financial planning and budgeting.

Section D: Leadership approach

Ultimately, the actions that you take as a leader are critical. What you do to create strategy, build relationships and ensure strong delivery will underpin the success of your staff and therefore your pupils. But it is not quite as simple as that. Your success as a leader at any level isn't just about what you do. It's also about how you lead: your leadership style and how you support and inspire others to develop. Section D of the

book discusses the importance for leaders at all levels to be able to adapt their leadership approach to suit their context. From my experience, this usually boils down to properly understanding the performance, the people and how much time you have! Central to success in this area is developing the critical leadership habit of *asking first*. Using a coaching leadership approach, at least to start with in a conversation, can unlock a much deeper understanding of any situation, enabling adjustments to then be made to both what you decide to do and how you decide to do it. Getting your leadership approach right has the potential to significantly enhance the impact of what you do for all those you work with.

Culture and climate

What you do as a school leader makes a difference to the results you achieve, however you choose to define what you mean by results. But the relationship between leadership and results isn't direct. As Figure 3 suggests, the actions you take as a leader have a significant impact on the culture and climate within your sphere of influence.

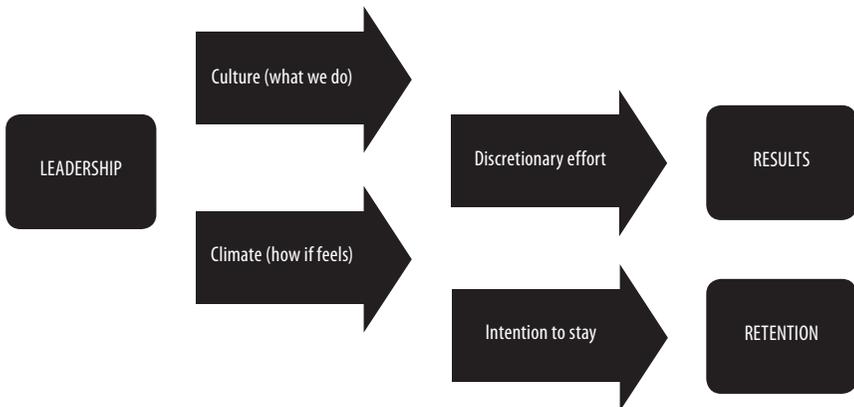


Figure 3: Leadership and results

Adapted from the Corporate Leadership Council (2004)

In this context, *culture* is taken to mean ‘the way we do things around here’ and relates to systems, procedures, and common practices as well as the high standards and expectations that exist in the way these are delivered. A useful way of thinking of culture is to consider what

someone new joining your team would see happening on a day-to-day basis and the extent to which everyone in the team is working in the same way and to the same level of expectation. Is there a consistent set of high expectations from you about how your team should work? As a result of this, for example, are the learning environments you oversee inspiring and well organised? Do pupils have strong and supportive relationships with their peers and all the staff they work with?

Climate is more about how it feels to work in a team. For your team, this reflects its morale, how appreciated your team of staff feel and the degree of trust within the team as whole. This is much more difficult to describe or measure, but there is evidence to suggest that the effect of climate on team productivity is considerable. This is explored in more detail in the next topic.

Discretionary effort

Taken together, the more positive the culture and climate you create, the more likely your team of staff are to go the extra mile. This concept is known as *discretionary effort*. It is commonly described as the input from individuals over and above that which they need to contribute in order to keep their jobs. Critical in this context, however, is that the effort individuals make is directed productively. You will probably know of well-meaning and hard-working colleagues who regrettably did not have the impact that their efforts deserved because they were too often focused on doing the wrong things. In a classroom context, it's all very well having fantastically enjoyable lessons if what the pupils are learning doesn't relate to the curriculum they are meant to be following or the assessments they will have to take.

In other words, it's not about working longer or harder. That way lie the issues of stress, burn-out and disaffection that mean too many people leave the profession. It's about caring about one's work in a way that means individuals are constantly striving to improve, to be a tiny bit better tomorrow than they were yesterday.

Getting the culture and climate right can therefore also have an impact on an individual's intention to stay at a school, which in turn affects overall retention levels. If you accept the argument that a bigger problem

for many school systems is retention not recruitment, then getting these basics conditions right is crucial for both schools and the wider system.

Pulling this all together

Figure 4 sums up the overall Leadership Matters framework. It forms the basis for the structure of the rest of the book.

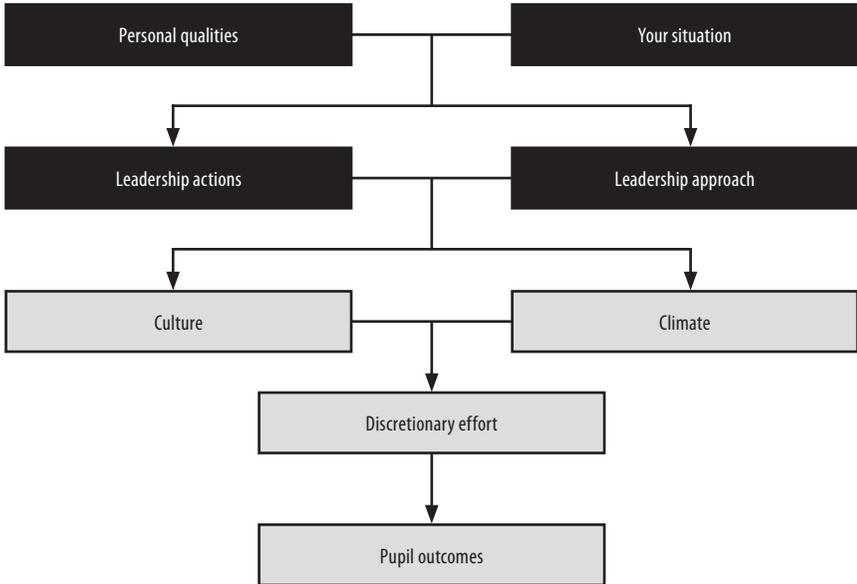


Figure 4: The Leadership Matters model

Leadership starts with you. Your understanding of yourself: the way you tend to behave in certain situations, what you enjoy and are good at and those areas you should probably focus on if you want to improve your effectiveness. But you also need to take the time to properly understand your situation: the people and the context you find yourself in.

Taken together, an understanding of self and situation should enable you to decide what actions you need to prioritise and the best approach to take in implementing them. If you get this right, you will create a productive culture and climate that combine to release significant discretionary effort from those you lead which will lead to you achieving the pupil outcomes you aspire to.

You will notice that the first four tiles are shaded. This reflects the fact that they are the key areas where school leaders can make changes that will make a difference. The remaining topics in the book are grouped under these four areas, with each representing the four key sections of the book. Section C, which focuses on leadership actions is considerably larger than the other sections, reflecting the fact that most important facet of leadership is what you actually do!

Taken together, the outcome of the changes you make in all these areas will lead to the positive differences in culture, climate and discretionary effort that will bring you the results you seek to achieve.

Key points

- Do you take time to properly understand your situation before acting?
- How do you make sure you properly understand your own predispositions?
- What is your balance like across the different areas of leadership actions?
- What do you do to build discretionary effort?

Final thoughts

Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.

Aristotle

In writing this third edition, I have become increasingly convinced that it is actually the development of the right leadership habits that makes the biggest difference to the effectiveness of school leaders and their impact on pupil outcomes. Every day I visit schools where I have the privilege to reflect on what these leaders are up to on a routine basis.

This final part of the book is my attempt to summarise what I think are, if you asked me to choose from everything in this book, the top six habits that leaders might prioritise. While being influenced by research and evidence, this is more of a personal view of what seems to me to represent the habits demonstrated by the most successful leaders at all levels within our school system.