

LEADERSHIP AND THE INDIVIDUAL

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Part 1

My Personal Leadership Challenge

"Leadership and learning

are indispensable to each other"

John F. Kennedy

I joined the Police in 1998 at the age of 22, starting as a Constable in the Metropolitan Police Service, based in Hackney, East London, where I worked as response officer and subsequently a Neighbourhood Beat Officer. I then transferred to South Wales in 2003. My leadership experience as an officer began at that point, as I was asked to act up to Sergeant, a rank I was substantively promoted into in 2005. I was then promoted to Inspector in 2008 and Chief Inspector in 2015. In relation to all of my promotions up to that point, I passed the boards on my first attempt. I was always modest, but quietly confident, and having graduated from University of Wales with a degree in Psychology prior to joining the organisation, I always felt that I had a good understanding of myself in terms of my personality style, how I like to work with others, and the importance of effective leadership.

However, in the latter part of 2018, I entered a period which I found very challenging in terms of my leadership, performance, and general wellbeing. I had been deployed in three different roles as a Chief Inspector, and had experience working with the Executive Team, partners and within the covert policing environment, and with that breadth of leadership experience, I felt ready to take the next step in my career and so applied for promotion to Superintendent. However, I was unsuccessful in both an application for a Temporary Superintendent position on a force change programme,

Mark, great paper with a lot of Personal Reflection, that on a personal level was deep; However, there were times on the team or in term of leadership you could have gone a little deeper, by answering a few more "whys" you could have garnered a more deeper reflection and captured the importance of what and why you did things

what was your thoughts and feelings about this?

what's it?

and then the main force promotion boards. At the start of 2019, I was then also overlooked for a position as a Temporary Superintendent within my own department, a specialist role which I had performed in an acting up capacity on many occasions and for which I had undergone extensive training in addition to my core role. Furthermore, I was also unsuccessful again at the force promotion boards at the end of 2019.

what was your feelings about this?

I felt that this succession of setbacks spanning over a 12-month period was a significant test of my resilience and my leadership, as I had to somehow put my personal disappointment to one side and continue to positively lead my team, whilst also trying to understand why I had been unsuccessful so that I could effectively address my personal development needs and put myself forward again in 2020. This was a real defining moment where I felt tested, and it triggered the need to self-reflect.

why?

Some of the research on the concept of 'self' in leadership, refers to these occasions as 'points of convergence' (Karp, 2013), where the situation is a key pivotal moment in one's self development, and when I look back on this period, this is exactly what it felt like for me at that point in my career. I felt uncharacteristically deflated, and very unclear about what my next steps ought to be. It was the first time in my career that my future seemed very ambiguous. More worrying was the fact that I also noticed that my feelings about the situation were starting to have a detrimental impact upon my ability to have energy and enthusiasm in the workplace and get the best out of my team, and I was frustrated with myself for allowing this to happen. Furthermore, the situation had become noticeable amongst the team. Colleagues showed empathy, stating they felt that I deserved the promotion and thought that the promotion process itself was unfair. Whilst it was comforting to know that I had my colleagues' support, I

didn't want my situation and my negative feelings to adversely affect their morale and in turn, undermine my ability to get the best from them.

why? What could have happened?

The ambition which I had, to get through the promotion process by 2020, was very important to me and I felt it was vital to set myself this goal, but I knew that in addition, I also needed to develop some resilience in terms of dealing with setbacks and disappointment, and to be able to continue to be an effective leader despite my own personal challenges. Whilst many theories around goal setting place focus on encouraging the development of action plans for others (Locke & Latham, 1980), this situation was about me setting goals for myself, in a way which would motivate me with a clear sense of direction and increase my own leadership performance. On reflection, the situation was similar to examples seen in areas such as sport, where it is well documented that professional sports men and women often have to overcome difficult periods of under-performance and personal challenges, and psychological techniques such as visualisation and goal-setting can help to positively influence their performance (Campos, et al., 2016). Whilst the chosen options for the psychological techniques are vast and will vary widely in different sectors and professions, I think the principle of mentally training oneself to undertake a period of self-development, will apply to leaders in almost all settings, and on reflection, it certainly applied to me in this difficult period.

good thoughts

why?

This journey of self-development which researchers refer to as a deliberate process (Kouzes & Posner, 2017) was essential in helping me to understand how I could increase my leadership competence and also re-discover my self-confidence which I knew would be important to not only be successful in future applications for promotion but also for continuing to lead others effectively regardless of my personal ambitions

and set-backs. Learning-based theories of leadership refer to the concept of self-efficacy, and in my example, this refers to my belief that I could perform well as a leader (Bandura, 1982) and demonstrate that I was a suitable candidate to take the step into the next rank

Indeed, self-confidence can make a difference between effective and ineffective leadership in critical situations (Boyatzis, 1982), is essential for charismatic leadership (Kets de Vries, 1994) and can also determine later advancement (Howard & Bray, 1988). I realised that the better I knew myself, the better I could make sense of the environment in which I was leading and re-discover my sense of self-confidence. Again, going back to the concept of 'self', leaders need to be able to form conceptions of themselves and use this information for their own development, self-confidence and self-esteem, and the way to achieve this is to actually engage in activities and situations to help raise self-awareness, where feedback is a critical step along the journey (Karp, 2013). When I reflect on this critical period in my career, I think this was the only way I could fully inspire others, as firstly, I had to believe in myself and truly understand what my colleagues thought about my leadership style.

Keeping my emotions in check, and dealing with the disappointment professionally was very challenging, however, I did so by setting out a development plan for how I was going to focus on my leadership style and performance to prepare myself for the future. Following positive feedback I received in the promotion boards, I spoke with the force Learning and Development Services and asked if I could undergo 360-degree feedback. This was a great deal more difficult than I had anticipated, as whilst I felt I had certain strong leadership traits, some of the feedback from my team completely challenged my thinking on this, and what I felt quite anxious about was the

what
what
did they think?
was your style?

fact that I already knew that my negative feelings have been picked up by staff. It was clear that my team felt that my most positive attributes are that I am a very reflective person, am supportive, engaging, and have high standards of ethical behaviour. However, what the feedback also revealed to me was that I needed to be more confident and vocal in expressing my opinions, do more to raise my profile, and think about how I can provide more clear direction and support for my team. In truth, these aspects of the feedback, which were expressed by a significant number of my colleagues, surprised me, but it was also a wake-up call and gave me clarity on the steps I needed to undertake to develop myself, and indeed others.

great observations
why did you
want to change?

Taking a personality psychology perspective, this process of raising my awareness of and accepting my perceived 'faults', and then looking to see how they can be turned into positives (Binney, et al., 2005), was vitaly important. Supplementing the 360-degree feedback, I also underwent a psychometric test which involved the completion of a Wave Professional Styles Questionnaire (Saville, et al., 2014). My responses were compared to those of 4,000 senior managers and executives who have previously completed the questionnaire to create a profile of how I view myself in the workplace. I was rather cynical about this process and whether the outcome would help me, but extensive research into the questionnaire has shown it to be a valid measure of how people will operate in the workplace. The questions and feedback covered four areas - Thought, Influence, Adaptability and Delivery.

why

For me, this process was very important and the literature refers to 'character-based leadership', which is based on positive character strengths, where self-awareness is important and is achieved through intentional developmental experiences such as the ones I undertook, and this is supported by experiential learning theory when learning

occurs through experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Therefore, despite my initial reservations, my participation in psychometric testing was a critical part of that process and it allowed me to identify my key leadership characteristics which included:

- I am approachable and focused on making a good impression
- I readily connect with others, and I am comfortable working collaboratively
- I have worked on refining my presentation skills. I explain things well and am reasonably confident when required to make an impact, voice my opinions, and negotiate
- I am comfortable in a leadership role, will not dominate people and am capable of listening, empowering, motivating and sharing success
- I am aware that alongside my task-focus, time spent with others is valuable to connect at a human level
- Self-confident, I show resilience under pressure and resolves interpersonal conflict calmly and effectively
- I adapt to change as well as most people, retains some optimism in the face of challenge, although I may take a little time to recover from setbacks

What I have learned from reflecting on these outcomes is that there is a difference between traits such as openness and extraversion etc and the way in which personality can adapt such as motives, goals, values, and principles as the latter can change over time and in different circumstances and environments (McAdams & Pals, 2006).

It was the feedback in the area of 'Influence' which particularly caught my attention because whilst it was generally positive, I have always regarded myself as being

why? 'introverted' and therefore the challenge I set myself was how I could excel in my ability to connect with others and make an impression as a leader in such a way that I could inspire and motivate those around me. When I think of leadership in this sense, I think of individuals who I have worked for throughout my career who are forthright, outgoing, and confident and in a sense 'extroverted'. On reflection, throughout my career, I have had an underlying pre-conception about what a successful leader looks like in terms of their personality traits.

Up to the 1940s trait spotting (Great man theory), was commonplace in managerial and leadership recruitment, where employers would search for good qualities and traits in individuals in what was referred to as an 'influencing process aimed at goal achievement' (Stogdill, 1950). Hundreds of trait studies were considered, and a list was compiled including traits such as self-confidence, ability to influence the behaviour of others and focus on completing tasks. However, I feel that this approach of looking at traits is very narrow and omits a range of other qualities, and the approach was eventually replaced by focusing more on leadership styles. It is noteworthy however that even today, many of the traits which were identified, such as self-confidence, would still be applicable and valid (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2017)

Looking at extraversion specifically, the 'Big 5 model of personality' (Costa & McCrae, 1992) is useful as it includes extraversion amongst openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. It has been used by many researchers, most notably in a study of 900 British managers where it was found that that conscientiousness and extraversion were positive characteristics while neuroticism was negatively related to effective management, and it was concluded that personality assessment is useful in selecting managers (Moutafi, et al., 2007). What I feel about this model however is

Did you agree?

that it doesn't consider the more human side of leadership, and the leader's ability to truly connect with people, however, a sixth personality dimension was later added which is the 'the H factor', namely, Honesty-Humility (Ashton & Lee, 2007) which considers sincerity, fairness, greed avoidance, and modesty, and for me these components are important in terms of leaders being able to show their vulnerability and be authentic.

thoughts on this?

Whilst some studies like these find that extraversion is a positive trait, for me it is arguable that Introverts can also be successful leaders, and there are several case studies of very successful leaders in a range of sectors who have stated that they are introvert and who have recognised this by setting goals in relation to making contact with others which counter-balance any anxiety they may feel that they have (Kasriel, 2016). Therefore, when I reflect on my own experience, what I knew I needed to do was to put myself into situations where I would be out of my normal comfort zone so that I could test my ability to adapt.

I entered a Level 5 Coaching qualification which helped me to consolidate a lot of what I already knew about the importance of creating a culture of reflective practice in the organisation, but it also gave me the opportunity to build on my skills of being approachable and supportive, and taking this to a higher level where I could inspire others in relation to their own self-development. I had so much positive feedback from colleagues who I supported through this period, and this gave me a real boost of confidence. I supplemented this by investing more time in holding one-to-one meetings and team discussions to evaluate performance and development, and used this to provide support, advice, and direction. I also set objectives for my managers to replicate this approach with the wider team so that there was a culture of supported learning in the workplace. I also ensured that I maximised my visibility by investing

great, but why are you doing this for your team or you?

more time away from my desk and speaking to the team, as I believed this was so important at senior leader level.

great, but why is it important?

However, what this experience also taught me was that it was of great benefit for me to also receive coaching, which I did on several occasions, and the sessions were opportunities for me to have conversations about what I was thinking and how I felt I was developing. Researchers state that the activities of listening, explaining, demonstration and imitation, all of which feature in coaching sessions, can help to have an enhanced awareness of leadership performance (Schon, 1987).

what did you learn?

I also put myself forward to attend the 'Academi Wales Summer School' where I had a fantastic experience meeting fellow senior leaders from partner agencies. I spent my time there being sure to be open minded to learning more about different leadership styles and putting my opinions across in group discussions. What certainly assisted me was having my pre-conceived ideas about leadership challenged by leaders from other sectors.

How?

This period of learning about leadership was absolutely critical and the learning behaviour theories refer to this as 'deliberate practice' of key leadership activities, which help to develop leadership expertise (Culbertson & Jackson, 2016) and that there are significant benefits to be had from engaging in leadership training, learning from other leaders in other areas, and extending one's own knowledge of leadership styles.

good such as? for who?

Following this, I worked with private industry to coordinate and deliver a series of learning events across the force in relation to digital evidence. This was a challenging experience, and whilst I was quite apprehensive about carrying out the presentations

initially, I thoroughly enjoyed rising to this challenge and received great feedback from those who received the training who stated it would support them in their day-to-day work, which is what my principal aim was.

Following this period of self-reflection and self-development, I again prepared myself to apply for promotion to Superintendent, and on this third attempt, I felt that I had a much clearer understanding of myself, my strengths, and what I wanted to continue working on. I had gained a diverse range of experiences which had enabled me to rediscover what kind of leader I was and ultimately, this led to me being successful in the promotion process and I was promoted to Detective Superintendent in March 2021 where I was appointed as the Director of Intelligence for the force.

what were these?

Congrats

This has helped me to conclude that self-awareness is critical for leadership development and purposeful and timely self-reflection offers an opportunity to develop self-awareness, and this is what some researchers refer to as 'Authentic leadership' which features characteristics such as self-awareness and, authentic behaviour (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011). This has direct links into other forms of leadership such as 'Virtuous leadership' where courage and humanity are important (Wang & Hackett, 2016), 'Servant leadership theory' which is based upon humility, authenticity and accountability (George, 2003), 'Intercultural leadership' which refers to continuous learning and interpersonal engagement (Mendenhall, et al., 2013). The challenge here is that the literature in this area is vast and in reality, the various theories are closely inter-connected, but one particular piece of theory which resonates with me personally is that of character strengths in leadership (Thun & Kelloway, 2011) which speaks of, amongst other things, courage. I think this is important because the ability to self-reflect, ask others for honest feedback and then be truly open about areas of self-development, is a very challenging but important aspect of leadership which has

certainly helped me to discover the leader I aspire to be. What all the aforementioned leadership theories have in common is ethical and moral leadership which is dependent on self-awareness and relationships with others aimed at 'doing good' (Kiersch & Gullekson, 2021), and ultimately, this whole experience gave me the platform to take my leadership journey to another level.

Part 2

My Strategic Leadership Challenge

"Getting good players is easy.

Getting them to play together

is the hard part"

Casey Stengel

The self-reflective journey which I had going into promotion in March 2021 meant that I had the opportunity to make an immediate impact in my new role as Director of Intelligence and approach the job in my own way with my own leadership style, using what I had learned and putting it into operational practice. I was designated as the Strategic Lead for Fraud, County Lines and Modern Slavery, each of which came with a significant amount of work in terms of performance improvement and the need to formulate new Strategic Plans and alternative ways of working. The main challenges this presented was due to the divisional structure in the organisation, I was relying heavily on colleagues outside of my immediate command, to deliver on key objectives. Additionally, I felt that I was starting from zero in some aspects of the work as there was no governance processes in place and no adequate engagement with partners.

Being placed in the position of Director of Intelligence meant that I was regarded by others as a subject matter expert and point of contact for these intelligence related areas, and therefore I was in, what the leadership theories refer to as, a position of power where I had 'the capacity to influence others' (Owens 2001, p 236). However, being in that position in itself wasn't enough. I still had to learn very quickly, because from my perspective, I would only have credibility once I could demonstrate that I fully

understood my business, and, that I had the ability to get the very best out of the team to deliver.

In Part 1, I referred to the fact that learning-based theories of leadership refer to the concept of self-efficacy, and that this was relevant in the development of my understanding about my leadership style. Now that I had been promoted, it seemed that I now had to develop self-efficacy in my role as a Director of Intelligence so that I had the technical competence and credibility to execute the functions which were a vital part of my role.

I had the benefit of being surrounded by people who knew these areas very well, and in the first three months of my role, I spent a great deal of time fact-finding, learning about the role, horizon scanning, reading previous reports, and reviewing the portfolio performance so that I could establish what was working well and what needed to improve. I knew from the outset that the transactional, top-down, power-based leadership approach wasn't going to be effective in these circumstances. For me to succeed, I knew I had to work with my team by getting them on board and fully exploiting their knowledge, skills, and experience. I have always preferred a Transformational Leadership style based on empowerment and shared goals and ideas, and so I felt that this was natural approach to take.

However, the responsibility I was given, to make fundamental strategic changes to the way the force was doing business, meant that I had to go beyond simply empowering my team, and for the first time in my career, I had to set key organisational goals, and set strategic direction, and this was when I really recognised the significant step up from Chief Inspector to Superintendent. This is where the concept of Instrumental

Leadership is interesting, as this speaks of a leadership style that goes beyond transformational and transactional influences, where leaders also need to enhance their organisational leadership by using their expertise to formulate and implement solutions to complex problems. So, they must be able to identify both strategic and tactical goals whilst also monitoring outcomes and changes in the environment (Antonakis & House, 2014). The responsibility for doing this rested on my shoulders as I was now regarded as the subject matter expert and therefore possessed expert-based power to implement the necessary changes (French & Raven, 1968).

How did this make you feel?

Some researchers go on to argue that strategic leadership is not about transformational leadership because the leader doesn't engage with other's views and ideas, and it is also not about transactional leadership because it is not about giving others instruction. It is more of a proactive strategic focus, looking at the capabilities of the organisation, designing strategy and setting objectives (Antonakis & House, 2014). However I feel that contrary to this, it is important that leaders show behaviour which raises self-belief amongst staff in a way which develops work satisfaction and performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998) and my view is that the way to do this is to provide the structure and resources while also monitoring performance, giving constructive feedback and assisting people in reaching their goals.

why

Did you learn this?

In terms of my immediate management team, this has worked very well. They work extremely hard as a unit, we communicate regularly, and I have received positive feedback from the managers I work with closely about the way I communicate with them, give clear goals and direction, and provide support. What I found in my interactions with the team is that I was able to think strategically, while the managers were the ones who got things done operationally. This is a very conventional way of seeing things, and some theorists argue that management and leadership

complement each other with individuals transitioning between the roles at different times (Birkinshaw, 2010), and furthermore, that effective management is just as important as effective leadership. In my experience, what I was finding was that my manager's ability to coordinate activity, put plans in place and manage the business, was allowing me time and scope to consider the strategic direction and take more of a landscape view of the business without having to get too involved at a tactical level.

Do you disagree with Birkinshaw?

However, I discovered that in terms of directing the wider resources beyond my management team, this was far from easy, because what I didn't consider was people's willingness and motivation to contribute and come with me on the journey and as time went on and the more staff I engaged with, I came to realise who was working with me and who was seemingly working against me. When I had completed my reviews of the business areas by May 2021, I then set about making recommendations and changing operational practice. For example, I have recommended that the force needs to establish and set up a dedicated, centralised investigation team to investigate Fraud. This was based upon a sound business case, with evidence and a plan for how this could be achieved. However, I was met with vociferous criticism and objection from peers around the force about my propositions and recommendations, and furthermore, when I asked them to work with me to seek alternative ways of approaching the issue, some were willing to engage, and others weren't. As an interim measure, I established a Fraud Operations Group which I chair, and in which I invite colleagues from across the force to discuss and scrutinise fraud cases, identify best practice, measure performance, and identify training opportunities. Getting buy-in at these meetings has proven to be extremely challenging and frustrating, and it felt like the membership of the group was split into two; those who

recognised the importance of improving the force response to fraud and wanting to engage with the programme, and others who did not see it as a priority and brought virtually nothing to the table.

In this regard, the Theory X and Theory Y (McGregor, 1987) is useful as this describes the opposites of the way people work:

X - average person avoids responsibility and lacks motivation

Y - people are committed to achieving objectives and have the capacity to be innovative

This may appear a very simplistic way of considering the issue, but these two extremes did manifest themselves in my experience and the challenge as far as I can see moving forward is to recognise that some staff will fall into one group and some the other, and some may even drift between the two depending on the circumstances, and so the test for me is how to respond by encouraging Group Y to continue and recognising their effort, and getting Group X on board. This is where I feel a transformational leadership style could be important because I want to give members of the group some responsibility to drive improvements in fraud investigations in their local areas and allow them the opportunity to identify innovative ways of doing so. In this regard, Behaviourist theories are helpful because there needs to be a blend of firstly 'initiating structure' which is essentially what I have done by establishing the Fraud Operations Group, ensuring tasks get done, and secondly, 'consideration' where I need to invest time and energy into building relationships and trust amongst the group membership (Owens, 2001). In my view, my effectiveness as a leader in this business area will be based upon getting that balance right and it is something I will

where were the shortfalls?

continuously need to focus on going forward. However, as stated, I also feel that a transformational leadership style in itself may not be enough. Giving people the opportunity to engage is one thing, but how do I give people the confidence to do it, and what I do with the information they provide me with when they do engage?

Reward?

The answer may lie within Inclusive leadership theories as they speak about steps which can be taken to achieving trust, and some of the traits which I need to be able to use such as communication, openness, accessibility, and availability to followers. What these can enable me to do is to give the team what is referred to as employee voice, "speaking out and challenging the status quo with the intent of improving the situation" (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, p. 853). This is about people feeling confident about speaking up and putting their point across without fear of repercussions (Jolly & Lee, 2021). I think in the context of what I am trying to achieve with Fraud, this is extremely important because it is clearly a divisive issue.

why is it important?

I want to be challenged. I want the team to have the confidence in making putting their points across, and in turn, I need to be prepared to have my ideas critiqued. What Inclusive Leadership also refers to is a relational leadership style where the leader makes sure they are available to followers, is open to ideas and actually takes positive step to encourage openness. Additionally, there is a willingness to actively listen to recommendations and develop an environment where leadership can develop at all levels through people being innovative and creative. For me, this answers the question about going beyond a transformational leadership style as it is about accepting people for who they are, highlighting their individuality. This influences the way people are motivated to engage with work activities (Choi, et al., 2015). However, there is a significant caveat to this which I need to consider; as a leader, I must be able to

why?

demonstrate that I am truly open to engagement and criticism of my ideas (Choi, et al., 2017). I can achieve this by actively doing things such as physically making time to speak to staff (Ye, et al., 2019), thanking them for their contributions, ensuring their ideas are given recognition and are explored, and most importantly, acknowledging when perhaps they are right, and I am wrong.

good
Reward Theory?

Concluding Remarks

As I reflect upon both my personal and strategic leadership challenges, the key issue which I consistently find myself revisiting is my ability to influence others, which I feel is the cornerstone of effective leadership.

→ That you have it or is it a struggle?

The key concept of self-efficacy has been very much apparent to me in my reflection and I feel that the investment which I made in my self-development prior to promotion, enabled me to have a greater understanding about my ability to lead and influence following promotion, and I feel that I was more self-aware of the fact that staff don't always automatically buy-in to the objectives which need to be completed; very often, staff need to be motivated to support a certain direction.

great, why?

The one key component which I feel is important to achieving that influence is trust; my ability to trust others and the trust which the team and wider organisation have in me. The reason why I state this is because my reflection has helped me to identify that as important as it is that I am clear with the team about their tasks and objectives, the only way they will truly buy-in to the process is if relationships are built and sustained, and this is almost entirely dependent upon trust. The work of Stephen Covey is

particularly helpful in understanding this. In his book 'The Speed of Trust', he identifies four key components (Covey & Merrill, 2018):

- Integrity – I need to be honest with myself about my own leadership approach and honest with my team about what I want them to do and why
- Intent – I need to be able to articulate what my motives are and how they link to the overarching force priorities
- Capabilities – I need to understand my own skills, knowledge, and abilities and those of the people I lead so that I know who to work with and what they can contribute
- Results – I need to demonstrate my effectiveness as a leader by ensuring that I can achieve good performance and productivity whilst providing recognition and reward to the team for making it happen

Having had the opportunity to invest in my own self-reflection and understand that leadership is a continuous learning process, my intention going forward is to ensure that I continue to consider the impact of my leadership on others. More importantly, as a coach and mentor, one of the most significantly important things I can do now is to help develop leadership in those I work with and give my team the opportunity to exercise their own individual leadership to help the organisation deliver an excellent service to the communities of South Wales.

great, why?

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