



Esther Cameron

Growing leadership maturity

Where are you on the leadership map?

There are hundreds of different leadership theories, frameworks and tools available today, with still more forms of support being devised and marketed every year. It seems there is no end to our fascination and hunger for this elusive capacity.

Whilst this is a wonderfully rich assortment to pick from, it can also be pretty mind-boggling. Many are left feeling unclear as where to start their leadership journey, and then how to progress beyond the basics. The leadership map outlined here, supported by thorough research and published in my latest book [Essential Leadership](#), helps leaders to navigate this complex territory, and sets out the full range of possible approaches in an accessible way.

This article introduces the 'Five Leadership Qualities' framework, which is a synthesis of much of the leadership literature, tested and refined in a wide range of leadership cultures. It's genesis and purpose are explained here, and the essence of each quality set out for readers to self-assess, draw conclusions and plot out next steps.

Leadership and the body

Over the last 10 years, I have been working together with colleagues Mike Green and Nick Mayhew, to clarify and develop an overarching framework that integrates the best of current leadership know-how, and works simultaneously with thoughts, feelings and actions.

Learning to lead is not a purely intellectual or cognitive pursuit, it is a [whole-body experience](#) involving the head, heart and belly. Leadership needs to be learned through practice in 'live', emotionally stretching situations, where outcomes really matter. It goes way beyond ideas, goals and plans, and involves numerous irrational elements such as relationships, passions, loyalty, power, vulnerability, fear, anxiety and courage - and even bowel movements!

So leadership training and education needs to include all of this, and support people to do much more than simply read an article like this! The five qualities framework, however is a good first step. Designed



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to embrace and illuminate the whole human experience of leadership, including what happens in our bodies as we lead, it opens new doors for those keen to [grow and mature as leaders](#).

Introduction to the *Five Leadership Qualities*

Each of the five qualities, described below, can be seen as both an imaginative 'archetype' to get a feel for and conjure up, as well as a cluster of inter-connected, coherent leadership skills and approaches to be learned through practice. So the qualities can be used by fledgling leaders as a straightforward checklist to get some fundamental skills in place, or worked with in a deeper or more creative, and full-bodied way to enable leaders to 'fill out' their own, distinctive leadership style.

Leaders at any stage of their journey can continue to grow their mastery of these qualities over a number of years, thus moving towards ever-greater maturity and adaptability. As this starts to happen, leaders notice how combinations of qualities are required in various situations, with perhaps one or two qualities in the foreground, and the others in support.

In fact, within every effective leadership 'move', all the qualities are present in some proportion, but this shouldn't be an excuse for mushy or deluded thinking about the capacities required. Leadership when done well is elegant, and full of both strong and subtle flavours.

What are your strengths, weak areas and blind spots?

Most leaders find that they relate quite naturally to one or two qualities, with these showing up more strongly than others in their leadership. But even where a quality is strong in someone, it can show up in narrow or clumsy ways. In other words, most leaders have some sort of 'blind-spot' in relation to some of the qualities, which can be born out of either strength and over-confidence, or lack of awareness and skill.

Every leader is different and needs to find his or her own, authentic style – ideally, reflecting all of the five



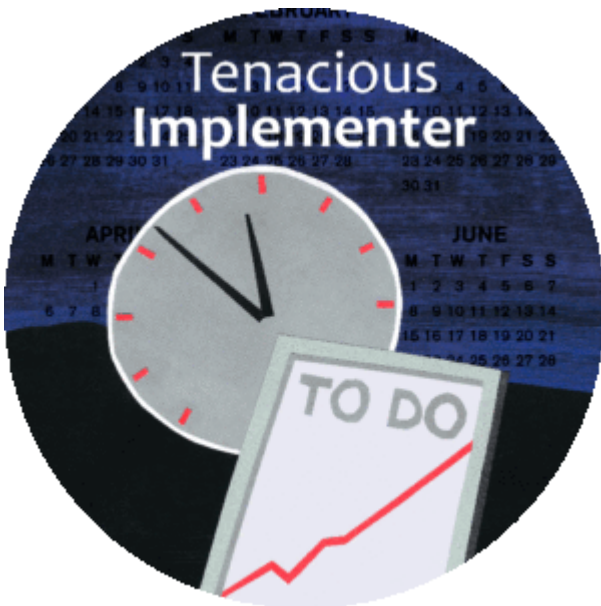
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qualities in their own distinctive way, yet in a way that uniquely serves their current context. The descriptions that follow here will help leaders to discover and develop their own capacity to flexibly and effectively respond to any situation that requires leadership. Please read on to explore each quality, and begin to discover your own current strengths and growing edges. At the end, you'll find a short reflection process to enable you to draw some conclusions and formulate next steps.

Tenacious Implementer



The Tenacious Implementer quality is found in leaders who are good at bringing focus to getting things done. These leaders are likely to be proficient in the skills of planning, delegating, monitoring, reviewing and performance management. Contracting well with people and holding them and oneself accountable is key, as is personal discipline and staying power. In more complex settings, their attention is on clarifying expectations, staying in touch and knowing when to step in, and when to allow struggle.

Quick quiz:

[Score yourself out of 5 on the following three questions. Be as honest as you can, and add the scores



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together, to give you a TI score.]

- Are you good at identifying deliverables and mapping out the series of small steps required from the current situation to make this happen?
- Do you follow-up on progress with rigour, ensuring that you hold others to account for any non-delivery, without taking over or punishing?
- Do you clarify the processes and standards that you expect your team to use, and commit to these yourself rather than doing your own thing?

Pitfalls:

Being over-rigid or fixed about a process, or deadline (or both?)

Destroying value through micro-managing and/or establishing a climate of fear

Taking on too much and becoming over-stressed about the possibility of failing in some way

In the body:

To embody this quality, stand with your feet slightly apart, in line with your shoulders. Sink into your hips a little, and breathe into your belly. Relax your shoulders and neck muscles. Then make a chopping motion with your hands and lower arms, as if slicing the air in front of you. Do this rhythmically for 30 seconds, and feel the rigour and repetitiveness of it. Notice if your focus drifts, and bring it back to keeping the beat - chop, chop, chop, chop. This quality requires especially good alignment between your head and your belly.

Research snippet:

Only 6% of the leaders in our survey said this quality came easily to them.

Measured Connector



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The Measured Connector quality is present in those who are good at working through people, growing trusting relationships and building effective teams. Skills such as coaching, running meetings, communicating information and growing collaborative teams or networks are key. Attention is paid to the people dimension of work, with the perspectives of others being listened to and factored in. In more complex settings, facilitating 'hot spot' dialogue, bringing a non-anxious presence, being creative and sensitive with process, and building whole system capability become more important.

Quick quiz:

[Score yourself out of 5 on the following three questions. Be as honest as you can, and add the scores together, to give you an MC score.]

- Are you able to keep calm and steadfast, even when you're feeling anxious under the surface?
- Do you encourage and enable those around you to stay in good quality contact with each other?
- Are you good at facilitating constructive dialogue which leads to agreed next steps, even amongst groups with differing perspectives?

Pitfalls:

Over-caring for people, rather than letting them take responsibility



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Failing to set out your agenda, preferring to restrict yourself to asking others what they think
Preferring relationship to delivery, and thus softening expectations

In the body:

To embody this quality, imagine sitting in a room full of colleagues, and gesture to them to come and sit with you, in a circle to discuss an important issue. Let your arms go out, and gather them in. Notice how this feels as it exposes your heart. Does it warm you or leave you feeling anxious or cold? To settle yourself, plant your feet on the ground and breathe into your belly, slowly three times. This quality requires good alignment between your heart and your belly.

Research snippet:

Most people in our original research would prefer their line manager to demonstrate this quality more.

Visionary Motivator



The Visionary Motivator quality is demonstrated in leaders who use words, images and stories to engage people in the way forward. They pay attention to the motivations, loyalties and perspectives of others and



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work to include these where possible. They also understand their own values and passions, and bring these to their work. Skills such as inspiring, visioning, expressing emotions and presenting are all key. In more complex settings, storytelling, using symbols and artefacts, and creating meaning-making become more important.

Quick quiz:

[Score yourself out of 5 on the following three questions. Be as honest as you can, and add the scores together, to give you an VM score.]

- Are you able to talk in a compelling and attractive way about where you and the team need to be heading?
- Do you enjoy finding out what motivates people and helping them get more of this?
- Are you able to bring your authentic self to any interaction in a way that lifts people out of their day-to-day pre-occupations and diversions?

Pitfalls:

Impulsively jumping from one enthusiasm to the next without working through the implications or next steps

Talking too much, and failing to value the ideas and insights of others

Over-selling an idea or course of action, and avoiding opening up to any doubts and concerns

In the body:

To embody this quality, imagine you're on a platform, speaking about what feels important to you about the work you do. Let your arms go up and out, as if conducting an orchestra. Try saying 'I'm here', looking out to the crowd, and see how that feels. You may notice your head clearing, your heart beating faster, and something engaging in your belly. This quality requires whole body alignment, yet for some this level of exposure provokes anxiety. This anxiety can be settled by breathing into the belly, taking time to look at people in a friendly way, and experimenting with quietly saying 'I'm excited' to yourself. The body's reactions to both anxiety and excitement are very similar.



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Research snippet:

Those who find the Tenacious Implementer quality easy to access, tend to find the Visionary Motivator quality difficult to access.

Edgy Catalyser



The Edgy Catalyser quality is found in those leaders who are able to bring fresh, probing eyes to a situation or issue in a way that catalyses change. Key skills are questioning, steadiness, a service orientation and the courage to confront. A willingness to enter into tough conversations, a quiet sensitivity to others' reactions and an ability to withstand conflict are especially important. In more complex settings, being able to 'wait and see', an ability to re-frame issues and providing a new perspective in an objective way are all helpful capacities.

Quick quiz:

[Score yourself out of 5 on the following three questions. Be as honest as you can, and add the scores together, to give you an EC score.]



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- Are you recognised for your ability to deal with conflict bravely and well?
- Do you bring clarity and precision when setting out your perspective?
- Are you good at spotting issues and seeing which are the most significant to overall success?

Pitfalls:

Tendency to an unhelpful combativeness and delight in upsetting things

Continuous or poorly pitched critique that irritates others or simply wears down their enthusiasm

Capacity to be objective comes across as 'impersonal' or insensitive, and can feel dismissive

In the body:

To embody this quality, sit in a chair as if at a meeting, and get yourself comfortable with your feet firmly on the floor, and your shoulders and neck relaxed. Then imagine an issue that you are currently dealing with that you'd like everyone else to see and understand. In a mindful way, imagine pointing to that issue in a way that others can really 'get' what the problem is. Notice the flow of energy around your body; you probably feel quite alive! This quality benefits from a lining up of the head, the heart and the belly.

Research snippet:

Leaders in our survey said this quality was particularly useful during restructuring, in times of crisis or when facing well-defined change.

Thoughtful Architect



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The Thoughtful Architect quality is about thinking and acting strategically, which recent research indicates only about 5% of leaders are able to do well. Those who embody the Thoughtful Architect quality are continually scanning both the environment and their own inner world of experiences and sensations. They notice trends, are perceptive about where there is 'flow' in a system, and are sensitive to emerging possibilities. Their intent is to discover how best to design or frame the way forward so that others can engage in the work ahead. In more complex settings, having access to a systemic perspective and maintaining an openness to innovative ideas become important skills/capabilities.

Quick quiz:

[Score yourself out of 5 on the following three questions. Be as honest as you can, and add the scores together, to give you a TA score.]

- Do you sometimes insist on taking your time to make decisions that feel complex?
- Are you open to new ideas about how to do things, particularly if they resonate with your sense of what's required?
- Are you good at anticipating the way a team or organisation is likely to behave, and therefore what might support next steps?



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Pitfalls:

A tendency to withdraw from the day to day, and maybe lose touch with personal relationships

Over-processing of data and possibilities and unnecessary delays

A preference for concepts and things, over people issues and more mundane practicalities

In the body:

One of the most important aspects of embodying the Thoughtful Architect quality, is that it requires the leader to stay focused on a problem or question over a significant period, without necessarily coming up with an answer. This is fine for some, and quite problematic for others. One way to practise is to think of a big question that feels 'live' for you.

Sit alone in a room with that question in mind, with your feet firmly planted on the ground, and a relaxed posture. Look down towards your lap and allow the history of everything connected with that problem up to this moment to infuse you, not necessarily in any very specific way. Then notice how you feel inside: energised, anxious, bored.... Notice what comes to mind. Then spend 10 minutes writing down 5 quick answers to your original question, without thinking about it at all. You might be surprised at the results.

This quality depends on a clear head, which is supported by an open heart and a steady belly.

Research snippet:

Our original research indicates that the Thoughtful Architect quality is one of the least frequently noticed and possibly therefore least appreciated qualities in organizational life.

How did you do?

Now you have read about the Five Leadership Qualities and had a chance to consider your own skills, style and preferences, note down your scores out of 15 for each quality. Most people tend to score themselves a little high at first, perhaps as a way of reassuring themselves that they are doing ok. There's



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no need to be hard on yourself; just be honest!

Take 10 minutes out to answer the questions below:

i) What did you learn about the way you lead from reading the descriptions of the Five Qualities:

- your key strengths and capacities?
- your weak areas and possible pitfalls?
- how leadership feels in your body?

ii) What reflections do you have on your leadership over the past 6 months:

- what went well?
- what didn't go so well?
- which of the above qualities were flowing, and which weren't?
- what does your body say about the above!?

iii) What type of leadership skills and capacities will your current role(s) require of you in the coming 3-6 months?

iv) Which skills or approaches do you feel motivated to get better at, and who might be able to support you in this?

v) What are three simple next steps you can action this week?

vi) How will you stay in touch with your head, heart and belly through all of this?

You can read much more about the history of leadership thinking and the evolution and content of the Five Qualities framework in [Essential Leadership \(Kogan Page, 2017\)](#).

Please note that if you are interested in using the Five Qualities framework as a core part of



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*your professional work as a change leader, facilitator, coach, trainer or consultant please **get in touch** to discuss how this could work. We supply training, accreditation and materials depending on what is required.*