

Leadership model

'What does a leader actually do?'

There are obvious 'leaders' in primary care such as the business owners, practice managers and team leaders. However, we believe anyone who has a strategic, supportive or teaching role needs leadership skills irrespective of their official position.

The action-centred leadership model

A useful starting point for developing leadership skills is to consider a model that can be applied to all situations. One of the most enduring and simple models is the action-centred leadership (ACL) model created by John Adair in the 1960s. He developed and tested this model while working at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and the model was eventually adopted as the core of their leadership training. It was later rolled out to the other armed forces and has since been taught in numerous environments including corporate, social development and higher education. *See Figure 3.1.*

This model illustrates the relationship between the needs of the task, team and individual. Crucially, it notes that they are interconnected and an effective leader therefore monitors all three elements and adjusts their focus accordingly. A leader's prime goal is the achievement of the task, hence its position at the top of the diagram. The team and individual needs should then be met as best as possible to support the task.

The task

The term 'task' refers to those things that must be achieved whether it is in the short, medium or long term.

A long-term task could include: acquiring new premises to expand a general practice or changing the management team structure.

Medium-term tasks could include: implementing a new pay system, ensuring the professional development of new nurses or adding a new partner to a practice.

Short-term tasks could include: ensuring all patients are treated to a standard of excellence on a daily basis, hygiene standards are maintained minute by minute or trainees have one formal training event per week.

The team

Your role will determine whether you are the leader of a multidisciplinary or single discipline team. For example, a practice manager has the responsibility of patient care by maximising how well all of the teams perform together. The nursing team



Figure 3.1 ACL model – three overlapping circles of needs.¹

leader however will only lead their team and be a liaison with other management staff.

The leader of a team must ensure that the appropriate resources are available and are utilised as well as develop the performance of the team as a unit and not simply as a group of individuals. Teambuilding skills are therefore a key element of leadership capability.

The individual

Human needs have been studied for decades with probably the best-known research conducted by Abraham Maslow in 1943. The result was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs² which indicates that people must meet their most 'basic needs' such as food, shelter and security before pursuing 'higher needs' such as sense of belonging, self-esteem, recognition and self-actualisation. There are many other needs which drive behaviour such as cooperation, honesty, balance, respect, freedom, care, and inclusion, to name a few.

As the leader, it is your job to be aware that these needs may surface at any time. Taking the view that all behaviour is an expression of a person trying to get their needs met brings a whole new light to understanding people's behaviour. This does not mean, however, that all behaviour is necessarily appropriate.

As individuals try to meet their needs, their behaviour may change or be perceived as difficult. Someone seeking accuracy and order may struggle with effective delegation. Similarly, someone needing recognition may appear to be irritable if they do not receive praise.

While people are working to have their needs met they are invariably less able to be creative and focused on the task and hence their performance will be lessened. As the leader's focus is achievement of the task they must address any behaviour that is detrimental to the individual or team's performance. Specifically identifying the needs driving unhelpful behaviours will allow you to get to the root of the problem.

In addition to needs, learning style preferences, levels of knowledge, skills and strengths will also vary between individuals. Knowing these gives the leader greater potential to bring out the best performance in each individual.

Exercise: Applying the ACL model

Consider a leadership situation that you are currently involved in. What are or might be the needs of the task?

Which teams are involved, e.g. the nursing team, the admin team? What are or might be the needs of each individual team?

What are or might be the needs of the greater practice team?

What are or might be the needs of the individuals?

The basic leadership functions

John Adair notes that leaders should be capable of six basic leadership functions and their associated activities, which I have elaborated on below. There are though a few things to keep in mind beforehand.

Leaders at different levels in a business find they have to satisfy these functions in different proportions. You may not even have to do some of these functions but be aware of what is happening in those areas as it affects you and your team. If you are the business owner or manager you will be doing a lot of planning and initiating, whereas a team leader who needs leadership capability will be doing a larger proportion of controlling and supporting.

These leadership functions also don't have to be done by you alone. A lot of them are best done in collaboration with your colleagues, staff and customers as you tap a rich source of information and also show that their opinions are valuable to you.

Ideally the decisions you make as a leader will follow information gathering from other people and sources. For those in a large business you have multiple colleagues to call upon. Even if you are a single-handed general practitioner and you are the leader and the management, you can seek input from the staff that you trust, your patients, family, friends and members of your professional network. You could also speak with a coach or mentor who could provide an independent perspective.

As you read through the following functions and actions, consider:

- what you are really good at and do more of it
- what you are OK at and either get better at it or delegate it
- what you are not good at and either improve to the minimal level that your role requires or delegate it.

1 Planning

- a Seek all available information from relevant people including your staff, customers (patients, the health authority), trust representatives and those who are politically aware.
- b Define vision, group/team task, purpose or goals, remembering this may be the ultimate purpose of the general practice (e.g. creating and maintaining excellent health in the community; getting patient satisfaction surveys completed by a deadline).
- c Make a workable plan in conjunction with the relevant people to achieve the goal.

2 Initiating

- a Brief the group/team on the goals and the strategy.
- b Explain why the goals or strategy are necessary, specifying the benefits to be gained or negative consequences to be avoided.
- c Allocate tasks to group members ensuring as far as possible that each individual utilises their strengths.
- d Set group standards for behaviour, performance and note the steps toward the end goal.

3 Controlling

- a Maintain group standards.
- b Influence tempo (i.e. speed up the pace if it is too slow or reflecting complacency and slow the pace if people are acting too quickly without due consideration).
- c Ensure all actions are taken towards meeting objectives (i.e. preventing postponement or avoidance of actions). If avoidance is occurring, the needs of the individuals and team/group should be explored to identify the obstacles to progress.
- d Keep discussion relevant to keep people interested and prevent time wasting.

- e Steer the group to action/decision. If a consensus cannot be reached having reviewed all available information, it will be up to the leader to make a decision.

4 Supporting

- a Accept people and appreciate their contribution.
- b Encourage the team and individuals.
- c Discipline the team and individuals as needed to maintain standards and progress.
- d Create a sense of purpose and accountability in the group/team.
- e Reconcile disagreements or encourage others to explore them and to reach a resolution.

5 Informing

- a Clarify the task and plan once it has been initiated.
- b Provide new information to the group so they are aware of the big picture. People rarely complain about knowing detail, but they will complain about not being informed.
- c Receive information from the group so you are able to review progress in relation to the goal as well as the effectiveness of strategy.
- d Summarise suggestions and ideas coherently so that you can present information in an easy-to-understand manner. As a manager, you will need to do this for your direct reports and your supervisor.

6 Evaluating

- a Check the feasibility of ideas and ensure all of the concerns and information are aired and debated.
- b Test the consequences of a proposed solution by imagining the solution has already been implemented and exploring the result.
- c Evaluate group/team performance and make appropriate changes if the team is not performing to the desired standard.
- d Help the group to evaluate its own performance against standards.

To help you remember these functions, just think you have to be a 'PICSIE' to lead.

Exercise: Applying the PICSIE

Consider a leadership situation that you are currently involved in.

- What planning steps have been done and what still needs to be done?
- What initiating steps have been done and what still needs to be done?
- What controlling steps have been done and what still needs to be done?
- What supporting steps have been done and what still needs to be done?
- What informing steps have been done and what still needs to be done?
- What evaluating steps have been done and what still needs to be done?

Suggested learning outcomes and action points

- 1 Understand the Adair action-centred leadership model.
- 2 Be able to review a leadership situation and consider what the needs are for the task, team and individuals.
- 3 Understand what is involved in the six key functions of a leader: planning, initiating, controlling, supporting, informing and evaluating (PICSIE).
- 4 If you haven't already done so, do the exercises 'Applying the ACL model' and 'Applying the PICSIE'.

References

- 1 Adair J. *Effective Leadership Development*. London: The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; 2006.
- 2 Maslow A. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper; 1954.

Further reading

- Blanchard K, Zigarmi P, Zigarmi D. *Leadership and the One Minute Manager*. London: HarperCollins, 2004.