

The Difference Between Leading & Managing

By Andrew Leach, MBA

Some people may think managing and leading are the same things. They are not! This article will explore the main difference between leadership and management, and discuss relevant implications for First Nations organizations.

The primary difference between a leader and a manager is that one is expected to create change while the other is expected to maintain the status quo.

In particular, a leader's role is essentially about initiating change. Furthermore, people can lead in many ways. For example, there are autocratic leaders, who want a firm hand in how things will change. Then there are democratic leaders, who like to get everyone involved in the change process.

Research shows that effective leaders rely upon more than one leadership style, depending on the circumstances. For example, they'll be autocratic in one situation and democratic in another. Extraordinary leaders have an almost instinctive knack for selecting the right leadership style with the right circumstance.

Are you a good leader? To answer this question, ask yourself this: Do you lead largely with one leadership style? Or are you skilled at using different styles for different people and different situations?

The primary role of a manager is to carry out organizational plans, while adhering to company policies and procedures. Good managers understand and appreciate planning concepts. They can also develop and execute company policies and procedures.

Ideally, a manager has a combination of both hard and soft skills. Hard skills include being able to crunch numbers and quickly gather, process and interpret lots of information. Soft skills include communication and social skills.

Are you a good manager? To answer this question, ask yourself this: Are you skilled at gathering and processing both the financial and non-financial information within your organization? Are you able to communicate your thoughts, orally and in writing, to a wide range of people, including superiors, subordinates, customers and suppliers?

Given these definitions, it's clear organizations need both good leaders and managers to reach their goals. Your leaders will help define where you are heading, and your managers will make sure you get there.



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It is important for First Nations organizations to know the fundamental difference between leading and managing. Indeed, there are many stories illustrating the struggles that arise when people fail to differentiate between these two roles. For example, many newly elected leaders struggle with the Band-management part of their duties. Also, many good First Nations administrators have had difficulty creating change within their organizations.

In an ideal world, your leaders can manage and your managers can lead. If that is not your situation, you need to do several things. First, never assume your leaders can perform the hard skills of management, such as financial statement analysis. Conversely, don't assume your most senior manager is the most capable of creating change within your organization or community.

Second, consider cross-training your managers and/or leaders. Specifically, train your managers to lead and your leaders to manage. As a side note, also recognize there are limitations to training; it won't solve issues overnight. Often, a combination of training and practical experience is the best approach to developing either leadership or management skills.

Finally, we need to acknowledge that some people have a knack for one skill, but are fundamentally weak in the other. If this is the case in your community, put people where they are most capable. Above all, don't give an important leadership or management task to someone who is incapable of completing it.

Summary

In summary, managing and leading are very different tasks. Ideally your community will have a healthy pool of both skills to draw from. If not, make sure your managers and leaders develop the skills needed to do their jobs. In the meantime, don't make the mistake of giving the wrong task to the wrong person, simply because of a person's position or title.



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