

NEXT STEP LEADERSHIP FITNESS TEST

A leadership self-assessment
designed with you in mind

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Next Step Leadership Fitness Test



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If you find this useful, you might like to register for the [Ascent Leadership Club](#). This is a free service from Pure Potential which alerts you to new downloads, videos and exercises, and invitations to webinars and round-table events.

Thanks for downloading the Leadership Assessment!

The Next Step Leadership Fitness Test is a self-assessment designed to help you develop awareness of and focus on the key areas that will improve your performance as a true leader. You may be a High Potential, moving into leadership; a leader in transition or an established leader who wants to reassess their leadership strengths in all areas.

Our Ascent leadership development programme identifies “[Five Signature Leadership Capacities](#)” which we use in leadership coaching. We have applied the same structure for this Leadership Fitness Test. On the following pages you will find each of the leadership capacities and a series of statements that relate to attitudes and behaviours considered critically important to effective leadership. There is no pass or fail for this test, it is simply a way of enabling self-awareness in leadership focus. To use this interactive document, please do the following:

1. Respond to each statement by clicking the radio button that identifies with your own self-perception.
2. Then mark the areas that you scored low with a tick in the box provided, as indicators for more focus on your part.
3. Read the accompanying text for analysis, tips and guidance for each of these key capacities.
4. Make notes in the “Focus areas and actions” for your next steps.
5. Save this document for reference.

When you have identified your relative strengths and development areas across the five leadership capacities you will have a great starting point for transforming your leadership performance. This will set a baseline to build on as you move forward!

Clearly a brief self-assessment such as this is not as valid as the more extensive assessment that we would run as part of our Leadership Ascent Programme. This includes feedback from 10 or more of your colleagues and stakeholders. However, for a first step that is accessible to leaders who are keen to make a start, we've developed this short self-assessment version that you can access here.

Implementor

< Very Strongly Disagree - Neither Agree nor Disagree - Very Strongly Agree >

Focus:

A. I enjoy driving for results



B. I make things happen.



C. I never assume that it's just happening.



D. I establish clear expectations and accountabilities around key performance indicators.



E. I am disciplined and logical about implementation.



F. I maintain a high task focus.



G. I don't tolerate lack of commitment.



H. I am a strong completer/finisher.



Capability Scores for Implementor

Experienced managers and leaders typically score highly in the Implementor section because they have often built their success so far from the results they have produced. Sometimes the results have been solely down to them but others have driven the results through other people. One thing is clear, leaders need to be terrific at implementing, and this requires discipline.

Here are some tips to boost your Implementation skills:

1. **See execution or implementation as the bedrock of your leadership.** It is the foundation of all your credibility as a leader. Bossidy and Charan who are the definitive experts on execution outline the following key behaviours that all leaders must embed in their organisations to ensure that they get the results that they need to succeed.
2. **Stay close to the actual business and to your customers.**
3. **Foster honest dialogue** with your people whether it's about communicating what customers are looking for from your organisation or challenges that your people face in delivering what they have committed to.
4. **Demonstrate your personal involvement and understanding** by conducting regular business reviews. Employees may not necessarily like that level of scrutiny but they can see that their leader genuinely cares about what they are trying to achieve.
5. **Be very clear about the key goals and priorities** and communicate them in a carefully thought out manner because in decentralised organisations today, without that clarity, employees spend too much time fighting for scarce resource rather than focusing on the critical deliverables.
6. **Have a follow up process in place** so that everyone does what they intended to do. Leaders get far greater momentum in executing on plans when they do so.

Implementor cont...

My focus areas and actions:

7. **If you want to produce specific results, reward those who deliver them.** Leaders need to ensure that rewards are linked to performance and the message is clear across their organisation that employees who know how to get things done, get rewarded for doing so.
8. **Leadership requires strength of character** and particularly when results have to be relentlessly delivered. It takes emotional resilience. Accept that you will get it wrong sometimes and your people will too, but to pick yourself up and learn from each mistake. Highly effective leaders need to show that they don't duck the tough issues and avoid conflict. They need to be able to reflect on their actions, take responsibility for them rather than blaming others and passing the buck. Jack Welch, a highly respected CEO of General Motors, also recognised that it is not helpful to beat people up for their mistakes. It is much more valuable to take the time to coach them, encourage them and help them regain their self-confidence because conscientious managers already know themselves when they get it wrong.

So, how do you cultivate these disciplines in yourself? While there are many books written on leadership, **much can be learned by paying attention to experience**. This learning is not an intellectual exercise. It requires tenacity, persistence and daily engagement. It requires reflection and modifying your personal behaviour. But once you put this in place as a regular practice, your capacity for growth expands significantly.

Insightful Strategist

< Very Strongly Disagree - Neither Agree nor Disagree - Very Strongly Agree >

Focus:

A. I have an ability to look ahead and to see with some accuracy where this industry is heading.



B. I dedicate time each week to keep abreast of developments, both internally and in the market.



C. I am aware of my competitors' strategies and how we differentiate ourselves from them.



D. I understand where we are going and what we are trying to accomplish.



E. I have an adaptive thinking style so I can understand the context in which I work but also recognise and seize new opportunities.



F. I am able to offer solutions quickly and thoughtfully.



G. I balance my expertise with a broad business understanding.



H. I take decisive action consistent with the strategic direction of my organization-despite distractions.



Capability Scores for Insightful Strategist

Many responders to this assessment score in the mid range yet a recent study by the Centre of Creative Leadership suggested that only 10% of leaders have well developed strategic thinking skills and yet it is the most prized skill in the C-Suite.

A study by the Wharton School Mack Institute found [six crucial strategic thinking skills](#) that need to be honed by aspiring leaders and they are the ability to *Anticipate, Challenge, Interpret, Decide, Align and Learn*.

Anticipate

Most organizations and leaders are poor at detecting ambiguous threats and opportunities on the periphery of their business. Austin Reed, the English tailors, were late seeing the trend towards buying online. Lego management initially missed the electronic revolution in toys and gaming. Strategic leaders, in contrast, are constantly vigilant, honing their ability to anticipate by scanning the environment for signals of change.

To improve your ability to [anticipate](#):

- Talk to your customers, suppliers, and other partners to understand their challenges.
- Conduct market research and business simulations to understand competitors' perspectives, gauge their likely reactions to new initiatives or products, and predict potential disruptive offerings.
- Examine a fast-growing rival and examine actions it has taken that you don't quite understand.
- List customers you have lost recently and try to figure out why.
- Attend conferences and events in other industries or functions.

Insightful Strategist cont.....

Challenge

Strategic thinkers question the status quo. They challenge their own and others' assumptions and encourage divergent points of view. Only after careful reflection and examination of a problem through many lenses do they take decisive action. This requires patience, courage and an open mind.

To improve your ability to **challenge**:

- Focus on the root causes of a problem rather than the symptoms. Apply the “five whys” of Sakichi Toyoda, Toyota’s founder. (“Product returns increased 5% this month.” “Why are they returned?” “Because the product intermittently malfunctions.” “Why do they malfunction?” And so on.)
- List long-standing assumptions that you hold about an aspect of your business (“High switching costs prevent our customers from defecting”) and ask a diverse group if your assumptions still hold true.
- Encourage debate by holding “safe zone” meetings where open dialogue and conflict are expected and welcomed.
- Include sceptics and critics in a decision process to surface challenges early.

Interpret

Leaders who challenge in the right way invariably elicit complex and conflicting information. That’s why the best ones are also able to interpret.

To improve your ability to **interpret**:

- Practice synthesizing all the input you receive and looking for patterns in the data, see past the ambiguity and seek new insights and hidden implications.
- When analysing ambiguous data, list at least three possible explanations for what you’re observing and invite perspectives from different stakeholders.
- Force yourself to zoom in on details and out to see the big picture. Actively look for missing information and evidence that negates your hypothesis.
- Supplement observation with quantitative analysis.
- Step away—go for a walk, look at art, put on some music, play a game—to stimulate an open mind.

Insightful Strategist cont....

Decide

In uncertain times, decision makers may have to make tough calls with incomplete information, and often they must do so quickly. But strategic thinkers insist on multiple options at the outset and don't get prematurely locked into simplistic go/no-go choices. They don't shoot from the hip but follow a disciplined process that balances rigor with speed, considers the trade-offs involved, and take both short- and long-term goals into account. In the end, strategic leaders must have the courage of their convictions—informed by a robust decision process.

To improve your ability to **decide**:

- Reframe typically binary decisions by explicitly asking your team, “What other options do we have?”
- Break big decisions down to understand the component parts so you can better see possible unintended consequences.
- Tailor your decision making criteria towards long-term versus short-term projects.
- Let others know where you are in your decision process. Are you still seeking divergent ideas and debate, or are you moving toward closure and choice?
- Determine who needs to be directly involved and who can influence the success of your decision. You may want to implement a particularly effective decision making framework such as Bain's RAPID process to ease clarity and roles for decision makers.
- Consider pilots or experiments instead of one-off big bets, and make staged commitments.

Align

Strategic leaders must be adept at finding common ground and achieving buy-in among stakeholders who have disparate views and agendas. This requires active collaboration. Success depends on proactive communication, trust building, and frequent engagement with stakeholders.

Insightful Strategist cont....

My focus areas and actions:

To improve your ability to **align**:

- Communicate early and often to combat the two most common complaints in organizations: “No one ever asked me” and “No one ever told me.”
- Identify key internal and external stakeholders, mapping their positions on your initiative and pinpointing any misalignment of interests. Look for hidden agendas and coalitions.
- Use structured and facilitated conversations to expose areas of misunderstanding or resistance. Be vigilant in monitoring stakeholders’ positions during the rollout of your initiative or strategy.
- Reach out to resisters directly to understand their concerns and then address them.
- Recognize and reward colleagues who support the overall team alignment.

Learn from yours and others’ mistakes

Strategic leaders are the focal point for organizational learning. They promote a culture of inquiry, and they search for the lessons in both successful and unsuccessful outcomes. They study failures—their own and their teams’—in an open, constructive way to find the hidden lessons.

To improve your ability to **learn**:

- Implement after-action reviews. Document lessons learned from major decisions or milestones and broadly communicate the resulting insights.
- Reward managers who try something innovative but fail in terms of outcomes.
- Identify initiatives that are not producing the expected results and examine the root causes.
- Create a culture in which inquiry is valued and mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities.

Influencer and Collaborator

< Very Strongly Disagree - Neither Agree nor Disagree - Very Strongly Agree >

Focus:

A. I understand how my emotions affect other people.



B. I show a genuine interest in other people.



C. I am able to ensure that my ideas are heard and I also challenge the ideas of others.



D. I put forward my ideas and offer logical, rational reasons to convince others to my point of view.



E. I look for compromises and make concessions to reach outcomes that satisfy my greater interest.



F. I build relationships and connect with others through listening, understanding and building coalitions.



G. I communicate my position and encourage others with a sense of shared purpose and possibilities.



H. I understand how certain groups make decisions and I adapt my approach accordingly.



Capability Scores for Influencer and Collaborator

Most responders to this questionnaire scored in the mid range and yet this is another leadership skillset that differentiates the potential leaders from the rest.

With flatter organisations and many professionals having to influence across country boundaries as well as virtually, honing your influencing and collaborative skills becomes even more important. Influence is about getting people to think, feel and act differently.

Here are some tips to increase your influencing and collaborative powers.

1. Experts have learned their own professional language but as they take on greater responsibility, they have to become multi -linguists. They have to **translate their expertise into a language that others can understand** and relate to. Equally, the expert needs to learn the common business language of finance, sales and marketing plus the language of other expert areas in their organisation and be able to translate as necessary. Leaders need to be able to communicate with the board, their investors, the salesforce, the R & D function and the general public. It is never too early to practice your messages with a broader and wider audience to hone these skills.
2. **High performing leaders have non-insular networks.** They have select ties up and down the hierarchy. They have lateral connections to peers, both inside and outside the organisation. They have high quality relations with those below them in the hierarchy and often mentor high potentials. They have select ties to experts outside of their organisation and they are known and respected outside of their companies. So it is worthwhile reflecting on your network: Who do you connect to regularly? Are they both inside and outside your organisation? How do you relate and collaborate with your peers?
3. Herminia Ibarra's research into leaders' networks looks at three key types of network that we should all invest in throughout our careers. The first is our **personal network** - our friends, our family and those who have helped us so far. Then there is the **operational network** - people who we work with today to achieve certain results - our team, colleagues, channel partners etc.

Influencer and Collaborator cont...

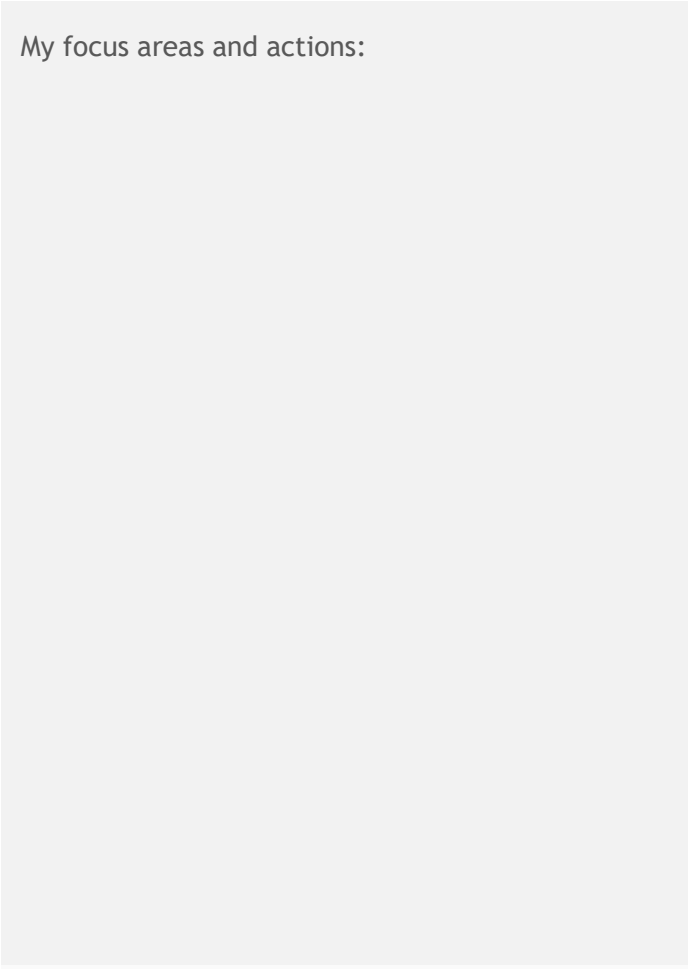
Notes on my networks:

And finally and often the most under-invested network - our **strategic network** - those people who will help us get to where we want to be in three to five years time - our boss, our mentors, our strategic allies etc. Take a few moments now to map out your three networks and ascertain where you need to invest at this point in your career.

4. In his seminal work on collaboration, Morten Hansen talks about the three steps we need to take to be more **collaborative leaders**. The first is **understanding what opportunities exist** within your organisation to collaborate. The second is examining and then **removing the barriers to collaboration** - the “not invented here” barrier; the “we only work with people we know well” barrier, the “hoarding” barrier where we keep the information to ourselves barrier and the “search” barrier where “we can’t find what we’re looking for here” barrier. Hansen recommends a disciplined approach to removing each of these obstacles by using three particular levers - a **unifying lever** where a common overarching goal is identified; a **T-shaped lever** that allows the leader to work across and down the organisation and finally, **the network lever** where people are encouraged to use their own personal networks to get things done. How could use this approach to deepen your collaboration with your colleagues?
5. No work on influence would be complete with mentioning Robert Cialdini. Cialdini observed that there are certain basic human needs that we can all tap into, that increase our influence with other people.
 - For example, if someone does you a favour, you will tend to feel a **need to repay** that gesture. So invest in important relationships if you want to increase their trust in you.
 - Find **common interests or common goals** and that will also increase your standing in their eyes.
 - Another Cialdini observation is that before we buy big items, we tend to seek the **opinion of those we respect** as well as those who we perceive to be our social peers. So, the lesson is to demonstrate your expertise regularly so that people will seek you out.

Influencer and Collaborator cont...

My focus areas and actions:



- Cultivate **constructive relationships** with your peers by making positive comments about them. Use peer power to influence horizontally rather than over relying on just influencing vertically. Ask peers to support initiatives and be prepared to return the favour.
- People will tend to fulfil **commitments they have made in writing or in public** so encourage people to declare their intentions.

Inspirer and People Motivator cont...

My focus areas and actions:

- **Deliver powerful messages frequently and confidently.** Personalise the messages where possible.
- Use language in your presentations that **evokes enthusiasm and passion** rather than presenting facts and figures alone.
- **Reflect upon the tone you set at your staff or team meetings.** Is it constructive? Is it inclusive? Do people look forward to them or reluctantly attend?
- **Dress well for your position** - it projects confidence and professionalism.
- **Tell stories** rather than communicate by PowerPoint. Psychologist and researcher Jerome Bruner found that facts are 20 times more likely to be remembered if they're part of a story. Stories are powerful because they provide context and create an emotional connection.

Innovator and Champion of Change cont...

My focus areas and actions:

Recommended Reading

[Execution](#) by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan with Charles Burck, 2002 (Random House Business Books)

[The Inspiring Leader](#) by John. H. Zenger and Joseph R. Folkman and Scott K. Edinger, 2009 (McGraw Hill)

[How Leaders Create and Use Networks](#) by Herminia Ibarra and Mark Lee Hunter, 2016 (Harvard Business Review)

[Influence - The Psychology of Persuasion](#) by Robert Cialdini, 2006 (Harper Business)

[Accelerate and Leading Change](#) by John Kotter, 2014 (Kotter International)

[Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Build Common Ground and Reap the Results](#), Morten Hansen, 2009 (Harvard Business School Publishing)

[The War for Talent](#) by Ed Michels, Helen Handfield-Jones, Beth Axelrod 1997 (McKinsey)

[Geeks and Geezers: How Era, Values and Defining Moments Shape Leaders](#) by Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas, 2002 (Accenture Publication)

I hope you found this Next Step Leadership Fitness Test interesting and informative. If you want to discuss how you could develop your Five Signature Leadership Capacities further, why not contact me, I would love to help!

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