

## The Influence of Leaders

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Effective leadership and traits of good leaders are often overlooked. The leader in popular culture is often strong, physically present and outspoken. Some of these traits are present in many of the great leaders of history. A leader must possess a sense of fortitude that will sustain them in the thin air that only Eagles soar. But leadership requires more than glory and the limelight. There is a way that is often lonely. A path less travelled.

To build trust within the brands that we work for requires careful management of decisions and reputation. One wrong decision made public can destroy decades of carefully managed public trust within the brand itself. Decision making in the context of Higher Education leadership can make or break the institution. Yet, there are often 100s if not 1000s of leadership decisions made within a week, month, or year. Clear frameworks such as the Eisenhower Decision Matrix can guide those decisions through meaningful dialogue.

The *Artificial Intelligence revolution* that is at the point of large-scale adoption is another part of the equation of how leaders manage, adapt, and overcome increasingly fractious workplace systematic shifts. The traits we present as leaders set the culture we seek to propagate within the broader system of cultural paradigms. The disruptive nature of AI has created a rift in the time fabric continuum. The analogue era before the digital technology revolution feels no closer than the Roman empire.

A crossroads in adversity has begun to emerge. To survive the future problems of the emerging technological order requires us to be antifragile in our approaches to problem solving and stakeholder management. The careful equilibrium of systems to solve complex scenarios is part of the leadership toolkit. Beneath the well-polished veneer are the nuts and bolts of those systems. Effective leaders know and understand this.

## The Way of Solitude

Leadership is not a journey for the fainthearted. It comes with sacrifice, patience, and servitude to your team and stakeholders. Your day never truly ends. There is no clear option to quiet, quit or disconnect the phone for more than a few hours. Because what's at stake is often the financial and operational outcomes of the business. Therefore, the standards we set as leaders must be at a much higher level than that set for our team (though we should also have high standards for how the team operates).

Operational decisions made will often not be made in the essence of pure popularity. Making the right decision when it would easier to make no decision becomes paramount even when earnings and reputational loss for the institution or business may become a deciding factor. Managing staff and ensuring that they buy into the overall vision of the business becomes another paramount point that leadership continues. How we approach the dignity of our team members is important to the overall health of the staff and how they approach their work.

**“Do what is right, though the world may perish”**  
*Immanuel Kant, German Enlightenment philosopher*

We seek to set good examples for our teams and stakeholders because to paraphrase Immanuel Kant: It is right. Effective leaders understand that there must be a sense of what is morally right when setting an example. This isn't a concept for those who seek only comfort. You will be scrutinized. You will be hated. You will be maligned. That is human nature. And particularly so given the crabs in a bucket/tall poppy syndrome that is often present in Australia.

Leadership can often be a thankless task. The image of the tech billionaire jet-setting or on their yacht exudes the luxury of the ultra-rich playboy. The stark reality of building a company or increasing stakeholder value and core efficiencies are different from the perceived imagery. History tells stories of great men and women, lionising them in written accounts. There is some truth to this. The historical events of greatness such as the Normandy Landings (General Eisenhower). What is missing is the mundane daily details of live and routine that fill most of a leader's time. So, do you really want to be a leader?

### Building Trust in the Higher Education Sector

Trust in the Higher Education Sector is vital for effective leadership. Multiple stakeholders, deadlines, and business demands create a complex myriad of operational paradigms and decision-making considerations. The daily operations of a department/faculty or larger organisation become a game of chess where strategic alignments become the bedrock of our approach in the sector. The wrong decision can have disastrous consequences for an organisation.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<b>Do</b> Do it right away.	<b>Decide</b> Schedule a time to do it later.
Not Important	<b>Delegate</b> Who is the best person for the task?	<b>Delete</b> Remove unnecessary tasks.

Figure 1.1 The Eisenhower Decision Matrix

How we prioritise our demands and use of time creates a set of decisions that will inevitably arise. The use of The Eisenhower Decision Matrix (Figure 1.1) is one such way in which to alleviate decision fatigue through a set of constructs designed to simplify choices. This becomes prescient for leaders in the Higher Education Sector as the demands of the job often requires continual choice selection. An academic under pressure (due to multiple classes, marking, student management etc.) will greatly benefit from the use of the Eisenhower Matrix as it simplifies the process.

Considered decision making through Do, Decide, Delegate, and Delete works to build trust in the processes surrounding core decisions and business outcomes. Our institutional reputations build part of the branding and trust that our customers rely on. How we respond under pressure to customers and students will set our reputation. It is our inherent desire to create excellent learning and educational outcomes for students through clear and directed policies and processes. Utilising a clear framework assists in that end goal. Reputation matters in the Tertiary Education space.

Integrity in leadership and the style in which that leadership is exercised is an important matter for building institutional reputations. It can be thankless, often involving untold hours of overtime to build decisions that work within the contextual lens of risk management. Foundational frameworks within current legislation and our institutions create a strong case for building institutional trust and branding through our decision-making capabilities. In other words: how do we build a brand without causing harm to it or our own reputations?

### **Systems in the Age of Artificial Intelligence**

Systems are structures that make things simple. A way of organising the many moving parts to create order. An incomplete or disorganised system can create chaos and disorder within a work environment. The age of Artificial intelligence has further complicated this environment as once simple truths surrounding work patterns have shifted beyond the obvious wholesale replacement of minimum skill white collar jobs. A new paradigm of global workplace governance is beginning to emerge.

**“Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing ‘patterns of change’ rather than static ‘snapshots.’”**

*Peter Senge, American Systems Scientist and MIT Academic*

The inter-relational paradigm between artificial intelligence, effective AI prompting, leadership. In the workplace, and the effectiveness of entrenched and emerging educational systems is apparent. The world will be defined much like the industrial revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the world before and the world afterwards. The frameworks that we need to develop to effectively manage the new paradigm must consider both the technological and the biological.

Tech futurists like Ray Kurzweil envisage a history in which all humanity has merged with machines and therefore evolved into an ideological Übermensch. A class of human being superior to our current understanding of the human condition. The new man will not tire easily, will not be easily manipulated, will compute complex equations and philosophical questions in the blink of an eye. Not all proponents of a tech driven future with AI as the centre point believe that a singularity is inevitable. There is another way forward.

To be forewarned of the potential disruptive power of the AI revolution is to be forewarned against its consequences as the disruptive nature of the fourth industrial revolution continues its slow permutational march through our modern society. Our systems and the safeguards we build into them will be paramount in how effectively we can manage the AI conundrum. We are at the unique point in history where humanity can create a way of management that does not allow our over-reliance on technological based systems. As leaders, it is paramount that we have these discussions now.

## Leadership through Adversity

The great difficulty of leadership comes from the management of human resources. Strategically, the arc of adversity brings unique challenges as to how we can and should lead. The concrete and static approach will leave an organisation unable to respond to evolving paradigms. The moto proprio of doing difficult things enables an effective leader to set a culture of problem solving and creativity. Dissecting the challenges facing a department or organisation will provide a framework for solving the emerging narratives of the modern workplace.

**“We do these things not because they are easy,  
but because they are hard.”**

*John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK), 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America*

The nuanced response of building a workplace culture that embraces adversity is incumbent on the leader of the organisation. This can take place in several ways including management of staff through the curation of specialist and generalist skillsets that empower workers to curate the assigned mission. A greater sense of building upon the foundations of excellence that we as leaders bestow upon our staff. Setting clear expectations of tasks and the levels we aim to achieve gives guidance to the larger sense of the contextual lens.

How we create organisational identities in the face of challenges and adversity will lend a sense of self in those set adversities. A clear direction of embracing the hard. The broader strategic frameworks of complex stakeholder management infuse potential solutions for adverse situations. Our ability to remain calm, cool, and collected in leadership are part of the framework for managing stressful situations. The underlying fears of the potential unknown will create an uncertain sense of place and time. It's ultimately about prioritisation of decisions to affirm long term solutions.

Our use of systems in the face of chaos and adversity will ultimately determine how we approach solutions-based leadership in the age of Artificial Intelligence. The solutions are not necessarily simple. How we approach complex tasks and the inherent learning that occurs as we overcome those challenges will make us more antifragile as we approach more tasks in future scenarios. The systems built are the framework for all that we seek to achieve. As leaders, our ability to have all stakeholders buy in is crucial for success. The future is in our hands.

The technology we use and choose to implement into the future should be humane and treat those who use it and will be affected by it with dignity. To utilise AI in an arbitrary manner harms all who use it. We must implement the important lessons surrounding humanity and its flaws to find equitable outcomes for our workers and stakeholder. A large part of leadership is understanding how to manage this type of complexity. Our philosophical and systemic approach can greatly assist in providing leaders with the correct tools to manage the emergence of organisational cultures.

Our use of tools such as the Eisenhower matrix is an important first step towards empowering leaders to prioritise decisions and decision making. It offers the opportunity for leaders both emerging and established to begin solving the cultural issues surrounding the larger organisational fabric. Ultimately, the examples set and the results of our teams are incumbent on our abilities to imbue exemplar qualities on our workers. Only then can we begin to make true progress in the workplace towards a logically enhanced future of work.

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