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Gandee Vasan/Getty ImagesAttempts to analyze leadership tend to fail because the would-be analyst misconceives his task. He usually does not study leadership at all. Instead he studies popularity, power, showmanship, or wisdom in long-range planning. Some leaders have these things, but they are not of the essence of leadership. HANNAH BATES: Welcome to HBR On Leadership, case studies and conversations with the world’s top business and management experts—hand-selected to help you unlock the best in those around you. Historically, executives were told to be decisive and hierarchical. Today, the advice has shifted away from that—towards being nimble and collaborative. But great leaders, according to IMD professor and social psychologist Jennifer Jordan, understand there’s a time and place for both traditional and new leadership styles. In this episode, Jordan breaks down leadership into seven key tensions—such as power-holding vs. power-sharing and tactical focus vs. big-picture vision—and she explains when to lean into each style to lead more effectively. JENNIFER JORDAN: Originally, my goal as a researcher was to figure out what are the competencies that leaders in this new world really need to be successful? And our research identified seven competencies. Being a power sharer, a visionary, being an adapter, being an accelerator, an analyst, a prospector, being a great listener. That said, as we work more and more with leaders in this VUCA disrupted world, we see that the best ones, they still dabble and they still have one foot in that more traditional leadership space and that more traditional leadership style. Sometimes they are more command and control. They’re tellers, they’re power holders. Yes, these new worlds or these emerging traits are important, but sometimes we still need to be traditional, and that’s where these seven tensions were born. I call them the seven tensions of the digital age. It’s a tension between the traditional and the emerging world. Power holder is somebody who holds power in a way that provides reassurance and security. So, when there is a lot changing, when people are feeling maybe insecure or unstable, a power holder really holds that authority in a way that creates security. Power share is somebody who shares power in a way that helps to develop others. They also see power-sharing as a way to free up their time for more strategic pursuits. So, what can I take off the table so I can really focus on what I need to focus on or what I’m good at? Tactician is somebody who’s much more short-term focused. What are the next steps and can they break down that vision for how it’s relevant for the different roles in the organization, the different levels? Visionary is somebody who sees the big picture, are able to create a vision that inspires. But on top of that, they can influence and persuade people to adopt that vision. Constant is somebody who has a very clear North Star. They say this is the non-negotiables. They are clear on their messaging, and that messaging is quite stable. And an adapter is somebody that understands that change is constant and sees adapting their message when new information becomes available as a strength rather than a weakness. A perfectionist is somebody who really is detail-oriented, ensures that a perfect finished product is delivered. An accelerator is somebody who sacrifices perfection for speed, says that we can satisfy sometimes, good is good enough, we need to move at speed. So, an intuitionist is someone who makes decisions from the gut. [inaudible 00:02:23] an analyst is somebody who brings in data and evidence to make their decisions. So, a miner is someone who goes deep. Really wants to understand a specific technology, a specific part of the market, et cetera. And a prospector’s someone who goes more broad, understanding and is hyper aware of the opportunities and the threats in the environment around them. A teller is much more somebody who gives direction, they have the answer, maybe they’re the expert, and so it is their responsibility as well to give the answer. A listener is somebody who listens to understand. They’re curious. They have a learning mindset, so they are learners. A good leader is never standing fully on one side of that tension or fully on the other. Maybe at a moment when they’re speaking or when they’re in a meeting, they are, but then when they leave that context, they need to think, okay, is this still the right style that I need? And that requires a lot of emotional intelligence. I would never tell a leader, “Aim for a great balance in all seven.” I think that’s too much. Pick out the three or four that they think are really important for them to be able to move between and to focus on [inaudible 00:03:31]. If you rely on one side exclusively, the downsides of that side are going to become apparent. So, let’s take the first tension we talk about, the listener and the teller. If I’m only a teller, what are the downsides of being a teller? Well, other people feel disengaged. Other people don’t feel their voices heard. The expertise you bring in is going to be very narrowly focused on your expertise. The same with being a listener. If you’re only a listener and you never speak, what are the downsides to being a listener? Well, you probably don’t have your voice heard. You probably don’t get to have a lot of say in the direction. You might indeed need to be a great listener. Add in that situation, you might also need to be able to hold power. Meaning, I listen to the people around me and I’m giving a clear frame, I’m giving them feedback, so maybe being a little bit of a teller. I’m giving them feedback, and I’m also creating that psychological safety where they can come back to me if they have questions. So I’m being a listener, but I’m also being a power holder in that situation. I have questions I ask. One is the situation, what’s going on? So, what do I sense in the environment around me? What’s going on? It might be a context question. I need to accelerate because the world is changing rapidly, so I need to accelerate. It might be a situational question and it can also be an emotional intelligent question. What am I sensing from the people around me? The people around me actually are feeling. I sense that they need to say something and I should shut up. Or I’m sensing that they’re frustrated because I’ve shared all this power, but maybe they’re not ready for it. I need to hold a little bit of power. I’ve certainly seen leaders who aren’t able to do that. They have a message that is very clear, it is well-thought-out, it’s smart, and yet the people below them are just not buying it. There’s no change being made, there’s no behavioral shift. And yet, the message stays the same. And they’re just not able to grasp that, yeah, I’ve done all the work. I’ve created a good strategy, but for some reason it’s just not working. What do I need to do differently? How do I need to adapt? And that questioning, I think is what leaders need as well. One of the people that stands out for me is Angela Renz. She was the former CEO of Burberry and the head of retail at Apple. And for me, she balanced a listener and teller beautifully because she said, “I’m not a digital person. The world is changing. I know that my future, our future customer at Burberry is going to be millennials. I don’t really get them. I need to listen to them. What are they looking for? How do they want to shop? How do they think about fashion?” And she was an incredibly curious person, and yet she also said, “These are some things that are non-negotiables. This is the history of Burberry. These are the things that we want to hold onto. And so, this is the frame. This is a non-negotiable for us. I’m here to help you. I’m here to support you, and I also want to learn from you. And I want to listen to the people that are at the bottom of the hierarchy, the next generation of leaders in this company so that I can bring this company to success.” Another leader that I admire is Mathias Dopfner. He was the head of the German media company, Axel Springer. He was the perfect balance on miner and prospector because advertising media, one of the most disrupted spaces when he came into the picture about 15, 20 years ago, really saying, “I need to understand how this industry is changing, how our readers and our customers want to digest media differently.” So, very much a prospector. He took his top team to Silicon Valley. They stayed six months there. He took the next levels down with him and he said, “We’re going to live like start-ups. I know you are in your comfort zone of executive life. We’re going to take you there. You’re going to fly economy class. You’re going to share rooms in a not-so-nice hotel so that you really feel like the world that we’re trying to adapt to, the startup world.” And that was his prospecting part of the leadership, but then saying, “Okay, there are a few areas where we already have competency. There’s some that we don’t. We’re going to sell those off, but where we have competency, we’re going to dive into this and we’re going to invest and we’re going to be miners here.” So, he was great at toggling between this prospector and miner. I see normally when leaders are on one side, so they have a sweet spot on one side and their range is very short, very focused. One of two things are happening, either a lack of skill. So, they’re very much tacticians. I think is what leaders need as well. One of the people that stands out for me is Angela Renz. She was the former CEO of Burberry and the head of retail at Apple. And for me, she balanced a listener and teller beautifully because she said, “I’m not a digital person. The world is changing. I know that my future, our future customer at Burberry is going to be millennials. I don’t really get them. I need to listen to them. What are they looking for? How do they want to shop? How do they think about fashion?” And she was an incredibly curious person, and yet she also said, “These are some things that are non-negotiables. This is the history of Burberry. These are the things that we want to hold onto. And so, this is the frame. This is a non-negotiable for us. I’m here to help you. I’m here to support you, and I also want to learn from you. 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You’re going to share rooms in a not-so-nice hotel so that you really feel like the world that we’re trying to adapt to, the startup world.” And that was his prospecting part of the leadership, but then saying, “Okay, there are a few areas where we already have competency. There’s some that we don’t. We’re going to sell those off, but where we have competency, we’re going to dive into this and we’re going to invest and we’re going to be miners here.” So, he was great at toggling between this prospector and miner. I see normally when leaders are on one side, so they have a sweet spot on one side and their range is very short, very focused. One of two things are happening, either a lack of skill. So, they’re very much tacticians. They don’t really know how to be visionaries. They don’t know how to create a vision. They don’t know how to influence people. Or they’re very much power-sharers, they don’t really know how to hold power, but more likely, I see they know how, but there’s a fear that keeps them from going there. Let us say that they are an absolute power-sharer. What is their fear? Their fear is the downside to being, becoming a power-holder, being seen as authoritarian, being maybe too assertive, being too aggressive, pushing down the voice of the people that work for them, that’s their fear. And so exploring, are all power-holders this? Why do you have that view? Give me some examples of power-holders that you think do so in a way that helps the team. Working through and understanding where those fears come from can release them to feel more emboldened, to explore that range. Same thing when I see the visionary versus tactician. Sometimes people are afraid to go onto the visionary side, to like, “Oh, that’s so fluffy and I don’t know what exactly that would entail. And I’m not a very good storyteller. I’m not very inspiring.” So, they’re afraid also of going there and failing, and exploring that visionary side of them and saying, “What does a vision look like? What do you think would be inspiring for your team? Why do you think vision is sometimes fluffy? How can we create a vision that’s not fluffy?” Challenging their fears or their misconceptions about what these other sides of the tensions might look like in a negative way. Many leaders come into my classroom utterly terrified of this world. They won’t say it. Yes, the world is changing. There’s no doubt about that. And yes, all of their expertise might not be so relevant anymore. And can they still be effective leaders if they share power and if they listen? Even with these younger generations that might have the technical answers and might want to have their voice heard, sometimes they’re also looking for that leader to give them guidance and to provide security and to shelter them from the politics that are going above so that they can do their job. And those are very traditional qualities. And so, I think it does give some comfort to leaders. HANNAH BATES: That was IMD professor Jennifer Jordan in an HBR Quick Study video. You can find that video, and more like it, on HBR’s YouTube channel. We’ll be back next Wednesday with another hand-picked conversation about leadership from Harvard Business Review. If you found this episode helpful, share it with your friends and colleagues, and follow our show on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts. While you’re there, be sure to leave us a review. When you’re ready for more podcasts, articles, case studies, books, and videos with the world’s top business and management experts, find it all at HBR.org. This episode was produced Scott LaPierre and me, Hannah Bates. Curt Nickisch is our editor. Music by Coma Media. Special thanks to Ian Fox, Maureen Hoch, Amanda Kersey, Rob Eckhardt, Erica Truxler, Ramsey Khabbaz, Nicole Smith, Anne Bartholomew, and you – our listener. See you next week. Page 2 (No reviews yet) Write a Review MSRP: Was: Now: \$11.95 (USD) Quantity price applied Format information (No reviews yet) Write a Review Item: #H07XMI-PDF-ENG Publication Date: December 13, 2023 Publication Date: December 13, 2023 And how to cultivate them. Related Topics: Summaries and excerpts of the latest books, special offers, and more from Harvard Business Review Press. Loading shopping cart, please wait... volanthevist/Getty ImagesWhen you're an individual contributor, your ability to use your technical expertise to deliver results is paramount. Once you've advanced into a leadership role, however, the toolkit that you relied on to deliver individual results rarely equips you to succeed through others. Beware of falling into the logical trap of “if I can do this work well, I should be able to lead a team of people who do this work.” This would be true if leading others were akin to operating a more powerful version of the same machinery you operated previously. But it’s not; machinery doesn’t perform better or worse based on what it thinks about you and how you make it feel, while humans do. Sebastian Kim/August ImageWhen Andy Jassy succeeded Jeff Bezos as CEO of Amazon, in 2021, he stepped into one of the most scrutinized leadership roles in business. Yet under Jassy’s leadership, Amazon has not only sustained its momentum but accelerated. According to the company, revenues have grown by more than \$230 billion during his four-year tenure, and it has made significant leaps in its delivery capabilities and use of AI. In a wide-ranging conversation with HBR editor at large Adi Ignatius, Jassy reflects on what it takes to lead at scale, encourage risk-taking, find smart ways to embrace AI, and reinvent corporate culture in a company with more than a million employees. Here are excerpts from that conversation. Peter Dazeley/Getty ImagesGrowing up, I thought successful leaders were supposed to figure out all the answers on their own. Being smart — and making sure everyone else knew it — seemed to be their most striking attribute. The best schools were supposed to lead to the best jobs, which produced the best leaders. Power, fame, glory, and money were the measure of professional success. Early in my career, prominent business leaders like GE’s Jack Welch were revered for their intellect, strategic sense, and hard-charging style. They were considered infallible geniuses, inspiring a quasi-cult following.Page 2 (No reviews yet) Write a Review MSRP: Was: Now: \$11.95 (USD) Quantity price applied Format information (No reviews yet) Write a Review Item: #H06YSB-PDF-ENG Publication Date: April 06, 2022 Publication Date: April 06, 2022 Understanding why you’re in the room is more important than being the smartest one in it. Related Topics: Summaries and excerpts of the latest books, special offers, and more from Harvard Business Review Press. Loading shopping cart, please wait... Sandra RilovaIn the spring of 2009, as the global financial crisis continued to roil markets and businesses, the chief executive of a multinational consulting company called an all-hands teleconference. Revenues had plunged, and everyone was braced for downsizing. Page 2 (No reviews yet) Write a Review MSRP: Was: Now: \$11.95 (USD) Quantity price applied Format information (No reviews yet) Write a Review Item: #H08ECR-PDF-ENG Publication Date: October 18, 2024 Publication Date: October 18, 2024 Expert advice on what every leader needs to know. Related Topics: Summaries and excerpts of the latest books, special offers, and more from Harvard Business Review Press. Loading shopping cart, please wait... Carol Yepes/Getty ImagesMuch has been written about common leadership styles and how to identify the right style for you, whether it’s transactional or transformational, bureaucratic or laissez-faire. But according to Daniel Coleman, a psychologist best known for his work on emotional intelligence, “Being a great leader means recognizing that different circumstances may call for different approaches.”Page 2 (No reviews yet) Write a Review MSRP: Was: Now: \$11.95 (USD) Quantity price applied Format information (No reviews yet) Write a Review Item: #H085MC-PDF-ENG Publication Date: April 09, 2024 Publication Date: April 09, 2024 Being a great leader means recognizing that different circumstances call for different approaches. Related Topics: Summaries and excerpts of the latest books, special offers, and more from Harvard Business Review Press. Loading shopping cart, please wait...