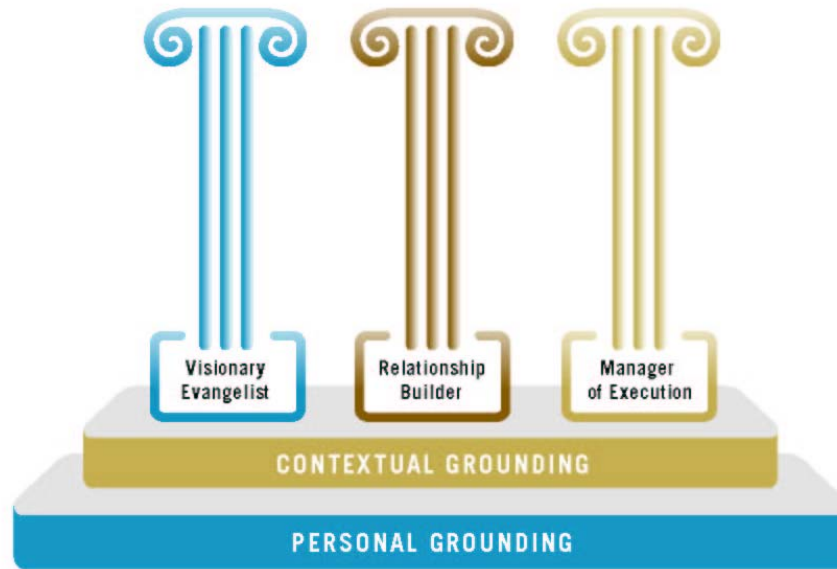


# The Three Pillars of Leadership

## Differing Styles of Successful Leadership



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In the 1980s Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, in their bestselling book, *In Search of Excellence*, glorified the Visionary Leader. At a time when entrepreneurs were changing the fundamental nature of the business world, Peters and Waterman said, “Developing a vision and living it vigorously are essential elements of leadership. Great leaders have a simple, compelling and crystal-clear vision.” Warren Bennis, the popular academic guru of leadership, agreed. He sug-

gested that the definition of leadership should be, “The capacity to create a compelling vision and translate it into action and sustain it.” So, clearly vision is the essence.

But then, in the 1990s Daniel Goleman came along, and in his best selling book, *Emotional Intelligence* and later in *Primal Leadership*, told us that it wasn’t just vision but emotional intelligence and social skills that made great leaders. He emphasized the importance of relationship

building skills: social awareness, empathy, reading the social currents of organizational life, influencing skills, communication skills, building social bonds, facilitating teamwork and collaborating. So, clearly, relationship skills are the essence.

Then, in 2002, Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan told us, in their bestselling book *Execution*, that although vision and relationship building skills were important, it was really execution that mattered. “Every great leader,” they

wrote, “has an instinct for execution.” They suggested that the major challenge for leaders is to create an “architecture” of execution — a culture and environment in which executing effectively is deeply valued by everyone. So, clearly execution is the essence of leadership. Right?

This brings to mind the parable of three blind men describing an elephant. The one who grabbed the tail was sure the beast resembled a rope. The one who wrapped his arms around a thick leg was sure it was very similar to a tree. The one who latched onto the trunk concluded that the animal was related to the snake. It appeared that none of the three men was able to grasp the entire picture.

It is our belief that the three perspectives outlined above represent three fundamentally different styles of leadership. Some great leaders are visionaries. Some are relationship builders. Others are superb managers of execution. Each can be successful but will tend to focus on a specific aspect of leadership. Each will have natural strengths and weaknesses. All three are rarely found in the same individual. Yet, most organizations need all three to be successful.

The remainder of this article

and others that will follow will lay out a theory of leadership based on 20 years of research conducted by Hagberg Consulting Group. These articles will describe the unique talents and contributions, along with the blind spots and potentially fatal weaknesses of each style of leadership.

*“Successful generals make plans to fit circumstances but do not try to create circumstances to fit plans.”*

*-George S. Patton, Jr.*

## A Research Based Model

Since 1984, Hagberg Consulting Group (HCG) has provided personal coaching to thousands of executives including hundreds of CEOs. Part of this coaching and leadership development process has involved assessing these executives utilizing 360 degree or multi-rater feedback instruments. These feedback devices measure such factors as decisiveness, planning, relationship building, model of values, dependability, openness to input, forthrightness, emotional control and com-

posure, visionary thinking, inspirational role model, self confidence, taking initiative, etc.

The data we have collected has been a rich source of research and insight into the makeup of leaders and leadership styles. It has provided a unique opportunity to understand the behavior, style and capabilities of some of the world’s best leaders. It has also showed us how leaders fail when certain critical ingredients of leadership are missing.

Over the years, the business climate has changed dramatically. A global economy has emerged. Technology has become a driver of many businesses. The speed of change has increased. New generations of leaders have succeeded previous generations and brought different values and styles to their companies. Research on leadership has suggested the potential importance of new leadership skills. Given this changing picture, the competencies we have measured on our 360° and the dimensions of personality we have assessed have also changed and evolved with time.

Despite all this change, we have continually observed in our statistical analysis three

fundamental components of leadership that seem to have remained constant. These three components, we have labeled **The Three Pillars of Leadership**.

### Indispensable Leadership Skills

Like gravity, which quietly did its work for several billion years before Newton had his revelation under the apple tree, or DNA, which has invisibly structured the bodies of all living things since the beginning of time, the Three Pillars of Leadership may represent timeless principles or natural laws, necessary for building and guiding any successful human organization. If you carefully investigate the leadership of any thriving organization, past or present, you will find the Three Pillars in operation – even if nobody knows they are there.

What are they?

First, they are *styles of leadership*, three different ways that leaders lead.

Second, they are *key roles* that all leaders must play, to the best of their ability, in managing or directing an organization.

Third, they are *natural functions* essential to the operation of any organization. As a liv-

ing organism depends on natural functions such as respiration and digestion, an organization needs leaders who can provide these three functions – who can play these roles and exemplify these leadership styles – if it is to survive and thrive.

*“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drum. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”*

*-Henry David Thoreau*

### The Three Pillars of Leadership

Using a method of statistical analysis called *factor analysis*, we have found that the skills, competencies, and personality traits of leaders cluster into three fundamental building blocks or styles required of effective leaders. These we have called **Visionary Evangelist**, **Relationship Builder**, and **Manager of Execution**.

### Visionary Evangelist

Visionary Evangelists see possibilities and inspire others with their vision. They are leaders who have the ability to articulate a compelling picture of a desirable future state and this picture motivates people to follow their lead. Based on their natural creativity and astute observations of the marketplace, the global economic environment, technology trends, scientific developments and consumer behavior, the Visionary Evangelists generate new ideas, approaches, products or solutions. They are self confident risk takers who create, sell, and drive the strategy of the organization. They are also effective public spokespersons, who use their enthusiasm and charisma to build confidence in the organization's potential for success. They take charge, push for action, and instill a sense of urgency to achieve the organization's goals. Many, if not most, entrepreneurs are Visionary Evangelists.

### Relationship Builder

Being a leader requires followers. Leaders develop leverage by enlisting the support and capabilities of others. This

requires outstanding social skills and emotional intelligence and the ability to read other people and connect with them. The Relationship Builder is the kind of leader who does this most effectively. They build followership by listening to others, understanding their needs, building relationships based on trust, reading the social dynamics of the team, showing respect and sensitivity, handling disagreements diplomatically and having a direct, sincere, approachable style. Their presence in an organization helps create a positive work environment. Leaders who are Relationship Builders develop loyalty by investing in building their relationships with their coworkers. They are open to the ideas of others, and are willing to share power. Their social skills provide the personal glue that holds together the organization.

## Manager of Execution

Leaders who are effective Managers of Execution provide structure, focus, discipline and a sense of priority to the organizations they lead. They are excellent administrators, and are skilled at getting things done. Put simply, they

## Top Rated Skills and Capabilities of the Visionary Evangelist

### 1. Visionary Thinking

Creates and communicates a clear, coherent and compelling image of what the organization strives to become; enthusiastically presents a target for the future that is energizing and inspiring and provides a sense of future direction

### 2. Taking Initiative

Takes the initiative to identify problems and opportunities and assumes a leadership role by taking action without being asked

### 3. Agent of Change

Challenges the status quo, supports fresh perspectives, tries out new approaches and enlists support for change initiatives

### 4. Inspirational Role Model

Gives others within the organization hope and inspiration by displaying optimism, energy, confidence, enthusiasm, determination and commitment, especially in tough times

### 5. Strategic Focus

Thinks strategically, creates an ongoing, dynamic strategic planning process, and communicates the organization's long-term direction

### 6. Creating Meaning

Ties day-to-day actions of individuals to a higher meaning and to the broad strategic priorities of the organization, giving a more expansive significance to work activities

### 7. Self Confidence

Demonstrates strong, realistic confidence in oneself and one's powers and abilities

### 8. Creativity and Innovation

Personally generates new or improved ideas, approaches, products or solutions

### 9. Formal Presentation

Delivers poised, interesting, high-impact, informative, and organized presentations that meet the expectations and needs of the audience

### 10. Decisiveness

Makes clear-cut decisions without unnecessary delay, even in tough times



know how to get results, accomplish objective and see projects to completion. They also sweat the details. Whereas Visionary Evangelists are only concerned with

broad brush direction and high level strategy, the Manager of Execution develops the tactical plans and operational disciplines that enable the execution of the vision.

They can be counted on. Nobody needs to worry about their meeting commitments. In fact, they are quite skilled at being sure that *others* meet their commitments; they excel when it comes to holding others accountable. Managers of Execution put an organization's systems and processes in place and monitor and measure to be sure projects are completed on time and on budget. They are practical realists who are sensitive to boundaries and limits. It is the Manager of Execution who provides the rigor and control necessary to keep the organization on course.

### Importance of the Three Pillars – for Organizations

Most organizations need a senior management team that possesses all of the qualities of the three essential Pillars of Leadership. If an organization is led by a CEO whose style strongly favors one of the three styles – for example, a visionary entrepreneur – then he needs to surround himself with an executive team that possesses the other two styles. If all of the bases are not covered, the organization will falter. A results-driven Manager of Execution may possess great project management skills and put in place practi-

## Top Rated Skills and Capabilities of the Relationship Builder

### 1. Sensitivity and Consideration

Shows respect for others and is sensitive to their needs, concerns and, perspectives

### 2. Relationship Building

Is friendly, open, and approachable; cultivates trusting relationships that are maintained over time

### 3. Openness to Input

Solicits and is open to feedback and differing ideas and views. Avoids intimidation or domination, and welcomes suggestions

### 4. Social Astuteness

Accurately reads and responds astutely and diplomatically in dealing with others; understands the social dynamics of the work group and the larger organization

### 5. Listening

Listens attentively, doesn't interrupt, accurately hears what is said, asks questions to clarify meaning, communicates understanding, and shows interest

### 6. Model of Values

Engenders respect from others through consistent moral and ethical behavior, high standards of personal conduct, and promoting modeling the principles and values that are central to the success of the organization

### 7. Emotional Control

Maintains composure during times of stress, pressure, or disagreement; avoids unproductive confrontation and maintains a positive outlook in the face of adversity

### 8. Forthrightness

Is sincere, genuine, open and direct with others. Has no hidden agenda

### 9. Creating Buy-in

Effectively builds commitment and wins support for initiatives through personal and professional credibility, trustworthiness, persuasive communication, stakeholder involvement, and by aligning expectations

### 10. Building Teams

Models and encourages teamwork by fostering cooperation, communication, trust, shared goals, interdependency, and mutual accountability



cal tactical plans but fail to inspire others or create a long term vision. The same is true for any one-sided leadership

profile. For maximum effectiveness, all three Pillars must be represented.

## Importance of the Three Pillars – for Leaders

To be a successful leader takes many diverse skills. Nobody has them all. In fact, nobody *needs* them all. There are many types of successful leaders, and many ways up the mountain. There is surely a style of leadership that suits each person's unique characteristics, and other people he or she can partner with, who have complementary qualities and strengths.

The essential message that our research offers to individuals is: *Be who you are*. You don't have to fit a rigid, pre-determined mold. You don't need to be discouraged because you don't have the personality profile of Jack Welch, Lou Gerstner or Bill Gates. You just need to discover your natural leadership style and develop it to its fullest potential.

"We succeed in enterprises which demand the positive qualities we possess," said Alexis de Tocqueville. If you are a Relationship Builder *by nature*, you will do best in your life and your career by sticking to that path. Trying to be a Manager of Execution would probably be difficult and stressful; it's not natural

## Top Rated Skills and Capabilities of the Manager of Execution

1. **Results and Productivity**  
Gets results, accomplishes objectives, and sees projects to completion
2. **Planning, Prioritizing and Maintaining Focus**  
Establishes short-term goals, clarifies roles and responsibilities, sets priorities and milestones and is not distracted by unimportant details or activities
3. **Re-engineering Processes**  
Identifies inefficiencies and recurring problems and restructures the organization to maximize effectiveness
4. **Dependability**  
Can be counted on to meet commitments and deadlines
5. **Developing Structures, Systems, and Processes**  
Designs and establishes structures, systems, and processes to most effectively achieve the organization's objectives
6. **Holding People Accountable**  
Clarifies expectations and holds people accountable for getting results; objectively measures outcomes against established goals while rewarding achievement and confronting poor performance
7. **Emphasizing Excellence**  
Sets challenging goals and high standards of excellence, while refusing to accept mediocre or substandard performance
8. **Decisiveness**  
Makes clear-cut decisions without unnecessary delay, even in tough situations
9. **Culture Management**  
Proactively aligns the organization's/workgroup's culture to support its strategy and core values
10. **Taking Initiative**  
Takes the initiative to identify problems and opportunities and assumes a leadership role by taking action without being asked



Jack Welch,  
Former CEO, GE

to you. By adhering to your natural inclinations and abilities, you will be most productive and make your greatest contribution because you are suited to that kind of work and life. And not only that – you will also be most at ease, relaxed, and happy, because it

is natural to you. As the pioneering humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow said, "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself."

## A Practical Tool

Knowledge of the Three Pillars provides a way for you as a leader to:

1. Understand how to leverage your natural style and its natural assets
2. Recognize the potential problems that accompany your style
3. Think more systematically and deliberately about the makeup of the team you lead and how to build that team with people who have the full complement of leadership styles

## The Foundation of the Pillars

In our research, we have uncovered two additional factors at the basis of these three pillars. We call these **Personal Grounding** and **Contextual Grounding**. The more these factors are lively in a leader, the higher he or she can rise in effectiveness.

**Personal Grounding** is a condition of centered self-awareness, a state of inner calm, solidity, and stability. People with a strong sense of Personal Grounding find it relatively easy to adapt, without losing their sense of self

or their clarity of focus. They see the world as it is. They stay in the Now. Confident and inwardly secure, they are not worried about defending themselves, and are open to others' opinions and ways of doing things. They tend to be optimistic and to believe that things will work out well. Because they are comfortable with who they are, they tend to be genuine and authentic, not trying to be something they are not. This inspires

confidence in their followers.

**Contextual Grounding** is the ability to see the big picture, and to formulate strategy based on an accurate perception and interpretation of things as they are – in business and in the world in general. Contextual grounding is inextricably bound up with personal grounding. “With eyes unclouded by longing,” the leader who is contextually grounded looks out at the

*“My best lesson in leadership came during my early days as a trial lawyer. Wanting to learn from the best, I went to see two of the most renowned litigators in San Antonio try cases. One sat there and never objected to anything, but was very gentle with witnesses and established a rapport with the jury. The other was an aggressive, thundering hell-raiser. And both seemed to win every case. That’s when I realized there are many different paths, not one right path. That’s true of leadership as well. People with different personalities, different approaches, different values succeed not because one set of values or practices is superior, but because their values and practices are genuine.”*

*-Herb Kelleher,*

world and watches the unrolling of destiny. He observes carefully the life story of the world, and tries to align the organization's direction as you would adjust the sails on a sailboat, to adapt his approach, his style, the style of the organization, to the patterns that are happening in the Now. Contextual Grounding is about looking, with minimal bias, at what is happening, and making choices about where to go and what to do that reflect an accurate understanding of what the world actually is.

Combining the Three Pillars and the two Groundings forms the basis of the most powerful and sustained leadership.

*"The truth waits for  
eyes unclouded by  
longing."*

*-Tao Tzu  
Tau Te Ching*

In the forthcoming series of articles, we will explore in depth the personality profile

and characteristic behavior patterns of each of the three Pillars. A clear picture will emerge of the strengths, along with the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of each Pillar. From our decades of consulting, we will offer suggestions to maximize the assets and minimize the downside of each of the Pillars, and to strengthen and enrich both Personal and Contextual Grounding.