



Living Leadership

Finding Equilibrium

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All of the Praesta team have had senior level business careers before becoming coaches - many were board members, CEOs, partners or managing directors of major organisations in their first careers. Thorough initial training, continual professional development and regular supervision are integral to how we work. As well as one to one coaching, we offer team and organisational coaching and board effectiveness reviews. We are also leaders in working with executive women.

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Introduction

Living leadership is about fully embracing your leadership challenges and opportunities. Leading well is about bringing all your experiences to bear, while not trying too hard and exhausting yourself. When you are living leadership you are drawing on your energy and insights, while leaving the sense of guilt behind. You are able to judge when to be on the balcony and when to be on the dance floor: ie when to be observing and when to be intervening.

Living leadership embraces enjoying leading, adapting your approach to fit the context, being true to your values and drawing on all your insights and experience. It involves being confident in what you bring as a leader while always being open to learn. It means being liberated to make your own choices on the way you lead.

Five Key Axes

At the heart of living leadership well is finding the point of equilibrium on five key axes, namely:

- 1. Leading and Managing**
- 2. Short-Term and Long-Term**
- 3. The Individual and the Team**
- 4. Activity and Reflection**
- 5. Being Resolute and Adaptable**

A pre-requisite for success includes making conscious decisions about the point of balance on these five axes. In this booklet, we highlight what we are observing in our work with senior executives about how they are finding their point of equilibrium on these axes. These axes may seem obvious, but they are easily ignored. Often we apply a default approach to the way we lead, returning to the way we have always done it.

Living leadership requires being vigilant about the point of equilibrium and when to vary it. It involves looking at these five axes anew and making conscious decisions about our approach.

1. Leading and Managing

There is a false dichotomy between leadership and management. Living leadership requires doing both well. Key elements are:

- **Bring clarity and purpose**
- **Create liberation, energy and hope**
- **Grow organisational resilience**

Bringing clarity of purpose requires a combination of leadership that inspires and management that delivers. Good leadership ignites a passion to make a difference. Sound management is about well planned programme, project, performance and risk management. It means clear expectations based on underpinning standards, with a significant degree of empowerment.

Without leadership there is no vision and energy. Without management there is limited discipline or structure. Clarity and purpose that is engaging and realistic will inspire a clear passion both to make a difference and to ensure quality management. Creating a clear picture

of what an organisation is there for requires both uplifting leadership and effective management.

Liberation, energy and hope flow naturally when simple things are done well and when there is a consistency between values and behaviours. A sense of personal liberation as a leader results from the individual knowing where they stand without guilt or fear of blame. Energy flows when the direction is clear, the sense of mutual encouragement and common purpose is strong and mutual respect is high.

Example: A renewed confidence

The organisation felt fearful of making mistakes and constrained. Its reputation had taken a hammering because of some well publicised errors. A new leader brought both clarity of purpose and a strong sense of both

challenge and encouragement. People within the organisation felt able to try new approaches. They felt more confident because of both purposeful leadership and sound programme and performance management arrangements.

Growing organisational resilience can often be ignored. Building organisational resilience is both about engaging people in new ways and building emotional resonance, alongside clarity about who is accountable for what. Growing organisational resilience is about building the capability to address both the known and the unknown. Evaluating clearly what happened following a minor crisis can lead to important lessons about addressing future, unpredicted events.

Key questions to consider might be:

- Is there more that needs to be done to inspire a clear passion to make a difference?
- Is there enough emphasis on sound management practices covering programmes, projects, performance and risks?
- What more can I do to engender liberation, energy and hope?
- What practical next steps might be taken to build organisational resilience?

Developing organisation resilience

- Ensure as much clarity as possible about the outcomes the organisation is to deliver.
- Be continually focused on customer expectations.
- Create an atmosphere where challenge is welcomed.
- Ensure effective and honest two-way communication throughout the organisation.
- Build an acceptance of the importance of collaboration.
- Demonstrate courage in the way difficult decisions are taken.
- Keep explaining the context within which decisions are made.
- Demonstrate consideration for the professional development of your people.
- Take care of yourself and the signals you give.
- Be consistent in the values and behaviours you want to encourage in the organisation.

2. Short-Term and Long-Term

How can you best have one foot in today and one in tomorrow?
Key elements are:

- **Recognise the urgent alongside the important**
- **Build the right foundation**
- **Ensure that long-term intentions and realities inform short-term decisions**

Recognising the urgent alongside the important is about the necessity of keeping the show on the road while delivering the transformation necessary to achieve long-term goals. It involves living with the polarity of doing both the urgent and what is important for the future. It is recognising that fire storms do have to be managed as well as ensuring time is preserved for longer term planning. It is acknowledging that the “day job” cannot be ignored.

Building the right foundation might mean 70% of the effort going into the preparation. It means stimulating debate that brings together quality and quantity with no factors being in the taboo or too difficult categories. It involves preliminary work that examines all the linkages, sees issues from different angles and embraces the perspective of customers and stakeholders. Preparation is about building on solid rock rather than shifting sand, wherever that is possible.

Ensuring that long-term intentions and realities inform short-term decisions is about bringing understanding about the long-term implications of short-term decisions, and about ensuring that long-term desires are not seen as irrelevant or unrelated to necessary short-term decisions.

A tight focus may be important to deliver specific tasks, but a wide field of vision helps ensure that consequences are seen. Bringing clarity about long-term intent can build a greater commitment to the initial steps. A clear understanding of attitudes and the approaches of others is essential to sustain the energy and commitment necessary to deliver multiple outcomes and not be thrown off course.

Example: Pulled in all directions

A leader felt pulled in many directions at the same time. He was rushing from one thing to the next. He knew he needed to be more systematic about allocating his time between the urgent and the important. He used a combination of

allocating blocks of time in his diary for longer term issues, being clearer what success looked like both this week and next year, being explicit about when he was available and not available, and recognising what raised or sapped his energy.

Key questions are:

- How might time best be allocated between the urgent and planning for transformation?
- How do you best ensure that the everyday routine work is done well alongside work on longer term transformation.
- Are there times when more resource and energy needs to go into building the foundation?
- How might long-term intentions be made more robust and explicit?
- How can you ensure that your field of vision is not blinkered and is wide enough to encourage the adventurous?

Recognising the urgent alongside the important

- What might get you or your boss sacked if it isn't done?
- What is damaging your reputation which needs to be addressed?
- How best do you ensure enough time and energy to deliver transformation?
- When can the urgent be dealt with by someone other than you?
- Who can hold you to account to ensure that the urgent does not drive out the important?
- How best do you measure progress in dealing with both the important and the urgent?

3. The Individual and the Team

Living leadership means nurturing and growing the energy of both the individual and the team. Both are crucial to success. Key elements are:

- **What is it only I can do as leader?**
- **How might I build a stronger, internal team?**
- **What external partnerships need to be strengthened?**

Most leaders can see where they can make a difference. They want to add value in lots of different ways. They may be better equipped than many of their team to do individual tasks well, but 'what is the value I can bring', may be the wrong question. A tighter question is, "What is it only I can do?" Asking that question puts a much tougher filter on how best the leader uses their time and energy.

A successful team will be delivering stronger outputs than they would as individuals. Successful teams will be generating energy in individuals as well as in the team through building on a sense of collective endeavour, with recognition and development of the diverse talents within the team. Teams that are doing well flow from individuals who are playing their part effectively, are true to their own values and are focused on team rather than individual outcomes.

Example: The team as more than the sum of the parts

Each member of the team shared their perspective on what would bring out the best in them. They identified the distinctive contribution each member brought and what they needed in particular from the leader. They worked through

what success looked like and how jointly they could increase their prospect of success through the way they supported and stretched each other. They identified how they could keep their deliberations fresh, energised and reflective.

Effective teams are not only internal teams. Building external partnerships well is about creating a wider sense of mutual engagement and commitment from people with a diversity of interests. Living leadership involves creating a sense of team both with those outside and inside an organisation so that there is a shared sense of common endeavour that creates commitment, energises and liberates. Success comes through asking the question regularly about how can building a broader team create synergies and energy that increase the prospect of success.

Key questions can be:

- What is it only I can do in ensuring a particular area of work is led well?
- What more might be done to enable and develop a sense of shared endeavour within a diverse team?
- What external partnerships need to be cultivated and grown?

What is it only I can do as a leader?

- What is brought together at my level?
- Who can I influence more effectively than others?
- What accountabilities do I have that others do not have?
- What is it I can do which affects uniquely the viability of this enterprise?
- If I was not here what would not happen?
- What will members of the team get from me that they would not get from other people?
- What unique insights does my background and experience mean that I bring?

4. Activity and Reflection

Getting the equilibrium right between activity and reflection is about, connecting head and heart, bringing focus and observation, and applying determination and detachment. Key elements are:

- **Seize the moment**
- **Exercise the power of reflection**
- **Timing is all**

Seizing the moment is about accepting new reality and being willing to promote fresh thinking and embrace radical approaches. It is recognising that decisions are needed and not procrastinating. It is being willing to put the foot on the accelerator when there is an opportunity that may not come again. Seizing the moment will often be about taking the initiative to build mutual understanding and a shared will to initiate change.

Exercising the power of reflection is about the importance of standing back and seeing a situation or decision from a number of different angles. It involves encouraging freshness and new thinking, even at busy times. Allowing effective reflection time so that preconceived ideas can be re-examined is fundamental to long-term success.

Good quality reflection will mean that learning is codified, embedded and built on. Astute reflection and observation will mean there is recognition of both the formal and informal processes through which decisions are arrived at. Reflection is not for wimps. Reflection sits alongside courage to ensure that decisions are thought through, consistent with your values and aligned with long-term intent.

Example: A more reflective approach

A leader found himself exhausted and failing to remember the names of key people. He knew he had to stand back in order to move forward effectively. He needed to calm down and create

some shafts of stillness. He began to take five minute breaks which helped recharge his energies and put issues back into a wider context. He saw times of being reflective as a strength and not a weakness.

“Timing is all” is knowing when to stand back and when to press the button. The most precious skill of leadership is about judging the moment to take an initiative, make a decision, or change direction. Good timing is about creating defining moments for both teams and wider organisations. Moments of crisis or celebration can be important in crystallizing what in an organisation is there to do. Living leadership is about knowing when to decide, when to “wing it” and when to stand back and reflect.

Key questions might be:

- What needs to happen for you to seize the moment as a leader?
- What practical steps might you take to enhance your powers of reflection?
- In what ways can you remove inhibitions so that your decisions on timing are uncluttered by previous behaviours or expectations?

Enhancing the power of reflection

- What helps you to stand back and stare so you observe well?
- What helps light your fire in terms of what are you passionate about?
- How do you best reflect in short bursts through creating time and space to think or for shafts of stillness?
- In what environment and at what time of day do you best stand back?
- Who are the companions on the way who best enable you to reflect in a purposeful and perceptive way?
- Who do you admire who reflects on situations well and what can you learn from them?
- What small steps can you take to enhance your powers of reflection?

5. Being Resolute and Adaptable

Underpinning the four axes above is the importance of getting the balance right between being resolute and adaptable. Being adaptable is a sign of strength and not weakness. Being overly resolute can mean rushing into a brick wall. Key elements are:

- **Be clear what you are passionate about**
- **Be adaptable and agile**
- **Emphasise co-creation**

Being resolute is about having the passion to make a difference in uncertain times and a doggedness to keep at it. Passion with a purpose starts from clarity of intent, consistent underlying values and the importance of building on the imperative for change.

Resolution and determination flows from confidence in your values and goals, and trust in your own judgement. It involves recognising when you are given authority by others and being willing to take responsibility for your actions. It incorporates a strong sense of self-authorising beliefs and actions, with a sound, internal barometer that keeps you on a reasonable track.

Being adaptable and agile includes recognising when persistent action and determination can risk blinking your understanding of current reality. It includes understanding your own emotions and how sometimes we can be rigid in our reactions.

Example: Choosing to be adaptable

Being single minded was not getting a leader the conclusions she thought were right. She felt as if she was banging her head on a brick wall. She knew she had to adapt her approach but was not finding the prospect attractive. She forced herself

to be more open to the views of others, more willing to vary her approach and less dogmatic about how the objectives should be delivered. She was reassured when progress began to be made.

Being adaptable means both being focused and retaining bandwidth with a breadth of understanding. Agility is about how we get over or around barriers in the way. Constantly searching after new opportunities to deliver well reinforces adaptability and agility, which is crucial to ensuring that resolution does not become tunnel vision.

Putting a strong emphasis on co-creation reinforces adaptability through the involvement of diverse interests and individuals in developing coherent next steps. Building progress around co-creation and partnership reaffirms the benefits from new ways of working together. Learning fast by working jointly and building buy-in can create both clear resolution and adaptable ways of getting things done.

Key questions to ask can be:

- What am I passionate about and how much of that is rooted in reality and the need for change?
- How much do I trust my own internal barometer to get the balance right between being resolute and adaptable?
- How do I need to be more agile in taking forward living leadership?
- What opportunities are there for more co-creation where I can encourage adaptability while ensuring a strong sense of common purpose?

What might being more adaptable mean?

- Recognising that your experience gives you distinctive insights.
- Believing you have choices, at least about your attitude
- Acknowledging that your perspective is equally valid to that of other people
- Being willing to try new and different approaches
- Not being restricted by previous frameworks or conceptions
- Not allowing yourself to be defined by the expectations of others
- Not limiting your perspective about what success is to previous definitions
- Not allowing yourself to feel guilty if you do not get it right first time

Next Steps

Living leadership to the full can be both painful and exhausting. It means recognising your own limitations, while continuing to stretch the boundaries of your own understanding and preferred approaches. Living leadership is about taking control of the future, being upbeat and assertive, while at the same time recognising the realities and limitations of both yourself and others.

Leading successfully involves keeping an eye on where you are on these five key axes, possibly using the approach set out in the annex. It is about recognising your natural behaviour and being willing to flex it. It includes training yourself to “stretch the slider bar” so you are trying different positions on the axes. Success will involve judgements about when you lead and when you follow, when you press your point and when you concede to others, and when you lead from the front or steer from behind.

These five axes may well be eternal verities but getting the balance right is fundamental to success for any leader in any sector at any time. Enjoy observing yourself, standing back, experimenting and flexing your approach.

Annex: Reviewing Your Approach

Many leaders we have worked with have found it helpful to stand back and reflect on where they are currently on these five axes.

- What is the split in the time I am currently giving to:
 - leading and managing
 - short-term and long-term
 - the individual and the team
 - activity and reflection
 - being resolute and adaptable
- Do I need to find a new equilibrium and move the “slider bar” on some of these axes?
- What might I experiment with in varying the balance of my use of time and energy?
- Who can I ask to stretch my thinking and give me feedback?

In relation to your team questions to enable them to reflect might be:

- Where are we as a team on these five axes?
- What benefits might flow from assessing whether we have got the balance right?
- What steps might we take as a team and as individuals to reassess the right point of equilibrium on these axes?
- What might we do differently?

Looking again at these five axes can provide a defining moment for an individual or team, when reviewed individually, or with a colleague or a coach, or in workshop. Time spent reflecting on these themes is likely to result in greater clarity about next steps and a renewed energy, however daunting the issues being addressed.

Living Leadership was researched and written by Peter Shaw with the help of colleagues at Praesta Partners.

Further Reading

“Thriving in a Faster and Faster World”, Heather Dawson, Praesta, 2007

“Riding the Rapids”, Peter Shaw and Jane Stephens, Praesta, 2008

“The Power of Coaching Top Teams”, Jacqueline Scholes-Rhodes and Hilary Lines, Praesta, 2009

“Seizing the Future”, Peter Shaw and Robin Hindle-Fisher, Praesta, 2010

“Raise Your Game: how to succeed at work”, Peter Shaw, Capstone, 2009

“Defining Moments: navigating through business and organisational life”, Peter Shaw, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010

“The Reflective Leader: standing still to move forward”, Peter Shaw and Alan Smith, Canterbury Press, 2011

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