

Vision

Value-
added

Vitality

Values

The Four Vs of Leadership: An Enduring Framework

Vision, Values, Value-added, Vitality

Praesta is an international partnership of business coaches. We support senior leaders, including CEOs, main board directors, leadership team members, other key senior executives and emerging leaders through Executive Coaching, Team Coaching and Board Performance Reviews. We are leaders in working with executive women and job-sharers.

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This publication has been researched and written by Peter Shaw, a Praesta coach.

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The Four Vs of Leadership: An Enduring Framework

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Introduction

Many leaders find it useful to have a framework within which to develop their own authentic leadership beliefs and narrative. The Four Vs of Leadership (vision, values, value-added and vitality) have proved to be an enduring framework for both individuals and teams.

This Praesta Insight sets out the relevance of this framework for individuals and teams and includes perspectives from leaders who have found the framework helpful. The framework was originally set out in the book, 'The Four Vs of Leadership' (Capstone 2006) written by Peter Shaw.

The Framework

Applying the four Vs enables you to become:

- Focused in your personal **vision** and equipped for greater responsibilities,
- Explicit in defining and living your **values** and in reassessing life priorities against these values,
- Clearer about your **value-added** contributions, drawing on others more effectively, and
- More deliberate in your use of energy, spending quality time on activities that are most important to you thereby raising and sustaining your **vitality**.

Focusing on these four Vs can help shape a leader's perspective on their responsibilities across different aspects of their work and personal life, and highlight opportunities available to them. They provide a framework for reviewing current

beliefs and priorities and redefining your leadership convictions and narrative. The four Vs are like the corners of a diamond which, when viewed together, bring light and sparkle to both work and personal life.

Why Have the Four Vs Become an Enduring Framework?

The four Vs resonate with leaders in very different worlds because they are easy to remember, embrace the whole of life, and link together personal and organisational priorities and pressures. They are forward-looking and encourage dynamic thinking. Because the four Vs are a framework and not a doctrine they provide a timely way of re-evaluating a leader's contribution and how different perspectives and interests can be rebalanced.

A senior leader in the private sector describes the benefit of this framework as:

"This is not like a theory. The four Vs relate to the whole of life and its ebbs and flows. They help you address how you want to live your life. They are easy to talk through and explain. You can personalise them yourself. They are very helpful in a whole range of situations. The framework is accessible and easy to use. It is timeless and applies to different age bands and can have repeated use. It is part reflective and part dynamic. The framework helps you think about the value you can add in any context or meeting and helps you think through how you nurture your energy at every phase of life. The framework helps you reflect and keep thinking about next steps. It has been a constant source of reference for me over thirteen years".

Vision

What is your purpose?
What guides you?

Value-added

What is your focus?
Where can you
make a difference?

Vitality

What nourishes you?
What gives you life?

Values

What matters to you?
What continues to shape you?

In his foreword to 'The Four Vs of Leadership' Sir David Normington wrote in 2006 that,

"As I read the book I found myself constantly reassessing my own hopes, fears and ambitions in a new role against this thought provoking, but always optimistic template. Peter refuses to compartmentalise life into the personal and professional. He believes - rightly - that successful leaders bring a consistency of behaviour and relationships to different aspects of their lives and draw strength and inspiration from the personal to the professional and vice versa".

What has reinforced the relevance of this framework includes: the rapid pace of change in every sphere, the inevitability of living with uncertainty while seeking to see opportunities and not just threats, and the need to handle the fast pace of technological and financial change.

Pertinent has been the impact of social media resulting in campaigns generating pace quickly and the difficulty of ensuring accurate data when truth is not viewed as objectively as it might be. The challenge of building trust in conflictual situations, where reputations are built slowly and lost quickly, has reinforced the importance of an agreed framework of shared values.

The much greater acceptance of flexible patterns of working has provided the opportunity for individuals to develop more varied ways of adding value. For example the growth of job-sharing has enabled individuals to both bring significant added value and maintain their vitality. This requires an organisation to have a clear vision about how best to use the talents within job-share partnerships effectively.

Applying the Four Vs going forward

The four Vs are proving particularly apposite where individuals are starting a new role, re-evaluating their contribution and impact, reviewing their life priorities or seeking to reenergize their approach in a context that is not changing as much as they would like.

The framework of the four Vs has been useful for teams when they are addressing how they can work together most effectively and what they want to deliver and be known for.

Managers have often found the four Vs useful when coaching their own people or mentoring developing leaders.

This booklet looks first at the relevance of the four Vs for individuals and then for teams. In each section it sets out key questions to consider and potential next steps. The hope is that these prompts are useful points of re-evaluation and assist in the rekindling of energy and forward momentum. Challenges to watch out for are identified. It ends with two prompt sheets for individual and team reflection.

A leader engaged in an industry driven by technological change comments:

"The framework has helped me think through what is most important. It has helped me see the contribution that I can make in different areas of life. It has prompted me to focus on what is most precious in my life. Technology speeds everything up so it is important to see life as one piece. Technology is a driver of behaviour and not just a facilitator. It helps you take back control but it can be a means of losing control. Technology speeds life up and means different areas of life are interconnected, hence the importance of seeing life as a whole and using the Four Vs as a relevant framework across the whole of life."

A leader in the voluntary sector comments:

"The framework ensured I stood still and saw my life as a whole. It broke me out of my silos. It forced me to reflect on the contribution I wanted to make in each area of my life. I realised the interdependencies more acutely than ever before. I knew I had to stop being blinkered and relentless in focusing first on my career."

The Four Vs and Individuals

Looking through the lens of the Four Vs can result in a greater coherence in your vision of who you are, and who you want to be that links each aspect of your life.

Vision

Key questions to work through can be:

- What are your distinctive qualities, and how do you want to develop the vision of who you want to be as a leader?
- What is your vision of your future contribution in your work, family and wider community?
- What is the best version of yourself you want to seek to be at work, at home and in the wider community?
- What is your vision of the organisation or team you lead and how can you shape next steps towards that vision?

Challenges to watch out for include, having a vision which is outside the bounds of realism, being stuck on a previous vision which has died with nothing having replaced it, a reluctance to look into the future as you do not want to be disappointed, and a sense of being overwhelmed by uncertainties or a deluge of immediate pressures.

A Policy Director observes:

"The focus on vision has enabled good policy thinking to happen. It is about getting the engine room right and not running the engine room down. It is important to give people space to develop their thinking. At times it is important to 'suspend disbelief'. You have to look at a vision anew. You need to think through how something can be presented more positively."

Steps going forward could include:

- Make an honest assessment of your journey so far recognising your joys, pleasures, successes and failures, acknowledging how these experiences have moulded you,
- Be deliberate in assessing what you have learnt from relative failures.
- Look five years ahead and assess where are the potential joys that are going to be most important to you and what are the potential failures you would be most concerned about,
- Allow yourself to think into different future possibilities with your personal vision being bold, but always triangulated with the perspectives of trusted others,
- Set the vision of your contribution at work alongside your vision of your contribution to family and community, and
- Be open-minded to new possibilities with your future vision not being rigid or blinkered.

"Key is how a sense of vision generates a forward dynamic. There is a balance between the vision I seek to bring and shared vision. When the intensity of work for everyone is relentless the vision has to be shared."

My vision of possibilities ahead of me had become frozen in time. I needed to update my narrative. There was baggage to be left behind. I now recognised what I could do well and that others believed in my qualities. It was about time I acknowledged that others saw potential in me. I could have a more confident vision about future possibilities.

Values

Focusing on values as part of the Four Vs can help ensure the application of your values is consistent across each aspect of your life, with you being more authentic in the way you live your values. You will understand more about where your values come from and why they are a core part of you.

You will take forward your values more deliberately in the way you engage with others. You will be looking at decisions through the lens of your values. You will be reflecting on how your values connect with the values of those around you and the values of the organisation you are part of.

Key questions to reflect on include:

- What are the values that continue to shape and drive me?
- How can I harness those values to steer my contribution in different spheres?
- How best do I balance the way I apply potentially competing values?
- How might I enable others to live shared values?
- How well do my personal values mesh in with the values of the organisation of which I am part?
- How do I handle situations where my values feel at odds with expectations on me?

"I was hiding my values for a period of my career. The framework helped me see my values as a strength: it has liberated me. It has enabled me to understand the relevance of my values and what they bring and how looking through the lens of values can be a valuable corrective."

Challenges to watch out for include seeking your values as a liability and not an asset. Too much emphasis on one value can result in a blindness to wider considerations. Pressure of expectations can mean that the desire to live particular values gets diluted. Values can become rigidly applied and not a living touchstone for assessing what is currently most needed.

A Director of Policy's perspective is:

"The values question makes you feel emotionally why you are doing something and takes you beyond just a mechanistic reason for your actions. Looking through the lens of values makes me smile. Engaging with your values creates and does not sap energy."

A head of profession comments:

"A focus on values as the starting point within the four Vs helped me decide on what were the right next steps in my career. Thinking through my values steered me towards roles leading change and delivering projects. It also led me to take on responsibility to develop the next generation of leaders."

A Charity Chief Executive commented:

"I have had to emphasise the importance of embodying and respecting shared values. Too often both employees and volunteers want to apply what they think are the applicable values rather than recognising that we need to fully inhabit the values that the charity stands for."

Steps going forward could include:

- Be curious about how and why your personal values are evolving,
- Be mindful when you are surprised how others apply values in making decisions,
- Observe how an organisation's values enable it to handle external change well or inhibits it from handling change effectively,
- Recognise the interplay between individual and corporate values, seeing how they mutually reinforce each other,
- Be deliberate in applying a particular value over a defined period and assessing whether this has made any difference and whether it is mirrored by others, and
- Think through when a particular value might influence your vision of your long-term leadership contribution.

A Chief Executive observes that:

"The four Vs helped me fourteen years ago to define the values that are most important to me as a leader. These values still hold true for me now five jobs later in a CEO role. It is the interplay of the five values (hard-edge, humanity, humility, honesty and humour) that has provided a framework with which I have frequently had to make tough decisions."

Value-added

Addressing the value-added theme within the Four Vs enables you to think in a structured way about where you want to add value. You will be rehearsing and practicing in areas where you want to develop your impact. You will not be daunted for long by setbacks, but will be developing the resilience to evolve your value-added through different pressures.

Key questions to reflect on include:

- What are my distinctive strengths as described by others?
- What is it only I can do in particular situations?
- Is my description of the value-added I bring up to date?
- How can I keep stretching the boundaries of where I can add value and stop doing things where others can bring the necessary added value?

"The theme of value-added has made me think about where I am adding value and where I might be taking value from someone else. It has reinforced the importance of valuing other people. Over time I have got better at understanding what my value-added is. I have learnt to keep honing my skills set. The essence of good leadership is how do you apply your skill set? As you become more senior it becomes more mission critical."

An important question is, 'What is the value-add you are adding to your team?' It can be:

- *judgement about forward direction,*
- *giving them the space to do their thinking,*
- *enabling them to be creative and do excellent work and giving people the space to think differently and challenge the status quo*

Challenges to watch out for include, a description of strengths that is ten years out of date, letting others define too readily what your value-add will be, being too comfortable in attitudes that have worked well in the past, and a reticence about trying new approaches, alongside a reluctance to stop doing things that you do well.

"I now recognise that the value-add I bring comes in different ways in different situations. I have learnt to recognise that I add value by listening, supporting and challenging. What matters is being deliberate and thoughtful about how I seek to add value in particular situations."

"My value-add is about creating the environment where people can thrive. I seek to support people so that they can focus on long-term sustainable values. I encourage people to keep moving forward: to draw a line illustrating how far they have come, and then to step over that line and occupy a new space. It is important to keep asking how you discern where you can add most value and to keep stretching the boundaries."

Steps going forward could be:

- Experimenting with different ways of contributing and influencing,
- Coaching others to enable them to add distinctive contributions,
- Defining more tightly what you are going to contribute,
- Being much more explicit about what you are not going to be doing,
- Time-limiting your contribution to particular activities,
- Observing others adding value in subtle ways and adopting some of their approaches,
- Developing your value-add in areas outside work which might in due course, equip you to add a different value within your work, and
- Being deliberate in operating outside your comfort one, and being ready to be surprised by the feedback from others.

A senior leader in Government describes how the focus on value-added has,

"Helped me build positive, external relationships, get the Directorate focused on the right things, decide on where I can have long-term influence, focus on getting the senior team more cohesive, and keep developing key leaders."

Vitality

Addressing vitality as part of the Four Vs will mean you taking a fresh look at your sources of energy. You will be experimenting with different ways of ensuring freshness and your enjoyment of life. You will have moved on from a rigid concept of work/life balance to assessing how each activity is sapping or re-energizing you.

Key questions to work through can include:

- What is at the heart of what gives you energy and what saps your energy?
- How do you bring an attitude of mind and heart that sustains your energy in tough times?
- What practical steps do you now need to take to be deliberate in rationing your time so that you can use your energy well?
- How do you best renew your freshness and curiosity?

“Vitality comes from what you believe. When my life is going well I am drawing energy from family, friends and work. When your activities are values driven you are more likely to maintain vitality through tough times.”

Challenges to watch out for include, exhaustion being seen as a badge of honour, blaming others for sapping your energy and being preoccupied in feeling a victim. Other challenges can include a reluctance to say “no” to requests, and a persistence in not listening to the inner voice.

“Looking through the vitality lens has enabled me to be much clearer about what gives me energy and how I use my energy. I am conscious that I can light up too much, and then am at risk of burning out. I have become much more discerning about the use of my time and energy and become more mindful of how I am likely to respond in different situations. I notice the patterns in my energy levels more and recognise the danger signs earlier.”

Steps going forward could be to:

- Build rhythms into your work which help keep you energized,
- Be deliberate in the use of gaps in the working day, creating opportunities for a quick five minute walk,
- Build shafts of stillness into your week,
- Recognise the danger signs when your concentration begins to lapse,
- Recognise your wider sources of energy, ensuring you spend enough time on physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual renewal,
- Be deliberate in spending time with those who encourage you and lift your spirits
- Help others to feel energized and thereby feel renewed yourself,
- Be immersed in specific activities outside work that give you a different type of fulfilment,
- Do something completely different which can renew your curiosity and freshness of thinking,
- Be open to meditation and drawing on spiritual wisdom and insights,
- Allow humour to burst through enjoying the ridiculous,

- Recognise the importance of special places, prose or poetry in nurturing vitality, and
- Allow blank space and not seeing that as a waste of time.

“The vitality theme has led me to be more deliberate in the use of my time. The focus on physical vitality has led to walking more, spending more time with family and friends, and using Friday in a different way. The focus on intellectual vitality has encouraged me to try new things, follow my curiosities, and read in different areas which has stretched my thinking.”

“The concept of shafts of stillness has stuck with me since I was introduced to this idea. The space it creates not only helps my vitality at that point but also allows me to subconsciously reflect on all sorts of things.”

Keeping up vitality in changed circumstances is not straightforward. A leader returning to work after a major operation commented:

“I had a dawning realisation when I came to an enforced watershed moment in my life and career is that whilst you can have a successful track record, and a very supportive team, that having to take time out of a job due to illness means that you are quickly out of sight and out of mind. The business understandably wants to continue to deliver and your role may be completely different by the >

time you return. I found myself in this difficult situation and found that although I am personally quite resilient, I was able to draw strength from a number of sources: firstly, the value you add to people through good leadership, coaching and mentoring means that they are happy to support you when you are in need with your network becoming essential in difficult times, and secondly I have found that working with a charitable organisation outside the workplace was invaluable in rebuilding my confidence after this very difficult period.”

Looking Ahead

The Four Vs also provide a framework for looking say five years ahead and can prompt thought about

- What is your vision of the mix of activities you might be engaged in five years from now?
- What are the values that will be preminent in your decisions about your future?
- Where would you most like to bring a value-add that you will find particularly fulfilling?
- How do you want to prepare now for the activities that you will maintain your vitality in the years ahead?

The Four Vs can therefore provide a useful framework for periodic reassessment.

The Four Vs and the Team

This section looks at the relevance of the four Vs for teams. The approach is relevant for teams in any sector and at varying levels of seniority.

Vision

Key questions to work through can include:

- What is the changing context in which the team needs to set its vision?
- How aligned are the aspirations of team members?
- How fixed is the vision and what flexibility does the team have within that vision?
- Is there a particular vision in the minds of the team's bosses, customers, staff or partners?

Challenges to look out for include, a limited alignment about the vision for the team going forward and a lack of clarity about timescales. There can be strident voices pushing the vision in a particular direction. There might be an acute mismatch between the vision, and the availability of resources and people.

Keeping a vision fresh is not straightforward. A leader of a major Government programme developed a clear vision with the initial team. She recalls several key challenges she then faced:

"I had to keep the vision alive and relevant as the team grew larger with colleagues joining who had not been part of the development of the original vision. It was critical to remember that a vision needs to develop taking account of restraints on financial resources and new people. The initial visionary ideas suggest a direction of travel but >

budgeting constraints and political decisions can often require significant modification of a vision.

Steps going forward could include:

- Observe how other teams have turned vision into reality,
- Reflect on what has enabled the team to apply an overall vision in shaping the way it addresses strategic issues,
- Ask those around the team to describe what they think the team is trying to achieve,
- Invite each team member to articulate what they see as the key outcomes from the work of the team in two years' time.

Values

Key questions to reflect on include:

- What are the lived values that are going to be most important to enable the team to be effective going forward?
- How readily does the team assess itself alongside the declared values of the organisation?
- How aligned are the declared values of the team and the lived values of team members?
- What enables the team to stand back and assess what values it is living?

Challenges to look out for include, an organisation or team ignoring its declared values,, pragmatism keeping trumping principle, trust between team members being limited, and an undercurrent of cynicism which undermines the engagement and effectiveness of the team.

When the leadership team of a national organisation focused anew on its values this reinforced the importance of:

- *listening and hearing, which included members, engaging with the evidence, having early dialogue and not talking over each other*
- *civility and challenge, with challenge welcomed as key to effective working*
- *corporate responsibility, which was about behaviours in relation to each other and the implementation of decisions reached collectively, and*
- *tenacity which was about focusing on the intent of the organisation and being brave enough to push forward agreed objectives, even if they are unpopular*

Steps going forward could include:

- Allow time to listen to each other's stories about the values that have been most relevant for them in their life and work journey,
- Be deliberate in talking through how key team values are lived: e.g. how best a desire for openness and trust is applied and assessed
- Invite others to say what are the three key values they would hope the team would exemplify, and
- Evaluate regularly how different values have interacted with each other in shaping the way the team has made decisions.
- Review how the lived values of the team align with the published values of the organisation

Value-added

Key questions to work through could include:

- How as a team do we currently add value to the wider organisation?
- How do we add value to each other, enabling each of us to be at our best?
- How do we enable the team leader to be an effective advocate of what we are able to contribute?
- How can we ensure we keep developing the value-add we bring as a team?

Challenges to be mindful of include an underestimation of the distinctive value we can add as a team. Team members might not be pushing each other enough to develop the value-add they can each bring to the team. There can be a risk that team members show too much patience to each other and allow colleagues to indulge in focusing on their narrow interests. Perhaps they do not read the signals about what type of contribution is most needed from the team going forward.

"The leadership team had always seen itself as a loose federation of disparate interests. During an away day they began to address what it meant to be more than the sum of the parts. They thought about what was the particular added-value they each brought to the team. They reflected on what they needed from each other to be able to be at their best in contributing to the team's success."

Steps going forward could include:

- Assess periodically what has been the value-added impact of the team,
- Review the extent to which individuals have had the scope to develop their value added contribution to the team and assess what might have got in the way of this,
- Invite team members to say what is the value add they would most like from their colleagues,
- Be ready to fully embrace the value add that new members can bring to the team
- Be alert to when a team's description of the value it adds is out of date, and
- Assess whether the split of time and energy on short term and longer term issues is appropriate.

Vitality

Key questions to work through can include:

- What causes the energy level in a team to rise or fall?
- How is the energy level in a team best sustained over an extended period?
- What place might humour play in building vitality in a team?
- How might a team become more creative and forward-looking?

Challenges to look out for include, historic differences which mean team members are wary of disclosing too much to each other. Team members may not know each other well enough to recognise what energizes each member. There is a risk that the items chosen for discussion in the team do not stimulate a high enough level of engagement, with a limited sense of progress resulting from team discussions.

Team members had very little awareness of what caused energy levels to rise or fall in team meetings. With the assistance of a team coach they began to observe their own energy cycles and what prompted a dip. They became more deliberate in managing their agendas and approaches to handling potentially controversial topics.

Steps going forward could be:

- Share experiences of what engages and energises team members outside work,
- Be honest about what saps or zaps energy in team meetings,
- Be deliberate in designing the way the team refreshes the way it engages with new issues,
- Allow reflective space varying the pacing of different items,
- Consider what is enhancing or diluting team resilience, and
- Know when the team needs to take a break and look at an issue through a different lens.

Next steps

The 4Vs can provide a valuable tool for individuals to use in self-reflection or in coaching conversations, and for team reflection or team workshops. Below are two prompt sheets which can be used by individuals or teams.

Prompt sheet for individual self reflection or for a coaching conversation on the 4Vs

Vision

1. What is your vision of the leader you aspire to be in the next season?
2. What mind-set and approaches will enable you to make sustainable steps towards that vision?

Values

3. What values are going to be most pertinent for you going forward?
4. How best will you hold in creative tension values that might take you in different directions?

Value-added

5. What is the value-add the organisation most needs from you and how aligned is that with the value-add you want to contribute going forward?
6. How might you keep developing the type of value-add that you bring in different areas of your work and wider responsibilities?

Vitality

7. What steps can you make to shape your attitude and approach in a way which will maintain and enhance your vitality across all areas of your life?
8. How best can you develop your resilience at times of uncertainty and change?

Next steps

9. What can get in the way of you being at your best that is within your control; how do you handle these risks?
10. How do you ensure you keep looking forwards and not backwards?

Prompt sheet for team reflection or a team workshop on the 4Vs

Vision

1. What is our vision of what the team needs to deliver and how do you want this team to be described by those affected by its work?
2. What mind-set do we as a team need to bring to best ensure that we make sustainable steps towards that vision

Values

3. What values will help guide the way we operate and make decisions as a team going forward?
4. In the way we make and implement decisions how best do we handle values that can appear in tension with each other?

Value-added

5. What is the distinctive value-add that we can each make to the team's endeavour?
6. How do we keep developing the value-add that the team is making to the wider enterprise?

Vitality

7. How do we as a team maintain freshness, openness and curiosity?
8. How do we enable each other to sustain our individual vitality in demanding times?

Next steps

9. What can get in the way of the team operating at its best that is within our control and how best do we address such risks?
10. How do we ensure the team looks forward and not backwards



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Peter's colleagues at Praesta Partners have been a valuable source of advice and encouragement in the coaching endeavour. Peter is indebted to those whom he has coached who have engaged wholeheartedly in this exploration of the relevance of the Four Vs.

**Other Relevant Publications
by Peter Shaw**

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