

JOHN ADAIR'S - ACTION CENTRED LEADERSHIP

John Adair's Action-Centred Leadership model provides a blueprint for leadership and the management of any team, group or organisation. The three parts of Adair's model are commonly represented by three overlapping circles (a trademark belonging to John Adair) and is one of the most recognisable and iconic symbols relating to management theory.

His work encompasses and endorses much of the previous thinking on human needs and motivation by Maslow and Herzberg and adds an elegant and simple additional organisational dimension to these earlier works. Importantly, Adair was probably the first to demonstrate that leadership is a trainable, transferable skill rather than being an exclusively inborn ability. He helped change perception of management (encompassing leadership) to include associated abilities of decision-making, communication and time-management.

The three core management responsibilities are:

- **Achieving the task**
- **Managing the team**
- **Managing individuals**

Being able to do all these things and keep the right balance gets results, builds morale, improves quality, develops teams and productivity and is the mark of a successful manager and leader.

The model adapts extremely well to the demands of modern business management. When using it in your own environment think about the aspects of performance necessary for success in your own situation and incorporate local relevant factors into the model to create your own interpretation. This is something I have done over the years in the different companies I have worked in, when managing and leading both large and small teams of people and it has given me a very useful management framework. Hopefully, it will do the same for you!

Responsibilities for achieving the task are:

- Identify aims and vision for the group, purpose and direction - define the activity (the task)
- Identify resources, people, processes, systems and tools (including financials, communications, IT)
- Create the plan to achieve the task - deliverables, measures, timescales, strategy and tactics
- Establish responsibilities, objectives, accountabilities and measures by agreement and delegation
- Set standards, quality, time and reporting parameters
- Control and maintain activities against parameters
- Monitor and maintain overall performance against your plan
- Report on progress towards the group's aim
- Review, re-assess, adjust your plan, methods and targets as necessary

Responsibilities for the team are:

- Establish, agree and communicate standards of performance and behaviour
- Establish style, culture, approach of the group - soft skill elements
- Monitor and maintain discipline, ethics, integrity and focus on objectives
- Anticipate and resolve group conflict, struggles or disagreements
- Assess and change as necessary the balance and composition of the group
- Develop team-working, cooperation, morale and team-spirit
- Develop the collective maturity and capability of the group - progressively increase group freedom and authority
- Encourage the team towards objectives and aims - motivate the group and provide a collective sense of purpose
- Identify, develop and agree team- and project-leadership roles within group
- Enable, facilitate and ensure effective internal and external group communications
- Identify and meet group training needs
- Give feedback to the group on overall progress; consult with and seek feedback and input from the group

Responsibilities for each individual are:

- Understand the team members as individuals - personality, skills, strengths, needs, aims and fears
- Assist and support individuals - plans, problems, challenges, highs and lows
- Identify and agree appropriate individual responsibilities and objectives
- Give recognition and praise to individuals - acknowledge effort and good work
- Where appropriate reward individuals with extra responsibility, advancement and status
- Identify, develop and utilise each individual's capabilities and strengths
- Train and develop individual team members
- Develop individual freedom and authority

The Action Centred Leadership model is Adair's best known work in which the three elements - Achieving the Task, Developing the Team and Developing Individuals - are mutually dependent as well as being separately essential to the overall leadership role.

In addition Adair set out these core functions of leadership and says they are vital to the Action Centred Leadership model:

- Planning - seeking information, defining tasks, setting aims
- Initiating - briefing, task allocation, setting standards
- Controlling - maintaining standards, ensuring progress, ongoing decision-making
- Supporting - individuals' contributions, encouraging, team spirit, reconciling, morale
- Informing - clarifying tasks and plans, updating, receiving feedback and interpreting
- Evaluating - feasibility of ideas, performance, enabling self assessment

The Action Centred Leadership model therefore does not stand alone; it is part of an integrated approach to managing and leading, which should include a strong emphasis on applying these

principles through training. Adair also promotes a '50:50 rule' which he applies to various situations involving two possible influencers; the view that 50% of motivation lies with the individual and 50% comes from external factors; among them leadership from another. This contradicts most of the motivation gurus who state that most motivation is from within the individual. He also suggests that 50% of team building success comes from the team and 50% from the leader.

Adair is an example of how management thinking changes and becomes more sophisticated over time and in response to the development of previous management thinking. Adair's work is far more accessible and relevant than much of the traditional thinking and being holistic it is easy to see how it works in a multi-dimensional way and above all it gets right to the heart of the leadership role which explains very clearly why some succeed and others don't.

Steve Savva