

THE
LEADERSHIP
LENS

Twelve months to observe, reflect, shape and create

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MONTH 1

Seeing Leadership Clearly

Leadership as a state, not a title

Something goes wrong on a Thursday afternoon.

Eleven people end up in a room that was booked for something else. The most senior person present is talking, and what they are saying is sensible.

Watch where people look. After each thing is said, several of them glance at someone three seats down who has contributed almost nothing. When that person eventually speaks, the room settles, and the meeting acquires a direction it did not have four minutes earlier.

Nobody would describe what happened as a change of leadership. Nothing on the organisational chart moved. Afterwards, asked who led the meeting, most of them would name the senior person, and they would be describing the agenda rather than what they actually experienced.

Leadership was in that room. It was simply not where the title was.

Leadership is one of the most discussed ideas of our time, yet one of the least clearly understood.

It is often described as a role, a position, or a set of behaviours. In practice, it is none of these. Leadership does

not begin when authority is granted, nor does it end when responsibility is removed. It appears before titles and persists after them.

Leadership is a **state**.

It is the way a person shows up, decides, influences, and carries responsibility through moments that matter. It is revealed under pressure, sustained over time, and recognised by its effects rather than its announcements.

Most leadership confusion stems from mistaking activity for leadership. Meetings are held, strategies are written, decisions are made, and visibility increases, yet leadership itself may be weak, inconsistent, or absent. The presence of leadership work does not guarantee the presence of leadership clarity.

This book begins with a simple but demanding proposition:

leadership becomes effective only when it is seen clearly.

Why leadership feels harder than it used to

Modern leadership is exercised in conditions that are materially different from those of previous generations. Information is constant, decisions are rarely final, and authority is frequently questioned. Leaders are expected to be decisive without being rigid, confident without being arrogant, visible without being performative, and humane without losing direction.

In such conditions, technical competence alone is insufficient.

Daniel Kahneman's account of two systems of thought is useful here. One is fast, automatic and intuitive. The other is slow, effortful and deliberate, and has limited capacity. Under load the second yields to the first, and a leader who believes they are deliberating is in fact running on habit. When leaders are stretched, they default to habit, avoidance, or imitation. Over time, leadership becomes reactive rather than deliberate.

At the same time, leadership is increasingly observed rather than formally assessed. People experience leadership through tone, presence, and consistency long before they analyse decisions. Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee argue that a leader's emotional state does not stay with the leader: it transmits, setting the tone of the group as resonance when the leader is steady and as dissonance when they are not. How leaders manage themselves, on that account, shapes trust before anything they say does.

Add to this the rise of automated systems, algorithmic recommendations, and artificial intelligence, and leadership becomes even more exposed. When systems suggest actions, optimise processes, or accelerate decisions, responsibility does not disappear. It concentrates.

In such an environment, leadership cannot be reduced to techniques. It must be understood as a **coherent internal state** that expresses itself outwardly.

The cost of unclear leadership

When leadership is unclear, three patterns tend to emerge.

First, **over-reliance on performance**. Leaders focus on appearing effective rather than being grounded. Language becomes inflated, activity increases, and reflection decreases.

Second, fragmentation. Different versions of the leader appear in different contexts. Values shift with audiences, and decisions lack continuity. This erodes trust slowly, and for good.

Third, **fatigue**. Without internal coherence, leadership requires constant effort. Energy is spent managing impressions rather than directing purpose. Over time, this leads to exhaustion or withdrawal.

None of these patterns result from a lack of ability. They result from a lack of clarity.

The four forces

Rather than defining leadership through traits or behaviours, this book treats leadership as a state shaped by four forces. They are always present. They are rarely balanced.

Judgement is the filter. It decides what is allowed to count: what is relevant, what is ignored, how risk is weighed, where responsibility lands. Judgement is how a leader chooses when the answer is not given, and it is a different thing from intelligence.

Direction is the trajectory. It is where leadership is taking things over time: what is being built, what is being left behind, how today connects to tomorrow. A leader can be quiet and have strong direction. A leader can be loud and have none.

Identity is the frame. It is the internal reference point that holds leadership together across roles and under pressure. Identity here means coherence, and has nothing to do with ego.

Attention is the energy. It is what leadership is tuned into: which people, which signals, which risks. What others call presence is simply attention made visible. Attention, as the word is used here, means focus rather than effort.

Go back to the Thursday room. The senior person had an agenda, which is not the same as direction; the room acquired direction only when somebody else spoke. Look at what that person was doing in the minutes before. While the room attended to the agenda, they were attending to the thing that had actually gone wrong. That is attention, and the other three grew out of it. From what they had noticed they made a judgement about what counted and what did

not, which is why the room settled when they said it. They said it in their own terms, anchored to what they thought was true rather than to what the room would reward, which is identity, and is the difference between coherence and confidence. And what they said gave the room its next step, which is direction. Four forces in one person, and the leadership sat where they met rather than where the chart put it.

These are not traits to acquire. They are forces to notice.

The leadership lens

Picture the four forces as two axes.

Judgement and Identity run vertically: how you decide, and who you are while deciding. Attention and Direction run horizontally: what you are tuned into, and where you are heading.

Between them sit four regions. Each is what happens when two forces meet.

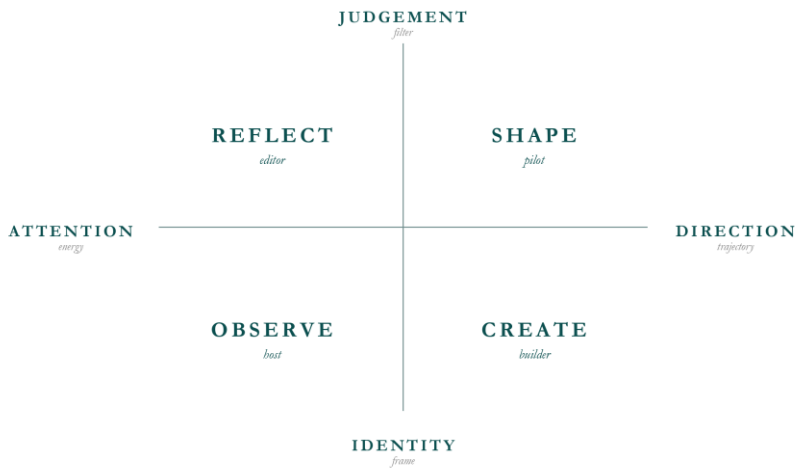
Where Judgement meets Attention, leadership reflects. This is the editor, reading the environment and adjusting course.

Where Judgement meets Direction, leadership shapes. This is the pilot, filtering what matters and setting a path.

Where Identity meets Attention, leadership observes. This is the host: present, grounded, trusted.

**Where Identity meets Direction, leadership creates.
This is the builder, purpose-anchored and moving
forward.**

Observe, reflect, shape, create. Four things leadership does,
formed from four forces it is made of.



The leadership lens.

This is not a measurement.

It is not a diagnostic.

It is not a scorecard.

It is a lens.

At any given moment, leadership leans. Sometimes towards judgement, because a decision cannot wait. Sometimes

towards attention, because someone needs to be heard. At other times it draws more heavily on identity or direction.

The purpose of the lens is only to notice:

where your leadership tends to sit
which forces take over under pressure
which are consistently underused

No leader operates evenly across all four. Balance does not mean equality. It means appropriateness.

You do not need to evaluate yourself. But do write something down. A sentence at the end of a week, in whatever you already carry, is enough. What you write matters far less than the act of writing it: a noticing held only in the head tends to dissolve by Friday, while the same noticing put into your own words is still available to you months later. Hold the lens in mind, and let it leave a trace.

Where this thinking comes from

The claim that leadership begins in perception rather than behaviour is not new, and it would be poor practice to present it as though it were.

Otto Scharmer, in the body of work he calls Theory U, argued that leadership carries a blind spot: not what leaders do, nor how they do it, but the inner place from which they operate. Two leaders in the same circumstances, taking the same action, produce different outcomes depending on that interior condition. He named the quality of attention

involved presencing, and built an extensive methodology for organisational and social change around it.

This book shares that premise and does something narrower with it.

Theory U is a method for collective transformation, intended for institutions and systems. What follows is a personal practice, intended for one leader over one year. There is no process to convene, no group to assemble and nothing to deliver at the end. It asks that you notice how your own leadership is currently arranged, on the assumption that what you cannot see clearly you cannot change deliberately. Noticing is not the whole of it. It is what lets you choose what to try, and then understand what happened when you tried it.

Where Scharmer describes a descent and return through the U, this book describes four forces and the regions where they meet. The purpose is the same: to make visible the thing shaping your decisions before you make them.

The lens itself came from a longer detour. I trained in education, where you are taught the history and the theory before you are allowed near a classroom, on the principle that you cannot teach what you have not first understood. Later, leading and coaching other people, I noticed that the same principle held and that almost nobody applied it. Leaders were handed techniques without the understanding that would let them carry a technique into a situation it was not designed for.

What transfers is not the method. It is the way of seeing that produced it. The four forces are an attempt to make that way of seeing explicit enough to practise, rather than leaving it to accumulate by accident across a career.

Leadership as coherence

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's work on self-determination identifies three conditions under which people sustain effort without being driven to it: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Motivation that is internally regulated tends to persist. Motivation sustained by external pressure is poorly maintained once the pressure is withdrawn, and transfers badly to situations the pressure never reached.

Leaders who act from internal coherence are less reactive, more consistent, and better able to handle complexity. They do not need to constantly assert authority because their leadership is felt through steadiness and judgement.

This does not mean leadership is calm or effortless, and it does not mean it is quiet. Coherence is not a temperament. An expressive, high-energy leader can be entirely coherent, and a soft-spoken one can be entirely performed. The volume tells you nothing about whether the person inside it is aligned with what they are doing.

Where this book sets clarity against loudness, it means the loudness that arrives under pressure as a substitute for

clarity, not the register a person naturally leads in. Intentional leadership is available at any volume. What it is not is reactive.

Why this book follows a year

Leadership does not develop in moments. It develops through accumulation.

This book is organised as a year not to suggest linear progression, but to reflect the way leadership is actually formed. Understanding deepens, patterns repeat, and insight compounds.

Each chapter explores leadership from a different angle. Some chapters will land immediately. Others may feel uncomfortable or untimely. That is expected.

By returning to the same lens throughout the book, leadership is not constantly redefined. It is steadily clarified.

Thought leadership and influence

In recent years, leadership has increasingly been associated with visibility. Profiles, platforms, and public statements shape perception. This has created opportunity, but also distortion.

Influence without coherence is fragile.

Coherence without visibility is limited.

True thought leadership is neither performance nor silence. It is the ability to articulate perspective with integrity and restraint. It is revealed through consistency of thinking, clarity of judgement, and respect for complexity.

This book does not aim to teach persuasion. It aims to restore **leadership clarity**, upon which influence naturally rests.

THROUGH THE LENS



Which of the four forces does your leadership reach for first, and which do you reach for last?

Holding the lens

As you move into the next chapter, resist the urge to evaluate yourself or to seek conclusions. Leadership is not improved by grading yourself. It is improved by seeing yourself accurately.

Instead, notice:

- where your leadership feels grounded
- where it feels stretched
- where it feels reactive
- where it feels deliberate

These observations are sufficient for now.

Leadership clarity begins not with answers, but with seeing more accurately.

Closing reflection

Leadership is a way of being that is revealed over time, rather than a collection of behaviours to be adopted.

Before you turn the page, consider this question quietly:

If leadership is a state rather than a title, how often am I truly in it?

That question is where the year begins.