

Inspiring others

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Introduction

Imagine an organisation where people eagerly come to work every day, have great pride in their company and a real passion for what they do. Group/team members draw excitement and energy from collaborating with others, go the extra mile for a customer or colleague and want each other to succeed. Managers feel a genuine concern for people development and create growth opportunities for all. Everyone strives to deliver exceptional customer experiences that impress and delight. People constantly ask themselves how to do things better, how to contribute their ideas and how to help drive innovation efforts. They are ambassadors for the firm, recommending its products and services to friends and family and encouraging talented others to join company ranks.

That is a description of an organisation where people are inspired. With inspiration aplenty, people give more discretionary effort, work more efficiently, produce higher quality work, are more creative, take the initiative, and inspire others. The ability to inspire is therefore seen by many as a powerful predictor of leadership effectiveness, a competency most desired of a leader by the group/team, and a quality that leads to greater satisfaction and engagement of group/team members. Whether a people manager or individual contributor, becoming more inspirational will immensely benefit your effectiveness as a leader and the results of those you work with.¹

We can all tell an inspiring person when we meet one. It is not immediately obvious, however, what it is that one needs to do to be seen as inspirational. Where one cannot easily explain what it takes, one might be tempted to reach an incorrect conclusion that the ability to inspire is an innate trait some just have and some do not. While it is true that some people are more inspirational than others, the fact of the matter is that it is something everyone can learn, and anyone can become more inspirational at any point in their life or career. Inspiring others amounts to adopting a number of inspirational attitudes and behaviours and engaging in emotional expression that inspires. The more of these you can master and develop into signature strengths, the more inspiring you will become.²

1. Inspiration explained

1.1 Definition

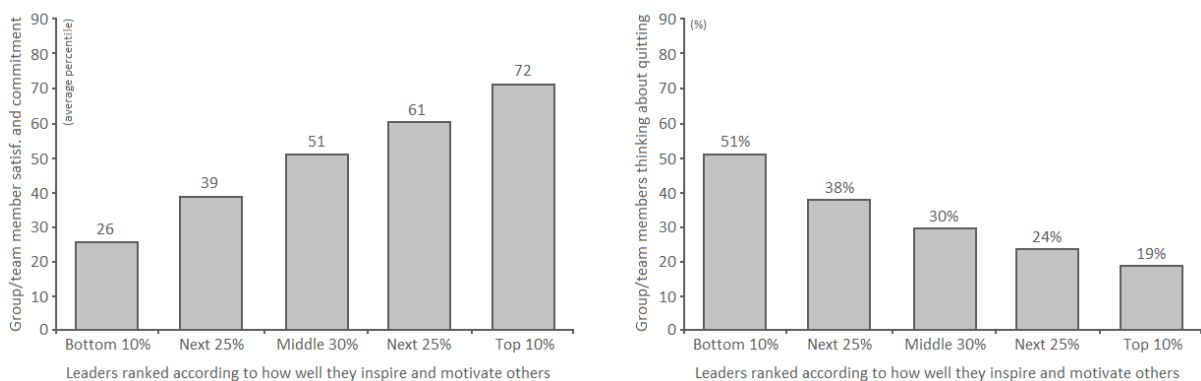
According to one definition, inspiration is a breathing in or infusion of an idea, purpose, etc. into the mind; the suggestion, awakening, or creation of a feeling or impulse, especially of an exalted kind.³ According to another, it is the quality of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially something creative.⁴ Inspiration then involves becoming aware of an exciting possibility and feeling the motivation to act on it. To arise, inspiration requires a stimulus and cannot be deliberately invoked in self through an act of one's own will.⁵ The stimulus can be an idea pieced together on one's own but more often comes from interactions with others who, whether by contributing new information, through their behaviour, emotional expressiveness or otherwise, awaken one to a new idea, purpose, set of values, way of thinking, or business opportunity. This latter route is how one person can have an inspiring effect on another.

1.2 Effects of inspiration

Inspiration has a powerful effect on the climate in the organisation and people's performance. When people are inspired, they derive more satisfaction from work and report greater commitment to their job. They also think less about quitting. Where leaders both inspire and motivate others towards high performance, group/team productivity rises markedly – people take the initiative, give more discretionary effort, work more efficiently, are more creative and produce higher quality work. Importantly, inspired people more easily inspire others. In contrast, when inspiration is absent, people's satisfaction, commitment, and productivity fall off sharply and their intention to leave the organisation rises.⁶

The greater the leader's skill at inspiring and motivating members of the group/team, the greater the satisfaction, commitment, and productivity that those members report. According to a study of 8000 leaders and 40,000 group/team members from 100 different organisations, each increment in a leader's skill at inspiring and motivating others translates into a significant increase in the satisfaction and commitment across the group/team and a clear decline in people's intention to leave (Figure 1).

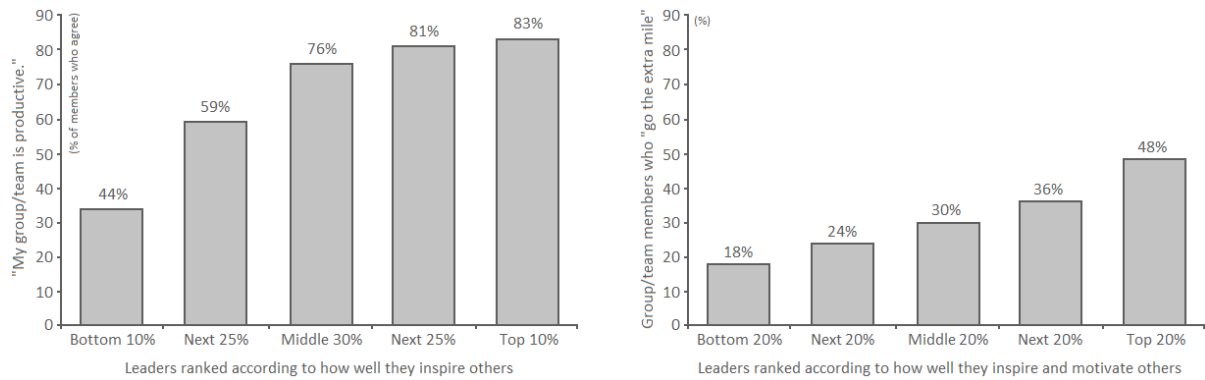
Figure 1: Group/team members of inspiring leaders are more satisfied and committed and think less about quitting the organisation.



Source: John H. Zenger, Joseph R. Folkman, Scott K. Edinger, "The inspiring leader", McGraw Hill, 2009, pp. 19, 21

Inspiring leaders are associated with greater group/team productivity. In a study where group/team members rated the productivity of their group/team and also the inspirational qualities of their immediate manager, direct reports of inspiring leaders rated their group/team productivity more highly and engaged in efforts to enhance it further (Figure 2, left). Another study of 35,000 leaders showed that where a leader is effective at inspiring and motivating others, a larger proportion of their group/team is willing to go the extra mile (Figure 2, right).

Figure 2: Group/team members of inspiring leaders consider their group/team to be more productive and are more willing to go the extra mile.



Source: John H. Zenger, Joseph R. Folkman, Scott K. Edinger, "The inspiring leader", McGraw Hill, 2009, p. 24 and "Unlocking the secrets behind how extraordinary leaders motivate", Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman, zengerfolkman.com, 2015, p. 4

1.3 Attributes, behaviours and emotions that inspire

Inspiring others relies on adopting a number of inspirational attitudes and behaviours and engaging in emotional expression that inspires. Attributes that inspire describe general approaches, attitudes, and patterns of action which, if demonstrated consistently, lead others to form an impression that a person is inspirational. The attributes that inspire also lay the foundation for the more specific behaviours a leader engages in in order to be effective and to inspire others. Attributes and behaviour are underpinned by emotional expression that inspires – a skilful use of emotions which amplifies the inspirational effect one can have. The attributes, behaviours and emotions that inspire are listed below and described in greater detail in the sections that follow. The more of these you can master and demonstrate every day, the more inspiring you will become.⁷

Figure 3: Inspiring others relies on adopting inspirational attitudes, inspirational behaviours and engaging in emotional expression that inspires.



Source: Adapted from John H. Zenger, Joseph R. Folkman, Scott K. Edinger, "The inspiring leader", McGraw Hill, 2009, pp. 62-64, 86-94.

2. Attributes that inspire

People who inspire typically demonstrate a set of three common attributes. These include setting an example for others as a role model, advocating for progress as a change champion, and getting things started by taking the initiative. The three attributes are inspirational in their own right and also form the foundation for engaging in behaviours that inspire. The attributes are described below and the behaviours in the section that follows.

2.1 Being a role model

Inspirational people deliberately act as role models and consistently demonstrate effective behaviours. Conscious that others watch, they hold themselves to high performance standards and exemplify strong values and cultural norms. They are aware that the bulk of the learning about effective behaviours comes from observing others, and so, over time, how they conduct themselves shapes the behaviour of those around them. By modelling effective behaviours, they inspire others to follow their example and to adopt the way they lead and engage.⁸

Being a role model also requires that one walks the talk. Saying one thing and doing another tends to get in the way of inspiration. An effective role model follows through on commitments and exemplifies all behavioural expectations he or she holds of others. People tend to find this inspiring and often adopt the modelled behaviours themselves thus helping proliferate effective ways of operating throughout the organisation. Importantly, everyone can become a role model, and the more there are in the organisation, the better its work climate and performance and the greater the commitment and engagement of its people.⁹

2.2 Being a change champion

Inspiring people seek to breathe new life into how their organisations operate and attempt to awaken others to new possibilities. They are always on the lookout for new trends and developments in the external environment and translate these into opportunities for the firm. They constantly explore with others how to do something better, smarter, or faster. They engage in continuous learning, gaining new and honing existing skills, and share their learnings with those who might benefit. Their ideas and insights speak directly to the curiosity, hope, and optimism of those around them, fuelling their desire to engage in a collective effort to attain an idealised future state.

With inspiration being an awakening to a new possibility or direction, to pursue it inevitably involves change. Openness to change and readiness to advocate for it are therefore essential to becoming inspirational. Creating a compelling case for change, winning people's hearts and minds to gain their support, energising groups/teams towards persistent effort, and recognising those who make change happen all belong to the toolkit of a person who inspires. Similarly, supporting change efforts initiated by others, contributing one's skills and resources to the change initiative, and helping win over the sceptics will cement one's status as a change champion.¹⁰

2.3 Being an initiator

Inspirational people take the initiative. They get things started and make them happen. They act as a catalyst for collective action thus unlocking the passion, energy, and ideas present in the organisation. They see initiatives through to completion, demonstrating decisiveness and accountability on the way. Their attitude enables progress,

creates a dynamic work environment and is an antidote to the delays, bottlenecks, and cancellations that afflict many a modern organisation. And it is precisely for this reason that others find them inspiring.

Initiators have a bias for taking action. They are aware that acting and responding quickly is seen as a sign of initiative and decisiveness. This does not mean that they do not think things through beforehand, however. They do consider the possible outcomes, have a sound basis for why they think they will be successful, and are transparent about the risks they are taking. Inspiring initiators also hold themselves accountable. When things go well, they celebrate the attainment and recognise everyone who contributed. In case of an adverse outcome, they take the responsibility and never point fingers at others.¹¹

3. Behaviours that inspire

Inspiration involves becoming aware of an exciting possibility and feeling the motivation to act on it. A number of behaviours have been found to provide the stimulus that evokes inspiration in others. These include creating a compelling vision which stimulates everyone to work towards a better future, powerfully communicating ideas in a way that appeals to both the mind and the heart, collaborating with others to enable a dynamic and productive workplace, helping people discover new possible selves, and unlocking their powers of creativity and innovation.¹²

3.1 Creating a clear vision and direction

A vivid picture of where the organisation is heading and what it aspires to accomplish over the next few years can be a powerful source of inspiration for its members. A compelling vision will serve to energise and motivate while providing everyone with the direction and context to guide and align their individual efforts. With a clear line of sight between people's individual goals and the organisational vision, work gains a purpose, meaning, and value.¹³ By providing the destination but not prescribing how to get there, the vision gives everyone the opportunity to use ingenuity and creativity and find their own way.¹⁴

An inspiring person catalyses the process of creating a vision, gets people excited about it and infects others with enthusiasm for what the future holds. He or she then regularly reaffirms and reinforces the vision and direction so that their prominence does not wear away in the whirlwind of day-to-day busyness. Organisational initiatives can then be aligned with the direction so that the vision can be attained.¹⁵

3.2 Communicating powerfully

Communicating powerfully is one sure way to inspire. That is why inspiring people actively look for and embrace opportunities to communicate. They keenly share their thoughts and ideas with others, knowing that such openness creates trust, fosters social inclusion and satisfies people's desire to know. If leading a group/team, they never miss their one-on-ones and in group/team settings give frequent updates on developments of interest from across the organisation. This sends a clear signal that people are trusted, valued and important.¹⁶

Inspirational people adopt a distinctive communication style. First of all, they keep their interactions uplifting and upbeat. They exude positivity, signal approval, offer support, express appreciation and give praise more often

than they make critical comments. Positivity and optimism create energy, provide affirmation, unlock creativity, encourage performance and boost satisfaction from work. If that is the effect you can bring about, you will be seen as inspirational.¹⁷

Secondly, inspiring people tend to focus less on themselves and more on others. They are excellent listeners, give others undivided attention and are genuinely curious about their interests, aspirations, and achievements. They remain attuned to the perspectives of those they communicate with and tailor their messages for greater relevance. To inspire others, they give fewer instructions and instead ask more questions. Asking questions signals openness and trust, demonstrates respect, leads to mutual learning and helps surface new ideas. It enables others to discover the answers for themselves; each such discovery akin to an inspiration.¹⁸

Thirdly, inspiring people consider how they can contribute usefully in different communication settings. In one-to-one interactions they employ emphatic listening, focus on the uniqueness of the other person and build a personal connection. When in a meeting as an attendee, they are engaged, ask relevant and insightful questions, share constructive thoughts as well as welcome and encourage contributions from others. When chairing, they focus on drawing out opinions and ideas from others first before offering their own. To do otherwise, especially when the person is in a position of formal authority, could discourage some from sharing divergent opinions thus reducing not only the quality of decision making but also the extent to which participants find the environment inspiring. When delivering a presentation, they focus on the audience and their needs, expectations and challenges and not on themselves, their idea or plan. They avoid complexity, they keep the pace brisk and frame their messages as stories that resonate with the audience. They understand what the attendees want to take away from the presentation, and they deliver it. They make sure every attendee leaves with clarity about what the presentation means for *them*.¹⁹

Finally, inspiring people understand that words are just one part of any communication. Equally, if not more, important are the feelings and emotions that accompany them. Where a person is able to demonstrate passion and enthusiasm in his or her communication, he or she will convey the strength of conviction, will be more persuasive and will induce positive emotions in others. Raising one's inspirational profile requires making an effort to become more comfortable in the world of emotions – this magnifies the ability to influence and inspire.²⁰

3.3 Collaborating with others

Almost all activity in an organisation requires that people from different groups, teams and functions collaborate, exchange information and share resources. When this cooperation is effective, work is a breeze. When it is not, frustration, bottlenecks, and delays are bound to result. Members in the organisation see this dynamic play out first hand, and so the vast majority favour collaboration and teamwork over internal rivalries and conflict. They welcome all effort to foster ever closer collaboration as this increases everyone's productivity, makes work more satisfying and the organisation more dynamic and a better place to work. Importantly, it also allows everyone to focus their energy on delivering an excellent service to clients and their attention on external competitors.²¹

Given all its benefits, people tend to find those who bring about greater collaboration highly inspirational. Leaders who intend to achieve this will emphasize the value of collaboration to the organisation and its members and will communicate frequently the need to expand collaboration and teamwork. They will model collaborative attitudes and behaviours themselves, will reward people for effective collaboration and will coach those who hesitate. They will be effective in bringing groups and teams together, emphasising the common vision and

purpose and creating an inclusive environment for all. They will provide reassurance to all collaborating parties reaffirming their identity, importance to the organisation, and the unique value they each bring. They will encourage the formation of cross-functional teams and will resolve any interpersonal conflict quickly.²²

3.4 Developing people

Helping people grow and develop benefits both their effectiveness tomorrow and is a powerful source of motivation already today. Engaging in developmental pursuits is not only fulfilling in its own right, but it also inspires and brings about thoughts of an exciting future. Feeling that someone supports one's growth and has one's back is highly satisfying and motivates towards greater effort and sustained performance. Opportunities for growth and advancement can be created through regular feedback and coaching, by introducing new and more difficult tasks not previously handled or by encouraging people to develop leadership, specialist, or other relevant skills through training or work assignments.

Providing ongoing feedback and regular coaching helps people become and feel more competent, leads to improved results and has highly motivating effects. Feedback serves to recognise and reinforce strong performance and to help the recipient notice areas where they can become more effective. Coaching is the opportunity to empower the person as well as to help them grow and develop. Offering feedback and coaching on a frequent and regular basis serves to reaffirm the person's competence and demonstrates commitment to their success and growth thus providing inspiration and motivating their continued effort.

Growth and development can also come from horizontal or vertical role enrichment: the scope of a person's role can be enhanced in terms of the breadth of activities it covers or in terms of the level of accountability and autonomy built into the role, the latter, for example, through greater inclusion of activities such as planning and decision making. Building and regularly revisiting a personal development plan with every direct report, exploring suitable training, job refresh, and stretch assignment opportunities, identifying potential future roles and facilitating the transition when the person is ready all contribute directly to the level of satisfaction and motivation in their current role and to the confidence they have in the leadership and the capabilities of the organisation.

3.5 Fostering innovation

Promoting innovation and creating an environment where innovation is encouraged and expected are highly inspirational.²³ People find it exciting to participate in and contribute to innovative pursuits as this gives them the opportunity to use their creativity and inventiveness, introduces novelty into their daily work, allows them to build new skills and gain new experiences. They can take pride in being part of a successful innovative organisation.

Inspirational people constantly explore with others how to do things better, smarter, or faster. They urge their groups and teams to stay abreast of client expectations, competitor moves, and industry developments. They make and encourage others to make suggestions about ways of improving a service, streamlining a process, or doing away with unnecessary paperwork. Aware that great ideas can come from people in every role and every part of the organisation, an inspiring person promotes an inclusive environment and explicitly asks everyone to contribute. Conscious that new ideas are fragile, he or she welcomes and acknowledges all well-intentioned contributions, even those which cannot be proceeded with. To instead give feedback which focuses on the downsides of an idea would not only be uninspiring and dispiriting but would inhibit idea generation in future.²⁴

Inspiring people encourage others to act as owners and to bring their ideas to life – the more proactivity in the organisation, the more dynamic and energising the work environment and the better the outcomes for everyone.

4. Emotions that inspire

Skilful perception and display of emotions are critical to the ability to inspire others. Furthermore, those who are highly expressive in their use of emotions tend to be seen as more inspirational than those who are not.²⁵ The role of both these skills – emotional intelligence and emotional expressiveness – in inspiring others is described below.

4.1 Emotional intelligence

The ability to inspire draws on all four emotional intelligence competencies. By bringing to one's attention what motivates and inspires, self-awareness fuels passion and enthusiasm for what one does, which in turn makes it easier to inspire others. Self-regulation, the next emotional intelligence competency, allows one to act with integrity, maintain clarity of direction, sustain focused effort as well as remain composed and display emotional stability in trying situations. People who self-regulate well drive performance and attainment, remain open to ambiguity and change, maintain a positive outlook and promote a positive organisational climate. All these are considered model behaviours that have an inspirational effect. Social awareness, in turn, enables better understanding of other people's emotions, needs, and perspectives and thus allows one to communicate in a way which resonates. A socially aware individual is able to demonstrate interest in the uniqueness of the other person and comes across as someone who has concern for others. Finally, social skill is the skilful use of emotions to guide others in the desired emotional direction. Priming positive emotions goes a long way in the organisational setting – they help everyone remain engaged, motivated, and inspired to achieve. Positive emotions also demonstrate passion and enthusiasm, convey the strength of one's conviction and, importantly, induce positive emotions in others.²⁶

4.2 Emotional expressiveness

Verbal elements are only one part of any face-to-face communication. The tone of voice and body language can also convey important meaning, and not to utilise these channels or to use them only sparsely is akin to voluntarily limiting the impact one has. This is particularly so when it comes to inspiring others – to arise, inspiration requires a stimulus, and emotions can be a very potent one. Becoming more comfortable in the world of emotions therefore significantly raises one's capacity for inspiring others.²⁷

Inspirational people are emotionally expressive. Rather than hide their emotions, they display them in a deliberate way for others to see. To this end they make conscious, generous and frequent use of gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice variation. They never hesitate to add extra emphasis to their messages through emotional expressiveness. This is what others tend to find inspirational about them.²⁸

Those who inspire are well aware of how emotions spread in groups and rely on this dynamic to promote positivity. Strong emotions transfer to others from those who display them, and so positivity begets positivity, and

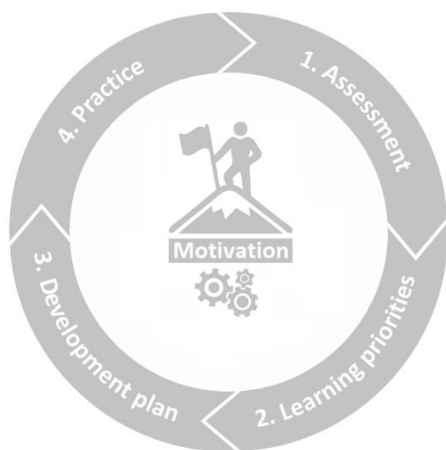
enthusiasm begets enthusiasm. Where your upbeat attitude can elevate the moods of others, the group/team will see you as inspirational. You will have made everyone feel better and the work environment more pleasant. That is why an inspiring person will expand interactions with others on days when he or she is upbeat but will first work on getting into better spirits himself/herself when not in the best of moods. That way he or she can maximise the positive impact he/she has in the organisation.²⁹

5. Learning how to inspire

Inspiring others is something everyone can learn, and anyone can become more inspirational at any point in their life or career. As any personal change, it takes work and dedicated effort and so requires ongoing commitment and sustained motivation. Only when one clearly sees the benefits which the ability to inspire others confers when mastered, will one continue in the resolve to put in the necessary effort and practice the new behaviours. That is why the best place to start is to create a source of ongoing motivation to keep one going. One such motivator can be an idealized vision of one's future self, living a successful life of one's choosing, the enabler of which are the inspirational qualities one resolved to develop. Keeping this vision in mind can be a powerful and sustainable source of motivation that propels one's learning pursuits.³⁰

Being inspirational means adopting a number of inspirational attitudes and behaviours and engaging in emotional expression that inspires. Learning how to inspire therefore involves developing these learnable skills. This can be achieved through a four-step process shown in the diagram and described in greater detail below.

Figure 4: Learning how to inspire requires sustained motivation and is achieved through a four-step process.



5.1 Assessment

The first step in the process is to take stock of one's inspirational profile. This involves finding out the general perception of oneself in terms of the ability to inspire and making high-level observations about what one does particularly well in this regard and what, if anything, might be getting in the way. Then, an assessment of one's

competence in each of the attributes, behaviours, and emotions that inspire will yield a more complete and detailed picture, which can serve as the basis for deciding the learning priorities and then devising the development plan. Assessments will be most accurate and useful if they address each competency in isolation and when they are carried out as 360-degree feedback from a wide range of stakeholders that includes direct reports and peers in addition to one's manager. With direct reports and peers being the primary intended beneficiaries of one's inspiration, their feedback is key. The output of the assessment will be particularly useful if it also presents individual competency ratings in comparison to those of other members in the organisation, e.g. by including decile or percentile ratings. That way the relative strengths and weaknesses will be more readily apparent.³¹

5.2 Learning priorities

With the assessment results available, it is time for deciding one's learning priorities. The ratings for each competency will indicate either a clear strength or a clear weakness or a somewhat middling level of skill. The approach to developing inspirational qualities should then be the same as that for developing leadership skills in general: develop a number of strengths, fix critical flaws, and only attend to areas of average skill later.³²

It is thanks to their strengths that inspirational people stand out and are seen as such. A person with a few clear strengths, even if they have a few rough edges, will come across as more inspiring than someone with average ratings across the board. Developing one, two, or three signature strengths should, therefore, be the focus of any development plan. This could mean honing the skills one is already good at or, for someone with middling ratings across the board, selecting a few most relevant competencies and developing these into clear strengths. Strengths will always benefit from further continued development – one can never be too good at a quality that inspires, and the higher the skill level, the more pronounced the inspirational effect one has.³³

No one is without weaknesses, but it is the critical flaws, if one has any, that require attention. Critical flaws are those that drag down the perceptions of one's effectiveness across other competencies and which get in the way of the person's ability to inspire others. A rating significantly lower than one's ratings for other competencies or a rating in the bottom decile on a relative basis likely indicates a critical flaw. It most likely is a critical flaw if the competence in question is also highly relevant and important to the person's job, if the flaw is widely affecting the person's group/team or peers and if the flaw is very obvious to most people working with the person. Fixing such a critical flaw will typically have a highly beneficial effect on the perception of the person by others.³⁴

Change efforts tend to succeed when they are focused and will have the biggest impact if they cover areas that matter most. That is why prioritising the build-up of strengths and the remediation of any critical flaws yields the best results. Unless they are required for the job or have been selected as areas of skill to be developed into strengths, attention to competencies which received middling ratings is therefore best given only afterwards.

5.3 Development plan

With learning priorities identified, the formulation of the development plan can follow. The plan will state how specifically one intends to develop each competence included in the list of priorities. To devise a plan, one will need to answer the question: Considering the content and context of my role, the people I work with and also my activities outside of work, how can I practice demonstrating the attributes, behaviours, or emotions I identified?

For example, to elevate one's profile as a change champion, one could start by reflecting about one's attitude to change using past change initiatives as a reference. Do I react positively when there is change that affects me? Do I first notice the opportunities that come with it or rather focus on the downsides? Do I join and support the change effort, remain indifferent or become upset and defensive? When others propose ideas, do I typically show interest and encourage them, do I remain uninvolved or perhaps tend to dismiss their idea outright? Have I recently actively advocated for an idea or proposal made by someone else? Have I made and championed any new proposals myself? Did I explore with others how to do something better, smarter, or faster? Did I bring and share new learnings or insights with the group? Based on the answers to these questions, what could I do differently in future in order to come across as more of a change champion? How could these be formulated as dos and don'ts that aid the practice of demonstrating the attribute? What specifically will I do today, this week, this month and this quarter to start embedding these principles into the way I go about my work and personal life? These action steps can then become part of the development plan.

As another example, if the behaviour one intends to improve upon is collaborating with others, a similar reflection could be in order. Do I recognise that sales and client excellence, appealing products and services, and streamlined processes and systems are each a result of close collaboration between organisational functions and cannot be delivered by any one function alone? Do I see how each group, team and function adds unique value and expertise, or am I of a view that some groups and teams are more important than the others? Do I seek opportunities to own and drive workstreams in projects initiated by other groups/teams? Do I build effective working relationships with colleagues in all parts of the organisation, or are there groups, teams, or functions which I prefer to avoid? Do I bring people from different groups together to improve the way we work jointly and to find solutions to any challenges we may be experiencing? When there is a disagreement between groups or teams, do I make an attempt to see things from the other unit's perspective and find a workable way forward? Do I give colleagues from other groups, teams and departments helpful feedback directly rather than tell others that the colleague made a mistake or is not pulling their weight when he or she is not present? Do I emphasize the value of collaboration and urge my group/team to always be open to collaborating with others? Do I praise and reward teamwork and collaborative efforts? Do I coach those who could collaborate more? Do I tame unhealthy rivalries and resolve interpersonal conflicts quickly? Do I promote an inclusive environment for all? As in the previous example, given the answers to these questions, what specific and time-bound action steps can I take to demonstrate a collaborative disposition more often? The most appropriate actions and the ones expected to have the biggest impact can then go into the development plan.

Self-reflection is best combined with other sources of input into the development plan. These can include any specific suggestions received in the 360-degree feedback report, additional feedback requested from the group/team, peers and one's manager, discussions with a coach, mentor, or a trusted person outside the organisation, and ideas from articles, books, and training. Identifying and carefully observing others who already excel at the skills one wishes to develop can also provide useful insight. The greater the variety of sources consulted and the wider the range of approaches explored and considered, the better the development plan will likely be.

5.4 Practice

With the plan in place, its implementation can begin and involves keeping an open eye for opportunities to practice and then taking the actions and following through on the resolutions identified in the plan. Everyday situations that arise in one's personal and professional life will offer ample opportunity to practice displaying situational attributes, behaviours and emotional expressiveness that inspire, while those less reliant on the situation can be planned and rehearsed in advance and initiated proactively. The new ways will likely not feel natural at first, but with consistent and repeat practice, they will become second nature and will come effortlessly.

As one practices, it is useful to engage in regular self-reflection and self-evaluation. What effect do the new behaviours have? What reactions do they appear to elicit? How do I come across? Is there a way to get feedback from others to confirm my impressions? If the results are favourable, what could I do to improve further? If they are not as expected, why could this be, and what needs doing differently? What other new approaches could I experiment with to be seen as more inspirational? Regular self-reflection and self-evaluation allow for mid-course adjustments, if necessary, and help achieve better results faster.

5.5 Repeat assessment

With 360-degree assessments taking place at regular intervals, the next one will reveal the extent of progress one has made thus providing the ultimate evaluation of the effectiveness of one's efforts. This creates an opportunity to revisit, update and refine the learning priorities and the resulting development plan taking into account the results of the assessment and any other relevant considerations. The learning process thus continues through a cycle of assessment, defining learning priorities, and devising and implementing a development plan, with each successive iteration bringing a material improvement to one's inspirational profile.

6. Helping others become more inspirational

Whether a people manager or individual contributor, everyone can benefit from becoming more inspirational. And the more people who inspire, the more successful the organisation and the better a place to work it is for everyone.

When helping someone undergo personal change it is useful to keep in mind that people change more readily when that change is what they themselves desire and when it fits their own goals. That is why a good starting point is to develop a detailed understanding of the person's interests, values, goals, and aspirations and how becoming more inspirational potentially fits and supports those. Exploring these with the person can help them form a vision of their possible future self which can then serve as a powerful motivator to sustain their change effort. Secondly, stimulating development by focusing mostly on strengths and opportunities typically yields better results than overemphasizing weaknesses and deficiencies. The former gives rise to positivity and enhances cognitive openness, flexibility, and learning, while the latter tends to induce negative emotions, stress, and defensiveness, all of which reduce cognitive functioning and inhibit change.³⁵

Inspirational qualities can be developed through a four-step cycle of assessment, learning priorities, development plan, and practice. These steps are explained in the preceding section, and the facilitator's role will

be to help the person complete these by providing coaching and feedback, creating a psychologically safe environment and helping them get back on track, if required.

To be able to develop new skills and undergo personal change one needs to adopt a growth mindset – a belief that everyone can change if they so resolve, and that the way to get there is through persistent effort, continued practice and gradual improvement. Where the facilitator senses that the person does not believe they can change or gets discouraged when a new behaviour does not come off immediately, the way to encourage a growth mindset is to demonstrate how similar others succeeded in personal change and to promote readiness to take on a challenge and willingness to persist in one’s effort.³⁶

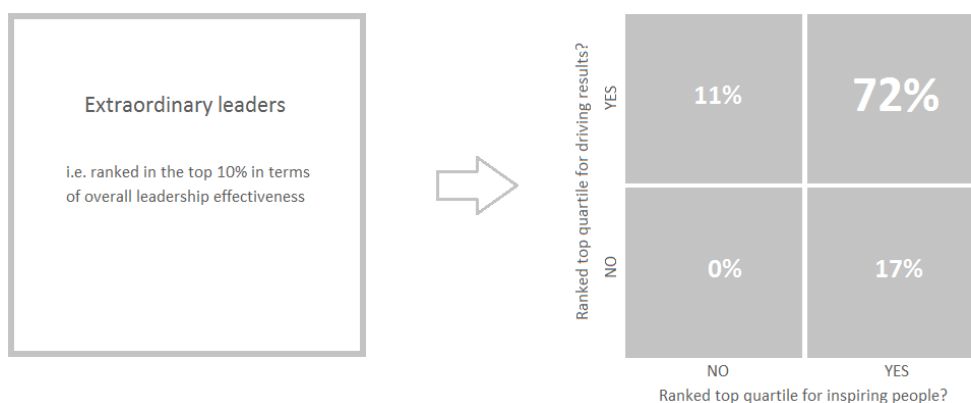
When engaging in new behaviours, a supportive environment contributes greatly to one’s learning experience. Without it, one could feel self-conscious and find it unsafe to experiment with new approaches. The resulting stress could impede learning and discourage further practice. It will therefore help the person immensely if the facilitator can foster a psychologically safe environment where new behaviours are welcomed and encouraged and not judged or criticised by others.³⁷

As the person continues with their practice, regular coaching and feedback will help them notice the progress they are making and identify areas for further improvement. Continued reinforcement of their growth mindset and encouragement of further effort and practice will help them advance. Regular feedback from others as well as periodic evaluations and assessments will help the person direct their efforts and stay the course.

7. Combining inspirational qualities with other skills

While an essential ingredient of effective leadership, the benefits of inspiration are most salient when a leader is able to combine his or her inspirational qualities with other complementary skills. When inspiration enhances other abilities, the compounded effect surpasses what could be achieved relying on only one skill alone. This was demonstrated in a study of high-potential leaders, the results of which are shown in Figure 5. Extraordinary leaders, i.e. those who ranked highest in their organisation in terms of overall leadership effectiveness, overwhelmingly ranked highly in both their ability to inspire others and in their ability to deliver results. Relatively few extraordinary leaders ranked highly in only one of these skills but not the other.³⁸

Figure 5: Extraordinary leaders typically achieve their remarkable effectiveness by both inspiring people and driving results.



Source: adapted from John H. Zenger, Joseph R. Folkman, Scott K. Edinger, “The inspiring leader”, McGraw Hill, 2009, p. 25

This does not come as a surprise given what inspiration is – a general state of enthusiasm that helps one do or create something.³⁹ So the doing and creating, or achieving results, is what needs to follow for one to become fully effective. With people in the organisation inspired to aim for new heights, their enthusiasm can now be channelled into delivering great outcomes for their clients, colleagues, and themselves. This is the topic of a separate guide entitled “[Motivating people](#)”.

Conclusion

The ability to inspire others is a competency that everyone should aspire to possess. Whether a people manager or individual contributor, becoming more inspirational will benefit immensely your effectiveness as a leader and the performance of your colleagues and the whole group/team. The ability to inspire is a hallmark of good leadership and a quality that contributes directly to people’s satisfaction and engagement.

Organisations need inspirational people at every level and in every role. Developing the ability to inspire is therefore a great investment one can make in self and in others. Everyone can become more inspirational at any point in their life or career. Inspiring others amounts to displaying a number of attitudes, behaviours and emotional expressions that inspire – each a skill that with practice anyone can learn.

The ability to inspire is a powerful enhancer of other skills. High competence in both inspirational qualities and in the ability to motivate others towards remarkable results make for a particularly potent combination.

Version control

No.	Date	Changes
1	Sep 2019	Original version
2	Nov 2020	- Updated the way certain terms are used (groups/teams, performance/results) for consistency - Made minor wording changes throughout the guide

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