

## **Reconnecting to Leadership Foundations**

What if we returned to the foundations of leadership? In coaching, working on leadership with an executive first involves turning inward. It raises an identity question in a professional context: What kind of leader does one aspire to be? Returning to the core of leadership thus becomes a journey back to one's personal foundations.

Leadership is sometimes seen as an innate quality: "You either have leadership or you don't." In fact it is a skill that can be developed by reconnecting with who we are and by tapping into the resources available within us.

### **What is Leadership ?**

Leadership is an energy that sets the environment in motion. This energy is generated more by the quality of presence than by effort, more by the consistency of attitudes than by theatricality. In our collective unconscious, leadership is sometimes associated with heroism, casting leaders as modern-day heroes - charismatic and infallible. Certainly, management requires a degree of courage, but true leadership is better sought in the figure of the anti-hero.

The anti-hero, in fact, challenges us because they are above all themselves and do not try to emulate external models. Ulysses, one of the earliest anti-heroic figures in history, used intelligence rather than the physical strength he lacked to defeat the Cyclops - by calling himself "Nobody" - in an era, antiquity, dominated by the ideal of Herculean strength.

Leadership first leverages our intrinsic qualities, which must be recognized and deployed, rather than trying to imitate a model.

For a leader to rally others, adaptation to context is also a key factor: A leadership style inspires because it meets the needs of its environment: the values to uphold, psychological needs, and requirements related to where the company stands in the marketplace.

Thus, an empowering and innovative style may suit a new, fast-growing business led by senior managers, but not a mature business run by inexperienced managers. Another example can be found in political history: Barack Obama's leadership style - eloquent, universalist, and integrative - emerged in response to American society's need for meaning and inclusion in the 2000s. Daniel Goleman, with his six leadership styles, was a key thinker in highlighting this alignment between leadership style and context.

It follows that leadership development work through coaching can only be effective if there is sufficient alignment between the leader and the culture. Of course, a leader bringing a very different culture can successfully drive transformation. But to do so and gain buy-in, they must connect with the existing culture at enough points to understand it and instill confidence.

### **Are There Primary Colors of Leadership?**

In my experience as an executive coach and assessor, I have observed that there are as many leadership styles as there are leaders. Some humbly, and gently convey their ideas; others are bold, dynamic, and energizing; still others inspire through sheer audacity.

Yet I wondered whether there might be a smaller common denominator underlying all leadership styles, something akin to the "prime factors" of leadership. Another way to think about it is as the primary colors

of leadership. My research, based on over 20 years of experience, working with over 300 leaders led me to identify five primary colors, meaning five essential resources necessary to truly engage and lead.

These five resources, because they are primary, are all necessary. However, they do not all need to be highly developed to generate leadership. Just as green requires both blue and yellow - regardless of the proportion the result will still be green - leadership emerges from the combination of these resources. Every leader and manager will have resources that are more dominant than others. It is their systemic combination that ultimately produces leadership, and defines the leader's unique style.

### **The Leadership 5 Resources Model®**

At the heart of leadership lies **vision**. A vision that is sufficiently developed, insightful, and forward-looking. This requires investing energy: listening to one's intuition, analyzing data, developing hypotheses about market evolution, gathering informal intelligence, and forming one's own point of view. It is the outcome of this visualization process that becomes inspiring for others.

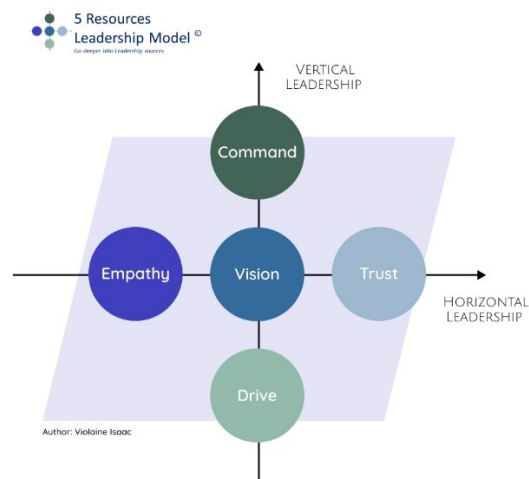
Next, leadership is woven through the capacity to give **empathy**. This means providing genuine listening and engagement, as well as enough authenticity to allow others access to who you truly are. Empathy and openness strengthen relationships with the teams. It is difficult to inspire others from behind the armor of authority! More often than not, it is the quality and depth of the relationships that creates the desire to align and commit.

Moreover, a leader channels and stabilizes the collective through their ability to demonstrate a natural capacity for **command**. Their determination to achieve goals, their ability to provide structure with clear direction, and their capacity to earn respect, shape collective action. For leaders, it is sometimes necessary to give oneself permission to exercise this natural authority, as doing so touches on self-esteem and also challenges one's own relationship to authority.

The ability to demonstrate confidence in the future and to place **trust** in others is a true cornerstone of leadership. This dimension fosters empowerment within teams. For leaders, this resource often needs to be rooted in self-confidence.

Finally, there is no leadership without the desire to occupy the leader's role, without aspirations or ambition. **Drive** is the very root of leadership, its most vital and energetic component. A manager driven solely by duty would neither inspire others to follow nor generate enthusiasm.

These five resources **interact systemically**, producing a specific kind of energy. Thus, a visionary leader with strong command and a powerful ambition to achieve objectives will embody a vertical form of leadership that shows the way forward. A relational, empathetic, and trusting leader, firmly committed to a clear direction, will offer a hybrid form of leadership - both vertical and horizontal - creating trust and psychological safety around them.



## Developing Self-Awareness as a Driver of Leadership

In coaching, the work focuses on identifying these resources and on how individuals mobilize them, in line with their own style and personal characteristics:

- **which resources are dominant** (for example, unconditional trust in others combined with a strong desire to fully step into the role),
- **which resources are less activated** (such as an underdeveloped vision, or limited effort to build connections with teams, resulting in a rather distant leadership style).

During the coaching session, the interconnections between resources, and the way they function as a system, are generally addressed quite naturally. For instance, in some leaders, the ability to exercise authority may be constrained by a still-strong need for closeness and relational connection.

The needs of the collective are, of course, taken into account: Do teams need more firmness and structure in response to an uncertainty? Or is the challenge to foster commitment to a more disruptive vision?

At this stage, the work culminates in initial decisions: which resources the leader wishes to mobilize more fully for their own development and for their teams, which resources they choose to emphasize less, and how, in practical terms, they will achieve a better balance to increase their impact.

This **reflection on doing** often opens up a **reflection on being**, as the roots of these resources - available in the present - may run deep. In light of the leader's upbringing and personal history, what does exercising command represent for them? How do they demonstrate authority? What do they believe in? How much trust do they put in others? Have certain experiences along their journey undermined that trust? This inquiry often brings to light long-standing limiting beliefs associated with emotional experiences.

Ultimately this deeper work leads to a redefinition: what kind of leader does the person want to be, and what do they want to embody? One CEO once told me: "Above all, I am a long-term builder, rational by nature, and in the short term, I allow poetry to enter my relationships with my teams, so I can feel them alongside me."

At times, societal - or even existential - dimensions come into play and help shape the leader's sense of legacy.

This work results in renewed and expanded self-awareness in relation to others, and in a new leadership project. These, in turn, generate:

- **stronger embodiment** of leadership and greater clarity in communication,
- **clarified expectations** toward the teams,
- **greater serenity** in the exercise of one's role.

The 5 Resources® Model conveys a Maslow-like logic: without the foundational anchors of leadership - its very sources - it is difficult to truly bring people along. One may work on speech quality, acquire techniques to foster buy-in, or use rhetoric to persuade, yet this will only produce the foam at the crest of the wave, not the energy of the entire wave.

### **What does leadership become in 2025, in the age of AI?**

Forms of leadership evolve alongside our societies and their models of authority. Since the COVID period, the needs of collectives within organizations have been calling for:

- **a more horizontal form of leadership**, centered on the ability to connect and federate energies, fostering collective intelligence,
- **alongside the enduring vertical leadership model**, aligned with a more traditional, top-down form, which provides a sense of security in uncertain contexts.

These two models coexist and continue to evolve. Leaders therefore need to adjust how they deploy their resources in order to exert sustainable influence, while continuously reassessing their alignment with the surrounding culture at each major phase of transformation.

With the rise of AI, deeper questions are emerging: Leaders and managers are asking themselves what their value proposition will be tomorrow. Will AI undermine their leadership by providing answers related to vision, strategy, or the future of roles and professions? Will AI demonstrate better listening skills, or even a form of empathy? In the Middle Ages, lords learned how to wield a sword; in 2025, leaders have a responsibility to learn how to wield AI.

Yet AI cannot contribute anything to the quality of the collective experience, which must be lived.

**In a world shaped by AI, leadership lies more than ever in the quality of the person** and their way of being, rather than in technical skills alone: genuine listening, sincere empathy, the ability to remain positive, the clarity of the psychological framework they provide, intuition, and the desire to move forward.

Another risk introduced by AI is the growing individualization within teams, as people retreat into tools in search of answers amid ongoing uncertainty. Tomorrow's leader therefore faces a major challenge: to develop the team as a living and powerful entity, and to mobilize collective intelligence - the only force that truly understands what the context requires. This will be achieved by trusting oneself, maintaining faith in people, and **mobilizing one's inner resources.**

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October 2025