

# The Paradox of Lean Leadership?

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Is there a juxtaposition between the application of Lean and the necessity for leadership? Why is Lean Leadership so very challenging? Well, the challenge here is between leaders who are put into a position with a responsibility to show the cause and effect of their efforts; but what if we are trying to get teams to work autonomously and try Lean in terms of having their own specific aims, objectives, etc? Get this right and they don't need direction from above! The leader becomes unnecessary! There is an interesting paradox here between how organisations are structured and the way they'd actually like to operate. This can often cause confusion and frustration to all involved.

Let's start with some simple definitions. The basic definition of Lean is to design systems or processes without anything other than the minimum amount of equipment or resource, which is absolutely essential to add value to a product or service. Leadership definitions tend to focus on what we can actually see, a badge of office, the status, how people behave and how they speak, what they do, how we note them. Formally, leadership is the thinking and decision making that actually make things happen through other people.

But there is a juxtaposition between running a Lean organisation where traditionally you take assets out of the system, which can disenfranchise people and de-motivate them. The challenge is how we then apply the 'correct' leadership skills to address aspects of organisational behaviour, people motivation, and the skill-sets in order to make them work

A desire for truly inspirational leaders is still valid because, if you optimise a process it will be fit for purpose today, perhaps the next week or month. But move forward into the next quarter and the business 'environment' may well be very, very different. This is where you need a senior team and good leaders. They have the role of providing strategic direction and purpose to inspire and move the business, team, and individual forward. An old, anonymous, Japanese quote states 'Vision without action is a day dream; action without vision is a nightmare'. Leadership therefore is the key!

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