

acas working
for everyone

Guidance

Leading people

February 2019



About Acas – What we do

Acas provides information, advice, training, conciliation and other services for employers and employees to help prevent or resolve workplace problems. Go to www.acas.org.uk for more details.

‘Should’

Throughout this guide, the word ‘should’ indicates what Acas considers to be good employment practice.

February 2019

Information in this guide has been revised up to the date of publication. For more information, go to the Acas website at www.acas.org.uk. Legal information is provided for guidance only and should not be regarded as an authoritative statement of the law. The particular circumstances of an individual case will always need to be taken into account. It may, therefore, be wise to seek legal advice.

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About this guide

This guide outlines the essential qualities, actions, considerations and implications associated with leadership using the Acas framework for effective leadership.

This guide is designed to be used alongside Acas guidance on managing people, which is available at www.acas.org.uk/managingpeople

This guide is intended to support people with leadership responsibilities at all levels of an organisation.

Understanding leadership

What is leadership?

Being a leader means being more than someone who manages people.

Effective leaders are followed, playing a critical role in the success of an organisation and becoming positive role models of behaviour. They inspire, encourage, motivate, mentor and trust.

A leader should:

- know rules and responsibilities
- communicate successfully
- shape the workplace culture
- develop a personal leadership style

Who has leadership responsibilities?

All managers are leaders.

The balance of leadership skills needed depends on factors like:

- is the person new to the organisation?
- have they been recently promoted?
- do they directly manage a team?
- what is their level of seniority?

For example, junior leaders usually need to spend more time on the rules, responsibilities and communicating successfully whilst senior leaders usually need to spend more time on the workplace culture and their personal leadership style.

Most staff have some level of leadership responsibility (because how they operate affects other people) but leadership is a more dominant and obvious role for managers, especially those who manage staff.

The Acas framework for effective leadership

Acas has developed a framework that helps leaders to focus on the key areas of leadership.

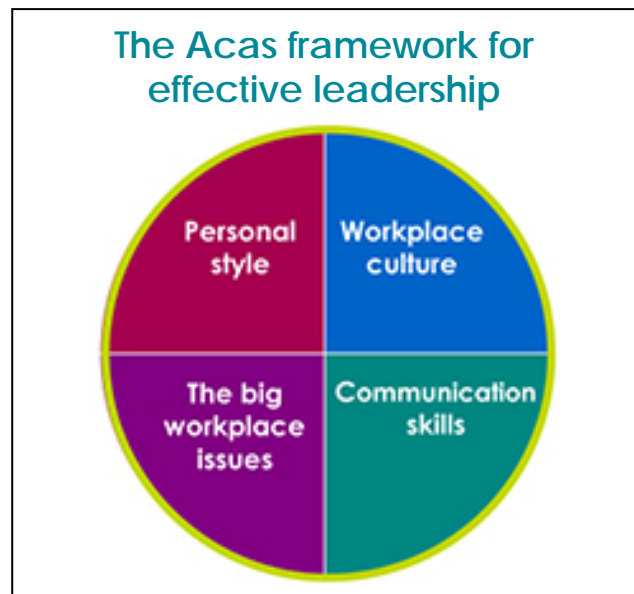
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These are:

- [Personal style](#)
- [Workplace culture](#)
- [Communication skills](#)
- [The big workplace issues](#)

This framework can help new and experienced leaders to:

- identify the balance of leadership skills needed in their current role
- recognise their leadership strengths
- develop themselves in the most important areas
- understand that how they lead can change when they switch roles



Changes in leadership style over time

All managers need the same leadership skills, behaviours and values.

However, their role or the level they work at will mean that some of these are more important (or used more often) than others.

When a manager changes to a new role, or gets promoted, the balance of leadership skills, behaviours and values they need will change. In part, this will also be influenced by the other leaders they interact with.

For example... New leader to experienced or more senior leader

A new leader may rely very heavily on their knowledge of the big workplace issues and only a little on their personal style. As they develop in their role, it is likely this balance will shift and their personal style will become their dominant skill.

It's important to be aware of changes like this so that leaders develop and improve their skills proportionately, enabling them to have the best impact and effect they can.

New leaders can be supported through their development by more experienced or senior leaders acting as coaches or mentors.

Leadership and productivity

Poor management practices and disengaged employees are major contributors to low levels of productivity and the UK productivity gap.

Acas has identified 'seven levers' to improve productivity:

1. Well designed work
2. Skilled line managers
3. Managing conflict effectively

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4. Clarity about rights and responsibilities
5. Fairness
6. Employee voice
7. High trust

Good leadership skills, behaviours and values help to support and drive these levers, which in turn help improve workplace productivity.

More information is available at www.acas.org.uk/productivity

Personal style

The role and level of responsibility a leader has is a big part of what will determine the leadership skills they need to use or develop.

But successful leadership also depends on individual style, character and personality – and the ability for a leader and their organisation to recognise and develop this.

A leader needs to be comfortable enough within their personal style so that they come across as genuine and can inspire, coach and mentor others.

Leaders should develop their personal style so they can:

- communicate a clear vision to their staff, colleagues, customers and stakeholders
- reach agreements by persuading, influencing, compromising and negotiating with others
- place and demonstrate their trust in others through collaboration and delegation, giving others support rather than micromanagement
- be recognised as reliable and trustworthy in their behaviours and actions
- demonstrate emotional intelligence when they interact with their staff and colleagues
- build resilience into themselves and their staff, particularly during times of change or conflict

Personal style can be developed in many ways, including:

- looking past satisfactory task completion to how personal style has challenged or helped a situation
- identifying important elements and techniques from the personal style of inspirational leaders and role models to use within the workplace
- seeking feedback from colleagues, mentors and team members to continuously critique and develop personal leadership style

What is emotional intelligence?

A leader's emotional intelligence is how good they are at recognising their own emotions, the emotions that others have and the impact on others. Emotions significantly impact the workplace through performance and productivity.

Leaders can use this information to help:

- guide their thinking
- guide their behaviour
- manage or adjust their emotions to specific situations
- achieve their goals
- have more effective difficult or challenging conversations

Workplace culture

A workplace culture refers to the wider environment, behaviour and ethos of a workplace. It is a critical part of what makes employees want to join or stay. A positive workplace culture can help develop a shared understanding of organisational goals and a common, collaborative drive to achieve them.

Workplace culture is shaped by many things, including:

- the sector or industry an organisation is based in
- workers, owners, trade unions, customers and stakeholders
- 'unwritten rules' or 'how things are here'
- an organisation's history and its vision for the future.

Leaders at all levels, equipped with the right leadership skills, can influence their workplace culture for the better in many different ways, such as:

- encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion
- ensuring that everyone is treated fairly and consistently
- showing compassion
- rewarding and recognising achievements
- supporting teamworking and organisational collaboration
- being fair and consistent when following, changing and communicating policies and procedures

A leader can be seen to 'fit in' to a workplace culture and help to shape it for the better at the same time.

Toxic workplace cultures

The cultures in some workplaces can feel 'toxic'. This is a subjective term and people can feel very differently about what is or is not toxic. However, indicators of a toxic workplace culture include:

- a high level of staff are leaving the organisation
- low employee engagement levels with staff scared to speak up
- high levels of absence
- high numbers of grievances, disciplinary procedures and employment tribunal claims
- internal procedures that are underused or untrusted

Leaders in a toxic workplace culture should:

- try to understand what is causing it
- work with their teams to agree standards of acceptable behaviour
- work with their teams to combat unacceptable behaviour, bullying, discrimination and harassment
- work with other leaders to achieve a greater impact. For example, a new senior manager might suggest new approaches, whilst an experienced junior manager might have first-hand experience of what has or has not worked previously

Communication skills

Communication skills are essential to any manager in almost anything they do. Communicating as a leader is different, but building on any existing expertise will help.

To **influence**, a leader should:

- put their own informed ideas across clearly and persuasively to other people
- switch 'management speak' into plain English that everyone can understand
- explain staff views to senior managers

To **liaise**, a leader should:

- work closely and proactively across the organisation
- collaborate and support colleagues in other teams and departments
- consult and negotiate with trade unions and employee representatives

To **engage**, a leader should:

- clearly understand, set out and commit to organisational and business goals
- give their employees a genuine voice
- communicate honestly in a way that builds trust and shows empathy

The value of listening

Research has shown that, by using the right skills, leaders can trigger 'positive discretionary behaviour' amongst their colleagues. An effective leader will consider the development of their listening skills as an integral part of this.

This includes:

- learning to listen carefully, patiently and actively
- finding the right time to listen (at a point where ideas can make a difference)
- providing an environment where people feel safe, valued and empowered to make suggestions

The big workplace issues

Being an effective workplace leader relies on a good and current understanding of the key employment issues that form the foundations of a successful organisation.

Absence

Leadership of **effective absence management** can include:

- developing an awareness of whether absences are increasing or decreasing and how these levels compare within the organisation, industry or region
- if there are any patterns or trends to absences, absence levels or absence frequencies (especially if they indicate a likely cause)
- understanding the reasons, implications, support options and management strategies for both short and long term absences
- collaborating across the organisation to help proactively manage and reduce absences through options like wellbeing programmes
- awareness of policies, legal and contractual rights surrounding absence, taking into account developments in case law (like holidays and sickness)

More information on managing absence is available at www.acas.org.uk/absence

Discipline and grievance

Leadership of **discipline and grievance** can include:

- an understanding of the value of managing conflict early and informally and the range of options this can include
- familiarity with all relevant policies and procedures, as well as the minimum standards set out in the statutory Acas Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures
- ensuring that any investigation is conducted fairly, swiftly, thoroughly, impartially and consistently no matter who is being investigated

More information on conducting workplace investigations is available at www.acas.org.uk/investigations

More guidance and information on the Acas Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures is available at www.acas.org.uk/dgcode

Health and wellbeing

Leadership of **health and wellbeing** can include:

- recognising the importance of supporting individual wellbeing and work-life balance, as well as the links between these, performance and productivity
- promoting positive mental health in the workplace and supporting staff experiencing mental ill health
- supporting staff with other health problems and disabilities
- detecting the signs and triggers of an unhealthy workplace and proposing and implementing steps to create change
- awareness of the latest legal developments and good practice approaches around specific health-related considerations like hot weather, reasonable adjustments and bereavement

More information on wellbeing is available at www.acas.org.uk/wellbeing

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More information on mental health is available at www.acas.org.uk/mentalhealth

Performance

Leadership of **performance** can include:

- taking a sensible and efficient approach to performance management that includes the development needs of individuals
- demonstrating personal use of processes and practices
- contributing to reviews of performance management and updating processes to meet evolving business and personal development goals
- recognising and managing the differing needs of underperforming, performing and overachieving staff
- understanding that performance management, employee capability and employee conduct are distinct but related matters

More information on managing performance can be found at www.acas.org.uk/performance

Current awareness

A leader cannot instantly know every solution to every situation they might face. However, an effective leader will have a well-rounded understanding of most big workplace issues, and a good understanding of how to find out further details as and when the need arises.

Leaders with effective **current awareness**:

- keep themselves up-to-date on key legal developments through options like network meetings, training, employment law updates, webinars, newsletters and email briefings
- are aware of all of their workplace policies and procedures and the importance of refreshing their knowledge of relevant areas before acting
- know and champion organisational values

Sign up to the free Acas email newsletter at www.acas.org.uk/subscribe

See the [further information](#) section for details of Acas resources and training across a range of employment rights and relations, including leadership.

Further information

Acas training

Training events, based on the Acas Framework for Effective Leadership, are available across Great Britain.

The events are designed to make good leadership more understandable and to provide practical tips and skills that delegates can take back and use in their workplace. By the end of the event delegates will understand:

- The business case for investing in leaders at all levels of the organisation
- Aspects of the different theories of leadership that best apply to the modern world of work

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- The four levels of the 'Acas Framework for Effective Leadership' and how these apply to you, your team and your organisation
- How to apply the principles of effective leadership to small and large-scale challenges at work
- What kind of leader you are and any skills gaps you might need to address
- How to create an action plan for improvement.

[View training event listings](#)

[Contact Acas to ask about running this training in-house](#)

Acas guidance

Guidance across a wide range of employment topics can be found at www.acas.org.uk/a-z

Further resources on leadership can be found at www.acas.org.uk/leadership

More information on front line managers and managing people can be found at www.acas.org.uk/managingpeople

More information on managing performance can be found at www.acas.org.uk/performance

More information on wellbeing is available at www.acas.org.uk/wellbeing

More information on mental health is available at www.acas.org.uk/mentalhealth

More information on conducting workplace investigations is available at www.acas.org.uk/investigations

More information on the Acas Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures is available at www.acas.org.uk/dgcode

More information on managing absence is available at www.acas.org.uk/absence

More information on productivity is available at www.acas.org.uk/productivity

Keep up-to-date and stay informed

Visit www.acas.org.uk for:

- free employment relations and employment law guidance
- tools and resources including free-to-download templates, forms and checklists
- an introduction to other Acas services including mediation, conciliation, training, arbitration and the Acas Early Conciliation service
- research and discussion papers on the UK workplace
- details of Acas training courses, conferences and events.

Sign up for the free Acas e-newsletter. The Acas email newsletter is a great way of keeping up to date with changes to employment law and to hear about events in your area. Find out more at: www.acas.org.uk/subscribe

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Acas Helpline Online. Have a question? We have a database of frequently asked employment queries that has been developed to help both employees and employers. It is an automated system designed to give you a straightforward answer to your employment questions, and also gives links to further advice and guidance on our website: www.acas.org.uk/helplineonline

Acas Helpline. Call the helpline for free and impartial advice on 0300 123 1100. We can provide employers and employees with clear and confidential guidance about any kind of dispute or relationship issue in the workplace. You may want to know about employment rights and rules, best practice or may need advice about a dispute. Whatever it is, our team are on hand. Find out more:

www.acas.org.uk/helpline

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Twitter - <http://twitter.com/acasorguk>

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