THE MENTAL MUSINGS

The Psychological Research Newsletter

Think leadership is only for those in senior roles? In reality, leadership is for everyone — no matter your position. So how can you build your leadership skills, and what support does ICA offer? Read on to find out!

Introduction

When we think of leaders, it is likely that presidents, directors or commanders come to mind. It is true that these conventional leaders play an important role in leading departments and making big decisions that affect us. However, leadership can be exhibited by anyone, in any rank and job title.

Therefore, in this article, we will first explain how leadership is for everyone. Next, we will learn about different types of leadership styles and introduce the ICA Leadership Competency Framework (ILCF) along with relevant case studies. Lastly, as always, we will conclude with some key reflections.

Leadership is for Everyone

Take a moment to consider the qualities you value in a leader, such as effective communication, strong problem-solving skills, and empathy for others. These traits are not exclusive to those in formal leadership positions. In fact, they are essential competencies that everyone in the workplace should develop. For example, you may be expected to:

- confidently present your project to stakeholders
- make independent decisions on the best course of action
- practise self-care by using healthy coping strategies

These skills evolve throughout your career and are applicable across various context, from managing yourself, to mentoring others, to leading teams. Leadership is not defined by a job title; it is reflected in your work ethic, team support and professional growth.

Self-Leadership

At the heart of effective leadership is self-leadership - the ability to manage yourself and your performance to achieve personal and professional goals. There are three key strategies to strengthen self-leadership.

Behavioural Strategies

Planning and goal-setting help ensure that tasks are completed efficiently. One useful tool is the **Eisenhower Matrix** (refer to the image on the right), which helps prioritises tasks based on urgency and importance. Do refer to Issue 8 of The Mental Musings for more details.

Cognitive Strategies

Adopting a constructive mindset strengthens your mental resilience. For instance, replace negative self-talk (e.g. "I am not good enough") with **growth-oriented thinking** (e.g. "I can grow by learning from my mistakes"). This approach equips you to handle workplace challenges more effectively and promotes personal development.

Motivational Strategies

It's natural to feel disengaged when dealing with tedious and unpleasant tasks. You can boost motivation by setting small **rewards** after a period of focused work or by reminding yourself of the **broader impact** your efforts have on others.

Leadership Styles

Your workplace skills and leadership qualities, like those mentioned above, shape your personal leadership style. One widely used model is **Goleman's Six Leadership Styles**, which outlines six different approaches to leading others.

Coercive

Demands immediate compliance; often used in crises but can dampen morale if overused.

Authoritative

Mobilises people toward a clear vision; motivates by explaining the "why."

Pacesetting

Sets high performance standards and expects others to follow; best with self-motivated teams.

Affiliative
Builds emotional bonds; prioritises team harmony, morale, and relationships.

Democratic
Encourages team participation and values input; leads by consensus.

Coaching
Develops people for the long term; focuses on strengths and areas for growth.

Effective leaders rarely rely on just one leadership style. Instead, they adapt their leadership approach depending on the context and needs of the team.

Let's put your understanding to the test. Can you identify the most appropriate leadership style for each scenario below? (Answers are at the end of the article!)

1. Scenario 1: Mentoring a new team member to familiarise them with a new system
2. Scenario 2: Setting expectations for experienced team members on a complex project
3. Scenario 3: Responding to a terrorist attack at Changi Airport

ILCF and Leadership in Action

While understanding leadership styles is helpful, how can they be applied within ICA's unique operating context? The ICA Leadership Competency Framework (ILCF), developed by IPD, provides a clear and practical guide to what leadership looks like for ICA officers. It was developed with your specific roles and responsibilities in mind.
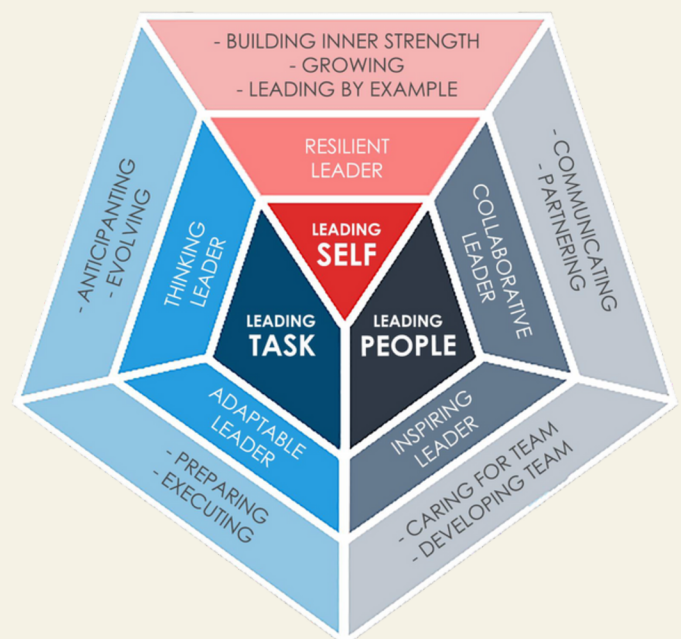
The ILCF outlines 3 key leadership areas:
- Leading Self
- Leading People
- Leading Task

These are supported by 5 leadership domains:
- Resilient
- Collaborative
- Inspiring
- Adaptable
- Thinking

Together, these domains encompass 11 core leadership competencies that officers at every level should develop. Refer to the ILCF pentagon on the right for the full structure.

So, what does this look like in action? Below are three case studies that illustrate how ICA officers embody these leadership behaviours in their daily work.

Case Study 1 (Leading Self, Building Inner Strength)

The Building Inner Strength competency involves practising self-care, and demonstrating resilience and perseverance. Christine, who works at Airport Command, shares how she maintains resilience.

At Airport Command, I interact with difficult members of the public daily. To remain professional, I stay composed by trying to understand their situation — many are likely genuine travellers feeling anxious or stressed from travelling. After work, I recharge through family time and exercise, which helps me return to each shift feeling refreshed.

Case Study 2 (Leading People, Caring for Team)

The Caring for Team competency reflects a leader's ability to build rapport, show empathy, and support staff through challenges. Shreya, a Director, shares how she supported her team during a period of transformation.

"With changing work processes creating uncertainty, I focus on staff morale by providing clear direction. For instance, I actively listen to my middle managers' challenges in balancing staff needs with leadership expectations to ensure the team gets the support they need."

Case Study 3 (Leading Task, Executing)

The Executing competency highlights a leader's ability to act decisively and solve problems in operational settings. Aiman, a team leader at Tuas Command, reflects on managing a critical incident.

"When a driver attempted a dash-through at a car booth, I reacted immediately by instructing an officer to hit the panic button. As a Team Leader, I must respond decisively and lead firmly during crises to ensure our response is effective."

Final Thoughts

Regular reflection on your strengths and areas for growth is a key part of self-leadership. It allows you to identify gaps in your competencies and take ownership of your growth, for instance, by enrolling in relevant courses via platforms like the LEARN app, SkillsFuture SG or the Civil Service College Course Portal.

In addition to these, here are some ICA-specific resources to support your leadership development:

- **North Star chatbot** (available on PAIR) - developed by Training Command
  - Offers information on the ILCF and recommended leadership courses
- **IPD's Psy Hub** (stay tuned for more information about the upcoming website!)
  - A one-stop platform featuring leadership resources for officers at all levels

While developing yourself, you can also shape ICA's leadership culture by modelling effective leadership behaviours and providing constructive feedback to your peers. Participating in 360 leadership feedback exercises contributes to a culture of shared growth, helping leaders find their habits to better support their team.

Ultimately, leadership begins with self-awareness and intentional growth. By reflecting on your own leadership journey and taking steps toward improvement, you play a vital role in fostering a healthier, more effective workplace, not just for yourself, but for your colleagues and leaders too.

Answers for scenario-based questions on leadership styles:

1. **Coaching**: When developing and supporting individuals, a coaching leader focuses on helping them grow and improve over time. This is ideal for onboarding and skill-building.
2. **Pacesetting**: With experienced staff, a pacesetting leader can set high standards and expect autonomy. This style works best when the team is already competent and motivated.
   a. Alternatively, leaders can be **Authoritative** to align the team under a clear strategic vision.
3. **Coercive**: In an emergency or crisis, rapid action is needed. A coercive leader demanding compliance and clear direction is most appropriate for this scenario.

References

Knight, R. (2024, April 9). 6 Common Leadership Styles — and How to Decide Which to Use When. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2024/04/6-common-leadership-styles-and-how-to-decide-which-to-use-when

Reichard, E. A., Smith, D. J., Reichard, R. J., & Houghton, J. D. (2025). Advancing the Construct of Self-Leadership: A Bibliometric review. Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies. https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518251316085

Woods, S. A., Napiersky, U., & Rivkin, W. (2022). Learning to self-lead: Examining self-leadership strategies, personality traits and learning attainment. Applied Psychology, 72(3), 1324–1338. https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12422

Wong, A. & Briggs, M. (2024). Leadership skills are essential for everyone. Defense Acquisition Magazine. https://www.dau.edu/library/damag/january-february2024/leadership-skills-are-essential-everyone