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True Amplifiers

Leaders, Bosses, Followers, and Subordinates

The key to unlocking organizational success lies in discovering and deploying the Amplifiers in your company. Amplifiers know how to increase the impact for all key stakeholders through the power of example and by bringing out the best in their colleagues who surround them. These Amplifiers have the power to turn up the volume to enable transformation efforts to be successful or to affect the positive change that a company is seeking for long-term and sustainable health.

Leadership and followership are compared to each other as if they are two different sides of the same coin. Common thinking suggests someone is *either* a leader *or* a follower. We don't often see them as two separate dimensions on differing axes. When we juxtapose leaders and bosses on the one axis, and subordinates and followers on the other, we see a different view on effectiveness. Amplifiers exist at the intersection of great leadership and great followership. When deployed effectively throughout the organization, they magnify the power of the teams that they are either assigned to or with whom they interact.

For the purposes of this book, we use the following definitions to frame the discussion. You will notice that our definitions, especially that of leader, differ from the common search definition on

Google, “the person who leads or commands a group, organization, or country.”¹

Our analysis does not focus on job performance skills or proficiency of the individuals. Our work focuses on the leadership and followership attitudes that drive employee engagement and create long-term differentiated and sustainable cultures. We assume that the capabilities of the individual workers are that they are trained, competent, and perform the expected job duties commensurate with their position. We recognize this is not always the case, but that is not in the scope of our analysis.

Leader	<i>A person who uses their influence, example, or persuasion to cause others to follow them</i>
Titled Executive/Boss	<i>A person who is in charge of or commands a group, team, or function</i>
Follower	<i>A person who willingly goes along with and accepts direction from a leader</i>
Subordinate	<i>A person lower in rank or position who complies with directives of a superior</i>

In this book, we make an important distinction between leaders and bosses, but not simply by juxtaposing leadership skills with management skills. Instead, we view leaders and bosses (or titled executives) as different ends of the same leadership continuum. They may hold the exact same job title and have the same responsibilities, but they may operate on different ends of the leadership continuum. Similarly, we view followers and subordinates as two ends to the followership continuum. Leaders are usually also bosses, and followers are usually subordinate to their leaders. The distinguishing factors that push them to one end of the continuum or the other are their individual styles, motives, and traits. These dynamics drive how they interact with others to get work done.

Most people think about leadership and followership as two ends of a continuum. However, in Figure 1.1, we show a matrix of

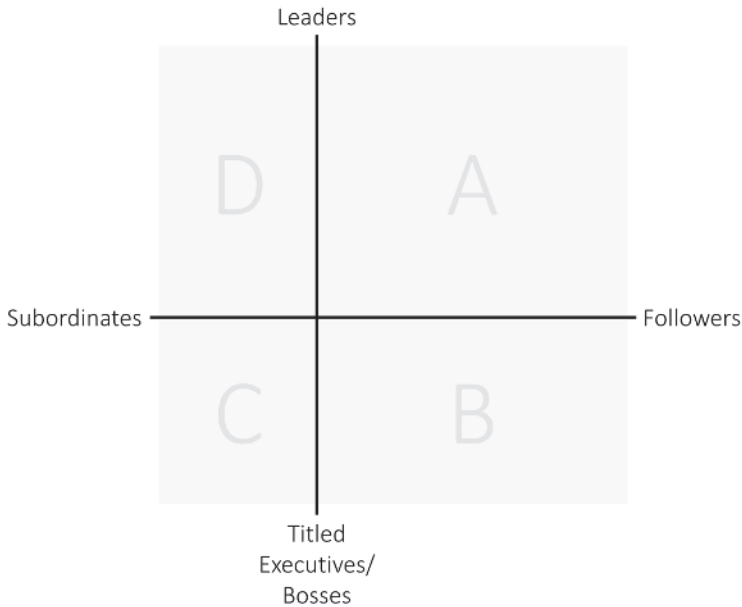


FIGURE 1.1 Leaders, Titled Executives/Bosses, Followers, and Subordinates

leadership and followership behaviors. For the purposes of uncovering and discovering true Amplifiers in an organization, we map leaders and bosses on the same continuum on the vertical axis. We also map followers and subordinates on the same continuum on the horizontal axis. Note the intersection is slightly off-center because most organizations have a higher concentration of leaders and followers.

It is important to note that the actual job function of the person at the top of an organization or function does not differ on the continuum of leaders and bosses. In fact, the activities are the same. We also assume for the purpose of Figure 1.1 that individuals performing their roles are competent; the figure does not evaluate performance but the style in which they carry out their role. What does differ and, in fact, differs significantly, is the style in which they carry out their core job functions. It is the same for followers and subordinates.

Followers and subordinates alike have work to do to complete their daily activities. How they conduct themselves and interact with their colleagues to get that work done is significantly different. The style and the nature of how they approach their work in the context of the broader organization and mission are what sets followers apart from subordinates.

One of the things that is amazing to me is the number of people who share with me their frustration when a colleague who has been promoted to be their boss lacks the requisite leadership skills. These individuals have excelled in their work product, have been exceptional employees, have demonstrated their ability to produce outstanding work, and seem to always reliably get the job done. They possess project planning skills, risk analysis, and the ability to budget and track status. But many times, an individual who possesses these functional subject matter expertise and perhaps even managerial expertise is recognized as a star worker, yet their peers on the team will not follow their lead. When the individual is promoted, the other team members shrug their shoulders in disbelief and commiserate with each other that they will now need to take direction from this newly promoted boss.

Why is it that some people amass followers and others do not? It's easy to spot a leader; just look for their followers. This is very different than looking for a manager and spotting their subordinates. For all the literature on leadership, there is very little that gets after the root cause to know why some people earn followers and some never will. Leaders have found ways to engage and inspire followers that may not exist in mere managers or bosses. Leaders need followers. Yet many leaders don't always understand the reason why their followers follow. Leaders may employ various methods to get work done, two of which are position power and influence. Leaders use these tools at different times for different types of work that needs to be done.

Position power stems from the formal authority vested in the leader simply because of their position in the organization's hierarchy.

Position power enables the leader to force others to take action. It can be extremely effective at getting a lot of work done in a short period of time. Many leaders rely on position power when prompt action needs to occur or when they know they need some quick wins in order to gain broader momentum throughout the organization. But getting work done through position power is not sustainable as a long-term leadership strategy because it generally leads to resentment and disengagement by followers.

Conversely, leaders who rely on influence to get work done by their followers are able to use persuasion to convince the follower to take action. Influence is most effective when the leader has already established a strong relationship with the follower. The follower in turn trusts and respects the leader. This can be motivational for followers. Influence is far more sustainable because influence is the fuel for the engine of followership.

When you are the boss, people think you have followership. What you actually have are people executing orders or following your directions. Tim Hassinger, former CEO of Dow AgroSciences, shared with me one of his secret strategies for checking himself as he progressed throughout his career. “Leaders need to challenge themselves frequently. Honestly ask yourself: do they listen to me because I had a good idea or because I am the boss?” It’s critical, especially for new bosses, to sit back and honestly self-assess this question. Everyone who gets promoted has typically received positive affirmation throughout their career. After being promoted to a position that oversees a team, department, business unit, or organization, leaders need to step back and have a regular method for self-appraisal by asking this key question.

Although challenging, the best organizations are able to differentiate between subordinates carrying out the boss’s directions and followers who are genuinely inspired by their leader. Most evaluation systems and performance review processes do an excellent job on the measurable elements of job performance. Many have attempted to uncover or discover leadership traits and how they may apply to

the individual, which can be fraught with implicit or explicit bias. However, few organizations evaluate or emphasize followership. In order for us to more fully understand leadership, we need to better understand followership. This is important because an Amplifier exists at the intersection of leadership and followership.

Let's look back at Figure 1.1. In quadrant A, we have the special blend of an organization that has leadership and followership. When companies and their corporate culture display behaviors that exist in this quadrant, they produce extraordinary results. The other interesting attribute about quadrant A is that here leaders and followers create legions of leaders and followers throughout the organization. When the flywheel is moving in this quadrant, organizations tend to dominate their markets.

The secret to how great leaders magnify the power of teams, increase the impact of organizations, and turn up the volume on positive change rests in unlocking these operating styles of the cream of the crop of the employee base in companies. The prized intersection of top-performing leaders and the top-performing followers are what we call *Amplifiers*. True Amplifiers are the key group of people in any company who activate the true potential of all stakeholders. Remember, employees can be in any quadrant regardless of their level within the company.

In Figure 1.2, true Amplifiers exist in upper right of quadrant A. These individuals possess the unique combination of leadership and followership skills. They are able to separate the flash leadership behaviors with the lasting leadership behaviors. They stand up and lead up, not just down and across. True Amplifiers have the ability to speak truth to power and influence leaders to change course. Great companies are unceasingly searching and developing Amplifiers throughout the organization regardless of title, tenure, or position.

On a bitterly cold and windy night in the fourth quarter of 2018, I had the opportunity to meet former Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick. My partner and I had spent a long day at Bain Capital's Boston

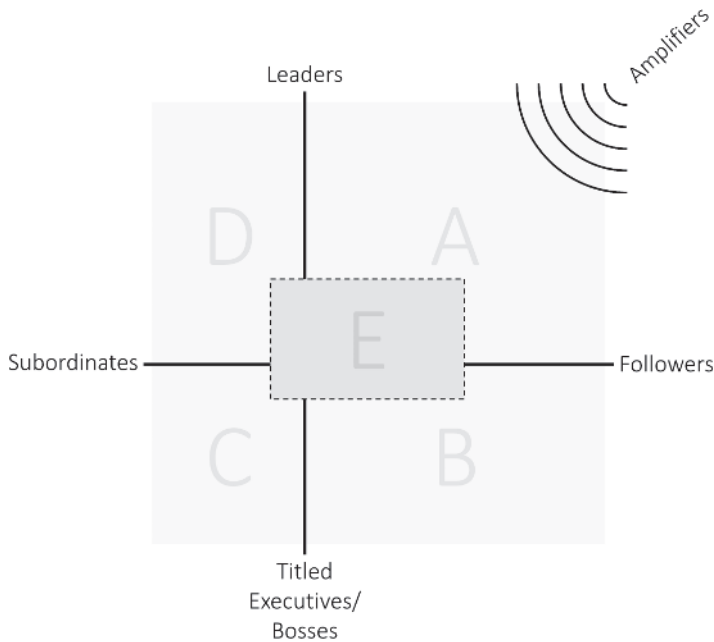


FIGURE 1.2 True Amplifiers

headquarters negotiating the sale of one of our businesses. Patrick had a long list of accomplishments during his eight-year term as governor of Massachusetts. His key priorities were to expand affordable health care, launch initiatives to stimulate clean energy and biotechnology, invest in education, and guide the state through economic crisis to a 25-year high in employment. After he left office, Patrick joined Bain Capital to help launch an impact investing fund. This innovative new fund—Bain Capital Double Impact—is designed to invest in mission-driven companies that target social good, while also generating impressive returns for investors. This chapter in his private work life was an amplification of his belief that private companies can be a force for public good.

I learned through our conversations that what makes Patrick himself a strong leader is that he is an exemplary follower. Over the years, he has been focused on effecting change and is driven by a higher purpose. The combination of competitive spirit and will to

succeed coupled with positive examples from some remarkable leaders he has served have created the true Amplifier qualities that he so effectively embodies. One of the nicest things that his team said about him when he left the justice department was that when it was time to sign off on a case from the civil rights department, the section leader would present, and Patrick would go around the table and ask everyone for input. Even if a paralegal was there, he'd ask them what ideas they had. It wasn't something they were accustomed to. But he was constantly learning and got so much more out of the team by engaging each of them that he magnified their impact. Patrick had the humility to be a good leader, to subordinate his ego and pull ideas out of the team. He railed at the "imperial CEO," whose feet never touched the ground, everything was looked after for them, and they lost sight of the implications of the decisions and impact to stakeholders because they were shielded from reality.

Quadrant B is an interesting quadrant insofar as it is composed of strong followers who lack leadership skills. For teams that report to executives in Quadrant B, true Amplifiers are critically important. The followers need to shore up the leadership gaps of their bosses in order to lead the team to achieve its mission and purpose. Organizations can be incredibly successful, even lack the institutional leadership, if they have followership en masse. I've seen firsthand over the years some very successful companies with great brands or products that have had marginal leaders at the top but have had outstanding key lieutenant followers in executive positions. These organizations, or functions within an organization, outlive the titled executive or boss. Followers and true Amplifiers can coexist with bosses or non-leaders in a particular function, but they are motivated and motivate others for a variety of reasons. In some cases, it's the higher purpose of the company. In other cases, it may be their career aspirations. But over time, they will need to have superiors who are higher on the leadership scale or they will self-select to another area within the company or outside the company altogether.

Quadrant C is much more problematic. However, a number of companies exist with a large employee population in quadrant C.

Quadrant C is where incremental progress occurs. Many companies can still be effective in the short run. This quadrant is full of low-profile companies operating at a baseline level of performance. In some cases, they operate in product or service sectors that are fully mature. These companies are rich acquisition targets due to their lack of revenue growth, operating performance, and steady cash flows. Alternatively, companies that exist in this quadrant were once high-flyers and have grown significantly but have evolved into a style of incremental management. They are too big to be acquired or too far beyond the ability to affect positive change. They have become large zombie companies.

Quadrant D is the most precarious. In this quadrant, there is strong leadership, potentially flash leadership in an organization filled with individuals who will carry out the tasks. Think of the individuals at Tyco in the procurement or accounts payable department who were responsible for buying and paying the bill for CEO Dennis Kozlowski's gold toilet seat or the toga party for his wife's birthday. In this example, there is a strong cultlike personality at the top job of the company. He had enough leadership, at least temporarily, to influence subordinates to engage in his outrageous behavior.

Another example is the GE travel team who allowed Jeffrey Immelt to have a backup jet available on each of his travel visits so that he would not be delayed. The enablement of these cultlike celebrity CEOs is the antithesis of good followership. Quadrant D is littered with bankrupt companies or companies that have fallen from grace. It is in this quadrant where more shareholder, employee, and societal damage occurs than anywhere else. Other traps in this quadrant consist of serial acquisitions with marginal payoffs. With this strategy, CEOs are often heralded in the media as rock stars because of the growth of the companies they have been tasked to manage. But debt and goodwill swells resulting in a magnified risk in the balance sheet. In a low-interest-rate environment, the strategy can be pursued for some time. Inevitably though, companies that pursue this strategy run out of runway and they crash and burn. One disastrous example

was the strategic pursuit of Valeant Pharmaceuticals from 2008 to 2016 under the direction of CEO Michael Pearson. His rampant buying spree was a terrible long-term strategy, although his methods artificially propped up the stock price for a short and unsustainable period of time.

Obviously, it's not as simple as individuals existing in a particular quadrant for all the roles they play within the company. Most of what we do needs to interoperate among the many hats we wear when executing our jobs. For example, an executive vice president in an organization clearly needs to have strong leadership skills *and* strong followership skills. They may be responsible for leading geographic regions, strategic business units, or major operational functions. Despite these clear responsibilities, they are also a subordinate follower to their leaders. This dynamic highlights how closely aligned leadership and followership are and, when combined, can produce extraordinary results.

Simply because an individual or company exists in a particular quadrant does not mean they will stay there indefinitely. We've seen companies drift or change over time. It is usually the case when there is a major change in strategic direction, market conditions, shareholder activism, or CEO succession. This leads us to dig deeper to understand what the characteristics are for individuals in each of the quadrants. It also leads us to understand leading indicators that may demonstrate movement between the quadrants.