Are You a Level-Six Leader?

Published: July 6, 2011
Author: Mitch Maidique

The central, most telling question to ask a leader is, whom do you serve?

Some leaders will tell you, using a popular descriptor, that they aspire to be "servant leaders." The question still remains, however, a servant to whom: to yourself, to your group, or to society (to cite three of several options)?

Asking the question whom do you serve? is a powerful vector on which to build a useful typology of leadership. Based on this idea, I have constructed a six-level Purpose-Driven Model of Leadership informed by the work of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and his colleague, Robert Kegan (see table 1). The answer to the question whom do you serve often reveals more about leaders than knowing their personality traits, level of achievement, or whether they were "transformational" or "transactional" leaders.

Level One: Sociopath

At the base of the model is the person who literally serves no one: the Sociopath. The Sociopath, afflicted with what the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) describes as antisocial personality disorder, exhibits abnormally low empathy and destroys value, himself, and, ultimately, those who surround him as well. (I use the male pronoun because the vast majority of Sociopaths and psychopaths are male.) Fortunately, Sociopaths comprise less than 1 percent of the population. An excellent current example is Muammar Gaddafi, who is destroying his country, his tribe, his family, and, in time, himself. Indeed, he serves no one. The same was true of Adolf Hitler and Saddam Hussein.

Level Two: Opportunist

The second level is the leader who serves only himself or herself, often at the expense of others: the Opportunist. These are the people who always ask, "What's in it for me?" Their moral compass is guided primarily by the accumulation of wealth and power, all else be damned. Bernie Madoff, now in prison, is a poster boy for the Opportunists. While Madoff enjoyed the luxuries of a life of wealth and power, hundreds if not thousands of retirees saw their nest eggs evaporate because of their unwitting participation in a deliberately contrived Ponzi scheme that, in time, became the largest ($50 billion) in Wall Street history. By this measure, or in terms of the families brought to financial ruin, Madoff remains one of the modern world's greatest Opportunists. Also of this genre, although somewhat lesser known, is Jeffrey Skilling, the Enron CEO who sold off tens of millions of dollars of stock just before Enron filed for bankruptcy, claiming he had no knowledge of the scandal that would engulf his company. He was sentenced to 24 years and four months in prison.
Level Three: Chameleon

At the next level sits Chameleons. These are the "leaders" who bend with the wind and strive to please as many people as possible at all times. In some cases this could be the group they work with; in other cases, the regional or national electorate. It is difficult to find renowned corporate leaders who fit this category because in business, typically, the Chameleons are weeded out before they reach the top. The world of politics is another matter. Many politicians fall into this category. Those who follow presidential politics will remember Senator John Kerry (D-MA), who was pilloried as a "flip-flopper" after explaining a vote regarding the Iraq war: "I actually did vote for the [authorization bill] before I voted against it." In Florida, former governor Charlie Crist changed colors so often that it was difficult to know with precision where he stood on any given issue, from climate change to which party, if any, he really belonged to.

There is a natural cleavage between the model's first three levels described above and the next three levels. There is not much to celebrate about the first three levels, although certainly levels two and three abound in organizations. There's much more to admire in levels four, five, and six.

Level Four: Achiever

The level-four leader, the Achiever, fills the senior executive ranks. These leaders rarely fail to achieve their goals and often exceed sales quotas, create generous profits, and are frequent stars at merit-award dinners. The Achiever, to use Peter Drucker's felicitous phrase, is often a "monomaniac with a mission" and is focused, energetic, results-oriented, and highly prized by top management. Achievers pursue goals established by their bosses or by themselves, in a single-minded manner. Therein lies the Achilles' heel of Achievers: They drive toward a goal without giving much consideration to the broader mission. Former Hewlett-Packard CEO Mark Hurd is an excellent example of a level-four leader. Under his watch HP's stock price more than doubled, but he decimated the infrastructure and intellectual seed corn (R&D) of the company to do so. By simply cutting R&D to a level of about 2.5 percent of revenue, down from 6 percent during the 1990s, the Carly Fiorina/Mark Hurd team "saved" HP about $4 billion—about the equivalent of half the profits earned during Hurd's last year. HP's once formidable technological and product strength was slowly sapped away. When I asked Dave Packard in the early 1980s what accounted for HP's extraordinary run he modestly replied, "I guess we found a way to make a better product." Where are those better products today? Referring to one of HP's most visible new product initiatives, the TouchPad, a late entry into the iPad dominated tablet space, a senior HP executive reportedly told the Wall Street Journal, "We know we're the fifth man in a four-man race." In their drive towards a goal, Achievers often substitute the needs of the whole with their personal striving to succeed.

Level Five: Builder

The level-five leader, the Builder, strives not to reach a goal but to build an institution. Builders are legendary leaders such as IBM’s Tom Watson Jr., GM’s Alfred P. Sloan, and Harpo's Oprah Winfrey. These people serve their institutions by managing for the long term and not allowing themselves to be seduced by the twin mirages of short-term profit or stock market valuations. They have a grand vision for the future of their organizations, and they infect others with their energy, enthusiasm, and integrity. These are the leaders we write books about, study, try to understand, and lionize.

Level Six: Transcendent
Builders are few and far between, but there is an even rarer type of leader who transcends the Builder: the Transcendent. Level-six leaders transcend their political party, their ethnic or racial group, and even their institutions. They focus on how to benefit all of society. These are "global citizens," in the words of Howard Gardner's recent book, *Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed*, who watch out not only for numero uno but for the wider public as well. There is no better example of what it really takes to be a Transcendent than the first black president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. He was able to soar above hatred for his white jailers, the political tug of the African National Congress, the pull of his racial and tribal group, and the rejection by the Afrikaners to build a South Africa for all South Africans. Now in his 90s, he is perhaps the world's greatest living leader.

Like Martin Luther King Jr., Mandela wanted people to be judged by the "content of their character rather than the color of their skin." The Dalai Lama, another Transcendent, told me that the first thing he does in the morning after he finishes his prayers is to ask himself, "How can I help to make the world better today?" Imagine if our senior political and business leaders started their day by asking that question and acting on the answer.

**Portfolio mix**

No one is a pure Transcendent or a pure Opportunist. Rather, we are all a portfolio of the different types with one type being dominant. Even the Dalai Lama has to deal with the pull of his emotions when he makes decisions. And Madoff did his best to shield his wife and sons when he confessed his grand scheme to the FBI.

Figure 1 graphically illustrates what the portfolio of levels might look like for a 35-year-old executive. This picture, however, is not static. Man is capable, though not always assured, of continuing moral development. The sense or the meaning we give to our life at 60 may be considerably different than how we see life at 30.

The levels we propose, though not linear, are in a general way a path to what Erik Erickson calls generativity and integrity. Helping leaders to find their own path and follow it should be the ultimate goal of a leadership development program.

![Figure 1: Profile for a Young Professional (35)](image)

**About the author**

**Modesto A. Maidique**
is a visiting professor at Harvard Business School. He is Professor of Management and executive director of the Center for Leadership in the College of Business Administration at Florida International University. He developed and serves
as director of the university's Leading Decisions Executive Leadership Development Program.

Reader Comments:

Very neat typology! Has it been tested empirically? If not, is there a way to do so?
Anonymous

1. Thank you for this clear model; the question you've posed at the heart of the model may appear innocuous to some, but is a searingly powerful one: "a servant to whom: to yourself, to your group, or to society?" It certainly connects with my 30 or so years of experience with functional and dysfunctional leaders of non-profit/ngo charitable organizations, government ministries and departments and private for profit companies.

I particularly appreciate the distinctions between the Achievers, Builders and Transcendents - the categories represent ever increasing levels of challenge in achieving true servant leadership in the face of higher levels of external pressures that require great commitment and clarity of values about who you serve and why. I've certainly faced and continue to face those challenges .

I also appreciate the acknowledgement of the aggregious styles of leadership captured in the Sociopath, Opportunist and Chameleon categories - these are very real in my observations; more widely distributed across all sectors than many would care to acknowledge (though generally in the minority) and can cause very serious harm as you've noted.

Gerard Bremault
CEO
The Centre for Child Development of the Lower Mainland

2. As somebody who is - at best - a level 4, this definitely gives me something to aspire to.

That could just be the achiever in me speaking though...

Jeremy

3. Thank you for this post. It is good to know that we have all 6 traits but it would be great to figure out a way to identify one's dominant leadership trait as not all people are able to do this for themselves. I
believe that would also help a whole lot.

E. Nyoreme Nakpodia
Founder/CEO
Nyoremes Inc

5. Its amazing how 45% of the model still rise to the top - in spite of their self serving profiles. After several decades of advising top and senior managers I am sad to report that the article looks to be right on target. One out of two top leaders look well suited to their jobs - the rest are surprisingly self centered. Short term results continue to serve as drivers for this group. Good article. Thanks.

Ed Bantlow
Founder
ExecWorth

6. This is a tremendous article. I can appreciate the idea of the levels not being static. We are always able to change and further develop our leadership skills.

Jeffrey Knkoche
Chief Operating Officer
Next Level Recruits L.L.C.

7. Interesting post. I am curious about the research / theoretical basis for your typology.

Having recently been much persuaded by a similar but different model of levels of leadership - Leadership Agility (book by this title by Bill Joiner and Stephen Josephs) - I wonder how you see your model aligning with theirs. There seems to me to be a degree of overlap, so would love to see your rendition of the similarities and differences between the two.

Vicki Macleod
Director
Performance By Design

8. Good article (models) on how leaders get changed by their age, experience and influence.

Transforming, Transitional and Transactional.

Mahesh
Business man

9. Do you have an instrument that identifies an individual's current leadership style according to your model (1,2,3, 4,5,6.)? What would be your definition of leadership as it would apply to business organizations, political positions, organized religions, etc. How do you feel your model compares to the Jim Collins book "Good to Great" and his "Level 5" leadership model? Some researchers feel leadership is not a position but a process involving the leader, the followers and the situation. What kind of a developmental intervention would you propose to bring an individual from a 1 or 2 level to a 6? I feel in order to make leadership research more relevant for real- word payoffs we still have a long ways to go before it will live up to all the hype.

Dick Meza Interaction & Associates
10. Given the pervasiveness of Level 5 Leadership from Good to Great by Jim Collins, I fear your model will just confuse a discipline already on overload from too many models. Further, Greenleaf was quite clear about what he meant by servant leadership.

Anonymous

11. Thanks Mitch for this model, highly memorable.

May I ask if the first five levels are equivalent to that in Jim Collin's book "Good to Great"?

Also, do you have evidence that level 6 leaders generate more sustainable value to a company (tangible + intangible) and its shareholders than level 5? (Intuitively I would expect level 6 leaders to generate more value to communities at large).

Charles Sorensson

12. This article has answered some of my doubts. Thanks. It also gives a hope that we can change.

Anonymous

13. The typology is very elegant!

I had a question: Do some businesses and organizations, by their very nature, require more of one leadership type than the other?

For example, if the business itself is self-serving, is hort-sighted, or is unethical is some way, will say Builder or Transcendent qualities support the business / organization to become better - or will the leader be a misfit and eventually drop off?

(I can recall a situation from my experience, where a builder leader was trying to operate in a chameleon organization. Needless to say, things weren't rocking)

Manasvini
   Learning Solutions
   Rumi Education

14. HEY! You need to be Level 6 laser lotus first!

(Editor's note: The commenter is referring to an episode of the NBC sit-com "Community." http://nymag.com/daily/entertainment/2010/10/communityrecapelevelfivelas.html )

Pierce

15. Thank you for providing a new lense for looking at leaders and leadership goals. Still the question remains: How to develop truly great leaders for a faster human progress and development?

K.L.Srivastava
16. Very interesting article. In my experience I have come across the 1st three types very often.

I wonder where Mahatma Gandhi would fit in?

Vijay

17. The figure 1: Profile of a young professional(35) has been examined with curiosity. This may relate to an average US guy but there will be much difference based on in-built traits which depend upon the geographical, cultural and spiritual/religious environment of which the concerned is a product. I place myself a bit at the lower position of level four. In my view reaching Level six is a rare situation.

Kapil Kumar Sopory  
Company Secretary  
SMEC(India) Private Limited

18. An amazing article especially on how you have captured Level 4-The Achiever. I tend to think this is where most corporate leaders tend to fall due to the pressures of delivering the much needed profits and value for their organizations. I feel there is need for organizations to develop all round leaders as it is said here in Kenya that "leaders are not born, they are developed".

John Parit  
Executive Director  
The Olive Branch-Africa

19. Although this article is about leaders and/or middle level professionals, one critical thing that I would like to know is this model applicable to young leaders and the change in styles throughout the working lifetime

Nishant Gupta  
EA to CEO  
Essar

20. What Saddam Hussain and Kadhafi have to do with this article. I found the topic of your article very interesting but I was very shocked by the porosity of your personal opinion within your study. This is very harmful

Anonymous

21. This is a very interesting and thought-provoking model - thank you. These levels, you say, "are not linear". But do you consider them to represent some kind of spectrum or scale on which people move? Even if "we are a portfolio of the different types" how do you come to quantify them as percentages and how do you account for people changing? Use of numbered levels seems to imply a hierarchy and possibly even a progression - do you suggest that leaders develop or move through levels? And how does this relate to what you describe as "a path...to integrity"? I can't see how any scale, continuum or trajectory can have Hitler-like behaviours at one end and Gandhi-like behaviours at the other. And you say "Even the Dalai Lama has to deal with the pull of his emotions when he makes decisions" - yet neuroscience - especially the work of Antonio Damasio - shows us that ALL
decision making involves emotions - and if there is anything that characterises psychopathic decision making it is that it is reason rather than emotion led. Thanks.

Paul Nicholas  
Director  
Soul-Chaplain Consultancy

22. Thank you for the model. Your opening question is compelling. In my experience as a leader in a religious organization and a consultant of many years "purpose" is a word that is given a great deal of lip service. I would agree that the drive behind many leadership behaviors is too seldom linked to a transcendent purpose. When I consider the framework of Piaget and Kohlberg it raises questions about the capacity to move from selfish motivations toward transcendent leadership. In particular, in the midst of disequilibrium, what moves leaders to re-examine purpose? Again, thanks for the work.

Paul  
Heritage Fellowship

23. In my thesis, I proposed the first quantitative measure for the transcendent leader, for which I built a validated taxonomy of strengths measured by a 360. We branded it the True Tilt Leader who is balanced, conscious, creative and inspired. In my thesis, I proved a strong correlation between the commendable traits & strengths with creativity and innovation in team-level climate. If you are interested in this research, it is published and available on amazon. "A New Vanguard of Leaders is Emerging" ....join us in our work to measure this so that people pay attention to it. I built my research on the work of many great scientists including the ones who are cited in this article. Kolberg, Kegan, Piaget, Selegman, Peterson, Jaques....and more. Our vision is to Change the World, One Leader at a Time. Pam Boney, Founder and CEO of Tilt, Inc.

Pam Boney  
CEO  
Tilt, Inc.

24. Is there a survey which we can take to identify our profile?

Anonymous

25. I wonder if there is a place for Transcendent leaders in public companies - would that support the aims of the shareholders? If a company leader's role is to maximize shareholder value, then shareholders should value a Builder leader more than a Transcendent one. Perhaps this is inherent in your thesis in that all the examples of Transcendent leaders were Political/Social leaders and all the examples of Builder leaders were Corporate ones.

Perhaps it begs the additional question...are the Corporate ranks a good recruiting ground for top Political Leaders?

Thought-provoking article - thank you.

Mike Gentile  
President  
GCS Consulting
26. From a perspective of theory or practice, I would agree that the threshold question, for constant focus, is: Who Are You Serving?

My book, 'Serve to Lead,' builds on this insight, applying it to key leadership competencies, including casting a vision, management and communications.

I would commend 'Serve to Lead' to the attention of those who have interest in this analytic approach.

James Strock

27. Excellent article

Anonymous

28. Absent an eternal, holistic perspective and empathy, how would a "truly great leader" or "faster human progress and development" be defined? Toward what outcome(s)? Who would craft, implement the development? How would "faster" be determined to be better? and by what criteria?

Anonymous

29. Good article, Mitch. I note the numerous calls for a self-evaluation instrument in these comments as a positive sign. I also note the desire for a quick fix, while this process deals more with lifetime development and, beyond that, social development. Many CEOs would like to be more "transformational" that the current system allows.

Meanwhile, transformational leaders within the business, NGO, and media technology worlds are beginning to shift the ground on which assumptions of shareholder value vs. stakeholder value (including communities) are based. Consider the emergence of the B-Corp as one small example and triple bottom line accounting another.

My book, VISION 3000, talks about the trends of where we are going as a global society and builds on many of the model sources you have mentioned and others, such as the Spiral Dynamics model based on the work Graves and extended by Wilbur.

Socially, this is a long-term evolution, but I see positive effects from understanding these complex, fractal movements in my day-to-day business dealings. VisionBuild Author Services helps transformational leaders get published. Thank you for helping to move the consciousness forward.

Michael Aschenbach
President
VisionBuild Author Services

30. Thought provoking article!!!!!

In my view, it is very rare for a business leader to become Transcendent leader unless they become philanthropist or otherway to serve the society. Transcendent leadership needs devotion to his public welfare goals.

It is very impressive to read through the examples of level 4,5 & 6.
I would consider the business leader Mr. Bill Gates alone as a Trancedent leader. Any comments?.

Vasanth Kaliannan
Sr. Manager
CTS

31. I would beg to differ. I find that the majority 95% are level 2 & 3, I have never met a 5 or 6 occupying a +800m mkt. cap company (I have in smaller companies, but they never get off the ground). In my own search for directors I have had the opportunity to interview CEO's & directors from many public companies ranging from 20m-5.4B mkt caps. The majority of these "leaders" are very self-serving, greedy, financially illiterate, and are like little babies. A segment of that category like to travel to exotic locations, stay at 5 star hotels act like they are master of the universe commanding pre revenue companies with very little or no equity in the business, on the shareholders dime. Most have no idea what governance or true leadership is. It shocked me until I realized that the majority of these "leaders" are really just middle managers taking orders from shadowy chairmen that refrain from the spotlight and use the company to line their own pockets, or worse use the company as a scape goat for financing other businesses. Most of these leaders, be it CEO's or chairmen merely were the last person standing or had their PA's type up their resume and submit it to an executive recruiter. There is just no commitment to the company or the shareholders, and I am only speaking of public companies not private. But one has to look at the big picture, the statistics say a CEO's typical term is 24 months and 70% of them are fired. If you knew that you had a very high chance of getting ousted, be it performance or politics, wouldn't you take as much as fast as you can, push the company debt so your top line can grow (and your comp)? Stability, caution, total disregard for others be damned. Carly Fiorina is a perfect example. It's like laying off 100% of your workforce just so you can have a killer Q.

I think that these top level archetypes are only produced when they start as a founder or came into the position as a turnaround guy. All of the level 6 leaders are political, and are not applicable to business, no shareholder would want 0 or negative ROI in smaller sub billion dollar revenue companies for substitution of green anything if it cuts into the bottom line and if they don't have to or it's goodwill will not return value. Martin Luther King Jr. & Mandela are basically speech writers and orators, look at South Africa pre and post apartheid using primarily stability and financials as metrics. Was it perfect? No. World's greatest leader? Dubious. But I am looking short term so...

I think that a lot of the "value" of these level four people is that they micromanage, more with less, and just out work by sheer hours everyone else. Is that leadership? No. The real problem with L4 is that the boards of directors are filled with these types of people. I met CEO's who travel 11 months out of the year, get 400-600 emails a day and work till 11pm at night, who's shares never go anywhere, and if they are revenue based don't grow but simply stagnate, and they keep going back to market to get more equity. In terms of level 5, most of these people started 20-30+ years ago, which to me is not applicable in this day and age. If I were to pitch an investor base in North America (public or private), and say we are building long term value over the 10-30 yr period, there would never be a realization of that idea into equity. Ever. In any scenario, in any industry. Everyone's time horizon is short term, and why would that be different on the leadership side?

david
CEO

32. Very true in relevance with corporate sector. Article gives a good plethora of self introspection. Herbert Spencer has rightly mentioned "its survival of the fittest" and fittests are always on top leaders level for or above. A true leader always places own example in front of team and society.
Amit Sharma  
Manager  
Cox & Kings Ltd

33. nice article -with good example

neeru  
student  
AIMS

34. Great read. Is there an assessment tool to measure what level you are?

Anonymous

35. An example of leadership exhibited by Acharya Chanakya can be very interesting example of right mix of leadership types. The rightness though depends on the moral values acquired in bringing up and the socio-economic situations of a personality.

Mayur  
Student, Manager

36. The irony of this article is the huge role that ghaddafi played in the ending of the apartheid and the release of mandela. And that in the past 40 years has held the highest standards of living in all of africa in his country, prior to recent violence, which is confirmed to be internationally funded rather than a genuine domestic conflict.

Which begs the question of the relevence in typecasting people as being in one of more of these categories - our most extreme examples hardly make the case.

Anonymous

37. Some folks have been asking about how Maidique's Level VI model compares to Collins' Level 5.

First, the Level 5 Leadership model by Collins is a sequential model. Individuals must proceed sequentially through each level of the leadership hierarchy to reach Level 5, and Level 5 leaders must have the characteristics of Levels 1-4 plus Level 5. The Level VI model appears not to be sequential. Individuals can lead from any of the various levels, though most individuals are theorized to have a predominant style.

Second, the Level 5 model was developed by first identifying 11 companies that had a unique pattern of suddenly escalating stock returns. Analyses of the CEOs at the helm when the returns transitioned from average to above average revealed that each had a distinct pattern of leadership, consisting of modesty and will (Collins, 2001).The Level VI model, unlike the Level 5 model, does not rely solely on company performance or traditional business leadership data, but instead aims to provide a theoretical framework for leadership in any arena based on whom the leader is serving.

Anonymous

38. This is a great article. It is a good classification of different types of leaderships. The best part of this article is the last paragraph which suggests that nobody is one type of leader, they are more of
portfolio but with different mix.

In most of the examples that you have stated, it can be interpreted that leaders were always conscious of where they belong and what they did. With this kind of study we can be conscious of our portfolio mix that helps us become better leaders of tomorrow.

Sridhar Karnam  
Product Marketing  
Adept Technology

39. Thank you for sharing! Inspiring.

I would imagine that ranking can best be done by others, so a self assessment would not be something I would ask for. Wouldn't the self-ranking be inverse to the ranking by others? Isn't that what Jim Collins tries to tell us in his book 'Good to Great'?

I have two additional thoughts. Is it true that leadership is an attribute of managers (CxOs) only? I like to think leadership can also characterise non-managers, professionals, civilians and even kids. Like Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development.

The second thought is that I assume that not everyone can be at level 6, 5 or even 4; even stronger, wouldn't it be enough to have only a small 'critical mass' in an organization / society / community to speak of 'civilization'? Just like only 30% of a population needs to be vaccinated to prevent an epidemic?

Combining both thoughts, I am interested if anything can be said about an ideal mix for a company to prosper...

Thanks again,

Ron van den Burg  
Employee of Logica

Ron van den Burg  
Logica

40. Those of you who have never seen a level 5 or 6 haven't spent much time in a strong shared governance nursing department. They exist without a specific title such as director or administrator, they are bedside nurses caring and advocating, leading change daily. They do exist there and have since Florence Nightengale. I have witnessed it.

Susan Helms  
Director Professional Practice  
community Memorial Healthcenter

41. Transcendent leadership takes a lot of sacrifice and to ordinary folks in lower wrungs of the leadership ladder may seem stupid. Like the Mandela example, it's never difficult to know a level VI leader when you see one.

Anonymous

42. Level 6 and Servant leadership are the new management mantra. Level 6 leadership is about charity,
compassion as long as they deliver massive results

If not, it is just socialism

Steve Sheinkopf
CEO
Yale Appliance

43. Thank you. This is also a good guide for us as individuals to lead our life. Whom do we serve in life?

Ricky Soo

44. Excellent article Mitch. The same question that is asked at the beginning of the day could actually be asked at the end of the day, "How did I help to make my world better today?" The implied introspection would in my view help to frame the question for the following day.

Listening to the BBC Reith Lectures by Aung San Suu Kyi last week on "Securing Freedom" it underscores the personal sacrifice paid by all freedom fighters a fact that Mandela himself expounds in his "Conversations with Myself". Why is it that so many other freedom fighters have failed to attain a transcendental status by staying the course especially after they become "free" and taste the rewards of freedom? The answer as provided by Mitch lies in the "portfolio mix over time". Yesterday's freedom fighter is sometimes today's looter, plunderer of national resources, corrupt and perpetrator of human rights abuses.

Geoffrey Ijumba
Advisor
UNICEF

45. Interesting article but I think the use of 'levels' is misleading; the portfolio approach clearly points towards a mix of six traits. In terms of self-analysis, it is somewhat depressing to have so many seeking a specific instrument; I think some solid self-reflection - a simple pen and paper exercise - should be enlightening enough for most, using these traits as a basis.

Mark Exton
Associate Principal
Colegio Roosevelt

46. An excellent classification indeed. However, one question that emerges in my mind as a 35 year old middle-management executive who closely gets to observe senior management with traits ranging across 1 - 5 levels in a growth organization is: how can companies struggling to attract and retain senior talent in an emerging economy like India, apply this? More often than not, market forces, pressures of performance put by global PE investors looking for a profitable exit, make it extremely difficult for organizations to take control in such matters.

In Indian context, the name of ex Infosys Chairman, NR Narayanan Murthy comes to mind as the closest who has probably reached level 6. If this is such a rarity, are there any ways that more such leaders can be spotted early and encouraged to grow instead of being left behind by level four leaders?

Amit Samant
Vice President
Anand Rathi Financial Services Limited

47. Informative. I tried assessing myself to see what level I was in. Interesting.

    Besting to do know is to know how to get to level 6.

    Anonymous

48. Great article. How can I be an achiever and transcendent at the same time?

    Anonymous

49. When I read this, I notice that Bush is a level-two leader, and Obama is a level-three leader.

    The good thing is, none of them is a level-one leader. The not-so-good thing is that they happen to lead the biggest company on earth: USA.

    Ira
    Sales Development Manager

50. As an aspiration and self-reflection model, I can endorse this 6-level approach.

    But it is important to avoid placing people into boxes (saying that "so and so" is a level x), because one's own knowledge and prejudice is at work in doing so.

    As long as humans are doing the judging, the process will be flawed and the output suspect.

    Anonymous

51. A levelled repository of leadership categories on a spectrum of consciousness level often hard to glean. One could propose a grid of individual and collective axis that a leader crosses on the journey to transcendence. As I prefer to say it is not who you may be but who you become in the journey of life that matters. Who are you becoming?

    Saira Samee
    Global Coach

52. Rather interesting article on the different model personalities and their causes. I would also be interested to see and or hear how the different personalities were shaped, or what was the profound influence.

    Anthony Chance
    Graduate Student
    MSB

53. Disagreeing with Exton, I would dearly like to see a validated self-assessment quiz. I think it's all too easy to delude even the most introspective among us.

    Not only will others see us differently than we see ourselves (since they can't see our motivations, and many of our actions will be invisible to most of them); but we ourselves will likely overlook some
actions and think of extenuating circumstances for others, over- or under-stating our "level".

And given such a validated assessment, as a CEO I want to know: What do I DO with this self-knowledge? Run for office? Found a religion? Resign and retire before I do real harm to my company?

And, for that matter, what do I do with similar knowledge about other leaders?

Anonymous

54. Good article.. As a former manager at Polaroid- we went bankrupt after Land left. The CEO's in the early 1990's were classic achievers; the last was an opportunist. Dr. Land was certainly a builder- with some traits of a transcender. Unfortunately, his high ego did not allow other builder types from succeeding with the company and they left to become builders at larger companies- examples: Tom Wyman went to CBS; Carl Yankowski went to Sony- both were highly successfull.

Milt
consultant

55. A new manager is primarily measured by their ability to execute to meet goals (Level IV). Unfortunately the managers with the strongest execution skills rise to the top without proper consideration of how they set goals. This article does an excellent job of describing the levels of goal setting which are so critical to the success of those at the top. Maximizing short-term profit rises no higher than Level IV and can ultimately lead to the failure of the organization, the industry, the economy and ultimately our democracy.

Anonymous

56. Nice article, Mitch. An overlay with emotional intelligence, which is likely necessary to "advance" to higher levels, would be interesting.

Mike
HR Director

57. Are You a Level-Six Leader? Redux

First and foremost, thanks to all of you who took the time to digest and respond to my Level-Six leadership article and for your words of encouragement. I am impressed with the quality and quantity of responses that the article and its comments have generated. It seems that the article struck a chord! In this note, I will do my best to respond to the main themes and topics that I have extracted from the reader's comments.

Comparisons to other models

Several individuals have asked me to compare and contrast the Level-Six model with other models, including Joiner and Josephs' Leadership Agility and Collins' Level 5 Leadership. The Level-Six model is distinct from these other two and others in that it is a classification model whereas the others are developmental models. The Level-Six model classifies leaders based on their intent, allowing that individuals can simultaneously operate at various levels. The Level-Six model recognizes that while leaders have a predominant purpose they nonetheless vary (intentionally and unintentionally) as the
focus of their service changes within and across situations. Moreover, the Level-Six model contends that individuals do not need to "master" lower levels of leadership in order to successfully execute higher levels (e.g. you don’t master "sociopathy" to move on to "transcendence"). The levels in the other two models represent progressive developmental stages or stages of mastery individuals undergo in leadership development that operate like "climbing the rungs of a ladder" (Joiner and Josephs, 2007, p. 200).

Questions about the Level-Six model

A handful of readers have asked specific questions about the Level-Six model, such as "do some businesses and organizations, by their very nature, require more of one leadership type than the other?" "is this model applicable to young leaders and the change in styles throughout the working lifetime?" and "how do you account for people changing?" First, I do expect that different businesses and organizations, as well as different leadership positions within an organization, recognize and reward the six levels of leadership differently. It is possible, however, to lead from any level in any organization or position. Second, most individuals do, evolve in their leadership profiles over the course of their lifetimes, though the Level-Six model is certainly applicable to young leaders. For example, work by psychologists such as Erik Erickson, Dan McAdams, and Abigail Stewart has shown that, in the U.S., a typical adult’s concern for and commitment to the next generation increases as individual move into middle and middle-to-late adulthood. The focus of who one serves as a leader will also vary based on his or her personal values and attitudes, organizational and cultural norms, personality, context and the leadership task at hand (just to name a few). Requests for Assessment

Several readers asked if I have a Level-Six assessment prepared. Good news. An assessment is in the works. In about six months I anticipate having an initial assessment. A fully-validated measure we expect to be ready in about a year. For additional information on the Center for Leadership and any current projects, visit lead.fiu.edu. Again, thank you for your responses. They will inform and strengthen the full-length article that I am now working on.

Mitch

58. Interesting article (and comments)! I work as a research scientist in the area of the psychology of leadership and social power. It seems to me that while the Level VI model isn’t strictly developmental, the top three levels (achiever, builder, and transcendent) are increasingly meritorious and difficult to achieve. One wonders if leaders who typically operate successfully at the achiever and builder levels might nonetheless aspire to the transcendent level, even if it is not always practical or feasible.

Anonymous

59. This is a very powerful, thought provoking, contemporary and aspiring article. This is good to know that the levels are dynamic and leaders have the scope to realize their level and can try to get into the good and admirable quadrant(s) of the six levels - this gives the room for hope and (any) good hope make the world more beautiful!

Amitava
SPM

60. What i think would be helpful would be creating an assessment test, otherwise, we are all prone to consider ourselves a level 6-er. But it could be interesting if an accurate assessment could be given
and ideas presented for how to grow.

thanks so much!

Heather Sarkissian
Independent

61. Heather,

Please see comment number 57 which addresses your suggestion. An assessment to is on the way!
Stay tuned!

Anonymous

62. I thoroughly enjoyed the article. It inspires me to actualize my transcendent leader traits. We likely have all 6 leadership level traits. The depth of our character will certainly align with our leadership level.

A factor lightly referenced in the article is time. Our decision making process will likely change as we age and mature. However the true impact of our decisions, the following results, may not be witnessed for decades, generations or lifetimes. I believe that research will support that a leader’s level closely corresponds to how far the look in making their decisions.

Play for Eternity.

HA

63. Transcendent, is the finest and ultimate sublimed personality of leader, as they are like few god men on earth, salt is needed in small proportion to make the meal taste and is vital ingredient for life saving as well, thereby it is important to have these as exemplary individuals who set their own landmarks and pave their own path that is untreaded leaving behind a trial for others to follow.

shraddha mathpal
Reader, faculty of management studies
Graphic Era University

64. This is a very good, thought-provoking article. Thank you, Dr. Maidique. May I suggest in your next article that use this new framework to grade our business leaders through the lens of time as historians now judge our past Presidents.

By example, were Mark Hurd and Carly Fiorina really Achievers for Hewlett Packard [HP] or will hindsight really show their true colors? I suspect that the next ten years [as the once-great HP falls apart] will show that these two HP CEO’s should be downgraded to Level Two: Opportunists.

I suspect also that the lens of time might also promote some leaders whose vision and actions during their term may have unfairly defined them at levels beneath their true greatness. Jimmy Carter comes to mind, here.

We need this next article using retrospect because Wall Street is causing too many of us to think that the banner of great leadership should be assigned to those who deliver quick profits. We need your prestige and this fine journal to show that this is not so.
Rob Reis  
President  
Breakthroughs

65. There are several comments above indicating that level V and VI are only applicable to political or religious leaders. Perhaps it is the prevalence of Level IV business leaders which requires regulation by government to ensure economic stability and other protections of the common good. How can our business leaders ask for less regulation when they have no motivation to operate at level V or VI?

Of course this begs the fact that it is critical that we have an election process which maximizes our ability to pick political leaders who operate at these higher levels, not only in word but deed. In this light it is clear why the Citizens United decision and our media conglomerates are corrupting in that they allow the level IV's to influence our choice of leaders.

Anonymous

66. Certainly, a level six leader is so hard to find. This article is such an eye-opener to almost all people in the society because everybody is a leader. They may not know it, but in their lives, they have influenced a lot of people. It is also a challenge for the leaders of today to chose what leader they should be.

Christine Teopiz

67. style and deliverence is good, provides deep insight about leadership.

jamil abbasi  
ceo  
seek academy

68. This article makes several important contributions that differentiate from other models of leadership. First, unlike others, it is not a developmental model. One does not have to go through one level to get to the other as models of child development- and most models of leadership development such as Collins and Joseph and Joiner's. Secondly, it allows for a leader to be a combination of many levels thus more closely approximating how human beings act. Finally, it includes a new type: the psychopathic leader that is stuck in that mode for life. The same may be true of the Chameleon. A real contribution- at least to my understanding of how leaders act.

Anonymous

69. Inspiring! It provides an interesting angle to understand how leaders behave and why they make decisions that are different from others. The purpose-driven model is dynamic in that people could evolve by experience and reflection at different stages of life. However, Sociopaths aren opportunists are the people that we could only avoid and pray that they will never be in a leading position. As an employee, I would work for transcendentists and builders and avoid opportunists and especially sociopaths.

Dongmei

70. Good analysis, keep on the good work.
71. Great article. We have used a leadership profiling tool (Facet 5) which can pull out leadership styles individually and also how to manage those types. Additionally combines as team to show strengths/weaknesses.

Anonymous

72. This is all well and good. However, there's one important caveat. Level six leaders, according to older research from Columbia, do not do well financially for their business. As I remember, the study found that level six lack competitively. My thinking is that it's probably a mixed bag, but that's pure, potentially erroneous intuition.

As a long term consultant, but with 22 years in parish ministry and seminary teaching, I find the emphasis upon "servant leadership" to be profoundly faddish and ill-informed. Too often it results in smarmy, "religious" behaviors that disguise the real issues.

Dan Erwin, PhD
principal
Erwin Group

73. Sociopath assumptions are poor! Most of them believe that they are serving a higher purpose on behalf of the ignorant mass around them. They tend to be technically the most intelligent, sitting outside the immediate social norm. The way to make them a positive force is to put them together and give them a secret job to do.

Not to be confused with psychopath most of whom are organisationally impotent and never discovered in their day job! In fact this is the only group who are truly the product of leadership which, in the real human world, is always genetically and uncontrollably self serving.

Anonymous

74. @Vasanth Kaliannan - We share the same good example except mine, is that Bill Gates, all by himself, goes through the Achiever (maybe even prior to founding MS), Builder (when he is already a CEO) and Trancendence (when he is already co-leading their Foundation).

This article is somewhat a confirmation for some individual out there, striving harder and smarter to achieve these three levels going up to trancendence.

Rodel

75. This is actually very insightful and very key for those candidates aspiring to be leaders of tomorrow. Its very categorical and gives aspiring leaders a chance to evaluate themselves in relation to what they want to be or achieve in future. The examples given in the context summarizes everything in terms of character and the skills required by aspiring leaders of today.

Jimmy Okaalo
Team Leader
Barclays Bank
Good article.

The current economic predicament (chaos) in the Eurozone has a lot to do with chameleon leaders who in my opinion do not lead but seek to remain in power at all costs following any populist ideology.

I find that Nelson Mandela is over used as an exemplar or Leadership. We need new and fresh examples.

Fergus Barry
Managing Partner
Fergus Barry & Associates

This week I had the pleasure of hearing Prof. Maidique lecture on this typology and it makes clear sense to me as a leader and small business owner. Becoming a six level leader is not a destination but a journey and it is clear for me where I need to be. This is a useful tool in not only understanding myself but also understanding those leaders who share my world. Thank you for the insight.

Pr. Ken Ninomiya
Small Biz Expert
Small Biz Pilot

The ideas in this paper have an 'invisible opposite' side - i.e., one cannot lead if no one will follow. An interesting study would be one in which each of these levels is examined toward understanding how followers are motivated by each level. Some are required by employment, others by hope of gaining whatever the leader offers, others are also transcendent in intention, etc. I cannot draw a tree, but I can draw the outline of the space occupied by a tree, and that drawing then looks like a tree -- I drew the invisible opposite side!

J Grantham
Sr Project Manager
U C Berkeley