

In Praise of the Incomplete Leader

The Idea in Brief

Have you ever feigned confidence to superiors or reports? Hidden the fact you were confused by the latest business results or blindsided by a competitor's move? If so, you've bought into the **myth of the complete leader**: the flawless being at the top who's got it all figured out.

It's an alluring myth. But in today's world of increasingly complex problems, no human being can meet this standard. Leaders who try only exhaust themselves, endangering their organizations.

Ancona and her coauthors suggest a better way to lead: Accept that you're human, with strengths and weaknesses. Understand the four leadership capabilities all organizations need:

- Sensemaking—interpreting developments in the business environment
- Relating—building trusting relationships
- Visioning—communicating a compelling image of the future
- Inventing—coming up with new ways of doing things

Then find and work with others who can provide the capabilities you're missing.

Take this approach, and you promote leadership throughout your organization, unleashing the expertise, vision, and new ideas your company needs to excel.

The Idea in Practice

Incomplete leaders find people throughout their company who can complement their strengths and offset their weaknesses. To do this, understand the four leadership capabilities organizations need. Then diagnose your strength in each:

Capability	What it means	Example	Look for help in this capability if you...
Sensemaking	Constantly understanding changes in the business environment and interpreting their ramifications for your industry and company	A CEO asks, "How will new technologies reshape our industry?" "How does globalization of labor markets affect our recruitment strategy?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel strongly that you're always right. • Frequently get blindsided by changes in your company or industry. • Feel resentful when things change.
Relating	Building trusting relationships, balancing advocacy (explaining your viewpoints) with inquiry (listening to understand others' viewpoints), and cultivating networks of supportive confidants	Former Southwest Airlines CEO Herb Kelleher excels at building trusting relationships. He wasn't afraid to tell employees he loved them, and reinforced those emotional bonds with equitable compensation and profit sharing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blame others for failed projects. • Feel others are constantly letting you down or that they can't be trusted. • Frequently experience unpleasant, frustrating, or argumentative interactions with others.
Visioning	Creating credible and compelling images of a desired future that people in the organization want to create together	eBay founder Pierre Omidyar envisioned a new way of doing large-scale retailing: an online community where users took responsibility for what happened and had equal access to information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often wonder, "Why are we doing this?" or "Does it really matter?" • Can't remember the last time you felt excited about your work. • Feel you're lacking sense of larger purpose.
Inventing	Creating new ways of approaching tasks or overcoming seemingly insurmountable problems to turn visions into reality	eBay CEO Meg Whitman helped bring Omidyar's vision of online retailing to life by inventing ways to deal with security, vendor reliability, and product diversification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have difficulty relating the company's vision to what you're doing today. • Notice gaps between your firm's aspirations and the way work is organized. • Find that things tend to revert to business as usual.