

# *RULES FOR PLAYING* **THE LEADERSHIP GAME**



Leading and being led are part of any business. What is effective leadership exactly and what does it involve? Opinions on this issue are divided. Research has shown that managers often find it difficult to lead their employees effectively, and that many employees are dissatisfied with their managers.

The purpose of this game is reflecting on how you function in your role as a leader. This involves some important questions such as:

- What is your vision of leadership and how do you put it into practice?
- Does your style of leadership best suit the current situation?
- What is your organization's vision of leadership?
- What do your employees expect from you as a manager and a leader?

Reflecting on your own vision of leadership is not something you should do only once. As your management situation changes you need to reconsider your vision for leadership and, if need be, make adjustments. This game can help you identify and implement these changes in a practical and effective way. It will also make discussing the topic with your employees an easier, more engaging and productive process.

The game consists of two parts:

1. **Aspects of leadership** (75 cards). These aspects (leadership is ..... ) describe a mix of behaviour, attitude and values and comprise six themes. The definitions have been worded as seen from the manager's point of view. Each of the six themes has its own coloured line, shown on the front of the cards, to differentiate between them. The six themes are:

- Managing values (e.g. treating everyone fairly)
- Aims and results (e.g. bringing out the best in everyone)
- Managing people (e.g. knowing what is of interest to your employees)
- Managing (e.g. establishing procedures and have them implemented)
- Decision- making (e.g. involving employees in what is to happen)
- Self-management (e.g. adjusting your own behaviour)

Some aspects of leadership can be classed under several different themes. You can adjust these six classifications as you see fit.

2. **Pictures** (40 cards). This series of striking images and photographs can be used as a medium to discuss concepts of leadership.

You will also find a small bag containing 60 coloured counters, that can be used with some of the methods to show any agreements or differences among players.

### **WAYS OF APPLYING THE GAME**

The Leadership Game covers all the main aspects of leadership. Therefore, the game is suited for all kinds of managers, for a range of situations and alternative visions on leadership. Using the summary below, select the method of play that best suits your specific situation.

#### **Applications for individual use:**

1. Coaching managers who want to investigate the way they function as leaders or are looking for ways to improve (methods 1 and 6).
2. Appraisal interviews with managers (methods 1 and 6).
3. Coaching employees who are having difficulties with the leadership styles of their manager (methods 2 and 6).

#### **Applications for groups and teams:**

4. Peer-group sessions involving managers, aimed at discussing the way they perform their job whilst giving each other feedback on their performance and leadership (methods 3, 3B and 6).
5. Peer-group sessions involving employees who are moving into management and who want to discuss and explore what the role requires (methods 3A and 6).
6. Balancing employees' and managers' expectations about leadership in a team (methods 4 and 6).
7. Giving feedback: the manager requests direct feedback from a particular employee about the way he or she performs and leads (method 5).

#### **Directions for playing the Leadership Game**

1. If you are a manager, we recommended you try out the game on your own before using it with your employees or colleagues, so you can experience the way the game works yourself and anticipate the likely impact it may have. This will also make it easier to assess in what situations (external) facilitation might be needed to gain most from the experience.

2. Always ask participants to explain, in their own words, what meaning they attach to the description on each card. This is important to prevent any misunderstandings.
3. You may choose to vary the number of cards that the players select, as you see fit. The optimal number of cards depends on the amount of time available and the amount of information you want to lay out on the table.
4. In each situation in which the game is applied, consider whether or not there are descriptions on any of the cards that are inappropriate for the context. If so, discard these cards before starting the game.
5. The maximum number of participants per set of cards is six. When working with a larger group, we recommended you split them into subgroups, in which case you will require further sets of cards. When working with a team you may prefer to play the game with the group as a whole. In that case you can use, self-adhesive notes, on which the players can write their preference in addition to the counters (see method 4).
6. The following methods have been worded from the perspective of the player, unless otherwise indicated.

### **Method 1 'COACHING THE MANAGER'**

#### **Purposes**

1. An opportunity for the manager to reflect on what are the most important features of how he or she performs their job and how well he or she does so.
2. An exploration of ways to improve the performance of the manager.

#### **Prior conditions**

1. Number of participants: 1 (+ coach).
2. Required: all of the cards 'aspects of leadership'.
3. Estimated playing time: 30-60 minutes.

#### **Procedure**

1. Select those cards for which the descriptions correspond most closely with what is currently on your mind, regarding your job. Alternatively you may decide just to select which of the six themes are most relevant, rather than working with all the cards. Discard the remaining cards.
2. Place the cards in two rows. In the first row include those carrying descriptions of leadership which you think you perform well. In the second row place the cards carrying descriptions of elements which you think you might like or need to improve.
3. Reflect on the results. Possible insights include:
  - What are your general impressions?

- Are there any descriptions that link to one another? If so, place them together.
  - Is there a common element that comes up every time? If so, which?
  - Can you spot a link between the cards that you chose and what is currently most on your mind, in relation to your job?
  - Which topics are currently especially important to focus on?
  - What could you do to improve any particular issue? Who or what might be holding you back in this case? Who or what might help you?
  - Are there any issues on which you might like to receive feedback from your employees?
  - Which of your employees would you ask to give you feedback?
  - Are there any issues on which you already perform well but that might help you by improving other matters that are not going the way you would like them to go?
  - (If the manager has a middle-management job) Do you have any performance issues around leadership because your manager is not fulfilling his or her job the way he or she should? Where are improvements required? To what extent can you influence your manager?
4. What conclusions can you draw from your reflection? What are the concrete points of action you intend to implement?

### **General remarks**

1. At step 1 you may choose to focus on a problem that bothers you, and select those descriptions of leadership that relate to that problem.
2. At step 2 you may also focus on questions such as:
  - On what issue(s) would you like to receive feedback from your employees?
  - On what issue(s) would you like to receive feedback from colleagues or managers?
  - What matter would you like to give more attention to?
  - On which aspects of leadership do you sometimes feel uncertain?
  - What do you want to be better at?
  - What can you already manage sufficiently well?
  - What can you not (always) manage that well?
  - What leadership issues might become more important in the nearby future, as a result of any changes that might occur in the organization?

You may want to ask some of these questions concurrently, e.g. first select which areas you find difficult to manage and then reflect on which of these you might like to receive feedback.

3. You can also apply this method to appraisal interviews with managers.
4. When applying this method with a manager who has just started in their role, you may find it useful to make a pre-selection of cards based on the question: What aspects of leadership fit naturally with who you are as a person and therefore match your strengths? These lay the foundation for 'a natural style of leadership' for this specific manager.

5. As a coach you may want to investigate which leadership issues are ignored or overlooked by the manager because he or she does not see these as particularly important.

## **Method 2 'COACHING THE EMPLOYEE'**

### **Purpose**

Share openly any difficulties that the employee may have with his or her manager.

### **Prior conditions**

1. The employee is dissatisfied with his or her manager.
2. Number of participants: 1 (+ coach).
3. Required: all of the cards 'aspects of leadership'.
4. Estimated playing time: 30-60 minutes.

### **Procedure**

1. Explain to your coach how and why you are dissatisfied with the way you work with your manager.
2. Consider, if appropriate, given the nature of the problem, whether it is useful to make a pre-selection of cards, based on issues that are linked to the problem. If you are not sure which issues are linked to the problem, you should use all of the cards.
3. Select a maximum of 20 cards with descriptions of what you expect from your manager. Discard the rest of the cards.
4. Place the selected cards in two rows. In the first row include descriptions on leadership, which in your view your manager performs well. In the second row put those aspects describing where your manager falls short. Within each row, place linked aspects together. Place the aspects you find most important, at the start of each row.
5. Reflect on the results. Possible insights include:
  - What are your general impressions?
  - Are your expectations of your manager realistic? Discuss your expectations.
  - What does the way you experience difficulty with your manager's behaviour tell you about yourself? Do you also experience those difficulties with other people in other situations? Is there some sort of pattern within your own perception or behaviour that you should investigate?
  - To what extent do your expectations towards your manager, relate to your childhood-experiences or earlier work experiences in terms of authority figures?
  - What effect does it have on you when your manager performs well?
  - Which aspects of your manager's behaviour bother you the most? What causes this to happen?
  - Is there anything you yourself can do to minimise situations in which your manager shows the behaviour that bothers you? If so, what?

- Is there anything you yourself can do to make the manager's work in general, easier for him or her? If so, what?
6. What conclusions can you draw? Are there any matters you would like to discuss with your manager? If so, which ones? What would you want to achieve by this?

### **General remarks**

1. As a coach you might also decide to invite the employee to start by selecting cards relating to matters with which he or she is dissatisfied, discuss these and then ask them to select the cards relating to matters with which they are generally happy. You can then ask what conclusion the employee draws. It's very common for us to focus on things that do not go as wished, which means we lose sight of those areas where we are generally satisfied.
2. Employees who are having difficulties with their manager, often share negative experiences with authority figures which have played an important role during their childhood.

### **Method 3 'PEER-GROUP CONSULTATION'**

#### **Purposes**

1. Discuss with colleagues the vision that you and they have on how leadership should be performed.
2. Share suggestions on how to (further) improve your performance as a manager.

#### **Prior conditions**

1. Managers may work at the same organization and/or know each other, but this is not essential. If you want to use this method with managers who have just taken up their management role, you should use method 3A.
2. Number of participants: 2-6.
3. Required: all of the cards 'aspects of leadership' and the counters.
4. Estimated playing time: 30-90 minutes.

#### **Procedure**

1. Make a pre-selection of a maximum of 40 cards with aspects of leadership that might be important for your job. Place these cards on the table face up. Alternatively you might select only a few categories instead of all of them. Make sure that all of the descriptions can be read and that there is at least 1 cm of space between the cards.
2. Each player selects a maximum of 8 descriptions that describe the most important aspects of leadership in their current job, from their perspective. Each of you should write down your list and also make a note against each aspect if you feel that you perform it well (+) or that you would like to be able to perform it better (-).
3. Each of the players selects a set of coloured counters. Indicate the cards you have chosen by putting your counters onto them. Place a counter on the coloured line in the middle

of each card carrying a description that you find you perform well. For those aspects that you feel you want to perform better, place a counter on the side of the card. Make sure the players know which is your set of counters by placing one on the table in front of you.

4. The cards without a counter should be discarded. Discuss the results for each card. Start with those cards on which the most counters have been placed. The aim is to ask each other questions about your choice and to share your ideas for improvement. Potential insights include:
  - What kind of concrete situations or examples were you thinking of while making your selection?
  - What effect does it have on you and your employees when you perform well on a specific issue?
  - Who or what helps you to perform well on a specific aspect?
  - What effect does it have on you and your employees when there are aspects on which you under-perform.
  - Do you have any suggestions that might help others to improve a specific aspect?
5. When all of the cards have been discussed, share your conclusions in turn and state in concrete terms what you intend to do as a result of everything that has been brought to the table.

### **General remarks**

1. When you play this method with fellow managers from the same organization, it might be useful to reflect on what the conclusions drawn at step 5 have to say about your organization as a whole. The next question might then be: Do you need to take action following the outcome? If so, what kind of action? If not, why not?
2. At step 2 you may also select cards based on a different question. Examples of this can be read at method 1, 'general remarks 2'. At step 3 you then place the counter on the coloured line in the middle of the cards.

### **Version 3A 'NEW TO THE JOB'**

This method can also be applied to managers who are new to this job within a specific organization. The aim is to then discuss their vision of leadership. You'll need to adapt the above-mentioned method in the following way :

- At step 2 each player selects a maximum of 8 descriptions aimed at managers who are new to the job. You can either choose to rate yourself beforehand on these aspects, or not.
- At step 3 you can make some adjustments based on your choices at step 2. If you chose to not rate yourself, place your counters on the coloured line in the middle of the cards.
- At step 4 the questions to ask yourself are:

- Why do you find this aspect important?
- What effect would it have on you and your employee, if you performed these aspects well?

If you choose to rate yourself you might want to answer the following questions:

- What sort of concrete situations or examples were you thinking of during the rating process?
- Who or what helps you to perform well on specific aspects?
- What effect would aspects that you cannot manage well have on you and your employee?
- Which suggestions can you share for improving different aspects?

### **Version 3B 'ANY QUESTIONS?'**

The aim of this version is to create an opportunity for players to ask each other questions about the way they fulfil specific aspects of leadership. The procedure is as follows:

1. Make a pre-selection of a maximum of 40 cards with descriptions that are appropriate as a basis for discussing personal approaches to leadership . Place these cards face up on the table.
2. Each player in turn selects a card describing an aspect of leadership on which the player would like to hear from others (either a specific player or everyone) concrete ideas for how he or she fulfils this aspect of leadership.
3. Ask those players to comment on that aspect or to give an explanation.
4. Repeat step 3 until all of the players have had their turn. If it is a small group, steps 2 and 3 may be repeated several times.

### **Method 4 'NEW TEAMS AND EXPECTATIONS'**

#### **Purpose**

Balancing expectations of leadership for managers and employees.

#### **Prior conditions**

1. The players will be working together or have recently started to work. This method is especially useful when changes, that effect styles of leadership are about to take place in the organization or in an existing team. The manager would like to discuss with his employees what they expect from her of him in terms of leadership. Note that in this situation, it is important that employees feel open to discussing these matters in the presence of the manager.
2. Number of participants: 2-6.
3. Required: all of the cards 'aspects of leadership' and the counters.
4. Estimated playing time: 30-60 minutes.



## Procedure

1. The team manager should make a pre-selection of a maximum of 40 cards. Select descriptions that directly affect your behaviour as a manager towards your employees. Place all of the selected cards face up on the table.
2. Ask each of the employees to choose a maximum of 8 descriptions that state what they value most in terms of their expectations towards you. Have them note these down. As their manager you should also note a maximum of 8 aspects of leadership that you find important in managing your employees.
3. Each of the players selects a set of coloured counters. They then indicate the cards they have chosen by placing their counters onto them. Make sure the players know which is your set of counters by placing one on the table in front of you.
4. Any cards without a counter should be discarded. Discuss the results for each card. Start with those cards on which the most counters have been placed. If during the course of the conversation it becomes clear that certain aspects are linked, place these cards alongside each other.

Possible insights in this conversation include:

- What does this aspect of leadership include and why do you find it important?
  - Is this aspect of leadership a matter that you as an individual find important, is it important regarding the current context in which the team operates, or both?
  - What is the effect on you as an employee when your manager performs well on this aspect?
  - What is the effect on you as an employee when your manager doesn't perform well on this aspect?
  - Can the team contribute to this aspect of leadership? If so, in what way?
  - Is there anything the team can do to make it easier for the manager to perform well on this aspect? If so, what exactly can the team do?
5. When all of the cards have been discussed: What conclusions can you draw? Are there any aspects of leadership on which the manager should be focussing more or perhaps less? If so, on which?

## General remarks

1. If this method is being played with an existing team, the manager should reflect beforehand on what he or she feels is the state of their relationship with their employees. If the employees are generally negative towards their manager, then there may well be a considerable risk that playing this method will result in a negative appraisal of the manager. One way to mitigate possible negative effects is by avoiding cards that might encourage unhelpful negative feedback.
2. Different views on leadership may come up when playing this method. This gives you the opportunity to reflect objectively on the team's situation: Which style of leadership is required now (whether or not this reflects the personal preferences of both manager

and employees)? This question demands quite an amount of reflection from both manager and employees.

### **Method 5 'MANAGER ASKING FOR FEEDBACK'**

#### **Purpose**

Manager asks for feedback from his employee.

#### **Prior conditions**

1. The manager wishes to receive feedback from a specific employee about the way he or she performs as a manager. The employee is willing and also capable of giving feedback. Note that it is important that there is a good and open relationship between the manager and the employee.
2. Number of participants: 2 (the manager and the employee).
3. Required: all of the cards 'aspects of leadership' and the counters.
4. Estimated playing time: 30-60 minutes.

#### **Procedure**

1. The manager makes a pre-selection of a maximum of 40 cards. By making this pre-selection the manager can attune the discussion more closely to his or her own situation and (the level of) the employee. Aspects of leadership that the employee may not be familiar with, can thus be left out.
2. Place the selected cards face up on the table. Make sure that all of the descriptions can be read and that there is at least 1 cm of space between the cards.
3. Both manager and employee note a maximum of 8 aspects of leadership that they consider to be currently important or that relate to a specific situation that currently is an issue. They should both state if the manager performs this aspect well or that improvement is required. If the number of selected cards is considerably lower than the maximum of 40, reduce the number of aspects that you discuss by a similar proportion.
4. Each of the players selects a set of coloured counters. Indicate the cards you have chosen by putting your counters on them. Place a counter on the coloured line in the middle of each card to reflect an aspect of leadership that you find that you/the manager performs well. For those aspects for which you wish to see an improved performance, place a counter on the side of the card. The cards without a counter should be discarded.
5. Discuss the results for each card. Start with those cards on which the both of you have placed a counter. Each explain your choices in turn. Discard the cards that have been discussed so you can keep a good overview. Possible insights include:
  - What is the effect on the employee of the aspects the manager performs well?
  - What is the effect on the employee of the aspects the manager could perform better?

- Does the employee have any suggestions for the manager in terms of the aspects that need improvement?
- Does the manager have any suggestions concerning the aspects that he or she needs to improve?
- Is there anything the employee can do to make it easier for the manager to perform well on a certain aspect? If so, what exactly?
- What conclusions can you draw? Are there any points of action for the manager? Are there any points of action for the employee?

### **General remarks**

1. Be careful about using this method concurrently with several employees. You want to avoid a situation in which the manager becomes defensive when the aspects that need improvement are being discussed. The conversation could then end up unfruitful.
2. If the manager only wishes to discuss a limited number of aspects, for example, 10, the method can be simplified. However, a limited range of aspects will limit the employees scope for comment and the feedback on any given aspects is then rather limited. In this reduced version the procedure is as follows: following step 1 all of the cards are discussed one after another. Both manager and employee give their opinion on the performance of each aspect.

## **Method 6 'APPLYING THE IMAGES'**

### **Purpose**

Reflect on leadership performance through the medium of pictures.

### **General remark**

When applying this set of cards, it is very important to have a specific and well formulated question on the basis of which players select one or more images.

### **Procedure**

- a. When applied during individual coaching of a manager:
  1. Which pictures best represent aspects of leadership? The manager can select any number of cards. The outcome often gives a pretty good overview of what elements play a role in the job of this specific manager.
  2. Which pictures represent important aspects on which you want to focus more in future as a manager? The manager can select any number of cards.
- b. When applied during individual coaching of the employee:
 

Which 5 images best represent what you expect from your manager? If you prefer, you may also invite the employee to select any number of cards.
- c. When applied during peer-group sessions:

Peer-group sessions with managers or potential managers: What do you think is the essence of leadership? Or: What would you like to do more of or be better at?

- d. When applied with teams consisting of both employees and their manager:
1. For the employees: What do you expect from your manager? Select one card.
  2. For the manager: What is the essence of leadership? Or: What would you like to be better at? Or: What would you like to be able to do more of? Select one card.

### OTHER CARDGAMES

*The Leadership Game* forms a series together with *The Feedback Game*, *The Values Game*, *The Feelings Game*, *The Quotations Game* and *Getting Acquainted*. More information you can find at: [www.kwaliteitenspel.nl/en](http://www.kwaliteitenspel.nl/en)

#### **Distribution**

*The Leadership Game* is developed and published by:

Gerrickens | *training & advies*

Rompertdreef 41, 5233 ED 's- Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands

Phone: + 31 73 6427411

email: [info@kwaliteitenspel.nl](mailto:info@kwaliteitenspel.nl) [www.kwaliteitenspel.nl/en](http://www.kwaliteitenspel.nl/en)

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