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Kotter Article: A Few Key Ideas

"What Leaders Really Do" introduces "one of those brand-new ideas that seems obvious once it's expressed, retired Harvard Business School professor John Kotter proposes that management and leadership are different but complementary, and that in a changing world, one cannot function without the other. He then enumerates and contrasts the primary tasks of the manager and the leader. His key point bears repeating: Managers promote stability while leaders press for change, and only organizations that embrace both sides of that contradiction can thrive in turbulent times".

"They (leaders) don't make plans; they don't solve problems; they don't even organize people. What leaders really do is prepare organizations for change and help them cope as they struggle through it".

"John Kotter proposes that management and leadership are different but complementary, and that in a changing world, one cannot function without the other".

"Rather, leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary systems of action. Each has its own function and characteristic activities. Both are necessary for success in an increasingly complex and volatile business environment".

"Management is about coping with complexity".

"Leadership, by contrast, is about coping with change".

"These two different functions – coping with complexity and coping with change – shape the characteristic activities of management and leadership. Each system of action involves deciding what needs to be done, creating networks of people and relationships that can accomplish an agenda, and then trying to ensure that those people actually do the job. But each accomplishes these three tasks in different ways".

"Companies manage complexity first by planning and budgeting – setting targets or goals for the future (typically for the next month or year), establishing detailed steps for achieving those targets, and then allocating resources to accomplish those plans. By contrast, leading an organization to constructive change begins by setting a direction - developing a vision of the future (often the distant future) along with strategies for producing the changes needed to achieve that vision".

"Since the function of leadership is to produce change, setting the direction of that change is fundamental to leadership. Setting direction is never the same as planning or even long-term planning, although people often confuse the two. Planning is a management process, deductive in nature and designed to produce orderly results, not change. Setting a direction is more inductive. Leaders gather a broad range of data and look for patterns, relationships, and linkages that help explain things. What's more, the direction-setting aspect of leadership does not produce plans; it creates vision and

strategies. These describe a business, technology, or corporate culture in terms of what it should become over the long term and articulate a feasible way of achieving this goal”.

Kotter, J. P. (1990). "What leaders really do." Harvard Business Review **68**(3): 103-111.

Kotter Chart:

<i>Functions →</i> <i>Tasks ↓</i>	Management <i>Cope with complexity</i>	Leadership <i>Cope with change</i>
Deciding what needs to be done	<i>By planning and budgeting</i> • Goal setting • Detailing steps • Allocating resources	<i>By setting a direction</i> • Creating a vision • Based on the future • Determining what to do
Developing capacity	<i>By organizing & staffing</i> • Creating organization & structure • Staffing with right people • Design monitoring system	<i>By aligning people</i> • Communicating the vision • Developing the organization • Getting the message across • Empowering people • Consistent follow-up
Ensuring accomplishment	<i>By controlling and problem solving</i> • Monitoring results • Identifying deviations • Solving problems to facilitate routine work processes	<i>By motivating people</i> • Generating enthusiasm • Satisfying people • Creating a network

Based on Kotter, J. P. (1990). What Leaders Really Do. *Harvard Business Review*

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