

# Beyond Leadership Development

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By Seth Glenn Elliott, author of *The Merlin Advantage: Rediscovering the Leader's Greatest Ally* (2020). For more information visit [www.selliotconsulting.com](http://www.selliotconsulting.com).

Leadership development provides vital foundations and lifelong growth opportunities, but the highest levels of performance *and* human flourishing lie beyond its borders in new approaches to collaboration. Traditionally, leadership collaboration has been cross-functional (HR, Marketing, Administration, Operations, IT, etc...) and buoyed by a set of competencies that ultimately improve mostly operational factors like information-sharing, coordination, and execution. These are all good things, but the true human experience in many organizations remains, at best, a daily compromise and at worst, **disastrous** to physical and mental health.

Though we spend billions on leadership development each year, a persistent accumulation of concerning management statistics, case studies, shared horror stories, and cringey sitcoms reveals an ongoing tension between **two vital paradigms**. One of these is the familiar command and control orientation best at producing maximum financial benefit. The other describes human-centered approaches best at promoting engagement, trust, and psychological safety. Current leadership development thinking maintains an unrecognized contradiction as it simultaneously tries to help leaders find the sweet spot between these two poles while also delivering world-class results in each, unique domain.

Here's why that doesn't work...

Historically, those most likely to be promoted into leadership roles tend to think, act, and feel in ways that naturally align with the command and control paradigm. They easily demonstrate confident posture, prioritize logic and facts, and communicate directly. They are comfortable and adept at navigating systems that are hierarchical, loyalty-based, and focussed on the bottom line. They are smart and can easily master the social skills and etiquette necessary to influence others. They can be fun, charismatic, and in most cases concerned about the welfare of others, but they exude competitive energy. Their drive is palpable. They make omelettes, but they break some eggs, too. They create vital wealth, growth, and tangible benefit, but they leave a wake. Leadership development can only mitigate this to a modest extent because these tendencies and preferences have **roots** in their brain structures and **psychological types**. I call these Performance Leaders in **my book**.

On the other hand, there is an undiscovered and under-leveraged ally quite gifted in the nuanced spaces of people and culture. They have different brain pathways, cognitive functions, and

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formal training. They are naturally empathic, contemplative, reflective and humanistic. Their innate inclination is toward harmony, synergy, collaboration, listening, and inclusion. They don't structure their world hierarchically. They are more tolerant of ambiguity and interdependency. I call these people Integral Process Leaders. They are adept at creating safety, trust, and sustainable culture - not the kind referenced in skillfully worded policy manuals, but the kind experienced genuinely by everyone in the workplace ecosystem.

Successful organizational leadership in the future will require bold, new collaborations rooted in these distinct, nearly archetypal, strength areas. Alternately, adherence to the popular assumption that leaders should excel across time, type, temperament, training, and organizational paradigm will only become more exhausting and impractical. For those able to re-imagine and deploy collaborative leadership in our rapidly changing world, sustainable, next-level performance and real joy at work are far more easily within reach.

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