

QUESTION 3

I Learned A Lot of Management in College—Is That the Same as Leadership?

The distinction between leadership and management (and leaders and managers) can be a slippery slope to navigate. While there certainly are similarities, and the consensus is certainly not unanimous, much of the scholarly literature seems to lean toward the 2 being considered separate constructs.¹ This does not mean that leaders and managers want different outcomes or are trying to achieve something different from the other—in fact, both usually want similar outcomes, like fewer medical errors, increased revenue, higher efficiency, or greater patient satisfaction. To complicate matters further, it is not uncommon for a single person to demonstrate both leadership and management behaviors. There is definitely overlap between management and leadership, but there is also a great deal that differentiates them.

Leadership and management skills are complementary, but their origins and philosophical foundations are different.² Understanding these differences is absolutely essential if effective leadership development programs are to be crafted and leadership performance evaluated fairly.³ Management aims to maintain standardization, consistency and order, and it is concerned with the efficient and effective running of organizations. Leadership aims to create change and improvement.⁴

Harvard organizational psychologist, Abraham Zaleznik⁵ argued that the difference between managers and leaders is based in the unconscious conceptions they hold about chaos and order. He claimed that managers tend to prefer procedure, seek stability and control, and instinctively handle problems before they fully understand their significance. In contrast, he believed that leaders are much better at tolerating chaos and the absence of obvious structure, and are often more willing to delay closure in order to understand problems more accurately. These differences are typically deep-seated in their psyches and not always self-evident. However, these differences do result in certain behaviors that are typical of leaders and/or typical of managers. Table 3-1 is a side-by-side comparison of some of these typical differences.

Other researchers, such as Ronald Heifetz,⁶ claim that managers and leaders are distinct in the processes they use to solve problems. For example, Heifetz claims that leaders typically use novel approaches to solve problems and handle conflict, and managers typically use existing precedent (or policy and procedure) to solve problems or handle conflict. It is clear that some of the earlier research on the differences between leadership and management is rooted in an indi-