

Coaching Corner

Doug Cooper looks at Leadership in the challenging world of paddlesports ...

*Where shall I go? When should I go?
How fast/far should I go? What should I
take? How do I ensure my group has fun
yet stays safe? How can I meet my groups'
expectations? What happens if the weather/
conditions change?*

TO LEAD in our ever changing water based environment poses a lot of questions for the leader; no doubt you can relate to many of the above questions, and add a lot more. From each of these questions follows a decision to be made, each one of the decisions leading to a successful day out or a day that could have perhaps been better. We know good leadership is all about keeping people safe, yet it is far more than that. We want to influence and motivate our group towards communal or individual goals, we want to inspire and of course we want them to develop that passion for paddlesport. To do this we must have good interpersonal skills, be able to communicate, show empathy and understand all those around us. Leadership is essentially all about our behaviours; our actions are always going to be remembered more than our status or name.

So how do we do it, or more importantly how could we do it better? What influences our behaviours and critically how should I behave? How should I answer all those questions and what style should I adopt when I'm leading? Well British Canoeing have been playing with a model to help answer just those questions, and considering it may not just make us safe leaders but perhaps make us inspirational leaders. Let's have a look at it:

Influences on Leadership Behaviour

For us to know how best to behave and then decide how best to therefore lead, we must first understand what influences our leadership behaviours. These influences are critical as it is these that dictate our behaviour, ignore them and poor leadership will follow, respond and adapt to them and inspirational you may be! Three key influences have been identified:

● The Situation and Environment

For Example: the weather, water conditions/seriousness, the goals of the group, the type of task.

Considerations: these will often dictate the leader to a specific type of required behaviour to manage the situation, more often the not linked to safety but can be linked to ensuring something is achieved.

● The Group Members

For Example: individuals' different characteristics, personality, ability and arousal levels relative to the task in hand, preference for specific leadership behaviours.



Considerations: these guide the leader to the groups/individuals preferred behaviour for them to get the most out of the situation, these may well change as the situation and environment does.

● You (The Leader):

For Example: your personality, expertise, experience, philosophy, personal values and beliefs.

Considerations: this will be the starting point to how you want to lead. However, it is critical this is constantly monitored and adapted based on the other two influences to ensure your actual behaviour delivered to the group has considered the situation and environment, along with the group members' preferences in response to this.

Leader Behaviour

Your *actual behaviour* is what the group sees and experiences, it is in essence what you are as a leader and from this how successful you will be. Your behaviour must be adaptable, reactive and in a constant state of being self-monitored. This process is fed by bearing in mind the influences outlined. What underpins all of this 'adaptive' behaviour is important, this is the 'magic stardust' that supports you being *inspirational*. Three simple things need to be part of your leadership everywhere you go and with everyone you lead:

● Vision: create an inspirational vision as a goal for the future for the group and/or for each individual within the group.

● Challenge: provide challenge when leading that is clearly leading towards achieving the vision – not too much, not too little, but just the right amount for each member of the group.

● Support: Provide the necessary support to help overcome the challenges set and work towards achieving the goal – this support will be psychological as well as physiological.

Leadership Style

The behaviour you chose as a leader

(influenced by three critical things and underpinned by vision, challenge and support) will shape your leadership style. Again this will change and a balance needs to be found, simply put there are two ends of the spectrum and we need to be monitoring where we are and whether it is where we want to be.

● Controlling: leader has control over decisions with little input from the group.

● Non-controlling: members participate in the decision-making process.



Research suggests that non-controlling leadership behaviours result in improved performance and psychological well-being. This empowering and supportive style ensures that the group members are central to, and actively involved in, the process. If controlling behaviours are felt necessary for safety reasons check to ensure you haven't set the challenge too high. Can you manipulate the level of challenge in order that you can hand over more control to the group members?

The Effect

To know if our behaviour is inspirational, that our style is appropriate and that the group are getting what they want, then we have to monitor the effect we are having.

This is simple: *Are the group enjoying the experience and is their performance meeting the demands required of it?*

By constantly asking yourself this question, then adapting accordingly will ensure great leadership. How do you adapt – well go back to the influences, check the vision, challenge and support is in place and then consider the style being used.

Remember!

it is all about the decisions we make

Our decisions are crucial and they should be happening all the time. So when planning, doing and reflecting consider the influences, the behaviour and the effect. Constantly observe and monitor to feed these decisions and always be prepared to react and then adapt when out leading based on these decisions.

So hopefully the challenging world of paddlesport leadership might just become a little easier to understand. More importantly our behaviours and actions that we will always be remembered by will be inspirational to those we lead.

For more information:

● Transformational Leadership
Calum Arthur
[youtube.com/watch?v=Tqr5w5Bn5n0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tqr5w5Bn5n0)

● Transformational Leadership
SCOTTISH PADDLER Coaching Corner
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● Multidimensional Model of Leadership –
Chelladurai, P. (2007)

