9. Leadership Fairness Model

What determines whether people feel I am treating them fairly?

Key Definitions

Fairness is the quality of behaving in a reasonable and just manner. It is about treating others the right way. But whether these others judge the behavior to be fair depends on their perception of what happened. In other words, fairness is in the eye of the beholder – you might think you behaved fairly, but that doesn't mean others experienced it as such.

To get people to follow willingly, leaders need to build trust, which hinges on being believed to be fair. If people don't have faith in the leader's fairness, they will fear unjust treatment, which might still compel them to follow, but in a compliant, not an engaged, manner.

Conceptual Model

The *Leadership Fairness Model* distinguishes between two fundamentally different pathways to leadership – the *fair* and *fear* approaches. Being fair is the high road to leadership influence, as being reasonable and just builds people's trust in the leader and makes them willing to let themselves be swayed. Playing on people's fear, on the contrary, is the low road to leadership influence, as people might reluctantly comply, but only to avoid undesirable consequences.

The model subsequently identifies three ways in which a leader can give people a sense of being treated fairly. These three types of fairness are complementary and can reinforce each other. They can be seen as the *input* (attitude), *throughput* (process) and *output* (outcome) of interaction between a leader and followers. Where leaders, intentionally or inadvertently, fail to behave in a fair manner, they will trigger a variety of fears in the people around them. The model suggests it is up to leaders to choose in which way they want to exert influence.

High Road to Influence	**Fair Attitude** *(Interactional Justice)* "Treating the other with dignity & respect"	**Fair Process** *(Procedural Justice)* "Going through the appropriate steps"	**Fair Outcomes** *(Distributive Justice)* "Ensuring an equitable result"	**Build Trust**
	as opposed to playing on…	as opposed to playing on..	as opposed to playing on…	
Low Road to Influence	**fear of…** Rejection, contempt, derision and/or condescension	**fear of…** Arbitrary behavior, political games and/or preferential treatment	**fear of…** Losing, getting less, failing, being blamed and/or being punished	**Trigger Compliance**

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Key Elements

The three types of fairness are the following:

1. **Fair attitude**. Every interaction between a leader and a follower starts with the basic posture that the two take towards each other. Where a leader approaches the follower with dignity and respect, this will be experienced as a recognition that the follower is valued as a human being. By expressing in word and deed that the other is accepted as a worthy individual, the leader signals "I acknowledge you as someone whose interests I will keep in mind". Such a just way of relating to the other is also referred to as *interaction justice*.

   Where a leader fails to embrace others as respected counterparts, they can feel irrelevant, rejected or looked down upon with contempt, derision and/or condescension.

2. **Fair process**. While fairness begins by approaching the other with respect, it needs to be followed up by treating the other in a reasonable and equitable way. Where a leader goes through the steps of due process, this will be experienced as an honest and legitimate handling of a situation. By following the appropriate procedures in a secure fashion, the leader signals "you can count on me to deal with you in a balanced, sensible and ethical manner". For this reason, this type of fairness is also called *procedural justice*.

   Where a leader fails to follow due process, others might feel at the mercy of his/her arbitrary whims, as pawns in his/her political games, and/or as victims of his/her partisanship.

3. **Fair outcomes**. A sense of fairness also depends on whether the results of the interactions between the leader and the follower are shared in a just manner. Whether a process has a favourable or undesirable outcome, for followers it is of critical importance that these results are allocated to the various stakeholders equitably. By dividing them among the different participants in an even-handed and appropriate way, the leader signals "you can have confidence that I will distribute the outcomes correctly". For this reason, this type of fairness is also called *distributive justice*.

   Where a leader fails to share the benefits and losses fittingly, others can feel they are losing out or getting less, and/or fear being branded a failure, given the blame and punished.

Key Insights

- **Fair and fear as the two approaches to leadership**. Leadership is the ability to influence others to move in a certain direction, and there are two types of influence; being fair builds trust and sways people to follow voluntarily, while fear triggers people to follow compliantly.

- **Fairness is the high road to leadership**. Acting fairly is a key ingredient of building trust between the leader and the followers. It generally takes long and requires considerable effort, but is the route to winning hearts and minds, and achieving lasting engagement.

- **Three types of fairness**. Leaders can be fair in the way they relate to others (*fair attitude*), in the way they deal with others (*fair process*) and in the way they share results with others (*fair outcomes*). The three forms are complementary and can reinforce each other.

- **Fairness is in the eye of the beholder**. While leaders might think they are behaving fairly, to have influence the only thing that matters is how the follower experiences a leader's behaviour. Therefore, leaders need to ensure that they are seen to be fair.

- **Fear also works**. But there is also a low road to leadership, which plays on fear to get people to comply. This approach works and it is intentionally, but also inadvertently, used by many. It is up to each leader to consciously choose which road they wish to take.

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Publication Schedule

July 2019	*Mind the Gap Model*	*Change Management*
August 2019	*Digital Platform Map*	*Digital Strategy*
September 2019	*Interaction Pressure Gauge*	*Interpersonal Interaction*
October 2019	*Revenue Model Framework*	*Revenue Model Typology*
November 2019	*House of Engagement*	*Organizational Engagement*
December 2019	*Confidence Quotient*	*Trust Building*
January 2020	*Competition Tornado*	*Competitive Strategy*
February 2020	*11C Synergy Model*	*Corporate Synergy Management*
March 2020	*Leadership Fairness Model*	*Leadership-Follower Interaction*
April 2020	Strategic Agility Model	Strategy Process Approach
May 2020	The Control Panel	Corporate Control Dimensions
June 2020	Rising Star Framework	Talent Management
July 2020	Strategy Development Cycle	Strategy Process Steps
August 2020	7I Roles of the Corporate Center	Corporate Organization
September 2020	Deft Dialogue Model	Interpersonal Communication
October 2020	Digital Business Model Dials	Digital Strategy
November 2020	Fruits & Nuts Matrix	Priority-Setting
December 2020	Story-Telling Scripts	Leadership Communication
January 2021	Corporate Value Creation Model	Corporate Level Strategy
February 2021	The Innovation Box	Innovation Approaches