

## Book Review

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**Fisher, Jim. (2016). *The Thoughtful Leader: A Model of Integrative Leadership*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.**

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In order to coach leaders toward greater leadership effectiveness, we need a clear sense of the destination, a robust idea of what leadership is. But what is leadership? Answering that question may appear simple enough until we consider what we actually *know* about leadership, versus what we simply *believe*. Leadership is a complex phenomenon, with so many situational variables that a true science of leadership may be forever beyond our ken. But that doesn't mean we have to engage in what Jeffrey Pfeffer, in his book *Leadership BS*, calls lay preaching, "telling people inspiring stories about heroic leaders and exceptional organizations ... making those who hear the stories feel good and temporarily uplifted while not changing much of what happens at many workplaces" (Pfeffer, 2015, p. 6).

Faced with the vast number of leadership theories that circulate in both academia and the popular press it is tempting for leaders and coaches alike to jump on the latest fad that claims to have THE answer to today's unique leadership challenges. And in an effort to carve out a niche for themselves, purveyors of these fads often portray previous theories as irrelevant relics of a bygone age.

For this reason, and despite its unassuming title, *The thoughtful leader: a model of integrative leadership* serves as a welcome respite. Fisher does not attempt to replace previous theories with a new one, but rather strives to integrate different leadership theories from different ages into a single unified matrix. His model offers anyone willing to embrace the complexity of leading effectively an expanded toolkit for doing so.

While each of these theories was developed in different eras and in response to different leadership challenges, there is nothing fundamentally

incompatible about them, according to Fisher, because these previous leadership theories were not really theories at all, but rather “cycles,” all of which are essential to effective leadership. Leadership is, on this view, more complex and multi-faceted than previous theories claimed, and only when we practice all three “cycles” can we be truly effective leaders.

### **The Three Cycles of Leadership**

Each of Fisher’s three cycles of leadership consists of three dimensions (see Table 1 below).

<b>MANAGING</b>	<b>DIRECTING</b>	<b>ENGAGING</b>
Plan	Vision	Values
Organize	Alignment	Clarity
Control	Motivation	Involvement

**Table 1: Fisher’s 9Box model of integrative leadership**

The first cycle, what Fisher calls ‘Managing,’ is traditional Command and Control-type leadership, with its three dimension of planning, organizing and controlling. In the early years of the industrial revolution, Managing alone was enough, and still is in certain circumstances (i.e. the Catholic Church, and other strictly hierarchical institutions). But in the 1990s, as the world became increasingly complex and unpredictable, leaders were called upon to do more than Manage – they were called upon to Direct.

The three dimensions of ‘Directing,’ Fisher’s second cycle of leadership, are vision, alignment and motivation. If Managing tells people what to do, Directing tells them why they are doing it. Directing recognizes that people don’t follow a leader – they follow an idea, personified in a leader. That idea is grounded in work that needs to be performed through a participatory process where workers feel adequately represented and where work becomes, as a result, more meaningful. In other words, Directing overcomes the alienation that results from work imposed on others by an all-knowing leader from above.

Still, Fisher maintains that even Managing and Directing are not enough in the new Millennium. Today’s generation of workers wants to contribute ideas more actively and spontaneously. They want their ideas to be taken

seriously, and want to be recognized for their creativity and initiative. In short, they want to be fully engaged. Leaders, today, must then Manage, Direct, and also Engage, which includes the three dimensions of values, clarity and involvement.

If embracing all this complexity seems overwhelming, don't worry. Underlying this model is the optimistic belief that leadership is "difficult but doable" (p. 152). Fisher believes that anyone who is motivated to lead can do it reasonably well. The model reminds us that leadership is a complex task with multiple dimensions, interacting in powerful and synergistic ways. But it also reminds us where to focus our time and energy, with a comprehensive checklist or dashboard.

Coaches can use Fisher's model to support leaders as they grapple with the disparate and confusing messages about leadership they are exposed to on LinkedIn and elsewhere. Many leaders feel they have to choose between what they instinctively do as leaders and what they 'should' do. Fisher's integrative model enables leaders to halve their cake and eat it to – to keep the tried and true while embracing seeming alternatives (that aren't actually alternatives, but rather complements.) It also allows coaches to take a 'yes, and ...' approach to leadership development, building on what their clients already know, while expanding their range.

## **References**

- Fisher, J. (2016). *The thoughtful leader: A model of integrative leadership*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Pfeffer, J. (2015). *Leadership BS: Fixing workplaces and careers one truth at a time*. New York: HarperCollins