



# LEADERSHIP UNVEILED

NAVIGATING THE MULTIFACETED  
PATH TO SUCCESS

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*Work-life balance is a keyword in today's dynamic landscape of challenges and diversity. Understandably, it is better to keep work and home separate to maintain mental health. However, as much as leadership stands out as a guiding force in navigating towards shared goals and collective success at the workplace, such skills may overlap with the requirements of home.*

**D**r Joe Schembri, a lecturer at the UM Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy, facilitated the panel discussion, 'Leading from the Front',

which was held at UM on 25 October 2023.

The roundtable brought together Prof. Leonie Baldacchino, former director of the Edward De Bono Institute for Creativity and Innovation; Joseph Sultana, original founder of Ascent Software, which has since been sold to an international group; and Ray Bonnici, the Chief People Officer of APS Bank. Throughout the discussion, Kylie Decelis kindly took notes.

During the panel, which was held as part of the Leadership and Personal Development study unit in UM's new International M.B.A., five important themes emerged regarding effective and efficient leadership: transferable leadership skills between the workplace and home, leadership's context-dependent nature, the selection of the right people for the proper role, inspiring the youth, and the role of expertise in leadership.

## **FROM WORK TO HOME**

Prof. Baldacchino emphasised that leadership is a multifaceted concept. The dynamics of being

a leader can vary greatly depending on the context. For example, the skills and strategies an individual applies in their workplace differ from those they use at home in a family scenario.

'It's important to understand that being a leader at work isn't the same as being [a leader] at home. These scenarios come with different challenges, aims, and expectations of a person as a leader. You usually need to be organised and focused on getting results at work. Conversely, it's more about understanding emotions and being sensitive to others at home. But there are skills you can learn that work well in both places, helping you excel in your professional and personal lives alike,' Baldacchino said. These fundamental transferable skills are empathy, emotional intelligence, and creative thinking.

Firstly, empathy is a cornerstone of effective leadership at work and at home. Empathetic leaders at work listen to their team, making things run more smoothly and boosting productivity. Likewise, empathy at home improves communication, builds trust, and strengthens bonds.

Secondly, as a supporting skill, a high degree of emotional intelligence enables leaders to navigate human emotions effectively. Emotional intelligence helps solve conflicts, unite teams, and make ➔



Images (Left & Right) taken during the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy panel discussion, 'Leading from the Front', held at UM on 25 October 2023.  
Photos by Kristov Scicluna

decisions in the workplace. Similarly, at home, it empowers individuals to handle family dynamics, resolve disputes, and create a supportive environment.

Thirdly, creative thinking is a priceless skill in any setting. It catalyses problem-solving and innovation. In leadership at work, creative thinking can spark innovative solutions and give an edge over competitors. At home, it fosters adaptability and finding new ways to tackle daily issues. Creative thinkers excel at finding solutions that suit everyone, whether in a meeting or with family.

Yet, an important personality trait has emerged as an essential part of effective leadership: authenticity. 'During the lectures, we discussed authentic leadership and that this is becoming a requirement today as our employees, clients, and all stakeholders expect us to be real. Being authentic is tied to being credible, someone who can be believed, which is essential for all leaders,' Schembri told **THINK**.

## NOT IN A VACUUM

Leadership happens in context. It is impossible to take leadership out of its surroundings as it is a concept deeply entwined with its environment, said Joseph Sultana, who founded Ascent Software twenty years ago.

'The kind of leader a company needs depends on its goals. Elon Musk and Steve Jobs have been known as visionaries who've shaken up the tech world. But they've also stirred controversy because they're super intense and assertive. They've shown amazing leadership in reaching their goals, but this has made people wonder about the well-being of those who work with them,' Sultana said.

Effective leadership hinges on an organisation's specific objectives and values. If someone wants to work for a company whose ultimate goal is to conquer the cosmos

or plant devices in human brains for de facto telepathic abilities, Elon Musk is the perfect choice.

Over the past two decades, research has changed how we view leadership. We have moved away from thinking that leaders are born with specific traits that make them perfect for any situation. Instead, today's research points towards the viability of situational leadership. This means the relationship between leaders and their followers depends on the context and the task.

'This has important implications, at least on two levels,' Schembri said. 'First, it implies that leadership can be improved, sharpened, and developed over time. This is a significant departure from the idea that some people are born leaders. Therefore, it encourages employees, team members – and anyone else – to invest in their own leadership development, which makes them more effective leaders. Secondly, it allows us to think of leadership potential in a context, in specific situations, and therefore to look at personality traits which were in the past associated with leadership with a pinch of salt,' he added.

## THE RIGHT FIT

Recognising individual talent is no longer enough for a leader to support their team. Leaders must assess how well someone will collaborate within a team. Ray Bonnici, Chief Officer of People and Culture at APS, emphasised that determining the right people and aligning them with the team is a cornerstone to success. Finding a balance maximises each team member's potential and minimises the risk of toxicity that may disrupt team cohesion and productivity.

'Recognising the harm that toxic individuals can inflict on a team serves as a reminder that selecting the right people for the right roles is not only a strategy for optimising



performance but also a safeguard against the potential pitfalls that can arise from toxic personnel,' said Bonnici.

Schembri agreed: 'The key to high performance lies in finding the right balance between having skilled individuals and fostering a cohesive team dynamic. Influential leaders create a safe environment where team members understand their roles, can question norms, and fully commit to shared goals. Achieving this balance is challenging but essential for any coach, manager, or leader.'

## INSPIRING THE YOUTH

As the labour market swells with an increasing need for talent and the available pool is getting younger, an outstanding leader must be able to recognise the unique qualities and values that define the younger generation.

Young people today demonstrate high social awareness, care deeply about environmental issues, and hold strong ethical values. These qualities significantly impact their preferences when selecting employers. They look for companies prioritising social and environmental responsibility alongside profit, seeking a genuine commitment to these causes.

This change in priorities requires leaders to adapt their leadership styles and organisational values to align with the younger workforce. Great leaders embrace the youth's values, integrate them into the company's mission, and genuinely engage in social and environmental efforts. Leadership hence evolves into a bridge that connects with the passion and dedication of the younger generation, creating an inclusive, environmentally-conscious, and future-oriented workplace.

'Organisations need to deeply understand what motivates young people to attract the best talent in the labour market's tight battle and effectively deploy them in their teams. Values like authenticity, sustainability, and quality of life

are becoming central issues for the youth. Organisations need to align their missions with these new aspirations but to do so authentically,' Schembri said.

## CONSTANT LEARNING TO EXPERTISE

Expertise is pivotal for a leader to support individuals and guide teams towards successful operations. Bonnici underscored the essential nature of fostering an inquisitive mind and a lifelong thirst for learning. 'It's physically and intellectually impossible to become an expert in every specialised field within one's business. Therefore, a broad understanding of various topics through continuous learning holds immense value,' Bonnici said.

Through continuous improvement of their knowledge and widening expertise, leaders become equipped to assess decisions, make informed judgments, and assemble the right teams. A foundation of general knowledge sharpens leadership skills and provides a competitive edge.

'Continuous learning is probably even more critical than expertise,' Schembri said. Continuous learning is the investment people make in themselves as professionals. It involves self-reflection on whatever we do and identifying gaps in our skills, attitudes and behaviours to address them over time and become better team players, followers, and leaders. 📦

*This event was possible thanks to the Leadership and Personal Development study unit, part of the International Master of Business Administration programme. Students were invited to reflect on their performance and work on a personal development plan, in which they considered strengths and weaknesses, among other things, and thought of ways of addressing them.*