

## **What leaders really do**

*By John P Kotter, Harvard Business Review, May-June 1990*

Leadership and management are two distinctive but complementary systems. Each has its own functions and characteristic activities. A company needs both to succeed.

Management is about coping with complexity. Leadership is about coping with change. Managers deal with complexity by planning and budgeting. Leaders drive change by setting a direction.

Managers achieve their plans by creating an organizational structure and assigning qualified individuals to different jobs. In contrast, leaders focus their energy on aligning people.

Managers are concerned with controlling and problem solving. They monitor performance, compare it with the plan, identify deviations and then plan and organize to deal with the problem. Leaders achieve their vision by motivating and inspiring people to move in the right direction. They appeal to basic but often untapped human needs, values and emotions.

To develop leaders, the careers of people with potential must be managed carefully. They should be provided significant challenges early in their career. This will enable them to actually lead, take risk and to learn from both successes and failures. Later in their career, job rotation across functions, unusually broad job assignments and special task force responsibilities can be used. This enables people to increase their breadth of knowledge and also develop valuable networks and relationships.

But whatever be the method used, developing people into leaders requires serious commitment on the part of senior executives. They have to identify people with potential early in their careers, make them visible and identify the development needs. Nurturing a culture where leaders can develop is the ultimate act of leadership.