

- 1) The participants in the session were seven members of Wansbeck Paddle Sports Club, six of whom were candidates for the British Canoe Union Four Star Whitewater Leader Training and one who came to take photographs of the river sessions .
- 2) The objectives for the session were:

At the end of the session participants will be able to:

- Explain what they think is important about leadership
- Explain what other participants think is important about leadership
- Explain a theoretical model of leadership and identify those parts of the model that reflect their thinking and that of other participants

3) The session began with a discussion about the importance of leadership within the context of the BCU 4* Whitewater Leader Award and a general agreement that leadership is more than it is represented in the instructional literature related to canoeing.

Following this discussion the group undertook a series of exercises:

Exercise 1a

Tom introduced participants to the exercise and explained that:

- We are seeking the views of participants
- We are here to learn from each other
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Any written parts of the sessions are for the participants own use and that they are writing things to remind themselves, we'll be discussing all points so there is no need to worry about the presentation and appearance of any writing

LEADERSHIP

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Please put a word, phrase or paragraph in each box to identify one thing that you consider important about LEADERSHIP

The participants each identified four things that they consider important, they were shared verbally with the group and recorded. The comments were:

Taking Responsibility

Confidence

High Skill

Be authoritative- give people confidence

Communication

Ability to Inspire

Make situation safe

Stay calm in a crisis

Knowing when to change authority levels

Positive role model

Honest about experience/skill

Take account of the ability and capabilities of others

Not only can but will listen to others

Confident in ability to deal with the task ahead personally

Good group management

Position of maximum utility

Clear directions/instructions

Approachable

Risk assessment

Appear confident

Quick decision making

Listen to others and evaluate abilities of others

Good communication

Authority

Boost morale

Good listening and communication

Gets people to listen

Take responsibility

Know field well

As people called out the things that they felt important about leadership other participants acknowledged the similarities and differences. Although discussion was short the group supported each other in describing their feelings about leadership. The group then completed the second part of the exercise.

- 1)
- 2) Empathise with others
- 3) Act Maturely/sensibly
- 4) Positive life experiences to call on
- 5) Give advice, recommend kit etc

- 1) Keep it simple – easy to process
- 2) Listen
- 3) Take control-know when to
- 4) Communicate Well
- 5) Experience, knowledge, confidence, understanding

The participants chose one of the issues to be the central theme for the second part of the exercise and identified further aspects as recorded.

The participants then discussed their responses in pairs (this involved Tom as a listener) and each partner encouraged each other to explain their thinking before reporting back to the larger group.

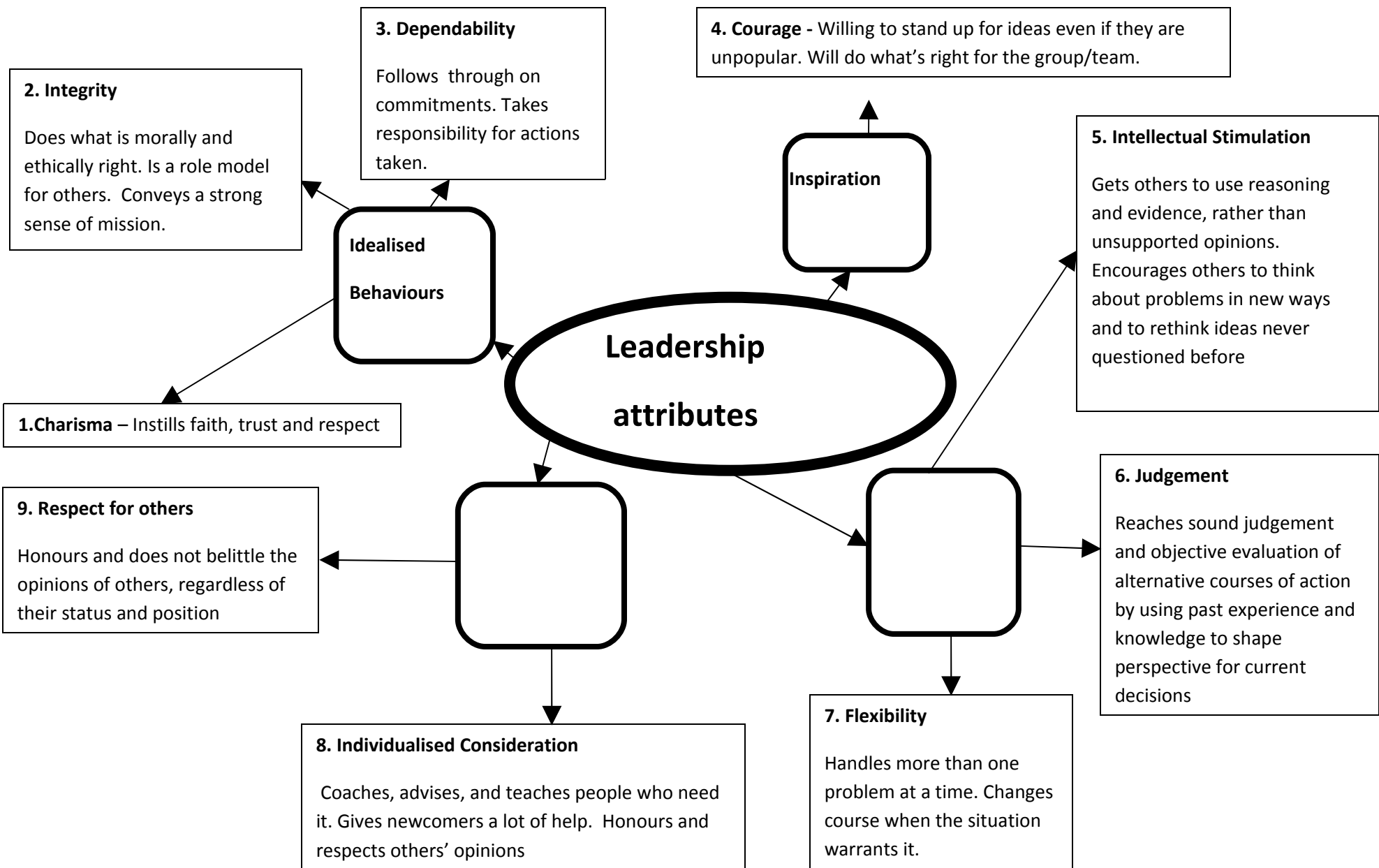
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|--------------------------|-----------|
| 1) Being Clear | Stuart |
| 2) Communication | Kirsty |
| 3) Taking Responsibility | Richard C |
| 4) Inspiration | Denton |
| 5) Knows Field | Richard S |

- 1) Communication – use signals
- 2) Speak Clearly
- 3) Organise group appropriately
- 4) Use Humour
- 5) Range of experience

- 1) Not too much talk – let people do
- 2) Clear Instructions
- 3) Put the needs of others before your own – group not individual
- 4) Positivity – half full not half empty

The reporting back created some discussion and this continued after the reporting back was done. Some of the key points identified were:

- The important role of a leader to create independent leadership amongst the group. That group reliance on the leader should be reduced and over time independent, intrinsically motivated leadership should be developed by group members. Leaders should not create dependency.
- Leadership is a balancing act – knowing when to take a particular role is as important as what role to take. The leadership role has to be appropriate to the situation. The group is always part of the situation.
- The needs of the group are more important than the needs of any individual however the group is made up of individuals and needs of the group are the needs of all the individuals. Further discussion on this topic highlighted the important issue that the needs of one individual should not be allowed to be detrimental to another member of the group.
- It is essential to develop a mutually supportive culture within groups. Individuals are unlikely to be as open and honest as they should be in an intimidating, hostile, competitive or boastful atmosphere and this could result in poor communication and potential danger.
- There is a balance to be made between showing concern and being supportive. Discussing fears, dangers etc can undermine a person's confidence and lower morale by placing undue stress on potential problems. Ignoring fears, dangers etc can also undermine a person's confidence and lower morale as the individual feels that they are the only one with such fears and a hindrance to the group. The balance includes an appropriate level of confident leadership with genuine opportunity for individuals to discuss fears and perceived problems.
- The confidence and morale of group members drop if the leader appears unsure and/or ill prepared.
- Good leadership includes encouraging people to make decisions for themselves and supporting them as long as they are not putting themselves or others in danger.
- Leadership is about helping individuals and groups to achieve what they want to achieve, however sometimes people are not aware of what they can achieve. There has to be a balance between helping people to make their objectives clear and inspiring people to new aspirations.



Tom presented “The Leadership Attributes” model adapted from management studies texts. There was a general discussion and then small groups then discussed one attribute and attempted to place it in the BCU Four Star Whitewater Leader context, points included the following.

1. Charisma – Instills faith, trust and respect

This was seen as ever present in paddling. Being well prepared, presenting well, being properly equipped, being and looking competent, confident and experienced on the water with a considered manner were seen as contributing significantly. Within this it was felt essential that the leader shows that they enjoy paddling and leading and have enthusiasm for the sport and for others participating in it.

A specific session was mentioned where a number of us were sea kayaking in Spain. In response to very strong winds we went to an estuary, that whilst being windy didn’t have swell or surf and there we were taught techniques for paddling in the wind. The coach, Phil Clegg, taught trim by popping his deck, getting his legs out of the cockpit and shuffling to the very front of the kayak and then to the back. This was an excellent demonstration and whilst being “coaching” it was hugely effective in instilling faith, trust and respect and enabled the group to overcome initial trepidation.

2. Integrity - Does what is morally and ethically right. Is a role model to others. Conveys a strong sense of mission.

The concept of role model was considered extremely important by the group – all the points on charisma relate to role modeling. Other issues about morally and ethically correct actions were considered important-being consistent in relating to access agreements, supervision ratios, club rules, codes of conduct etc and being honest when any of these are compromised as opposed to “one rule for one, another rule for others” eg wearing buoyancy aid and helmet.. Conveying the strong sense of mission requires a long term perspective and that means the leaders need to have long, medium and short term plans and to be consistently working towards them. One of Tom’s favourite quotes “Be the change you want to see in the world” (Gandhi) was touched on, emphasizing the power of role modeling in relation to what is morally and ethically right.

3. Dependability - Follows through on commitments. Takes responsibility for actions taken.

A clear issue came up here – timekeeping! A culture of respect relies on people doing the simple things – turning up when they are supposed to, communicating about trips and activities, having their kit etc. Other aspects raised include people having roles when on the river – particularly staying close to buddies, offering safety cover when people are playing means being in position and ready to go. Dependability was seen as more important than charisma in developing trust and that it is a more reliable aspect of leadership to work on.

4. Courage - Willing to stand up for ideas even if they are unpopular. Will do what's right for the group/team.

This is very difficult but essential. Examples could include deciding to do a trip at a lower grade than some members want to, ending trips early, deciding that people have to walk a rapid that some people want to run etc. Other examples included sticking to club/BCU rules, policies and procedures that may be inconvenient for some.

5. Intellectual Stimulation - Gets others to use reasoning and evidence, rather than unsupported opinions. Encourages others to think about problems in new ways and to re-think ideas never questioned before.

This was considered most important for the creation of independent leadership. Group members being aware of why decisions are made, what factors influence the decision making process, how different factors are "weighed in the balance" etc contribute to the understanding of leadership. Similarly leaders getting group members to try different things, take learning from one craft to another (e.g. adapting "setting" from open canoe to kayak),

6. Judgement - Reaches sound judgement and objective evaluation of alternative courses of action by using past experience and knowledge to shape perspective for current decisions

The group felt that this was all about learning from experiences not just having them. The earlier discussion about obtaining feedback, using feed back to change future plans, honest evaluation of personal leadership performance, constant vigilance against complacency and over confidence and seeking opportunities to learn were revisited. A strong message from the group concerned the importance of judgement, it is at the very centre of leadership, combined with the difficulty of learning judgement. A major challenge is to learn from all leadership experiences. To some extent it is easier to learn when something demonstrably goes wrong because there is evidence of failings. How do we get the evidence when things go well and when there are near misses?

7. Flexibility - Handles more than one problem at a time. Changes course when the situation warrants it.

This was seen as being central to leadership in paddling. From the very first steps in planning a trip through to enjoyable paddling, paddlers have to adapt to the environment – predicting where and when there will be water in the rivers, interpreting the physical clues that signify river features, recognizing that rivers are constantly changing, the changing weather whilst on a trip, changes to river flows between trips, potential hazards – old and new, changing capability/fitness/enthusiasm of paddlers etc mean that leaders must be flexible. The importance of recognizing when a decision needs to be changed was also emphasized and that it is much better to do so openly and honestly, to engage the group to ensure that they understand that a change has been made. The other important factor in discussion about this attribute was the importance of having clear plans that include plans B etc. Having potential escape routes, pre-planned strategies to deal with or preferably prevent emergencies are paddling manifestations of flexible leadership.

8. Individualised Consideration - Coaches, advises, and teaches people who need it. Gives newcomers a lot of help. Honours and respects others' opinions

This topic caused interested debate. The BCU Four Star White Water Leader is specifically a leadership award as opposed to a coaching award. However, as this model, this issue and the group work demonstrates coaching is an integral part of leadership and leadership is an integral part of coaching. All agreed that as individuals we feel that our responsibilities to the group and individuals require that we would coach if that is the most appropriate way to lead a group successfully.

9. Respect for others - Honours and does not belittle the opinions of others, regardless of their status and position

This was felt to underpin all the other aspects and that leadership will not be effective without respect for the group and the individuals that make the group. Without the group there is no need for a leader!

The group discussion of all of these points was engaging and aspects of the discussion were referred to when on the river over the next few weeks .