



leadership ethos
confidence, authenticity, impact

Level up your leadership:

**Unlock your potential as you transition from
technical expert to leading teams with impact**

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Enabling the true potential of emerging leadership talent

The Tech Leadership ascent: From common hurdles to uncommon impact.

Early tech leadership, be it as a Development Manager, Scrum Lead, Tech Support Manager, Consultancy Lead or a similar position, is a significant milestone. Leadership is a journey filled with opportunity, but also a landscape of distinctly different challenges than you're likely to have faced before. You might be grappling with the shift from being a hands-on technical expert to a people leader, navigating changed team dynamics (especially with former peers), or striving to develop a broader business mindset beyond technical delivery. Understanding these common hurdles is the first step toward effectively addressing them.

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Shifting from Technical Expert to People Leader: This is often the primary hurdle. Many are promoted for their technical proficiency but find it challenging to step back from detailed technical work and instead focus on leading and developing others. This can mean duties like mentoring or strategic planning get neglected, potentially demotivating your team.

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Navigating Changed Relationships and Team Dynamics: Moving into management, especially when supervising former peers, inevitably alters workplace relationships. Establishing authority and trust in this new capacity requires conscious effort, as does managing perceptions and avoiding inconsistencies that can erode respect and team unity.

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Developing a Broader Business Mindset and Strategic Focus: The transition demands a significant shift from focusing on technical metrics to understanding and prioritising wider business objectives such as budget, ROI, and how technical decisions align with company strategy. Even if it isn't being explicitly being asked of you, the implicit expectation exists. This can be daunting without prior exposure or explicit training in the "language" of business.

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Mastering Multifaceted Communication: Effective leadership hinges on strong communication, yet many new tech leaders must quickly learn to adapt their style for diverse audiences – their team, their own managers, peers, and other stakeholders. This includes giving constructive feedback, navigating difficult

conversations and articulating a clear vision, often with "soft skills" that may have been less critical in previous technical roles.

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Embracing Performance Management and Accountability: A significant new responsibility is accountability for the performance of team members. This involves setting clear expectations, providing regular feedback, conducting reviews, and addressing underperformance – tasks that can be uncomfortable, especially without prior experience or when managing former colleagues.

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Overcoming Personal Doubts and Identity Crisis (Imposter Syndrome): The move away from proven technical expertise into the less familiar domain of people leadership can trigger significant self-doubt. Many new managers grapple with imposter syndrome, feeling unqualified despite their past successes, which can hinder their confidence and decisiveness.

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These are all common experiences for new leaders in the demanding tech environment.

While each challenge can feel unique, trying to tackle them all separately can be overwhelming. What if, instead, you could cultivate two foundational leadership *meta-capabilities* that provide a powerful framework for addressing these diverse issues and significantly accelerate your growth?

This guide focuses on these two pillars:

1. **Unlocking Purpose:** Crafting and communicating a vision that truly inspires.
2. **Forging Unshakeable Teams:** Mastering the art of cohesion and collaboration.

I'm Damien Mulligan and with *leadership ethos*, I specialise in helping tech leaders like you develop these profound capabilities. Let's explore how.

Meta-Capability 1: Unlocking purpose – crafting and communicating a vision that inspires



As a tech leader, moving beyond day-to-day execution to co-create and articulate a compelling vision is paramount. A clear sense of purpose, effectively communicated, doesn't just provide direction; it addresses many underlying challenges. It helps you transition from solely *doing* technical work to *leading* others, provides the strategic context often missing when you're deep in the weeds, and can even build your own confidence by anchoring your role to a larger 'why'.

Foundations: Why vision resonates – Self-Determination Theory At its heart, an inspiring vision taps into fundamental human psychological needs. Self-Determination Theory (*Deci and Ryan, 1980*) highlights three such needs:

- **Autonomy:** The desire to feel in control of one's own actions and decisions.
- **Competence:** The drive to master skills and feel effective.
- **Relatedness:** The need to feel connected to others and a part of something meaningful. A well-crafted vision, communicated effectively, can fuel these needs within your team, leading to greater intrinsic motivation and engagement.

Key elements of an inspiring vision:

- **Alignment of compelling vision with clear goals:** Your vision should be ambitious yet attainable, painting a clear picture of a desired future. This vision must then be broken down into understandable, measurable goals (think OKRs!) that guide daily work.
- **Narratives that connect individual purpose to team purpose:** People are moved by stories. Craft narratives that illustrate how everyone's contributions directly link to the team's overall mission and the broader organisational vision. Show them how their work matters.
- **Consistent communication and common language:** A vision isn't a "set it and forget it" item. It needs to be communicated regularly, consistently, and using language that resonates with your team. Reinforce it in meetings, one-on-ones, and decision-making processes.



Actionable guidelines: Bringing your vision to life

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Reflect on your "Why": Before you can inspire others, understand your own connection to the team's purpose. What excites you? What impact do you want to create?

2

Involve your team (where appropriate): While the overarching organisational vision might be set, involve your team in defining how *your team* contributes to it. This fosters ownership.

3

Articulate a clear & concise vision statement: Can you state your team's core purpose and desired future in a way that is easy to remember and repeat?

4

Translate vision into actionable goals: Use frameworks like SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals to connect the big picture to daily tasks.

5

Tell stories: Share examples of how the team's work (past, present, or potential future) embodies the vision and makes a difference.

6

Be the "Chief Reminding Officer" of your team: Continuously link day-to-day decisions and priorities back to the vision.

Meta-Capability 2: Forging unshakeable teams – The art of cohesion and collaboration

As a tech leader, your success is inextricably linked to your team's ability to work together effectively. Whether you like it or not, this is one of the ways you will implicitly be measured. Building strong team cohesion and fostering genuine collaboration helps address challenges like navigating changed (and sometimes awkward) relationships, improving how the team communicates internally and externally, and creating an environment where performance accountability is a shared standard, not just a top-down mandate.



Foundations: Creating the right environment

Psychological safety: Coined by Amy Edmondson, psychological safety is the bedrock of high-performing teams. It's a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. Team members feel accepted and respected, free to speak up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes without fear of punishment or humiliation. Without it, true collaboration and innovation are stifled.

Guarding against team dysfunctions: Patrick Lencioni, in his book "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team," outlines common pitfalls: Absence of Trust, Fear of Conflict, Lack of Commitment, Avoidance of Accountability, and Inattention to Results. Proactively working to build defences against these is crucial.

Key elements of strong team cohesion & collaboration:

Managing conflict constructively: Conflict is inevitable, but not all conflict is bad. Encourage it. Healthy, respectful debate around ideas is vital for innovation. The key is to ensure conflict remains task-focused, not personal, and that the team has clear norms for disagreeing constructively and resolving issues.

A safe space for innovation and creativity: Tech teams thrive on innovation. This requires an environment where experimentation is encouraged, failure (when learning-oriented) is seen as a data point, and diverse perspectives are actively sought and valued. Psychological safety is your enabler here.

Actionable guidelines: Cultivating cohesion & collaboration

1. **Prioritise trust-building:** Be reliable, transparent, and extend trust to your team members. Create opportunities for members to (appropriately) connect personally.
2. **Model vulnerability:** As a leader, admitting your own mistakes or uncertainties can help create space for others to do the same, fostering psychological safety.
3. **Establish clear team norms:** Collaboratively define how the team will make decisions, communicate, handle disagreements, and hold each other accountable.
4. **Encourage constructive dissent:** Actively solicit different viewpoints. When disagreements arise, guide the team to focus on the issues and explore solutions collaboratively rather than letting it become personal.
5. **Promote shared goals & mutual accountability:** Ensure everyone understands how their work contributes to team goals and foster a culture where team members feel responsible for supporting each other's success.
6. **Create dedicated time/space for creative thinking:** Whether it's brainstorming sessions, hackathons, or simply encouraging experimentation, signal that innovation is valued.
7. **Recognise and celebrate collaboration:** Acknowledge and reward instances where the team works well together, shares knowledge, and supports each other.

Mastering vision & teamwork: Your fast-track to senior leadership

Developing your ability to craft an inspiring vision and forge truly cohesive, collaborative teams will do more than solve immediate managerial headaches. These are the hallmarks of impactful leadership that get noticed by executives. They are 2 of the 3 **Impactful Intangibles** that are fundamental to success in leadership.

Impactful Intangibles

vision

authenticity

collaboration

Intangible because there's no test for them, yet you will frequently find that your performance is implicitly measured in these areas by your management, peers and direct reports.

Impactful because of the difference they make to sustainably delivering results – and how apparent they are in their absence!

Impactful Intangibles articulate and help cultivate critical skills and behaviours that accelerate personal development from manager to authentic leader, delivering to your true potential. This combination means that you are best placed to act with confidence, continually developing your thriving team to delivers the results that you and your company needs.

When you can articulate a clear purpose that motivates, and when you build teams that are engaged, innovative, and mutually supportive, you demonstrate strategic capability far beyond technical execution. You show that you can scale your impact by empowering others – a critical factor your leadership advancement.

Ready to deepen these capabilities and transform your leadership?

The principles and frameworks in this guide offer a starting point for elevating your leadership. If you're committed to:

- Mastering the art of inspiring vision and purpose-driven leadership,
- Building high-performing, psychologically safe, and deeply collaborative teams,
- Receiving personalised coaching to navigate your unique challenges and amplify your strengths,

...then I'm here to support your journey with this unique *leadership ethos* program.

Take the Next Step:

- **Visit:** [Leadership Ethos](#) to explore tailored leadership coaching programs.
- **Book:** A complimentary [Discovery Call](#) to discuss your specific leadership goals.
- **Subscribe:** To [Leadership Ethos Substack](#) for insights, strategies, & inspiration.
- **Download:** Your complimentary [Leadership Insights Assessment Pack](#).

about damien mulligan



Damien Mulligan is a business leader, coach and mentor passionately dedicated to empowering newly promoted and aspiring tech leaders. Drawing on extensive experience building and leading successful tech teams and driving innovation, Damien provides practical, actionable strategies that help individuals master the transition from practitioner to leadership, accelerate their career growth, and lead with enduring confidence and impact. *leadership ethos* is your partner in cultivating the essential capabilities for outstanding tech leadership.

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Further Reading:

For a deeper dive into the power of starting with "why" to inspire action, explore **Simon Sinek's "Start With Why"** and his concept of the Golden Circle.

Explore **Amy Edmondson's work** on "**Psychological Safety**" (e.g., her book "The Fearless Organisation").

Read **Patrick Lencioni's "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team"** to understand common pitfalls and how to build a more functional, cohesive unit.

The background to **Self-Determination Theory** can be traced back to the article by **Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M.**, 'Self-Determination Theory: When Mind Mediates Behavior', from the *The Journal of Mind and Behavior*, 1(1), pp. 33–43, 1980.