

The Leadership Gap

A consistent pattern has emerged across LCI's leadership assessment work in the Caribbean region. While many leaders demonstrate strong technical capability and role-specific expertise, performance differentiation at senior levels is increasingly driven by behavioural capability rather than experience alone.

When comparing high-performing and lower-performing leadership groups in the Caribbean, the most pronounced gaps consistently appear in two leadership clusters: **Adaptability** and **Influence**. These capabilities are not new requirements but their importance has intensified as organisations navigate ongoing change, increased complexity and heightened expectations of leadership impact, exacerbated by the current existing geo-political landscape. This is even more acute for Caribbean leaders many of whom must balance the weight of off-island "head office demands" with "in-country realities".

This paper, the **Leadership Gap**, is part one of a three-part Leadership Series which examines effective leadership and delves into some of the critical competencies required to be a High Performing Leader. In this paper, we explore the competencies that represent the most significant leadership gap: Adaptability and Influence. We look more closely at what the data reveals about behavioural patterns across leadership populations we've worked with and why these capabilities are becoming decisive factors in leadership effectiveness.

Understanding the Leadership Gap

In more stable organisational environments, leadership effectiveness is often sustained through experience, procedural knowledge and established authority. However, organisations today are operating in conditions where certainty is reduced, timelines are compressed and stakeholder expectations are rising (Hassanzadeh et al., 2015).

In this context, leaders must be able to:

- Adjust quickly to changing priorities and external pressures
- Respond constructively to uncertainty and evolving information
- Influence and align diverse teams without relying on their managerial rank
- Keep people engaged and motivated through continuous change

From the data, what is revealed is that while these demands are recognised widely by Caribbean leaders, they are not consistently applied in their leadership behaviours.

In fact, our assessment data, which examines Caribbean leaders against a best practice norm group of international senior leaders and executives, reveals that the behavioural gap between high and low performers is widest where leaders are required to adapt their approach and influence others effectively toward intended organisational outcomes.

Adaptability: Leading in Uncertainty

Adaptability reflects how leaders respond to change, process new information and adjust their behaviour under pressure. It encompasses learning agility, openness to change, resilience and the ability to remain effective when conditions are uncertain or unfamiliar (Bromley et al., 2021).

High-performing leaders display clarity and composure in fluid environments. They can reassess assumptions, absorb feedback and adjust strategies without losing momentum. They tend to view change as a constant rather than a disruption.

By contrast, lower-performing leaders often show:

- Resistance or slowing in response to change
- Over-reliance on familiar approaches that no longer fit emerging conditions
- Reduced effectiveness when expectations become unclear or priorities shift

The data suggests that adaptability is not evenly distributed across leadership levels. While exposure to complexity increases at senior levels, behavioural readiness does not always keep pace. This creates risk during periods of transformation, where leadership response becomes as important as leadership direction.

Influence: Mobilising Performance Without Authority

Influence reflects a leader's ability to engage, persuade and align others to achieve outcomes. It goes beyond communication skills and includes relationship building, emotional intelligence, stakeholder awareness and credibility.

High-performing leaders consistently demonstrate strong influencing behaviours. They are able to:

- Engage diverse stakeholders with confidence and clarity
- Build trust and commitment during periods of change
- Navigate resistance without escalating tension
- Motivate others to act, even in ambiguous situations

Leaders with lower influence capability often struggle to generate traction despite sound technical or strategic intent. Common patterns include:

- Over-reliance on positional authority
- Difficulty gaining buy-in across teams or functions
- Limited impact when change requires behavioural commitment from others

In modern organisational environments, where collaboration, cross-functional delivery and stakeholder alignment are essential, influence is increasingly a core leadership requirement, not a soft skill.

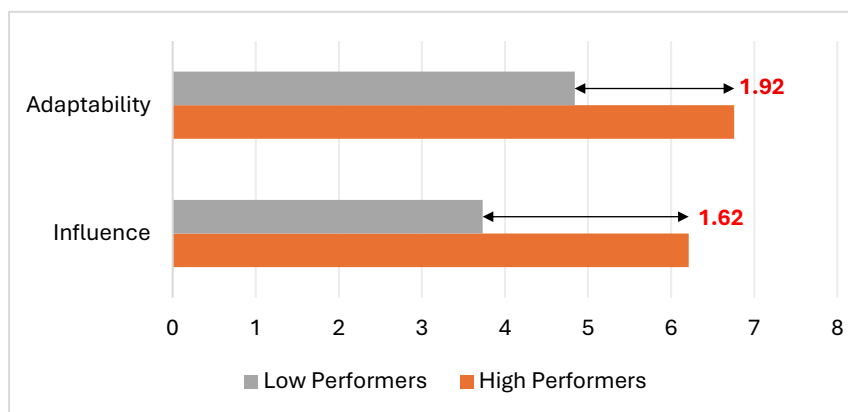


Figure 1.1 Behavioural Differences Between High and Low Performing Leaders in the Adaptability & Influence Clusters.

This figure compares average behavioural scores for high and low performing leaders across the Adaptability and Influence clusters, measured on a 1-10 scale, where 10 represents the highest level of demonstrated capability. High Performers pivot between an 8 -10 rating for senior leadership.

Across both clusters, high performers score higher than low performers, indicating a clear and repeatable behavioural gap. The size of the difference across multiple scale points suggests that Adaptability and Influence are meaningful differentiators of leadership effectiveness, rather than marginal variations in style or preference.

Information derived from Saville Wave Professional Styles assessments.

The Interaction Between Adaptability and Influence- Why it Matters

While Adaptability and Influence are distinct behavioural clusters, their impact is most visible where they intersect.

Adaptable leaders who lack influence may adjust well personally but fail to bring others with them. Influential leaders who lack adaptability may engage effectively but struggle when conditions evolve faster than their preferred leadership style (Waseem et al., 2025).

High-performing leaders demonstrate strength across both dimensions. They adapt their thinking and behaviour while simultaneously maintaining credibility, trust and engagement (Waseem et al., 2025). This combination enables them to lead change rather than react to it.

LCI's data shows that this dual capability is a defining marker of leadership effectiveness at senior and executive levels. However, as *Figure 1.1* illustrates, it is also where many Caribbean leaders face their greatest challenge - continually balancing the "group's wants" with their respective "island's needs."

Without the ability to effectively influence expectations from head office (or the wider group), and to adapt those expectations to local realities, many leaders risk being confined to operational roles rather than acting as strategic enablers. Addressing this gap is critical if we are to thrive as a region.

Up Next...

The next paper in the Leadership Insights Series will focus on the other two behavioural clusters, **Thought and Delivery**. It will explore how leaders handle complex situations, make choices and turn their plans into action. It also shows how these skills can either help or hurt their ability to adapt and influence others.

Together, these insights move beyond individual traits to reveal how leadership behaviour truly shapes organisational outcomes.



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