

Doing the right things is not the same as doing things right!

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There is a difference between doing the right (or wrong) things and doing things right (or wrong). The first is often called leadership, going for the right things, e.g. fighting injustice, or standing up for the planet. Leadership can also be used for wrong things, such as waging war to expand territory. However, someone can have leadership qualities and be followed by many people, without really doing things right. The term managing refers to doing things right (planning, organizing, etc.). Leadership and management concern two related but clearly distinguishable dimensions.

	Few management skills	Many management skills
Lacking in leadership		
Much leadership		

An important difference between leadership and management is that managerial skills, easier than leadership skills, can be learned through training. A manager can be appointed. Leadership is difficult to enforce, it can be assigned to a person, often in specific areas, at some points in his/her life. For example, someone may have very good skills in sports, or music, or a lot of knowledge about something, which makes people tend to rely on this person. A good teacher has leadership in the classroom, but not necessarily outside it. In practice, a good manager can transfer the qualities of organizing, planning, controlling and so on from job to job. If no leadership is then added, however, at most someone will be given the position of control assistant, or the humane counterpart of the navigation voice in the car, which can be ignored without consequences. We have become accustomed to such assistance systems; in the complex system world, our actions are often implicitly and sometimes explicitly mediated – managed – by apps, programs, training courses, infrastructures and manuals. As a result, we are often much more focused on management (doing things right) than on leadership (doing the right things).

Last week we stated that we are already born with an “original sin”: the system into which we have been absorbed from birth and to which we are painstakingly adapted through education, systematically demands more than the planet can provide. Although we learn to do the things we do the best we can (management), we rarely really learn to do the right things or ask the right questions. That is, we're doing the wrong things when we define doing right as narrowing the gap between reality (planet depletion, mass extinction) and the ideal world (where we don't take more than the planet can provide). In terms of diversity, sustainability and climate, we do the things we are good at our best (quality systems, smart technology, big tech development, global economy, etc.), but unfortunately those are completely the wrong things. On an individual level, it is psychologically ingrained that we can all feel guilty about something, which encourages us to pay off debt. With original sin this is very different! Original sin goes beyond our individual guilt and calls for an “instance” to replace the psychological “gap”. For good reasons that was, for example, the field of religion, or nowadays (post-, and/or trans) humanism. Unfortunately, sometimes the debt was paid off through a scapegoat, or by passing the debt on to a hostile nation or religion. From there, war could become an attempt to restore balance. But in the deeper religious communities, in the monasteries, a more internalized penance was sought. Leadership is invariably about doing right (or wrong) things. Prophets and populists are easy to understand in this context, they appeal – often via the gut feeling – to latent feelings of (original) sin. And meanwhile, the system world is raging by doing the wrong things (including a lot of smart technology) as well as possible. Insight into the difference between the two psychological quantities, managing and leadership is indispensable to gain insight into the challenges (transitions) that our world faces!