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The Ulster Business School has recently re-launched the Department of Management and Leadership, with a focus on nurturing the new business leaders of tomorrow. But why is it important to develop both?

DO WE NEED LEADERS, MANAGERS OR BOTH? - TWO HEADS ... ONE BODY?

To quote Mintzberg, management and leadership are “part of the same whole. Splitting them disparages managers and detaches leaders ... Managers who don't lead are uninspiring and ineffective. Leaders who don't manage become detached and do not know what is going on ... we need both and in the right proportions

Organisations need to become less 'management-centric' in the traditional sense and particularly as managers increasingly need to become 'more things to more people' if they are to lead and inspire their workforce. I suspect however that it is a question of effectively balancing both roles, notwithstanding the fact that top flight leadership is often the element that can make the difference. That difference might be in bringing a creative edge, a level of sustainability and/or the motivation and purpose necessary to drive the organisation and its people forward at the speed required in today's business environment.

Achieving this balance in practice however is not always easy and as Peter Drucker also acknowledged, the aim is to lead rather than manage people: “to make productive the specific strengths and knowledge of every individual”. As part of this, softer skills development plays a fundamental role and is something that we continue to focus heavily on in all of our programmes in the University. Such a focus allows students to acquire and develop the skills that will enable them to engage effectively with internal and external stakeholders and make a professional, timely and relevant contribution. Of course, the approach is tailored to the needs of particular target markets – whether it is senior managers undertaking an MBA or pre-experience graduates coming to MBS course (from a range of specialist backgrounds), it is fundamental to deal with both 'sides of the coin'.

The need for both management and leadership development is now recognised as best practice and indeed the University is now providing an undergraduate degree programme in Management and Leadership Development to students who are only embarking on this journey.

Irrespective of the course/level however, it is about providing the opportunities to further develop and enhance management and leadership competency whilst also stimulating and encouraging a culture of creativity and flexibility.

This approach to development is about real business issues and as successful entrepreneur, Michael Ludlow, commented: “undertaking the MBA was the best thing I ever did, providing the management expertise I need and confidence to lead from the front. This is absolutely crucial in developing the skill set necessary to make an impact and translate conceptual ideas into commercially viable product offerings”. Michael's aerospace company LenisAer, recently won both the 25K award and the InterTrade Ireland Seedcorn award for its innovative aero engine technology.

It is this ability to lead from the front that assures us that the right mix of skills and abilities is being developed in our students and consequently, in our future managers and leaders. Undoubtedly, the development of management and leadership capacity in Northern Ireland's business community is pivotal to the future growth of our economy - we are committed to play an important part in that success. Of an organisation's size or sector there are certain disciplines and topics that managers simply cannot ignore. Often these disciplines do not constitute 'core business' yet managers need to perform in an effective and informed manner when it comes to these areas of management.