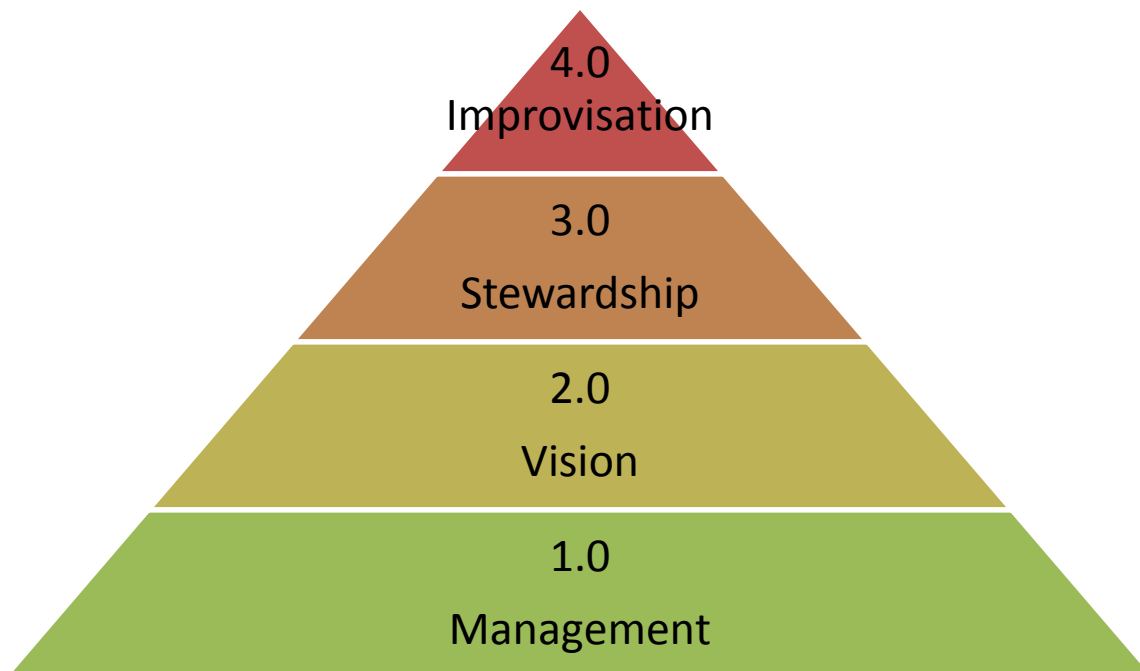


## Taxonomy of Leadership

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In the course of my professional activities, I enjoy the privilege of engaging with academic executives and administrators. In fact, I've interviewed 338 such individuals, including: 27 university presidents or vice presidents; 38 provosts, vice provosts, or associate provosts; 171 deans, associate deans, or assistant deans; and 102 directors, chairs, or department heads to date—an experience that has informed my understanding of the nature of academic administration. This led to the development of a theory of academic leadership: just as software receives periodic upgrades, we might consider educational leaders as achieving increasingly higher levels of skill and expertise.



### Leadership 1.0: Management

At the most fundamental level, administrators cause people to do things. This often happens through the exertion of influence such as setting deadlines, offering performance incentives, or imposing consequences if a task is not completed. Accomplished managers do this with sensitivity and respect. The most skillful inspire their employees to high-level performance rather than resorting to force. Management requires the ability to maintain complex organizational structures. It is foundational to all academic leadership.

### Leadership 2.0: Vision

Administrators at the next level move beyond management to employ the principles of constructive and positive leadership. They prefer to communicate a contagious vision, seeking to inspire employee performance through intrinsic motivation rather than the application of external incentives. This includes practicing genuine listening, exhibiting compassion, and demonstrating enthusiasm for the

organization's mission and goals. Inspirational leadership through communication of a shared vision produces a stronger workplace and fosters collaboration. Vision is essential to promoting or coping with change.

### Leadership 3.0: Stewardship

Servant-leadership takes vision to the next level. Leaders support their employees by providing opportunities for success and recognition. They refrain from self-promotion, but place others in the forefront, facilitating their professional accomplishments and inspiring those employees to become more deeply engaged in working towards the organization's success. Servant-leaders also consider the larger context of any situation, keeping an eye towards the impact of their decisions on their professional discipline; on their department, college or school; and on the institution as a whole.

### Leadership 4.0: Improvisation

Educational leaders apply all of these skills on a daily basis, but the very best administrators move fluidly between them. Most institutions of higher education operate under a set of policies, procedures, rules and regulations. These place limits on what the administrator is able to do, but they also provide a structure within which appropriate action becomes clear. At the top level of administrative competency, leaders possess a firm grasp of these governing principles and systems. They are able to apply this knowledge with discernment and wisdom as they respond to challenges on all three levels, managing, inspiring, and supporting employees and students.

The taxonomy represents the differing approaches to leadership in ascending order, but not as a hierarchy. Management is fundamental to leadership and is essential to sustaining organizations. Vision, stewardship, and improvisation all depend on a strong managerial foundation. Indeed, many organizations seldom move beyond this foundation, particularly those that remain unchanged for long periods.

Differences in these levels of leadership become most apparent when problems arise. Level 1.0 administrators react authoritatively, often by issuing mandates and imposing consequences for non-compliance. Level 2.0 administrators respond by gathering their team together, employing discussion and reasoning and they lead employees in collaborative problem solving. Level 3.0 administrators seek out the employees best equipped to address the problem and empower them to achieve solutions. Each one of these strategies may be effective; however, taking a single approach rarely leads to the highest quality solution.

The best administrators do all of these things, engaging in improvisation to fluidly adapt each strategy as necessary. They do not lose sight of the "big picture" even as they focus on the immediate need. They keep an eye on institutional requirements, the health of their department, and the wellbeing of all students and employees. They seek to resolve the situation without sacrificing educational quality. They maintain personal integrity and provide unflinching support for everyone under their leadership. They also accept responsibility and hold themselves accountable to upper administration.

Level 4.0 leadership requires foresight, creativity, and intelligence. Even more, it demands the ability to see beyond what is to what is possible.

Although the majority of daily administrative tasks exist on the level of management, Level 4.0 leaders approach even the most mundane administrative tasks with an understanding of how their actions will affect the organization as a whole and the individuals involved in the immediate situation. Vision and stewardship permeate everything they do, whether consciously or intuitively.

Undoubtedly, both my background as a corporate executive and longstanding interest in the topic of leadership have shaped my views, along with my present research and professional service. A corporate CEO and a university president share many of the same concerns and characteristics: after all, whether an organization is primarily engaged in producing a tangible product, providing a necessary service, or educating students, every organization is comprised of human beings. Leadership is about the relationship between the leader, the persons led, and the organization they all serve. All of those charged with positions of responsibility can learn from the example of those who achieve Level 4.0 in this taxonomy and strive towards the same level of accomplishment.