

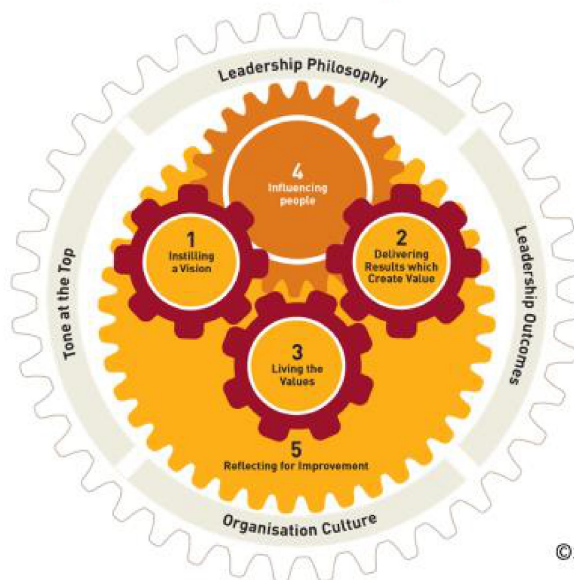
# Answering the top 10 FAQs about South Africa's #LeadershipStandard

by

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Since the development of South Africa's first leadership standard on 14 September 2017 in Kyalami, Johannesburg, the SABPP office has been inundated with questions from the market about this exciting project. The idea of the #LeadershipStandard project was to provide a clear framework for leaders on what good leadership is all about in the South African situation. The first version of the leadership standard was launched on 26 October 2017, while we are preparing for further development work about this exciting journey. We captured most of these questions and today we will share the answers with you.

## South African Leadership Standard



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### 1. Why do we need a South African Leadership Standard?

Our South Africa of the mid to late 2010s is generally acknowledged to be experiencing a crisis of leadership. For some time now we have been confronted daily with examples of organisational

failures in all spheres of the economy and many institutions of our society, which can largely, and maybe completely, be traced back to a failure of leadership as the root cause. Our reputation as a nation is under threat and the repercussions are felt financially and socially by everyone in the country.

The leadership crisis has to be looked at also as a moral crisis, because sometimes we can see strong leadership, but coming from a poor moral base which does not place morals, ethics and good governance at the forefront. The results are scandals, corruption and damage to people.

Our young democracy cannot afford such leadership problems if we are to solve our national development problems, which manifest largely as unemployment, inequality and poverty, and get ourselves back onto a path of an economic growth which will benefit all South Africans.

We have pockets of excellent leadership which can be seen also across all spheres of the economy, individuals who deliver valuable results and role model good moral leadership, but these pockets do not spread their positive influence as much as we would hope they would, so we do not achieve a critical mass of good leadership.

Even good leaders will admit that the role and task of leadership is complex in modern times. A volatile business environment, a lack of economic growth, uncertainty, increased compliance regimes, business and political scandals, rapid change, technological advancement, disruptive technologies, globalisation and a myriad of other factors complicate the role of leaders.

Against the backdrop of this leadership crisis, the development of a national leadership standard will assist in developing authentic leaders and mobilising them to rise to the occasion based on clear guidelines for leadership practice. We need a common platform of understanding what leadership means for SA leaders in all fields so that we can unlock the potential in SA's workforce and society in general. We need a standard to guide all leaders in their daily leadership practice and a common understanding on the demands of leadership which can serve two important functions:

- To present to leaders in simple terms what is expected of them; and
- To form the basis from which to understand current failures of leadership in many sectors.

From here, we can identify actions to improve leadership in South Africa.

## 2. Why is this Leadership Standard issued by the SABPP?

The SA Board for People Practices (SABPP) is an HR professional and quality assurance body operating in accordance with the NQF Act and the Skills Development Act. Research by the SABPP in 2011 revealed that HR practitioners lacked a national identity given the absence of a national framework on HR professionalism. In short, each HR practitioner does his own thing, or conforms to his or her company's approach to HR. Hence there are inconsistencies in HR practices, within companies, across companies, industries and nationally. The HR Management System Model and a set of HR Management Standards was unanimously supported throughout the country and subsequently approved by the SABPP Board after extensive multi-stakeholder consultation and involvement. Since then, a full audit framework has been developed to audit organisations against the HR Standards.

The South African HR standards have provided leadership within the HR domain of practice, and have been successfully implemented in several countries and have attracted interest from all over the world.

Inevitably, with SABPP having raised the bar on HR practice, attention is drawn by many stakeholders to the parallel need to raise the bar on the people management skills and behaviours of organisations' leaders and line managers, and the SABPP has been requested to address this issue. Many of the HR Directors implementing the HR Standards have commented on the lack of leadership and people management skills of their management teams, which are seen as a major obstacle to implementing the HR Standards successfully within their organisations.

Something must be done, and it starts with the collaboration between the SABPP, Wits Enterprise and Talent Talks to drive excellence in leadership as one of the key people practices. The SABPP sees leadership as the first in a list of key people practices that managers need to master for proper governance and performance. Once the leadership standard is in place, other standards can follow.

### 3. How can a leadership standard help improve matters?

The enormous body of research and academic writing on the topic of leadership illustrates how complex the concept of leadership can be. However, most people taking on leadership roles would like to know in simple terms what is expected of them and how they can continuously improve their leadership skills.

Across and within organisations, inconsistencies in leadership and people management practices occur. The different philosophies of universities, business schools and other learning providers contribute to the problem, given the fact that some institutions' management and leadership curricula are dominated by traditional management approaches developed during the previous century, while current and future demands require a different leadership paradigm and competence. The result is that students exiting these institutions come from different academic backgrounds based on vastly different schools of thought. In many cases, these students have to be retrained according to the needs of the organisation, and some companies even go as far to create their own corporate universities to train their own leaders.

The intention with this South African Leadership Standard is to provide one simple framework against which organisations and individual leaders can reflect on their leadership. Each leadership model taught and applied by different universities, business schools, consultants, psychologists and learning providers can be mapped to this standard. It is not the intention of the SABPP to insist that there is only one model of leadership, the complexity of the topic clearly shows that this is not realistic. But the way in which the Leadership Standard is framed concentrates on four parts, which will enable a consistent application of different leadership models. These parts are:

- A Leadership Framework depicting different dimensions which need to be considered. For each of the five core elements of this Framework, three sections have been elaborated.

- Outcome Statement. This explains what should be a visible outcome of leadership in this element.
- Fundamental Requirements for Good Practice. These are a set of clear and simple indicators which will form the building blocks for achieving the Outcome Statement.
- Key Questions. These are a set of questions which any organisation or individual leader needs to reflect on and arrive at an answer which suits the specific context of the organisation or individual leader.

#### 4. How have we approached the compilation of this South African Leadership Standard?

The three partners in this project, the SABPP, Talent Talks and Wits Enterprise, adopted the consultative and co-creating methodology used previously by the SABPP when it formulated the HR Management Standards. A high profile event was organised for September 14<sup>th</sup> 2017 at which interested individuals from a wide range of South African organisations (private, public and non-profit) came together to consider and discuss what the content should be for the Leadership Standard. The product of the group discussions at this event is contained in the draft leadership standard and is presented as an initial “first edition” which is to form the basis of wide consultation across South Africa.

The range and depth of stakeholders who have an interest in creating and adopting the best possible South African Leadership Standard is immense, and a careful strategy will be followed in identifying, approaching and involving as many stakeholders as possible.

#### 5. Can this South African Leadership Standard be applied outside South Africa?

The Leadership Standard was drawn up by South Africans in response to a crisis in leadership in South Africa. However, it is likely that the content of the Leadership Standard would apply in many other different situations. A similar consultative process would be needed in another country to ensure applicability and stakeholder involvement. Leadership problems are not unique to South Africa, and we would like to encourage other nations to develop their own leadership standards.

#### 6. Has the South African Leadership Standard been benchmarked outside South Africa?

The purpose of the leadership standard was to create a standard for South African leaders to guide leadership practice in South Africa, and not for leaders globally. Unique aspects of leadership in South Africa form part of the standard, such as the need for leaders to be active



citizens in addressing socio-economic problems. However, an attempt was made to compare the South African leadership standard to global leadership approaches and theories, and the design team managed to confirm that the essence of good leadership world-wide is covered in the South African leadership standard. However, there are no full national leadership standards available globally. As far as we could establish, there are only two sector specific leadership standards available, i.e. for banking in the UK and for school principals in Scotland, but these two examples are not cross-sector national standards, but sector-specific leadership standards.

## 7. Is the Leadership Standard relevant to small, medium and micro enterprises?

Small business owners contributed to the development of the leadership standard. Also, the standard was submitted to several small business owners for their inputs, including Enterprise Magazine. All these SMME stakeholders agreed that the standard is relevant to them. In fact, the high failure rate (80%) of new businesses is attributed to poor leadership by entrepreneurs. SMME owners are strong with the vision for the business (element 1), but struggle to instil the vision in all employees. Furthermore, they are typically good in delivering value for customers (element 2), but often fail to create a culture of living the values (element 3), as well as influencing people (element 4). Hence, the under-performance of their businesses is perpetuated and their full potential not realised. Interestingly, the real successful entrepreneurs have mastered all five elements, so much so that they have grown their SMMEs at such a rapid rate, that the SMME was transformed into a big business.

The biggest weakness of small business owners, and family businesses in particular, is that nothing or only a few things leaders do from a leadership perspective is written down. This makes it difficult to transfer leadership skills, to create a leadership culture and to share leadership lessons. Thus, SMMEs can double their profits if they can manage to transcend their current leadership focus on product and service only (element 2), by improving their leadership behaviour by applying all five elements in an integrated way by making the transition from entrepreneurs only to leadership entrepreneurs. The developers of the leadership standard reached consensus that the size of the business is irrelevant. In fact, the overarching conclusion was: The smaller the business, the more you need the leadership standard. A big business can afford to have 5 poor leaders and still survive. A small business with one or two poor leaders is at a bigger risk of going down as a result of poor leadership.

## 8. The fifth element, i.e. reflection, appears to be missing in most leadership models. Is this the case?

Indeed, reflection is perhaps the biggest challenge for leaders. They are so busy with different projects, meetings, customer and other engagements, leading teams, and other priorities,

that they never get the time to reflect on their leadership. It is essential that leaders schedule time to reflect on their leadership and that they get feedback from their teams about their leadership performance. During the working group sessions, all leaders admitted that they neglect reflection. This is problematic, because reflection provides the best opportunity for improving leadership and ultimately the improvement of the organisation. The SABPP position is clear: All leaders must be formally assessed, and all top leaders must have mentors or executive coaches to guide them in improving their leadership practice.

## 9. Does the leadership standard address the complexity of leadership, in particular, for dealing with complex matters?

The purpose of the leadership standard is not to resolve leadership complexity, but to provide a simple framework for all leaders to apply. The 5 elements of leadership are discussed in 10 pages only. Reading and applying the 10 pages will help leaders to focus on the key practices of good leadership. Moreover, leaders will relate the principles and practices to their own organisation and to their own unique leadership approaches, personalities and styles. Answering the key questions at the end of each element will guide leaders to internalise the standard element, and then to adapt their leadership practice to the complexity of their situation. It is the task of the leader to manage this complexity, while simultaneously simplify it for their teams and other stakeholders. Using all members of your leadership team during your scheduled reflection sessions, with the support of executive coaches or psychologists, can further strengthen the effectiveness of leaders in dealing with complexity in appropriate ways. Our advice to leaders struggling with the complexity of leadership in today's turbulent environment, is to read and sign the leadership pledge at the back of the standard. Reading this every day for 5 days will focus your mind on simplifying what good leadership is all about.

## 10. Where do we go from here?

An explicit model and approach is needed to utilise the knowledge of South Africa's good leaders and to replicate and build on their successes. Good leadership should become the norm and not the exception, hence the need for a leadership standard that spans across industries, sectors and spheres of society. Exceptional leadership is needed to take organisations, industries and South Africa as a country forward.

This "first edition" will serve as the basis to start the journey. Whilst further consultation will happen, we believe that we already have the content that organisations and individuals can start to use to reflect on current practice, identify gaps and take action.

We want to thank all leaders and other participants who have been involved in the development of the leadership standard. We also signed a leadership pledge to publicly commit to the implementation of the standard. We hope leaders will be inspired to join the leadership standard journey in making

leadership our top priority. Please follow all the action on twitter @SABPP1 and hashtag #LeadershipStandard for regular updates.

Let us prioritise leadership in South Africa to create better organisations making a more significant impact on society!

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