

# Exceptional vs. Average: What Top Leaders Do Best

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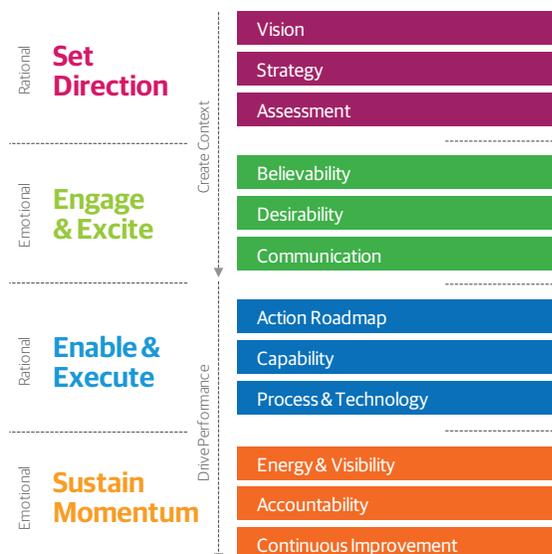
Companies are facing challenges to their status quo. Advances in technology and customer experience expectations are upending what had been "business as usual." Employees are looking to strong leaders to help them navigate the rapid industry and societal changes in effect. Success won't be about who has the best products or services. It will be about which organization is the most prepared to handle change with effective leaders to guide their organizations.

This paper introduces the Vision to Results framework of effective leadership drivers, backed by extensive research demonstrating what exceptional leaders do differently to stand out from the rest.

## From Vision to Results

What makes a leader effective at affecting change within an organization? At TeleTech Consulting, we've developed a framework of 12 drivers that clearly outlines the baseline leadership activities we believe are essential to position the leader, team and/or organization for execution success. We then measured how more than 5,000 leaders rate across each of the drivers.

**Figure 1: Vision To Results Framework**  
12 baseline leadership drivers that position you and your organization to move from strategy creation to realization as quickly as possible.



Vision to Results (VTR) deconstructs the entire complex process -- from setting a vision to delivering the ultimate result required -- in one easily-understood framework that ensures both the rational and the emotional aspects of a plan are properly addressed, in the correct order, with sufficient weight and balance. We refer to the application of these criteria as Applied Leadership.

The beauty of VTR is in its simplicity. It can be used by any leader of any organization, no matter how big or small, to lead a team; from the development of a strategy to its successful delivery.

There are four stages in the VTR framework. Two are "rational" (Set Direction and Enable & Execute). Two are "emotional" (Engage & Excite and Sustain Momentum). Six of the drivers lie in the "Create Context" section, and are about setting the goal and engaging the people and resources to make it happen. They feed into the six drivers in the "Drive Performance" section, which concern getting the vision done and producing results. The Rational drivers are targets that can be achieved and completed. The Emotional drivers require constant attention and reinforcement.

VTR is NOT a silver bullet, panacea, or the new big thing. Ultimately, leading any organization or team is hard work. Those leaders who have a clear vision, a logical strategy, can engage and excite others and are disciplined in executing the strategy while holding their teams and themselves to account, are far more likely to deliver the results. VTR ensures this happens by addressing both the rational and emotional criteria necessary for successful execution.

## What Successful Leaders Do Best

Digging deeper into the framework, we learned that when it comes to leadership, conventional wisdom isn't always the most effective. Over the past two years, we surveyed more than 5,000 business users about their organization's leadership effectiveness<sup>1</sup>. We asked questions that connect their leaders' activities to the VTR

<sup>1</sup> The study was conducted prior to adding "communication" and "continuous improvement" as individual components of the framework.

framework. The research uncovered common strengths and weaknesses facing many leaders. We also discovered the most effective leaders excel in the emotional driver of believability, rather than the more rational accountability.

**Common strengths and weaknesses among leaders**

<p><b>Strengths:</b> Respondents scored the following statements highest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I am enthusiastic about working in this organization."</li> <li>• "I have a very clear understanding of my role and the goals I am expected to achieve."</li> <li>• "I am personally very attached to what this organization is trying to achieve."</li> </ul> <p><b>Insight:</b> People share a degree of enthusiasm about the organization and how they contribute to the outcomes. Beware: this could also be an individual's blind spot: "it can't possibly be my fault, I know what to do."</p>	<p><b>Weaknesses:</b> Respondents scored these statements lowest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "When set, our strategy tends not to change reactively."</li> <li>• "Leaders invest more time gaining buy-in to the organizational direction than on ensuring adherence to operational tasks."</li> <li>• "A sense of excitement about the future pervades the organization."</li> </ul> <p><b>Insight:</b> Confidence and support in the strategy is lost when leaders appear to react to conditions and focus on doing rather than leading.</p>
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We also asked people to allocate units of time to the activities that they want leaders to focus their energy on. Two stood out as most important to employees:

- "Clearly communicating the strategy (plans) for achieving the vision, so that everyone is clear on the key initiatives to get there."
- "Revisiting the vision and strategy to ensure they reflect the reality of our external and internal environments."

**Insight:** These point to poor performance by leaders in the "communication" domain, and reinforces the finding that leaders aren't able to build belief and excitement in the vision and strategy as conditions change.

**The most successful leaders engage and inspire trust among employees**

Across all our data, respondents chose **Execute** as the strongest VTR area within their organization (see Figure 2). This isn't surprising, as conventional wisdom says that

leaders tend to prioritize tangible elements. Next is Engage & Excite, Set Direction, and lastly Sustain Momentum.

However, a different picture emerges when you slice the results into leaders and laggards. **Engaged & Excite** is the strongest element for leaders ranked in the top 5% in terms of effectiveness, followed by Execute, Set Direction, and Sustain Momentum. Meanwhile, Engage & Excite is the lowest scoring VTR area for those at the bottom 10% of results, or the least effective leaders. They ranked Execute and Set Direction (tie) as their strongest elements.

**Insight:** Effective leadership is driven by how successful the leadership team can engage and excite their team and how effectively they can execute their plans.

Figure 2: Strongest VTR Drivers

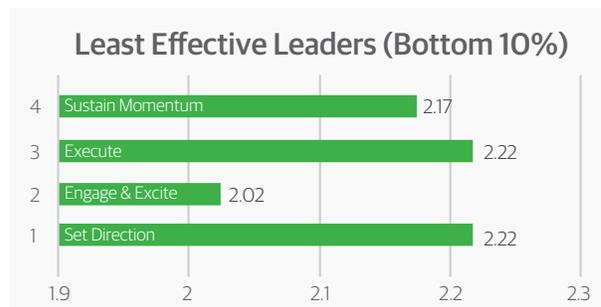
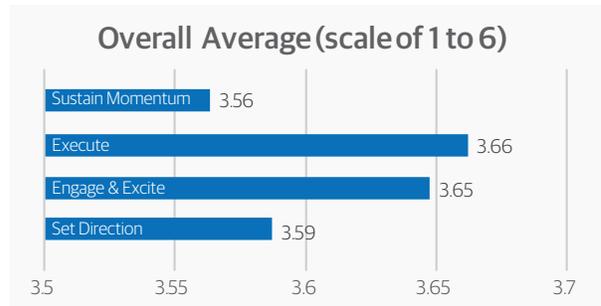
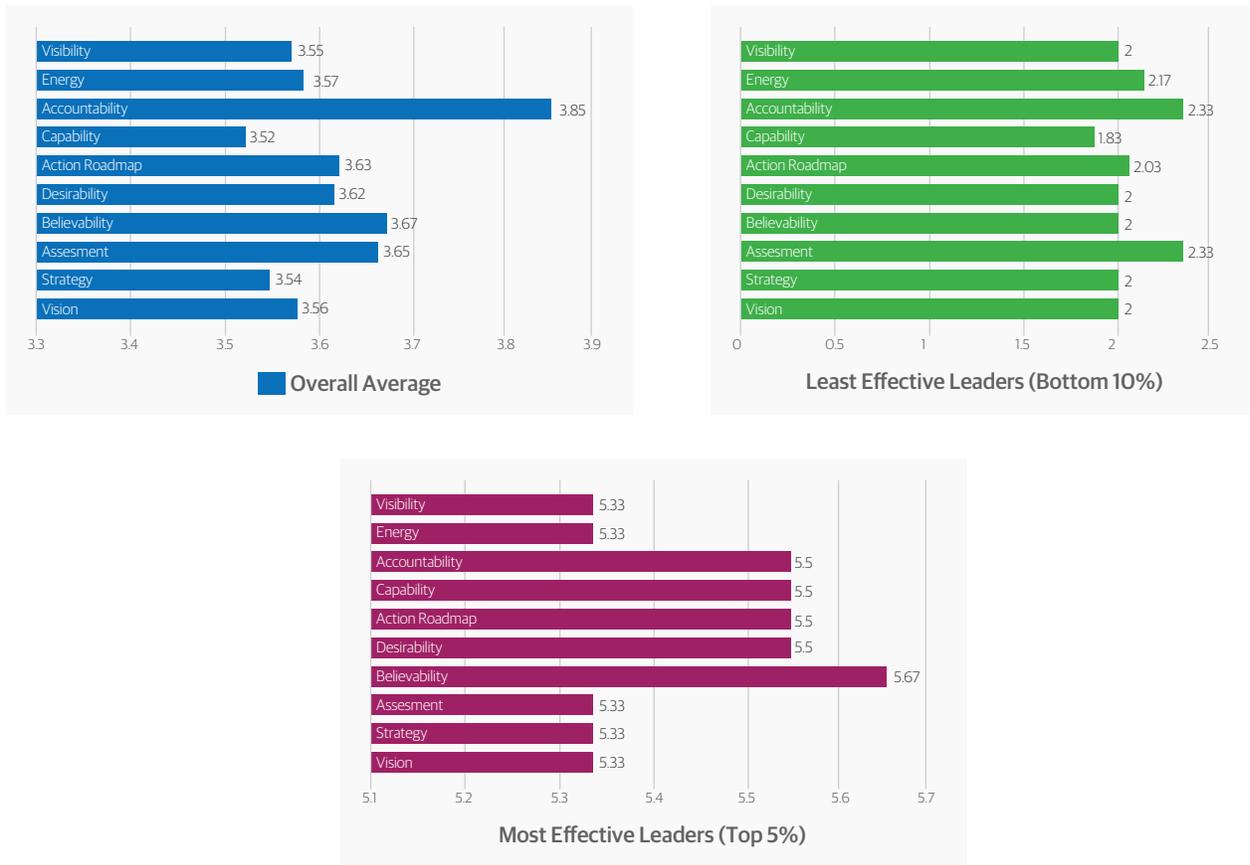


Figure 3: Drivers of Leadership Execution Effectiveness



**Accountability** is the strongest performing driver in the overall results, while Capability is the weakest (see Figure 3). However, Believability is by far the strongest driver for the most effective leaders, followed by a tie for Desirability, Prioritized Activity, Capability, and Accountability. At the bottom 10% we see little difference across the drivers, with Reality and Accountability featuring as the top scorers.

**Insight:** Top performing leaders really get the “buy in” working, demonstrate the required capabilities, and are more driven in terms of execution than the rest. The most effective leaders are ones who can engage and excite their teams, and who instill believability that the strategy is the right direction. They know that authentic leadership comes from staying true to the vision in the face of adversity and change. They are therefore not too reactive which provides others the confidence to follow them. If a change in strategy is necessary to respond to a changing market place, then the most successful leaders promote

transparent conversations to help people see how the new tactics will enable the organization to hold its course so it can deliver on the results aligned with the vision.

The data suggests that average leaders, on the other hand, drive accountability above all the other drivers. That implies using the age-old behavior modifying techniques of the ‘stick’. It leads to an unhealthy corporate environment that drives compliance, which in turn delivers low morale and a lack of innovation. This approach is gravely ineffective if the team does not believe or desire the leaders’ vision.

## Keys to Leadership Effectiveness

Individually, the elements are important. But it’s the combination of all four that create true customer-centric leadership. And each driver impacts the next. For example, if your team isn’t engaged and excited about the

customer-centric direction you're championing, find out whether the broader team is connected to the purpose and understands the strategy. Clarifying the direction will help. And if the organization is truly engaged and excited but execution is still failing, the question to ask is whether leaders are executing their prioritized leadership tasks in cascading the customer-centric direction consistently and effectively. Here are some tips to improve along each area of the VTR framework.

### Tips To Set Direction

- Communicate your direction as clearly and concretely as possible. Include prioritized actions and tangible measures.
- Start with analytics. Understand your capabilities, resources, clients, stakeholders, and competitors.
- Check your strategic options against the values and long-term purpose of the business. Will your plan take you in the right direction?
- Don't plan the strategy in a vacuum. Instead, make sure you consider the context of the wider organization, including other functions, service areas, and industries to co-author the strategy.
- Embrace uncertainty and contingencies. Identify scenarios based on what you're both likely, and unlikely, to face, and create plans that respond accordingly.

### Tips To Engage & Excite

- Identify your top talent and turn them into champions. Understand their goals, involve them in the change process, and most importantly, listen to their advice.
- Look at the culture afresh to identify and nurture existing behaviors and beliefs that support the execution of the strategy.
- Identify and counter old behaviors and beliefs that hinder progress.
- Build a team that is aligned with your vision and strategy. Pick team members who are influential at all levels, not just senior people.
- Align individual interest with organizational

performance. Give team members a chance to benefit when the business prospers.

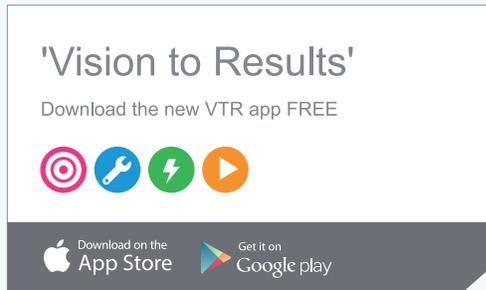
- Step in and step back. Give your team enough structure and support to navigate uncertainty while still encouraging them to use and develop their own creative process.
- Communicate concise updates and strategic insights to your team on a regular basis.

### Tips To Execute

- Create a simple plan that has a maximum of three to four focus areas. Include key activities and identified measures. If it doesn't fit on a single page, you haven't done enough to prioritize what counts.
- Commit to stopping or delegating one activity a week to allow yourself "space" to focus on customer centricity. You can't move forward unless you let go of the past.
- Identify and assess the knowledge, skills, process, and mindset required from each role (leader & team) in order to achieve peak performance.
- Create an environment that helps people learn. Allow people to make mistakes and be sure to reward incremental success.
- Set expectations. Invite commitment. Measure progress. Provide feedback.

### Tips To Sustain Momentum

- Determine what metrics you will use to track your progress.
- Ensure that you celebrate and communicate the small wins as well as the large accomplishments. Progress on the journey should be rewarded.
- Create, distribute, and actively use a dashboard of key measures that allow you to track progress toward the achievement of your direction.
- Stay authentic. Leadership visibility is less about communication events and more about individual conversations.



### Leadership Excellence on the Go

Download the free Vision to Results (VTR) mobile app to access essential and useful tips to help you manage your business and employees.

innovation, enterprise innovation, learning innovation and strategic management consulting. Through the TeleTech Community Foundation, the company leverages its innovative leadership to ensure that students in underserved communities around the globe have access to the tools and support they need to maximize their educational outcomes. For additional information, please visit [www.teletech.com](http://www.teletech.com).

## Conclusion

Leadership can sometimes appear complicated and feel personal. In those instances it is sometimes best to fall back on a tried and tested framework to help objectively assess what drivers will lift performance. In every case, the data shows that developing the emotional driver of believability, ahead of driving accountability, will deliver better results.

## About TeleTech

For nearly 30 years, TeleTech and its subsidiaries have helped the world's most successful companies design, build, implement and manage superior customer experiences across the customer lifecycle in order to drive shareholder value. As the go-to partner for the Global 1000, the TeleTech group of companies delivers technology-based solutions that maximize revenue, transform customer experiences and optimize business processes. From strategic consulting to operational execution, our more than 41,000 employees drive success for clients in the communications and media, financial services, government, healthcare, technology, transportation and retail industries. Our companies deliver award-winning integrated solutions in support of customer innovation, revenue generation, technology