

Leadership Is Not About Having All the Answers

Everything rises and falls on leadership. But one of the less comfortable truths about leadership is that a leader's capability can become the ceiling on the effectiveness and potential of the people and organization they lead.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup offered a striking illustration. In the semifinal between England and Argentina, England took a 1–0 lead and with a place in the final within reach, increasingly adopted a defensive posture. Argentina kept pressing, equalized and eventually found the winner in stoppage time. England had the talent to compete, but its approach appeared to limit what that talent could produce when it mattered most.

There is a leadership lesson here that goes beyond football.

Sometimes, the leader becomes the bottleneck not because they lack ability, but because they have become too central to how the organization thinks, decides and acts. Every important decision comes back to them. Significant relationships require their involvement. Capable executives wait for approval because they do not want to overstep. Gradually, people recruited to strengthen the organization begin operating below their capacity.

That is the quiet tension many leaders miss: an organization can have highly capable people and still underperform because its leadership environment does not give that capability enough room to flourish. The answer does not lie simply in delegating more. Leadership still requires judgment about when to step in, which decisions cannot be delegated and where experience or accountability demands direct involvement. The problem begins when protection becomes the default, experience becomes control, or capable people learn that the safest course is to wait for the leader.

A stronger question for leaders is therefore not, “Am I delegating enough?” It is, “Am I creating enough room for the people around me to contribute what I cannot?”

That requires humility and confidence. Leaders must keep developing, seek help when necessary and resist feeling threatened by people who are stronger in particular areas. No leader can possess all the capability an organization needs. The leader's job is to bring the right people, capabilities and resources together in service of the mission.

This matters beyond individual organizations. In Nigeria, conversations about development challenges frequently return to leadership. Yet the country clearly possesses extraordinary talent across business, technology, academia, medicine, the creative industries and many other fields, both at home and around the world. The more difficult question is why institutions sometimes struggle to convert individual excellence into collective performance.

Part of the answer lies in whether leaders create environments where capability can actually be exercised. The best leaders are therefore not necessarily those with the most answers. They know which questions to ask, whose judgment to trust and when to step back so that others can lead.

Leadership is not about being the smartest person in the room. It is about creating a room in which the collective intelligence of the organization can do its best work. When a leader becomes the answer to every question, the organization eventually stops thinking for itself.

The best leaders do not cap their teams. They lift the lid.