

# Act Like A Leader Think Herminia Ibarra

## Act Like a Leader, Think Herminia Ibarra: Reframing Leadership for the Modern World

Herminia Ibarra, a renowned organizational behaviorist and professor at London Business School, has significantly reshaped our understanding of leadership development. Her work challenges traditional approaches, advocating for a more dynamic, experiential model rather than relying solely on theoretical learning. This article delves into Ibarra's influential concepts, exploring how to “act like a leader” and the practical implications for personal and professional growth. We'll examine her research on **leadership development**, **experiential learning**, **identity work**, and **managing transitions**, providing a framework for cultivating authentic and effective leadership.

### Rethinking Leadership Development: Beyond the Classroom

Traditional leadership development often focuses on acquiring knowledge and skills through formal training programs and theoretical frameworks. However, Ibarra argues that this approach is insufficient. She emphasizes the importance of **experiential learning**, suggesting that true leadership development happens through actively engaging in leadership roles and learning from real-world experiences. This involves stepping outside one's comfort zone, taking calculated risks, and embracing the inevitable challenges and setbacks. Ibarra's research underscores the crucial role of **identity work**, the process of reconciling one's existing self-image with the aspirational leader one aims to become. This process is not a passive one; it requires actively shaping one's identity to align with leadership roles.

### The Importance of Acting Before Feeling Ready

Ibarra's research highlights the paradoxical nature of leadership development. Often, we wait until we feel ready to assume a leadership position, mastering all the requisite skills and knowledge. However, she champions a different approach: "acting like a leader" even before feeling fully prepared. This involves seeking out opportunities to lead, even in small ways, actively experimenting with different leadership styles, and gradually expanding one's leadership repertoire. This iterative process of trying, learning, and adapting is central to her approach. Instead of focusing on achieving a pre-defined level of competence, Ibarra encourages a mindset of continuous learning and development.

### Developing Authentic Leadership Through Experiential Learning

Ibarra's work emphasizes the power of **experiential learning** in leadership development. She challenges the traditional approach of solely focusing on classroom learning and suggests that true leadership development happens through "doing," not just knowing. This means actively seeking out opportunities to lead, even if those opportunities are small or seem outside of your comfort zone.

This involves three key phases:

- **Self-assessment:** Understanding your current skills, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as your personal values and aspirations.
- **Experimentation:** Actively seeking out challenging roles and responsibilities that push you outside your comfort zone and allow you to experiment with different leadership styles.
- **Reflection:** Regularly evaluating your experiences, identifying areas for improvement, and refining your leadership approach based on your learnings.

By embracing this iterative cycle of experimentation and reflection, individuals can develop authentic leadership styles tailored to their unique strengths and perspectives. This differs significantly from attempting to emulate a pre-defined “ideal” leader, promoting a more genuine and effective leadership style.

## The Power of Networking and Building Relationships: Expanding Your Leadership Circle

Another critical aspect of Ibarra's work revolves around networking and building relationships. She recognizes the importance of cultivating strong networks both inside and outside one's immediate organization. These relationships provide invaluable support, mentorship, and opportunities for learning and growth. Expanding one's network helps build social capital, creating opportunities to take on new challenges and expand one's leadership experiences. This necessitates actively seeking out individuals with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The concept of “managing transitions” also involves proactively building relationships, aligning expectations, and securing buy-in to ensure smooth transitions when taking on new leadership roles.

## Navigating Leadership Transitions: The Role of Identity Work

Ibarra dedicates significant attention to navigating leadership transitions. Whether moving into a new role, taking on increased responsibility, or shifting to a different leadership style, transitions can be challenging. Her research shows that effectively managing these transitions requires careful **identity work**. This involves actively shaping and adapting one's self-image to align with the expectations and demands of the new role. It means acknowledging the potential conflicts between one's current identity and the aspirational leader identity and developing strategies to bridge the gap. This proactive approach to managing change ensures smoother transitions and increases the likelihood of successful leadership in a new context.

## Conclusion: Embracing the Journey of Leadership Development

Acting like a leader, as championed by Herminia Ibarra, is not about faking it until you make it. It's about embracing a proactive and iterative approach to leadership development that centers on experiential learning, identity work, and building strong relationships. By stepping outside your comfort zone, actively seeking out challenges, and reflecting on your experiences, you can cultivate an authentic and impactful leadership style that serves you and your organization well. The key takeaway is to understand that leadership is a journey, not a destination, and the continuous process of learning and adapting is crucial for ongoing success.

## FAQ

### Q1: How can I apply Ibarra's concepts in my current role, even if I don't have a formal leadership title?

A1: Even without a formal leadership title, you can still “act like a leader.” Seek out opportunities to mentor colleagues, take initiative on projects, volunteer for challenging tasks, and actively participate in team discussions. Use these opportunities to practice different leadership styles and build your skills. Focus on influencing and motivating those around you, regardless of your formal position.

### Q2: What are some practical steps for engaging in identity work?

A2: Identity work involves reflecting on your values, strengths, and aspirations, and how they align with your desired leadership style. Journaling, seeking feedback from trusted colleagues, and identifying role models can be beneficial. Consider experimenting with different leadership behaviors and observing their impact. The goal is to create a sense of coherence between your self-image and your leadership aspirations.

### Q3: How can I effectively manage transitions into new leadership roles?

A3: Proactive planning and relationship-building are essential. Clearly define expectations, communicate your vision, and build strong relationships with your team and stakeholders. Anticipate potential challenges and develop strategies for overcoming them. Seeking mentorship from experienced leaders can also be incredibly valuable.

### Q4: What if I fail in a leadership experiment? How should I react?

A4: Failure is an inevitable part of the learning process. View setbacks as opportunities for growth and learning. Reflect on what went wrong, identify areas for improvement, and adjust your approach accordingly. Don't let failure discourage you; instead, use it as a springboard for future success.

**Q5: How does Ibarra's approach differ from traditional leadership training?**

A5: Traditional leadership training often emphasizes theoretical knowledge and skills development through classroom learning. Ibarra's approach prioritizes experiential learning, emphasizing the importance of acting like a leader and learning through real-world experiences. It's a more dynamic and iterative process.

**Q6: Is Ibarra's model applicable to all leadership styles?**

A6: Yes, Ibarra's model provides a framework that's applicable across various leadership styles. The focus on experiential learning, identity work, and building relationships is relevant regardless of whether your leadership style leans towards transformational, transactional, or other approaches. The framework helps you build an authentic leadership style tailored to your personality and context.

**Q7: What are some resources to further explore Herminia Ibarra's work?**

A7: Herminia Ibarra has authored several influential books and articles, including "Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing Your Career," which is a key source for understanding her concepts. Searching for her publications on academic databases and professional websites will provide further insights into her research.

**Q8: How can I measure the success of "acting like a leader"?**

A8: Success isn't solely measured by external metrics, such as promotions or team performance (though those can be indicators). It's also measured by personal growth, increased self-awareness, and the development of effective leadership skills. Regularly reflecting on your experiences, seeking feedback, and tracking your progress in key areas will help assess your success in your leadership journey.

## **Act Like a Leader, Think Like Herminia Ibarra: Unlocking Authentic Leadership**

Herminia Ibarra, a renowned professor at INSEAD, has profoundly reshaped our understanding of leadership development. Her groundbreaking work challenges the traditional approaches that often concentrate on improving existing skills rather than nurturing a leader's authentic self. Instead of simply educating aspiring leaders a set of prescribed behaviors, Ibarra champions a more integrated approach, emphasizing the importance of exploration and learning through action. This article will delve into Ibarra's key ideas and provide practical strategies for individuals seeking to embark on their own leadership journeys using her insightful framework.

Ibarra's work directly counters the traditional leadership development framework which frequently emphasizes training in specific skills. These programs often rely on role-playing and theoretical comprehension, leaving participants with a sense of alienation from the practical realities of leadership. Ibarra contends that true leadership development arises from immersing oneself in authentic experiences and actively seeking new challenges that push personal boundaries . This process, she terms "action learning," is at the core of her methodology.

Central to Ibarra's framework is the concept of "shadowing" – studying leaders in different contexts and industries. This gives valuable insight into different leadership styles and methods, allowing individuals to identify approaches that resonate with their own values and aspirations. By carefully observing, they can acquire a deeper understanding of the complexities of leadership beyond the theoretical. Further, Ibarra encourages individuals to involve in "networking" not merely as a means of job seeking but as a way to create relationships with people from diverse experiences . This expands their understanding of different leadership challenges and fosters a sense of connection.

Another crucial element of Ibarra's work is the value of "experimentation." This involves actively seeking out new roles and responsibilities that challenge the individual's existing skills and comfort zones . It's about venturing outside of one's known territory and embracing uncertainty. By actively undertaking new challenges and reflecting upon the outcomes , individuals can discover their strengths and weaknesses, hone their leadership style, and cultivate greater self-awareness. This iterative process is key to developing authentic leadership, one built on practical knowledge rather than theoretical understanding .

Ibarra's approach also highlights the importance of reflecting upon experiences. Through careful self-reflection and feedback from colleagues and mentors, individuals can discover patterns in their behavior, acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses, and develop more effective leadership strategies. Journaling, mentoring relationships, and 360-degree feedback are all tools Ibarra suggests for promoting this crucial process of self-discovery and growth.

The practical benefits of adopting Ibarra's approach are substantial. Individuals who actively engage in action learning and experimentation nurture a deeper understanding of their own leadership style, elevate their self-awareness, and build more authentic and effective relationships. This translates to improved performance, greater job satisfaction, and enhanced career progression. Organizations, in turn, benefit from a more engaged and effective leadership team.

To implement Ibarra's ideas, individuals can start by identifying areas where they want to improve their leadership skills. They can then seek out opportunities for shadowing, networking, and experimentation within their current roles or through actively seeking new assignments. Regular self-reflection and feedback from mentors and colleagues are critical to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments along the way.

In conclusion, Herminia Ibarra's framework provides a valuable and practical approach to leadership development that emphasizes sincerity and action-oriented learning. By welcoming experimentation, actively engaging with others, and consistently reflecting upon experiences, individuals can release their full leadership potential and create a more impactful contribution to their organizations and communities.

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):**

#### **Q1: Is Ibarra's approach suitable for all levels of leadership?**

A1: Yes, Ibarra's principles of action learning, shadowing, and experimentation are applicable to leaders at all levels, from entry-level managers to senior executives. The specific activities and challenges will naturally vary based on the individual's experience and position.

#### **Q2: How much time commitment is required to effectively implement Ibarra's approach?**

A2: The time commitment depends on the individual's goals and the depth of engagement. Even small, consistent efforts like regular reflection and seeking out opportunities for networking can yield significant results.

#### **Q3: What if I don't have the opportunity to shadow or experiment within my current role?**

A3: Seek out opportunities outside of your current role. Attend industry events, connect with individuals in other organizations through networking, and consider taking on volunteer leadership roles to gain experience in different contexts.

#### **Q4: How can I effectively incorporate self-reflection into my leadership development journey?**

A4: Use journaling to reflect on your experiences, actively seek feedback from trusted colleagues and mentors, and consider utilizing 360-degree feedback tools for a more comprehensive perspective.

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