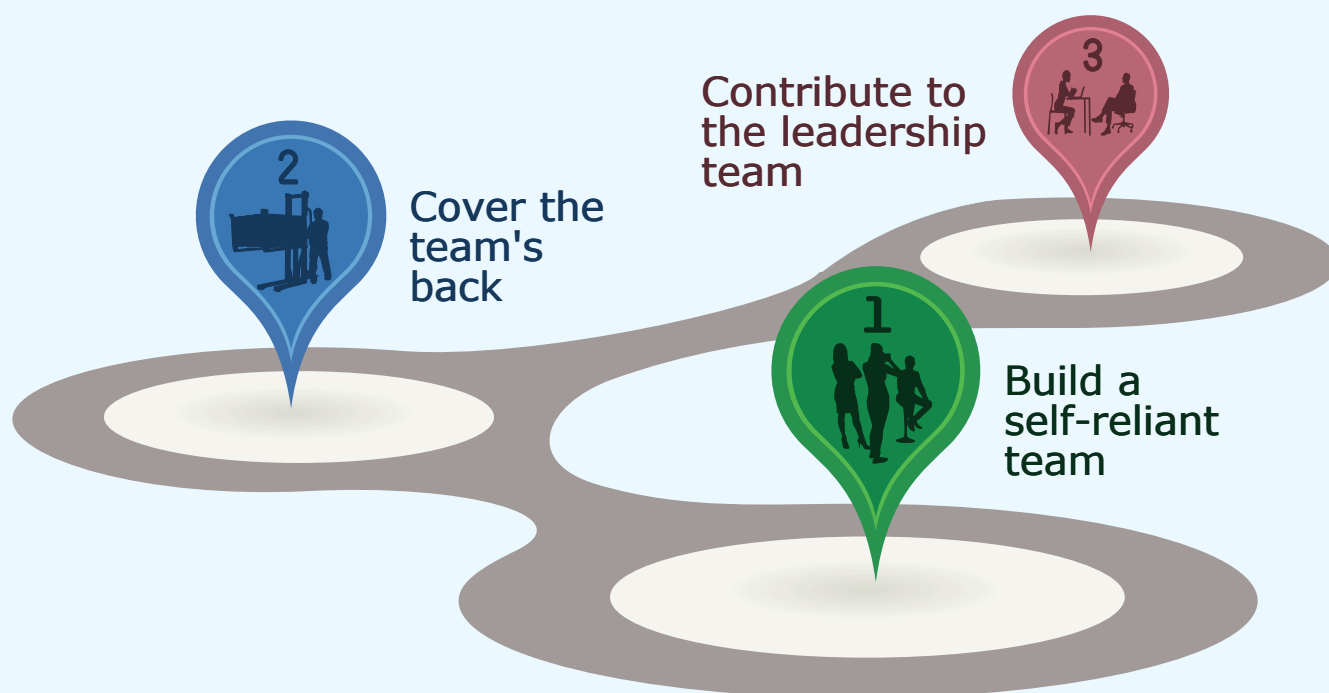




Foundations of a formal leadership role

A leadership role is different to an individual contributor. Individual contributors focus on their own work in the team. For a leader to perform well, they have to focus on helping others do well in their roles. Here we review three foundations for how a leader does this.



Build a self-reliant team

The primary foundation for a leader's activity is to build a self-reliant team. This means people know what to do, how to do it, have the skills and knowledge they need, can work together, and finally, are able to self-organise because they know what they are doing.

When a team is self-reliant, the leader does not have to get caught up in micro-managing and can focus on ensuring everything is in place so people can keep working and succeeding.

In times of change, self-reliance will be challenged, so leaders have to be ready to help build the elements of self-reliance in a new context.

The leader works with the team to make sure things go well and to resolve issues. The more the leader and team can succeed at this, the greater the confidence others will have in them.



Cover the team's back

As the team's self-reliance grows, the leader is able to focus more effort on ensuring the team has what it needs to do its work. This means making sure people have the resources they need, when they need them. It also means making sure that work goals and outcomes are clear.

The leader has to build relationships and deal with many people outside of the team. These include suppliers, partners, distributors, customers, and other stakeholders. The leader resolves issues, clarifies expectations, and follows through to make sure expectations are met.

All of this requires the leader to spend time making sure they understand and plan their business well, adapting and learning as they go along.

Without building a self-reliant team, leaders will find it hard to make the time for meeting people, planning, and learning.



Contribute to the leadership team

The third foundation for a leader's activity is their work as part of the leadership team gathered around their boss. A leader is always a participant in two teams: the one they lead and the team gathered around their own leader. If a leader doesn't build self-reliance in the first team, it becomes hard to fulfil their role in the second team.

Actively participating in the leadership team is important for resolving larger issues, developing improvements in the organisation, and ensuring consistency across work teams and projects.

The leader also has to do projects as part of this team. These are initiatives, programs, reports, research, organisational collaboration, or taking responsibility for key customers or other stakeholders.

At times the leader may have to act in their boss' role, which will be very hard if they haven't built a self-reliant team.

