# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT[1]:

*The expansion of capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes.*

- *Leaders are individuals whose values, character and competencies enable them to influence others by providing purpose, direction, and motivation, in order to accomplish the mission and improve the organization….*

- *"Leaders are any people in the organization actively involved in the process of producing direction, alignment, and commitment" (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004)*

## PREFATORY COMMENT:

*"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you (pl) with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you (pl) may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you (pl) may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you (pl) to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light."*
*Colossians 1:9-12*

Our aspirations are for a leadership process that is Christianly and substantially transformational. As such it must be yoked to means that facilitate that outcome. To be 'Christian' learning it must first of all be *'faithful'*— learning that grows out of a rich faith and aims at developing a strong and mature faith. But it must have courage to explore fairly and honestly all proposals that claim to show us what is true, honorable, just, pleasing, commendable and excellent (Phil. 4:8) It must also be *effective*. It must lead to action that is faithful to the calling and commands of God. It must lead to character that is strong, wise, mature, moral and courageous. It must be learning for living, not simply learning for the sake of obtaining credentials or the advancement of family status or organizational promotion. It must effect transformation. Paul underscores a number of matters in his prayer for the Colossians:

- fruitful good works
- growth in the knowledge of God
- strengthened personhoods within the community, strengthened
- to endure patiently whatever comes and to engage life joyfully with thanksgiving to God

This is one example of multiple passages where competent wisdom and understanding, mature and strong character, an active and joyful life are underlined as the effective results of

gaining knowledge in a learning process such as leadership development—knowledge oriented to the will of God, knowledge that is *wise and understanding* and thus results in *fruitful good works* by a *substantially strengthened person* within the community. This pattern can serve as a beginning framework for exploring issues involved in the sort of knowledge and learning endeavor we aim to deploy in leadership development.

## WHAT HAVE I LEARNED ABOUT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

### ONE, IT IS RELIANT IN PART ON HOW LEADERSHIP AS WELL AS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IS DEFINED[2].

**As personal growth:** leaders are in touch with their dreams and talents and will act to fulfill them. LD is aimed at increasing self-awareness and self-exploration and at increasing the virtues that mark the mature Christian leader – integrity, compassion, prudence, self-control etc.

**As development of conceptual understanding:** what makes up "leadership" (and often embodied in theories of leadership) – its components and acquisition of those components as well as what makes up the key elements of competency to lead. Here use of case studies and real life experience is critical to developing problem solving schema since increasingly what is needed is

vertical development – the movement of a leader to high stages of cognitive complexity, comfortable with dealing with complex, ambiguous and often dangerous and difficult situations in navigating the future for an organization.

**As feedback:** 360 degree instruments, coaching aimed at helping individuals strengthen areas of weakness and strengthen their ability to problem solve, especially complex issues.

**As skill building:** hard (financial, strategic, technological) and soft skills (social, emotional) –competencies thought to be necessary conditions for strong leadership. LD is providing learning opportunities to acquire those skill sets and competencies. This is a form of horizontal development of new skills, abilities and behaviors. It is technical learning. Horizontal development is most useful when a problem is clearly defined and there are known techniques for solving it.

TWO, IT RESULTS FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES OF LEARNING (ACTIVITIES, CONTEXTS THAT WILL FOSTER THE LD PROCESS): Classroom based training led by an instructor or facilitator (can morph to e-learning) from a workshop to full courses. This might be JIT (just in time training).

**Executive coaching/mentoring:** personal feedback, counsel

enabling improvements in professional performance and personal satisfaction – including networking with senior executives, interpersonal relationships with more experienced leaders; a framework of support (orientation, coaching etc.) when individuals transition into new positions, esp. at a senior level.

**Individual development plans:** mapping a path leading from current skills and competencies to building greater performance capacities needed for higher level leadership positions; may include job rotation to learn a variety of different functional units and how they work; may include a career path and experience map (especially where there are tall organizational structures).

**Job design/action learning:** developmental (stretch) assignments where work placement has two attributes - challenge and an opportunity to learn; action learning assignments inside or outside the current work position.

**Feedback of various sorts:** 360 or multi-rater instruments; post-mortem evaluations of events and performance vis-à-vis stated outcome goals; individual or group reflection on events, activities or experiences; self-reflective journaling and self-evaluation of performance.

Retreats/outdoor leadership development events: sequenced, integrated physical activities conducted away from work and/or primarily in the outdoors aimed a creating an environment to change attitudes and behavior.

Simulations: management/leadership games that require trainees to analyze complex problems, make decisions and gain experience role-playing and developing insight into real life situations they will face.

IT IS ROOTED IN AMBIENT CONDITIONS WITHIN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND MOTIVATIONS WITHIN THE INDIVIDUAL THAT ENHANCE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT (LD).

LD happens when a leader is **motivated to move** from one stage or level of leader competency to another because the person feels consistently frustrated by a situation, dilemma, or challenge in their life:

- It causes them to feel the limits of their current way of thinking.
- It is in an area of their life that they care about deeply.
- There is sufficient support that they are able to persist in the face of the anxiety and conflict.

LD happens when leaders have a **sense of autonomy** and ownership over their own developmental process – they no

longer feel someone else is responsible for "sending" them to training events or telling them what they need to learn (a danger of mentoring/coaching). This is when leadership development has its greatest impact.

LD happens when the organizational **"leadership culture" encourages high risk/high reward** and aligns reward systems to emphasize both development as well as performance. Senior leadership enables an environment where it is safe to take reasonable risks and stretch one's mind beyond its comfort zone.

LD happens when there is access to what leaders indicate are the **top five experiences** considered most effective for developing leadership capabilities: (1) projects with a high degree of complexity, (2) leading a larger operation, (3) leading a turnaround situation, (4) having contact with senior managers, and (5) being exposed to different business and/or functional perspectives.

IT RESPONDS TO THE LARGER ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT IN TERMS OF SHIFTING PRIORITIES. AN ENVIRONMENT OF –

**Globalization**: This is one marker that change has accelerated so that what was assumed and taken for granted shifts more rapidly than before and impinges from a wider scope of influences.

VUCA: This new environment has been summarized as:

**Volatile** – change happens rapidly and on a large scale.

**Uncertain** – the future cannot be predicted with any precision.

**Complex**- challenges are complicated by many factors; there are few single causes or solutions.

**Ambiguous** – There is little clarity on what events mean and what effect they may have.

**"Wicked problems:"** Leaders face: 'tame problems' – ones that may be complicated, but have likely occurred before—a combination of experience, knowledge and judgment can be applied to resolve them. 'Wicked problems,' on the other hand, are the ill-defined, ill-structured, real-life decisions that have incomplete, contradictory and changing requirements. Leaders must be equipped with tools and mental schema that enable them to deconstruct and "solve" such problems. What is needed in response to these changes is critical thinking (strategic thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making). This means advancement to higher levels or stages in the ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity (vertical, not just horizontal development). According to McGuire and Rhodes (2009) of the Center for Creative Leadership[3],

> *"Each successive (level) or stair holds greater ability for learning, complex problem-solving and the ability to set new direction and lead change. People who gain another step can learn more, adapt faster, and generate more complex*

*solutions than they could before. Those at higher levels can learn and react faster because they have bigger minds … people at later stages are better at seeing and connecting more dots in more scenarios (which means they are better at strategy). That's all. But that's a lot."*

**A short conclusion:** There are no simple, existing models or programs, which will be sufficient to develop the levels of collective leadership required to meet an increasingly complex future. We will continue to need to learn from our practices and traditions, to modify them and innovate in the face of increased need and demand for better Christian leadership in all sectors of life and at all levels of leadership. Whatever we construct, it must be reflective, dialogical, in-service, involve a diversity of delivery modalities, involve self-assessment and lead to an overall competency (not just competencies) to successfully lead at various levels and in various situations. James Burns' words from 1978 remain true: "One of the most universal cravings of our time is a hunger for compelling and creative leadership."[4] We still puzzle over how to create a social ecology that fosters such leadership on a wide scale.

## WHAT DO I WANT TO LEARN ABOUT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

Every generation faces questions about the means and modes of learning. Within a variety of contexts changes may demand modification and adaptation of what, at one time, were adequate means. Changes demand a continuing examination of why, who, what and how we engage learning while remaining responsive to the imperatives of the Kingdom of God. Communication technologies, scholarly disciplines, ministry/leadership challenges, cultural transformations, global realities are all in dynamic transformation and require adjustments as we seek more efficient and effective means for learning.

1. How do certain experiences develop key leadership capacities? What conditions are necessary to increase the efficacy of those experiences?

2. How do we better align formal learning opportunities (workshops; e-learning; degree programs; coaching etc.) to workplace challenges and to the stage and level of development of a leader?

3. How do we build organizational "leadership cultures" that are both performance oriented and fully committed to integrity/ responsibility of staff (as well as the organization's integrity) by means of what we do to form senior leadership?

4. Are there critical developmental times when leadership qualities/competencies are optimally developed? If so what

are the developmental stages and what is the best means and content at each stage?

5. How do we build more collective rather than individual leadership in the workplace and train leaders to work within a more collective leadership context?

6. How do we develop less dependency and passivity in leaders by enabling them to own their own developmental process and access the best resources/tools for both their horizontal and vertical developmental needs?

7. What dangers/opportunities lie in the intersection between biblically/Christian sourced notions of leadership and the notions of leadership and its development found in the larger circle of discourse that includes secular and other religious traditions? How do we determine what is true, excellent and commendable about leadership and LD from all our sources (Christian and non-Christian)?

8. What role should we give to the newer technologically facilitated learning management systems and delivery modes in providing more access to excellent leadership development processes?

## RESOURCES

1. Nick Petrie, *Future Trends in Leadership Development*, Center for Creative Leadership (Dec. 2011), www.ccl.org

2. These four elements come from Learning to Lead, Jay Conger, 1992.

3. McGuire, C., & Rhodes, G. (2009). Transforming your leadership culture. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

4. James MacGregor Burns, Leadership (New York: HarperPerennial, 1978)