
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Careers unfold over time. Leadership also develops over time and often over an entire career. For these reasons, when discussing *leadership development* (as with careers), there is an inherent longitudinal focus. Development implies change and growth. Leadership development is mainly concerned with the intrapersonal change and growth of individual leaders, as well as the relational aspects associated with interpersonal leadership processes. Compared with the disciplines of work careers and leadership, the field of leadership development is weak on theory. There are no recognized theories of leadership development, but a great deal has been published on various practices. Thus, a primary focus has been on using and, to a much lesser extent, evaluating different ways of developing leadership.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AND DEFINITIONS

Leadership has proved impossible to define in a way that is universally accepted. Different leadership approaches emphasize specific behaviors (e.g., initiating structure, providing support); aggregate leadership styles (e.g., task- and relationship-oriented); trait like characteristics (e.g., charisma); the relationship between a leader and a follower (e.g., leader-member exchange quality); and so on. Leadership can include any of these emphases but is most holistically characterized as a process involving leaders, followers, and

situations. Thus, contemporary approaches view leadership as a dynamic process, not as a static formal position.

Leadership development can be described as the longitudinal process of expanding the capacities of individuals, groups, and organizations to increase their effectiveness in leadership roles and processes. Increased effectiveness from this perspective pertains to anything that would improve the ability for groups of people to work together in productive and meaningful ways. Thus, leadership development is inherently multilevel in that the developmental focus can be on the individual, group or team, or the entire organization—or some combination of all three levels. Taking into account group and organizational levels is important to the goal of building a sustainable leadership-development system that supports continuous and ongoing individual self-development processes.

Although the best leadership-development processes include multiple levels, there is a long-standing confusion between *leader development* and *leadership development*. What is typically called leadership development is usually more accurately conceptualized as leader development, as it is targeted at developing individual leaders. This distinction goes beyond mere semantics, because it gets at the core of the important role that social context plays in leadership. A social context is necessary in that no leadership can occur without at least one other person (i.e., “follower”) who is influenced, directed, supported, or otherwise affected by the leadership process. Nonetheless, most so-called leadership-development efforts are focused entirely on enhancing individual leaders’ knowledge, skills, and abilities (or broader competencies) in ways that are expected to improve their overall individual leadership capabilities. Developing individual or intrapersonal capabilities (i.e., human capital) can enhance the potential for effective leadership at some future point, but it does not ensure more effective leadership without attention to the social context. The broader concept of leadership emerges through social interaction and is based on the pattern and quality of networked interpersonal relationships in an organization (i.e., social capital).

Effective leadership development requires attention to both human and social capital concerns. Developing individual capabilities without any attention to the social context ignores the fundamental tenet that leadership is based on interactions among leaders, followers, and the social environment. Attempting to develop the pattern and quality of networked

relationships that defines the social capital component of leadership without preparing individual leaders with the requisite skills to communicate, influence, inspire, and otherwise participate effectively in leadership processes could risk putting people into situations in which they are unprepared individually to lead effectively. Critical to developing effective leadership is designing and implementing developmental systems that link intrapersonal leader development with networked interpersonal leadership development in ways that build both the human and social capital components of leadership.

DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICES

Many different types of interventions have been used to facilitate leadership development. They vary in degree of intensity, organizational embeddedness, and temporal scope. An important distinction across various interventions is the extent to which they emphasize the development of intrapersonal skills (e.g., self-awareness, self-regulation, or other individual skills), interpersonal skills (e.g., social skills, social awareness, or other relational skills), or both. An especially important but often overlooked aspect of successful leadership development is linking the development of intrapersonal skills (human capital) with the development of interpersonal skills (social capital).

Formal Classroom Programs

The most common approach to leadership development is the formal classroom program in which basic principles of leadership are presented, discussed, and reflected on. It has been estimated that approximately 85 percent of companies engaged in leadership-development efforts use some version of classroom programs. Frequently, these programs are designed to promote self-insight and enhance self-awareness through the application of leadership principles to participants' personal experiences. Another version is the assessment-for-development approach that was pioneered by the Center for Creative Leadership, in which participants complete self-assessment (e.g., personality) inventories and receive feedback about their personal characteristics and behavioral profiles. Often, formal programs occur over the course of several days and are held off-site. *Open-enrollment programs* are classroom courses in which participation is open to all qualified participants (usually determined

by job level) regardless of their organization affiliation. *Custom programs* are specifically designed for a particular organization to enhance the relevance of the course with regard to the business objectives of the client firm.

Although popular, formal classroom programs are limited by high development costs (especially in custom work) and issues with the transfer of knowledge from the classroom to the job (especially in open-enrollment programs). Thus, many organizations are coming to realize that formal classroom programs are valuable but not completely adequate for effective leadership development. As leadership tends to be most effectively developed through the enactment of leadership, a majority of the more cutting-edge approaches emphasize the role of hands-on experiences in development. In particular, experiences that occur in the context of ongoing work may provide the most meaningful development and are often used as follow-up efforts to formal classroom programs.

Multisource Feedback

Also known as *360-degree feedback*, *multisource feedback* seeks to enhance self-knowledge of leadership ability and one's impact on others by providing leaders with multiple assessments of their performance from different role perspectives. In this method, ratings of a target's performance are systematically collected from multiple sources—including supervisors, peers, subordinates, and self-perceptions—in order to compile a comprehensive, "360-degree" picture of a target's ability and behaviors. The underlying philosophy of multisource feedback is that people in different reporting roles in relation to a target may experience different aspects of that person's personality and behavior. Widening the lens to include perspectives other than one's boss is thought to develop a more complete understanding of the impact of one's behavior on others across different role relationships. Multisource feedback can help leaders enhance the intrapersonal skill of self-awareness by illustrating the effects they have on others and by highlighting any discrepancies between various perceptions of performance. But simply providing feedback does not necessarily translate into enhanced leadership. In many cases, other elements are added to the process to help someone make better sense of the feedback and to use it to create and implement a developmental plan. An *executive coach* is often used for this purpose.

Mentoring

Whereas executive coaches are often hired as external consultants to help people develop necessary leadership competencies or address specific leadership challenges, developmental relationships (i.e., mentoring) can also be fostered formally or informally within organizations. Mentoring usually occurs as a more senior member interacts with a more junior protégé (typically at least two organizational levels below the mentor) to advise, share lessons learned, and enhance career development and advancement. Through observing and interacting with mentors, developing leaders can expand their perceptions of key organizational challenges and strategies as well as enhance more microlevel interpersonal skills. Mentoring relations run the risk of failure, however, if the protégé becomes too dependent on the mentor. A Other important components of effective mentoring are the quality of the mentor and the mentoring experiences. Only recently have researchers begun to examine the effects of “marginal mentoring” (that is, mentors limited in terms of effectiveness but who still have value) on the performance and development of protégés.

Networking

To facilitate communication among functional areas and to build better social capital, organizations have implemented initiatives to foster the development and maintenance of work-related relationships. Initiatives such as regular lunches, electronic dialogue, and other social events at work can help individuals build their networks. Broad social networks are advantageous to leaders in expanding their resources with regard to knowing who has expertise in which particular domains (called *transactive memory*). Individuals can also develop broader and more complex ways of viewing problems and ways of working with others and can challenge basic assumptions through network relationships.

Outdoor Challenges

Outdoor challenges or wilderness training include challenging experiences, such as high- and low-ropes courses, orienteering, rappelling, and whitewater rafting. These experiences are designed to require collaboration, trust, and participation for successful performance and are aimed at encouraging individuals to

overcome risk-taking fears (intrapersonal) while enhancing teamwork skills (interpersonal). As such, they have a heavy affective component in terms of their effects on participants. While these initiatives are popular, little empirical evidence exists of the effectiveness of enhanced leadership on the job. One important obstacle to successful transfer is the difference between a wilderness setting and typical business environments.

Challenging Job Assignments

Challenging assignments within one's current role as well as expatriate assignments, job rotation, and cross-unit rotation encourage the development of new skills, such as team building, strategic thinking, and social-influence skills. Complex cognitive and social skills can be developed when individuals are challenged or pushed beyond their comfort zones. These “stretch assignments” can facilitate self-awareness that can challenge how an individual learns, thinks, and interacts. Challenging job assignments are effective for development only when they are intentionally developmental and learning oriented, rather than solely focused on performance. An important consideration is to avoid potentially putting people “in over their heads,” resulting in feelings of helplessness, rather than encouraging development. Some attention should be given to the developmental readiness of the person to take on a new and significantly challenging job assignment, as well as helping the incumbent learn and develop from the challenge.

Action Learning

Often used in conjunction with challenging job assignments, action learning involves development through work-related organizational experiences. The approach is grounded in the assumption that people learn most effectively when dealing with work-related issues in real time, which heightens the relevance of the learning. Action learning is best described as a structured, continuous process of learning and reflection that also addresses a complex challenge of strategic importance to an organization. It is typically group or team based, includes aspects of coaching and mentoring, and has a specific focus on learning. The overall spirit of action learning is to help people learn and develop from their work, rather than taking them away from work to learn and develop. Techniques such as

journaling are often used in conjunction with action learning to facilitate reflection and keep the learning process intentional.

Because leadership is a complex interaction between the individual leaders and their social and organizational contexts, comprehensive developmental efforts need to be directed at (a) developing individual leaders, (b) developing broader interpersonal leadership capacity, and (c) linking the two. Leadership development practices also are generally more successful when linked to key strategic business imperatives. Effective development is less dependent on which specific practices are employed relative to how tightly tied the efforts are to intentional and consistent implementation. To implement effective developmental programs, organizations must overcome a tendency to allow development to become a haphazard process. This haphazard tendency can be addressed through intentionality, evaluation, accountability, and adopting a long-term focus.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

It is presumptuous to assume that the rate or nature of change will be the same for all leaders for any given developmental experience, and it certainly cannot be expected to be identical across entire careers. *Developmental readiness*, or how prepared an individual is to benefit from developmental experiences, provides a preliminary point for understanding development. Factors such as cognitive ability, motivation, and maturity influence an individual's preparedness. Some researchers suggest that developmental readiness may be related to a person's moral reasoning. More complex moral reasoning is associated with a greater reflexive capacity through which leaders are better able to "step back" to perceive how their actions affect others. In this sense, developmental readiness is related to one's capacity for self-awareness. Given individual differences in developmental readiness and existing abilities, some experiences or interventions might be better suited only to certain individuals. To maximize success of a leader developmental practice, a match may be required between an individual's readiness and existing abilities and specific experiences.

Environmental factors, within both the formal training context and work environment, are also important for facilitating the *transfer of training*, or the degree to which trainees apply to their jobs the knowledge, skills,

behaviors, and attitudes gained in training. Developmental experiences in the context of ongoing work provide an advantage over classroom programs because what is learned more readily transfers to the job. A supportive environment, in which individuals are encouraged to apply learned leadership skills, allowed to reflect on and adopt various leadership styles, and supported to continue their development, is critical for success. A recipe for failure includes sending a changed individual into an inflexible and unchangeable environment. Similarly, leadership is best developed in an environment characterized by safety and trust, support for learning and change, and a sense of purpose in which members are encouraged to work closely with each other.

CONCLUSION

A key to the effective development of leaders and leadership depends a great deal on implementation. All of the various developmental practices have some evidence of effectiveness. What is of utmost importance in making them work is how they are implemented. One consideration is how consistently and broadly the developmental initiatives are practiced. Instead of limiting development to top levels or "high-potential" executives, a more effective implementation strategy may be to introduce versions of the focal practices throughout all levels of an organization as a means of developing deeper leadership capacity. Another key to effective implementation is to link initiatives so that leadership development builds on leader development. Grounding developmental initiatives in an overall purpose tied to key strategic business challenges is one way to heighten the relevance of leadership development for better organizational performance. One caution is that development is a relatively long-term investment in the human and social capital of an organization. There are no proven shortcuts to leadership development, but the potential pay-offs from a well-designed initiative with consistent implementation across organizational levels can provide a key for better overall individual, team, and organizational effectiveness.

—David V. Day and Michelle M. Harrison

See also Center for Creative Leadership, Human capital, Job challenge, Mentoring, Performance appraisal and feedback, Social capital, Three-hundred-sixty-degree (360°) evaluation

Further Readings and References

- Avolio, B. J. 2005. *Leadership Development in Balance*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Conger, J. A. and Benjamin, B. 1999. *Building Leaders: How Successful Companies Develop the Next Generation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Day, D. V. 2000. "Leadership Development: A Review in Context." *Leadership Quarterly* 11:581-613.
- Day, D. V., Zaccaro, S. J. and Halpin, S. M., eds. 2004. *Leader Development for Transforming Organizations: Growing Leaders for Tomorrow*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Gibber, D., Carter, L. and Goldsmith, M., eds. 1999. *Linkage, Inc.'s Best Practices in Leadership Development Handbook*. Lexington, MA: Linkage Press.
- London, M. 2002. *Leadership Development: Paths to Self-insight and Professional Growth*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- McCall, M. W. 1998. *High Flyers: Developing the Next Generation of Leaders*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School.
- McCauley, C. D. and Van Velsor, E., eds. 2004. *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*. 2d ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Murphy, S. E. and Riggio, R. E., eds. 2003. *The Future of Leadership Development*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Vicere, A. A. and Fulmer, R. M. 1998. *Leadership by Design*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School.