

THINKING AND LEARNING
ABOUT LEADER AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is both a leadership source and resource, serving as a hub or what sociologists call a “third place” for boundary-crossing leaders. Recently, IEL explored the question, “*How do we get the leaders for education we need—individuals who can ensure results for all children and youth?*”

Specifically, IEL wanted to learn how leaders for education—PreK through Postsecondary Education—are being prepared to improve outcomes for children and youth, and to identify lessons learned that could help improve future leadership development efforts. To answer the question, IEL harvested lessons learned from its Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP), a cross-boundary leadership development activity in continuous operation since 1964.

IEL began its exploration by conducting a review of relevant literature on leader and leadership development. This report, ***Thinking and Learning About Leader And Leadership Development***, documents what IEL learned about leadership development – what it is, how it is conducted, and how it is evaluated.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

There is a growing amount of research devoted to the complex concept of leadership development. Early writing on leadership development referred broadly to activities that enhance an individual’s ability to lead. In recent years, there has been a move within the field to distinguish between the development of an individual’s capacity to lead (leader development) and the development of a group’s shared capacity to lead (leadership development). This shift has led to a definition that emphasizes developmental activities designed to enhance the collective capacity of groups to carry out leadership tasks. The developmental activities may take place in settings internal or external to organizations.

The Development of the Field

Efforts to understand and develop the capacities that make one a better leader have existed for decades. During the twentieth century, institutions used leadership theory to identify and inculcate the skills necessary to lead. The military, schools of business, and corporations were pioneers of leadership training programs. “Early leadership training programs stressed increasing the supervisor’s human relations knowledge, skills, and ability, especially with reference to problems of interaction among his or her subordinates” (Bass 838).

Evolution in scholarship influenced the development of leadership programs. The emergence of commonly accepted and scientifically validated traits of leadership increased the sophistication of content and delivery. By the late 20th century, leadership training and development programs flourished in a variety of settings.

A majority of the research about leadership development stems from three primary sources: (1) scholars (e.g., academicians with interests in leadership theory, business, or human resources); (2) practitioners (e.g., organizations and independent consultants who design and implement leadership development activities); and (3) funders (e.g., foundations and corporations that provide financial support for leadership development activities). These categories overlap and together may be considered the field from which

leadership development norms and practices are generated. The work produced is largely practical with a strong focus on defining leadership development and narrowing the concept in the interest of identifying the practices that best support its application in various settings.

A Shift in the Field: Leader Development vs. Leadership Development

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), the premier leadership development organization that conducts a variety of leadership development activities in countries around the world, has defined leadership development as the “expansion of the organization’s capacity to enact the basic leadership tasks needed for collective work: setting direction, creating alignment, and maintaining commitment” (McCauley and Van Velsor 18). In a comprehensive review of leadership development research and practices, David Day argues that “a leadership development approach is oriented towards building capacity in anticipation of unforeseen challenges” (Day 582).

The question of who benefits from leadership development is also addressed broadly in CCL’s *Handbook for Leadership Development*. In it, the authors make an explicit distinction between leader development and leadership development. “Leader development is directed towards individuals to expand their capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes” (McCauley and Van Velsor 3). In contrast, leadership development emphasizes the interdependent and collective nature of leadership tasks undertaken by an organization (Hannum, Martineau, and Reinelt 5).

Day further illustrates the distinctions between leader development and leadership development. “In the case of leader development, the emphasis is typically on individual-based knowledge, skills and abilities associated with formal leadership roles” (Day 584). In contrast, “leadership development can be thought of as an *integration* strategy by helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives” (Day 586).

The distinction between leader development and leadership development can be further elucidated by defining the capacities that are increased. CCL suggests that leader development and leadership development exist on a continuum along which individual skills are developed in tandem with an organization’s collective capacity to conduct leadership work. The individual leadership skills include self-management capabilities, social capabilities, and work facilitation capabilities. Within an entity, leadership development activities enhance “connections between individuals, between collectives within the organization, and between the organization and key constituents and stakeholders in the environment” (McCauley and Van Velsor 19). CCL contends that “[leadership development] develops individual and collective capacities to create shared meaning to effectively engage in interdependent work across boundaries, and to enact tasks of leadership in a way that is more inclusive” (McCauley and Van Velsor 19).

CCL’s definition expands on Day’s work, which also takes into account the role of human and social capital in leader development and leadership development. “The primary emphasis in leadership development is on building and using interpersonal competence” (Day 585). Day continues with an analysis of the work of Daniel Goleman and Cynthia McCauley: “key components of interpersonal competence include *social awareness* (e.g. empathy, service, orientation and developing others) and *social skills* (e.g. collaboration and cooperation, building bonds, and conflict management)” (Day 585).

Day contends that the interpersonal competencies increased due to leadership development can be characterized as a form of social capital. Indeed, if leader development can be conceived of as an activity that develops human capital, then leadership development has an “orientation towards social capital [that] emphasizes the development of reciprocal obligations and commitments built on a foundation of mutual trust and respect” (Day 605).

The Role of Context

There appears to be agreement within the field that leadership development does not have to take place within the traditional boundaries of an organization (Day 582). Leadership development efforts encompass a broad range of activities that may target an individual, organization, or system (WKKF 7-15). Research has demonstrated that programs embedded within an organization benefit from alignment with the strategic direction and expectations of the organization’s leadership (Velsor, Moxley, and Bunker 224). However, the design of some of the programs may call for the interaction of individuals from organizations that do not ordinarily interact; such a design may be similarly effective when the activities and outcomes are closely connected to individuals’ organizations.

HOW IS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CONDUCTED?

Leadership development practitioners employ a variety of techniques to increase the capacity of participants. Day identified and analyzed the research related to the following commonly used leadership development techniques:

Feedback Instruments — One of the most commonly used techniques is 360-degree feedback instruments which are also known as multi-source feedback (MSF) or multi-source assessments. The instruments are a method of “systematically collecting perceptions of an individual’s performance from the entire circle of relevant viewpoints” (Day 587). The sources of feedback most often include superiors, peers, and subordinates. Supporters of MSF cite the use of the instruments as a developmental tool in the areas of interpersonal knowledge and awareness. This tool has also have been shown to be effective in capturing users’ varying behaviors across different constituencies. Critics of the 360 feedback method cite a user’s willingness to change his or her behavior as one significant factor that bears upon the effectiveness of the tool.

Executive Coaching — Executive coaching is a common practice that uses one-on-one learning to yield individual change or to resolve a particular organizational issue (Day 590-91). Coaching often combines multi-source feedback with planning that enables one or more users to implement strategies to address concern(s). Day identified little research detailing the empirical value of executive coaching in enhancing development beyond improvement in performance. There also is little data to show how or why it works and to what extent it promotes the growth of social capital among participants.

Mentoring — A growing body of research demonstrates the value of mentoring in leadership development activities. Formal mentoring involves pairing junior-level individuals with senior-level individuals outside of their direct reporting line (Day 594). Effective mentoring relationships have been shown to help mentees “increase [their] self-esteem and satisfaction with their work and the progress of their career” (Bass 835). Mentors may also “assist in the organizational visibility... [and provide mentees] with counseling, protection, friendship and challenging assignments” (Bass 835). Mentoring has demonstrated a positive impact on both the mentee and mentor, but there are certain conditions necessary for expanding the impact of these

efforts. Research has shown that effective mentors are predisposed to a “relations orientation, even temperament, tolerance for ambiguity, valuing the organization, liking the [mentee], and respect for the [mentee’s] intelligence” (Bass 836). Effective matching activities are critical to the success of mentoring as a leadership development activity.

Networking — Networking is a particularly useful leadership development practice; it provides a means for the user to develop social capital through interaction with individuals who occupy common roles (McCauley and Douglas 93). “An important goal of networking is to develop leaders beyond merely knowing *what* and knowing *how*, to knowing *who* in terms of problem solving resources. Networking is also about expanding one’s definition of what and how through exposure to others’ thinking, which can challenge basic assumptions about what we think we know” (Day 597). Research has shown the centrality of networks to a leader’s functioning (Bass 671). The effectiveness of networking as a developmental activity is closely linked to the extent to which the networks provide the user with access to knowledge and individuals that positively influence the participant’s leadership activities.

Job Assignments — Job assignments have been shown to be a highly effective leadership development activity in contexts in which users are exposed to unfamiliar and challenging situations (Day 599-600, Ohlott 155). “Research has shown that job assignments have been identified as particularly helpful to managers in learning about building teams, how to be better strategic thinkers, and how to gain valuable persuasion and influence skills” (Day 598). A potential drawback is the selection and implementation of job assignments. Assignments that emphasize development tend to have a higher degree of responsibility and put the individual in situations that require change and the possibility of failure. The organizational climate must be willing to view failures as developmental opportunities in order to enhance the individual’s learning.

Action Learning — Action learning refers to “a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with a corresponding emphasis on getting things done” (Day 601). This strategy is embedded in theories of adult learning; participants engage in work that includes “delivering measurable results in service of an organization’s work, learning and communicating lessons specific to a particular context, and developing individual and collective capacities for learning and leadership more generally” (Palus and Horth 461). Action learning is an evolving technique and few data exist describing the impact of this technique on participants. A majority of the writings on action learning provide qualitative descriptions of programs employing action learning techniques (Day 603). Day identified one promising strand of research emerging from Amy Edmondson. That work describes the “psychological safety” that develops in work teams (Day 603). The presence of psychological safety or as described by Edmondson “a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking” may lead participants to engage in challenging or risky behaviors that lead to learning and growth (Day 603).

HOW IS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT EVALUATED?

The individuals and organizations that fund, study, and run leadership development programs have a sustained interest in advancing the methods available for measuring the outcomes of their efforts. In 2002, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) commissioned a scan of fifty-five leadership development programs to determine how practitioners measured the impact of their programs. The Leadership Learning Community (LLC), a national organization committed to connecting the learning, practices, and resources of the field, frequently convenes researchers to explore strategies for evaluating leadership development activities. In 2006, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) produced a field guide providing an overview

of methods available to leadership development program evaluators. The resulting publication, *Handbook of Leadership Development Evaluation*, pools research culled from leadership development stakeholders.

Two major themes emerged in the review of literature related to leadership development evaluation. The first theme describes the evaluation of the potential outcomes of leadership development efforts, while the second theme is concerned with the methods used to evaluate the outcomes.

Evaluating Leadership Development Outcomes

Leadership development activities do not exist in a vacuum. Many of the strategies employed by leadership development practitioners emphasize the context of participants with the purpose of affecting change beyond the individual.

The previously mentioned WKKF scan of fifty-five leadership development programs identifies five different types of potential outcomes. Individual outcomes are changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and perceptions; behaviors; and/or values and beliefs (WKKF 7). Organizational outcomes are those that change organizations functioning, lead to program innovation or expansion, or enhance the leadership capacity of organizations (WKKF 9-10). Community outcomes are those that broaden participation in leadership activities to individuals who are not members of the “leadership elite” and bring together organizations that do not ordinarily collaborate to address community problems (WKKF 11-12). Field of leadership outcomes include the development of future leaders, replication of existing leadership development programs, promulgation of sustained relationships and social networks, and the fostering of policy knowledge (WKKF 13). Lastly, systemic outcomes are those characterized by “changed public discourse on a topic, changes in public policies that impact children and families in public discourse, [and] institutional cultures and practices that focus on maximizing people’s assets and capacities” (WKKF 14).

Methods of Evaluating Leadership Development

The complexity in identifying the multiple levels at which leadership development programs may influence change is matched by the inherent difficulty in measuring and analyzing data in these various domains. Many of the outcomes desired by leadership development practitioners and funders take place over time and require intricate evaluation plans that accurately capture the relationship between program activities and observed impacts. CCL’s *Handbook on Leadership Development Evaluation* identified and discussed four widely accepted methods for assessing the impact of leadership development programs.

Experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation. Experimental designs are often referred to as the “gold-standard” of research design methods. Evaluators use a randomly assigned control group to measure the cause and effect relationship of an intervention on observed outcomes. Quasi-experimental evaluation is similar to experimental design, but it lacks random assignment. This difference is crucial as random assignment is the best method for minimizing differences between the control and treatment groups. In the context of leadership development programming, experimental and quasi-experimental design methods give evaluators the capacity to identify and quantify the causal relationship between a leadership development program and observed effects on participants (Craig and Hannum 20).

There are several challenges to creating appropriate experimental and quasi-experimental research designs. Some challenges, such as problems with the reliability or validity of the assessment, are not unique to leadership development evaluations. However, the context of leadership development efforts

may complicate an already formidable task. Contextual variables such as ambiguously defined outcomes (e.g., increased problem solving skills) and inadequate measurements (e.g., problem solving skill tests) may be further compounded by the fluid nature of leadership development efforts (e.g., mentoring) and instability in the participant's environment (e.g., organizational restructuring) (Craig and Hannum 24-27). Program evaluators working with experimental research designs must be careful to capture effects that are directly related to the leadership development tasks.

Theory of Change Approach. The theory of change approach to evaluations was first advanced by researcher Carol Weiss. She contended that “a theory of change approach to evaluation requires that the designers of an initiative articulate the premises, assumptions, and hypotheses that might explain the how, when, and why of the processes of change” (Gutierrez and Tasse 49). The use of this approach in evaluating leadership development programs is predated by its use as a method for measuring outcomes in comprehensive community initiatives in the 1990s (Gutierrez and Tasse 49, 52-53).

The authors argue that the theory of change or pathway mapping approach is “a good fit” for leadership development evaluations because it involves stakeholders in the process of defining a program's view on leadership, articulating desired outcomes at the individual, organizational, and system levels, and establishing the interaction between the different components and or interventions within a particular program design.

The authors identify several contexts for which the theory of change approach may not be appropriate. The first example is that of “a stable leadership program that undergoes periodic evaluation and that has already identified, with good clarity, its objectives, interventions, and intended outcomes” (Gutierrez and Tasse 68-70). The authors also suggest that the method would not be useful for programs in an exploratory or pilot phase without identifiable “pathways of change.” They argue that in both contexts the theory of change approach may not add value beyond what could be provided by other evaluation methods such as experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

EvaluleAD: An Open-Systems Approach. The EvaluleAD approach to evaluating leadership development programming is designed to capture the systemic effects of a program through methods of inquiry that begin with identifying all possible outcomes. In this approach, results are defined as episodic, developmental, or transformative in the context of three domains: individual, organizational, or society/community (Grove, Kibel, and Haas 77-79).

The authors define episodic results as predictable, or well-defined, time-restricted outcomes that are stimulated by the program intervention. Examples include a documented increase in knowledge or development and submission of a particular policy proposal in a community (Grove, Kibel, and Haas 77-79). Development results are identified as those that occur over time and are subject to influences from the external environment of the program. Examples include a change in organizational strategy or the implementation of a new program. Transformational results are described as “fundamental shifts in individual, organizational, or community values or perspectives” (Grove, Kibel, and Haas 79). Examples may appear to be episodic in the short-term, but usually involve a change in viewpoint or career shifts.

The authors propose that evaluators use two forms of inquiry to capture the results of a particular program (Grove, Kibel, and Haas 81-82). Evidential inquiry is descriptive in nature and seeks “to capture and represent what is happening to people (and by extension, to their organizations and communities.)” In

contrast, “evocative inquiry seeks the perspectives and influences of those influenced by the program – either directly or indirectly” (Grove, Kibel, and Haas 82).

The authors anticipate and directly address the challenges and potential criticisms of the EvaluLEAD design and recommend a “willingness to move behind causal logic” to embrace “synchronicity, serendipity, and synergy” (Grove, Kibel, and Haas 108): Synchronicity implies that things happen only when – and precisely when – there is an appropriate alignment of factors and forces, some of which we still do not understand. Serendipity refers to the fortuitous results when life trajectories intersect by chance or accident. Synergy is defined as higher order characteristics or properties when two or more parties interact as to give birth to them.

Return on Investment. The return on investment (ROI) approach to evaluating leadership development programming borrows heavily from business literature and practices. The method, considered controversial by some, requires evaluators to “isolate the effects (of the program), capture costs, convert data to money, calculate ROI, and identify the intangibles” (J. Phillips and P. Phillips 155). The aforementioned activities rely on the use of a control group and stakeholder estimates of the impact of the program on output variables.

As with the other evaluation approaches, the authors identify challenges to wide application of the method. ROI evaluation designs are best used when a leadership development program is focused on a particular need. Furthermore, the approach requires a significant amount of data collection to adequately measure the costs and outputs directly attributable to the actual program (J. Phillips and P. Phillips 162-164).

Suggestions for Additional Research

Reviewing the literature on leader and leadership development brought IEL into contact with a significant number of resources related to leadership development programming at the local, state, and national levels. The rich and growing body of research devoted to leadership development has emerged from a community of scholars, practitioners, and funders seeking to improve outcomes for the individuals, organizations, and communities that benefit from these programs. IEL joins those calling for increased research to identify and then disseminate best practices in leadership development. To enhance the quality of leadership development programs, individuals must know how and why activities lead to observable change and outcomes. The time and sophistication required for this type of data collection and analysis cannot be understated; its importance is considerable.

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