1

Guiding Principles

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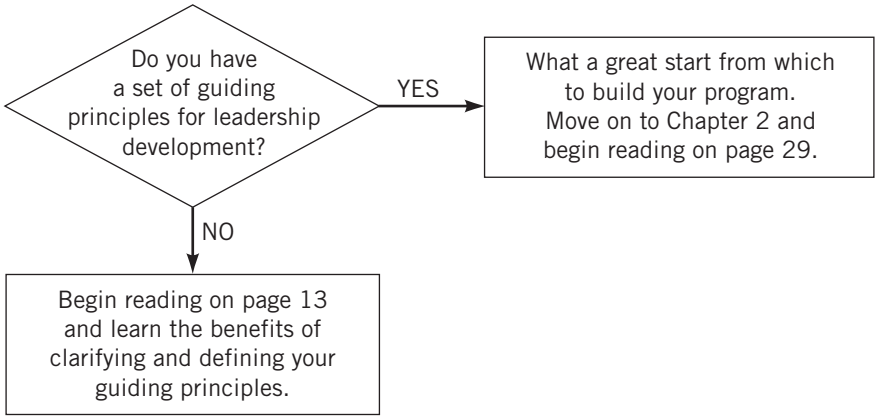
Let me take you back to our first meeting. Our goal was to kick off the leadership development initiative in six months. With all of our combined experience, we were sure this "start-up" phase would be the easiest of our discussions. Boy, were we wrong! In a matter of a few hours, Rick and I realized that we had a multitude of great ideas and a mountain of work ahead of us. Leadership development is a broad topic. Much has already been written and compiled about it, but nothing met the requirements we felt were important: in particular, customized to the organization and individualized to the participants at a variety of learning levels. This told us that establishing a strong foundation for the program was imperative. A solid foundation would provide the base on which all other pieces would operate.

FIRST STEP IN THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ALGORITHM



WITH THE DECISION to build your own leadership development program from the beginning or to enhance an already existing program, you are probably excited to begin putting it together. While this is quite normal, take some time to focus on the principles of your program. These are essentially those attributes that you believe should be considered as you build each piece of your leadership development program and that will act as key guidelines during construction of the program foundation. You may change learning objectives, curricular activities, and the like, but your principles remain the cornerstone of your program.

Therefore, the first important step in the design of a leadership development program is to focus on the key principles that will provide the structure for your program. This piece will provide direction for everything else that follows and will provide the fundamental basis to sustain the program over time. Without a strong set of guiding principles, programs often flounder, as direction may become unclear, making it difficult, if not impossible, for the program to be an integral part of the organization's overall strategy.

The Program Principles

The following principles have worked well for us. However, depending on the culture of your organization, you may very well add or delete some from the list. Just be sure that, whatever your final list looks like, it represents what your organization believes is important in leadership development.

The Leadership Development Program Is Aligned with the Organization's Mission, Vision, Values, Goals, and Strategic Initiatives

The alignment of the foundation elements with the mission, vision, values, goals, and strategic initiatives of the organization is crucial to the initiation and sustaining of an effective leadership development process. Too many times, organizations have written mission, vision, values, goals, and strategic initiatives that do not become effectively operationalized in institutional programs and processes. If an organizational mission statement is not "brought to life" through the day-to-day activities of the organization, it may become a liability in that the staff will see it as a sham rather than as a motivator. The same is true for the other elements.

The organization's written documents should be assessed with a view toward ensuring that the same language, spirit, and intent guide the development of your program. The leadership development program should be an important representative of the organization, demonstrating how the true spirit of the mission, vision, values, goals, and strategic initiatives can be made part of the daily processes that guide the organization, thus making them "part of the woodwork" and "the way we do business around here." There should be no question as to whether the leadership development program is inherent in the very fiber of the organization. This will certainly enhance the probability that it will not be a "one-shot" process, but that it will be sustained over time and will continue to provide opportunities for personal and professional development for current participants and future members of the leadership team.

One way to ascertain whether or not your principles are aligned with the organization is to conduct an analysis of the language of existing organizational documents. When reviewing documents, look for key words that you may use in your development process, such as *leadership, commitment, accountability, communication, innovation, personal and professional development,* and so on. If words such as these do not appear in the written statements of your organization, you may want to initiate efforts to add them so that the overarching strategy of the organization is parallel with your leadership development program. This will be a critical enhancement for your ongoing success.

Your principles should contain language that centers on the fundamental beliefs of the organization, such as

- The importance of human growth and development in the organization
- The organization's commitment to lifelong learning
- The importance of highly productive and effective leaders
- The commitment to self-managed and adult learning principles
- The relationship of leadership development to the organization's mission, vision, values, goals, and strategic initiatives

We recommend, if it is not already occurring, that there be language in the organization's strategic plan that reflects a long-term, not short-term, commitment to leadership development. It has been our experience that if this is not present, selling the leadership program becomes an annual event, and it must compete for dollars and support each time the budget cycle rolls around. If there is language in the long-term strategy of the organization noting its commitment to leadership development, it does not guarantee the program, but it certainly makes it more likely that the program will receive the resources it needs.

The Leadership Development Program Is Outcome-Based and Measurable, Leading to a Significant Return on Investment for the Organization

Another important aspect that must be represented in the principles is that the leadership learning is outcome-based and measurable. This will provide the organization with the direction to measure how its leaders are developing personally and professionally and how their development measures up to the organization's expectations. Additionally, this will provide the basis for the development of an ROI model for the program. This leads to obtaining and sustaining the necessary financial support for the program by relating it to the financial health of the organization.

Often missing with human resource development (HRD) activities is ROI. The absence of a systemic ROI model often renders HRD initiatives very vulnerable when it comes to budget allocations, both short term and long term. We have developed an effective model for leadership development ROI that organizations can use. The organization must have a sense that it is truly receiving a return on what will be a very substantial investment in time, energy, and money.

The Leadership Development Program Reflects the Commitment of the Organization to Its Long-Range Success

As you put your program together, be sure that its language reflects the long-range commitment of the organization to the success of the program. Anywhere you can, insert language that indicates that the organization is committed to its leaders and to their ongoing personal and professional development. As that language becomes part of the culture of the organization, it enhances the possibilities of sufficient economic and human resources to sustain the program.

Since the ultimate clients of the leadership development program are the executive leadership team and the governing board, it is critical that these groups "own" the program and be fully committed to it. Without that, its

ongoing existence is tenuous, at best. We will offer several strategies to ensure that the executive team and the governing board not just support the program, but are engaged in it in meaningful ways.

The Leadership Development Program Is Competency-Based

If your organization does not have a set of leadership competencies, you may want to convene focus groups of key leaders (perhaps some key staff as well) to determine what they see as the most important leadership competencies. Even with organizations spread across multiple facilities, methods such as teleconferences and videoconferences can be employed to conduct some of the focus groups, as well as provide a means to deliver content when the program is initiated. You will be trying to ascertain what skills, talents, and abilities the organization desires and will value over time. Be sure to include members of the senior leadership team in this process to ensure its success, as they will ultimately approve the entire process. In addition to focus groups, consider the use of methodologies such as the nominal group technique and/or the Delphi Technique. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 3, and can be found in Exhibits 3.3 and 3.4.

Leadership development activities often occur in a classroom setting and do not provide opportunities for participants to develop their skills in real-life situations as a way of demonstrating their competency. A key part of the leadership development process should be to provide opportunities for participants to engage in organizational initiatives such as strategic planning, building projects, new product selection, new or redesigned work processes, and organization development activities. This will give program participants a chance to exhibit requisite leadership competencies beyond the cognitive level. Not only will this give the program participants real experience and insight into "senior" level activities, but it will also build the strength of the organization so that more individuals will be prepared to take new and/or expanded leadership roles. (As an aside, this approach could be a significant element in selling the program to the executive leadership team and/or the governing board.)

Assuring that the program is competency-based is a significant piece of a successful overall approach. Be careful not to accept "canned" competencies that someone or some other organization has determined to be important; rather, be sure that the competencies that drive your program are reflective of what your organization considers important. If you do choose to use other resources for your competencies, be sure that they speak the language of your organization and that they provide key measures of leadership behavior that are important to your organization.

The Leadership Development Program Is Based on the Fundamentals of Self-Managed and Adult Learning

One of the key elements in a productive leadership development program is that it is based on the fundamentals of self-managed and adult learning. If the program is essentially instructor-centered, the participants may never take true ownership of their own learning. One of the ultimate goals of the program is that participants begin to recognize and address their own learning needs. It is important that they begin seeking avenues to meet those needs, collaborate with their colleagues, and seek other available resources to leverage the expertise and experience that will enhance their own learning.

Self-management of learning and adult learning will be important concepts for your program. First, you want your participants to take responsibility for their own learning, and second, the learning experiences you provide for them must be engaging, interactive, and use the methods by which adults learn best. Some assumptions to consider as you build your program are that

- Adults learn best through experiences
- Adults learn best through problem solving
- Adults learn best when the learning is of practical and immediate value

In addition, your program should contain language that reflects individual learning styles. For example, some individuals learn best by

- Doing something active with the content, applying it to their work
- Teaching it to others
- Thinking about the content
- Working in groups
- Working alone
- Learning facts
- Discovering options
- Seeing pictures and graphics
- Focusing on words and classroom dialogue
- Having the content presented in linear steps
- Dealing with content in more global and generalized terms

Finally, your program should demonstrate the idea that individuals, to be able to grow personally and professionally, will be exposed to learning activities that reflect the fundamentals of self-managed learning. Some of those that lead to success are when

- Learning is closely linked to individual learning needs
- Individuals take responsibility for their own learning
- A wide range of learning opportunities is employed
- Learning is focused on long-term goals
- Interaction with others is emphasized and, in fact, required

As we continued our deliberations, it became clear to us that we wanted to have an organization full of self-managed learners, who would not only accept responsibility for their own learning, but would have the personal and professional tools to accomplish that learning. All too often, organizations provide more of an instructor-based learning design, rather than a learner-

based design. We thought that it was critical to the long-term success of the program that the learners "own" the program.

The Leadership Development Program Contains Multiple Learning Levels

To avoid the often-used approach of "one size fits all," we feel that it is imperative that a leadership development program contain at least two or more learning levels for each competency. However, caution is urged about coming up with too many learning levels. Each learning level for each of your identified competencies must have its own set of behavioral statements, diagnostic tools, and curriculum. In addition, there may be scheduling logistics to consider, as each level for each competency will have to have its own scheduled meeting times. Our experience indicates that three learning levels is probably the most any organization may want to use and that, in many cases, two learning levels may be sufficient. Remember that your goal is to meet as many diverse learning needs as possible, but in the process you don't want to create a scheduling nightmare.

We continued to think about what the learning levels might look like and then about how we would diagnose learning needs of individuals to tailor their learning experiences. To individualize the program as much as possible, and to keep it manageable, we agreed on three learning levels. Individual organizations can develop their programs with fewer or more learning levels as they choose. It seemed to us that the three levels could be generally defined as beginner/apprentice, competent, and expert. To give each level its own identity, we named and described them as follows:

1. Beginner/Apprentice—individuals who were relatively new to their leadership roles or who had not yet had time or experience to demonstrate particular competencies would be classified as *beginners/apprentices*. Their learning experiences would center largely on information necessary to understand the basic concepts as they relate to a particular competency. The focus would be to prepare the participants to demonstrate competence in a particular area

and to move them to the next level of learning. Examples of learning activities include selected readings, discussion of those readings, self-perceptions regarding a particular competency, structured experiences, simulations, and case studies.

2. Competent—individuals who have demonstrated competency in actually carrying out activities related to a particular competency would be classified as *competents*. The learning experiences for these individuals would consist of activities designed not to give them basic information (as with a beginner/apprentice) regarding a competency, but rather to hone their already existing skills and to build on existing knowledge. The learning activities would be focused mainly on application of principles in a leadership role and would build on the collective experiences of the participants. Activities would include selected readings, sharing of application experiences in the workplace, operational assessments, case studies, simulations, and structured experiences.
3. Expert—individuals who have been identified as coaches and mentors for others regarding a particular competency would be classified as *experts*. Their learning activities would concentrate on the continued development of their coaching and mentoring skills for a particular competency and would emphasize the successes they have experienced as coaches/mentors. The learning activities would center on high-level discussions of an advanced nature so as to identify and implement what would be the best practices for the organization, as well as enriching the experts' ability to coach and mentor others in the organization.

The Leadership Development Program Contains Learning Diagnostic Measures

To meet the diverse learning needs of your participants, the program should provide individual diagnostic mechanisms from which individual learning needs can be identified. This approach directly addresses the issue of "one size does *not* fit all" and shows that your organization will provide a systematic way

to diagnose learning needs for all participants so the program can be tailored, as much as possible, to individual needs. The diagnostic tool should be directly related to the leadership competencies. Note that individuals can be at different learning levels for different competencies. In fact, many will be at different learning levels based on their backgrounds and experiences with a particular competency.

The Leadership Development Program Has Provisions for Individual Learning Plans

Another very important factor to be included, and one that stems from our approach to learning levels and learning diagnoses, is the provision for individualized learning plans for all participants. Once again, most leadership development programs take on a structure in which all participants are exposed to the same developmental activities, regardless of their learning needs. To avoid this, a comprehensive analysis of the leadership competencies must be conducted to determine which competencies are important to your particular organization. Next, a diagnostic assessment must be developed to determine where individuals are on the learning curve for each competency. This information is generated collaboratively between the individual participant and his or her immediate superior. Following that, a learning plan is developed and the individual is placed in the appropriate learning activities related to his or her individual learning needs. Ongoing collaboration with the participants' superiors is critical to ensure engagement in the program and attainment of learning goals.

The importance of learning plans is to ensure that learning activities and resources are being spent for the greatest effectiveness and with the greatest efficiency and that the process is using the participants' time appropriately. Without individualized learning plans to help map the way, participants might not see value in some of the learning opportunities.

The Leadership Development Program Is Fully Supported by the Entire Organization Through a Learning Culture

Another key factor is the creation and sustaining of an organizational culture dedicated to learning. This does not mean only the provision of learning

opportunities for all members of the organization, but a comprehensive commitment from the top down that everyone be engaged in learning activities focused on personal and professional development. If the leadership development process is just another "program," any long-term success will certainly be by chance. It must be considered an inherent part of how the organization does business. Anything less will probably mean that leadership development may have a difficult time surviving and may become a victim of annual budget allocations.

One of the pitfalls of many leadership development programs is that they are based on the traditional "teacher-pupil" relationship, in which experts are utilized to teach participants what they need to know about leadership. It is imperative that the program go beyond that approach and include learning opportunities that are interactive in nature. Assuring that the learning activities are organizationally grounded provides the relevance the participants need.

This concept may seem very obvious, but too many times there is not enough attention paid to being sure that the program is fully supported by not only the developers and participants, but also by the decision makers, who ultimately control the financial and organizational future of the program. In the design, there should be specific and direct language that commits the organization to the long-term support of the personal and professional development of its leadership team through well-designed and focused learning initiatives. Language that speaks to the organizational commitment for the growth and development of its entire leadership team would be appropriate. Too often, the support of leadership development programs resides at the middle-management level, creating a program vulnerable to failure.

The Leadership Development Program Centers on Long-Term Sustainability

There is no question that today's turbulent and often-chaotic business environment requires that organizations develop and sustain effective leaders at all levels of the organization. As "organizational pyramids" have flattened out, there are fewer levels of management, and responsibilities and accountabilities are being driven deeper into the organization. Therefore, individuals who heretofore have just carried out instructions are now expected to make impor-

tant decisions regarding how work is organized, processed, and evaluated. This means that they must possess the requisite leadership skills to carry out the new responsibilities, and therefore significant organizational commitment is required to ensure that leadership development is an inherent part of the organizational culture. Note should be made here that leadership development is not a series of program offerings, but is an integrated and comprehensive approach to the development of the leaders of the future.

Thought should also be given to the concept of "growing your own" as a key part of the leadership development approach. While there is value in bringing in "new blood" to fill leadership roles, there is also significant value in preparing internal staff to assume leadership roles as they become available and then to sustain them in those roles. This process often results in higher morale and commitment to the organization. Individuals will also see that the organization is interested in their personal and professional development and that there are potential opportunities for advancement without leaving the organization.

A key aspect in the success of your leadership development program and the ability to sustain it over time is to use the talent and experience of the senior leadership team as coaches and mentors. Of course, just because individuals have moved up the organizational ladder does not mean that they are skilled coaches or mentors for others. They may be very technically accomplished themselves, but may not possess the requisite skills to coach others. Therefore, components of your program design might include training and development for members of the senior team to ensure that they can carry out the necessary coaching and mentoring.

Another important aspect of leadership development is creating and sustaining an organizational culture conducive to learning and development so that leadership can flourish and prosper. Specifically, the organizational culture must contain at least the following factors:

- Openness of thought and opinion
- Shared mission, vision, and values
- Participatory leadership style
- Empowerment of staff

- Promotion of the true spirit of cooperation and teams
- Maximizing the effectiveness of human capital

The culture is the core of how the organization operates on a day-to-day basis. It is not just a set of written documents, but rather the fundamental way members of the organization are expected to behave and interact with one another. Everyone in the organization, from top to bottom, is held accountable for behaviors that are true to its culture. It is worth remembering that actions speak louder than words, and the behaviors exhibited by the leadership team will be carefully observed by all.

Finally, the entire management team must demonstrate that personal and professional development of staff is vital to sustaining the process. This should be the essence of the leadership development program. It should be reflected in the leadership competencies that guide the program, reinforced by the way leaders are held accountable for their behavior, and supported in the ways they are recognized within the organization. Leadership styles should stress the development and use of behaviors and strategies that focus, not just on task accomplishment, but more on personal and professional growth and development.

With many leadership development programs, there is a flurry of activity at the beginning, with much excitement about a new venture. But unfortunately, and because most programs have no built-in sustainability, the enthusiasm wanes and the materials gather dust on bookshelves all around the organization. That is why many leadership development programs become the "fad of the year" or "program of the month." In our book, we wanted to be sure that the readers were provided with information and strategies that would enable the organization to not only build a solid foundation for leadership, but that leadership development would become an integral part of the organization's mission, vision, values, goals, and strategic planning.

Summary

Your first step in developing a leadership development program should be to establish the guiding principles that will become the cornerstone of your program. While guiding principles may vary, we have suggested several that we believe to be effective.

The first major principle is that all aspects of your program should be aligned with the mission, vision, values, goals, and strategic initiatives of the organization. In addition, your program should be outcome-based and measurable, providing the opportunity to develop a strong return on investment. The executive leadership team and the governing board should be fully engaged in the process to ensure the long-term commitment of the organization to the program's success.

Your leadership development program should be competency-based and should focus on learning activities that give participants real-time experiences to demonstrate and develop their competencies. Basing your program on the principles of self-managed and adult learning encourages participants to take responsibility for their own learning. To provide for as much individualization as possible, without creating logistic issues for your program, consider the adoption of multiple learning levels.

Based on the leadership competencies, your program should feature diagnostic measures through which participants will be able to design their own learning plans.

Finally, your leadership development program should be fully supportable by the entire organization through the cultivation of a learning culture centering on the long-term sustainability of the program. Your program should not be the "program of the month," but rather an integral part of your organization's commitment to the development of its present and future leaders.