

1 *This chapter provides an overview of leadership competencies including the history of emergence, contemporary uses, common frameworks, challenges, benefits, and future implications.*

Developing Leadership Competencies

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Are leaders born or made? This is the classic question often posed to students in leadership classes as they grapple with whether they believe the capacity to lead effectively is something that is innate or something that can be learned. Many leadership scholars, however, have asserted there are elements of leadership that can be taught and developed (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2001) through experience, training, classes, or workshops, either separately or through a combination of opportunities (Astin & Astin, 2000; Roberts, 2003). So, what exactly is being taught and developed to help people engage in effective leadership? This chapter will cover the history and emergence of leadership competencies, the use of leadership competencies today, using competencies for college student leadership development, and examples of leadership competencies in action.

History and Emergence of Leadership Competencies

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a paradigm shift occurred in the field of personnel management from a traditional standard performance approach, centered on individuals' formal qualifications and experiences as predictors of job achievement, to an approach acknowledging greater self-directed behavior and responsibility of the employee in their achievement of job excellence (Horton, Hondeghen, & Farnham, 2002). One way to address this shift was through the use of competencies. Hirsch and Stabler (1995; in Horton et al., 2002) "define competencies as the skills, knowledge, experience, attributes and behavior that an individual needs to perform a job effectively" (p. 4).

Using competencies in a job setting, often referred to as competency-based management, involves identifying the varied knowledge, values, abilities, and behaviors that people need to possess and exercise to achieve the strategic objectives, goals, and performance expectations of the

organization. Competency-based management can provide a framework for recruitment (What competencies should be in this job description and how do I market to prospective employees who have those competencies?); selection (Which prospective candidate best possesses the competencies necessary for the job?); training (How can I create training experiences that help develop the competencies associated with the position?); and the development of incentives, recognitions, and rewards (What can I do to recognize the development and achievement of essential competencies?) (Horton et al., 2002).

The work of psychologist David McClelland is associated with developing the modern concept of competencies (German & Johnson, 2006). McClelland (1973) reviewed with some skepticism the main lines of evidence for the validity of intelligence and aptitude tests through standardized testing. Disillusioned with the idea that test achievement could be the only determination to qualify a person for admittance into schools or colleges or for employment purposes, McClelland offered alternatives to traditional intelligence testing. The alternatives concentrated on the analysis of the behavior of a person, the changes reflected based on the learning acquired, and the consideration of various situations in which the person is critiqued (McClelland).

Additionally, McClelland (1973) asserted that testing for personality variables or competencies of life outcomes such as communication skills, patience, moderate goal setting, and ego development (taking initiative), could be a strong indicator of one's abilities. His principles for defining a new alternative testing analysis method were centered as much on evaluating educational progress as they were in identifying fixed characteristics for selection purposes into schools, employment, or advancement (McClelland).

McClelland's approach has provided an important foundation for shaping the modern definition of personal competencies and traction for the competency movement. In the early 1980s, the American Management Association conducted a study in which competencies were defined as "underlying characteristics of an individual that is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job" (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 21). By the late 1990s and early 2000s, it became increasingly clear that many jobs in the modern workplace required some level of leadership aptitude (Bolden & Gosling, 2006). "Leadership competencies shifted emphasis from the mainly technical requirements of specific jobs to the softer interpersonal qualities sought from people at many levels across an organization" (Bolden & Gosling, 2006, p. 5).

Leadership Competencies Today

Both the Society for Human Resource Management and the United States Office of Personnel Management promote the use of leadership

competencies in the workplace. The Society for Human Resource Management (2008) defines leadership competencies as “leadership skills and behaviors that contribute to superior performance” (p. 1), whereas the Office of Personnel Management (n.d.) defines a competency as “a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully” (para. 1). Leadership competencies can be found in corporate settings and professional associations across a multitude of fields.

Corporate Leadership Competencies. Today, many companies use leadership competencies for training, development, and evaluation. The Walt Disney Company, through the Disney Institute, provides training and instruction on three core competencies: leadership, employee engagement, and service. These core competencies reflect their business approach to customer service and leadership (Disney, n.d.). The Microsoft Corporation focuses on four key skills for training and development: values-based leadership practices, communication skills, specific business strategies and financial comprehension, and insights in leading at the enterprise level (Blueprint Leadership Development, n.d.).

Professional Association Leadership Competencies. In addition to the use of competencies in specific workplaces, leadership competencies are also used in professional associations to provide a foundation for effective professional performance. For example, the Public Relations Society of America requires their professionals to acquire knowledge, skills, and abilities in the following areas: researching, planning, implementing and evaluating programs, leading the public relations function, managing relationships, applying ethics and law, managing issues and crisis communications, understanding communication models, and theories and history of the profession (Universal Accreditation Board, 2016).

In the accounting profession, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) defines a set of skill-based competencies necessary for those looking to enter the field of accounting. The core personal competencies essential for the accounting professional include professional demeanor, problem-solving and decision-making, interaction, leadership, communication, project management, and leveraging technology to develop and enhance personal competencies (American Institute of CPAs, 2016).

Student Affairs Leadership Competencies. Student Affairs professionals, who serve in roles focused on college student development and student life, are also well versed in professional development and skill-based achievement through competency development. NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and ACPA: College Student Educators International joined forces to create the Professional Competency Areas for the Student Affairs Practitioners to define the broad professional “knowledge, skills and in some cases, attitudes expected of student affairs professionals” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 6). The following are the

professional competency areas for student affairs educators: personal and ethical foundations; values, philosophy, and history; assessment, evaluation, and research; law, policy, and governance; organizational and human resource; leadership; social justice and inclusion; student learning and development; technology; and advising and supporting (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

National Leadership Education Research Agenda Leadership Competencies. There are also core competencies aimed at leadership educators more specifically. The National Leadership Education Research Agenda (NLERA) released in 2013 established seven priorities vital for leadership education (Andenoro, 2013). The first two priorities, in particular, fall under Pedagogical Priorities—The Applied How of Leadership Education. These priorities focus on “leadership learning and transfer of learning through innovative leadership education” and include the critical practices of teaching, learning, and curriculum development, as well as program assessment and evaluation (Andenoro, 2013, p. 3).

In addition, one of the standards of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2012) is for Student Leadership Programs. It outlines 10 competencies essential for leadership educators, including diversity, communication, reflection, and group dynamics.

Using Competencies for College Student Leadership Development

Given the widespread use of competencies in the professional sector, colleges and universities provide an ideal environment for helping students develop leadership competencies before they enter their future careers (Seemiller, 2016a). Thus, identifying critical competencies for students to develop is a key piece of leadership program design. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation identified four categories for an exemplary leadership program, which include competencies such as problem solving and self-assessment embedded into the framework (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2001). Described in more detail below, other frameworks focused more specifically on leadership competency development for students include the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) competencies (Brill et al., 2009), Student Leadership Competencies (Seemiller, 2013b), the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 1987), and the National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies (2014).

NACA Competencies. Acknowledging the necessity for identifying leadership competencies for college students, the NACA Education Advisory group, comprised of student affairs professionals throughout the United States, developed *The Competency Guide for College Student Leaders*. This guide serves as a “learning map for student leaders as they grow and develop through participation in student organizations, community service, campus employment, grassroots activities, leadership positions,

followership positions, mentoring relationships with campus activities advisors, etc.” (Brill et al., 2009, p. 2). The resource highlights 10 core competencies from the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education related to working with students (Brill et al., 2009). These competencies include leadership development, assessment and evaluation, event management, meaningful interpersonal relationships, collaboration, social responsibility, effective communication, multicultural competency, intellectual growth, and clarified values (Brill et al., 2009). NACA also offers a facilitator guide and evaluation instrument based on these competencies.

Student Leadership Competencies. Based on more than 5 years of extensive research, *The Student Leadership Competencies Guidebook* includes 60 leadership competencies for the twenty-first century (Seemiller, 2013b). This list of competencies emerged through an analysis of components of three contemporary leadership models, content from the 2006 CAS Standards (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2006) and ACPA and NASPA’s 2004 Learning Reconsidered document (Day et al., 2004), as well as nearly 18,000 learning outcomes embedded into the accreditation manuals of all 522 accredited academic programs in U.S. higher education. These 60 leadership competencies are categorized in eight clusters: learning and reasoning, self-awareness and development, interpersonal interaction, group dynamics, civic responsibility, communication, strategic planning, and personal behavior (Seemiller, 2013b). Further, each competency includes four dimensions that reflect levels of learning. These include the knowledge (content), value (belief), ability (skill or motivation), and behavior (action).

The Student Leadership Competencies Guidebook (Seemiller, 2013b) serves as a framework to develop a program or course, infuse meaningful competency-based activities into the curriculum, and help students reflect and apply their learning in future academic, professional, and life contexts (Seemiller, 2013b). Educators can also utilize the Student Leadership Competencies to assess competency learning and development using various tools such as the online inventory, evaluation measurements, and rubrics, as well as award digital leadership competency badges to recognize student achievement.

Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. In 1987, Kouzes and Posner published *The Leadership Challenge*, which presented five practices of exemplary leadership. The practices, model the way, challenge the process, enable others to act, inspire a shared vision, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 1987), are grounded in decades of research (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Each of the five practices is comprised of a multitude of individual competencies, which can be found on the Jossey-Bass Student Leadership Competencies Database website (Seemiller, 2013a).

The five practices of exemplary leadership were later linked to high school and college student populations, resulting in the creation of *The Student Leadership Challenge* (Kouzes & Posner, 2008) and a student ver-

sion of the Leadership Practices Inventory called the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 1998). This inventory marked one of the earlier adopted skill-based inventories for assessing one's competencies for leading. The Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Student LPI) is designed to assess students' areas of strength as well as areas warranting further development in the five areas of practice. The authors assert that "the more frequently students are perceived as engaging in the behavior and actions identified in the Student LPI, the more likely it is that students will be perceived as effective leaders" (Kouzes & Posner, 1998, p. 7). The Student LPI consists of both the student's self-assessment of their behaviors around the five practices and an observer's external assessment. Once both parties have completed their assessments independently, responses are cross-referenced to identify the consistencies and inconsistencies focusing on students' strengths and areas of improvement.

NACE Career Readiness Competencies. The National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) has also established key leadership competencies for career readiness. In 2014, a task force of career services and HR professionals conducted a study of 606 employers (NACE, 2014) and determined seven competencies essential for being hired in the workforce. These include critical thinking/problem solving, oral/written communications, teamwork/collaboration, information technology application, leadership, professionalism/work ethic, and career management (NACE, n.d.). To put these competencies into practices, NACE offers resources such as evaluation forms, a resume rubric, and links to course syllabi and program descriptions using the NACE career readiness competencies.

Examples of Leadership Competencies in Action

In addition to providing the frameworks and resources related to leadership competencies, it is also important to highlight tangible examples of using leadership competencies with students. These examples are offered to provoke additional interest in learning more about leadership competencies and to showcase their wide variety of use.

Co-Curricular Leadership Programs. The Geneseo Opportunities for Leadership Development (GOLD) Program at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Geneseo "seeks to prepare students for college and community leadership roles and responsibilities in service to the college and the global community" (Matthews, 2013, p. 17). This mission is delivered through a comprehensive educational, developmental, and training series of workshops, volunteer work, and active engagement. A comprehensive overview of the program and workshop modules can be found in *Building Leaders One Hour at a Time: Guidebook for Leadership Development* (Matthews, 2013). The *Student Leadership Competencies Implementation Handbook* (Seemiller, 2016b) identifies the specific

competencies associated with each workshop module so educators can easily find a module that addresses the intended competency.

Another example of a co-curricular leadership program that uses competencies is the Advanced Leadership Challenge at Florida International University. In this program, students participate in one distinct leadership experience (such as a workshop, event, role) from each of the eight Student Leadership Competencies clusters (Seemiller, 2013b). After completing a reflection on the experience, students are awarded a leadership medallion to wear at graduation (Florida International University, 2016).

Experiential Learning Transcripts. The University of North Florida offers a Leadership Certificate Program, which consists of 15 academic credit hours and requires students to create an Experiential Learning Transcript. Through reflective practice, the Experiential Learning Transcript enables the student to identify leadership competencies they developed through various activities including employment, community service, study and travel abroad, internships, and engagement in campus and community organizations and projects (University of North Florida, n.d.).

Student Leadership Conferences. In fall 2015, Lead365 entered the leadership education and development arena as a competency-based national student leadership conference. The conference curriculum aligns with three developmental progressions of a leader: engage, explore, and evolve, with each level focusing on a specific set of leadership competencies.

- Explore: Enhancing inspiration for self-awareness, understanding leadership, building personal leadership abilities and skill sets, and identifying a mission and leadership purpose
- Engage: Developing interpersonal communication competencies and creating environments for collaboration and teamwork
- Evolve: Understanding social justice and diversity, facilitating change, and embracing social responsibility

Each conference session is mapped to both a developmental level and a specific leadership competency. Students are able to select sessions to attend based on competencies they would like to develop, making the conference experience more intentionally developmental. Although the sessions to choose from are diverse in terms of competency focus, the 2016 conference also offered students an opportunity to hone in on one specific competency to engage in deep learning and development. Students who selected and participated in eight workshops and leadership labs related to the competency of verbal communication were able to earn a Student Leadership Competencies digital badge in Verbal Communication to showcase on social media and in their ePortfolios (Lead365, 2016).

Academic Leadership Programs. In addition to the co-curriculum, leadership competencies can also be used in credit-bearing leadership programs. For example, Wright State University has mapped each course in the undergraduate Organizational Leadership major to specific leadership competencies (B. Kraner, personal communication, January 3, 2017). By identifying the competencies connected with each required course, the faculty members could make curricular modifications to address additional competencies as needed, generate marketing ideas around the intended competencies, develop an ePortfolio requirement for students that aligns with the selected competencies, and assess student competency development through end-of-semester evaluations.

Self-Evaluations. In recent years, there has been increased attention to performance-based accountability in higher education, especially in employability upon graduation (Peck et al., 2015; Seemiller, 2013b). This has led to the creation of NACA® NEXT (NACA, 2015), which is designed to assist students as they prepare for their career aspirations upon graduation. NACA® NEXT offers a self-evaluation tool based on NACE survey results of the skills employers seek. Students also have the option of inviting their advisor or activities professional to evaluate them on these same skills so that the students can compare their self-evaluation with evaluations from professionals and peers. The evaluation also includes recommendations for students to enhance their skills through leadership activities and engagement.

Another self-evaluation tool available to students is the Student Leadership Competencies Inventory (Seemiller, 2016c). The online inventory is comprised of eight mini-inventories. Each includes measurements that assess competency proficiency (ability to enact a competency) for each competency in that cluster. For example, the Communication mini-inventory measures competencies such as Verbal Communication and Listening. Upon completion of each mini-inventory, a report is generated showcasing how students self-report their competency proficiency. For those who want more of a comparison tool, the Student Leadership Competencies 360 evaluation allows students to complete a self-evaluation of their competency performance (effective use of a competency) across all 60 competencies and compare it with evaluations completed by observers, which can include supervisors, advisors, instructors, and peers.

Professional Development. In 2014, the topic of the National Leadership Symposium hosted by the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs (NCLP) and NACA was “Leadership Competencies from Research to Results.” During the symposium, several scholars and practitioners came together to discuss strategies to integrate leadership competency development and measurement in their programs and courses. Each participant was given a copy of *The Student Leadership Competencies Guidebook* (Seemiller, 2013b) as a resource and was asked to work in small groups to develop a project that included competency setting, curriculum development, facilitation, and assessment.

Challenges and Benefits in Using Leadership Competencies with Students

It is important to note some challenges in using leadership competencies with students. First, leadership competency models tend to focus on individual skill development (leader development) and less on collaboration and relationship-oriented approaches (leadership development). Bolden and Gosling (2006) state, “competency frameworks tend to reinforce individualistic practices that dissociate leaders from the relational environment in which they operate and could, arguably, inhibit the emergence of more inclusive and collective forms of leadership” (p. 13). Therefore, it is important to remain mindful of context and relationships within leadership situations and to help students learn how to leverage their own competencies along with the competencies of others for effective group functioning. Although this issue focuses on individual development, future research may explore how groups and communities develop collective competencies. The Social Change Model of Leadership Development, for example, offers three levels of development: individual, group, and community (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996), in which competency development at the group and community levels may be useful both for the process and outcome of leadership.

In addition, certain challenges arise through the wide variation of competency models that exist. Models with a large number of competencies might suggest it is not possible to develop all competencies, thus creating a sense of feeling overwhelmed with choices. On the other hand, some models may have too few competencies that do not reflect the true complexity of leadership (Hollenbeck, McCall, & Silzer, 2006).

Although there can be challenges, there are benefits in utilizing leadership competencies with students. First, leadership competencies can provide a theoretical foundation from which to build programs, courses, and experiences for leadership education. Second, using a common competency language can help create bridges between student affairs and academic units (for marketing, partnership, and accreditation purposes) as well as give students the language to use with prospective employers. Finally, as leadership development may be elusive to measure, there are many tools specifically designed to measure leadership competency development. Having an assessment protocol and set of tools around leadership competency development can create a systematic way to gather data that can be used in annual reports, marketing materials, and to seek performance-based funding.

Conclusion

It is evident that leadership programs have the opportunity to benefit students' undergraduate experience directly, as they provide a “sense of integration in the collegiate experience, higher rates of retention, and a stronger

sense of involvement in the surrounding community” (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2001, p. 67). Utilizing a leadership competency-based approach can provide an intentional and developmental way to design programs, develop curriculum, conduct assessment, and recognize learning for deep and meaningful student leadership development.

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