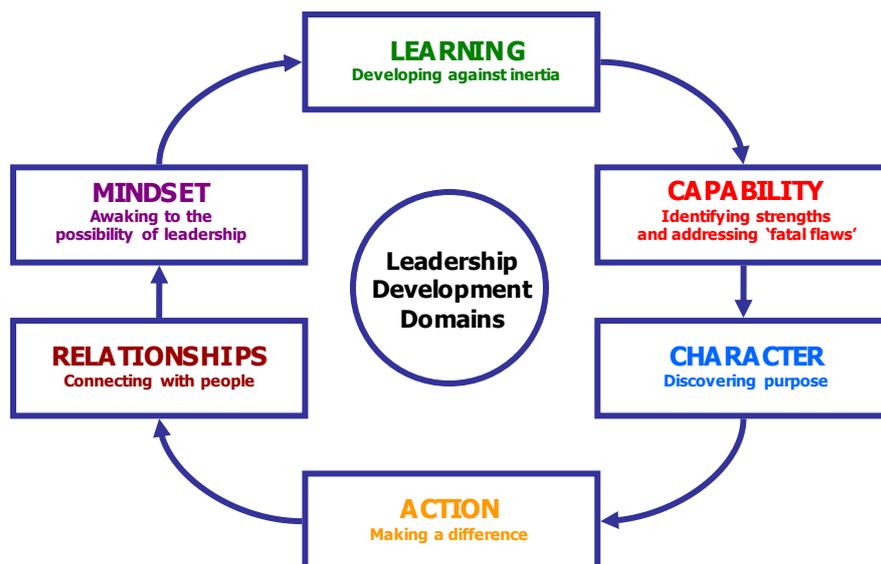


Six Domains for Leadership Development

Introduction

So, having declared that leadership is one of the most important items on the business agenda, the CEO asks you for a change strategy that will boost the organisation's leadership bench strength! Where do you start? You have your own perspective and experience of course but you want to know what others are thinking and writing about leadership and its development. So you pick up the latest Harvard Business Review (which you find is a special issue on leadership), search the web for ideas, call a few friendly consultants or colleagues in your network to hear what they are doing, or scan the management shelves of the nearest bookshop for an appealing title. A rack of books extol the virtues of, amongst others, Shackleton, Patton, Mandela, Welch, Henry V, Giuliani, Jesus and even Star Trek's Jean Luc Picard. Others have titles like *Leading out Loud*, *Leadership and Self-Deception*, *Leading with Soul*, *Business Leadership*, *The Leadership Moment*, *Authentic Leadership*, *Leading Teams*, *the Leadership Mystique* and *Shared Leadership*. Initial excitement at your discoveries turns to frustration as you realise that there are as many theories, models and techniques as there are writers, consultants and teachers. Each manifestation is as personal as leadership itself. And most of what is written contains no theory of leadership development, only of leadership. All paths of inquiry return to the stark truth that it will be your insight, your wisdom, and your choices that determine where and how and with whom you will act in building more capable and effective leaders within a healthier and more productive leadership culture.

This paper helps the practitioner faced with this dilemma cut through the mountain of theory to **six core leadership domains**. Skillfully integrated the perspectives and practices contained in these domains constitute an integrated framework for leadership development that can greatly enhance understanding, practice and impact.



1. Mindset

The first domain is often neglected in leadership development. It is neglected because it deals with fundamental questions of human existence, meaning and freedom. It is an unsettling place for travellers because it argues that to be a leader is to reinvent your *self* as a leader. The 'natural' development of the self from childhood into adulthood is a gradual erosion of freedom. The human condition is driven by a fear of freedom and the isolation and aloneness that it brings¹. People do not want to stand alone. The need to belong, to be accepted, to conform are elemental drives which shape the way we live our lives. In this domain a reflective examination of the self – how it is the source of success and limitation – brings the nature of the human condition to the surface in a way that liberates from the fear of freedom.

The task for leadership development in the first domain is to help people become aware of their *way of being* and how this affects what they do and the results they get, albeit in a critical not self-justifying way. The learning frame that makes this accessible is philosophical inquiry, and there are two aspects to this. The first is unpacking, through reflection and self-examination, what it is like to be *yourself*, and where this self originates from. Developmentally, it requires conditions in which individuals can observe themselves – their frames of reference, the nature of relationships with others and their beliefs about how life should turn out - as a way of provoking moments of self-insight. The second aspect is an extension of the first. By becoming expert in your self, you increase the range of choices available to you. You discover that your freedom extends further than you thought. You see the consequences of your current way of being and you move closer to the threshold that separates you from a life-path that may be greater and more leaderful. You realise that you

¹ Erich Fromm (1984). *The Fear of Freedom*. Routledge

are free to create your life however you want it to be². Leadership development accompanies the traveller as she first confronts, and then embraces, the unknown.

2. Learning

If leadership development in the first domain involves nudging individuals into reappraising their past and present lives so that new possibilities open up for their futures, the paradigm in this domain sees the capacity for leadership as a lifetime's journey of learning from experience. Leadership development in the second domain brings openness to all experience and an appetite for seeking out new challenges. Being in this domain is like swimming in a long river, pushing oneself away from the sides into the whitewater at the middle, not just once but repeatedly, throughout life. This is what Peter Vaill calls learning as a way of being, the capacity for fluid and adaptive living³. Leader-learners are self-directed and curious, able to learn in the midst of action.

This domain contrasts this view of lifelong leader development with the prevailing 'institutionalized' forms of learning that take responsibility for learning away from the learner. Organisational learning paradigms remain, for the most part, stuck in industrial-age principles and archetypes, with educational programmes, processes and frameworks that attempt to structure, control and manipulate experience. But the not-so-new world of complexity, speed, connectedness and unpredictability requires learning to be self-directed, creative, experiential, spontaneous and continuous. Leadership development creates symbols and structures that emphasise learning as a way of being, like some versions of the ubiquitous corporate university. Paradoxically, it can also teach skills that enable leaders to switch out of habitual response and into a more reflecting and inquisitive way of operating, like systems thinking and modeling. Practically, our interventions offer a broad variety of developmental experiences, like the opportunity to manage large groups of people, to have significant decision-making authority, to launch new businesses or turnaround a struggling project. And, at the edge of this domain, we can experiment with more 'radical' solutions, like long-term therapeutic relationships that help unfreeze the rigid assumptions and patterns of the past, enabling individuals to become more open to their experience, and more adept at responding to complexity and uncertainty.

3. Capability

In the third domain, the business imperative is to build organisational capability, and we witness attempts by human resource teams to link business and people strategies via leadership competencies. In this domain difficult questions about whether leadership is born or made surface. Frustrated by the slow pace of learning and development to deliver results, and excited by the 'neuroscience of talent', organisations endeavour to accelerate their leadership capability-building through 'find' not 'grow' strategies. Performance and

² Tracy Goss (1996). *The Last Word on Power*. Doubleday

³ Peter Vaill (1996). *Learning as a Way of Being*. Jossey Bass.

talent management processes –like ‘top-grading’ - classify employees into lists of haves and have-nots: the exceptional few who have innate leadership skills, attitudes and potential, and the vast majority who don’t. As a result, this is a domain full of judgments and assessment, of top and bottom ten percents, of employees selected in and selected out. Although the competency movement has been in decline, organisations in this domain cling to a belief that leadership can be defined, and once defined, measured, selected and nurtured. The segmentation of talent, and the smarter targeting of training budgets around narrower curriculums, is revealed in the proliferation of assessment centres and development programmes centered on key transition points, e.g. the career move from operational management to general management or from general management to a corporate global executive role.

The innovations in the third domain are impressive, but there is also a shadow side. HR’s addiction to cause-and-effect competency models, assessment and selection processes, and large-scale development interventions mask the realities of organisational prescription, or what Paulo Freire calls, ‘the pedagogy of the oppressed’⁴. Single-loop thinking locks organisations into an endless cycle of ‘solutioneering’ one people change programme after another, whether it is a missing capability (like strategic thinking or emotional literacy), or an especially culpable stratum of managers. The danger signals are there for all to see: the egos and narcissism fueled by talent processes, the projection of the organisation’s failures onto specific individuals or groups of employees, and the fall in levels of commitment and identity resulting from the exclusivity of the organisation’s culture.

Another approach is to embrace a more inclusive, expansive and appreciative perspective on the development of leadership capability. Such a perspective is underpinned by a different set of values to the mainstream: development is declining egocentrism, there are many potential streams of development (cognitive, moral, spiritual, interpersonal, somatic, kinesthetic, etc), evolution to higher levels of capability occurs when a person has fully experienced their present stage of development, later stages of development transcend earlier stages and bring new perceptions and orientations, enabling more choice and more capacity in thoughts, feelings and behaviours⁵. Rather than starting with the identification of ‘the problem’, an analysis of its root cause and the identification of solutions for its treatment, leadership development begins with an appreciation of ‘what is’, affirming past and present strengths, successes and potentials. The metaphor in this domain is ‘gifts’ and the action is discovery. Only when the present development stage has been fully experienced, with all its possibilities, limitations and contradictions, is it possible to let go of one’s attachment and move forward. The developmental agenda is to facilitate personal insight and awareness through reflection, conversation, meditation and experience.

4. Character

⁴ Paulo Freire (1993). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin Books.

⁵ Ken Wilber (2000). *A Theory of Everything*. Shambhala Publications. Dalmar Fisher, David Rooke, Bill Torbert (2003). *Personal and Organisational Transformations through Action Inquiry*. Edge/Work Press.

In the fourth domain, the inside journey remains important but the developer's attention turns to an articulation of the purpose and principles that are the foundation for leadership. Leadership development moves from discovery to creation. As we enter the fourth domain leaders find themselves back in the world, faced with dilemmas and decisions that test their strength of character. This territory is rich with examples of what Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas call the 'crucibles of leadership'⁶, defining moments that call for authentic action in even the most negative or demanding of circumstances. Some of these moments are genuinely life or death, like climber Joe Simpson's decision not to die after falling into a crevasse in the Andes. Others have the potential to affect the lives of many thousands of people, like research director Roy Vagelos' decision to produce a wonder drug that would cost his company \$3 a tablet to manufacture and distribute, yet would not generate a penny in income. But most leadership moments are not so profound or heroic. They are the daily choices and simple actions made and taken by what Joseph Badaracco calls 'quiet leaders'⁷. Like Elliot Cortez who challenged his company's unofficial policy of selling drugs for unauthorised uses. Or Kendra Jefferson, who having been promoted into a new role, was told by her boss to fire a member of her team. For both, quiet leadership balanced idealism with the messy reality of their jobs.

Few leaders act naturally from purpose or principle. Leadership development first helps leaders recognise certain work or life experiences as crucibles, in which they learned who they were – warts and all - and what they were destined to become. This insight gives individuals the freedom to compose their leadership identity, keeping what is vital while also adding new verses. In this domain the gift of leadership development is the opportunity to craft an authentic identity, so leaders find the purpose for their leadership and the values that will guide decisions, choices and actions as they face future defining moments. Sometimes practitioners will attempt to manufacture crucibles intended to build character, such as overseas assignments, community projects or 'quests' where individuals are pushed to their physical, mental and emotional limits. More often, though, leadership development will provide structures within which individuals and groups can reflect on moments of authentic and inauthentic leadership, and seek out a path in work and life that provides purpose, orientation and direction. Because in this domain leadership is an act of creation, leadership development becomes a matter of providing leaders with a place and space to compose their leadership identity and write the next chapter of their life. Leaders author what Noel Tichy and legions of General Electric leaders would call a teachable point of view⁸. They declare their intentions, communicate and take a stand on their values, and enact their leadership in the world.

5. Action

If it felt in the fourth domain that we were standing on a bridge between inside and outside leadership development, then in this domain we step into the swell of external reality, of

⁶ Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas (2002). *Geeks & Geezers: How Era, Values, and Defining Moments Shape Leaders*. Harvard Business School Publishing.

⁷ Joseph L. Badaracco, Jr (2002). *Leading Quietly*. Harvard Business School Press.

⁸ Noel Tichy (2002). *The Cycle of Leadership*. HarperCollins

chaos and complexity, of leadership strategies, actions and results. In the fifth domain leadership is not so much about you - your personality, character, style or charisma - as what you do⁹. Action defines leadership, not character or personality. Our metaphor is surfing. Leaders look at the sea and notice where the waves are rising and when they are breaking. Leadership is paying attention to what is happening, knowing where to act, when to act, and to what end. It is not creating waves for their own sake. Leadership is akin to surfing and leadership development is building the cognitive and intuitive capacity to read the organisation and its context, to decide what action is required, and then to act appropriately and often quickly. Chris Argyris calls this the 'knowledge for action'. Leaders know what to do, and then make a commitment to do it.

The action domain argues that the great potential in leadership is its power to transform; yet leadership development seldom takes more than a tentative step into this domain. It is much easier to develop - using Ronald Heifetz's distinction - technical leadership skills, like downsizing, restructuring or reducing costs, than adaptive leadership, which makes happen what would otherwise not have happened¹⁰. Managers at all levels are preoccupied with non-leadership work: putting out fires, seizing opportunities, handling tasks, and delivering the short term performance and cost targets set by others. In contrast, leaders hold themselves accountable for developing the business, not just routinely doing the things that have made them successful up to now. Leaders ask themselves tough questions like what is really going on around here, what are the values and practices that encumber this organisation, what would be a wise move in this situation, and what is a better future for all our stakeholders - customers, employees, communities and shareholders? And, of great importance in the wake of Enron, WorldCom and Andersen, what drives my choices and actions: service or selfishness?

Leadership development in this domain has been influenced by models that differentiate the work of leaders at different levels in the organisational hierarchy. Business school programmes introduce managers and executives to the roles and tasks they will meet at the next 'turn' in the organisational hierarchy. But leadership in this domain reaches beyond strategic thinking and general management skills into the development and application of wisdom, questions of ethics and responsibility, and a surfacing of the anxieties and risks leaders encounter as they set out to courageously reshape the world. Leadership development in this domain therefore calls leaders to think wisely about the ways they might lead profound, adaptive and emergent change. As Heifetz says there are no easy answers to complex business challenges that require changes in attitudes, behaviours and values. Leadership development does not prescribe courses of action; leaders must do this on their own. Instead, leadership development provides leaders with a clear space to lead, a place from which they can think deeply about the challenges and limitations of the existing organisational reality, explore and play with possible futures, and - crucially - embark on a course of action that is wise, meaningful and responsible.

The leadership development pedagogy in this domain extends beyond self managed and action learning. The formation of a structure - a container - lifts managers and executives

⁹ James O'Toole (1999). *Leadership A to Z: A Guide for the Appropriately Ambitious*. Jossey Bass.

¹⁰ Ron Heifetz (1998). *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Harvard University Press.

out of the frenetic daily demands of their jobs. The design challenge is the creation of an environment wherein leaders can build intimate relationships that are a secure foundation from which to push their leadership out into the organization. The container models complexity, embraces anxiety, and is a structure that facilitates both action and reflective inquiry. Leaders are encouraged to immerse themselves in a rigorous diagnosis of the organisation, to understand its current stage of development and discern the ways the organisation defends itself from change, and explore pathways that will move the organisation forward. Leadership development does not denigrate or ignore the pressures leaders experience in the present. Leaders are encouraged to explore the tensions 'between the pressure to perform and to transform organisations and their own skeptical, sometimes bitter sense of what is possible in the real world'¹¹. The goal of leadership development in this domain is wisdom and the vehicle is engagement with all shades of personal experience – anxiety, helplessness, resistance, tension, courage and excitement.

6. Relationship

In this, our sixth and final domain, leadership moves from tasks to relationships. For many the ability to connect with people, to inspire them to do more than they thought possible, is the real meaning of leadership. Here we explore the capacity of the *individual leader* to articulate a clear and compelling vision that inspires followers, to generate extraordinary effort and loyalty, and to face and overcome complex challenges and obstacles. Believing that leadership is inherent in the personal style and qualities of the individual leader, whether CEO, middle manager, team leader, or functional specialist leads practitioners down a path of approaches that accentuate social intelligence skills like empathy and openness, or personal influence and impact strategies such as expressing demands and expectations or using rational and logical argument. 360-degree feedback sheds light on the question, 'why should anyone want to be led by me?' Personal power courses provide opportunities to analyse, plan and practice personal influence strategies. But does this kind of *leader* development really benefit anyone other than the registered participant?

In this domain we also encounter neglected questions of soul, spirit and meaning. Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal draw attention to the way that leaders create meaning through the gifts of authorship, power, love and significance¹². These are antidotes to organisational cultures unfit for the human spirit, where people suffer a kind of malaise which shows up in turf wars and friction, scape-goating, damaged relationships, inauthenticity, useless activity, loss of commitment and energy, and employee resentment, absenteeism and turnover. Other commentators notice how storytelling is being employed in organisations to teach company values and restore corporate identity in the wake of eroded and fragmented organisational structures and cultures. And yet, even though leadership stems from the leader's soul and spirit rather than her ability to persuade, reason or advocate, the source of leadership remains individualized.

¹¹ George Binney, Gerhard Wilke, Colin Williams (2003). *Leaders in Transition: the Dramas of Ordinary Heroes*.

¹² Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (1995). *Leading with Soul*. Jossey Bass.

We have all witnessed the charismatic allure of individual leaders. Mayor Giuliani in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11 2001 is a memorable example of a leader who held a nation's fear and anxiety, calmly and decisively guiding people through distressing events as they were unfolding. But our organisations are too complex for any single leader, no matter how enigmatic or inspirational, to lead. Leaders cannot know everything. People must learn to lead together, to share responsibility for both long term organisational development and dealing with short term crises. What is required is a way of communicating that builds common ground and mutual trust between leaders and followers as a basis for understanding, questioning and addressing complex and systemic leadership problems. Here leadership is participation in the organisation as a universal and self-organising whole rather than the autonomous actions and intentions of a group of individual leaders within an organisational structure of dissociated parts. Leaders cooperate in a web of relationships to better understand the needs of each other and to create leadership across different and often competing philosophies, values and beliefs. Conversation becomes a critical competitive advantage.

The skills and discipline of dialogue are essential to what we call shared or *relational leadership*. Dialogue is different from prevailing forms of communication and decision-making in organisations. Although it addresses what businessmen would call real work it does so *dia logos*, or *through relationship*¹³. Dialogue seeks to collapse the boundaries between people and create leadership across fragmented and competing perspectives about what is right and true. By accompanying participants on a journey through progressively higher levels or fields of conversation people begin to identify and then suspend their opinions and assumptions and become less certain, more curious and increasingly open to new possibilities in thought and action. As Ed Schein remarks, 'Dialogue is focused more on the thinking process and how our perceptions and cognitions are preformed by past experiences. The principle here is that if we become more conscious of how our *thought process* works, we will think better, collectively, and communicate better'¹⁴. Dialogue is therefore the gateway to deep listening, mutual curiosity and shared understanding where leadership 'includes – but is not limited to the sparkling whitecaps we know as leaders. A meaning that sees how, in making leadership happen, *we all swim together* in the deep blue sea'¹⁵. Better decisions, innovative solutions and fully supported and aligned actions arise from the 'common mind' that the intimacy and authenticity associated with dialogue brings.

Because our society and culture values individual self-assertion above collective integration¹⁶ and the world is increasingly interconnected and interdependent, leadership development in our sixth domain can help our organisations find a healthy and dynamic balance amid personal leadership and relational leadership – between individual and collective leadership intelligence - where *I* and *we* learn and change together.

¹³ Danah Zohar (1997). *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*. Berrett Koehler.

¹⁴ Edgar H. Schein (1993) On Dialogue, Culture, and Organizational Learning. *Organizational Dynamics*, vol. 22, Summer

¹⁵ Wilfred Drath 2001. *The Deep Blue Sea: Rethinking the Source of Leadership*.

¹⁶ Fritjof Capra (1996). *The Web of Life*. Harper Collins

No single domain contains the total answer. Each domain has weaknesses compensated for in the strength of others. By blending insights and practices from all six domains we can significantly increase the effectiveness of our leadership development practices.

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