What Leaders Read 1

Centre for Creative Leadership
Handbook of Leadership Development
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1998, Jossey-Bass

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Fifteen authors, including the editors themselves, have contributed to the collection of works in the Handbook. Each author has been involved in the work of CCL. The Centre for Creative Leadership was established in 1970 in North Carolina, USA, has worked with hundreds of thousands of executives and managers, and has created programmes, tools and models for the development of effective leaders. CCL’s own definition of itself is “an international, non-profit, educational institute whose mission is to advance the understanding, practice and development of leadership for the benefit of society worldwide”.

The Handbook of Leadership Development summarises and integrates almost 30 years of research work at CCL. The book has been specifically written for people in organisations who are directly involved in leadership development activities.

There are four main sections, beginning with the Introduction, which lays down the leadership development model on which the text is based. Each of the remaining three sections covers aspects of leadership development: Part One examines experiences and Part Two relationships. Other leadership development issues are covered in Part Three.

From the opening narrative the scene is set in a clear and direct language. An imaginary conversation between a manager and a sage summarises the message of the book: “…not every experience offers important leadership lessons…challenges are important, but we don’t necessarily learn when we are challenged…you only grow (develop) from challenges when you have the ability to learn from them”.

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CCL defines leadership development as “the expansion of a person’s capacity to be effective in leadership roles or processes, enabling people to work together in productive and meaningful ways”. Thus, this is not only about people learning and developing themselves, but others also.

Fundamental to the work of CCL are the development and developmental process models which form the foundation on which their work is built. The developmental process has three key drivers of leadership development: assessment, challenge and support. Each underpins the development experience, and leadership development is most effective when all three elements are present. The development process requires a variety of developmental experiences, coupled with the ability to learn, together creating the capacities for developing leadership.

**Assessment** comprises data capture, predominantly from feedback methods, which provides a benchmark identifying an individual’s strengths, weaknesses and development needs.

**Challenge** means taking people out of their comfort zones by facing them with new and testing experiences, developing new capacities in the process.

**Support** through the development process provides the individual with the motivation and belief that they can learn, grow and change.

**Part One: The six leadership development experiences**

Developmental experiences are deemed essential to leadership development. There are six experiences, three formal, heavily planned and monitored (360-degree feedback, feedback-intensive programmes and skills-based training) and three informal, occurring naturally but with some design (job assignments, developmental relationships and hardships).

360-degree, or multi-rater, feedback uses a carefully structured instrument (questionnaire) and systematically collects opinions about a person’s performance from a wide range of people (co-workers as well as customers and others). The resulting data is processed and fed back to the participant – probably, the author states, the only time a leader is given a thorough appraisal of his or her performance effectiveness.

The use of feedback data plays a large part in the work of CCL’s development programmes. The Feedback-Intensive Programme (FIP) covers much greater breadth and depth than 360-degree feedback (which is just part of the FIP process) and focuses on skills, behaviours, values and individual preferences.

FIP is recommended for managers who have taken on greater responsibilities. The programme comprises a pre-programme element, the one-week programme itself, followed by post-programme activities of monitoring goal-setting and providing continued support. Throughout, the tripartite elements of assessment, challenge and support are maintained. Outcomes from FIP include greater self-awareness, leading to transformational perspective change, goal attaining and, eventually, behavioural change.

The third formal experience is Skills-Based Training (SBT), in which individuals gain knowledge and practise behaviours needed to improve existing skills and develop new ones. CCL suggests that the development programmes build on each other: thus SBT can extend and enhance the learning from 360-degree feedback and feedback-intensive programmes. SBT often involves learning on the job through off-site training, complementing the process through lectures, case studies, role-playing, behavioural role modelling and simulation events. The stress is on learning by doing, following the leadership development model of assessment, challenge and support.

The author suggests that the use of training needs analysis to determine the type of SBT required, and it is often found to be very useful for just-in-time training, providing skills at the right time when people need them most.
Building on the formal experiences of 360-degree feedback, FIP and SBT, leadership development experience is further enhanced by less formal job assignments. The key developmental element here is challenge, as job assignments reveal strengths and deficiencies.

The *Handbook* makes frequent references to the significant work of McCall, Lombardo and Morrison published in the book ‘Lessons of Experience’ in 1988. The three authors were working at CCL when their research on learning from experience determined five themes which were fundamental to a leader’s ability to be effective: handling relationships, setting and implementing agendas, basic values, personal insights and possessing "executive temperament".

The observations from 'Lessons of Experience' have highlighted the effectiveness of job assignments if used properly. In the organisational context they create a shared understanding and help people see learning opportunities, and they are useful in succession planning. Learning can be maximised, and the tracking of individuals through assignments over time greatly enhances the developmental process.

Relationships are deemed central to the learning and development process and affect each of the three key elements of assessment, challenge and support. The author presents a table comparing the role and function of relationships within each of these elements.

Feedback providers give feedback, dialogue partners, assignment brokers and accountants are involved in challenges, and counsellors, cheerleaders, reinforcers and cohorts all provide different forms of support. Each of these roles can be positive or negative, and more than one role can be held by one person (often the boss). Each role also represents a relationship, with some being more developmental than others. The authors prescribe individual strategies for using developmental relationships, and the organisation can help achieve this through the arranging of formal one-on-one mentoring, peer coaching, executive coaching and coaching in groups.

The sixth developmental experience, hardship, is different in that it is invariably unplanned. From hardship, the lessons are learned after the event, on reflection. Reference is again made to McCall, Lombardo and Morrison’s ‘Lessons of Experience’, which found “the acceptance and recognition of limitations followed by an effort to redirect oneself are characteristic of successful people”.

CCL presents five types of hardship event: business mistakes or failures, career setbacks, personal trauma, problem employees and downsizing. However, the issues learned – recognising limitations and blind spots, sensitivity, coping with circumstances beyond one’s control, balance and flexibility – are very important developmental experiences which better prepare leaders to handle the “permanent white water” of the work environment.

**Part Two: The process of leadership development**

The experiences covered in Part One are considered by CCL to be essential in leadership development, and therefore gain most pages in the *Handbook*. The “how”, or process, is described in Part Two, beginning with an overview of the systems approach to leadership development.

The systems approach depends on linkages between the three key elements that drive leadership development: assessment, challenge and support. Integrating the experiences forms the next link, displayed in the equation:

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Feedback-intensive programmes + 360° feedback + development assignments + developmental relationships + hardship = leadership development.
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Experiences must be integrated and leadership skills must be developed and practised. Practising them will turn weaknesses into strengths and allow behaviour changes to occur over time. The next and equally vital link, without which the whole process could not happen, is embedding the process in a supportive organisational context.

A number of case studies of organisations that have integrated the systems approach to leadership development (although, for reasons not explained, they are identity-protected), neatly illustrate the success stories of the CCL approach.

Echoing the manager and sage conversation from the beginning of the Handbook text, an essential part of the process is the ability to learn from experience. Reframing points of view, recognising the new behaviours, skills and attitudes that are required, and developing new tactics with which to learn mean the leadership development process is working.

Developing the ability to think and reflect on experiences, taking action to experiment and learn, accessing others for support and advice, and managing emotions (the 'executive temperament' from 'Lessons of Experience') form the basic set of learning competences. Again, the authors endorse the presence of the three key elements and the fact that the organisation must underpin and support the individual's development programme.

The final chapter of Part Two deals with assessing the impacts of developmental experiences. CCL places great emphasis on measurement and evaluation (an interesting point, also discussed later in the cross-cultural context), which must, it says, understand the goals of the organisation’s stakeholders and understand what can be expected, and why, from the leadership development programme. They discuss the principles applied to change and ways to assess change in individuals and groups, as well as the impacts of leadership development on individual and group experiences and the bottom line (though here the evidence falls short of a conclusion).

Part Three: Issues of leadership development

Race and gender

The bulk of CCL’s work since it opened in 1970 has been with (American) white males. McCall, Lombardo and Morrison’s ‘Lessons of Experience’ study on how executives learn, grow and change was based on all-male executives. The study was later replicated with women executives and the findings published in Morrison, White and Van Velsor’s 1987 book, ‘Breaking the Glass Ceiling’. This found that, although the challenges were the same, there were additional barriers for women.

CCL has studied and prepared programmes for African-American (the term "people of colour" is also used in the text) and white women managers. From the work at CCL, Morrison’s 1992 book, ‘New Leaders’ identified six barriers to these diverse groups in large US corporations: prejudice, poor career planning, poor work environment, lack of organisational savvy, comfort when dealing with one’s own kind and balancing career and family.

The authors acknowledge that the findings must be considered in the context of the US historical backdrop of patriarchy and slavery. They go on to discuss four leadership development practices: 360-degree feedback, feedback intensive programmes, challenging assignments and developmental relationships, and how the barriers to the diverse groups affect these practices. They also suggest stereotypes and how these groups might be catered for by, for example, single-identity programmes designed specifically for a group.

Although there are advantages and disadvantages, the authors maintain the results for single-identity programmes show more advantages than disadvantages. Again, the integrated systems
approach is championed – modified for opportunities, assessment procedures and effective use of challenges – though enforcement is required to ensure diversity practices are adhered to, with accountability held by senior managers.

Cross-cultural issues

The author of this section looks at the CCL model of leadership development and examines its applicability in other cultures. It is acknowledged that the models are based on assessment, challenge and support purely from a US vantage point, and that assumptions and definitions need to be modified for different cultures. The author also admits that US practice is not a yardstick for understanding leadership development around the world, an important point in this context.

A study by Wilson, Hoppe and Sayle in 1996 compared US values and beliefs with nine other countries selected to represent differences. The resulting information was presented as a table comprising six bi-polar dimensions of: individual-collective, same-different, tough-tender, dynamic-stable, active-reflective and doing-being. The study showed similarities and marked differences. For example, East Asian managers were reluctant to accept promotion as they did not want to compete with their peers for personal gain. Many other examples are quoted. Of the three key elements, assessment is deemed the most problematic to transfer across cultures.

The discussion moves to the challenge of ‘generalisability’. Not every culture wants the same, particularly in the choice of instrument for assessment, as not all cultures value such measurement. Though the desire for challenge and support are (generally) global, interpretations as to what is challenging and how support is provided (and to whom) varies among cultures. The conclusion is that the CCL leadership development model can be used across cultures as long as it is used in the context of the specific cultural environment. A list of “to-dos” is provided comprising twelve general points, ten points on assessment, three on challenge and two on support.

Developing leaders for global roles and the future of leadership development

Using studies and contributions from numerous academics, the terms ‘global organisation’ and ‘capacities needed by global leaders’ are defined. By now the reader will be familiar with the three key elements and the integrated systems approach to leadership development, only here it is addressed in terms of “working as a member of a cross-cultural team” and “expatriate assignments”. The overriding capacities for the global leader are all of the preceding aspects of the leadership development programme, coupled with an ability and a willingness to learn from other cultures, and a well-developed sense of moral reasoning.

The author of the chapter on the future of leadership development presents an informed, if possibly speculative, view. Describing the evolution of the leadership model from its roots in the notion of one extraordinary individual leading a group of followers (Alexander the Great, among many others), whose qualities represent dominating, commanding and power, he proposes the future model will instead reflect reciprocal relations, mutual meaning-making and group interaction.

The implications for the future of leadership development are that the individual’s ability will shift from taking charge to taking part, thus moving the focus toward interdependence. Direction will arise from the ‘reciprocal-relatedness’ of individuals, emphasising the leadership capacity of work groups. The concept is described as “a process that constitutes the system and its sub-system”.

Should this vision be realised, the work of CCL will need to develop and transform along with it.
Finally

The editors, in an Afterword, recognise that the Handbook represents the story of leadership development (from CCL’s perspective) at a point in time. They leave the reader with a set of six questions to consider the present state and future possibilities for leadership development.

Discussion

Although this is the work of 15 authors, together representing the cumulative work of the Centre for Creative Leadership, the book reads and flows well as one piece. The language is clear and direct throughout, and where many books on leadership written by academics cover the theoretical approach to leaders and leadership, this volume takes a specific and admittedly self-centred (CCL-centric) view of the subject of leadership development.

The editors state: “The aim of the book is to bring the cumulative knowledge of nearly 30 years’ research at CCL into one volume which can be used in organisations to create developmental experiences and design leadership developmental processes”. The handbook provides a solid first step towards this goal. The content as a whole, but particularly the ‘Leadership Development: Experiences’ section, clearly outlines what is involved in a leadership development programme.

Despite the acknowledgements that the work presented in the Handbook is not a yardstick to leadership development globally, there is an underlying implication that this is the way to conduct leadership development programmes.