

Exploring a Taxonomy of Global Leadership Competencies and Meta-competencies

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ABSTRACT

There is a substantial body of research evidence regarding the importance of leadership development to organizational success, Charan, Drotter and Noel (2001), Fullmer and Goldsmith (2001), McCall and Hollenbeck (2002), McCauley, Moxley and Van Velsor (1998), Viceri and Fulmer (1997, Whetton and Cameron (2005). There is no more important task with regard to leadership development than identifying the competencies and meta-competencies that comprise leadership. However, to date, there has not been agreement regarding just what are the Global Leadership Competencies that should be taught and learned. In this paper leadership is defined as, "Influencing others to accomplish organizational goals," (Tubbs, 2005). Based on the model presented in this paper, the rationale is advanced that some aspects of leadership are more or less fixed at a young age while others are able to be developed even well into adult life (i.e., the Global Leadership Competencies).

This paper describes the model and identifies fifty Global Leadership Competencies in the form of a taxonomy of Global Leadership Competencies and Meta-competencies. Most importantly, leadership development efforts must be targeted on the outermost circle in the model..

INTRODUCTION

Approximately \$50 billion a year is spent on Leadership Development (Raelin (2004). Yet, two of the most frequently asked questions of leadership scholars is (1) what competencies and meta-competencies comprise leadership and (2) can leadership, in fact, be taught and learned. This paper attempts to answer both questions. Some aspects of leadership are more likely to be learnable and others are less so. For the purposes of this paper, leadership is defined as, "Influencing others to accomplish organizational goals," Tubbs, (2005). Leadership is often discussed in terms of competencies, (Boyatzis (1982), Bueno and Tubbs, (2004), Chin, Gu and Tubbs (2001), Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002), Whetton and Cameron, (2005). Competency is a term that describes the characteristics that lead to success on a job or at a task, Boyatzis (1982). Competencies can be described by the acronym KSA knowledge, skills and abilities. The model in Appendix A shows that leadership competencies can be represented by three concentric circles. These three circles describe three distinct aspects of leadership. The innermost circle includes an individual's Core Personality. The second circle includes an individual's values. The outermost circle represents an individual's leadership behaviors and skills, (i.e., meta-competencies). The authors contend that (1) the attributes in the innermost circle are more or less fixed at a young age and are unlikely to be changed as a result of leadership development efforts; (2) that a person's values are somewhat more malleable than personality characteristics, yet more stable and perhaps more resistant to change than behaviors; and (3) that the behaviors represented in the outermost circle are the most likely to be changed through leadership development efforts. Each of these circles are be discussed below.

PERSONALITY

Personality represents the accumulation of enduring physical and mental attributes that provide an individual with his or her identity. These attributes result from the interaction of heredity and environmental factors. Determinates of personality can be grouped in four broad categories: hereditary, cultural, familial and social interactions. Each of these perspectives suggest that an individual's personality is a relatively enduring characteristic formed early in their life. Genetic specialists argue that components of an individual's personality are in large part heredity (Holden, 1988). Personality is also affected by an individual's culture because it directs what an individual will learn and formats the context in which behavior is interpreted (Hofstede, 1984). While the culture dictates and restricts what can be taught, a person's family plays a key role in the constitution of an individual's personality development. The overall social context created by parents is vital to personality development (Levinson, 1978). Besides family influences on personality, social interactions in the environment effect personality by dictating what is acceptable and customary in the social group.

Self-Concept

A leader's self-concept represents the centerpiece of that leader's conscious existence. Self-concept refers to a leader's perception as a physical, social and moral person. A leader's self-concept is shaped by their self-esteem, self-efficacy and cognitive thought process (Brief and Aldag, 1981). Self-esteem is shaped by an assessment of one's overall self-worth. Self-efficacy is represented by one's faith in their ability to perform a particular activity. Finally, cognition concerns one's knowledge, opinions or beliefs (Sullivan, 1989).

Personality researchers have identified three enduring characteristics of individuals across time. These characteristics can be categorized by the prevalence of dominant personality dimensions, attribution of events impacting the individual and preferred manner of resolving unmet needs.

The Big 5 Personality Dimensions

Personality research has increasingly identified five dominant personality dimensions simply termed: the Big Five. The Big Five personality dimensions are extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience (Barrick and Mount, 1991). The following represent characteristics of a person scoring high on each of the Big 5 personality dimensions:

Extraversion: Outgoing, talkative, sociable, assertive;
Agreeableness: Trusting, good-natured, cooperative, soft hearted;
Conscientiousness: Dependable, responsible, achievement oriented, persistent;
Emotional Stability: Relaxed, secure, and unworried;
Openness to Experience: Intellectual, imaginative, curious, broad minded.

Research from the Big 5 personality literature indicates that these personality dimensions are stable forms of an individual's character from early childhood. Further, the Big 5 personality dimensions appear to be ethnocentric across cultures. Cross-cultural personality research has found stable Big 5 personality dimensions among individuals in such divergent nations as Russia, Canada, China, Poland, Germany, South Korea, and Finland (Blaylock and Rees, 1984). Repeatedly, conscientiousness has been found to be the personality dimension most related to job performance, including leadership and managerial behavior, among the Big 5 (Rice and Lindecamp, 1989). Successful entrepreneurs have been linked with the dimension of conscientiousness from the Big 5. A high degree of openness to experience, extraversion and conscientiousness among entrepreneurs has been described as proactive personalities. Those termed proactive persons demonstrate a commitment to purpose and persistence to a task. Further, entrepreneurs with a proactive personality as measured by the Big 5 personality dimensions were found to be action-oriented, less restricted by situational constraints and geared to alter conditions in their environment. The Big 5 personality research indicated that individuals scoring high in these dimensions of the Big 5 are naturally predisposed to behave in this manner (Ramsoomair, 1994).

Locus of Control

A second key job-related personality factor is an individual's locus of control. Locus of control pertains to the extent that individuals hold themselves accountable for their actions and its consequences. Those inclined to attribute consequences to their own behavior are said to hold an internal locus of control. Those predisposed to attribute consequences to circumstances beyond their control are said to possess an external locus of control (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001). Research on entrepreneurs have found that individuals with an internal locus of control can withstand more business setbacks because they perceive themselves as having greater control over events than those entrepreneurs with an external locus of control. Researchers have consistently found that individuals with a high internal locus of control experience greater work motivation, have higher expectations of their own job performance, and are less anxious than those with an external locus of control (Kinicki, McKee and Wade, 1995).

Need Satisfaction

A final area effecting personality comes from reducing unsatisfied needs. A well researched needs theory is McClelland's Need for Achievement Theory (McClelland, 1961). This theory specifies that individuals vary by their desire to accommodate the three following motivational needs:

Need for Achievement: Desire to accomplish something difficult;
Need for Affiliation: Desire to spend time in social relationships and activities;
Need for Power: Desire to influence, coach, teach or encourage others

Research has found that these three needs were relatively stable personality and motivational characteristics for an individual. Research findings from the Need for Achievement research indicate that leaders with a high need

for power and a low need for affiliation are the most effective leaders. This is because of their strong need to positively influence organizational objectives coupled with a relative lack of concern of offending subordinates. Leaders with a very high need for achievement have been found to be unsuited for top management positions because of their unwillingness to delegate tasks. Leaders with a very high need for affiliation have been found to be ineffective leaders because of their interest in wanting to be well liked, and have a hard time implementing difficult decisions that may alienate subordinates (Bluen, Barling, and Burns, 1990).

Personality Conclusions

An individual's core personality is a relatively permanent characteristic of that leader. It is formed by hereditary, cultural, familial and social interactions. Research findings indicate that individual personalities differ along dominant personality dimensions, attribution of events impacting the individual and preferred manner of resolving unmet needs. In sum, the personality research suggests that an individual's core personality, the innermost circle, is formed early in the life of an individual and once acquired is rather immutable.

VALUES

While personality is certainly a strong influence on behavior, an individual's values also strongly shape peoples' behaviors, Rokeach (1960, 1979). Rokeach (1979) defines values as, "a relatively small number of core ideas or cognitions present in every society about desirable end states of existence and desirable models of behavior instrumental to their attainment that are capable of being organized to form different priorities." (p. 49). Quinn (2004) argues extensively that values form the "fundamental state" of leader's behavior, (p. 87).

Witness the recent U.S. presidential election. Exit polls showed that, more than any other factor, peoples' perception of the candidate's "moral values," for better or for worse, shaped their choice in the voting booth. Similarly, the scandals in American corporations have resulted in a loud outcry for an increased emphasis on business ethics in American business schools Gini (2004), Zhu, May and Avolio (2004), Thompson (2004). The strong value system is that individuals and businesses that perform in ethical ways are much more likely to succeed in the long run. The question also arises as to whether values can be taught and learned. It is our contention that they can be taught and learned even at the college level and beyond. This view is supported by recent evidence from other recent sources (Lennick and Kiel, 2005). However, while they are more learnable than changing a person's personality, they are less changeable than peoples' actual behaviors. That is where we turn our focus in the next section.

BEHAVIORS

The outermost circle in the model shown in Appendix A describes the competencies associated with effective leadership. The fifty competencies are clustered under seven meta-competencies, Each of these will be discussed below. These competencies have been derived from the first author's interviews and discussions with over fifty-thousand leaders in North America, South America, Europe and Asia over the past thirty-five years in organizations that are large and small, union and non-union, for-profit and not-for-profit.

Understanding the Big Picture

Leaders can gain the respect of followers by demonstrating their knowledge of the entire organization. Behaviors can include use of systems theory to show the realization that changes in one part of the organization often can and do impact other parts of the system Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004). Effective utilization of technology such as the Internet and an organizational Intranet are other such behaviors. Acting in a way that demonstrates global sensitivity is another skill. Utilizing effective compensation plans is another critical organization-wide competency. Demonstrating an overarching commitment to ethical practices is still another "big picture" competency.

Attitudes are Everything

Demonstrating a compelling and achievable vision and a decisive pursuit of that vision are more likely to lead to organizational success. Showing inclusiveness and respect for diversity is another competency that can lead to an organization's success. Overcoming obstacles and overcoming adversity will also most likely result in a more successful organization, Seijts, *et. al.* (2004). Attitudes include demonstrating appropriate self-confidence and confidence in others as well.

Leadership, The Driving Force

Competencies in this area of the model include inspiring others, Ellemers, *et. al.* (2004), going against outdated or ineffective practices, building trust, varying leadership to the demands of the situation, delegating effectively, evaluating others, mentoring others, leading with sensitivity and empathy, seeing nuances of alternatives, not just either/or extremes, and serving as an appropriate role model for others.

Communication, The Leader's Voice

Effective communication competencies include demonstrating appropriate emotional intelligence, active listening, non-defensiveness, appropriate and skillful use of language, and body language, effective interviewing, effective negotiation, rumor control, techno-etiquette, and presentational skills, Tubbs and Moss (2003).

Innovation and Creativity

Competencies in this area include developing an organizational climate that supports innovation, improving creative decision-making, using weird ideas that work, avoiding indecision based on old paradigms, learning the art of reframing, and continually encouraging people to use and develop their creative abilities, Sheremata (2004).

Leading Change

Competencies in this area of the model include creating transformational change, developing an organizational culture that embraces continuous learning, building support mechanisms to create and sustain change efforts, managing the change process, developing change agents, and encouraging individual as well as structural change in the organization.

Teamwork and Followership

Competencies in this portion of the model include learning to focus, employing no-fault problem solving, developing a team oriented culture as well as team-based incentive and reward systems, managing your boss, effectively navigating organizational politics, supporting others on the team, effectively utilizing empowerment, developing self-directed work teams, and effectively utilizing process improvement teams to improve organizational effectiveness (Kirkman, *et. al.* (2004), Tubbs (2004).

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Leadership development is necessary and desirable for all individuals in all organizations. The viewpoint advocated in this paper is that everyone in the organization influences others by their actions. Therefore, by our definition, everyone has the potential to contribute to (or detract from) the leadership of the organization. McCall (2004) states that, "It makes little sense to begin executive development processes at very senior levels, as so many companies do. Instead, the process must start early." To which we would add, for everyone in the organization. Similarly, Bergman, Hurson and Russ-Eft (1999) support this view in their book entitled, *Everyone a Leader*. Therefore, it can be argued that the process of leadership development applies to every person in every organization. Given the pervasive nature of this phenomenon, it is crucial to better understand the dynamics of leadership development.

Despite the huge sums of money spent each year on leadership development, people continue to debate whether or not leadership can be taught and learned. However, Conger (2004) sums it up well when he writes, "'It is not a matter of whether leaders are born or made. They are born and made...Our foundations for the leadership qualities of self-confidence, achievement drive, communications skills, and interpersonal competence are formed principally in our family environment...[however] Research suggests that successful performance in most forms of work endeavors can be attributed to experience and coaching, rather than simply to in-born talent or early-life experiences" (p.136-137).

Leadership scholars as well as business practitioners need to focus on those competencies that can be learned and the most effective methods for learning them. A taxonomy of Leadership Competencies and Meta-Competencies is offered in Appendix B.

As scholars begin to focus on the most critical leadership competencies and metacompetencies, the processes of leadership development can be fine-tuned for greater efficiency and greater potential contribution to organizations. Our goal is to help advance the process of identifying and refining the search for these competencies.

However, it is also important to keep in mind Mintzberg's (2004) sage advice that, "Learning a set of competencies does not per se make a manager competent" (p. 140). Or, as Raelin (2004) puts it, The 'list approach' assumes fallaciously, that once managers become expert in this list, they would have graduated into leadership" (p. 131). Nonetheless, current trends indicate that identifying competencies is a valuable piece of the leadership development puzzle, Yamazaki and Kayes (2004).

This paper has attempted to identify a taxonomy of leadership competencies and meta-competencies, and to clarify which parts of an individual's leadership attributes can be developed, and which are most likely fixed at a relatively early stage of life.

Future research needs to focus more specifically on prioritizing which leadership competencies seem to be the most potent in the most situations.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B

TAXONOMY OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES AND META-COMPETENCIES (Abridged from Tubbs (2005))

METACOMPETENCY I: Understanding the Big Picture

1. Demonstrating knowledge of the entire organization
2. Using systems theory
3. Effectively utilizing technology
4. Demonstrating global sensitivity
5. Utilizing effective compensation
6. Demonstrating ethical practices

METACOMPETENCY II. Attitudes are Everything

7. Demonstrating a vision
8. Showing inclusiveness and respect for diversity
9. Overcoming adversity
10. Demonstrating appropriate confidence in self and others

METACOMPETENCY III: Leadership, The Driving Force

11. Inspiring others
12. Going against outdated or ineffective practices
13. Building trust
14. Varying leadership to the demands of the situation
15. Delegating
16. Evaluating others
17. Mentoring others
18. Demonstrating sensitivity and empathy
19. Seeing nuances of alternatives, not just either/or extremes
20. Serving as an appropriate role model .

METACOMPTEENCY IV: Communication, The Leader 's Voice

21. Demonstrating appropriate emotional intelligence
22. Using active listening
23. Demonstrating non-defensiveness
24. Skillfully using language
25. Skillfully using body language
26. Effective interviewing
27. Effective negotiation
28. Effectively giving oral presentations.

METACOMPTEENCY V: Innovation and Creativity

29. Developing an innovative organizational climate
30. Improving creative decision-making
31. Using weird ideas that work
32. Avoiding indecision based on old paradigms
33. Learning reframing
34. Encouraging people to use and develop their creative abilities.

METACOMPETENCY VI: Leading Change

35. Creating transformational change
36. Developing a continuous learning culture
37. Building support mechanisms to create and sustain change efforts
38. Managing the change process
39. Developing change agents
40. Encouraging individual change
41. Encouraging structural change

METACOMPETENCY VII: Teamwork and Followership

42. Learning to focus
43. Employing no-fault problem solving
44. Developing a team oriented culture
45. Developing team-based incentive and reward systems
46. Managing your boss
47. Navigating organizational politics
48. Supporting others on the team
49. Utilizing empowerment
50. Developing self-directed work teams

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