

Leadership Development: To What End, By What Means?

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Stream E, N: Management Education and Development, Leadership

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Abstract

Leadership is a critical driver of organisational performance. This paper, based on a case study of the Australian Defence Force Academy, highlights the implication of the changed context for leadership development. Noting the requirement is for a multi-dimensional capability, this paper argues the capability requirement goes beyond skills provided through training. The paper explores learning and development theory and presents some considerations and challenges for current leadership development for the military within the broad questions: to what end and by what means?

Keywords: Leadership, leadership development, learning, change

Faced with the realities of the environment there is a renewed and considerably changed focus on leadership. As organisations come to terms with these changes and the requirement for a multi-dimensional capability in future leaders there is also a pressing need to reconsider leadership development. This paper is part of a doctoral case study based on the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA), which "provides the foundational level of development" for entry level military officers (Gates 2001: 3). This paper, drawing on learning and development theory presents challenges for the design and conduct of leadership development within the broad questions: *to what end and by what means?* It prefaces research insights reported in a second paper that may go some way to bridging the gap between theory and practice in development (Gibbons 1999; Castells 2000).

Leadership requirement: From Competence to Building Capability

Leadership is a context-dependent phenomenon, and depending on the basic idea associated with the verb *'to lead'*, the words *'leader'* (to have positional prominence), *'leading'* (process of direction setting) and *'leadership'* (front running or setting the pace) can each be given different and distinct shades of meaning (Klagge 1996). What is clear however is that leadership is a critical driver of organisational performance and in light of the changed operational environment there has been an unprecedented concentration on leadership, both in the corporate sector and the military. Reflecting on the changes Admiral Raydon Gates, commander of the Australian Defence Colleges, argues "effective leadership and its development will become an important competitive edge" (Gates 2001: 2).

For the military, comprising the uniformed members of the Navy, Army and Air Force, there are clearly constants as well as important qualitative changes in the leadership requirement. There remains a clear emphasis on virtues such as “physical courage, endurance, mental toughness, adaptability, risk-taking, professional knowledge, and will to win” (Smith 1998: 37-39). However, there is also a recognition that at the operational level leadership is “intellectual rather than physical” (Smith 1998: 50). The organisation also anticipates that junior leaders will have to accept “enormous responsibility” perhaps in the glare of television (Smith 1998: 5). As a result, the military identifies capabilities such as strategic understanding, autonomy and a sense of accountability founded on moral and ethical reasoning as important development objectives. Synthesising these and other needs, the leadership requirement can be categorised in terms of character, intellect and performance capability in both technical and interpersonal terms.

This requirement goes somewhat beyond a pre-defined skill-set or level of competence. Competence alone cannot promise effective leadership practice in the changed environment and the old stereotype of the leader as the dynamic in-charge type of person, issuing decisions and allocating resources is arguably redundant. The risk in such a model is of developing individuals with outdated concepts and methods to deal with a rapidly changing and dramatically different world. The reality invites a need to question basic operating and training assumptions. In the words of Abraham Lincoln speaking at the outbreak of the American Civil War: *"as our circumstances are new, we must think anew and act anew"* (Hanks 1994: 35).

Emphasising this need to think and act anew is the fact that personal development is now understood not as a single event but a "time based process" (CCLH 1998: 218). Studies also show that culture is a powerful determinant of knowledge appropriation and transmission (Carneiro 2000). In terms of leadership per se, there is recognition of the emphasis on subtle aspects of the individual in terms of their thoughts, beliefs and feeling, including the capacity to give meaning and purpose. Consequently, in considering suitable development strategies it is difficult to separate intellectual development from social, emotional and moral development (Hirst and Peters 1970). These intertwined qualitative

changes in cognitive, social and affective skills occur as a result of specific learning experiences. The form of learning is characterised as *learning from experience* and it can be argued that in order to develop the full potential of a person, the ability to learn and benefit from experience is an implicit capability. The need to embrace the complexity of the environment requires an explicit capacity to learn continuously, which coincides with the emerging themes of lifelong learning, learning how to learn or metacognition (Iles 1994; Salomon 1997) and the learning organisation (Senge 1995; Shaw and Green 1999). Overall, these points reinforce the role of learning in development and the critical need for learner friendly approaches to professional development.

Another consideration emerges from the work of educational theorists like Piaget (cognitive development), Kohlberg (moral development) and others. They reveal the problematic nature of defining an "end-state" to represent a culmination of the development process. Such a stance negates personal development as a time-based process (CCLH 1998). It is also essentially limiting because as some commentators suggest life offers a great variety of possibilities for development (Hirst and Peters 1970; Daft 2002). These 'possibilities' depend in part on cultural pressures and in part on individual choice. End-states can however be discussed with some confidence in the context of *mastery* of skills and qualities of mind such as critical thinking, integrity and creativity (Daft 2002). Mastery of these skills is a reasonable and definable end-state, as they are a product of a person's past experience, through explicit and other tacit forms of learning. There is an apparent need to re-conceptualise the focus of leadership development. This theme is considered next.

Learning and Leadership Development

The range of intellectual and other professional capabilities identified represents a significant development challenge and one that requires the successful integration of leadership development and learning. While there are a wide variety of approaches to leadership development and practitioners differ in the use of terminology, it is generally agreed that leadership can be taught (Klenke 1996; Kur and Bunning 1996; Krejci and Malin 1997; Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt 1999). There is also an emerging body of research that is documenting this effort. Much of this evaluative work appears

designed to identify methods, possible models and themes of leadership programs. The link to learning and the learning process is however less evident.

Leadership development can be described as a process of *expanding a person's capacity to be effective in present and future leadership roles and processes, generally within teams and organisations* (CCLH 1998; Cacioppe 2000). This purposive expansion of capacity or development may be *cognitive* and/or it may be *social*, and is concerned with what we know, how we think and how we reason, the product of aspects such as emotions, personality, morality and interpersonal attributes specific to each individual (Lindenfield 1995; Sternberg 1995). Development is also described in terms of growth in inner self-confidence, self-knowledge, clear personal goals and positive thinking. The emphasis is on personal character, interpersonal skills and capabilities including the ability to learn from experience. For these reasons we could describe leadership development as *activity designed to evoke qualitative cognitive and social change in the individual as a result of learning from experience* (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1

There is a qualitative difference in this definition from the earlier purposive description of the process and it is why leadership development is often equated with *personal development*. However, to give leadership development a personal development focus rather than a vocational emphasis invites the not unreasonable question of development, but *to what end*. In response, personal development may not appear an adequate answer to the organisational need for effective leadership. Yet, given the organisation's emphasis on character and broad capabilities, the shift from a vocational and functional perspective to an individual and learning centered one does not appear unreasonable.

In leadership, individual character and personal attributes count. This is not to do with superficial issues of style, but with deeper attributes of trust, purpose and direction, optimism and a bias towards action. The process of developing and sustaining these attributes is a personal development issue, the elements involved are cognitive and social change, and the focus of any program is arguably the learner rather than the learning per se. Consequently, it is a fair presumption that leadership

development should be based on an active learning process (Argyris 1992; Argyris 2000) involving a pedagogy that reflects an understanding that process (the methods used) matters as much as the content (Rogers 1989). Consistent with this broad intent of providing the individual with "opportunities for learning, growth and change" (DeSimone and Harris 1998: 513), the outcome is the building of *capacity* in an on-going process of cognitive, psychomotor and affective development through levels of understanding. With time and experience, this capacity could be expected to move progressively from *naïve*, to *novice*, to *apprentice* and then to *mastery* (Wiske 1998). This process is beyond training to a focus on personal development that emphasises the potential to expand and grow individual capability (Daft 2002). Noting over eighty-five percent of leader behaviour is learned through modelling (Decker 1986), such an approach emphasising learner-centered development as an on-going process appears to promise better results than a purely instrumental approach.

What is not reflected in this discussion is the role of and implications for organisations supporting this development process. Clearly the term development is unsuited to a single, definitive answer. What it suggests is that questions need to be asked in terms of learning and the learning process, both of which seem central to the qualitative development of the individual.

Learning and Change - A Useful Linkage

The capacity to learn is at the heart of development directed at individual or organisational change. The reason is simple - learning determines change in behaviour (Cowan 1995). Two kinds of learning can be distinguished: *adaptive* and *generative* (see Table 1) (Argyris and Schon 1978; Hanks 1994; Senge 1995; Argyris 2000; Carneiro 2000). Both types are necessary in an organisation

Insert Table 1

Given the centrality of learning, it is not surprising that learning has become a strategic initiative for many companies (DiBella, 2001). There is obvious value in fostering a learning capability, although the best blend of the two kinds of learning remains open to debate. Arguably *adaptive* learning should not outweigh *generative* learning, which is needed to expand existing capability through second order

change. However, because innovation happens in unpredictable and unforeseen ways it is not possible to predict the value of longer-term investments, founded on generative learning (Collins and Porras 1994). Yet, in terms of the imperative to encourage a generative learning capacity, studies by Argyris and colleagues caution that individuals socialised with adaptive learning strategies or 'Model 1' theories-in-use are likely to be incapable of learning oriented norms (Model 2 theory-in-use) that are more akin to generative learning (Argyris and Schon 1978; Argyris 1992; Argyris 2000).

Educational Planning Considerations

While learning is described predominantly in behavioural (actions) terms - "*some systematic change in behaviour ...that occurs as a consequence of experience*" (Watkins 1991), it can also be explained in terms of cognitive, social and contextual influences (DeSimone and Harris 1998; Reid 2001). Assuming suitable learner motivation, the focus of learning in educational interventions must be on qualitative change in a person's view of reality and not on the ability to repeat quantities of information on demand. The point draws attention to surface and deep approaches to learning (Chalmers and Fuller 1996). Notably, as studies cited by Ramsden (1992) indicate, students appear not to change their understanding of reality as a consequence of their studies. The research suggests that students retain quantities of information at least for a short period and may also experience other superficial changes, but appear not to develop a self-critical awareness of the subject. These findings are as Ramsden says a "serious indictment of teaching" practice (Ramsden 1992: 30). The challenge is for institutions to adapt practice to achieve the desired deep learning outcomes that would move a student progressively towards mastery.

To this end, educational planners must understand that both quantitative and qualitative learning outcomes are determined by a complex interaction between teaching practices and student characteristics. Any attempt to define a desired outcome requires a consideration of prior knowledge, student motives and their learning strategies. Learning outcomes can also vary by learner traits such as locus of control, by personality, general mental ability, cognitive information gathering and organising style, and particular learning style. Another factor is the actual learning processes being used, which is

equally as important as subject content in terms of achieving the desired outcome. In sum, learning is a complex process and learners have varying aptitudes for different outcomes.

Turning to development practice, the general education landscape is apparently dominated by economic or utilitarian priorities (Carneiro 2000). This is manifested by the link between knowledge and competencies and by education institutions operating like large machines designed to teach and control learning to large numbers of students. The challenge for professional development is to shift beyond the utilitarian focus concerned with efficiency to also consider the longer-term efficacy of the program. The environment requires a multi-dimensional leadership capacity that goes beyond predefined skills. These capabilities are best developed over time through practice and suitable encouragement often despite the potential existence of "many mechanisms that obstruct learning" (Swieringa and Wierdsma 1992: 55, 61) in the structures of the organisation.

Devising a Framework for Learning

There is strong justification for a common framework to understand learning in the workplace. In devising a suitable framework, the three qualitatively different levels of learning outcomes identified by Ramsden (1992) deserve consideration. These three learning domains, which correspond with an earlier conceptual framework by Mezirow (see Table 2), are:

- *[At the first level] highly categorical proficiencies like knowledge of information, technical or manipulative skills, and specific problem solving skills;*
- *[At the next level] specific, content related understanding linked to a discipline or profession. It includes the less easily defined ways of thinking when faced with a typical problem; and*
- *[At the most abstract level] general abilities and personal qualities such as critical thinking and being able to communicate effectively.*

Insert Table2

As Ramsden says "knowledge at all three levels and the ability to connect knowledge at each level to each of the others is essential" (Ramsden 1992: 18). The point made is that there is a simultaneous

need to *develop job (technical) skills* and the intertwined needs of *learning about the organisation and the self* (Watkins 1991). Ramsden's critique of teaching methods is brought into clearer focus when it is understood that training approaches are characteristic of the dominant behaviourist development perspective. Training is suited as an educational method to Ramsden's *categorical proficiencies* level or Mezirow's domain of "*instrumental*" learning (Mezirow 1981: 75). This learning domain is concerned with factual representation and replication or *more-of-the-same type* of learning. Importantly however, training methods are unsuited to learning about *the organisation* and to learning at the abstract level that is concerned with general abilities and *self-reflective* learning.

For these latter domains there is a pressing need to explore other more appropriate approaches to facilitate learning. Practical learning takes place in the workplace and involves understanding communication processes, the culture and policies, goals and objectives. Self-reflective learning emphasises critical reflection as a member of a larger social unit. While directed at personal change, both practical and self-reflective learning suggest a willing involvement by the student learner. Not surprisingly, the educational processes involved for these learning domains are very different to the first domain of job related skills or technical learning. Respective methods include:

- *Methods for the second domain include: role play, developing empathy, conflict resolution, group discussion and dialogue, leading learning groups, listening and expressing, critical thinking, differentiating between "in order to" motives and "because" motives, and symbolic interaction (Mezirow 1981: 76).*
- *Methods for the third domain include: interviews to compare movement in problem awareness, expectations and goals, or Socratic dialogue in small groups of learners facing a common dilemma. The aim is to elicit and challenge assumptions behind habituated ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling and behaving. An ethos of support, encouragement, non-judgemental acceptance and individual responsibility needs to be created, even while alternate perspectives are presented. The role of "critical reflexivity" appears essential (Mezirow 1981: 77).*

In practical terms there are few situations that will involve only one learning domain and Ramsden and Mezirow flag the intertwined nature of the three domains. What is a relatively new insight is the role of learning *from* experience and *reflection* in recognising the interconnections. As Watkins says, people only become aware of the connections in learning "when they become critically reflective" (Watkins 1991: 41). In devising a development framework the implicit need is for a three-track development process corresponding to the specific learning domains. Two other points need emphasis. First, in order to facilitate learning, adult educators need to master the demands of all three domains. They need to become adept at working with learners in ways that are sensitive to the relatedness and difference of each learning domain. Second, the current use of behaviourist training techniques for the second and third learning domains is inappropriate.

Closing Remarks

This paper outlined a shift in emphasis towards a multi-dimensional capability by future military leaders. As the organisation come to terms with these changes there is an equally pressing need to reconsider leadership development. While the term development is unsuited to a single definitive term, questions need to be asked of basic assumptions underpinning military development, particularly given the foundational role played by the Defence Academy in the development of future leaders.

What is evident is that learning and learning processes are central to the qualitative development of an individual. To this end, development theory points to a number of challenges in the design, planning and conduct of leadership development. These challenges include:

- *Redefining leadership development as being associated with qualitative changes in **cognitive** and **social skills** in individuals that result from specific learning experiences. There is a qualitative difference in this definition from a more functional description of development.*
- *Understanding the concern for rational knowledge must also be concerned with the aspect of feelings that can influence judgement.*
- *The problematic nature of defining an "end-state" that represents a culmination of a process involving an individual's emotions, personality and range of other interpersonal attributes.*

- *Adapting practice to meet the three qualitative different levels of learning, noting training methods are unsuited to learning about the organisation and about self.*

In closing, despite growing research insights educational systems and learning approaches are still a landscape of uncertainty and major differences (Marsick 1988; O'Brien 1999; Phillips 2000; Marchese 2001). In these changed times it is perhaps time for organisations to challenge assumptions, to experiment in practice and to try out what has been conceived in theory. There is good reason to doubt the extent to which educational processes in the military have changed in practice relative to the stated requirement. Given the premium the military places on leadership there is also clear value in reviewing the educational processes in terms of the questions: to what end and by what means?

Figure 1: The Nature of Personal Development

Table 1: Adaptive and Generative Learning (Adapted from Carneiro, 2000)	
Adaptive Learning	Generative Learning
Responding to environmental change	Expanding capabilities
Coping with threats	Enhancing creativity
Reacting to symptoms	New ways of looking at the environment
Capturing trends and incorporating early signs of change	Addressing underlying causes
Flexibility as a prime value	Thinking differently, anticipating futures
Strategy: Efficiency through continuous improvement	Strategy: Longer term effectiveness through innovation and learning

Table 2: Learning Domains for Development

Subject area	Mezirow Domains (1981)	Ramsden's Levels of Learning (1992)
Job skills	Technical" or "instrumental	Categorical proficiencies (technical or very specific)
Social/organisation	Practical learning	Content related understanding linked to a discipline or profession
Self	Self-reflective learning or transformative learning	General abilities and personal qualities

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