



LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT &
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

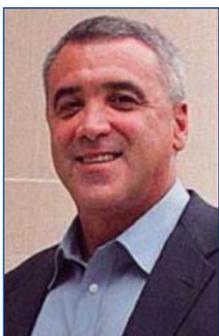
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EXTRACT - FEATURES ARTICLE

Commentary about Leadership Research



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In this article I want to provide you with some brief updates concerning research being done with the MLQ, as well as to point out some methodologies for using the MLQ for strategic interventions in organizations. Let me begin with the research updates.

Are Leaders Born vs. Made?

This question comes up again and again in almost every workshop I've ever conducted around the world. I often wonder why people are at leadership training workshops, if they truly believe that leadership is born not made! It is probably not a voluntary choice for them.

Over the last ten years, there have been 5 studies that have examined whether transformational leadership can be enhanced through training. The good news is that in each and every study, there was a positive impact on transformational leadership development. The even better news is that the last two studies were rigorous true field experiments, and in both of these investigations there were significant improvements in transformational leadership behaviors, as seen by followers versus just in one's self ratings.

Let me summarize briefly what appeared to have the biggest

impact on changing leadership styles to be more transformational in these respective investigations.

- Having a clearly stated goal concerning the leadership style one wants to work on, a specific way to evaluate progress towards the goal, and support in the form of one to one coaching.
- Extending training over time using "booster sessions" one and two months out, not only appears to sustain enhancements to transformational leadership development, but also increases the impact of initial training.
- Providing participants with 360 MLQ feedback and identifying both strengths and areas for development, which can be included in development planning.
- Offering support from one's peer group following training for consultation and advice.
- Presenting a coherent model of leadership, which we refer to as Full Range Leadership™, seems to be a major factor in facilitating participant's reflective learning capacity and ability to develop transformational leadership style over time.

In sum, these five areas appeared to be the main factors that impacted on transformational leadership development and demonstrated support for the idea that leadership indeed can be developed.

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Commentary about Leadership Research continued...

Strategic Leadership Development

Oftentimes, I have taken the position that when we train leaders to be more effective, we should look at training as being a strategic intervention. Specifically, if we are “messing” with the leadership styles of managers, then improvements in those styles can affect many people, if not departments and indeed an entire organization.

In my own consulting work, I try to start by working with top management identifying a key strategic target goal that they want to accomplish. This is a business goal, as opposed to a training goal. For example, in one organization it was accelerating the “time to market” of new products. In another setting, it was achieving the “value proposition” of the organization, which was to provide the “best customer service in the industry”.

I begin by interviewing the top management team to identify key business targets. During those interviews, I attempt to identify the culture of the organization, obstacles to leadership training interventions, and what top management can and will do to support leadership development. Top management must not only champion the process, but they should also understand it.

At the end of my interviews with all top managers, I summarize in a short written report my observations of the organization’s readiness for leadership development. In this report, I also include targeted business issues to focus on, as well as enablers and obstacles to the strategic leadership process being successful. I meet with top management to discuss their reactions to the report, and typically to map out a year-long intervention process. The first step in the process is usually a 3-hour briefing with staff to discuss what we are planning to do, and to discuss the report I disseminated to top management. I generally involve a planning group in formulating a two-day retreat. In the 2-day retreat, I work with participants to help them understand the full range leadership model, I provide 360 MLQ feedback to each participant, and help them build a leadership development plan to work on during and following the first retreat.

Usually following the retreat, I ask teams comprised of 3 to 4 members, to work on various projects. Usually one project team takes on the building of what I call a “Compact of

Understanding”. This is a document that portrays the group’s ideal principles for interacting with each other, e.g., how will they solve problems, handle conflicts, provide feedback to each other or up the chain of command, etc. Other groups may work on developing methods to apply the leadership model to the business goals. For example, how can one use individualized consideration to enhance interactions with clients and customers?

I usually interact via technology with groups for a couple of months participating in online coaching. In some instances, I also add in face to face coaching as well. Then 3 months after the first 2-day retreat, we hold another retreat, usually focusing on issues such as changing the culture of the organization by applying the Compact of Understanding, Full Range Model and other models or methods. The follow-up workshop and subsequent interventions are customized to client’s needs.

In sum, I believe that leadership development is a strategic intervention that should be extended over time and customized to grow with the learner’s needs. The outline for the strategic intervention discussed above, is one of many different ways that a strategic leadership intervention can be implemented in an organization. In subsequent newsletters, I will provide more specific examples of strategic interventions to build on the points raised here.

by Professor Bruce J. Avolio

At the time of writing and publication Professor Avolio was Director, Centre for Leadership Studies, Binghamton University, New York State, USA. From 2004 - Professor Avolio holds the Clifton Chair in Leadership, College of Business Administration, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), USA and is also Director of the Gallup Leadership Centre, Washington.

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