

Exploring Action Learning as a Leadership Development Tool

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Overview

- Leadership Models
- What Dimensions of Leadership Might AL Develop?
- AL and the Leader Development Process
- Implications for Practitioners



How do Leaders Lead?

- Leaders influence followers based on their shared sense of what is important, worth doing well, and expending energy on it.
 - James McGregor Burns (1978)
- Models explain differences in how they go about it



Leadership Models

- Transactional Leadership
- Transformational Leadership
- Authentic Leadership



Transactional Leadership

- Based on an exchange of something of value the leader possesses or controls that the follower wants in return for services.
 - Jobs for votes, subsidies for campaign contributions, money for work
- Commitment to the organization is reciprocal – they work for whatever the organization has promised in return for the person's output.



Transactional Leadership (2)

- Manage by Exception
 - Monitor for deviances, mistakes
 - Take corrective action
- Use Contingent Awards
 - Clarify expectations and offer recognition
- Most frequently used style
 - Management vs. Leadership
 - Need to accomplish specific goals



Transformational Leaders

- How does it work?
 - Identify the needed change
 - Create a vision to guide the change through inspiration
 - Execute the change with the commitment of the members of the group
- Conscious effort to turn followers into leaders, to share the vision
 - Charismatic leadership
- More values-driven than transactional
 - “Raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and the led” (Burns)



Transformational Leadership (2)

- Leadership Components
 - Individualized consideration
 - Take care of follower development
 - Intellectual stimulation
 - Question
 - Generate creative solutions
 - Inspirational motivation
 - Provide meaning and challenge to followers' work
 - Idealized influence
 - Followers identify with leaders and want to emulate them.



Authentic Leadership

- Focuses on self-awareness and self-regulation
 - High ethical standards that guide decision making
- Authentic leaders anchored by deep sense of self
 - Know where they stand on important issues, values and beliefs
 - Stay the course when faced with challenges
 - Actions and words convey their principles, values and ethics



Authentic Leadership

- Components
 - Self-awareness
 - Know strengths/limitations
 - Relational transparency
 - Open to allow others to speak up
 - Balanced processing
 - Solicit opinions/viewpoints when making decisions
 - Internalized moral perspective
 - High standards
 - Beliefs and actions consistent



Relevant Leadership Models

Reviewed here:

- Transactional
- Transformational
- Authentic

Also relevant:

- Leadership competency models (e.g., OPM ECQ)
- Functional models (e.g., dynamic team leadership)
- Your client's favorite model...



Transactional Leadership

How does AL develop transactional leaders?

- Developing ***equitable exchange contracts*** and ***executing contracts reliably*** requires:
 - Identifying and clarifying necessary actions
 - Establishing norms around accountability
 - Ability to conduct difficult discussions
 - Impact of keeping/not keeping commitments
 - Addressing the problem without blaming the person



Transformational Leadership

How does AL develop transformational leaders?

- ***Individualized Consideration*** requires:
 - Asking questions
 - Developing curiosity
 - Listening for understanding
 - Looking for opportunities to recognize progress on personal goals
- ***Intellectual Stimulation*** requires:
 - Asking/encouraging questions that challenge assumptions
 - Soliciting multiple perspectives
 - Reframing problems
 - Climate that encourages creativity



Authentic Leadership

How does AL develop authentic leaders?

- **Self-awareness** requires:
 - Challenges that stimulate self-examination
 - Self-directed reflection
 - Soliciting feedback and observing/attending to impact on others
- **Relational transparency** requires:
 - Honest and open exchanges with others
 - Admitting mistakes
- **Balanced processing** requires:
 - Soliciting opinions that challenge own deeply held beliefs
 - Understanding and integrating different perspectives



Functional Leadership Models

How does AL enhance a leader's ability to effectively perform the **functions** of a team leader?

- Prepare and orient the team to each other and the task
 - Team orientation, socialization
 - Goals and strategies
- Develop and monitor commitment, performance, and learning
 - Build commitment, team identify
 - Monitor performance, enhance self- and team-efficacy
 - Intervene to develop and support
- Ensures that the team reflects on process and performance
 - Individual performance
 - Team performance
 - Lessons to take forward

Developing Adaptive Teams: A Theory of dynamic team leadership (Kozlowski et al, 2009)



What Does it Take to Develop Leaders?

- Assumptions:
 - Leader development is a process of personal growth
 - Personal growth precedes increases in proficiency on most leadership competencies (e.g., strategic thinking, empowering others)
- “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”
Albert Einstein



AL and the Leader Development Process

- What does it take to develop leaders?
 - Features of the environment
 - Individual factors (developmental readiness)
- Relationship between AL experience and
 - Environmental factors supporting leader development
 - Developmental readiness



Features of the Environment

- Challenging Experiences
- Assessment and Feedback
- Support



Challenging Experiences

- The Lessons of Experience (McCall et al., 1988)
 - Job transitions
 - Task-related challenges (e.g., start-up)
 - Personal and professional hardships
- Trigger events: high impact experiences that create a state of “disequilibrium”
 - Established views no longer explain reality
 - Individuals may pause and reflect on their
 - Self-concept
 - Traditional patterns of behavior
 - Mental models of leadership
 - Other core beliefs and assumptions
 - Leads to major shift in perspective



Assessment and Feedback



Assessment and Feedback

- Assessment/feedback cycle can be:
 - Naturally occurring
 - Part of a formal system
 - 360-degree assessment and feedback
 - Other individual assessments
 - Developmental assessment centers
 - Embedded in a leader development program
 - Journaling
 - Learning portfolios



Support

- Challenge creates stress; high levels of stress can interfere with learning
- Possible sources of stress
 - Mismatch between individual capacity and the challenge
 - Lack of tolerance (from self or others) for mistakes
 - Performance goal orientation: Self-esteem is dependent on others' evaluations
 - Lack of control to impact results
- Support mitigates stress
 - Safe environment to experiment with new behavior
 - Endorsement for one's ideas or actions
 - Sense of collegiality
 - Outlets for stress relief



Features of the Environment : Summary

- The ideal developmental environment provides
 - Challenges that cause the individual to “stretch”
 - Assessment and feedback
 - Support to facilitate learning
- Support is particularly important to those who are low on developmental readiness



Developmental Readiness

- Developmentally ready individuals are predisposed to learn from experience. They
 - Have a learning goal orientation
 - Embrace challenges
 - Welcome and learn from negative as well as positive feedback
 - Self-esteem not dependent on others' views of them
 - Can think about their thoughts, reflect on their experiences, and learn from them
 - AKA metacognitive ability
 - Have complex self-concepts and corresponding views of the world



AL as a Developmental Environment

- Challenge
 - AL problems are real, complex, important
 - AL structure, ground rules, questioning, and reflection processes challenge
 - traditional linear approaches to problem solving
 - usual ways of interacting and thinking
- AL can be a “trigger event” for some participants



AL as a Developmental Environment

- Assessment and Feedback
 - Coach prompts assessment and feedback of task, group process, and individual learning
 - How is the group doing?
 - Has group accomplished goals for the day?
 - What was the impact of actions taken?
 - What progress did you make on your developmental goals?



AL as a Developmental Environment

- Support
 - Coaches create a safe environment
 - Model supportive interactions
 - Intervene if participants display negative or critical behavior
 - Support is inherent in the process
 - Respect and openness for participants' ideas and actions
 - Feedback is an opportunity for self-discovery and learning
 - Trains listening skills, commenting on others' ideas, as opposed to “making your case”



AL : Impact on Developmental Readiness

- Great questions exercise metacognitive skills and promote learning goal orientation
 - Challenge assumptions
 - Reveal multiple perspectives on an issue
 - Emphasize exploration, questioning, learning more about the problem, not on defending one's position
- Encourages metacognitive ability via reflection on
 - Framing of problem
 - Group process
 - Progress on individual learning goals



Implications/Questions for Practitioners

- What are the client goals and expectations for AL?
 - Are clients hoping to create a learning organization or simply solve the problem?
 - Do organizations expect/want leader development?
- How do client's objectives influence the coach's approach to AL?
- How does AL reverberate throughout the organization?
 - How do participants carry new inquiry skills to the workplace?

