

Learning to Respect Diversity, Gender Equality, and Collaboration: A Childhood Agenda or the Content of a Leadership Development Program?

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Abstract. Most leadership training initiatives fail to produce leaders, and few participants undergo a transformation in their learning regarding some important topics such as gender equality and diversity. Dealing with the core values of leadership, it is logical to believe that some of these values should be addressed early in life, while others may be gained or enhanced through courses, exercises, programs, etc. Empowering families, women, and children, as the smallest unit in society, is the most important mechanism to guarantee a sound and steady increasing of welfare and to provide opportunities for the young generation, irrespective of gender and diversity, to learn the needed skills and to enhance their hidden competencies. Simulation exercises may be an effective instrument to enhance individual and group knowledge, skills, and competencies in both youths and adults.

Keywords. Gender equality, diversity, collaboration, leadership, childhood

1. Introduction

There is a need to address the increasing number of global crises, and natural disasters by creating adequate management policies and plans. Although policies and plans can be implemented by local and national governments, or the international community, they must be carried out by well-educated and skilled managers and well-informed public entities [1–3].

Despite having diverse roles, both managers and the public are part of the same community, consisting of various groups and units with broad diversity and different sizes ranging from a small family to large enterprises. Consequently, in an emergency, they are all affected irrespective of gender, background, and economic condition [1]. Most of the emergencies are caused by pre-existing risks that affect all people. However, there are some special groups that may suffer more than others. The elderly, youths, pregnant women, those who are deaf or blind, and those with other handicaps, e.g. patients with special care living at home, belong to this distinct or “vulnerable” group [4].

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Planning for management of any emergency demands a risk and vulnerability analysis by which risks are identified, vulnerability to those risks is evaluated, and preventive measures are prepared to increase the grade of community preparedness [5]. Such a huge work needs well-established routines, channels for information sharing and communication, step-by-step education, and a larger workforce and multi-agency collaboration [6,7].

One important factor in a successful collaboration is good leadership in both vertical and horizontal organizations. Vertical leadership implies the hierarchical structure of an organization in which all necessary steps are taken downward/upward through a line of leadership consisting of strategic, tactical, and operational leaders. Horizontal leadership is the side-by-side collaboration between leaders from various organizations [8]. Any leadership needs knowledge in command, control, communication, coordination, collaboration, and continuity, and it does not take any other criteria into consideration. A leader should have a good command-and-control structure to enable analysis and distribution of accurate information through a valid communication channel between coordinated organizations, and to ease the collaboration and decision making for optimal continuity of the management process. In no part of this algorithm should the gender or diversity of those involved be taken into consideration; the only issue which matters is their skill and competency. Accordingly, a leader should have the intellectual ability to understand, analyse, and evaluate available information, the executive capability of decision making, and the emotional awareness to weigh decisions against future consequences. A leader should simply enable other staff to bring up their best while collaborating and aiming at the same goal irrespective of gender and diversity.

2. Core Values in Leadership

There are core values in leadership, which might differ depending on the characteristics of the communities, e.g., academic community vs. business community [9]. A definition of core values of the Social Change Model was presented in 1996 and may still be one important guideline for developing leadership programs. These values can be divided into three categories, and the interaction among the components of these values under groups will emerge as important criteria for good leadership [10]. These values are individual, group, and community values.

2.1. Individual Values

There are three values which together highlight individual values of a good leader: *self-consciousness, congruence, and commitment*. A good leader should be aware of the beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that motivate her/him to take action. As these actions involve a leader's thinking, feeling, and behaviour, they must be presented with consistency, authenticity, and honesty towards others. Furthermore, she/he must be able to show commitment towards the group activity and its intended outcomes.

2.2. Group Values

Group values involve having the same goals and aims to facilitate the group's ability to engage in collective analysis of data and engagement in planned tasks and actions

(*common purpose*). This needs collaboration, which empowers self and others through trust. Any collaboration, however, needs the recognition of two fundamental facts: 1) differences in viewpoint are inevitable, and 2) such differences must be brought up and discussed with respect for others, a willingness to hear each other's views, and the exercise of restraint in criticizing the views and actions of others (controversy with civility)

2.3. Society/Community Values

Citizenship and change are two basic values for society/community. The former implies the process of creating a responsible connection between an individual and the collaborative group to the community and society through the leadership development activity. The latter emphasizes being able to adapt to constantly evolving environments and situations while maintaining the core functions of the group.

These values are all transferable to most of the commercial, professional, and public communities. However, while some of these values can be learned, the mastering of many of them involve training for a long period of time. Individual values, for instance, should be learned and tested long before attending a university program. Individual values are an important requirement for understanding group values—of having the same goal, recognizing the need for collaboration, and having the motivation to lead [11]. Furthermore, both individual and group values are important factors for acquiring civic responsibility and being prepared for evolving changes.

Leadership can be defined in different ways. However, the key concepts can be said to consist of 1) influence and motivation; 2) followers and teams; 3) direction, goals, and standards; and 4) cooperation and collaboration. The opportunities for acting as a leader will appear at any time and to anyone who recognizes the possibility, is motivated, and chooses to become a leader [12]. Leadership starts in childhood. In many countries, potential leaders can be found in schools, sports teams, academic contests, and sometimes by chance and through an event or incident. Although there are interests and real ambitions for taking on childhood leadership, the lack of early investment in educational initiatives, either through family education or a school program, is a true limitation. Such initiatives and programs are needed to enhance the individual characteristics of a young leader. These characteristics are personality, values and beliefs, vision and motivation, skills (strengths and weaknesses), level and type of experience, previous interactions with others within and external to the workplace, and finally a specific mood [12,13].

One main reason for shortcomings in leadership capability is the lack of investment and interest in commercial and professional adult leadership programs. The question is whether adult programs on leadership development, which may have a specific focus on one level of society and targeting a certain period, are sufficient measures for future leadership development.

3. The Outcome of Adult Leadership Programs

There are various leadership programs offered to different communities. One group of professionals who have initiated leadership programs comprises physicians, who may find themselves in leadership positions at some point in their career with no formal leadership training or experience [14]. The main reason for initiating such programs is

a belief that physician leadership programs are important for quality of care, professional advancement, and patient satisfaction. However, besides courses and programs, successful leadership development also requires motivation to improve as leaders by the physicians themselves [15]. The duration of such programs varies from hours to days and years. In most programs, didactic lectures or interactive seminars or group work are used as teaching methods. The educational content spans common topics, including leadership, teamwork, financial management, conflict management, quality improvement, communication, and health policy/strategy. Most studies have reported that participants show an increased quality of care (objective or self-reported), patient satisfaction, advancement to higher leadership roles, or implementation of business plans and higher success rate in publishing papers compared to nonparticipants [16].

In a qualitative analysis of how students react to, learn from, and resist social justice-oriented curricula and teaching strategies, particularly those related to gender issues, the data suggested that, after a year of exposure to readings and written assignments about gender and other diversity issues, few students had undergone significant transformations in their learning regarding gender issues. Moreover, it was found that many students demonstrated resistance to reading about, reflecting on, and discussing gender issues [17].

Other reports have indicated that most leadership training initiatives fail to produce leaders. They promote leadership literacy but not leadership competence. While leadership cannot be taught, leadership can be learned, by both genders, through practice and through performing deliberate acts of leadership [18].

In another study, the practical relevance of the coursework of doctoral leadership programs was investigated by using 44 competency items, which were rated by both college administrators and faculty as “important” and “very important”. This study revealed a significant difference in rating between these two groups, indicating diverse understanding about the requirements for such leadership. It also raised some interesting questions: Is there any possibility that competencies could be learned and grasped in leadership programs, or should they be learned on a practical basis at work and through organizational leadership development programs? Should doctoral leadership programs emphasize all the needed competencies, or is it enough to only provide a good foundation for these competencies? What should doctoral leadership programs focus on—existing practices, questioning, investigating, problem solving, or discovering and lifelong learning? This study clearly showed that any leadership program needs integration among knowledge, skills and value as well as further dialogue and collaboration between various involved partners [19].

4. What Do We Need?

There is limited scientific evidence behind leadership development programs. However, these programs may provide a possibility for participants to develop and refine their attitudes, skills, and behaviours [15]. There are some interesting points that should be taken into consideration for designing and advocating such programs. Firstly, they should have a strong study design, based on needed and defined competencies, which are necessary to achieve good leadership, along with a multidisciplinary approach, which aims for systemic and organizational effectiveness outcomes. Secondly, the target population and needed intervention should be clearly defined, and the outcomes must be assessed through blind review, using validated instruments. Finally, education-

al programs should include both qualitative and quantitative methods of evaluation [20,21].

As already mentioned, besides courses and programs, successful leadership development also requires motivation to improve as a leader by the potential leaders themselves. What can individuals do to become more effective leaders? Firstly, potential leaders should recognize the need for learning from others. Success and mistakes committed by other leaders can be worthy in developing one's own leadership. Secondly, they should choose a respected leader as a role model. The third important point is to consult with and read the work of experts and leaders in other areas. This will greatly increase the portfolio of leadership tactics. The fourth step is the willingness to be regularly evaluated and to be ready to change if needed. Finally, potential leaders should practice deliberately, and all lessons learned should be put into practice [13,15].

The recommendations mentioned above deal with all adult leadership programs. However, as stated, youths are the future of our world in many perspectives and a real asset as future managers and leaders. There is enough evidence to believe that youth leadership programs increase not only capacity building and community participation in youth but also youth empowerment [22]. Furthermore, there is an established youth–adult relationship that begins already in every family. Many youngsters choose role models early in their lives [23]. Thus, the first opportunity to motivate leadership, and to teach future leaders about respect for different genders, diversity, and being a responsible citizen by working in collaboration with others, appears in early ages.

Dealing with the core values of leadership—*self-consciousness, congruence, and commitment, common purpose, collaboration, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change*—it is logical to believe that some of these values should be addressed early in life, while the others may be gained or enhanced through courses, exercises, programs, etc. The self-consciousness, congruence, and commitment would probably be best taught during childhood by having a helpful role model and educated parents. These characteristics will also enhance the readiness to understand the purpose of a common goal and the need for collaboration. The latter will, in turn, stimulate the possibility of learning civility and the need for change. Having said that, a designed program should bring out the individual core values of a person to enhance and strengthen the group and community values. Simulation exercises have been shown to be effective in these respects. Engagement with a multidisciplinary group of professionals is also fruitful, as they enhance the individual and group knowledge, skills, and competency and can be used to educate both youths and adults [24–26]. Two reported simulation exercises that can be used as part of a leadership program are 3 Level Collaboration (3LC), and Mac-Sim (Mass Casualty Simulation) exercises.

3LC is a training model used to train small or larger groups of participants in emergencies and major incidents. The development of the 3LC model was based on the hypothesis that the collaborative elements in a mutual task help to reduce the organizational barriers. Organizational abilities and limitations are enlisted to promote interplay with no hierarchal authority, as well as to promote the ability to switch between different collaboration strategies as demanded by the specific situations. Collaboration training offers a chance to not only exhibit stability (the qualities that one develops through drill and practice), but also to practice transitions, overlaps, fearlessness, improvisation, creative thinking, and the ability to handle unexpected situations. The value in being able to try it out, i.e., to test a model to cope with an event, evaluate the effect of the model in the next stage, create a new approach, test it, and develop the method continuously, is the most important aspect to this model [27].

MacSim was created for scientific development and evaluation of methodologies used in the medical response to major incidents and disasters. It can also be used for education and training for basic to advanced-level medical response and for staff of all categories. In addition, it can be used to test an existing organization regarding planning and preparedness for, and performance in, major incidents and disasters. In this perspective, all parts of a disaster or emergency management process can be tested and trained. In another words, although the system was created for the medical management of an emergency, it can also test and evaluate other organizations involved in management. The idea of MacSim is to intensively obtain the needed knowledge and skills required by interactive training, that is, “learning by doing.” The exercises are run with either fictive or real resources. Medical staff, rescue services, or police perform their tasks with access to the given resources or their real number of staff. A mass-casualty scenario is given, and the scene is built up, together with a chain of pre-hospital transportation. Hospitals and command centres are placed far from the scene, and all communication is conducted by using radio communication or telephones. The patient cards used in MacSim are authentic, taken from real incidents.

MacSim allows for training and evaluation of the whole chain of response—scene, transport, hospitals, command, communication—and its outcome. It makes it possible to train and evaluate coordination between the different components of this chain. The system includes common seminars where the participants exchange experiences and do common analyses of the decision making. During the seminars, the routines used for the decision making between the organizations and the professions are compared. Furthermore, the role distribution between the participants is clarified. The training involves testing different scenarios and evaluating the outcome of different strategies. All participants and their organizations are evaluated [24,26,27].

5. Conclusions

Most leadership training initiatives fail to produce leaders, and studies show that few participants undergo a transformation in their learning regarding topics such as gender equality and diversity issues [17,18]. However, while leadership cannot be taught, leadership can be learned, by both genders, by practice and by performing deliberate acts of leadership [18].

Dealing with the core values of leadership, it is logical to believe that some of these values should be addressed early in life (e.g., respect for gender equality and social diversity), while others may be gained or enhanced through courses, exercises, programs, etc. Empowering families, women, and children, as the smallest unit in society, is the most important mechanism to guarantee a sound and steady increasing of welfare and to provide opportunities for the young generation, irrespective of gender and diversity, to learn what is needed and to enhance their hidden competencies. Simulation exercises may be an effective instrument to be used in leadership programs to enhance the individual’s knowledge, skills, and competency with regard to sound leadership [24,26,27].

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