

Competent Leaders – A Knowledge-based Perspective

The [I-C-E Path to Leadership Expertise](#) contends that leaders move through three overlapping developmental phases, namely, the inexperienced, competent and expert phases. The following observations on the knowledge-base of competent leaders is again based on my own experience, my experience working closely with other leaders and my reading of the literature on leadership. I begin with an examination of the basic values that competent leaders may wish to hold.

Basic Values

The basic values that leaders espouse form the foundation upon which their leadership performance will be built. I contend that the ideas and skills that leaders use will depend to a great extent on the basic values that they hold (Wall, 2008). Developing a set of basic leadership values is a highly personal process and each leader will develop a unique set of values to guide their leadership development.

Based on my education, experience, and readings, I have developed the following set of basic values.

- A deep respect for myself, others and the environment
- A commitment to lifelong learning
- A belief in collaboration and teamwork

After reflecting on the above set of values, I realized that they are congruent with the three basic themes underlying self-determination theory, namely, autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) Given the extensive amount of empirical data supporting the benefits of self-determination theory, I feel even more comfortable espousing and trying to act on the above set of basic leadership values.

Key Ideas

Key ideas are the second major feature in the knowledge-based model of leadership expertise and they are often based on the values that leaders hold. Again, each leader will develop their own set of key ideas; however, I believe that at a minimum competent leaders need to understand and apply the following four key ideas about leading in educational settings.

Develop a shared vision with clear goals

At the core of effective educational leadership is the development, implementation and ongoing revision of a shared vision focused on student learning and wellness. Developing a meaningful shared vision provides direction for students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders in the community.

As leaders become increasingly more competent, they appreciate that developing a shared vision helps articulate the key goals that they and their colleagues wish to reach. A variety of leadership skills will be needed to develop an effective shared vision; however, research indicates that it is an essential aspect of effective educational leadership (Leithwood, 1998; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, Leithwood, Harris, 2004; Harris & Hopkins, 2008).

Establish a competent leadership network

Competent leaders understand that they cannot reach significant organizational goals on their own. They need the support of a network of colleagues, especially those who can effectively share leadership responsibilities with them. Moreover, as leadership competence and confidence grows, leaders come to recognize the importance of sharing their leadership and the value of developing the capacity of other leaders (Barth, 1986; Lambert,

1998; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003; Stoll, 2009; Wall, 2008).

Encourage a collaborative culture

Given the demands of meeting the learning and wellness needs of students, as well as in response to the forces of educational change, much greater emphasis is now being placed on the importance of developing a collegial and collaborative school culture and the value of developing trust within school settings (Bryk, 2010; Bryk and Schneider, 2003; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Patterson & Patterson, 2004)

As leaders become more competent, they come to appreciate more fully the value of building trusting relationships with their colleagues while modeling effective communication and collaboration skills. Most importantly, competent leaders facilitate the development of a collaborative culture by encouraging their colleagues to share leadership, use effective discussion and decision-making skills and reinforcing the importance of collaboration within the groups and teams within their organization (Barth, 2001; Lambert, 2002).

Support effective teamwork

The [BASIC, SMART, GREAT Team Development](#) continuum, on my website, contends that team performance improves with each level of team development. Most importantly, with time and a willingness to improve, a group of people can move from performing at the level of a BASIC team to performing at a SMART or GREAT team level. Competent leaders appreciate that the team building process takes time; however, given the benefits of enhanced team performance they are willing to spend the time

and energy in fostering such teamwork within their organizations (DeVries, 1999; Druskat, 2004; Hackman, 2002; 2011; Hackman & Wageman, 2005; Katzenbach & Smith, 1999).

Essential Skills

Competent leaders develop a range of skills based on the values and key ideas that underlie their leadership style. Based on the key ideas outlined above, the skills that I believe leaders should acquire are outlined below:

Listening for understanding

The foundation for effective leadership is the ability to listen so as to fully understand what people are trying to communicate. Quite simply, listening for understanding is the most important leadership skill. The following resources on listening may be useful to those wishing to improve their listening skills:

[Listening: The Most Important Leadership Skill](#)

[Learning to Listen for Understanding](#)

Facilitating positive and productive meetings

Skills related to the planning and chairing of meetings, as well as skills related to participating effectively in them, are skills that leaders and their colleagues need to develop. Suggestions on how to enhance the planning and chairing of meetings are provided in the following documents:

[Planning Effective Meetings with AGENDA](#)

[CHAIRING – An Acronym on Basic Meeting Chairing Skills](#)

Applying collaborative decision-making

Group decision making will be much more effective if leaders employ a range of collaborative decision-making skills. Some useful strategies to enhance collaborative decision-making are presented in the following resources:

[Introduction: A Continuum of Decision-making Skills](#)

[Collaborative Decision-making Methods](#)

Developing effective teams

As noted above, effective teams are the basis for the development of a proactive and productive organizational culture; hence, leaders need to be able to build, coach, and support effective teamwork. Some potentially helpful suggestions on team building, based on the BASIC, SMART, GREAT Team Development framework, are included in the following documents:

[Developing and Leading BASIC, SMART and GREAT Teams](#)

[LEARNING – Teamwork Guidelines](#)

Self-awareness

Competent leaders reflect on their leadership performance on a regular basis. Use of self-evaluation quizzes can help leaders identify skills that they might need to improve. A number of self reflection quizzes are provided on my website. Click on the following heading to access them:

[Self-Reflection Quizzes](#)

REFLECT: In addition, using the acronym-based REFLECT process can facilitate the personal reflection process and lead to a deeper awareness of one's leadership performance:

Reflect on a relevant leadership experience

Elaborate its main features

Focus reflection on the key aspects

List the potential lessons learned

Examine whether the lessons ring true

Connect the lessons with past experiences and readings

Try to identify some key gold nuggets

Reflect on a relevant leadership experience

It may be an experience in which you played a major role or one that you simply observed. The key point is that you feel it is relevant and merits taking the time to reflect on it.

Elaborate its main features

What actually occurred in the situation? Where did it take place?

Who was involved? How did events unfold?

Why was it important?

Focus reflection on the key aspects

What were the salient aspects of the experience? How did they link together?

Who were the major players and how did they impact the situation?

What went well?

What could have been done better?

List the potential lessons learned

Try to identify several potential lessons learned.

Which lessons seem to be the most important? Why?

What other potential lessons might be garnered from your reflections?

Examine whether the lessons ring true

Take some time to consider each of the potential lessons.

Based on your past experience, decide whether they seem to be valid. If not, consider ways to revise them and examine their validity again.

Connect the lessons with related readings

Reflect on each of the lessons learned. Link the lesson learned to ideas, strategies and skills that you have read in the professional literature that might support, add to, or revise them.

Try to identify some key "gold nuggets"

"Gold nuggets" are important ideas, skills or values that you would like to share with your professional colleagues, as they will contribute to the building of educational leadership capacity in your school or centre.

Self-regulation

Ongoing learning is a key characteristic of competent leaders.

Being aware of the professional learning process described in the

[Developing Leadership Skills – The Four A's to Mastery](#) document can help facilitate the skill learning process.

Competent leaders also become increasingly aware of the need to live a balanced lifestyle. Some of the time management strategies that I have found to be helpful are described in the following two documents:

[Time Management Practices Self-evaluation Questionnaire](#)

[The LEAD-TIME Management Process](#)

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