

## **Expert Leaders: A Knowledge-based Perspective**

As noted in earlier documents describing the [I-C-E Path to Leadership Expertise](#), the expert level is the final phase in the development of leadership expertise. Again I use the knowledge-based model of leadership expertise as a framework from which to examine the basic values, key ideas and essential skills that leaders develop, as well as, the self-awareness and self regulatory strategies they develop ( Wall, 2008). This final set of developmental observations are based on my own experience, my experience working closely with other leaders and my reading of the literature on leadership. They are designed to encourage leaders to reflect on their own leadership knowledge-base and perhaps consider the use of some of the ideas and strategies that are shared. I begin with an examination of the important question of the basic values that expert leaders hold.

### **Basic Leadership Values**

As leaders move towards the expert level of leadership expertise, they become increasingly more aware of the impact that their values have on their leadership performance. Begley (2000) provides an insightful review of the theoretical relationship between values and leadership. He contends that the values leaders adhere to will influence how they will make decisions, solve problems and handle crises.

Adapting some of the classic ideas on values and leadership presented by Hodgkinson ( 1978; 1991), Begley (2000) outlines how the individual's sense of self and deeper motives influence the values and attitudes that they espouse and try to act on. To a large extent, the actions and words of leaders will be determined by the unique impact of those motives, values, and attitudes. Begley (2000) underscores the challenge that such a complex, interactive, values-based process, provides to researchers or others who try to understand why a leader takes a given course of action. As he notes, one may be able to discern the values of a leader, but determining why they adhere to such values is a more difficult question, which underscores, from my own developmental perspective, the need to respect

the unique, personal, nature of values-selection and the care that needs to be taken in promoting a single set of leadership values.

Begley (2000) provides another helpful framework for considering the impact that values have on leadership. He observes that leadership takes place in a series of “arenas”, that is, a set of leadership situations “each with potentially competing or incompatible values” that range from the self, to the group, organization, community, culture and ultimately the transcendental. As he so wisely pointed out, value differences within any of these arenas can result in value conflicts, which can make the task of the leader a very challenging one. Expert leaders become increasingly more aware of the influence that values have in the various arenas in which they are leading and they take value differences into consideration when making or facilitating decisions.

In closing this brief discussion on values and leadership, I would like to note that some of the leadership literature that I have found particularly rewarding to read during my development as a leader included the following: Covey, 1990; Fullan, 2003; Greenleaf, 1977; McGregor, 1960; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schein, 1992).

## **Key Leadership Ideas**

In addition to the key ideas discussed earlier at the [competent level of leadership expertise](#) related to the development of a shared vision, the establishment of a competent leadership network, the encouragement of a collaborative culture, and the importance of facilitating effective teamwork, leaders moving towards the expert phase also appreciate the importance of building relational trust, monitoring progress and sharing leadership. Let us consider each of these key leadership ideas.

### **The Importance of Relational Trust:**

Building relational trust within an organization is of fundamental importance. Bryk (2010) has conducted a series of studies on the impact that the existence of relational trust has within educational settings. He reports that trusting relationships facilitate organizational change and help motivate teachers, support staff, and students to work collaboratively towards shared goals.

In Britain, Muijs and Harris (2006) found that teacher leadership was most effective when it took place within supportive cultures where positive relationships existed among teachers and administrators. Moreover, based on their research, Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) conclude that “neither organizational learning nor professional community can endure without trust — between teachers and administrators, among teachers, and between teachers and parents” (p. 55).

Clearly, the development of relational trust is of prime importance, especially in educational settings where distributed leadership is so important.

### **Monitoring Progress:**

As leaders gain increased expertise, they come to understand the value of evaluating progress on a regular basis and begin to take an interest in the use of accountability strategies. More competent educational leaders use a variety of monitoring strategies and they are open to learning more about how to evaluate progress more effectively (Popham, 2005, 2007). As their competence increases, they encourage their colleagues to monitor and evaluate the progress that their groups or teams are making. In fact, they take a considerable amount of time to facilitate the learning of monitoring strategies (Katzenbach & Smith, 1999).

Leaders approaching the expert level, employ a variety of monitoring strategies and often are able to create project specific accountability methods, which often enhance the productivity of the groups or teams with which they are working (Hackman, 2002).

### **Sharing Leadership:**

Expert leaders understand that they cannot reach significant organizational goals on their own. Effective leaders provide direction by developing a shared vision and establishing a common set of realistic and realizable goals. In addition, expert leaders try to ensure that people are flexibly aligned so that they can contribute towards reaching their shared goals (Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons & Hopkins, 2007; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2006).

Expert leaders also understand that when they share leadership it actually increases their influence. Given the increasing demands for change within educational settings, the sharing of leadership is really the only viable option. At times sharing leadership can be difficult; however, with increased competence, educational leaders are able to effectively delegate increased responsibilities to colleagues. In doing so, expert leaders understand that they are then free to handle tasks that they alone can do (Lambert, 1998, 2002; MacBeath, 2002; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Stoll, 2009).

Finally, expert leaders appreciate that if they are to use a distributed leadership network in an effective manner, then they must spend a considerable amount of time and effort building the capacity of their colleagues. As even a brief perusal of the values, ideas and skills described at each level of the I-C-E path to leadership expertise shows, formal and informal educational leaders need a wide variety of opportunities to acquire the required expertise (Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons & Hopkins, 2007; Lambert, 1998, 2002; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Quite simply, sharing leadership requires a clear focus on capacity building.

## **Essential Leadership Skills**

Leaders moving towards the expert level of leadership expertise take the time to develop a variety of leadership skills. Each leader will develop their own set of leadership skills depending on the leadership situations that they are facing. Some of the essential leadership skills that I have found beneficial to use in trying to implement the above three key ideas are briefly described below.

In terms of developing relational trust, I have found the use of consensus-decision making processes to be especially valuable. The process described in the [Collaborative Decision-making Methods – Consensus](#) document has proven to be particularly effective with groups in a variety of settings.

Depending on the complexity of the leadership situation, the monitoring of progress can be a considerable challenge. I have found the process outlined in the resource entitled: [Gameplan – A Project Monitoring and Evaluating Process](#) to be useful in monitoring the progress of small, as

well as, relatively large projects. I also have found the steps outlined in the acronym-based [ACTION process](#) on the planning, monitoring and evaluation of action projects to be quite helpful.

Finally, in relation to enhancing the capacity to support shared leadership, I have found the acronym-based [BUILD process](#) on capacity building to be quite helpful.

Clearly, expert leaders acquire and use a wide variety of leadership skills. In this discussion, I have tried to provide examples of skills that might prove useful to leaders who are moving towards the expert level of leadership expertise who wish to implement some of the ideas described in this document.

## **Self-awareness**

As noted earlier, as leaders gain competence and confidence, they become increasingly more aware of the repertoire of leadership skills that they can use. They also become more cognizant of the key ideas and leadership principles that influence their day-to-day performance.

As leaders move towards the expert phase, they are much more likely to reflect on their own leadership and discuss the use of different leadership strategies with other leaders. Moreover, in addition to having their own mentors, they also often become involved in the mentoring of other leaders.

Most importantly, when they face complex or especially challenging leadership situations, they are willing to discuss those situations with trusted colleagues or with their own mentors. Expert leaders are also able to keep challenging situations in perspective and call on a variety of self-regulatory strategies to ensure that they employ strategically-wise leadership processes, especially when dealing with stressful or value-laden leadership situations.

## **Self-regulation**

Educational leaders are often confronted with the challenge of facilitating personal and organizational change. Leaders who are moving towards the expert level of leadership expertise recognize the challenge of change and use a variety of self-regulatory strategies to try to deal with it.

For example, I have found that reflecting on the series of questions outlined in the [Achievable Project Test](#) document can help focus attention on some of the inter-related factors that can influence the change process. For example, being aware of the degree to which key stakeholders will have to change their behaviours, acquire new skills or adopt a different professional perspective can have a major impact on the human, physical, and financial resources required to support a change project. In discussions with other leaders, they have also indicated that taking the time to strategically consider the implications of initiating a change project has been very beneficial.

As leaders move towards increased expertise, they become more fully aware of the challenges of facilitating educational change. For example, understanding the three phases in the personal change process described by Bridges (2009), namely, “saying goodbye, shifting into neutral, and moving forward to the new beginning” has proven to be helpful in deciding why, when and how to facilitate personal, as well as, organizational change initiatives.

Clearly, expert leaders use a variety of self-regulatory strategies. However, maintaining a balanced lifestyle is a very important goal for all leaders, especially for those who are leading in challenging or stressful situations. Based on my own experience as a leader and my conversations with other leaders, I have found it important to try to remain physically active while trying to control my weight by eating sensibly.

In addition, I try to ensure that each day I find time to relax either by reading, listening to music, taking a walk, or by meditating. I have found it particularly helpful to follow the suggestions provided by Benson and Proctor (2010) of Harvard Medical School on the use of meditation.

Finally I believe it is important to take time for mini-vacations, as well as family holidays, as they have been shown to be of great value in maintaining a healthy, balanced lifestyle. Clearly, these are highly personal decisions; however, it is very important for leaders at every level to consider the self-regulatory strategies that they will employ to try and ensure that they are leading a balanced, healthy and happy lifestyle.

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