Leadership Development Training In Extension: A Research-Based Curriculum Design

John E. Barbuto, Jr., Assistant Professor and Director
Leadership Studies Doctoral Program
Leadership Development Extension Specialist
Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication, 306 Ag Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68583-0709
jbarbuto@unl.edu

Arlen W. Etling, Professor and Director
International/Global Programs
Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68583-0706
aetling1@unl.edu

Abstract

One of the great challenges leadership development specialists face is how best to facilitate the development of community leaders, given the social and economic challenges faced by these communities. These leaders of communities often times are limited in time and resources to engage in such training, and the instrumentation/assessment necessary to substantively impact behavioral changes is often available at premium costs. The dilemma is this: how can educators provide world-class training to our community leaders on an extension specialist budget, in absence of philanthropic foundations and/or grants? This paper will discuss this issue, outlining a curriculum design, which optimizes community leaders’ experiences and learning opportunities, while providing a strong research database, at a fraction of the costs of other educational methodologies.

This philosophical paper is intended to provide practical ideas for both programming and collaboration that optimally lend themselves to the research, extension, and outreach missions of most land grant and public universities. Specifically, this paper addresses 1) the leadership development process, 2) the need for research-based programming, 3) the integrative opportunities between extension and research agendas, and 4) the reporting advantages for documenting impacts. A leadership development curriculum designed by the primary author and used in cross-cultural settings will also be described in this paper, as it relates to each of these objectives. The curriculum design described encompasses the full range of leadership behaviors, ranging from transformational to purely transactional (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990). The methodologies used in the curriculum are also grounded in research, based on the three-tier leadership development process – assessment, challenge, and support (McCauley, Moxley & Velsor, 1999).
Theoretical and Philosophical Themes

Leadership Development Process

The strongest philosophical underpinning of this program is that leadership development is a process, not an event (McCaulley, Moxley, & Van Velsor, 1998). The majority of leadership development initiatives in extension are short one-time workshops or, “shows”. Attendees collect information, enjoy their time spent and leave with some ideas to implement, which often don’t get implemented. Research demonstrates that these event-type workshops rarely lead to substantive leadership development or long-term behavioral change (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Yukl, 1998). For this reason, it is proposed that all leadership development initiatives embrace a process-based curriculum in leadership development extension efforts.

The leadership development process can be broken down into several key components (see Figures 1 & 2). The first, and perhaps most important (perhaps overlooked by many) is the ability to learn. While this is usually assumed, many underestimate the importance of a person’s willingness and aptitude for leadership development. There are many executives that we have worked with that believe they have “figured it all out” and these individuals are often not capable of developing their leadership skills without a strong dissonance-invoking experience. A dissonance-invoking experience is one that reveals information to an individual that is so counter to the individual’s self-concept (self view of traits, competencies, and values) that it causes discomfort, which may lead to reformation of self-concept (Leonard, Beauvais & Scholl, 1999). The ability to learn can be viewed also from an aptitude standpoint. Many individuals haven’t developed the capacity to reflect on their personal experiences (some may lack experience to begin with) causing them to either misinterpret important information or not embrace the behavioral transformation opportunities presented. Some believe that knowing the theory is enough, overlooking the practical realities necessary to develop leadership skills.

There are two key points that must be remembered about the leadership development process. For leadership development to occur there must be both a variety of developmental experiences and also the ability and opportunity to learn from these experiences. Individuals that have gained experiences, but haven’t learned from them (or learning without practical experiences) will not experience any substantive leadership development. Individuals with a plethora of developmental experiences haven’t necessarily developed leadership skills (despite the assumptions of many that a person with such experiences has done so). Conversely, Individuals that have learned the concepts and understand the philosophies of leadership haven’t necessarily developed leadership skills either (but they can talk a good game). Notwithstanding, the leadership development process will succeed in instances where individuals have solid developmental experiences, while being given robust opportunities to learn. This integration produces leadership development.
The developmental process relies heavily on developmental experiences. What separates developmental experiences from “practical, in the trenches experiences” is that developmental experiences include three key components: assessment, challenge, and support (see Figure 2). A developmental experience lacking in any of the three will not provide a developmental experience (McCaulley, et al. 1998). Assessment consists of empirically or qualitatively collected information (data) that provides sound feedback to individuals about their skills, values, and/or traits. Assessment works to motivate individuals to want to improve or find better ways to do things. Without good assessments in developmental experiences, individuals lack a sound gauge to work from. Challenge consists of pushing individuals to be better at what they do. This involves challenging them to hold themselves to a higher standard, while creating optimism that leadership development is within their reach. Support consists of on-going emotional and professional intervention. This intervention is geared to create a safe and supportive environment for individuals to practice their skills and behaviors. Any developmental experience lacking in assessment, challenge, or support may suffer accordingly. An experience that lacks assessment may result in a low motivation to change. An experience that lacks challenge may allow complacency or will lack the rigor necessary to develop. An experience that lacks support will make the endeavor seem too risky resulting in withdrawal or loafing (going through the motions, rather than embracing the leadership development opportunities).

The next philosophical view is that all leadership development efforts need to be solidly grounded in leadership theory and research. An estimated 70% of all leadership development training conducted is not research-based (McCauley, Moxley & Van Velsor, 1998). Research has demonstrated that those training efforts that are solidly grounded in research have the greatest likelihood of succeeding (Barling, et al., 1996; Yukl, 1998).

With this in mind, the most researched leadership model also happens to be one of the most generally applicable – full range leadership (Bass, 1990). The full range leadership model is based on over a hundred years of leadership research. The full range of leader behaviors identifies both transactional and transformational behaviors. Transactional
behaviors include laissez-faire (hands-off leadership), management-by-exception (putting out the fires), and contingent rewards (let’s make a deal). Transformational behaviors include individualized consideration (compassionate leadership), intellectual stimulation (thinking outside of ‘the box’), inspirational motivation (exciting the masses/sharing the vision), and idealized influence (walking the walk).

Laissez-Faire (hands-off leadership) is characterized by an absence of leadership, where the leader avoids taking a stand on issues, doesn’t emphasize results, refrains from intervening when issues arise, are unaware of employee performance, and leaves employees with the feeling, “That leader doesn’t even care if we do or if we don’t.”

Management-By-Exception (putting out the fires) is characterized by leaders taking corrective actions, setting standards – but waiting for problems to arise before doing anything, stressing what people are doing wrong, enforcing rules, disliking challenges to the status quo, and leaving employees with the feeling, “Uh oh, here he/she comes again!”

Contingent Rewards (let’s make a deal!) is characterized by constructive transactions, with clear expectations of outcomes and rewards, where leaders make exchanges of rewards and recognitions for accomplishments, and they actively monitor employees’ progress and provide supportive feedback. Employees of a leader that practices contingent rewards will often have the feeling, “If I do as we agreed, I’ll get the reward.” Next, we discuss the four transformational behaviors – individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence.

Individualized Consideration (compassionate leader) is characterized by leaders empathizing with individual needs, making interpersonal connections with employees, genuinely caring and showing this compassion in actions, and encouraging continuous development and growth of employees. Leaders using individualized consideration leave employees with the message, “I care about you and am looking out for your best interest.”

Intellectual Stimulation (thinking outside of the box) is characterized by leaders encouraging the imagination of employees, while challenging the old ways of doing things. This behavior features leaders looking for better ways to do things, and encouraging followers not to think like them. Leaders practicing this behavior are willing to take risks. The message being sent by this type of leader is, “If we change our assumptions, then…”

Inspirational Motivation (exciting the masses/sharing the vision) is characterized by leaders inspiring others to perform above and beyond expectations and clarifying where the organization will be in the future. This type of behavior creates a strong sense of purpose among employees by aligning individual and organizational needs and helping followers to achieve more than even they thought was possible. The message being sent is, “If we focus on what this organization stands for…we can achieve whatever we desire!”

Idealized Influence (actions speak louder than words) is characterized by leaders demonstrating an inclusive vision and essentially walking the walk. This behavior allows leaders to exhibit great commitment and persistence in pursuing objectives, while expressing confidence in the vision of the organization. Leaders are developing trust and confidence among employees, symbolizing the goals and mission of the organization and are essentially sending the message, “I believe that this is truly the right thing to do.”

Research conducted in Nebraska demonstrates that those leaders able to practice these four transformational leadership behaviors tend to gain extra effort from employees, experience higher employee satisfaction, and enjoy higher productivity and greater
organizational effectiveness. The same has been found with national and international samples (Bass, 1990).

The chart below (see Figure 3) illustrates the full range of leadership behaviors. Laissez-Faire (LF) is the most inactive and generally least effective of the leader behaviors. Research shows that leaders using this style of leadership are rarely viewed as effective on the job. Management-by-exception (MBE) is generally more effective than Laissez-faire, but is generally ineffective leadership. Leaders high use of management-by-exception behaviors is related to high employee turnover and absenteeism, poor satisfaction, and poor perception of organizational effectiveness. Contingent rewards (CR) can be an effective style of leadership. However, leaders will not get more than they bargain for when practicing this style of leadership.

It is only with the remaining four behaviors that leaders are able to excite followers to perform above expectations and transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization. The four I’s, individualized consideration (IC), intellectual stimulation (IS), inspirational motivation (IM), and idealized influence (II) have all resulted in extra effort from workers, higher productivity, higher morale and satisfaction, higher organizational effectiveness, lower turnover, lower absenteeism, and greater organizational adaptability to changes in the environment (Bass, 1990). In summary, leaders are generally most effective when they regularly use each of the four transformational behaviors (individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence) to build on contingent rewards.

Figure 3. Full Range Leadership Model

The full range leadership model described here offers extension leadership development specialists a great tool to facilitate leadership development among residents and communities. Because the model has an established measure, with items to measure each of the subscales described above, it is possible to provide extensive feedback to clients about their leadership behaviors. Norming data is also available to help participants compare themselves to others. The information (data) is collected from multiple raters, thus 360-
degree feedback, to ensure credibility of the results. Participants can compare their self-ratings with those of their employees/raters. Based on the results, participants will be challenged to improve in those transformational behaviors that they are low in and to reduce their use of transactional behaviors (where appropriate).

The program proposed would include extensive assessment of the full range leadership model, coupled with a two-day training session with at least six follow-up sessions. The two-day training session would generally use the first day to learn the full range leadership model with presentations, videos, and multi-media applications. At the end of day one participants would get their results (assessment) and give some thought to which areas they want most to improve. The second day features practicing the four transformational behaviors using activities, role-plays, and simulations. At the end of day two participants write a leadership development plan, which indicates those behaviors they are seeking to improve and also what steps they plan to take to do so. Follow-up sessions (monthly or bi-monthly) are used to discuss ideas and strategies being used, trouble shoot issues that arise during implementation of the leadership development plans, and to create a support cohort group for participants. At the end of the program, participants should be re-evaluated to measure improvements to the behavioral changes desired. Research has shown that participants committed to this process are most likely to achieve the desired behavioral changes (Barling, et al., 1996; Bass & Avolio, 1996). The flip side of this is that participants who attend the two-day workshop, but not the follow-up sessions, show no significant changes in behavior. This reinforces that leadership development must be approached and planned as a process (not an event).

Collaboration Opportunities and Resource Benefits

Another opportunity created by the approach described in this paper is collaboration between research and extension faculty. Some faculty members are fortunate to have both research and extension appointments, making an integration of these efforts a natural fit. Others may seek collaboration with research faculty to make this educational program work. Others may not have a research appointment, but may still be expected to produce published research. In these instances integration is both expedient and mutually beneficial (extension and research benefits). Extension efforts benefit from the quality of assessments and outcome interpretations. Research efforts benefit from this integration by having greater access to subjects.

The instrumentation alone for programs with psychometrically sound assessments and measures can cost more than $300.00 per person. However, when incorporating a research agenda into these programs, these research instruments can be used for research purposes at little or no cost. Most researchers who own the copyrights to instruments lend them to scholars conducting behavioral research at no charge, provided results of the studies are shared with the researchers. Participants of these educational programs receive a higher quality, long-term experience and will also benefit from a more favorable budget.

The benefits also include the opportunity to collect data (for assessment and research) for other variables beyond the full range leadership or other leadership styles/theories. For example, data currently being collected at the University of Nebraska includes the following variables: leader’s sources of motivation, leader’s personality, leader’s locus of control, leader’s anticipated resistance from followers, leader’s perception of leader’s full range leadership behaviors, leader’s self-perception of leader’s conflict management styles, and
leader’s Machiavellianism. We also collect from four to eight raters (per leader) the following variables: follower/rater’s perception of leader’s use of full range leadership behaviors, influence tactics, and leader-member-exchange quality. Raters also report their own sources of motivation and organizational citizenship behavior. From this data, a strong two-day program and a strong series of follow-up programs are very possible and enlightening. The mutual benefits between research and extension efforts are clear in the program described.

Documenting Impacts of Extension Programs

The added bonus of a strong research focus in leadership development interventions and the process-based approach is that measurable behavioral changes can be longitudinally documented. With the process-based program, measurement and documentation opportunities abound.

Documenting impacts of extension efforts is a major piece of the extension task at the University of Nebraska, as well as at many other universities. Extension specialists and educators are expected to demonstrate the difference that their work has made, often times with tangible, quantifiable means. A research-based curriculum like the one discussed in this paper affords extension specialists the opportunity to demonstrate a long-term behavioral change, resulting from the leadership development initiative. Also, great trade publication opportunities surround a project such as this (in addition to the refereed publication opportunities using the research data).

Conclusions and Educational Importance

Leadership development is a process that requires a long-term initiative, typically lasting between six and eighteen months (Yukl, 1998). This process combines the desire and aptitude of leaders to develop with providing these individuals a variety of leadership development experiences. The key elements of leadership development experiences include assessment, challenge, and support. Leadership development experiences must be carefully planned to incorporate each of these three components (McCauley, et al., 1998). Programs shown to be most effective are those grounded in solid leadership theory and research (Barling, et al. 1996). For this reason, we suggest that all leadership development programs be examined to ascertain their place in the leadership research literature. Programs based solely on popular press books should therefore be avoided, except for those instances where such books are solidly grounded in the field. With the plethora of leadership research that already exists, it is irresponsible for extension staff to advocate programs that are not research-based.

The potential integration of extension and research efforts has been described in detail in this paper. These instruments can be used at a fraction of the $300 price, if used for research. Organizing a community leadership development program doesn’t have to be restricted by budgetary concerns. This type of integration and collaboration creates a true win-win alternative, because the extension programs developed from the research-base will be more likely to impact community and organizational leaders and the research benefits from access to community leaders and “attentive” subjects that are typically very motivated to participate. In this paper, we outline several strategies for use in design and implementation of a community leadership development program.
In the educational field we are often challenged by the multiple forces that seem to limit our opportunities and availabilities of top-notch, world-class training. The philosophies described in this paper outline a process for rethinking the leadership extension roles by developing research-based curricula to increase the likelihood of development. Extension faculty will benefit by providing the most reputable assessments and measures in the leadership development field at a fraction of the programming cost. This is particularly valuable to international extension faculty at universities with limited or depleting programming funds.

Participants of these programs will benefit from quality of feedback, sound research-base to the programming, and from a process-based curriculum. This combination will increase the likelihood of developing leadership skills. It is hoped that many extension specialists will incorporate these perspectives and strategies and optimize the leadership development opportunities at the community level while also optimizing their own scholarship and research.

References