RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Leadership Development Impact (LDI) Framework

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Background

Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) has been successfully developing leaders across the globe for more than 50 years, and formally evaluating the effectiveness of leadership programs for decades. Based on our direct experience, corroborated by external research (e.g., Garavan et al., 2019; Lacarenza, et al., 2017), there is abundant evidence that leadership development leads to positive impact. But how do we define impact, and what factors should we consider when assessing the results of a leadership development initiative? The purpose of our proposed framework is to introduce a structure for measuring and maximizing the impact of leadership development; this includes the type of impact that can be expected and measured as well as key factors that influence the extent to which a leadership development initiative is achieving the desired impact.

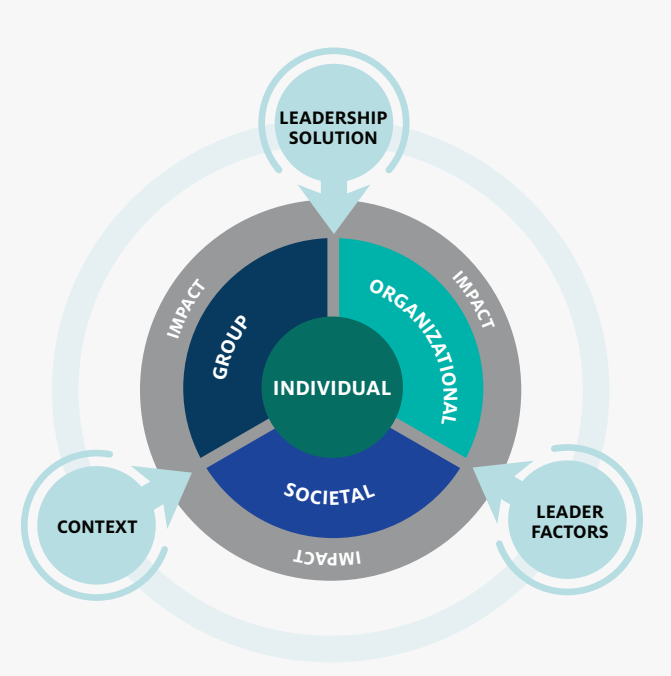
In the six decades following Kirkpatrick's publication of his four levels tied to training evaluation (reaction, learning, behavior, results), his framework has become synonymous with training evaluation itself. His simple heuristic of moving from reaction (e.g., trainees' reaction to the training) to results (i.e. impact on business and financial goals for the organization) has received far-reaching acceptance among training and development professionals worldwide. That said, Kirkpatrick himself acknowledged that while the framework serves as a good starting point for evaluation, training practitioners should develop increasingly sophisticated and more complete systems for evaluating training outcomes (Kirkpatrick, 1998).

Expanding on Kirkpatrick's four levels, we propose a comprehensive yet simple framework that is specifically relevant to leadership development. Building on our previously published framework (Patterson et al., 2017) it combines ***levels of impact*** (e.g., changes tied to individual, group, organization, and society) with three unique factors that contribute to the effectiveness of leadership development programs. These c***ontributing factors*** include (a) *leader characteristics* (e.g., readiness, willingness, and other individual difference characteristics relevant to development), (b) *leadership solution* (e.g., content, design characteristics and delivery elements, cohesiveness and flow), and (c) *context* (e.g., internal organizational factors, such as culture, support, leadership or other organizational changes as well as external factors such as, shifts in the industry and market place, significant economic and social issues or changes).

We note here that ***levels of impact*** (individual, group, organization, to society) should be viewed not as isolated events but as connected outcomes that ripple outward over time beginning with the individual to societal levels, much like a drop of water ripples out from the center. Similarly, ***contributing factors*** should be viewed as dynamically interacting with one another to exert their collective influence on one or more of the impact levels – usually – beginning at the individual level. The measurement approach should be determined by the level(s) of impact targeted by the leadership solution and the most relevant contributing factor(s).

We outline below each component of CCL's Leadership Development Impact (LDI) Framework:

FIGURE 1.
CCL'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IMPACT (LDI) FRAMEWORK



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Four Levels of Impact

In CCL's LDI Framework, successful leadership development programs are expected to exert their impact on one or more of four distinct yet connected levels – individual, group, organizational, societal (Hoole & Martineau, 2014). The term ***impact*** as used here is defined as any near- or longer-term change or changes in one or more of the four impact levels - i.e. individual, group, organization, and/or society (see Descriptions in Table 1 below). It should be noted that not all leadership solutions are expected to exert their impact on all four levels; the expected impact on a given level will depend largely on the specific goals of each solution. We further clarify *change* here as potentially involving *internal shifts* (e.g., to awareness, mindset) and/or *external shifts* (e.g., overt behavior changes that can be observed at the individual, group, organization, or societal levels). Table 1 below provides descriptions of impact at each level.

Table 1: Four Levels of Impact

LEVEL OF IMPACT	DESCRIPTION
Individual Impact:	Changes or shifts within the leader with respect to their attitude, mindset, behavior, mindset and/or effectiveness – anticipated to occur as a result of their participation in the development intervention.
Group Impact:	Changes in the collective or group-level attitude, mindset, behavior, and/or effectiveness that stem from a leader's and/or group's participation in a leadership intervention.
Organizational Impact:	Changes in attitude, mindset, behavior, cognition and/or effectiveness – observed at the organizational level.
Societal Impact*:	Changes or shifts in systems, collective attitude, mindset, behavior, and/or effectiveness observed beyond a single organization. This may be a geographical community, an industry, or so on.

Table 2 further shows that within each level of leadership impact, changes that lead to shifts in leadership practices and behaviors can be represented by one or more of four categories listed. Proposed by Hiller and his colleagues, these include attitude, mindset**, behavior, and effectiveness (Hiller et al., 2011).

Understanding these four levels will enable organizations to (a) gain alignment on the goals and purpose of their development initiatives; (b) clarify where they can expect impact; thus, guide their decisions on what to measure; and (c) help establish a clear link between leaders and their organizational and business outcomes.

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Table 2: Examples of Potential Changes at Each Impact Level

LEVEL OF IMPACT	IMPACT DOMAIN	EXAMPLE
Individual	Attitude*	• Improved engagement and commitment to the organization. • Reduction in individual work-related stress
	Mindset**	• Enhanced self-awareness – e.g., of one's view of self, impact on others, strengths, opportunities • Shifts in beliefs about what it means to be an effective leader
	Behavior	• Overt changes to one's behavior – e.g., frequency of communication, collaboration, and/or influence skills
	Effectiveness	• Improved job performance/productivity, or promotion to the next level of responsibility
Group	Attitude*	• Collective improvement in engagement and commitment • Enhanced cohesion among team members
	Mindset**	• Developing shared beliefs about how leadership should happen in the group
	Behavior	• Norm of providing direct feedback becomes more common
	Effectiveness	• Group-level performance/productivity/efficiency • Enhanced quality of ideas and efforts to innovate
Organization	Attitude*	• Shift in organizational climate perceptions to one that places greater value on equity, diversity and inclusion
	Mindset**	• Shared understanding of "digital innovation" and how to achieve it • Culture change; shift in collective beliefs that conflict is helpful and productive
	Behavior	• Improved practices for inter-departmental coordination/collaboration
	Effectiveness	• Improved efficiency, retention in top talent • Improved revenue, patient satisfaction scores, sales volume, return on equity, and reduced safety incidents
Society**	Attitude*	• Changes to societal attitudes towards equity – e.g., from emphasis on equality to greater value placed on equity. • Increased willingness to make pro-environment purchases • Shift in attitudes about privatizing public education
	Mindset**	• Widespread changes in understanding about what constitutes a healthy diet stemming from improved access to health-related information
	Behavior	• Increased advice-seeking behavior seen among community leaders • Shifts in how people treat those who are different - e.g., upward trend towards hiring workers with disabilities
	Effectiveness	• Reduced healthcare costs stemming from reduced hospital admissions, return visits, and improvement in overall community health. • Improved standards and working conditions for employees at an industry level.

**Attitude encompasses attitudinal, motivational, and emotional.*
*** We use the term "mindset" interchangeably with Hiller et al.'s "cognition."*

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CCL defines leadership as the process of producing Direction, Alignment, and Commitment in collectives (DAC: McCauley, Van Velsor, Ruderman, 2010). DAC can be considered a secondary outcome resulting from collective levels of impact (Group, Organizational, Societal). At the individual level, leaders may also achieve outcomes that help them facilitate DAC. Improvements in DAC are best characterized as "effectiveness;" however, there are also elements of DAC that relate to attitudes, mindsets and behaviors.

Explicit acknowledgment of the factors that facilitate or hinder leadership development initiatives can help enhance your understanding of the results – enabling you to take appropriate steps to maximize impact of your development initiatives.

Factors that Contribute to Impact

Leadership Solution Factors

Not all leadership development solutions are equally successful in achieving their intended impact. Research supports the notion that the impact of a leadership development initiative depends largely on key characteristics of the initiative or "solution" itself. In a meta-analysis of 200 lab and field studies involving leadership development interventions, Avolio and his colleagues reported a significant influence of intervention characteristics on outcomes across varied intervention types (Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumba, & Chan, 2009). While not exhaustive, we strongly recommend that leadership solutions incorporate the elements outlined below. Our recommendation of these core factors is informed by both CCL's extensive first-hand experience as well as independent research conducted by the wider academic community.

First, developing leaders should be done with the intention of supporting an organization's (or community's) success; thus, leadership solutions are more effective when designed with clearly articulated goals linked to organizational needs. While this seems logical, many organizations underestimate the importance of carefully analyzing the needs of the organization – citing time and cost as key barriers (see Carlisle et al., 2011). Notwithstanding these challenges, their benefits to outcomes are clear. In a meta-analysis comprised of 335 independent samples, Lacerenza and her colleagues showed that leadership solutions designed around needs analysis were more effective in general; and specifically better at helping leaders learn and transfer compared to those that were not designed around a needs analysis (Lacerenza et al., 2017). Combining this with CCL's extensive first-hand

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experience, we advise organizations to start with a needs analysis or a systematic discovery process prior to designing and implementing a leadership program.

Second, leadership solutions often vary widely with respect to method, duration and modality. While ongoing, research across geography, disciplines, and industries are converging on a handful of best practices with respect to maximizing impact of development programs (Liebermann & Hoffmann, 2008; Reinhold et al., 2015; Blume et al., 2010; Lim & Johnson, 2002; Burke & Hutchins, 2008). Both extant research and CCL's collective experience – gained from having trained over 500,000 leaders across the globe – converge on the notion that superior results are associated with programs that:

- Provide research-based content that is perceived to be relevant by the audience (Liebermann & Hoffmann, 2008; Blume et al., 2010; Lim & Johnson, 2002);
- Are delivered in engaging ways (Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2008);
- Treat learning as a process and include specific strategies for implementation/ learning transfer (Reinhold, Patterson, & Hegel, 2015);
- Include components of assessment, appropriate challenge and support (McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010; Blume et al., 2010; Dermol & Čater, 2013).

Leader Factors

Individual leader factors are also among the numerous factors that can influence the effectiveness of a leadership development initiative.

First, each leader brings to the development context his/her unique set of characteristics including knowledge, skills, abilities, as well as other personal characteristics such as personality, values (personal and generational), motivation and interests. As an example, recent research has identified leader development efficacy (one's belief in his or her ability to develop leadership skills) as a critical motivational variable that can impact outcomes associated with leader development (e.g., Reichard, Walker, Putter, Middleton, & Johnson, 2017). The concept of efficacy in its original form is viewed as a state and there is ample evidence showing that it can be systematically enhanced (Bandura, 1997; Betz & Hackett, 1983; Betz, Borgen, & Harmon, 1996). Designers can incorporate such techniques as social persuasion (e.g., building confidence for leadership skills through encouragement), social modeling (e.g., sharing success stories about past participants), and mastery experiences (e.g., through simulations) to help enhance leaders' development efficacy, and ultimately, their motivation to both learn and apply their learned skills (see Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Luzzo & Taylor, 1994).

Second, leaders can be differentially engaged with development opportunities depending on their personal preferences. Regardless of approach, the key here is to ensure that participants are fully engaged – with the facilitator and other participants. Not surprisingly, a number of studies have shown that the more participants are engaged with the training content, the more they are likely to be motivated (Mahle, 2011; Wen-chi, et al., 2011), persist with learning (Tello, 2007; Joo, Lim, & Kim, 2011), and achieve a deeper level of learning (Offir, et al., 2008). Based on these findings, we recommend that leadership development interventions incorporate into their programs, as many available tools and techniques as possible to maintain a high level of engagement.

Third, we expect the degree to which leaders are committed to continuous learning and improvement will positively impact learning and transfer (see Avolio & Hannah, 2018). This means that the extent to which leadership development programs can be designed to enhance commitment on the part of participants, the greater the likelihood of success. In an analysis of post-program impact data by CCL, researchers found that compared to leaders who were only "somewhat successful" in achieving goals, leaders who were "very successful" demonstrated commitment by taking every opportunity to integrate what they learned (Stawiski, 2019).

To summarize, while it can be challenging to fully customize a given leadership solution to each participant, designers can take simple evidence-based steps to enhance a number of leader factors to their

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advantage. All of the above factors outlined above, in varying degrees, serve to facilitate or hinder the strength of the relationship between leadership solutions and impact.

Context Factors

Context refers to conditions within or outside the organization that can influence outcomes and results. Internal factors can include a recent merger, major organizational change, or high turnover among the ranks of an organization's key leadership. External factors may include changes in the economy, market trends, or, a global pandemic! The idea that factors outside the program itself may influence program effectiveness is not new, and in fact, is well supported in the literature (e.g., Tracey & Cardenas, 2017; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Yorks et al., 1999).

One example of a context factor is direct support from managers, peers and other colleagues. Imagine a leader attending a powerful one-week leadership program and returning to work to be greeted by her manager with curiosity about the experience, and an offer to be a sounding board for the leader as she tries new leadership behaviors. This well-supported leader will be more likely to effectively develop the desired skills than one whose manager does not take the time to inquire about and support her development. In line with this, a study by Young, Champion, Raper & Braddy (2017) showed that participants with greater boss support reported significantly higher improvement in development outcomes including self-awareness, leadership capability, leadership effectiveness and engagement.

A second example relates to overall culture and/or climate of the organization. One particularly relevant aspect involves an organization's *climate for development*, characterized by the amount of value an organization places on leader development (McCauley, Kanaga, & Lafferty, 2010). For example, whether senior leaders acknowledge and reward leadership talent as much as they do sales performance or other technical expertise is one indicator of the degree to which development of leadership skills is valued. Research indeed supports the notion that impact of a given intervention largely depends on the developmental climate or environment of the organization. For example, Ellison (2018) demonstrated that a CCL leadership development program was more effective for leaders who worked in a more supportive feedback environment (e.g., those where feedback is seen as credible, useful, delivered tactfully).

See Table 3 for examples of metrics associated with each of the three contributing factors.

Table 3: Examples of Contributing Factors

CONTEXT FACTORS	LEADER FACTORS	LEADERSHIP SOLUTION FACTORS
• % of leaders who report favorable development support from their managers. • % who believe they will be held accountable for their development goals. • % who believe that the new behaviors they want to adopt are modeled by senior leaders. • Qualitative examples and stories of barriers to application and behavior change.	• % of leaders indicating they intend to apply what they learned. • % of leaders reporting they were highly committed to achievement of development goals. • % of leaders reporting that the program content fits with their developmental needs. • % of leaders reporting that they are confident in applying new skills.	• Mean score ratings of relevance of content to leaders' challenges. • Ratings of value of each program component (i.e. experientials, 360 feedback, and coaching, etc.). • % of leaders who report that learning objectives were met. • Ratings of how valuable and engaging the program was perceived to be.

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Measure the factors that can actually help to maximize the impact of your leadership development initiatives, ensuring the design of the solution is relevant to the challenges faced by leaders, is delivered in a way that engages leaders, and accounts for contextual factors where possible.

Conclusion

Organizations around the globe recognize that developing their leaders is indispensable for their continued success. However, despite enormous investments made towards leadership development each year, the lack of clarity around the precise mechanisms that distinguish successful initiatives from those less successful have led some to downplay its value to organizations. CCL has demonstrated time and time again, the value of developing leaders and programs that maximize their intended aims to develop the right skills, at the right time, to enable leaders to impact their own lives and the lives of those around them. In this sense, effective leadership development programs have the potential to exert their impact-sometimes in small ways-and other times in transformational ways-for individuals, groups, organizations and even at the societal level. Measuring impact is critical, as is paying attention to the factors that will support or hinder an initiative's ability to achieve impact. Equipped with these data and insights, organizations that recognize the importance of context, leader and leadership solution factors, are able to maximize the impact of their investment in leadership development.

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