

## **Effective Leadership Development in Higher Education: Individual and Group Level Approaches**

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### **Abstract**

Research in commercial organizations has provided a multitude of examples on how leadership development can effectively foster employees' performance and work-related attitudes such as commitment or satisfaction. In contrast, to date systematic leadership development is largely lacking for employees in higher education. However, we suggest that the positive effects of leadership development in commercial organizations also apply to the academic context. Thus, the purpose of this applied article is to present two approaches to the development of leadership in higher education. More specifically, we provide a detailed description of two different programs offered to researchers at a large German university. The first program constitutes a leader development initiative for junior faculty on an individual level, whereas the second focuses on the development of leadership within university departments on a group level. We provide recommendations for establishing and evaluating effective leadership development in higher education.

### **Introduction**

Effective leadership is central to an organization's success. Several studies have shown the positive effects of leadership development on a variety of organizational variables such as followers' satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Barling, Weber & Kelloway, 1996; Dvir, Eden, Avolio & Shamir, 2002; Popper, Landau & Gluskinos, 1992). As Arsenault (2007) suggests, "Universities are definitively not immune to this need for effective leadership as

they face similar challenges as any other organization” (p. 14). However, leadership development in higher education is still an under-investigated field of research and application (Bryman, 2007; Castle & Schutz, 2002). To date, faculty are appointed to a senior rank based upon their deep subject knowledge, experience, and scientific accomplishment (e.g., number of publications in international journals), not based on leadership skills. Subsequently, senior faculty members hold leadership positions without adequate preparation. Moreover, to strengthen organizational effectiveness the expectations placed on senior faculty are often excessively high (Beck-Frazier, White & McFadden, 2007). Often academic leaders address the resulting work-overload inadequately (Rowley & Sherman, 2003). However, few authors have taken into consideration the specific challenges faced by academic leaders, such as the complex and dynamic social, economic, and political contexts most colleagues and universities are operating in, as well as the consequences of effective or rather ineffective leadership in higher education (Smith & Hughey, 2006). In spite of the enormous importance of effective leadership in higher education, concrete suggestions for specific development programs are scarce (e.g., Arsenault, 2007). This is the challenge in leadership education we will address.

According to Day (2000), the approaches to facilitate effective leadership can be differentiated into “leader” and “leadership” development. To be more specific, he defines leader development as a “purposeful investment in human capital” that typically emphasizes “individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities” of (future) leaders (p. 584).

In contrast, Day (2000) contends that leadership development incorporates the expansion of “the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in organizational roles and processes” and is specifically directed towards “groups of people to learn their way out of problems that could not have been predicted” (p. 582). We agree with this differentiation and apply it to the development programs introduced in this article.

Consequently, the purpose of the article is to present two approaches that facilitate effective leadership in higher education, with the first program focusing on the individual level (leader development) and the second program aiming at the development of leadership on a group level (leadership development). Initially, we introduce the general concept of the Center for Leadership and People Management, which offers these programs for senior and junior faculty at Ludwig-Maximilian University (LMU) in Munich, Germany.

## **The LMU Center for Leadership and People Management**

The LMU Center for Leadership and People Management aims to promote researchers' scientific excellence by facilitating effective leadership and teamwork. The underlying premise of the center is that academic excellence depends not only on researchers' scientific knowledge and skills, but also on their ability to motivate and lead their staff effectively (Peus & Frey, 2009).

Consequently, the center offers a variety of courses for senior and junior faculty. Course contents as well as methods applied are grounded in scientific evidence. Furthermore, individual coaching sessions are offered to (future) academic leaders. This multilevel approach meets the requirements for creating "good leaders" proposed by Stech (2008). A combination of theoretical education, practical training sessions, and individual developmental activities are recommended (e.g., coaching; Stech, 2008). The contents taught in our courses specifically address the challenges faced by researchers, such as restructuring and internationalization of study programs, financial constraints, or lack of long-term career perspectives. For example, we offer a four-hour introductory course on leadership and motivation for junior and senior faculty to improve their abilities in promoting innovation and academic excellence. The course is followed by a moderated exchange of experiences, which enhances the transfer of the theoretical content into one's daily work environment.

The program of the LMU Center for Leadership and People Management is based on three pillars. *(a) All activities are designed in line with the strategic goals of the university:*

- Academic excellence.
- Development of young academics.
- Interdisciplinary cooperation.
- Internationality.
- Gender equality.

We maintain and advance the university's reputation by reinforcing its goals as a core target of our developmental programs. *(b) Our activities correspond to the educational demands of university academics.* To ensure that our courses meet the specific needs of junior and senior faculty we conducted an interview-based needs analysis. *(c) All teaching contents and methods are grounded in theories and results from scientific research.* The application of evidence-based concepts for the purposes of practical training and coaching is a unique characteristic of our approach.

In the following section, we present two programs offered by the LMU Center for Leadership and People Management, including an individual level approach for

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leader development of junior faculty and a group level approach for leadership development within university departments.

### **Development for Future Leaders**

Junior faculty as future leaders are a particularly relevant target group for development activities as they profoundly affect tomorrow's universities. According to the definition provided by Day (2000), junior faculty development can be seen as one specific approach to leader development that is directed towards young talent on an individual level. However, most universities have left the field of developing future leaders untouched and existing programs are rarely based on sound theoretical background such as transactional and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985, 1998; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Additionally, the evaluation of leadership development activities faces specific challenges (Hannun & Craig, 2008) and as a result, the programs are often not evaluated according to scientific standards (Elmuti, Minnis, & Abebe, 2005). Multilevel evaluation criteria and multiple methods for data collection are lacking, however, they are necessary to improve the validity of evaluations (Hannun & Craig, 2008). Our program, therefore, includes: (a) an examination of individual development over time, (b) evaluation according to multi-level criteria, and (c) the use of multiple methods for data collection. We designed this program with the aim of supporting promising junior faculty with regard to their leadership skills. The program comprises two group workshops and up to three individual coaching sessions per person. All interventions were developed based on theories such as transactional and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985, 1998), justice in teams (Colquitt, Noe, & Jackson, 2002), goal setting (Locke & Latham, 2002), and negotiation and conflict management (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991).

#### **Leader Development Program**

Based on the findings from previous workshops, qualitative needs assessments, and a review of research findings, we identified three main areas important to leader development for junior faculty: (a) setting goals and priorities, (b) interpersonal relations, communication, and conflict, and (c) career planning and work-life balance.

A small group of high performing individuals (about 10 persons) were selected to participate in this program based on several inclusion criteria (e.g., publications, relevant work experiences, and previous grants or scholarships).

The leader development program consists of two workshops. The first one-day workshop focuses on the following issues:

- identification of basic work-related and private values,

- targeted vs. actual involvement in various areas of life,
- identification of resources, potential, and strengths,
- successful work relationships with supervisor and colleagues,
- self-marketing, and
- setting short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals and priorities.

The primary objective of the first workshop is analyzing the participants' current status, as well as identifying areas for improvement. Additionally, participants are acquainted with knowledge about some work- and time-management tools. Methodological focus in the workshop is on group discussions and peer coaching.

The first workshop is followed by up to three individual coaching sessions. According to Arsenault (2007), individual coaching sessions should be part of academic leadership development programs to help participants implement course content in their day-to-day work. Issues discussed during coaching sessions are: individual decision-making, leading and motivating student assistants, and conflict with colleagues. The experienced coaches, all trained team members from LMU Center for Leadership and People Management, use various methods such as behavior modification or systemic coaching tools.

The second one-day workshop covers additional issues around career planning and serves as a wrap-up for remaining questions.

### **Evaluation Concept**

The evaluation of the leader development program is challenging because individual characteristics, situational constraints, and post-training motivation influence transfer of training (Cannon-Bowers, Salas, Tannenbaum, & Mathieu, 1995). As a result, we based our evaluation on the revised version of Kirkpatrick's model for training evaluation (cited in Alliger et al., 1997). It comprises four levels of evaluation criteria: (a) affective and utility reactions, (b) learning – including immediate knowledge, knowledge retention, and behavior/skill demonstration, (c) transfer – indicating on-the-job performance, and (d) results – comprising productivity gains.

In our evaluation of the program the main outcome variables are goal attainment, emotional and behavioral functioning of participants, as well as their satisfaction with the program. Additionally, the relevance of several personality traits such as procrastination, self-efficacy and perseverance is tested as potential moderators of the program's effectiveness. In addition to self-report data, we also include 360 or 180 degree feedback and qualitative data from interviews with the participants two months after the second workshop. Participants who signed up for the

program's waiting list are used as one control group. In addition, we add a second control group taking part in different courses.

The launch of the leader development program was accompanied by great interest among young researchers. The first evaluation results indicate its practical relevance and effectiveness on a variety of evaluation and career measures.

### **Leadership Development within University Departments**

Bensimon and Neumann (1992) state the challenge for an academic leader is to "mold a group of people so that they lead, act, and think together" (p. 281). Taking into account Day's (2000) definition of "leadership development" as applying to "groups of people" (p. 582), we emphasize the idea that development on a group level is crucial for the facilitation of effective leadership in higher education. As a result, the program is specifically directed towards the improvement of academic performance through the integrated development of leadership and teamwork among university departments.

### **Leadership Development by "Cooperation Culture"**

The program "Cooperation Culture" offers its participants a unique opportunity to implement specific, empirically derived developmental activities designed to strengthen the department's leadership and teamwork. The starting point is a thorough, scientifically based analysis of the department's leadership and teamwork processes. The goal of this analysis is to identify particular strengths and potentials for improvement within the department. A broad range of topics related to leadership and teamwork are examined, such as:

- leadership style,
- communication,
- conflict management,
- workload and stress,
- job motivation and satisfaction, and
- strategies for dealing with change.

In addition, the analytical focus is thoroughly adapted according to the needs of the participating department. When the diagnostic phase is completed, the department is assisted with the implementation of improved leadership and teamwork structures with scientifically based development methods.

### **Underlying Theoretical Concepts**

A unique feature of this program is that leadership development is based on well established scientific concepts. Although the content of the analysis may vary

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according to the individual needs of a department, certain concepts are always included:

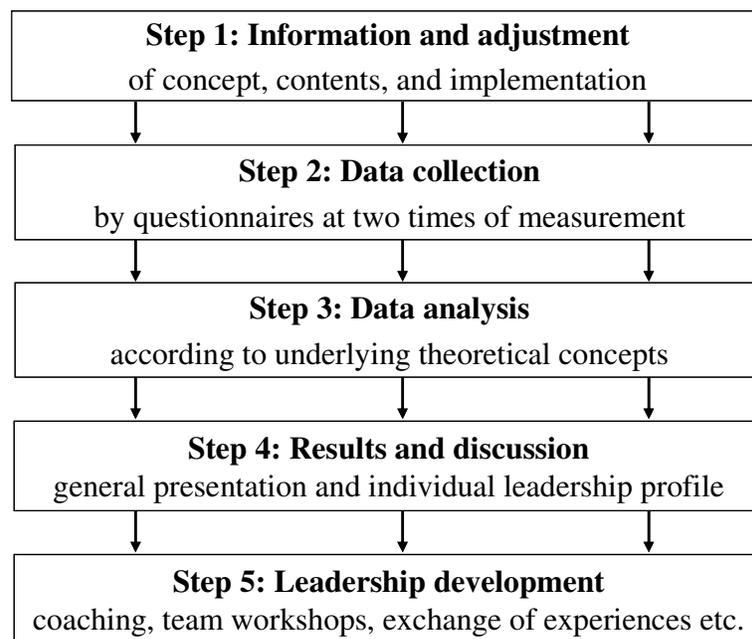
- *Transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, 1985, 1998)*  
Transactional leadership describes leadership as a transaction between a leader and a follower based on the clarification of expectations and the rewards for one's performance. Transformational leadership is assumed to have an effect on performance beyond a leader's expectations (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). It is directed towards the individual needs and values of the followers.
- *Team climate for innovation (Anderson & West, 1996)*  
The team climate for innovation is based on four aspects: participative safety, support for innovation, vision, and task orientation. It is assumed that the climate for innovation is especially important for team success and satisfaction.
- *Intra-group conflict (Jehn, 1995)*  
Intra-group conflict is not necessarily counterproductive: Moderate levels of task conflict, especially in groups with non-routine tasks, can encourage group members to present dissenting viewpoints. However, in the case of relationship conflict, work performance can decline.
- *Commitment to change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002)*  
This concept considers whether employees actually support the implementation of change processes in their working environment or whether they feel pressured to adapt to new standards.

### **Analysis and Leadership Development**

In the first step of this program (see Figure 1), the department's members receive detailed information about the theoretical background and scientific methodology. During this meeting, particularly relevant issues are discussed and subsequently included in the analysis. The second step involves the administration of two questionnaires (online or paper-pencil). The measurement is split up into two test intervals to ensure the scientific basis of the results by limiting single source and single method bias (Avolio, Yammarino & Bass, 1991). This is followed by the third step, *data analysis*. Subsequently, the results are presented and discussed with the department head and the team (fourth step). The presentation gives evidence-based suggestions for leadership and teamwork development within the department. For all department heads evaluated by five or more of their team members, individual leadership profiles are prepared. Building on the results, but also considering the expectations of the department's members, specific methods for the development of leadership and teamwork are implemented as the fifth step (e.g., individual coaching, team workshops, or moderated exchange of experiences).

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Figure 1. Process of analysis and leadership development



### **Conclusions: How to Facilitate Effective Leadership in Higher Education**

The purpose of this article was to present two approaches for the facilitation of effective leadership in higher education. The first program focuses on leader development on an individual level, whereas the second program focuses on leadership development on a departmental level.

From the experience we have gathered in implementing these programs, we derive four major recommendations for leadership educators in higher education:

- *Exact fit of teaching content.*  
The specific challenges of higher education (Smith & Hughey, 2006) ask for an exact adjustment of teaching content. We suggest that leadership educators should integrate the specific topics relevant to (future) academic leaders (e.g., long-term career planning, goal setting, or work-life balance), and adapt their teaching content accordingly.
- *Use of multiple training methods.*  
In line with Stech (2008), we suggest the combination of various intervention methods, e.g., individual and group approaches (Day, 2000), as well as theoretical and applied learning to facilitate transfer into daily leadership practice.
- *Scientifically-based program evaluation.*  
We strongly recommend more research on evaluation procedures in the

field of leadership development in higher education. This includes the use of multi-level evaluation criteria and multiple methods for data-collection (Hannun & Craig, 2008).

- *Strategic cooperation of leadership educators in higher education.*  
To date, systematic leadership development plays only a minor role in higher education (Bryman, 2007). We strongly recommend leadership educators to share their present practical experience and empirically based knowledge with each other in order to facilitate systematic leadership development in higher education area around the world.

The development of effective leadership is crucial for performance and success not only in commercial organizations, but also in academia (Bensimon & Neumann, 1992). Many of the methods presented here can be applied in leadership development initiatives in various types of organizations including commercial and non-profit organizations as well as public administrations. Hence, we would like to encourage leadership developers at universities as well as in the business setting to experiment with the application of the described approaches in their specific areas.

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