

## TRAINING LEADERSHIP TRAINERS: Cultivating the Next Generation of Leadership Educators in Nicaragua

### Abstract

Although the leadership training and development industry generates billions of dollars each year, some countries lag behind. This article explores one program's attempt to expand leadership training and development opportunities in Nicaragua. The Leadership Trainer Certification Program (LTCP) is designed to prepare those who are responsible for the leadership development of others with the knowledge, skills, and facilitation techniques to effectively train others in leadership. In this article, we detail qualitative narrative data from one participant's experience to share how he translated his learning into his leadership training and development practice. This article illuminates how leadership train-the-trainer programming can re-shape the leadership landscape, especially in places like Nicaragua and throughout the Global South.

### Introduction

The leadership training industry, across the globe, is worth billions of dollars and grows at seemingly exponential rates. The exact number is difficult to pinpoint. One data set suggested that as we approached the millennium shift into the 2000's, investment in leadership education and development approached \$50 billion (Ready & Conger, 2003). Another suggested that in 2010, U.S.-based organizations invested \$12 billion in leadership development programs and activities (Ashford & DeRue, 2012). And another estimated that in 2013, the leadership training and development industry to be worth over \$24 billion dollars—a 15% increase from the year prior (Ashkenaus & Hausmann, 2016).

Training Industry ([www.TrainingIndustry.com](http://www.TrainingIndustry.com)), an organization that promotes itself as the most trusted source of information on the business of learning, compiles financial data on the training industry, broadly. They indicate that the total global spend on training in 2019, of which leadership training and development is a part, was over \$370 billion US dollars. In North America, it exceeded \$169 billion US dollars. Comparatively, North America represents about 46% percent of the global training market. It is not clear based upon Training Industry's data if Nicaragua is considered part of South America at only 2% of the global training market or if Central American countries are lumped with 'the rest of the world' at 1%. Per Training Industries' research,

between the decades of 2010 – 2020, the training industry grew by \$100 billion dollars.

In the Global North, leadership training and development is commonly offered through leadership coaching, conferences, retreats, seminars, webinars, and workshops. There is no shortage of books, magazines, and online resources. Motivational speakers, understanding how hot 'leadership' is, exploit this "L" word in their marketing and promotion. Certificates, undergraduate studies, and graduate-level academic programs focusing on leadership—or just strategically utilizing the word—continue to proliferate. In the Global South—Nicaragua in particular—there is a different story altogether.

This paper begins by detailing the environment, state of affairs, and leadership landscape in Nicaragua. We then offer a description of the Leadership Trainer Certification Program—a train-the-trainer experience for those charged with and expected to facilitate the leadership training and development of others. To highlight the experience of one Nicaraguan participant, we share a conversation between the two authors, framed around Manuel's Leadership Trainer Certification Program participant experience. Before concluding the paper, we offer recommendations for the Leadership Trainer Certification Program and other leadership development experiences.

## Nicaragua in Context

The Republic of Nicaragua, a country of just over 6 million people, is the largest—by land mass—country in Central America. The Northern border is shared with Honduras. The Southern border, Costa Rica. The Pacific Ocean laps against the entirety of the western edge of the country. The Caribbean Sea, the eastern portion of the country.

Nicaragua is the second-poorest country in the Western Hemisphere—Haiti is the poorest—not a statistic for which they strive (World Population Review, 2021). Basic services are a challenge for most of the population. Approximately 45.7% of the population lives on less than \$2 per day (Nicaraguan Central Bank, 2017). Although there was sustained growth in 2016, 2017, and early 2018, the World Bank expects, due to

political and social unrest (since April 2018 and lingering into 2021) and the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy is forecasted to weaken.

Within all of Latin America, Nicaragua necessitates the least amount of mandatory education—only 7 years, from preschool to elementary school. In 2019, of those within the 25 – 35-year-old age bracket, only 23.4% had completed high school (Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina SITEAL, 2019). School infrastructures are precarious. Data from the Nicaraguan Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUNIDES) indicates that less than half (only 48.5%) of Nicaragua's educational centers have drinkable water and more than half (52.6%) of the classrooms need repair, rehabilitation, or remodeling. Other data highlights that in 2017, Nicaragua's Ministry of Education employed 55,000 teachers. Of these, 22% were considered to be without any degree, credential, or training to serve in that capacity. The average teacher annual salary is \$2,308 USD—this is less than \$200 USD per month (Ministerio del Trabajo, Nicaragua, 2021). For reference, the cost of living for a family of five is \$430 a month. (Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo, Nicaragua, August 2021).

Due to multiple factors, including economic limitations, it is estimated that nearly 500,000 young people do not study nor work in Nicaragua (Tunnermann, 2017). Collectively, these data indicate that students' learning and cognitive development are at risk. The socio-economic challenges result in higher rates of domestic violence, teen pregnancy, and unemployment, a perfect storm for an insufficient quality of public education (Tunnermann, 2017). The result is a significant portion of the population failing to learn basic educational capabilities such as reading, writing, and analytical thinking. Furthermore, the government-backed education system is criticized as a politicized and indoctrinating political instrument (Romero, 2018).

In Nicaragua, leadership and politics go hand-in-hand. Leadership is recognized as a role exclusively reserved for those who venture into the political field. This is a centuries-old concept rooted in both the indigenous cultural-hierarchy and emphasized with the Spanish colonization and conquest of the Americas. The image of a Chief or King—one who is divinely anointed and destined to rule with his God-given power and authority as a hero-leader—is common in Nicaraguan culture and

imagination. Although historical, this conception of leadership manifests in contemporary Nicaragua contexts.

Daniel Ortega led the Sandinista Revolution of the late-1970's and early 1980's against the three-generation Somoza family dictatorship. Following the overturn, Ortega served as the country's foremost positional leader for more than a decade until 1990. Three Presidential elections ensued in which he lost. In 2006 he was elected to serve as Nicaragua's President. Since then, he has weakened democratic institutions, pursued a power-grab, and has garnered full control over all branches of government (Ramos, Baltodano, & Bellorin, 2020). This has been accomplished by installing friends and allies in the Supreme Court, Election Commission, and other critical government posts. For example, his wife, Rosario Murillo, serves as Nicaragua's Vice President and the government's official spokesperson. His children command the nation's media outlets.

In advance of the November 2021 election, Ortega announced his candidacy for what many believe to be an unconstitutional fourth term. As part of his election strategy, he passed laws that stipulate the President has the power to unilaterally declare citizens terrorists, classify them as traitors to the homeland, and ban them from running as candidates. Specifically, the law bans candidates who lead or finance a coup, encourage foreign interference, ask for military intervention, propose or plan economic blockades (which occurred during massive political and social unrest in 2018), or applaud and champion the imposition of sanctions against Nicaragua or its citizens (Human Rights Watch, 2020). With this last point, social media posts that simply share news of sanctions can be perceived as applauding or championing those sanctions. This was a precursor to his actions in the summer of 2021.

Between May and September 2021, for instance, twenty-nine opposition candidates, business leaders, journalists, media personalities, and other outspoken individuals became political prisoners (*Mecanismo para el reconomiento de personas presas políticas*, 2021)—arrested for what many international election observers claim as false charges (Mendoza & Kurmanaev, 2021). "Being a social leader and carrying out community work is a high-risk activity, especially in societies with vast social inequities, fragile democracies,

marked clientelism, corruption, and violence as a mechanism of social control to preserve power by elites allied with hegemonic power and at times with crime" (Shockman, Hernández Soto, Boitano de Moras, 2019, p. 63).

## The Leadership Landscape in Nicaragua

Leadership training and development provides the foundations for addressing local and global challenges. In a politicized context, such as in Nicaragua, this can represent a threat to the political establishment and status quo. Nicaragua is governed with a limited budget. Investment in education is not a priority. It should be no surprise that the leadership training and development infrastructure in Nicaragua is limited. These endeavors are perceived as a luxury—if they are even in one's frame of reference.

In Nicaragua, formal leadership training and development opportunities are almost nonexistent. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts along with other youth-based programming like Big Sister/Big Brothers are rare. Although some higher education institutions advertise their programs as leadership developmental, their curricula do not include intentional leadership education components. University co-curricular experiences, where students in North America have opportunities to explore and experiment with leadership, are simply exempt from the educational experience. Professional associations and conferences are uncommon. In-house Learning and Development offices within corporate entities are absent. Informal opportunities for leadership training and development, such as community service projects, faith-based groups, and participation in international associations (e.g., Rotary International) neglect to provide intentional interventions to enhance leadership capacities or skills.

This deficiency of a leadership training and development infrastructure has resulted in an ingrained leadership culture that assumes leadership is about position, power, and prestige. This leads to a focus on personal reward—a 'what's in it for me?' leadership attitude. The outcome is the acceptance of corrupt practices. Transparency International, for 2018, has ranked Nicaragua as the 152<sup>nd</sup> most corrupt nation—out of 180 nations across the globe. This is 'highly corrupt'.

The leadership culture demonstrated in Nicaragua is not new nor is it special to that particular country. van Vugt and Ahuja (2011) suggest that this has been the dominant leadership paradigm since we societally transitioned from Hunter-Gatherers to Agrarian societies millennia ago. A hallmark of Hunter-Gatherer societies was cooperative leadership and decision-making processes based upon the interests of the collective. A shift occurred with the emergence of Agrarian societies. Once this societal shift occurred, individual decision-making by those who wielded the most power—based upon their own personal interests—became the *modus operandi*. This leadership tradition has been so strongly woven into the fabric of our leadership psyche that it is engrained in our contemporary understandings, expectations, and applications of leadership today. Notwithstanding, there is an opportunity for change.

With the advent of technology, the internet has provided younger generations of Nicaraguans a glimpse of alternative leadership models. They are more open to challenge the antiquated perspectives of leadership and dismantle the socially -constructed notion that leadership is a trait-based phenomenon solely reserved for the political elite.

Culture-change takes time. It is a long-term, generational endeavor. This though, is a seemingly ripe opportunity in Nicaragua for leadership culture-change. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Nicaragua has the largest youth bulge in the whole of Latin America—with over 2 million school-aged children—approximately one third of the country's population. Of those, an estimated 500,000 (one quarter) of the youth (aged 3 – 17) are not in the formal educational system.

Nonprofit organizations in Nicaragua are the entities that serve the youth and families detailed by the UNESCO data. For example, JustHope focuses on combatting extreme poverty through agriculture, education, health, and social enterprise projects. They highlight that through their programs, they support the community (families, students, teachers, and schools) by providing experiences where individuals develop the skills needed to pursue steady employment and make healthy life decisions.

Nica Nadadores, another NGO, utilizes the sport of swimming as a tool to empower the next generation of leaders in under-served communities in Nicaragua. They claim to be more than just a swim team. They identify as a youth development and empowerment program, community service vehicle, and scholarship initiative.

Another organization, Soluciones Comunitarias is organized to design and offer social innovations to improve the economy and health of community members. SolCom, as they are affectionately known, provides financial literacy training, small business consultation, and an award-winning micro-consignment initiative that assists entrepreneurs by loaning products at no interest. The small businesses keep the profits for what is sold. If the product does not sell, it is returned to SolCom at no cost. All three of these examples, and countless more, explicitly, and implicitly offer leadership development and skills-training as part of their initiatives and mission-objectives.

Unfortunately, the nonprofit leaders at the helm of these organizations and their initiatives are rarely—if ever—trained in leadership. The result is leadership development experiences that are ill-informed or ineffective. This professional population—nonprofit leaders—are on the front-lines of educating the next generation of leaders. If they can be trained on how to effectively facilitate the leadership development of others, then, over time, a more compassionate, collective, and resonant leadership model will replace the current corruption-laden paradigm.

## **The Leadership Trainer Certification Program**

How can we effectively develop the leadership skills and capacities of others if we do not have the theoretical knowledge, practical abilities, or facilitation skills to do so? This is the guiding question that initiated and now frames *El Programa de Certificación para Entrenadores en Liderazgo* (The Leadership Trainer Certification Program).

The Leadership Trainer Certification Program is designed to appeal to those who are charged with and responsible for the leadership development of others. The 60-hour curriculum is designed to provide an intentional and immersive leadership train-the-trainer

experience to prepare individuals to better serve their organizations and communities. It has two fundamental goals. First, it prepares participants with the knowledge, skills, and dynamism to effectively facilitate the leadership learning and development of others. Just as important, due to the limited leadership infrastructure and opportunities for leadership exploration in Nicaragua, a second objective is to provide an intentional space for participants to enhance their own leadership skills and practices.

### **2017 Pilot Program.**

The 2017 *Programa de Certificación para Entrenadores en Liderazgo* was structured over seven weeks. Participants met for full-day Saturdays in a private space in the back of a Bed & Breakfast and café in central León, Nicaragua. The LTCP was designed and led by one Lead Facilitator—one of the authors of this paper. Three Guest Facilitators participated in-person over three different weeks to share their expertise on various leadership topics. When designing the experience, the creators were intent on it being a hands-on and immersive experience. Learning about leadership and leadership training—particularly with experiential learning and reflective dialogue—occurred by actually engaging the participants in it. The seven-week experience was crafted for participants to have ample time to experiment with their own facilitation tactics and techniques. This was intentional as a skills-building endeavor as well as preparatory for their Certification Exam during Week Seven. In a literal sense, participants read select leadership literature during the week and engaged in enrichment experiences and reflective dialogue during the Saturday sessions to process, unpack, and expand their leadership learning and facilitation skills-building.

The curricula for each week were bifurcated into three sections: an exploration into leadership theories; the development of leadership competencies and practices; and the acquisition and enhancement of facilitation skills—particularly with experiential learning and reflective dialogue. Week One served as an introduction and overview. We cultivated relationships and fostered our learning community by exploring, reflecting upon, and dialoguing about what we believe leadership to be and the diverse ways it is defined. We reviewed the differences between hard and human (soft) leadership practices. The conclusion to this Saturday was an overview of experiential learning and reflective dialogue

and how to infuse these methods into our leadership training facilitation—with the Learning Partnerships Model (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004)—as a framework or praxis.

Week Two offered a trajectory of leadership—in theory and scholarship. We also engaged in a surface-level review of industrial leadership theories—Trait, Skills, and Behavioral approaches to leadership. For practices, we reviewed visioning as well as emotional intelligence. The facilitation component provided an overview of Leadership Trainer's Narrative Approach to leadership trainings—where trainers design a five-pronged training story.

Week Three was dedicated to the Situational Approach to Leadership as well as the Path-Goal and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theories. The practices focused on communication as well as understanding dissonance and navigating leadership toxicity. The facilitation component expanded on the practices component by exploring communication techniques for leadership trainers.

Week Four began to explore post-industrial leadership theories. This included Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Authentic Leadership. For practices, we reviewed the importance of integrating reflection and action as a healthy leadership habit as well as mindfulness—so we can lead in an awake and attuned way. Our facilitation feature for this week was on how to facilitate reflective exercises such as worksheet-based activities. For example, during the program, these included an adapted MBTI exercise as well as values activity whereby participants narrowed their most important leadership values from a list of over 100 to just two.

Week Five included Adaptive Leadership, the Social Change Model of Leadership, and the Leadership Challenge—as our theories. Our practices focused on cultivating flow and effectively engaging with groups and teams. The facilitation element capitalized on this by focusing on facilitating group development and teamwork-based activities.

Week Six included the Fundamental State of Leadership, Theory U, and Conviction in Action as our leadership theories. The practices for this week centered on asking powerful questions and hope as leadership skills. The facilitation portion focused on technical skills

for navigating obstacles—particularly with time and participant management.

Week Seven focused on gender and culture in leadership. Our practices focused on leading ethically and with compassion. And the final facilitation practice was rooted in trainer presence. Before the end of this Week (this Saturday), participants facilitated a miniature training that incorporated their learning from the seven-week experience. This served as the Certification Exam. All seven passed and became Certified Leadership Trainers.

*Participant recruitment.* In early 2017, an open call went out through the LTCP's sponsoring organization to invite participation. Enticements included scholarships to participate, promotion of potential paid facilitation opportunities once participants earned their certification, free resources including a 200-page Training Manual, meals, and the programming objective—a leadership development experience that would enhance our participant's leadership skills while preparing them to serve as effective leadership trainers and developers of others.

*Participants.* The 2017 *Programa de Certificación para Entrenadores en Liderazgo* pilot experience, included five nonprofit leaders and two middle managers of international call centers—seven participants in total. Each of these participants had front-facing leadership development responsibilities to their constituents or supervisees. Due to their roles, they were formally charged with or responsible for the leadership skills development and capacity building of others. Aged between 20 and 35, these participants are considered the next generation of organizational and community leaders. (The names used below are pseudonyms to protect the identity of these individuals.)

*Participant interest.* During the first session of the LTCP, participants vocalized their interest in

participating through recorded group sharing. We include some of their reflections here. Enrique, a middle manager of an international call center, suggested that learning how to facilitate leadership development enables training participants to “reencounter our forgotten humanity.” Carlos, an undergraduate university student on summer break with an insatiable interest in leadership, participated because he wanted to help people “understand that they have a voice...and that they matter, especially in our country, Nicaragua.” He went on to offer that leadership training and development “offers ways to get to know people, to organize people, to empower people—and that is why it is important. I want to learn those tools.”

Juana, another international call center middle manager, excitedly suggested her participation was rooted in gaining the skills to become a better leader. “If I can become a better leader with this training, I want to do it!” Gloria, a director-level team member of an English-language nonprofit, registered because she was “thirsty” for this kind of opportunity. She believed the program would enhance her skills and improve the condition of her life as a young woman in Nicaragua.

Isidro, a nonprofit coordinator who interfaces with teachers in a rural school district to develop their teaching skills, commented that he was particularly interested to learn new things about leadership. This program would, in a healthy way, “challenge” what he knows about leadership. He went on to offer that “learning to facilitate gives you the tools to put yourself in any situation, with any group of people, in any environment.”—what he and others believe to be a very valuable skill set.

Finally, Manuel—an author of this paper—wanted to provide for folks who otherwise would have never had the opportunity to explore and experiment with leadership. Following the methodological framing, we provide a narrative dialogue to detail Manuel's experience of the Leadership Trainer Certification Program and how he has utilized

the learning from the LTCP in his leadership and leadership training practice.

*Methodological framing.* Qualitative research is designed, structured, and employed with an attempt to *understand*.

The purpose of studying other people in depth is not to measure, predict, or classify them. Our purpose is to *understand*, more extensively or deeply, other people's experiences of some aspect of their lives. Our focus is on subjectivity (Josselson, 2013, p. viii).

By framing broad questions to be reflected upon and responded to, rather than forming premature hypotheses, we avoided predicting or controlling the outcome. By focusing on Manuel's lived experience of the Leadership Trainer Certification Program, we could capture his particular reflections, beliefs, and attitudes. With the publication of these reflections, beliefs, and attitudes, we encourage and foster learning (Magolda, 2000)—learning that may be applied to other leadership training and development contexts.

Specifically, our methodology is narrative in nature with an emphasis in autoethnography. With this approach, we utilized narrative dialogue, autobiographical self-study, and memory work to construct stories of personal experience (Butler-Kisber, 2010). The interview questions were designed to plumb the depths and complexities of Manuel's experience—with the attempt to enlarge rather than reduce the picture already present in the scholarly literature (Josselson, 2013).

The commentary below is derived from video-based dialogues between the two authors that were hosted between February and April of 2021. The recorded-and-then-transcribed commentary was utilized to frame this article and report these reflections. It is intended to be conversational in nature.

### **Manuel's Leadership Trainer Certification Program Experience.**

Manuel is a talented nonprofit executive and serves as the Country Executive Director of *Organización Comunitaria (OC)*—a thirty-five-year-old nonprofit organization based in Nicaragua's northwest. Both Manuel and *Organización Comunitaria* are pseudonyms. Due to the political situation in Nicaragua, it is important to protect their identities as a matter of personal and organizational safety.

*Organización Comunitaria* serves a community that is economically and culturally driven by agriculture and cattle ranching for the 25,000 city residents and the 15,000 citizens who live in the rural environment surrounding the city. OC's programming and projects focus on sustainable community development. Specifically, the aim is to break the cycle of poverty for the most disadvantaged children and youth through the investment on education and other youth-developmental initiatives. For example, a variety of afterschool programs—including tutoring, technical classes for adolescents, environmental education, career counseling, educational field trips, college scholarships, and psychological counseling—are accessible to everyone in the greater community. OC also funds a model preschool with the purpose of introducing preschool educators to new methods of teaching. Working closely with the city Ministry of Education, the preschool is implementing best-practices to improve teacher skills and enhance early education.

#### **Narrative dialogue.**

**Jonathan:** Manuel, prior to enrolling in the Leadership Trainer Certification Program, what was your interest for participating?

**Manuel:** To best answer this question, it is important to share some of my leadership development experiences and previous roles as a nonprofit director. My first intentional leadership experience was in 2010, when I was hired as a Program Coordinator in Nicaragua for a US organization that provided cultural immersion trips for delegations of high school students from the US (to Nicaragua). This was

the first time I ever had an opportunity to explore leadership or train in leadership.

Growing up in Nicaragua, there were no opportunities. It was only through this professional role, at age twenty-three, through a US-based international NGO, that I could explore leadership. In fact, this was a major facet of the program and the position. To me, this was awareness-raising. For instance, it highlighted that in Nicaragua, leadership is rooted in power, specifically economic power. A person's socio-economic status determines leadership opportunities. The more wealth people have, the more power they have. The more power they have, the more they are perceived as leaders. I do not believe that leadership should just be for the privileged classes. Yet, in Nicaragua, then and now, the people who had the chance to travel, or go to private high schools were the ones who were leading. On top of that, the educational system trains students solely to listen to those who have power and do what they say. It does not teach critical thinking.

When I applied for the job, I was concerned I was not going to get it because I did not have a *leadership* background. Ultimately, I was hired. And in this role, my responsibility was to create and deliver a twenty-one day education, community service, and leadership program in one of the three cities where the organization operated in Nicaragua.

Over the next few years, I advanced within the organization. By the third year I was responsible for overseeing the program in all three cities and to lead the expansion effort to a fourth city. In my new role, I was responsible for providing leadership training and guidance to the new site-specific Program Coordinators who were responsible for providing the direct-service programming for the participants. My experiences with this organization were the backbone for my professional and leadership development. It highlighted the importance of education and leadership training for the development of a country.

Fast forward to my current position—and to answer your question regarding my interest in the LTCP—as Country Executive Director of a community-based educational nonprofit—I am in a position where I can contribute to the educational and leadership development of kids and youth from my community. However, most of what I had learned about leadership was from my own experiences and what I could find on the internet. I was lacking intentional leadership training. I wanted to learn about leadership theories. I wanted to explore the literature that could provide a foundation to my leadership knowledge. Being aware of my leadership position, I looked for opportunities to develop the leadership skills for my role and to train others. I wanted to learn more, so I joined the LTCP.

**Jonathan:** And how was the leadership learning experience for you?

**Manuel:** This is exactly what I was looking for. Every session was structured to provide training opportunities on how to facilitate leadership sessions for a variety of groups; learning to be flexible and aware of the individual needs of the training participants; identifying participant's areas of strength and areas of growth in their interaction with others and their skills to effectively lead, train, and inspire others and to provide the tactics that facilitates the learning of the participants. You gave us the structure to facilitate leadership workshops while enhancing our own leadership skills.

I also appreciated that it was a safe environment that helped create a space for free expression. This was key for the positive group interactions with the other participants. It promoted the exchange of ideas that allowed us to deepen the understanding of these leadership theories and practices. Finally, the program was an opportunity for self-evaluation. I was able to identify my personal leadership and leadership training strengths, as well as the areas that I need to improve upon personally and professionally.

I was also able to cultivate relationships and expand my network with other nonprofit leaders.



The LTCP was an opportunity to interact with other leaders from local organizations who had similar motivations to train on leadership best-practices.

Now, I believe I am a stronger trainer. I feel more secure in structuring workshops and ensuring they flow. My workshops are comprehensive and easy to digest for the participants. Now, I believe they are fun, interactive, and meaningful. I feel like the participants can confidently say *I learned*, by the end of the workshop.

Ultimately, it was something new. I wanted to participate in something new. This type of leadership development experience is not common in Nicaragua. I wanted to be a part of it!

**Jonathan:** You were starting to share about what you learned, can you expand on that?

**Manuel:** One of the strengths of the LTCP is that it presents leadership practices and theories in a digestible way for someone who hasn't had any formal leadership formation. It was a nurturing experience as it helped create the foundational knowledge in leadership and facilitating meaningful training opportunities. I feel capable of creating and delivering inspirational, educational, and meaningful leadership courses, workshops, or retreats. The LTCP gave me the confidence to pass on the leadership learning to more people.

One of the things that made me more confident is the academic foundations. Before, I would google the leadership or training topic. Now I have the knowledge base and the resources from the books and training manual from the program.

Specifically with facilitating training, I am now comfortable with how to structure a workshop or retreat. The program was not just about learning the concepts, it was about comfortably doing it during our weekly sessions. I learned how to present myself as a facilitator, how to give participants the opportunity to be engaged, how to create a safe training environment, how to navigate challenging situations and balance diverse opinions of

participants. There is still so much to learn! I keep thinking about how I might apply this learning to my work with *Organización Comunitaria*.

**Jonathan:** Manuel, you just mentioned that you keep thinking about how you apply your learning from the LTCP to your role with *Organización Comunitaria*. Can you share more about *how* you are applying your learning to your work?

**Manuel:** After the LTCP, I've had the opportunity to provide a number of workshops for my co-workers and adolescents on different topics—leadership ethics, emotional intelligence, [leadership] soft skills, self-esteem, among others. But also to mentor my peers on building the capacity for them to facilitate trainings for the adolescents we work with.

More practically, as an administrator, because the LTCP provides a library of different leadership theories and practices, I've been able to refer to them and go back to the books, adapting the different leadership theories to different challenges I face as an organizational leader. My reading of leadership theories also expanded the way I see the everyday challenges at work and in personal life. I have developed a culture of self-reflection as a way to process more deeply the problems and evaluate possible solutions. I am now putting into practice what we learned in the program from the seminars, the practice, the reflections, the group interaction, and feedback from my peers.

I am also creating intentional leadership development opportunities for the staff and the adolescents of *Organización Comunitaria*. We can't expect people to develop leadership skills if we—those who are in leadership positions—don't provide intentional leadership development opportunities. I had given leadership workshops before the LTCP. After the LTCP, they are better structured with better logical processes. Most people here [in Nicaragua] have not had the opportunity for an intentional leadership training. To provide it for them is heart-warming. When people are aware of their leadership potential, they want to

participate more, learn more, and be more exposed. This program has enabled me to help people think differently about leadership and reach towards their leadership potential.

**Jonathan:** And what about LTCP limitations or growth areas? What do we need to improve upon?

**Manuel:** The language barrier. It should be accessible to everyone. The LTCP Pilot Program was facilitated in English. I know it was planned to be facilitated in *Español* before it was cancelled due to the unrest in 2018. It has to be in the language of the people. Otherwise, it is just for the privileged.

It should also be less academic and more adjustable. For example, there should be an overview of the leadership theories, with an emphasis on how to implement it into a leadership training. There should be more videos, case studies, and reflection questions.

Also, participants' previous knowledge of leadership is a limitation—especially because most potential participants here [in Nicaragua] won't have had any intentional leadership training or development experiences.

Participants should first explore who a leader is to have a mindset for the rest of the program. And not traditional ways of understanding who a leader is. Not by position or power or wealth.

## Recommendations

Rooted in the leadership and cultural context of Nicaragua—as well as Manuel's reflections—we have drafted recommendations for this program and other leadership development experiences. First and foremost, if long-term generational change is to occur, constituent-facing nonprofit and NGO leaders need train-the-trainer leadership-developmental experiences. These experiences should be facilitated by leadership scholars and master trainers so that the participants can learn about leadership beyond pop-culture references as well as the pedagogy necessary to ensure leadership learning is accessible, internalized and can be applied by the participants.

When facilitating the LTCP or similar programming, it should be culturally responsive and relevant. For example, case studies and examples should be utilized that maximize the local history, businesses and organizational challenges, and socio-cultural-and-political conditions. It is also essential to ensure how leadership is understood in those local cultures and manifests in those local contexts—particularly in the Global South. For example, in Nicaragua, a country deeply rooted in *machismo* pride, it would be important to strategically explore the role of women leaders, the challenges faced by women in leadership positions, and cultural contexts of glass ceiling and labyrinths. Similarly, any replication of the LTCP in Nicaragua should be offered and facilitated in Spanish. More so, leadership books and resources need to be translated into Spanish. Besides the rare exception, only pop-culture texts are translated from the dominant leadership literature language, English.

It has been previously stated that intentional leadership training and development is exceedingly rare in Nicaragua. The vast majority of participants will have not explored leadership or experimented with leadership-developmental opportunities through clubs, activities, co-curricula. Training programs and resources ought to be designed for those who are beginning their leadership learning journey.

Specifically for the Leadership Trainer Certification Program, it is recommended that changes be made to the curriculum as well as structure of the experience. This includes ensuring the program is responsive to participants' diverse learning styles by incorporating more videos, case-studies, experiential learning activities, and opportunities for participants to learn-by-doing as they facilitate diverse components of a training. Another growth opportunity is to infuse training needs assessment into the curriculum. How might our participants assess organizations and teams to identify their 'pain points' and craft training experiences that are responsive to those needs? It would also be wise to include observational opportunities for participants to witness facilitated trainings. Inviting outside organizations or agencies to a training would provide those participants with a leadership skills-enhancement opportunity while providing LTCP participants with a tactical experience to reflect on what they witnessed, what they would want to replicate, and what they would

want to facilitate differently if they were charged with facilitating the training.

## Conclusion

The Global North and Global South, in broad strokes, have wildly different leadership infrastructures. The landscape for leadership learning and development in the Global South, Nicaragua in particular, is ripe for tilling. To cultivate long-term generational change, a focus on leadership train-the-trainer opportunities—to provide intentional leadership-developmental experiences for those on the front-line of leadership training and development of others—is important.

The Leadership Trainer Certification Program is one such model. As detailed in the article, this immersive train-the-trainer program has provided an immeasurable opportunity to enhance participants' healthy leadership habits for their own practice while emphasizing the development of leadership training skills that can be applied to the leadership trainings facilitated for others. Although strategic changes need to be employed for future opportunities, this type of program and serve to challenge antiquated notions of leadership rooted in power, position, and prestige and establish a new culture of leadership learning, training, and development for the next generations.

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