

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP

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What is the challenge of staff development?

Presumably, every organization wants to achieve higher levels of staff development, particularly in knowledge- and skill-intensive areas, such as strategic planning, campaign development and implementation, grant writing, etc. The question of whether an organization wants more competent and committed leaders is always answered in the affirmative. And the need for staff development typically exists at all organizational levels, from managers and administrators to supervisors and line staff.

The need for staff development is often apparent from a paucity of innovative thinking and resistance to adopt and implement the most efficient and effective solutions to managerial, supervisory, and operational demands. Several project directors have told me personally that their greatest job-related frustration is in the area staff development.

The culture and practices of most organizations implicitly support the idea that staff development is achieved mostly through *formal* training programs. It is expected that staff members, following formal training, will adopt more desirable work patterns because they are convinced it is both the right thing to do professionally (for the beneficiaries of their work) and organizationally (for the benefit of their organization), as well as personally (for their own career advancement).

Training, however, ordinarily is *not* linked to effective follow-up to ensure that the learning and inspiration of the training experience is carried into action in day-to-day operations. There are few *effective* permanent policies and procedures in place to ensure staff development: evaluations often are not consistently performed, face-to-face performance expectations and support—apart from immediate tasks—often are not clearly set and regularly reviewed, and consequences for performance successes and failures often are not consistently implemented.

What is a leadership strategy for staff development?

What is the relationship of leadership development to an organization's other strategic objectives, such as staff development?

Leadership development is the essential condition to achieve virtually all of an organization's objectives. If an organization is developing a dynamic group of leaders at all levels, its problems diminish in proportion to their numbers, strength, and distribution. Conversely, to the extent that an organization has few strong, skilled leaders, its plans, policies, programs, and procedures will not enable it to meet its challenges.

What is the relationship of leadership development to staff development?

Staff development, by definition, follows from understandings and actions by leaders within an organization. An organization's leadership development strategy largely determines the extent and effectiveness of its staff development. In the final analysis, staff development and leadership development are synonymous.

What are the functions and locations of organizational leadership as *conventionally* understood?

Organizational experts commonly define leaders as those who take the lead in producing:

- *Inspiring visions*
- *Increased resources (i.e., people and money)*
- *Effective teams (including broadened decision-making)*
- *Successful strategies and tactics*
- *Creative processes*
- *Improved communication*
- *Enhanced performances*

Conditions commonly associated with effective leadership include the following:

- *Education and training*
- *Experience*
- *Analytical/conceptual ability*
- *Relationship skills*
- *Charisma*
- *BLIP (brains, looks, initiative, and personality)*

Opportunities exist for leadership to be demonstrated at every location (level) of the organization, from senior managers and project directors to line workers.

How do organizing staff members typically define their roles as leaders?

Project directors, because often they are the most experienced and committed members of their staff, commonly assume supervisory and technical roles as trouble-shooters, direct-service providers, trainers, team-builders, policy-makers, and final arbiters of operational procedure—but they are much less frequently in the role of managerial leaders.

Senior and lead organizers often do not think of themselves as organizational leaders and do not have any clear conception of their roles as such.

Staff organizers virtually never think of themselves as leaders

Several organizers have conveyed to me their perspective that leaders are those who occupy positions above them in the organizational structure.

Why is the primary role of leaders to maximize staff development?

The pivotal goal of a leader is the development others as leaders. The effects of a leader's efforts to develop staff as leaders have greater influence in organizational survival and success than any other leadership initiative. This is so because developing substantially greater numbers of leaders has the following effects:

- *Qualitative* improvement in organizational performance, e.g., launching of new projects and campaigns, development of new revenue streams, dramatic reductions in the administrative and operational costs, and measurable improvements in efficiency and effectiveness;
- Marked reduction in organizational vulnerability to the inevitable loss of experienced staff from all causes, e.g., retirement, burnout, job-change for career advancement, etc.; and
- Significant improvement in staff morale.

This leadership goal is not at odds with the other strategic and tactical goals and objectives of the organization because the principal tools of leadership development are geared to directly serve those ends.

What are the basic tools of leadership development?

The primary tools of leadership development are:

- Relationship-building;
- Direct support;
- Gauged challenge; and
- Follow-up (accountability) mentoring.

Relationship in which there is trust is the foundation for leadership development, because the central pillar of that development is a challenge to take risks. Organizing projects often have a well-developed culture that supports close relationships among staff.

The essential characteristics of *support* are:

- Addressing that which people often fear most, which is failure, and thereby making it much more likely that they'll take a risk by giving assurances that speak to emotional and psychological needs for support; and
- Communicating clearly and explicitly the specific time and other resources that will be available to the person who is being challenged.

The essential characteristics of *challenge* are:

- Asking rather than telling—helping people to think through their decision to act and then asking them to take a step forward;
- Gauging the resources of the person who is to be challenged—experience, skills, emotional wherewithal, learning, etc.—before making the challenge;
- Asking the person to do something he or she hasn't done before;
- Planning ahead so as not to make the challenge so small that it's not challenging or so large that it's overwhelming;
- Not talking people into things—the challenge is always in the form of a question, such as, “Would you be willing to do . . . ?”—fill in the blank; and
- Articulating challenges with a neutral tone of voice that allows the person to accept or to refuse with dignity.

The essential characteristics of *follow-up (accountability) mentoring* are:

- Budgeting sufficient organizational personnel resources to ensure that follow-up doesn't fall through the cracks;
- Doing follow-up both when the challenge has been successfully met and when it has not been met;
- Giving credit for any actual commitment or effort that was demonstrated, even though a challenge has not been successfully met; avoiding causing embarrassment to the person who was challenged, by focusing on what resources the person would want to be better prepared for a similar challenge in the future; and posing another challenge that offers the person an opportunity to “get back up on the horse” and succeed; and

- When a challenge has been successfully met, crediting what was accomplished and posing another challenge that builds on the confidence and skill that was attained from the first challenge

What are other conditions we can influence to stimulate or reinforce leadership development?

The presence of opportunities or threats that will materially effect the well-being of an individual, family, neighborhood, community, or society are mostly not under our influence, but we can take steps to make them better known:

- The presence of competent and trustworthy leadership models that can be observed and learned from is largely a function of the leadership development strategy we devise and carry out;
- The presence of accessible rewards and shared beliefs that encourage individuals to take leadership initiative follows from the resources that we budget and dedicate through a variety of policies and procedures; and
- The presence of an organizational “structure and culture of *learning*,” that is, formal and informal expectations supported by shared values and practical consequences that encourage openness to learning and growth for all staff, are essential supports for the organization’s leadership development strategy.

What is the measure of leadership development?

To determine the effectiveness of a leader we may ask:

- How many leaders, who were not previously considered leaders, have you developed this past year?
- What measurable successes have they had in the past year—and how many leaders are they developing?

The significance of these questions is numerical, for if leaders develop other leaders, who in turn become capable of developing still more leaders, there is then a potential multiplication of the number of leaders.