Strengthening Leadership in Government Organizations

by

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Leadership is critical for good governance. Today, government organizations are over managed and under led. What is the difference between leadership and management and what makes a leader, leadership challenges in the era of globalization and liberalization, how do we develop leaders in our government organizations are some of the major challenges facing government organizations today. This paper explores these important challenges of leadership, and outlines EPIC framework and a set of leadership practices to address the challenges our government organizations are confronted with. Finally, we list the key stages that government organizations should utilize to hone leadership skills in the government

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Introduction

In today's fast-changing world, leadership issues are getting increasing importance in government organizations - both at policy and implementation level. A sense of urgency is being experienced to improve the performance of our public organizations to meet the interests and expectations of the nation and the citizens. And there is realization that it is effective leadership that can help government organizations make the critical transition from intention to implementation, potential to performance, and policy to practice.

To enhance the effectiveness of the government, the country has undertaken structural and management reforms to better align public services with the needs of contemporary society. But we find that attempts to actually implement these reforms and improve things after such reforms run into predictable hurdles of 'mindset' and 'culture' problems. A common complaint is lack of dedication and lack of commitment to the underlying values of public service and the interests of the citizens served. To align the mindset and culture to the demands of organizational challenges, leadership is often suggested as a solution.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)[1] describes governance as the way in which the underlying values of a nation (usually articulated in some way in its constitution) are institutionalized. This may include formal aspects such as separate powers, checks and balances, transparency, accountability and responsiveness. However, for these values to be realized in actual practice, they must guide the actions of public officials throughout the system. They must become a part of the culture. That is why leadership is considered as the flesh on the bones of the constitution. It is at the heart of good governance. Without this important and crucial variable, we cannot achieve enhanced management capacity as well as organizational performance. With renewed efforts to drive reform, there is increasing interest in the subject of leadership. People realize that it is the quality of leadership, more than any other single factor that determines the success or failure of an organization. It is required at different levels of our public organizations.

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[1]Public Sector Leadership for the 21st Century, OECD, 2001

Leadership helps make changes happen by opening channels of communication with the public and other stakeholders. It achieves integration across different departments and different levels of the government. It utilizes technological advances effectively to improve performance, and modifies organizational processes to promote newer ways of delivering service. It develops individual, team and organizational capacity for taking on challenges. And it brings together public and private actors to achieve developmental goals and strategies in a sustainable manner. To sum up, leadership is a critical component of good public governance.

Leadership and management

While these two notions are often used interchangeably, they actually describe two different concepts. Over a period of time, tools and techniques of *management* have evolved in large measures to ensure organizational stability, operational efficiency and predictable performance. Formal planning systems, centralized decision making processes, hierarchical organizational structures, procedures and rules help maintain stability in the levels of performance in organization.

But these traditional tools cannot meet the challenge of change that confronts our public organizations today. The traditional tools provide little or no guidance on how to meet the challenges of increasing demands for responsiveness to external environment, continuous adaptation and giving people in the organization a sense of direction and confidence in the face of all the turbulence. It is *leadership* that addresses these challenges. Thus, leadership prepares organizations for change and helps facilitate the process of transition to achieve intended goals. Leadership attends to the following aspects:

- focusing on delivery of results
- challenging assumptions
- learning from outside
- understanding the environment and its impact
- thinking and acting strategically
- building new patterns and ways of work
- developing and communicating a vision of change

What Makes a Leader?

There is a growing body of research on what makes a leader. Kouzes and Posner[2] have surveyed and researched what people look for and admire in their leaders. The results of these surveys

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[2] The Leadership Challenge, Kouzes and Posner, 2002

have been striking in their regularity over the years. It appears that a person must pass several essential tests before others are willing to grant the title *leader*. These personal traits or characteristics are presented below.

• Honest	• Fair-minded	• Cooperative	• Caring
• Forward-looking	• Broad-minded	• Determined	• Mature
• Competent	• Supportive	• Imaginative	• Loyal
• Inspiring	• Straightforward	• Ambitious	• Self-controlled
• Intelligent	• Dependable	• Courageous	• Independent

All though all characteristics receive some votes, and therefore each is important to some people, what is most striking and most evident is that, consistently over time and across continents, *only four* have continuously received over 50 percent of the votes. What people *most* look for and admire in a leader has been constant over a period of time. The majority of constituents believe that the leader must be:
 ❖ *Honest*
 ❖ *Forward-looking*
 ❖ *Competent*
 ❖ *Inspiring*

Honest

In almost every survey, honesty has been selected more often than any other leadership characteristics; overall, it emerges as the single most important ingredient. It's clear that if people anywhere are to willingly follow-someone whether it be into battle or into the boardroom – they first want to assure themselves that the person is worthy of their trust.

Forward-Looking

More than 70 percent of respondents selected the ability to look ahead as one of their most sought-after leadership traits. People expect leaders to have a sense of direction and a concern for the future of the organization. Whether we call that ability vision, a dream, a calling, a goal, or a personal agenda, the message is clear: leaders must know where they are going if they expect others to willingly join them on the journey.

Competent

To enlist in another's cause, we must believe that the person is competent to guide us where we are headed. We must see the leader as capable and effective. Leadership competence refers to the leader's track record and ability to get things done. It's the kind of competence that inspires

confidence that the leader will be able to guide the entire organization, large or small, in the direction in which it needs to go.

Inspiring
We also expect our leaders to be enthusiastic, energetic, and positive about the future. We expect them to be inspiring. It's not enough for a leader to have a dream about the future. A leader must be able to communicate the vision in ways that encourage us to sign on for the duration.

Leadership Challenges

The organizations in the government have to be sensitive to the major shifts in the environment, as briefly discussed below:

- *Globalization:* There is a need to review the implications of increasing globalization of economic and social policies. This creates a need for new capacities to exploit new opportunities and to deal effectively with new threats.

- *Decentralization:* With greater decentralization of national policies, there is increasing fragmentation of policy responsibilities. This poses major challenges of policy coordination, accountability and coherence.

- *Rapid changes in technology:* With development of information and communication technologies, it is possible for governments to cope with new problems in a swift, transparent and flexible manner.

In addition to the above, Robert D. Behn[3] enlists eight great challenges for top public executives: *the leadership challenge, the strategy challenge, the performance challenge, the motivation challenge, the collaboration challenge, the accountability challenge, the learning challenge and the external-communication challenge*. He argues that leadership challenge requires the articulation of an inspiring mission, personal persistence and a commitment of generating enthusiasm among employees. Strategy challenge requires leaders recognize the true purpose to be achieved and an understanding of how people and organizations behave and also the ability to match behavior to purposes by crafting concrete yet subtle organizational endeavors that will, directly, indirectly, influence people to help achieve those purposes. Performance challenge requires the establishment of specific output targets that people are charged with producing and a conscious theory about how the organization's outputs contribute to the desired outcomes.

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[3] The Great Challenges for Top Public Executives, Robert D. Behn, Kennedy School of Government

Motivational challenge is the mobilization of individual and collective efforts to produce results. The collaboration challenge is the cooperative work with other (public, nonprofit, and private) organizations that have similar, yet not identical, missions to achieve broader, overlapping purposes. Accountability challenge is the necessity for public organizations to abide by the rules for finances and fairness while, at the same time, producing real results. The learning challenge is the uncovering basic principles of action, management and leadership from a plethora of details in new and very specific circumstances followed by the application of these general principles in new situations. The external-communication challenge is the enlisting of support for the organization's mission, strategies, targets, and activities from a diversity of stakeholders.

EQ more important than IQ for leadership

When people are asked to define the ideal leader, many tend to emphasize traits such as intelligence, toughness, determination, and vision. These are the qualities traditionally associated with leadership. There is little doubt about such skills being necessary. Studies, however, indicate that they are insufficient for effective leadership. Although a certain degree of analytical and technical skill is a minimum requirement for success, research indicates that Emotional Intelligence (EI) may be the key attribute that distinguishes outstanding performers from those who are merely adequate. That's why EQ (Emotional Quotient) is considered more important than IQ (Intelligent Quotient) for leadership.

Leadership research tells us that the lack of interpersonal skills and the inability to adapt are the two principal derailment factors in careers. Today, there is a growing body of knowledge that clearly shows that proper understanding and use of emotions can be critical in helping us become more effective leaders and better communicators. Without EI, persons can have first-class training, incisive minds, and endless supply of good ideas, but they still won't be great leaders.

EI includes two aspects of managing self – *self-awareness* and *self-motivation*; and two aspects of managing others – *empathy*, and *social skill*.

Managing self includes:
- Ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well their effect on others.
- Ability to control or channelize impulses and moods that are disruptive. This requires the propensity to suspend judgement and to think critically before acting, and
- Passion to work for reasons that are beyond money and status, and also a propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence.

Managing others includes:
- Ability to understand the emotional make up of other people;
- Skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions, and
- Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks and ability to build rapport and find common ground.

Increased EI moves individuals and teams to increased resilience in the face of change, enhanced performance and greater success. Individuals with strong EI form good working relationships, function as cooperative and constructive members of groups, and control anger and other disruptive impulses. Colleagues and subordinates also view managers who are high on EI as generally pleasant to be around. To sum up, for effective and sustained leaders, high IQ (Intelligence Quotient) alone is insufficient.

We are aware that analytical, quantitative and verbal abilities are measured through conventional IQ tests. Similarly there are tests to measure EQ (Emotional Quotient). Research indicates that high EQ accounts for over 90% of the difference between ineffective leaders and effective leadership performance. Effective leadership improves unit performance and service delivery.

Leadership at different levels: In traditional hierarchy, leaders are considered to be those very few people in higher positions. But increasingly, it is being realized that leadership is required at different levels in the hierarchy as outlined below:

1) *Strategic Leadership:* This is required at the higher levels. This involves strategic thinking, political savvy, vision, external awareness, influencing or negotiating, and cultural awareness.
2) *Team Leadership:* This is required at the middle level more than others. At this level, project management, team building and interpersonal skills are crucial.
3) *Technical/Functional Leadership:* This is required at lower levels. This emphasizes professional and technical skills.

How do Progressive Organizations develop Leaders

In an important recent survey by the Corporate Leadership Council[4], a highly regarded research agency, it was found that people management skills are the most important attribute of effective leadership. This was followed by strategic management skills. Innate personal characteristics and skills in process management were considered to be important, but lower down in priority.

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[4] Leadership Development in the Public Sector, Corporate Leadership Council, 2001

It was also found that most organizations were weak in terms of both the numbers and quality of leaders. Many organizations may be *adequately managed*, but they are *under led*. With the environment becoming more demanding leadership development has become even more critical for organizations.

Key elements of leadership development: The general experience appears to be that feedback and relationship based development programmes are highly effective for leadership development. In other words, people in key positions should have an opportunity to receive feedback from others (superiors, colleagues, subordinates and customers). Without this valuable feed back, the speed of development is greatly hampered. Individuals in key positions should also have opportunities to discuss their feed back and their development agenda and learning challenges with others. That is why, in many progressive organizations, individuals in top positions allocate a certain amount of time for facilitating leadership development.

One very interesting finding of the Corporate Leadership Council is with regard to the key role that autonomy plays in leadership development. The greater the decision making authority that we give to leaders, the faster is our leadership development.

Steps for Leadership Development

When we look at the leadership development approaches adopted by governments in other countries, we find some general and common trends. The OECD publication on leadership outlines the broad elements of the approach followed in OECD countries. The steps are briefly outlined below:-

1) *Define a competence profile for future leaders:* The first step taken to develop future leaders was to define the competence profile for future leaders. The competencies required for future leaders could be different from those required for present leaders in terms of their responsibility, capability and role. For this step we should first make predictions of the future environment and the challenges that leaders are likely to face.
2) *Identify and select potential leaders:* This identification would be based on the competence framework for future leaders. A key choice would be whether we should select future leaders from outside or nurture them within our own organizations.
3) *Encourage mentoring and training:* There should be substantial efforts made to train future leaders. Some countries have set up specialized institutions for leadership development, and others have established new training courses for senior people within their existing training institutions.
4) *Keep leadership development sustainable:* We must remember that leadership development occurs over a period of time. To sustain the efforts over a long time, we must have a

comprehensive programme for the whole of the government and ensure that senior people devote time to development programmes.

Leadership studies indicate that good leaders are not 'born'; they 'grow'. Individuals with desire and willpower develop themselves as effective leaders through a constant process of self-study, dedication, training and experience.

It is said that experience is inevitable; learning is not. Individuals confront significant challenges in their lives. They would have successes, setbacks, and even crises. By converting these experiences into learning events they develop themselves. When individuals get open and frank feedback from others, and have a chance to discuss their developmental agenda, they hasten their leadership development.

It is of course true that most individuals do develop over a period of time through their experiences. In many cases, the speed of this learning is too slow. By accelerating the process of learning, we can foster effective leadership development in a shorter time.

Information, guidance and support: The good news is that leadership can be learned and improved at any age. But the specific leadership competencies don't automatically come through life experience. Leaders who are motivated to improve their skills can do so if they are given the following:

- R*ight information:* The information individuals need is a candid assessment of their strengths and limitations from people who know them well and whose opinions they trust.
- *Guidance:* The guidance they need is a specific developmental plan that uses naturally occurring workplace events as the laboratory for learning.
- *Support:* The support they need is someone to talk to as they practice how to handle different situations, what to do when they have made some mistakes, and how to learn from such mistakes and setbacks.

If leaders cultivate these resources and practice continually, they can develop specific leadership skills – skills that will last for years.

Proposed Leadership Framework

We propose a leadership framework in this section that is applicable to our public organizations. We have based it on a wide range of ideas from the leadership literature and our own discussions

with senior people in several government organizations. In our inquiry, we looked at specific instances where senior people demonstrated leadership behaviours, what actions they took and how they made a difference. We also looked at some of the behaviours that were missing in the not-so-successful leaders. Our study revealed certain clear themes. Accordingly, we propose a **EPIC** Leadership Framework that concentrates on four "areas of critical influence". These four aspects are:

- **E nergizing people**
- **P lanning and achieving results**
- **I mplementing required changes**
- **C reating coalitions and win-win partnerships**

The above four areas deal with the "how" a leader can be effective. They are concerned with leadership behaviour or leadership action.

In the words of noted author Peter Drucker, "Leadership is not status or position. Leadership is all about achievement of the right results. Leaders are doers, who take responsibility and make a difference". The first important aspect of framework therefore pertains to leadership behavior that deals with the way members of the unit are inspired and energized to generate a sense on commitment. This leads to learning about how to be effective as a team, and so team members are able to deliver high quality performance.

In the words of Carl von Clausewitz, the author of a seminal work on the conduct of war, '*In war, everything is simple' but it is simple things that are difficult.*' Major plans often fail because people have not taken into account all the irksome little conditions or frictions that have to be dealt with for the plan to succeed. It is necessary for leaders to create organizational capacity to ensure that all the little conditions are anticipated and dealt with quickly and effectively. Leaders therefore pay attention to ensure that the key members think through larger plan and work out a detailed step by step plan with specific accountabilities, deadlines, budgets etc. for guiding action and ensure effective execution of plans. Thus the second aspect of our framework deals with these aspects in "Planning and achieving results" section.

As a social system, an organization develops its own unique way of planning, organizing, solving problems, encouraging innovations, monitoring what we do and ensuring effective implementation. We may refer to this as organizational routine or work practices. Certain aspects of the routines and practices may continue even if these have outlived their utility. The practices

have to be reoriented to adapt them to changing circumstances. We deal with this aspect in the third part of the model under "Implementing required changes".

We have the fourth part of the model on "Creating coalitions and win-win partnerships".   The power of our organizations comes from the ability to build synergistic partnerships with relevant others.   Leaders must be skilled in cultivating win-win partnerships. They must hone their abilities in managing differences, providing effective feedback and developing relationships of mutual influence.

On the basis of the framework, a set of leadership practices are developed to address the challenges that our government organizations are confronted with. By focusing on practices that are concrete behaviours and actions rather than abstract ideas, we hasten leadership development. The underlying belief is that modifying actions is the more effective way to modify values and philosophies, than seeking to modify the latter directly. The leadership practices list can also help in generating 360-degree feedback for leaders that can be used for developmental purposes. Each of the dimensions consists of a number of items, and these are presented on the following pages.

To sum up, we have looked at what makes a leader and what are the leadership challenges in the public sector. We have also looked at how progressive countries and organizations develop leaders. Finally, we list the key stages that government organizations should utilize to hone leadership skills in the government.

- Adopt a leadership model
- Decide on who will receive leadership development
- Involve senior leaders in development process
- Define the results expected from leaders and link these to the larger strategy
- Use powerful learning and training methods to accelerate development
- Emphasize action learning projects
- Create a culture of feed back
- Make development a long term process, and not just an event

EPIC
Framework for Leadership in Government

Energizing People

1. Clearly communicating expectations through a two-way communication process and holding people accountable.
2. Recognizing people when they make special efforts to solve persistent problems.
3. Being supportive and helpful in your daily contacts with people.
4. Supporting your people when you feel they are right, even if there are extraneous pressures.
5. Demonstrating strong commitment to people development.
6. Developing leadership in others through coaching, mentoring, rewarding and guiding employees.
7. Paying attention to staffing issues and concerns.
8. Giving people a clear cut decision when they need one.
9. Empowering people at operational levels to make decisions and solve problems.
10. Encouraging open exchange of ideas with your people and not being vague or indirect in your communication.
11. Consistently developing and sustaining working relationships in a manner that fosters commitment, team spirit, pride and trust.
12. Managing and resolving conflicts and disagreements in a positive and constructive manner to minimize negative impact.
13. Creating a culture that fosters high standards of ethics.
14. Behaving in a fair and ethical manner toward others and demonstrating commitment to public service.

Planning and Achieving Results

1. Keeping abreast of changes in the environment.
2. Developing strategies and plans that are responsive to the needs of the citizens and society.
3. Establishing and communicating clear specific performance goals and standards based on a positive vision of the unit's future.
4. Focusing your time and energy on the most important priorities.
5. Dealing effectively with multiple demands and priorities.
6. Helping people understand how their jobs contribute to the overall success of the unit.
7. Actively looking for ways to increase quality of service and satisfaction for the customers / citizens, and being committed to continuous improvement.
8. Ensuring that projects within areas of specific responsibility are completed in a timely manner and within budget.

9. Monitoring and evaluating plans and measuring attainment of results and outcomes.
10. Making well informed decisions by perceiving the impact and implications of decisions, but doing so without compromising the timeliness of decisions.
11. Being proactive, achievement oriented and willing to take risks.
12. Understanding and appropriately applying procedures, requirements, regulations and policies related to specialized expertise.
13. Developing your skills in managing finances, human resources, delivery of effective services, etc.
14. Using efficient and cost effective approaches to improve programme effectiveness by integrating technology into the work place.

Implementing Required Changes

1. Devoting time and attention to develop innovative solutions to make organizational improvements.
2. Encouraging creative thinking and innovation in your team / unit by spending time and attention with people to challenge the status quo and seek alternative solutions.
3. Being open to change and new information, and keeping up to date with important developments in your field, function or sector.
4. Building a shared vision with others.
5. Determining objectives and setting priorities and anticipating potential threats or opportunities.
6. Influencing others to translate vision into action.
7. Inculcating spirit of service and meaningful contributions in your team / unit to accomplish the unit's goals and mission.
8. Creating and sustaining a culture which encourages others to provide the quality of service essential to high performance.
9. Managing change in a thoughtful and well planned rather than a reactive manner.
10. Being willing to speak out on issues and champion change even when your view is unpopular.
11. Recovering quickly from setbacks.
12. Maintaining focus and intensity and remaining optimistic and persistent even under adversity.
13. Adapting behavior and work methods in response to new information, changing conditions or unexpected obstacles.

Creating Coalitions and Win-Win Partnerships

1. Developing, building alliances, engaging in cross functional activities; collaborating across boundaries and finding common ground with wide range of stakeholders.

2. Consistently demonstrating high levels of integrity in your contacts with various stakeholders.
3. Facilitating win-win situations.
4. Spending time with customer / citizen groups or with those who have direct contact with them.
5. Approaching each problem situation with a clear perception of the organizational and political reality and recognizing the impact of alternative courses of action.
6. Responding in a non-defensive manner when others disagree with your view point.
7. Persuading others and building consensus through give and take.
8. Gaining cooperation from others to obtain information and accomplish goals.
9. Responding appropriately to the needs, feelings and capabilities of different people in different situations.
10. Being tactful, compassionate and sensitive and treating different partners / stakeholders with respect.
11. Listening effectively and clarifying information as needed.
12. Facilitating an open exchange of ideas and fostering atmosphere of free and frank communication.
13. Expressing facts and ideas in writing and orally in a clear, convincing and organized manner.

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