

# Leadership Responsibilities of Professionals

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This chapter introduces a leadership development model that raises the question: Leadership for what? Leadership is about going somewhere—personally and in concert with others in an organization<sup>1</sup>. Although leadership is often discussed in terms of leader qualities and skills, especially position leadership, the matter of leadership as a responsibility of each professional receives little attention. Organizations and programs do not flourish with one leader in a group. Thus, more attention has to be paid to the definition of leader as anyone willing to help (Wheatley, 2005). Leadership is not about position only, but about taking responsibility as a member of a group (whether 2-person or 60-person) to share leadership for the organization's well-being.

Despite the investments in time, money, and energy, leadership development programs in many organizations are often piecemeal, focused on aspects in isolation (Ready, 2004). They may offer the latest competency program, an up-to-date performance management system, a sophisticated assessment instrument, the latest electronic learning package, and/or a program built around available speakers and facilitators known to the leadership development committee. In these approaches, there is also a danger in focusing on local issues to the exclusion of broad, sweeping issues of importance to the national or international perspective for the organization. Then, too, we live in a world that is different and changing so fast that former approaches just don't serve the current and future needs of organizations.

Each organization needs to learn how to grow its own leaders, but it needs a theoretical framework to accomplish this worthy objective. The South American poet Machado declared, "The road is your footsteps, nothing else" (Wheatley, 2005, p. 43). The leadership development model described in this chapter is intended to guide your footsteps in a direction that clarifies your personal and professional journey and shares responsibility among colleagues for the well-being of your organization. The following sections will discuss the basic components of a leadership development model, a leadership theory, issue framing, and a concluding section that ties everything together as a comprehensive approach to leadership development.

## **Basic Components of the Reflective Human Action Leadership Development Model**

If the premise is accepted that an organization cannot succeed without position leadership and group members sharing leadership responsibilities, it is then incumbent upon each organization to establish an intentional program to develop leadership skills at all levels. Presently, pre-professionals and professionals, alike, experience leadership development in a haphazard manner. In some ways, leadership of a profession is more important than content to carry on its mission and practice. The proposed Reflective Human Action (RHA) Leadership Development Model (Figure 1) focuses on (a) strengthening self-awareness, (b) developing relationships and teamwork, (c) understanding alliances and political realities, (d) understanding the elements of a promising future of the organization, and coupled with (e) Reflective Human Action (RHA) leadership theory as its foundation and framing as a communications tool. It is hypothesized that the model will enable individuals to assume leadership responsibilities as professionals. At its base this model states the philosophy that underlies leadership; the next level includes the basic components of leadership development that are coupled with theory and with competency in framing—all leading to the overall objective: organizational leadership. The following section explains the four basic components of the Model.



Figure 1. Reflective Human Action (RHA) Leadership Development Model  
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### I. Strengthening self-awareness

People live in their own world of self-generating beliefs, which are often untested (Ross, 1994). These beliefs are the product of past experience and inferences from observations. Argyris (1990) labeled this phenomenon the “ladder of inference,” a mental pathway based upon observable data and experiences and composed of the data selected, the meanings assigned, the assumptions made, conclusions drawn, beliefs adopted, and actions taken. If all of these components are unquestioned and untested, these inferences may lead to misguided beliefs. But one’s self-awareness can be strengthened by reflection (becoming more aware of one’s own thinking and reasoning), advocacy (making one’s thinking and reasoning more visible to others), and inquiry (inquiring into other’s thinking and reasoning) (adapted from Ross, 1994, p. 245). Ross suggested the following questions that can assist a group in testing beliefs:

- What are the observable data behind that statement?
- Does everyone agree on what the data are?
- Can you run me through your reasoning? What is the basis of your interpretation?
- When you said \_\_\_\_\_, did you mean \_\_\_\_\_?

The ladder of inference is a tool for examination of one’s own beliefs and actions and contributes to a healthy climate for reflection in organizational matters.

### II. Developing relationships and teamwork

Collaborative leadership within an organization by definition requires that one’s self-knowledge be applied in interaction with others to develop relationships and teamwork. Collaboration is a worthy skill because it provides many benefits: a unified approach, effective internal decision making, reduced costs through shared resources, and more creative outcomes (Weiss & Hughes, 2005). But collaboration is not easily achieved. To improve collaboration, the issue of conflict must be addressed. Differences in perspective, competencies, access to information, and strategic focus cause conflict, so acknowledgement and development of processes to manage it are

necessary precursors to effective collaboration. By exploring all of the differences, conflict situations produce benefits by providing new insights and possibilities for improving organizational decisions and outcomes.

Effective collaboration requires both individual and network expertise. Connectivity gained through networks produces synergistic outcomes, but it has its downside as well: countless meetings can drain time and energy. So, there is a “need to develop a strategic, sophisticated view of collaboration . . .” (Cross, Liedtka, & Weiss, 2005). The appropriate degree of connectivity must be determined for achieving specific results required of the organization. Some tasks will require all players while others can be assigned to specific networks, all the while maintaining openness and communication to ensure understanding and transparency.

Collaborative leaders know that you can’t force collaboration, but you can expect it. It requires discipline and dogged persistence in expecting collaborative behavior. When leaders “consistently ask questions that remind people of those expectations, they tend to get what they expect” (Linden, 2003, p. 47). A collaborative leader should be able to

- Articulate the project’s purpose in a way that excites others.
- Be an effective convener: get the appropriate people to the table and keep them there.
- Help the participants see their common interests and the benefits possible through joint effort.
- Generate trust.
- Help the participants design a transparent, credible process.
- Assist the participants in win-win negotiations to meet three related interests (needs of each partner, of the product they are creating, and of the relationships involved).
- Make relationship building a priority for the group.
- See that there’s a senior champion of the effort.
- Help everyone engage in collaborative problem solving and make creative use of their diverse viewpoints when differences arise.
- Celebrate small successes; share credit widely.
- Provide confidence, hope, and resilience. (Linden, 2003, pp. 42-44)

Accompanying the above tasks is the disposition to have persistence, energy, and resolve; passion about achieving a collaborative outcome; the ability to pull others rather than push them in a collaborative direction; and the ability to think systemically and see the interconnections (Linden, 2003, p. 45).

### **III. Understanding alliances and political realities**

Relations, between and among people, are often uncertain, fluid, and complex. These relationships often include alliances formed on the basis of values and interests of a core of like-minded individuals. Thus, an organization needs to examine the alliances in the group to find the mutual points of agreement upon which to build trust. Although these alliances may be political realities, it isn’t useful to label their activities as political. So-called political intelligence, however, is needed to identify how relationships are likely to affect success (Ciampa, 2005). Political skills include the use of power and influence to enhance or protect interests, thus group members need to be encouraged to go out of their way to help the group find ways to be sensitive to the various points of view and to be respectful of diverse spheres of interests. Efforts need to be made to ensure that interactions and group processes are transparent so that trust can build. Holbeche (2004) describes constructive political behavior as

- Establishing effective relationships
- Understanding individual agendas
- Creating win-win situations

- Acting in a principled way
- Building strong support for constructive ideas
- Building a personal reputation
- Treating everyone fairly
- Influencing others rather than directly using power

By understanding alliances and political realities and using constructive political behavior, leaders can make things happen, unblock barriers to change, create buy-in on organizational initiatives, produce greater organizational cohesion, and speed up decision making. But leaders have the responsibility of creating a receptive environment by using persuasion constructively. “Persuasion promotes understanding; understanding breeds acceptance; acceptance leads to action” (Garvin & Roberto, 2005, p. 112).

#### **IV. Understanding the elements of a promising future**

Vision, opportunity, and risk could be called the hallmarks for establishing promising futures (Price, 2004). Vision and direction need to be well understood if organizations are to have a clear sense of where they are going and to focus attention on this vision. With vision, smart choices can be made with the end result in mind. Short-term goals are geared to the larger picture. “Vision allows for a long-term proactive stance—creating what we want—rather than a short-term reactive stance—getting rid of what we don’t want” (Blanchard & Stoner, 2004, p. 22).

When pushing the boundaries, there is always an element of risk. In this fast-paced world, we face diversity, contradictions, and complexity. How do we converge our energies to balance the opportunities and risks in the interest of a new vision and excellence? It will be important to find answers to the questions of “What is important?” “What is best?” “Who are we impacting?” “What will be the consequences?” A promising future offers these challenges; answers come from looking at current realities and visions, using the data to establish core beliefs, converting beliefs into principles, and proposing practices to implement the beliefs (Donaldson, 2000). With courage and perseverance, leaders of an organization can use these elements to define and recreate the entity for a promising future.

Although understanding the elements of a promising future is the most important of the four basic components, this stage cannot be reached without the other three—self-awareness, healthy relationships and effective teamwork, and political skill. That’s a tall order. The need for leadership is clear. Each organization must decide what it is going to do about it.

The four basic components of the RHA Leadership Development Model, in and of themselves, will not ensure excellence. Leadership is a multidimensional and multi-layered construct. A comprehensive leadership theory and philosophy is necessary to provide a foundation for leadership.

#### **Leadership Theory**

The previous chapter described the theoretical framework of *Reflective Human Action*, a leadership theory and philosophy promulgated by Kappa Omicron Nu, and authored by Frances E. Andrews, Dorothy I. Mitstifer, Marcia Rehm, and Gladys Gary Vaughn (1995). This theory was based on the work of Terry (1993) and Wheatley (1994). To recap—the principles for leadership practice are

- Accept chaos
- Share information
- Develop relationships
- Embrace vision

and the core features of Reflective Human Action are

- Authenticity
- Ethical sensibility
- Spirituality
- Features of action

These principles and core features are themes throughout the four basic components of leadership development discussed above. Hesselbine (2005, p. 4) succinctly makes the case for these themes: “We need leaders who believe and embody in concept, language, and action that leadership is a matter of how to be, not how to do . . . . “

*Reflective Human Action* is a state-of-the-art comprehensive theoretical framework; its action wheel is an astounding diagnostic tool for naming and framing organizational issues and determining the strategic interventions necessary to address the identified issues. A professional development module and an online free course ([www.kon.org/rha\\_online\\_files/rha\\_online2.htm](http://www.kon.org/rha_online_files/rha_online2.htm)) are available to learn about the leadership theory and for use in self-managed life change.

### **Issue Framing with Reflective Human Action Theory**

“Leadership . . . is grounded in the wisdom of knowing what is really happening, which often means moving beyond fixing and managing” (Terry, 2003, p. 34). Leaders need to understand and interpret what is going on in an organization and how individuals should relate to it; these actions define issue framing. The particular means of accomplishing these two tasks has either a beneficial or negative impact on what is done about the issue or conflict. Thus, in an effective collaborative leadership style, a core skill is the ability to name and frame issues in organizations. A process is needed to learn the concerns people have about an issue; identify the consequences, costs, and benefits associated with various options for action regarding the issue; work through inherent conflicts; and find shared direction or common ground for action. In contrast to framing as the hot topic in political circles, which often seeks to *win* the “framing game,” this skill fulfills a powerful role in groups by evoking greater understanding of diverse perspectives, embracing a wider range of views, and finding intelligent choices about a shared future.

Terry (1993, 2003) made a significant contribution by focusing on the importance in leadership of answering the question of what is really going on. Using his action wheel (1993) (see Figure 2 in previous chapter), the process of framing diagnoses the issues and identifies the interventions. In the complex world of today, the deep questions of identity and meaning must be answered by engagement of spirit. Thus leadership must make a lifetime commitment to answer the tough questions of what is really going on. Terry’s six features of action—mission, meaning, existence, resources, structure, and power—require the overarching skill of issue framing for fulfillment of human action. Whether or not all features of action have been attended to and are functioning well, the group is united in thinking, being, and doing.

Framing could be described as a communication tool for everyone working on an issue or conflict. The objective is to redefine the perspectives, values, and assumptions about issues to become more inclusive and mobilizing to individuals in the group. The social context is created for win/win choices about direction. Communication in the form of conversation is a key element in forging organizational futures. In her book, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, Wheatley (2002, p. 35) noted that

It is difficult to give up our certainties—our positions, our beliefs, our explanations. These help define us; they lie at the heart of our personal identity. Yet I believe we will succeed in changing this work only if we can think and work together in new ways. Curiosity is what we

need. We don't have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes.

The ability to listen without judgment needs to accompany the curious mind. It isn't the differences that divide; it's judgments that do. Listening for differences will create uncertainty, but "We can't be creative if we refuse to be confused. Change always starts with confusion; cherished interpretations must dissolve to make way for the new" (p. 37). From diversity a group can gain a rich array of ideas and possibilities for finding common ground.

Atlee (n.d.) described several additional communication strategies<sup>2</sup> for framing issues. In all of the processes, inclusion and engagement of diverse people and perspectives produce common ground, with underlying shared needs, spirit, and experience. Even if win/win solutions are not found, the complexity of issues will have been uncovered, and participants will have gained an appreciation for the difficult task of making some decisions.

### **Bringing It All Together**

The professed intention of this chapter was to describe the RHA Leadership Development Model for developing professional leadership. After the four components of the model were explored and juxtaposed with Reflection Human Action theory, the overarching skill of issue framing was discussed as a communication tool for mobilizing leadership action. When responsibility is widely shared, leadership efforts are successful for at least ten reasons (adapted from Terry, 1993, pp. 286-287):

- A consensus is formed on desired outcomes.
- No one loses.
- Ownership is pooled.
- Fear and hope combine to motivate cooperation.
- People make things happen.
- Non-positional leaders fill key roles.
- Reliable information is gathered.
- A flexible system of self-direction is used.
- Individual talents are tapped.
- Individuals with initiative and entrepreneurial spirit are involved.

The RHA Leadership Development Model focuses on a belief in people—their capacity, energy, creativity, and commitment; on coherence, not control; and on taking action. Organizations depend upon these factors to ensure their endurance and viability in the future. But most important of all, organizational endurance depends upon having a model to organize its leadership development process and upon inviting broad participation and engagement in rethinking, redesigning, and restructuring the organization to achieve its mission. Taken together, leadership and broad participation can create a sense of community.

However, the natural instinct for community does not necessarily lead to organizational strength and endurance. Indeed, various cultures (including professions) are increasingly creating specialty islands to protect themselves from difference. Wheatley (2001, 2005) holds that this phenomenon can be traced to the mistaken assumption that organizations are machines. For example, the language of *tool*, *build*, *drive*, and *reengineer*—all imply machine characteristics. Instead, a different ideal is surfacing—organizations as adaptive, flexible, self-renewing, resilient, learning, and intelligent. These attributes are found in living systems—self-organizing systems.

Organizations need to adopt characteristics of a self-organizing system and to erase all traces of command and control.

Self-organizing systems have what all leaders crave: the capacity to respond continuously to change. In these systems, change is the organizing force, not a problematic intrusion. Structures and solutions are temporary. Resources and people come together to create new initiatives, to respond to new regulations, to shift the organization's processes. Leaders emerge from the needs of the moment. (Wheatley, 2005, p. 33)

It is the nature of self-organizing systems to be disturbed by outside information, not directed by it. The sense-making capacity comes from within the system. "This explains why organizations reject reports and data that others assume to be obvious and compelling" (p. 37). Thus, the system (organization) has to develop its own identity—a coherent center and clarity about what sustains the organization through turbulent times. The organization's identity is formed through clarity about vision, mission, and values and a current interpretation of its history, present decisions and activities, and its sense of its future. Such clarity of purpose then enables the organization to reach out to its customers, partners, and others to gather information, develop effective relationships, and demonstrate that its identity truly directs its actions.

When an organization self-organizes as a living system,

... it develops shared understanding of what's important, what's acceptable behavior, what actions are required, and how these actions will get done. It develops channels of communication, networks of workers, and complex physical structures. And as the system develops, new capacities emerge. Looking at this list of what a self-organizing system creates leads to the realization that the system can do for itself most of what [position] leaders have felt was necessary to do to it. (Wheatley, 2005, p. 66)

Lest there is an implication that there is no place for the position leader, organizations do need a chief leader to create a receptive environment for creative thinking and experimentation, support self-organizing responses, provide information and resources, create connections, keep the focus on who the organization wants to be and what it wants to accomplish. Position leaders also need to coach and develop people, keep the team vision alive, energize with a positive outlook, insist on transparency, make hard decisions when necessary, probe and question, inspire risk-taking, and celebrate to recognize contributions (Welch, 2005).

The new worldview of organizations as living systems affects position leaders in profound ways (Wheatley, 2001, pp. 15-19). The following principles guide their work:

- Meaning engages creativity – if we want people to be creative we must uncover meaningful issues.
- Depend on diversity – a mosaic of perspectives comes from identifying differences.
- Involve everybody who cares – the only way to know what will work is to invite everyone into the design process.
- Diversity is the path to unity – a group can come together as it recognizes its mutual interests.
- People will always surprise us – people come together through the act of listening.
- Rely on human goodness – the impossible can be done through creativity, caring, and human will.

The better nature of humans rises, according to Wheatley, because we are beginning to give up treating people as machines.

We *are* our only hope for creating a future worth working for. We can't go it alone, we can't get there without each other, and we can't create it without relying anew on our fundamental and precious human goodness. (2001, p. 20)

In summary, then, the RHA Leadership Development Model is intended to bring it all together by choreographing the interaction among layers—the philosophy that underlies leadership, the basic components of leadership development, leadership theory, and issue framing—to offer a comprehensive approach to leadership development. A model is only a beginning for organizational leadership. You are invited to join your colleagues on the journey—one footstep at a time.

### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> *Organization* in this chapter refers to all kinds of informal and formal groups: neighborhoods, communities, agencies, professions, institutions, corporations—even families.

<sup>2</sup> Additional communication strategies for framing issues:

*National Issues Forum (NIF) and Study Circles* – The NIF and Study Circles techniques employ deliberative sessions based on issue books or discussion guides developed in advance by leaders who produce briefings that are unbiased and engaging. These briefings describe the context, some of the underlying issues within the issue, three to five approaches to the issues, arguments pro and con, and notes on the values and trade-offs associated with each approach. When participants can find their own values in the approaches, they can better listen to each other’s perspectives and are less likely to be stuck in narrow opinions. See [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org) and [www.studyircles.org](http://www.studyircles.org).

*Negotiation and Mediation* – Conflict is framed in terms of interests. A moderator helps people clarify and agree on legitimate interests so that the group can work on searching for solutions to embrace all interests. Fisher and Ury’s “Getting to Yes” is explained at [www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/example/fish7513.htm](http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/example/fish7513.htm).

*Nonviolent Communication* – Conflict is framed in terms of unmet needs. A facilitator works to clarify the unmet needs through questions, empathic imagination, and reflective listening. See [www.co-intelligence.org/P-nonviolentcomm.html](http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-nonviolentcomm.html).

*Dynamic Facilitation* – A choice-creating process of framing and reframing evolves dynamically during conversation. Attacks are resolved through questions such as “So, what’s your concern?” “What do you think should be done about that?” The conversation continues by charting concerns, possible solutions, problem statements, and data. Framing unfolds through interaction that follows the group’s energy and evolving understanding. See [www.co-intelligence.org/P-dynamicfacilitation.html](http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-dynamicfacilitation.html).

*Consensus Process* – An issue is framed and reframed until a new collective frame emerges from the group. Special attention is paid to ensure that everybody’s concerns are adequately addressed. Through this means a final decision will have more wisdom and broad support. See [www.co-intelligence.org/P-consensus.html](http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-consensus.html).

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