

LEADERSHIP MAKES A DIFFERENCE: GROWING FEDERAL CIVILIAN LEADERS

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

LEADERSHIP MAKES A DIFFERENCE: GROWING FEDERAL CIVILIAN LEADERS

by

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ABSTRACT

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The quality of federal leaders is vital to the effectiveness of our government. No longer can we depend on leaders simply and conveniently emerging, rather we must invest in a deliberate systematic process to develop leaders at all levels. Research indicates that currently our government does not grow effective leaders. Often those “rising to the top” are technical experts with minimal leadership experiences, mostly unacquainted with the fundamentals of leadership. How can our government grow civilian leaders? Realizing all leaders do not possess the potential to “rise to the top,” how do we identify those with the potential to lead government-wide? Once potential leaders are identified, how will our federal agencies invest in them to lead 21st Century organizations? This SRP documents the urgency to develop civilian leaders. It proposes a new leadership development strategy built on empowering innovation and partnership across the federal government. The time is right for change – our nation depends on powerful civilian leaders.

LEADERSHIP MAKES A DIFFERENCE: GROWING FEDERAL CIVILIAN LEADERS

The federal government is the largest, most complex, most diverse and ultimately the most important organization on the face of the earth. You've got to have top quality leadership running that operation...it's critically important to our homeland and national security...

—David Walker¹

Leader development has enormous value when it comes to the performance of the federal workforce. However, many federal agencies do not have an established or systematic process to develop leaders beginning at the entry level. The skills and attributes required of an “effective leader today are vastly different than the past,”² so we must change our civilian leader development programs and policies to strengthen today's and grow tomorrow's leaders.

Today, federal employees face great challenges in their work environment, “ranging from the spread of avian flu to the threat of terrorism,”³ along with traditional pressures to perform excellently at every level. These employees are led by leaders who participate in daily activities that require technical competence but who also must rely on their leadership skills. Federal leaders “must have the capacity to lead complex organizations with global scope and scale, demonstrate visionary thinking as well as the ability to execute, hold the highest standards of ethics, develop others at all levels, understand the business as a whole, and build influential relationships with customers and stakeholders.”⁴

The stakes are incredibly high: An effective federal government relies on great civilian leaders. How can we produce these leaders? This SRP reviews current policy and identifies common themes found among federal agencies that affect successful leader development. Then it describes common characteristics of successful leader

development programs. Finally, it proposes a new adaptive and flexible leader development strategy and recommends best ways to institutionalize the process.

“We do not grow leaders in the United States Government,”⁵ according to James Locher, Executive Director, Project for Interagency Reform. “We have great technical people, doctors, lawyers and such but we do not focus on producing effective leaders to lead organizations.”⁶ The Project on Interagency Reform documented several problems that impede the government’s “ability to integrate and resource the elements of national power well.”⁷ One issue is the effectiveness of its leadership – “finding good leadership is the solution ... to poor performance.”⁸

Scholars and practitioners emphasize the critical role leaders have in organizational effectiveness, yet “too often leaders are promoted into leadership positions for their technical skills and are unfamiliar with fundamental leadership ideas.”⁹ These leaders often exhibit the best technical skills, but they rarely make the best leaders. Two recent surveys address employees’ assessments of their federal leaders. Leadership effectiveness continues to be among the lowest rated items in the 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey, which reports that less than half the employees responding to the survey are satisfied with the effectiveness of government-wide leadership.¹⁰ This same survey reports that assessments of training needs are not well established or well communicated government-wide.¹¹ Additionally, “The Merit Systems Protection Board’s 2005 survey results find that while 68 percent of federal employees believe their supervisors are technically competent, only 56 percent of the employees believe their supervisors have good management skills.”¹² These statistics do not compare favorably with the best U.S. private companies, but are about on par

with other corporate American organizations.¹³ Because the criteria measured in the federal and corporate surveys are not identical, we cannot compare the data further; however, available data surely indicates that the government has room for improvement.

Recent headlines, “Looming Leadership Crisis, Organizations Placing Their Companies Growth Strategies at Risk” and “The Leadership Crisis – New Survey on the Best Companies for Leaders” raise concerns about a widespread lack of effective leadership. Many companies, along with federal agencies, worry about the approaching baby boomer exodus and question whether today’s rising leaders are actually ready to lead: “Organizations need to worry about the supply of future leaders, there is no easy solution ... if organizations want to ensure the right leaders”¹⁴ are leading their organizations, they must commit to developing them. “Organizations are increasingly reporting the urgency to develop effective leaders now.”¹⁵

However, many of the same organizations reporting the urgency to develop leaders question their ability to develop future leaders. “Current models ... seem to be falling short of delivering adequate leadership talent,”¹⁶ reported in the Corporate University Exchange Leadership 2012 study. More than 75% of human resource executives participating in IBM’s 2007 Global Human Capital Study are concerned with their ability to develop future leaders given explosive markets, imminent retirements, and lack of a pipeline of talent.¹⁷ Similarly, federal agencies are facing unprecedented change, along with retirements, an uncertain pipeline of talent and no unity of effort or viable system to cultivate leadership.

Policy vs. Reality

Demands from the increased complexities in public service work require systematic, progressive, and sequential leader development from entry to senior levels. The issue of developing leaders is becoming a more predominant among current senior leaders. In September 2006, Linda Springer, Director, Office of Personnel Management, sent a memorandum to the government's chief human capital officers specifying guidelines to develop effective leaders. The memorandum provides a list of specific criteria and explicit components for leader development programs, along with a list of consideration for best practices in leadership development programs. In March 2007, Daniel Akaka, Chairman, Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, introduced legislation to amend Chapter 41 of Title 5, United States Code. This legislation, referred to as the Federal Supervisory Act of 2007, directs development of a program "to provide interactive instructor-based training to supervisors on actions, options and strategies a supervisor may use."¹⁸ This program includes a variety of topics, such as performance goals, mentoring, motivating employees, and managing employees' unacceptable behavior. These two initiatives – one bureaucratic, the other legislative – along with the author's review of several federal agency strategic plans and discussion with a number of leaders – confirm that senior leaders are focusing on developing future leaders. Indeed, leadership development is on the radar screen.

The cited federal surveys reflect participants' dissatisfaction with their leaders. These findings can be associated with the opportunities employees have to develop themselves as leaders. A recent study conducted by Dr. James Thompson, University of Illinois at Chicago, assessed leadership training and development programs in the

federal government. Thompson found that six of thirty federal agencies have particularly robust programs: Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Internal Revenue Service, Federal Aviation Administration, Government Accountability Office, and Defense Logistics Agency.¹⁹ Thompson discovered that these agencies, although lacking a plan to achieve their particular goals, did share common themes in their leadership programs: training and education, performance feedback, challenging assignments and mentoring. These issues are discussed later in this paper as critical elements of good leader development programs. However, one critical element cited as most valuable is leaders' development through job assignments; this was found to be the least commonly used developmental method among federal agencies.²⁰ Many of the agencies identified as not having particularly robust leader development programs did have some of the critical elements. The Air Force was the only Department of Defense (DOD) participant in this study. Agencies across DOD use a variety of core leader development elements cited in Thompson's assessment. Because "DOD has the single largest civilian employee population in the Federal Government,"²¹ which performs some of the most diverse missions, it is important to gain a better understanding of its enterprise-wide efforts to improve leader development. DOD's programs, along with those of the agencies participating in Thompson's study provide valuable information to other agencies seeking to improve their leader development programs.

DOD is currently deeply engaged with transforming its approach to producing the best mission-ready cadre of senior executives. Marilee Fitzgerald, Principal Director, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, reports that "the shifting priorities of the

department require senior leaders integrated as a total force partner. Leaders exert influence and make decisions that cross disciplines and environments. We must draw upon a portfolio of experiences to think broadly and keep in mind the needs of the entire Department of Defense.”²² DOD, like many federal agencies, has found that often their SES members rise to the top because of their technical expertise. These SES members tend to stay in the same positions and rarely move among federal agencies. DOD’s new approach includes nine guiding principles, which make up the framework for developing senior executives.²³ These principles, which prescribe requirements for senior leaders and are consistent with the Office of Personnel Management’s September 2006 memorandum, provide a best practice for other agencies to consider (See Table 1).

- Respect, engage, and value individual needs of our SES leaders
- Value talent, workforce diversity, performance, leadership, and commitment to public service
- Fully integrate SES leaders as a “Total Force” partner in execution of DOD’s mission
- Manage and develop leaders across the Department with a flexible, executable, transparent, and credible framework
- Recognize Component mission requirements in managing executive talent across DOD
- Transition the management of SES leadership careers from an ad hoc to a deliberate corporate process
- Encourage, recognize, and reward all SES leaders who are role models and good corporate citizens
- Value a portfolio of experiences that build perspective and expertise to exert influence and make decisions crossing disciplines and diverse environments
- Ensure deliberate and early development of a leadership pipeline that meets OPM and DOD executive core qualifications

Table 1. DOD Guiding Principles

DOD’s first phase addresses its senior executives and later its feeder group – mid-to-senior-grade civilians. Currently, DOD relies on a couple of programs – the

Executive Leadership Development Program (ELDP) and Defense Leadership and Management Program (DLAMP) along with its components – to fill the executive pool to meet the organization’s needs. DLAMP is undergoing transformation to better align with a joint leader construct that focuses on the enterprise-wide perspective leaders need to lead in a joint, interagency, and multi-national environment. Both DLAMP and ELDP are competitive programs: only high potential employees capable of performing at the highest levels of government are selected into these programs. Several DOD agencies have developed strategies and are changing processes and implementing new programs to strengthen leader development. In response to the finding of two studies – the Army Training and Leader Development Panel Civilian Study (ATLDP-CIV 2003) and the Review of Education, Training, and Assignments for Leaders (RETAL 2006) – the Army is transforming its civilian leader development program. Despite huge financial constraints, the Army has institutionalized a systematic training and education program for its civilian corps. The Army, like many agencies, is struggling to establish policies and programs mandating other key components so its civilians can pursue a holistic developmental career path. The Air Force is currently undergoing similar reviews and transformational efforts. Like the Army, “the Air Force conceptualizes education, training, and experience as a continuum of learning that spans a career through tactical, operational and strategic levels.”²⁴ Today the Air Force is reviewing institutional competencies and levels of descriptive behaviors that are expected of Air Force civilians.²⁵ The reviews will look at content and proficiency levels of current programs. It will identify gaps and recommend either continuing with current programs learning or design new developmental opportunities.

The Department of Navy 2007 Human Capital Strategy recognizes that the changing workforce requires better ways to manage and develop its people. One of Navy's people-focused goals is "to build intellectual capital by creating an environment that supports lifelong learning and individual growth."²⁶ Their focus, similar to that of the Army and Air Force, is greater investments in training, education, and developmental opportunities. To succeed in today's environment, the Navy acknowledges the need to develop all of their people at every level.²⁷

It is encouraging that there is widespread advocacy of leadership development, as well as increased momentum to establish policy for leader development. Many federal agencies are developing human capital development plans, while some are investing in specific developmental programs. However, most do not have a process to exchange ideas with other agencies, nor to share methods, programs, or systems. However, a common thread emerges – the reality is all compete for resources: Leadership development takes time and money. To develop the federal government's most valuable asset – its people, both time and money are mandatory.

The uncertain, complex, and ever-changing strategic environment demands that "Leadership will be understood as the collective capacity of all members of an organization to accomplish such critical tasks as setting direction, creating alignment, and gaining commitment."²⁸ Developing leaders to this standard is difficult because the focus on the individual must expand further to include all members of the team.²⁹

Characteristics of Good Leader Development Programs

There is no single process or system for developing leaders – leadership development is an on-going process. However, there are some characteristics often

found in a continuous learning environment that encapsulate a leader development framework. Federal agencies rely heavily on training – most often a random event that is not part of a development plan. “Classroom training should not be the only part of leadership development initiative, and may be the least critical.”³⁰ The 2007 Hewitt Study found that many of the top companies attribute their success in leader development to a blended development model. This model relies heavily on job experience, mentoring, coaching, and less on training. Consider the following examination of some characteristics of successful leader development programs from both industry and the federal government:

Competencies-Based

A key characteristic of a successful leader development program is that it focuses core leader competencies. These competencies include a leader’s skills, knowledge, and behavior – the capabilities required to lead effectively. These competencies have changed since the end of the 20th century. Today common core competencies, found in industry and the federal government, underpin leader development programs. These competencies are assessed to measure achievement of developmental goals and to create metrics to determine current and future business needs. The Office of Personnel Management conducted a review of federal leadership competencies in 2006; this survey identified fundamental competencies which now cross five broad dimensions – leading people, leading change, possessing business acumen, building coalitions, and being results driven. Effective leader development programs focus on these core competencies and acknowledge that they must adapt to changes in the organization environment. Additionally, competencies developed and implemented within the

construct of the organization's business model bring about profound and long-lasting changes.³¹

Invest Time and Money

Top leaders from Fortune's best led companies agree: "You don't build leaders on the cheap, and you don't just bolt a development program onto existing HR procedures."³² Several of the top companies reported their Chief Executive Officers spend nearly half of their time focused on people issues. Many companies claim they are interested in developing leaders, but if you check their leader's calendars, you will clearly identify their priorities.³³ Their dedication to development is evident in their attention to the next generation of leaders. This cascading effect is very powerful – if the senior leaders are truly devoted to developing human capital.

Organizations committed to leadership development demonstrate this commitment by devoting funding for training and leader development. In 2004, the Corporate Leadership Council reported organizations are spending "about 26% of the organization's training and development budgets solely on leadership development, an increase over previous years."³⁴ These organizations view development as an investment, not a cost. Fiscally stressed federal government agencies facing many competing demands must rely on more creative and innovative developmental methods.

Identify Talent Early (Talent: Potential vs. Performance)

When discussing leader development among federal leaders, most associate it with the development of individuals in supervisory or management positions. But ideally, leader development begins well before one's first supervisory position. Often the question is asked, how do you identify talent early on? The Corporate Leadership

Council's model proposes that an employee's potential is determined by his or her "aspiration, ability, and engagement."³⁵ A 2005 survey conducted with over 11,000 employees and managers from 59 organizations, which included some federal agencies, provided startling results: less than two-and-a-half percent of today's workforce will succeed at the next level if they are immediately promoted.³⁶

Often organizations rely on high performance and the length of time an individual has in an organization to select individuals with high potential. These indicators are between 8 to 17% reliable.³⁷ A literature review recommends a wide range of indicators that help identify high potential leaders. One corporate profile, for example, presents a model that includes superior performance, along with eagerness to operate beyond the immediate sphere of accountability, willingness to take risks, and the desire to assume leadership responsibilities.³⁸ General Electric begins its evaluation on day one of employment by observing interpersonal skills when employees have absolutely no authority in the company. "Spotting leaders early means working on their development early."³⁹ This can be risky for some organizations that highly value tenure and time in service. Many companies are moving past these traditional indicators, believing that nurturing future leaders early creates a competitive edge by building a robust talent pool.

Training, Education, and Assignments

Successful leader development programs are underpinned by training, education, and professional experiences. The amount of each varies from program to program. But the employee's individual career plan should be a consideration in leadership development. The U.S. Army is leading the way in providing a robust leader training

and education continuum for its civilian corps. The Civilian Education System, delivered by means of a blend of classroom and online curriculum, includes four courses, beginning with a foundational leader course and culminating with an advanced course. Other agencies have developed online courses and have contracted for formal training for their employees. Effective training and education is followed with on-the-job applications.

Experiential on the job learning is a critical component in a leader development program. Some organizations find it difficult to rotate employees because they have been hired for a specific job – what they are good at rather than what they need to improve.⁴⁰ To enhance learning, some organizations are developing short work assignments – leaders are not leaving their job but taking on ad hoc additional assignments. “Development today means providing people opportunities to learn from their work rather than taking them away from their work to learn.”⁴¹ This is not new to many federal agencies. Often additional duties, special assignments, and task forces provide excellent learning opportunities to expand organizational knowledge and broaden one’s skills.

Feedback, Coaching and Mentoring

“When executives are more engaged, they are more likely to develop the managers that report to them. Similarly, when managers are engaged, they are more likely to develop their employees.”⁴² This behavior cascades down to the front line to the people who engage daily with customers. “It is the most elementary principle of learning: if you don’t know how you’ve performed, you don’t learn, and you soon stop caring.”⁴³ Candid and frequent feedback is important – it breeds a healthy organization.

Several institutions rely on coaching and have incorporated multi-source feedback tools, 360 degree assessments, and personality tools. These instruments are useful supplemented with coaching; they are highly valuable in personalizing employees' development.

"Mentoring is one of the tools that you use to help fill the skill gap and keep people involved and growing,"⁴⁴ claims Jim Young, chief engineer for Naval Systems at Integrated Defense System, St. Louis site. Boeing has also found mentoring important to fill skill gaps as their workforce ages. For Boeing, "Mentoring is one tool that can help introduce and expand the base of the knowledge here, and help retain expertise."⁴⁵ Mentoring is part of the corporate culture at Boeing and many other organizations. In 2005 The United States Army senior leaders (the Secretary, Chief of staff, and Sergeant Major of the Army) encouraged soldiers and civilians to leave a "legacy through mentorship." They recommended encouraging every leader to make a commitment to mentor one person from outside of their chain of command and carry forward this tradition in the years ahead.⁴⁶ The U.S. Army has always expected its leaders to mentor junior people, but now more than ever this is critical due to its increased responsibilities in fighting the Global War on Terrorism. An Army organization that has advocated mentorship's power is the Installation Management Command (IMCOM). This command assigned a senior executive to lead the effort as its mentoring champion. In the photo below (Figure 1), J. Randall Robinson, IMCOM West Region Director, welcomes the FY08 Mentoring Program Participants October 2007 orientation in San Antonio, Texas. IMCOM offers four types of mentoring programs: supervisory, informal, facilitated, and centralized. IMCOM's program design enables leaders to

“enhance employee professional and career development, to promote opportunities for professional success, and to encourage succession planning.”⁴⁷ President George Bush summed up the importance of mentorship during his 2003 inaugural speech, “one mentor, one person, can change a life forever. And I urge you to be that one person.”⁴⁸



Figure 1. IMCOM Centralized Mentoring Program 2007 Orientation

Self-Development

Leaders must take ownership of their learning and think of learning as a continuous process. A good leader development program introduces leaders to a variety of methods for enriching knowledge through initiative. Self-development results from self-assessment and reflection. Likewise, personal interest can enhance self-development, which comes in a variety of methods: online courses, conferences, team building events, public speaking, or reading books. Leaders willingly devote some personal time to self-development.

The Hewitt study described a clear set of practices used to develop leaders; however, agencies must be aware of the likely challenges to their adaptations of these practices. The IBM study identified some of the best practices as significant challenges. Table 2, identifies some of these challenges that agencies should anticipate and navigate past. Without change, “we are not building a strong core of great leaders”⁴⁹...impacting performance.

2007 Best Practices (HayGroup Study)	Significant Challenges (IBM Study)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership development opportunities are made available to managers • Managers are held accountable for creating a work climate that motivates employees to do their best • Training and other activities intended to help leadership teams work together more effectively are provided • Talent Management led by an in-depth analysis of the roles that need to be filled in the future • Leadership Training and development opportunities intended to help leaders transition into new roles • Working abroad/international experiences • External hires participating in formal orientation programs to prepare them for leadership positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing leaders through experiences - Rotating leadership talent across divisions and geographies • Transferring knowledge from older to younger employees – Communicating among generations • Locating the experts - ability to apply existing knowledge • Predicting the future skills necessary to address current and future business needs – identifying future key competencies • Fostering collaboration: organizational silos; time pressures; misaligned performance measures

Table 2. Best Practices and Challenges to Consider

Recommendations for a New Strategy

“We believe the time is right to recommit the Federal Government to developing effective leaders.”⁵⁰ The Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) guidelines for

managerial development propose programs for leaders and potential leaders at all levels. OPM relies on the agencies to fully implement the guidance and thereby to ensure development of an effective leadership cadre for today and the future. Current disparate federal efforts to develop talented leaders do not fully address the future needs of the federal workforce. However, working together, agencies can create a multitude of more promising opportunities that can be tailored and adapted to the specific needs of a given agency.

To leverage these opportunities, OPM should establish a federal leader corporate university. Such institutions have been variously designed. An excellent resource, however, is Corporate University Enterprise (CUE), Inc, which has identified key principles and defined roles for a corporate university.⁵¹ Consider CUE's list of characteristics of successful programs:

- proactively staying ahead of the change curve and aligning learning as part of corporate initiatives
- event-based training to solutions-based approaches to development
- shared accountability for learning with executives, managers, and employees
- seamless technology integration to support comprehensive tracking
- learning solutions that focus on providing the right learning to the right person in the right place and at the right time
- common "system" for learning that promotes collaboration and reduction of redundancies
- formal and comprehensive methodologies to demonstrate the value of learning

Certainly these characteristics should be considered as we create a federal leader corporate university. Federal agencies should have the flexibility to create their own

corporate university based on the vision, core competencies, and guiding principles of the federal leader corporate university model. Agencies can select from such methods as classroom training, distributed learning courses, or interagency developmental assignments.

To support development of a federal leader corporate university model, OPM should offer opportunities to exchange ideas, to share methodologies, programs, and systems. Agencies should then coordinate their own efforts, then plan, monitor, and track developmental activities. The hybrid leader development model encourages agency leaders to think differently about developing future leaders. It allows agencies to share, adopt, adapt, or eliminate redundant programs or systems.

A Hybrid Leader Development Model

The federal government's vast array of opportunities can provide optimal leader development for the entire workforce. OPM's recommended federal leader corporate university model could provide a strategic umbrella to foster the growth of all federal leaders. The hybrid leader development model allows federal agencies to maintain the flexibility to customize their leadership development by using a three-pronged approach to create or assess and refine their existing programs. Agencies must retain the responsibility to *design, plan* and *evaluate* their programs. Within this framework, they can concentrate efforts to create and implement their agency's leader development model. The first step in the design phase is to create a vision. By focusing on a fundamental question: What is the desired outcome? Once this question is answered, the planning phase should begin. Agencies then must identify the skills and attributes they seek in their leaders. They should focus first on the senior leader in the

organization by describing the skills and attributes necessary to lead the organization at the highest level. These requirements should then cascade down to the lowest level in the organization.

After a vision is created, guiding principles should be developed. They must correspond with OPM guidance for developing effective leaders. The vision and the guiding principles should correlate with core leader competencies. Of course, outlined by OPM. OPM encourages flexibility in applying the standards to achieve the specific core leader competencies identified in the plan phase. The plan phase focuses on achieving the vision – the endstate. Agencies then concentrate on answering the question: How do we get there? The characteristics of successful leader development programs discussed earlier offer valuable insights for developing an agency program. Each program should finally provide a core foundation of training and education, experiential learning, and feedback. Implementing a process that provides continuous learning throughout an individual’s career optimally develops effective leaders.

The Hybrid Leader Development Model focuses on the individual and then expands to organizational team development. This model includes individual assessments designed show personnel how to improve their performance. By overcoming weaknesses and capitalizing on strengths, individuals perform more effectively and productively⁵² – and enhance their ability to lead. Individual assessments thus help personalize leader development. The old adage, “One shoe does not fit all” applies to leadership development: The Hybrid Leader Development Model emphasizes individuality – linking the person to requirements necessary for that person to attain leader competencies. Expanding from individual to team development

requires integration of the developmental program with the organization’s business and culture.

The third prong of this model addresses evaluation. Agencies should begin this phase by answering the question: Are we there? This question remains relevant at all times because evaluating leader development programs is a continuous process. A developmental program can become stale or irrelevant in our current dynamic and unpredictable environment. What works now will not work forever. Often agencies successfully identify changing conditions but fail to make appropriate adjustments in what is desired of their leaders.

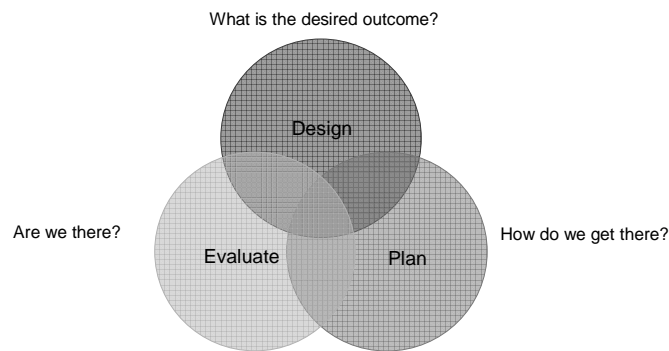


Figure 2. Hybrid Leader Development Model

Capitalize on the Investment

To establish a culture that embraces leader development, we should implement a clear, transparent, yet deliberate approach to leader development. Institutionalizing federal leader development initiatives relies on three core elements: leadership commitment, policy, and assessment. Leadership commitment addresses two important issues, time and money – both attest to leader involvement. In the current strategic environment, innovative measures are necessary to encourage leaders to fully

develop employees through coaching, counseling, and mentoring. Leaders must reserve dedicated time for this very important responsibility.

Leaders must safeguard funding for leader development. Leading organizations acknowledge that “running leader development programs can also be expensive, but no Chief Executive Officer (CEO) seems to doubt their value.”⁵³ Even when money is scarcest, they seem to find the funding. Whirlpool’s CEO, Jeff Fettig declares, “[Leader development] is the single best investment we make in our company.”⁵⁴ Likewise, a recent Department of the Army report affirms that “Leader development is an investment, not a cost.”⁵⁵ Our federal government depends on its leaders. Investing in our government’s leaders is an investment in our nation’s future.

Funding constraints do require leaders to develop creative ways to grow leaders. Agencies may not have enough funding available to send employees to classroom training, but may use developmental assignments or special tasks to develop or attain core leader competencies. “Using job assignments for developmental purposes provides benefits that go beyond getting the job done.”⁵⁶ The employee’s time spent learning – whether in a classroom, or reading a book, or shadowing a leader – is an investment in that person’s knowledge and increased productivity. This time represents a long-term organizational investment. Current leaders must serve as catalysts for developing future leaders. Leaders must know the employees, understand their strengths and shortcomings. Leaders must coach and mentor, and develop and implement individualized incremental developmental plans. Two of leaders’ most important responsibilities are to present themselves as role models and to champion the development of leaders.

Leaders must also constantly evaluate their agencies' developmental programs. Discussions with many senior federal leaders confirmed that until leader development is evaluated, the employees' commitment to the program remains tepid and mostly inconsistent. So leaders' commitment cannot be measured solely on core business results.

OPM must take the lead in establishing metrics to assess the leadership and leader development programs, rather than relying on agencies to develop their own metrics. Leader development is "strategically important and expensive."⁵⁷ Most agencies, both in industry and the government, find it difficult to measure the return on investment. The federal leader corporate university construct relies on OPM to measure program effectiveness, even if outcomes are not met. Metrics must focus on the holistic development of the individual, the competencies attained or those lacking. Metrics should measure more than the program; they should account for individual progress. Through the proper use of metrics, the federal government can identify with more certainty areas needing improvement.

Conclusion

OPM's renewed recommitment to develop effective federal civilian leaders is a huge step in the right direction. But we must now think differently about the approach the federal government uses to create policy and programs to develop our leaders – then plan for rapid execution. We must act quickly because the need for effective leaders at all levels is greater now than ever before. The federal government is operating during a period of complexity and unprecedented change, while faced with great resource challenges. Leaders across all federal agencies must collaborate,

overcome isolationist tendencies, and create leader development policy and programs – together. Agencies must create and implement their own systematic, progressive, and sequential leader development programs from entry to senior levels. This new approach pays greater attention to developing individuals. It demands tailoring of one’s development rather than relying on an assembly-line approach to make powerful leaders. This individualized approach demands leader involvement; leaders must coach, teach, guide, and mentor their juniors.

The federal leader corporate university model consolidates leader development under an OPM strategic umbrella; however, it gives agencies much flexibility to plan and implement their own vision through organizationally tailored programs. This developmental program is designed to empower innovation and partnership across the federal government, without disrupting organizational program integrity. It is time to change. Our nation’s future relies on developing powerful civilian leaders at every level of the federal government.

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