

## DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS. IDENTIFYING LEADERSHIP QUALITIES AND ATTRIBUTES

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DOI: 10.19062/1842-9238.2017.15.1.22

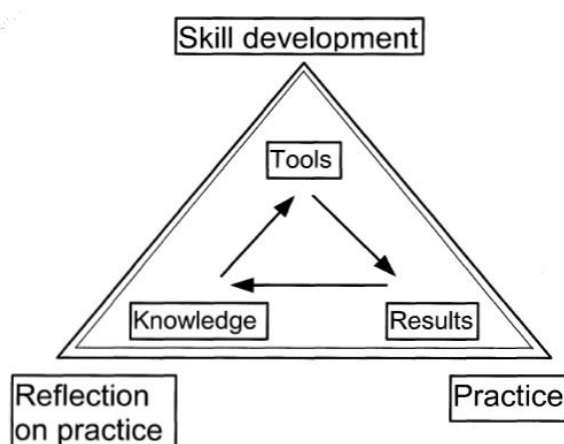
**Abstract:** *One of the selection criteria for someone to join the military and especially to become an officer is to pass a psychological exam, which consists of a situational test in order to evaluate leader aptitudes and the capacity to work in a team. Passing that exam does not guarantee that a student will become a leader, he only has the potential to become one and skill developing requires other than a special educational program also self reflection on practice. In this article I developed a self-assessment questionnaire for identifying leadership qualities and attributes which can help both students and instructors as an initial evaluation of his students.*

**Keywords:** *leader, leadership, self-assessment*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*“Leadership cannot be taught. It can only be learned.”*  
- Harold S. Geneen

Leadership skills can be developed. Everybody has a certain potential to become a leader, which can be developed or left behind depending on many situational factors as the need to adapt to an environment and its requirement. Leaders are not born and from leadership skills can benefit anyone.



**Fig. 1.** Leadership skill development model

In this article I present a self-assessment questionnaire for identifying leadership qualities and attributes as one of the most important aspects of a leader development is relying on his own reflection on practice.

In order to define the most important qualities and attributes of a leader, I made an overview of the main theories on leadership which gives us an idea of this complex concept.

Self-evaluation is an essential element in the process of evaluation that helps the student to focus on his development by providing information about what has been achieved and what we need to accomplish. As important is the fact that students participating in the self-evaluation can develop metacognitive skills.

Like most learning activities does, self-evaluation is also a skill that must be developed. Students who rarely does evaluate themselves, need guidance in order to get used with the process, choose the right questions as many times the right question can be more important than a bias answer. Personal specific action plans, represents an ideal format of the questionnaire outcome.

As an instructor, this questionnaire can serve as an initial evaluation of students. The answers are marked in three different colors: red, yellow and green, which can serve as a criteria for the instructor to organize his groups in smaller groups and give specific group tasks depending on their developmental level on a specific criteria.

## 2. LEADERSHIP THEORIES OVERVIEW

Among the most popular and clearly defined theories in leadership approach are as follows:

- Great Man Theory
- Trait Theory
- Behavioral Theory
  - The Managerial Grid Model / Leadership Grid
  - Role Theory
- Participative Leadership
  - Lewin's leadership styles
  - Likert's leadership styles
- Situational Leadership
  - Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership
  - Vroom and Yetton's Normative Model
  - House's Path-Goal Theory of Leadership
- Contingency Theories
  - Fiedler's Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) Theory
  - Cognitive Resource Theory
  - Strategic Contingencies Theory
- Transactional Leadership
  - Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory
- Transformational Leadership
  - Bass' Transformational Leadership Theory
  - Burns' Transformational Leadership Theory

One of the major aspects of the leadership process is *influence*. In this process a leader influences a number of individuals to fulfil a common mission, but those individuals are influenced not by power, authority, the imposed influence comes from a freedom of choice. Without this type of relations, we are talking about an order execution, which is a management feature. "Managers have subordinates, leaders have followers."-Murray Johannsen

Certainly, the existence of freedom does not mean the absence of any form of authority, but also the value of freedom rests on the authority which provides laws in front of which all men are equal.

By researching all the theories mentioned above in a chronological order, I found a few common characteristics:

- Leaders aren't born, they develop. Leadership is a process of training based on experience, education, learning and personal challenge. Even in societies ruled by a king who inherit the right to lead, his leadership is subjected to an education in this respect.

- You don't have to own the authority to be a leader. If we look on any definition we notice that no leader needs to be a commander, all commanders though should be leaders.

- Leaders are responsible for their actions. Tyranny is born due to absolute power without responsibility, freedom of the press and the justice are the means by which the highest levels of leaders are responsible for the actions.

- Leaders have a positive approach to carry out missions. Punishments, coercive methods to influence, extortion, are not the means by which a true leader exercises influence over the others.

- The leader must be moral. Adolf Hitler had fulfilled most of the features of a leader except the moral side and that is just one example of what leadership means without a moral component. " Bad leadership implies no leadership. I contend that there is nothing neutral about leadership; it is valued as a moral necessity " MacGregor Burns[1]

### **3. IDENTIFYING LEADERSHIP QUALITIES AND ATTRIBUTES.**

As I stated before, my belief is that leadership skills can be developed and learned, and also in the military, the right kind of leadership and the most complete is most often "transformational leadership". A transformational leader can motivate his followers in crisis situations and build a team capable of meeting the next challenge even more effectively, inspiring vision of the future and manage the implementation of that vision.

A lot of this goes on within a potential leader's mind, however, as someone seeking to nurture leaders in a military academy, we can learn to recognize the traits shown by these people. By watching out for these traits, we can see if that person we're watching is thinking in the right way. Military students come into schools with a great potential that instructors need to ensure it's developed.

So, while almost everyone can develop leadership qualities, some may already be more advanced in their ability to do well in leadership roles. The observed behaviors listed below show this high potential and by having this questionnaire as an initial evaluation, the instructor can form groups of students on the same level that can challenge each other and also have different standards set. This self-assessment questionnaire has three colors that can transform into a specific group by extracting the criteria of interest.

First, take time to honestly analyze yourself. Learn to understand yourself. It's the first step to understanding others.

Red = NEVER, Yellow = SOMETIMES and Green = ALWAYS

At the end of the questionnaire, identify areas for improvement. Look for these personal attributes in others and develop them in yourself.

Table 1. Leadership qualities and attributes

Do you accept the status quo by settling for things the way they are? <i>By combining their technical ability with their strong conceptual skills, leaders are able to generate new ideas and build an inspiring vision of how the future could be.</i>			
Do you often think of new and practical ideas and suggestions?			
Do you stay aware of current issues and trends, understand the impact these can have, and is quick to define opportunities and threats?			
Do you enjoy bouncing ideas around and thinking laterally?			
Do you often look for bigger assignments and for opportunities to learn new skills?			
Are you passionate about leading? <i>Leaders have an internal drive to spearhead projects and take on the leadership role.</i>			
Do you usually see the "big picture" and plan at least the first few moves to accomplish your tasks?			
Do you commit to ideas and get results?			
Do you enjoy initiating new projects?			
Do you have a high level of self awareness? <i>Leaders know themselves. This means that they know what they're good at, they know what they're bad at, they exploit their strengths, and they manage their weaknesses (for example, by working with someone with complementary strengths).</i>			
Do you seek ways to increase your understanding of yourself –skills, aptitudes, and competencies?			
Are you open to all types of feedback?			
Do you ask for feedback and act constructively to make improvements?			
Do you usually listen without trying to justify or getting defensive?			
Do you see the impact that your behavior has on others and makes adjustments accordingly?			
Do you proactively turn mistakes into learning experiences?			
Do you have high integrity <i>Leaders are fair and trustworthy and expect the same from others. People trust what they say and have faith in what they do. Because of this, these leaders are respected and they treat others with respect as well.</i>			
Do you communicate openly with everyone?			
Are you afraid to be wrong or to have a different opinion?			
Do you share mistakes and bad news openly and honestly?			
Do you take responsibility without seeking blame?			
Do you provide valuable feedback to others?			

Do you resist making quick judgments on instinct, and prefer instead to observe what others do and the types of decisions they make?			
Have you consistently performed very well and deliver outstanding results?			
Do you respect other people? <i>While leaders aren't always people-people (being extroverted or charismatic helps, but isn't essential), they are genuinely interested and concerned about others welfare, and they work hard to help people in their teams make the most of themselves.</i>			
Do you invest in relationships with people?			
Do you see the value in others and want everyone to be the best they can be?			
Are you quick to ask for, give help and encourage collaborative work behavior?			
Do you bring a contagious enthusiasm to the workplace. <i>Leaders are inspirational – they have a positive and motivational energy.</i>			
Would you describe yourself as a fun, positive, generous person?			
Are you quick to give credit to others?			
Do you openly celebrate success?			
Do you focus on the positive, and try to make the best of a situation?			
Do you make solid decisions in highly uncertain situations?			
Are you good at simplifying complex issues?			
Are you mentally tough? <i>Whatever the challenge, you have to be strong, see things through a new lens, and take decisive action if you want to move through it successfully.</i>			
Do you accept and encourage change?			
Are you proactive?			
Do you believe in yourself?			
Are you purposeful and driven into getting the job done?			

## CONCLUSIONS

Leadership skills development is important for any person that works in a team. Becoming a leader and create visions, values, inspire commitment, challenge and transform ways of thinking and acting requires more than a formal educational frame, it is a personal challenge.

The first step in becoming a leader starts with self-awareness, acknowledgement of strengths and weaknesses. In a military academy, instructors have to do more than transmitting knowledge to students, they need to be mentored and challenged to develop themselves.

Insight does not simply appear, formed from the consumption of professional content, growth brought on by experience, and the refinement that everyday discussion brings. Great leaders take this process intentionally, so that they are ready when problems arise.

Reflection is the step a leader takes in shaping the surrounding content into personalized insight. For example, after completing a self-assessment questionnaire as the one I presented, the reflection step is capturing how the text is specifically relevant and applicable. Reflection is intellectually challenging. Anyone can pick out a brilliant quote, but the great leader is able to convert that insight into lessons that resonate in his own leadership environment. Leaders draw insight from experience, lessons learned provided that they are open to learning from that experience.

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