

## **Leadership Development Strategies; the Ghanaian Perspective**

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**Abstract:** *The pace of organizational life and change has accelerated the need for leaders to become better leaders and better learners. A new and wider array of skills and competencies are needed by leaders in the 21st century*

*Leadership development must seek to cultivate a self confidence that is always balanced by the recognition that no one person has all the answers. It is instead engaged in a quest to build staff commitment, engagement and participation in the achievement of the organization's goals.*

*The primary objective of this study was to examine how leadership development takes place in Ghanaian organisations, specifically, the study sought to find out how organisations evaluate their leadership development activities, and the forms of evaluation they find to be the most effective.*

*The total number of respondents was one hundred and eleven (111) individuals from 19 organisations in Ghana. The descriptive design was used. The results revealed that coaching, closely followed by mentoring and job assignment are the most widely used leadership development activities undertaken by Ghanaian organisations. It is also clear that many organisations use many of these techniques in combination with each other.*

*It is our hope that this study will improve on those leadership development activities organisations currently undertake. We therefore suggest some steps that can be taken, and some relevant questions that should be routinely asked, when leadership development strategies are being developed. If life cannot be made perfect, it can at least be made better.*

**Keywords:** *Leadership, Leadership Development, Strategies, Private sector, Public sector, Not for Profit Organisations, Ghanaian Perspective.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Interest in leadership and leadership development is now intense in many organisations. Leadership is sometimes touted as a panacea for deeply embedded problems, with Government in particular urging the indiscriminate application of models drawn from the private sector, on the assumption that they will be universally applicable (Currie and Lockett, 2007). If leaders are expected to combine the saintliness of Gandhi, the forgiveness of Mandela, the compassion of Mother Theresa, the rhetorical skills of Martin Luther King, the vision of John F. Kennedy, and the inspirational abilities of Winston Churchill, then we can only conclude that pretty much all of our organisations are in deep trouble.

Yet it is undeniable that effective leadership, more modestly defined, is important for organisational success (Yoo and Brooks, 2005). Various studies have all drawn attention to the need for effective

leadership development in organisations and emphasised how good practice in leadership development could improve effectiveness. The challenge is to have a workable vision of what we mean by leadership, and then devise some form of development that can help as many people as possible to grow those leadership talents they possess. Such talents are rarely in full bloom at birth: leaders are born and made. It is clear that much of this 'making' has to happen when people arrive in organisations rather than before.

Blackler and Kennedy (2004) note that there is surprisingly little consensus about appropriate approaches for leader development particularly in the public sector. In this paper, and on the assumption that we can always learn from the experiences of others, we attempt to shed some light on these issues. We therefore draw on an extensive survey that we conducted of leadership development practices in Ghanaian organisations to show some of the methods that are most commonly employed to develop people. None of them is necessarily better than the others - the point is that organisations should be more aware of the options that are available, and select whichever ones are most appropriate to their needs, purposes, values and resources.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. The Concept of Leadership**

It is useful to begin by specifying what we mean by 'leadership.' It is difficult to 'develop' what you have not defined. Despite this, as previous researchers have found, the concept of leadership is poorly thought through in many organisations (Alimo-Metcalfe and Lawler, 2001). In particular, leaders in organizations are often required to take on a leadership role 'in situations where many of the key players and the resources are not under their direct control' (van Zwanenberg, 2003: 14). Command and control views of leadership are not only inappropriate; they are likely to be counterproductive.

The term "leadership" in the frame of organizations refers to the approaches adopted by superiors in their everyday interaction with employees. It consists of many dimensions, such as values, standards, norms, items or issues observed in the working environment and affects employees' emotions, performance and behavior (Lok and Crawford, 2004).

We would therefore commend the perspective of Northouse (2003: 3), who asserts that 'Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.' We would only add that leadership is a reciprocal process. Followers influence leaders just as much as the other way round, or need to if rounded individuals are to assume leadership roles and proceed to lead effective organisations. As Mintzberg (2004: 141) has wisely noted: 'We are now inundated with heroic leaders who are dragging their organizations down amidst their own hubris.' Genuine leaders are those open to feedback from others, particularly when it is critical of organisational strategy or the leader's own performance (Tourish, 2005). Leadership development, then, must seek to cultivate a self confidence that is always balanced by the recognition that no one person has all the answers, and is instead engaged in a quest to build staff commitment, engagement and participation in the achievement of the organization's goals. It follows that leadership development should seek to encourage people into leadership roles and processes, while recognizing that this will encompass those with both formal and informal authority (Day, 2001).

### **2.2. Types of Leadership Style**

Research results have revealed various types or styles of leadership implemented in different organizations, cultures and working frames. Some leaders incorporate leadership styles depending on the situation or their feelings at a given moment, while others adhere to the same style regardless of the situation they have to face. Every leader is characterized by their own style, which is influenced by organizational culture and is likely to produce a management style that prevails and represents a standard of conduct for leaders to adopt (Shurbagi and Zahari, 2012).

Through their education, training, and experience, managers develop their personal leadership style (Hersey et al., 2001). This leadership style is a fundamental concern of managers and researchers (Wood, 1994) due to its effect on subordinates who, it is suggested, work more effectively and productively when their managers adopt a specific leadership style. If managers adopt their subordinates' preferred style giving employees the respect and fair treatment they deserve, then this is seen to lead to job satisfaction, which will affect the functioning of the organisation (Spector, 1997). Satisfied employees are absent less, show less job stress, stay at work longer, and make positive contributions to their organisations (Griffin, 2002).

Leadership style refers to a leader's behaviour. It is the result of the philosophy, personality and experience of the leader. Lewin et al (1939), identified different styles of leadership: Autocratic, Participative and Laissez-Faire

### **2.3. Autocratic or Authoritarian Style**

Under the autocratic leadership style, all decision-making powers are centralized in the leader, as with dictator leaders. They do not entertain any suggestions or initiatives from subordinates. The autocratic management has been successful as it provides strong motivation to the manager. It permits quick decision-making as only one person decides for the whole group and keeps each decision to himself until he feels it is needed to be shared with the rest of the group.

### **2.4. Participative or Democratic Style**

The democratic leadership style favours decision-making by the group, such a leader gives instruction after consulting the group. They can win the co-operation of their group and motivate them effectively and positively. The decisions of the democratic leader are not unilateral as with the autocrat because they arise from consultation with the group members and participation by them.

### **2.5. Laissez-Faire or Free Rein Style**

A free-rein leader does not lead, but leaves the group entirely to itself as shown; such a leader allows maximum freedom to subordinates, i.e., they are given a free hand in deciding their own policies and methods. Different situations call for different leadership styles. In an emergency when there is little time to converge on an agreement and where a designated authority has significantly more experience or expertise than the rest of the team, an autocratic leadership style may be most effective; however, in a highly motivated and aligned team with a homogeneous level of expertise, a more democratic or laissez-faire style may be more effective. The style adopted should be the one that most effectively achieves the objectives of the group while balancing the interests of individual members.

### **2.6. Servant Leadership**

This style of leadership according to Patterson (2003) is defined as leadership focused on followers, whereby followers are leaders' primary concern and organizational concerns are peripheral. Characteristics ascribed to this emerging approach to leadership include building community in the workplace, listening receptively to others, demonstrating empathy for others, using highly developed powers of persuasion, and being able to clearly conceptualize and communicate concepts. Servant leaders also exert a "healing" influence upon individuals and institutions by utilising foresight, intuition, awareness, perception, the art of contemplation, and deep-seated recognition that servant-leadership begins with a leader's desire to change himself or herself (Spears, 1994). Since its conceptual inception, servant leadership has been espoused by a growing number of researchers as a "valid theory" of organizational leadership (Russell & Stone, 2002) with great promise for both theoretical and practical development (Bass, 1990).

### **2.7. Forms of Leadership Development**

Normally, leadership development assumes seven main forms.

#### *2.7.1. Development Programmes and Courses*

Internally or externally provided. These vary hugely in their quality, duration, location, credibility and impact.

#### *2.7.2. 360-Degree Performance Feedback*

Three hundred and sixty-degree feedback is widely used as a personal and professional development strategy. This describes a variety of survey methods used to collect feedback on an individual's performance from the entire range of relevant viewpoints. Typically, this would include their peers, subordinates and superiors. Its key claim is to produce a more thorough and accurate picture of individual performance, thereby controlling for the biases that can arise from either an individual feedback source or from feedback drawn from only one vantage point in the organisational hierarchy (Becton and Schraeder, 2004). It has grown to such an extent that some writers have described it as 'perhaps the most notable management innovation of the 1990s' (Atwater and Waldman, 1998).

Problems concerning self-ratings and rating by one individual stimulated many organizations to use 360 degree feedback. The central assumption in using 360 degree feedback is that aggregated scores of several raters will result in a more accurate representation of the actual work behaviour (Robinson and Robinson, 1989). 360 degree feedback is often called a multi-source feedback. It is a widely used technique to improve the reliability and validity of ratings of employee abilities or performances.

Feedback is considered to be important for the enhancement of self-knowledge; this could be due to the fact that self-ratings are problematic. Serious problems have been reported concerning the use of self-ratings: leniency, unreliability, bias and also affected by numerous factors such as age, gender, personality, and self-esteem (Hoffman, Nathan and Holden, 1991; Yammarino and Atwater, 1997; Beehr, Ivanitskaya, Hansen, Erofeev and Gudanowski, 2001). It seems to be difficult to rate one's own abilities or effectiveness of work behaviour in a reliable and valid way. Therefore, 360 degree feedback is considered to be important for the enhancement of self-knowledge.

### 2.7.3. Coaching

This describes practical, goal focused, ongoing and one to one learning and behavioural change. The emphasis is generally on improving individual rather than unit or team performance, although some coaching efforts also address performance at team level (LeMay and Ellis, 2007). In view of the cost implications, most such efforts are short term.

According to Adair (2002), Coaching is arguably the most powerful method for developing managers' capacity for leadership. Coaching and mentoring are on the A-list of capacity-building celebrities today. It seems you cannot read a review of good practice capacity building without coming across mentoring and coaching. Any self-respecting leadership development has coaching and mentoring present.

During the 1990s, coaching entered contemporary business environments in the areas of personal, professional, and business development (Berman and Bradt, 2006).

Organizations have many tools at their disposal when attempting to improve the leadership skills of their managers and employees. The concept of managerial coaching is included among these tools. Kilburg (1996) posited that executive coaching is a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement.

### Manager as Coach

One of the earliest uses of the term "coach" in the business world evolved from the movement of delayering large organizations and giving increased autonomy and responsibility to work teams. This raised questions around what the role of the manager or supervisor was. "Coaching" became one of the answers many people understood and began to act upon. Kimball Fisher, a guru on leadership in team settings, lists coaching as one of the critical competencies for being an effective leader. This made sense in that work groups were now being called "teams" and every team needs a coach. While this concept is not as talked about today as it was five to ten years ago, it still continues as a common application of coaching.

A large energy company is currently implementing a program designed specifically to move their leaders to a new way of managing. They have gone to great lengths to provide career paths and career guidance to their employees but still feel something is missing around developing their workforce. They are convinced getting each of their leaders to lead more from a coaching mindset than as a director is key to them taking the next step in performance. This type of coaching, and the training that goes with it, has several distinctions from other types of coaching. There is still a boss subordinate relationship and a formal performance review process (Baker, 2006).

### The GROW Model of Coaching

As opines by Baker (2006), the GROW model of coaching is made up of the following elements:

**G – Goal.** The person's goal should be as specific and measurable as possible, enabling the coach to ask:

How will you know that you have achieved that goal?

What are the expectations of others?

Who else needs to know about the plan? How will you inform them?

**R – Reality.** The current situation the person is experiencing needs careful analysis.

Sometimes, simply by seeing the situation clearly (rather than what was imagined), the resolution becomes obvious. Coaches can ask:

What has been stopping you reaching your goal?

Do you know anyone who has achieved that goal?

What can you learn from them?

**O – Options.** Once you know where you are and where you want to go, the next step is to explore the options you have for getting there. Coaches can ask:

What could you do as a first step?

What else could you do?

What would happen if you did nothing?

**W – Will.** To change and improve performance, motivation is necessary. The desired outcome from this stage is a commitment to action. The following questions can guide coaches:

Where does this goal fit in with your personal priorities at the moment?

What obstacles do you expect to meet? How will you overcome them?

How committed are you to this goal?

What steps do you need to take to achieve this?

The STEER model, another well-known model, like so many coaching models is an acronym: Spot, Tailor, Explain, Encourage and Review. Like GROW, the STEER model is task-oriented and derives from the world of sport. Solution-focused coaching differs from other approaches, which tend to focus on the problem. The OSKAR model (Outcome, Scaling, Know-how and Resources, Affirm and action and Review) is one of the tools used to guide solution-focused coaching.

### **Key factors in successful Coaching and Mentoring**

The learning histories and interviews highlighted a number of factors that influenced the success or failure of the coaching and mentoring processes:

- Commitment and interest of the individuals involved
- Sufficient resources and organisational support
- Taking a holistic, personal approach
- Embedding the process in the organisational context
- Skills and experience of coaches and mentors
- Recognition of cross-cultural issues
- Ensuring an enabling external environment.

#### *2.7.4. Mentoring*

This aims to help people in their development through creating a relationship between a relatively inexperienced leader and a more experienced counterpart. While informal and unplanned mentoring is common, it is also often formalised, with senior figures rewarded for engaging in mentoring relationships. There is some evidence that it is particularly effective as a form of development, since 'the opportunity to observe and interact with members of senior management helps develop a more sophisticated and strategic perspective on the organisation' (Day, 2001: 594). Clearly, it absorbs considerable time on the part of those involved.

Recent reviews of mentoring literature (Hobson & Sharp, 2005) conclude there is little evidence of the effectiveness of mentoring and coaching for new leaders. However, there is agreement that mentoring seems to offer significant benefits for leaders including: role socialisation, reduced feelings of isolation, professional development, increased job satisfaction, improved leadership skills and leadership-capacity building (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Fagan & Walter, 1982; Scandura *et al.*, 1996; Stott & Walker, 1992). Mentoring as leadership development is also recognised as complex and not without pitfalls or criticism. While mentoring leaders can be viewed as a model based on relational learning that is helpful in co-creating a learning environment (Beattie, 2002), there is criticism that it addresses only selected people rather than building capacity for the organisation (Hartley & Hinksman, 2003). At an operational level, Bullough and Draper (2004) highlight a lack of understanding about how mentoring relationships operate, and suggest that mentors can feel vulnerable, unexperienced, exposed, and without the necessary skills. Clutterbuck (2004) also outlines some of the difficulties in mentoring leaders including selection of mentors, the demands of working with high level issues and continuously having to reassess and refocus due to complexity of role. Given there is a range of concerns, mentoring is still viewed as a particularly significant approach to leadership development (Belasco, 2000; Hobson & Sharp, 2005). Clutterbuck (2004) and Clutterbuck and Schneider (1998) offer a number of reasons for the current popularity of mentoring leaders that have resonance for this study. These include: increasing acceptance that development is a continuous activity particularly at senior levels; the changing nature of executive roles having to deal with increasing complexities and constant environmental change; and a move to flatter organisational structures that results in a greater leap and transition to leadership roles.

### **An Understanding of Mentoring**

Mentoring can be seen as a holistic and fluid concept that attends to professional, corporate and personal development (Clutterbuck, 2001; Kram, 1983; Parsloe & Wray 2002). Beech and Brockbank (1999) suggest two main strands to mentoring. The first is that of career coach and professional helper, with a focus on understanding how the organisation operates at a cultural and political level. The second is psychosocial and includes role modelling, personal support, increasing confidence and self-awareness in mentee's ability, and professional identity. English and Sutton (2000) use the term 'holistic mentor' to describe someone who can help the mentee at technical and personal levels but who would also have the knowledge and expertise to signpost them to specialist technical or personal help if required. Clutterbuck and Megginson (1999) describe mentoring as 'off-line help' where one individual helps another to make 'significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking'. Clutterbuck (1998) also describes mentoring as a multi-functional role that has four sub-roles of coach (job-related knowledge and guidance), counsellor (emotional support and listener), guardian (concerned for the mentee's well-being and interests) and networker/ facilitator (providing access to networks and resources). A holistic view of the mentor's role attending to the corporate, professional and personal can also be reflected in key characteristics defining the nature of the mentoring relationship. For example, from a corporate perspective, Townley (1994) views the mentoring relationship as a social relationship where the mentor is key in socializing the mentee into the culture of an organisation. From a professional angle, mentoring offers a private and protected relationship that enables mentees to test out new ideas and look at issues from a fresh perspective in a safe and non-threatening environment (McDougall & Beattie, 1997).

#### *2.7.5. Networking*

This seeks to break down barriers between functional areas to foster wider individual networks, create a greater business literacy and more in-depth organisational knowledge. For example, groups of managers can be brought together on a regular basis to dialogue about their shared experiences. In some cases, this can be accomplished electronically. It seeks to provide leaders with knowledge about not just what they should do, but with whom they can connect with to make it happen. Thus, the peer relationships that are so often critical for long term leadership success are developed (Ragins and Cotton, 1999).

### **Network Perspective Defined**

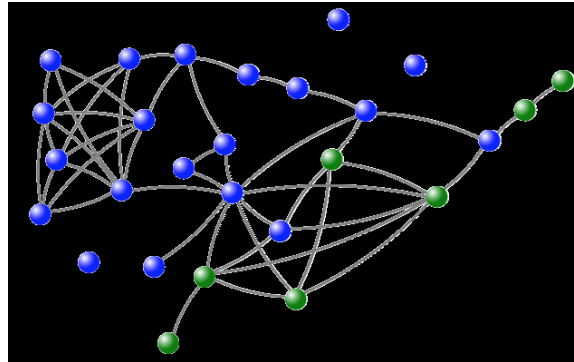
According to Cullen et al (2013), People with network perspective understand the dynamic web of connections that have an impact on their work, their leadership, and the leadership culture of their organization. They can identify patterns of relationships and people in their personal network and the broader organizational network that will foster strategic success—and those that will inhibit or undermine it.

Many researchers and practitioners are working hard to understand how collectives—groups of people, teams, organizations, communities—may enhance their network perspective and build, manage, and leverage their network connections.

The Power of Embracing Leadership as a Shared Process

- Increase the collective capacity for leadership in your organization or community.
- Enable others to step up, adjust, and make decisions about the future of your project, team, organization, or community.
- Transform the leadership culture from reliance on command-and-control hierarchies to adaptation within agile, interdependent networks.

### Network Perspective of leadership development



*Adapted from 2014 Center for Creative Leadership*

#### 2.7.6. Job Assignments

This provides people with challenging job assignments, which seek to develop leaders by providing new roles, tasks and responsibilities. Job assignments are particularly helpful in teaching people how to build teams, become better strategic thinkers, and improve their influencing and persuasion skills (McCall et al, 1988). Thus, some organisations transfer managers between divisions or countries to gain requisite experience, while others perform more locally based and modest versions of such assignments.

#### Challenges of Job Assignment

According to Ohlott (2003), challenging job assignments are perhaps the most potent form of leader development. But what makes a job assignment challenging, and what specific types of assignments fit the bill?

Research into what makes a job developmental has identified five main sources of challenge related to learning: 1.job transitions 2.creatingchange 3.high levels of responsibility 4.managing boundaries and 5.dealingwith diversity.

#### *Job Transitions*

A transition involves a change in work role that may affect job content, level of responsibility, or location. Job transitions that have been shown to be particularly developmental include changes in level, function, or employer; increases in the scope of an assignment; and moving from a line job to a corporate staff role. Transitions place people in new situations in which job responsibilities are to some degree unfamiliar and the usual routines and behaviors are no longer adequate. Transitions require people to find new ways of thinking about and responding to problems and opportunities.

#### *Creating Change*

Jobs that require leaders to create change call for numerous actions and decisions in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity.

#### *High Levels of Responsibility*

Leadership assignments with high levels of responsibility have greater breadth, visibility, and complexity.

They also expose leaders to pressure and require them to make high-stakes decisions. Moving to a job with a high level of responsibility may involve a leap in the scope of the job, larger budgets, and oversight of more people and more diverse functions, groups, or areas. There may also be a danger of overload because of such jobs.

### ***Managing Boundaries***

Most leaders are accustomed to managing downward. When they find themselves in situations in which they must work across lateral boundaries, either externally or within their own organizations, they encounter a new source of challenge—the need to work with people over whom they have no formal or direct authority. Leaders in these situations learn a great deal about building relationships, handling conflict, and being straightforward with others. To get all parties to work together effectively, leaders have to learn new skills in negotiation, communication, and conflict management.

### ***Getting Started***

Job assignments provide many of the developmental opportunities in today's organizations. Unfortunately, these potent sources of leader development are often ignored or used haphazardly. The first step for organizations that want to make use of these opportunities is to identify their potentially developmental jobs and assignments. Once an organization has done that, there are several ways that it can proceed. If it wants to keep its involvement minimal, it can provide people with information about developmental opportunities that exist in their current jobs and allow them to take charge of their own development, including seeking out the challenges they believe they need. If the organization wants to conduct assignment-based development on a larger scale, it may choose to develop a systematic program of job rotation, in which future leaders and their strengths and development needs are identified and development plans are devised under which individuals are given particular jobs intended to improve their skills and abilities. (Ohlott, 2003)

#### ***2.7.7. Action Learning***

This assumes that people learn most by getting things done, and in particular by working on real organisational problems (Stein and Farmer, 2004). Typically, participants meet to identify issues or problems, and then develop and implement recommendations designed to address them.

There is evidence (for instance from Delarue, Hootegem, Procter and Burrige, 2008) that enhanced teamwork improves productivity. That would help with workload. Thus, action learning enhances the transfer of learning.

Holton and Baldwin (2003) affirm that training room activities by themselves do not always result in on-the-job change. Instead we determined to use actual changes faced by the organisation as the vehicle for managers to develop the required skills and understanding.

To simplify a little, there are two related families of action research. As originally devised by Revans (e.g. 1983/1998), action learning teams—setsl, as they were called—consisted of individuals (usually CEOs) from different organisations. Revans' belief was that learning consisted both of knowledge and of the understanding that arises from questioning inquiry. He captured this relationship in his well-known formula  $L = P + Q$ , where **L** is learning, **P** is programmed knowledge that is already known, and **Q** is new learning which arises from questioning. In this approach to action learning the CEOs met regularly in self-facilitated groups. They helped each other to improve their work as managers and to learn from their management activities.

Some present-day action learning follows this approach. An alternative form has arisen in which in-house project teams form around organisational projects. The teams are usually heavily facilitated for the duration of their existence. Marquardt (1999) and Raelin (2008), among many others, provide examples of this approach. In both varieties of action learning the facilitator encourages a climate of questioning inquiry. Our choice was a hybrid design that was project based with self-facilitated groups.

### **How and why Action Learning can be effective in developing and Sustaining Leadership Skills**

Revans (1980, 1982, 1998), the founder of action learning, noted that people learn more and better when put into action than when passively listening to lectures or audio tapes or watching video presentations. Learning through doing has now become a familiar mantra in the training and development community. The National Academy of Sciences (Christina & Bjork, 1991), in reviewing



what is known about optimizing long-term retention and transfer of knowledge, made a number of recommendations to educators and trainers. These recommendations, with additional notes on action learning's ability include the following:

- Engage the learner in the process: As Revans (1998) noted, "There can be no action with learning, and no learning without action" (p. 14). Participants who are engaged in meaningful action, with inquiry and reflection, cannot help but learn.
- Integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge: The action learning coach specifically uses this strategy when asking questions that require team members to identify not only what they learned but how these learnings can be applied in the future
- Increase generalizability by practicing a variety of situations with increasing levels of complexity and difficulty: Early in an action learning process, the team grapples with some basic problems such as how to get organized, make decisions, and balance personal and team goals. Although these tasks and processes occur throughout the life of the team, they become more complex and complicated as the problem and goal are clarified and the solution begins to emerge.
- Increase proficiency and mastery by adding more challenges, more basic skills and knowledge are mastered: The team has multiple opportunities to practice and master the team skill necessary for high performance. As the skills are practiced, the team begins to recognize more nuances to the problem and processes.
- Use spaced practice: A key advantage of a spaced program is that it allows team members to integrate and practice new skills between sessions (Marquardt et al., 2009). In most action learning programs used for developing leadership skills, teams meet on a periodic, spaced schedule, typically every 2 or 3 weeks.
- Diminish external feedback: As team members become more proficient in dealing with challenges, the coach provides less feedback and encourages them to be more self-monitoring.
- Encourage mental rehearsal: Although the coach does not direct the team to rehearse for important events and meetings, they often indirectly encourage team members to mentally prepare for and rehearse before important situations (Marquardt et al., 2009).

Hicks and Peterson (1999) provide another developmental model, the Development Pipeline that helps to explain why action learning is such a powerful method for developing complex skills such as leadership. These authors identified what they considered the necessary and sufficient elements for learning and sustained development—insight, motivation, skill development, real-world practice, and accountability. Each of these elements represents a "success factor" or "active ingredient" in the learning or development process. Each element also represents a potential "pinch point" that determines how much actual learning or development occurs. For example, a leadership program with a great classroom curriculum will have limited effectiveness without opportunities for real-world practice or organizational policies that provide consequences, both good and bad, for performing the new skills on the job.

When viewed through this lens, action learning does a better job in ensuring the inclusion of these necessary and sufficient elements than other popular leadership development strategies.

### **Leadership Skills developed through Action Learning**

One of the virtues of action learning is that learning is focused on the skills that individual team members consider high priorities for them (Dixon, 1998). Action Learning is not based on a fixed curriculum that includes the skills that other people (such as training designers or the organizational leadership) consider important. Individual team members decide what behaviors or leadership skills they want to develop at that time and given the problem at hand. Typically, the behaviors and skills chosen relate to previous feedback from supervisors, training, 360-degree feedback, and self-assessment instruments (Dilworth & Willis, 2003). The final selection of developmental goals, however, is up to each individual.

In the context of leadership development, any leadership behaviour or skill that an individual team member chooses can be developed in the action learning process. This is because effective management and leadership is always about directing, motivating, inspiring, and empowering a group, team, or organization to achieve an important goal (Leonard, 2003; Pearce et al., 2003; Pearce & Sims, 2002).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research reported here was designed to investigate what organisations in Ghana are doing on the varied fronts of developing their leaders. The survey covered all categories of organisations, that is the private, public and not for profit sectors.

Our primary objectives were to:

- Examine how leadership development takes place at present in Ghanaian organisations
- determine the forms leadership development assumes
- find out how organisations evaluate their leadership development activities, and which forms of evaluation they find to be the most effective
- identify the obstacles and/or challenges that prevent effective leadership development from taking place
- Prescribe what needs to be done to improve leadership development throughout the aforementioned sectors in Ghana.

#### 3.1. Instrument

To achieve the above objectives, a comprehensive questionnaire survey was sent to a broad range of organisations to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. This was complemented by a series of semi-structured interviews carried out. The survey was issued to 150 organisations, via the post or email to named contacts in the organisations. Where possible, it was sent to those at Chief Executive Level who had indicated a willingness to respond, or to a Senior Human Resources figure who had been identified as having a particular interest in or responsibility for leadership development. After a reminder letter, 19 organisations responded to the survey, giving an overall response rate of 13%. A series of semi-structured interviews were also held. These were carried out with a broad range of one hundred and eleven (111) participants, selected from organisations.

The interviews therefore covered the three main employment sectors (private, public and not for profit) with different organisations sizes thus, small, medium and large. In all, 2-5 participants at various levels throughout the organisations were interviewed.

Self-constructed questionnaires were administered in which participants were asked to indicate the leadership development strategies, methods of evaluation and challenges faced in adopting and implementing these strategies on a five point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (As) to the least been Strongly Disagree (DA).

#### 3.2. Validity and Reliability

Pilot studies were done in 7 organisations to test the validity and reliability of the instrument, thus 3 private organisations, 2 public and 2 non for profit organisations in the Volta Region were used. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was 0.79 indicating that the instrument is highly valid.

### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

It was revealed that half of the organisations surveyed had a clear statement about how they expected their leaders to behave. This suggests considerable vagueness around the construct of leadership. In this case, there were significant differences between sectors, with 19% of organisations in the not for profit sector having such a statement, compared with 65% in the public sector and 42% in the private sector. In our view, this is a first base requirement for effective leadership development. Vagueness around what leadership is, makes it harder for organisations to design interventions geared at producing well balanced, effective and insightful leaders attuned to their needs. It also means that evaluating the impact of leadership development is considerably more difficult, since there is little in the way of clear criteria to guide it.

#### 4.1. Leadership Development Courses

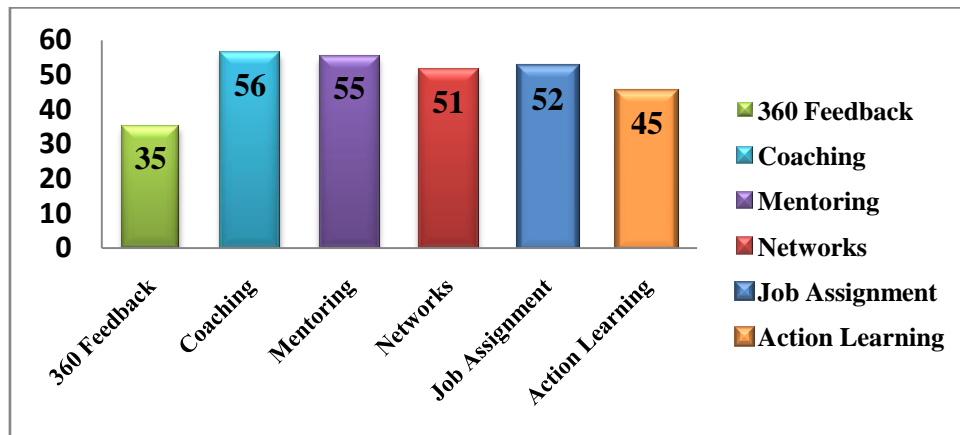
Participants were asked to describe major initiatives for developing leaders. A little above half of respondents (58%) said they were provided such opportunities which take the form of externally provided courses. A similar number of organisations (54%) said they ran courses internally to develop leaders. Again, these were provided for people from top level right through to middle and lower level managers.

What is most interesting here is that very large number of the organisations offer their people no opportunities for development through attending courses of any kind. Critical comments often focused on the feeling that the programmes were not relevant or appropriate for the target audience, or were too fragmented or inconsistently applied in their organisations. As some interviewed commented.

**4.2. Leadership Development Practices**

We now focus our findings that explored six specific formal and informal leadership development practices commonly referred to in leadership literature (Day, 2001), and which we outlined earlier in this paper. The overall picture is of huge variations in practice, not always driven by conscious choice and strategic intent.

The chart below shows the overall percentage of organizations currently implementing these practices, ranked in order of the most popular.



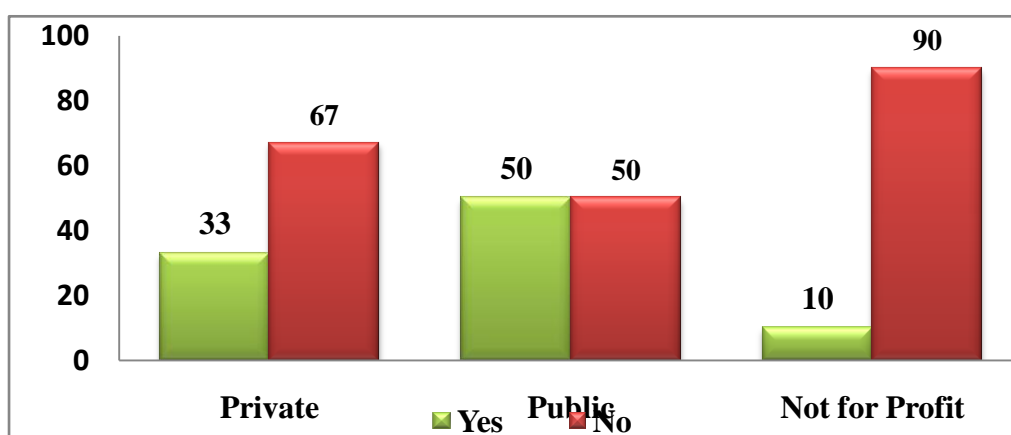
**Chart1.** Participation in the six practices

**Source:** Field Survey, 2014

These data revealed that coaching, closely followed by mentoring, are the most widely used leadership development activities undertaken by Ghanaian organisations. It is also clear that many organisations use many of these techniques in combination with each other. Interestingly, only 9% of organisations currently implemented all six practices. The majority of these (14 out of the 19) were large organisations with over 250 employees. Conversely, 10% of organisations implemented none of them. The majority of these were from the private sector. This is a fundamental problem. As Hartley (2003: 39) noted, 'Leadership and leadership development is still a field of inquiry, high on exhortation and low on evaluation'. There is much that could be done, but clearly is not being done.

Furthermore, it is likely that many of these methods are employed on a very informal basis - for example, that mentoring relationships are frequently informal, voluntary and subject to limited evaluation.

**4.3. 360 Degree Feedback**



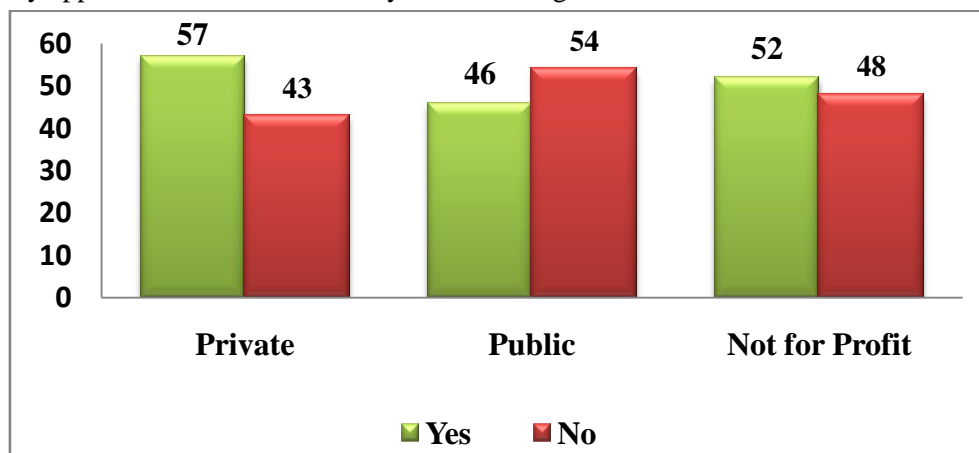
**Chart2.** Percentage (%) breakdowns by sectors

**Source:** Field Survey, 2014

This practice was most commonly employed in public sector organisations, where 50% used it to at least some extent (see Chart 2 below). On the other hand, only 10% of not for profit organisations did so. 33% of private sector organisations utilised it as well. Organisational size is clearly a factor in this. A significantly higher percentage of larger organisation used 360 feedback compared to their medium and small sized counterparts. It may be that 360 feedback is viewed as being more appropriate in larger organisations, where more varied management levels and occupational groups are mostly found. However, the basic techniques of 360 are widely applicable, and one possible concern from this data is that the not for profit sector in particular is missing out on a key leadership development tool, despite the potential benefits that it offers.

**4.4. Job Assignments**

Public sector organisations (46%) tended to use job assignments slightly less often than their private counterparts (57%) and not for profit (52%) counterparts (see chart 3 below). As with many of the techniques being discussed here, job assignments are one of the effective development tools, and in general they appear to be under-utilized by Ghanaian organizations.



**Chart3.** Percentage (%) of job assignment by sector

Source: Field Survey, 2014

**4.5. Evaluation of Leadership Development**

How leadership development is evaluated is a critical question. As may be realized, leadership development demands a lot of efforts and resources which only few organisations can handle. Our data suggests that this is precisely what often happens when the issue is leadership development; little consideration is given to it.

Participants were asked how leadership development was periodically evaluated in their organization. Kirkpatrick's (1994) influential levels of evaluation were used to facilitate the categorization of responses in this instance. This proposes four key dimensions against which leadership development can be evaluated (see Table 1below).

**Table1.** Kirkpatrick's 4 Levels of Evaluation

REACTIONS -	How participants react to it
LEARNING -	Extent to which participants have advanced in areas such as: competencies, skills, knowledge and attitudes
TRANSFER -	Extent to which learning from a programme has transferred to behaviour at work
RESULTS -	Extent to which the programme has improved performance, including return on investment, higher profits, increased sales, improved quality, decreased costs

Adapted from Kirkpatrick (1994)

**Table2.** % of organisation which evaluated leadership development at each level

Level of Evaluation	% of the organisations who evaluated leadership development at these levels
REACTIONS	54%
LEARNING	55%
TRANSFER	49%
RESULTS	32%

Source: Field Survey, 2014

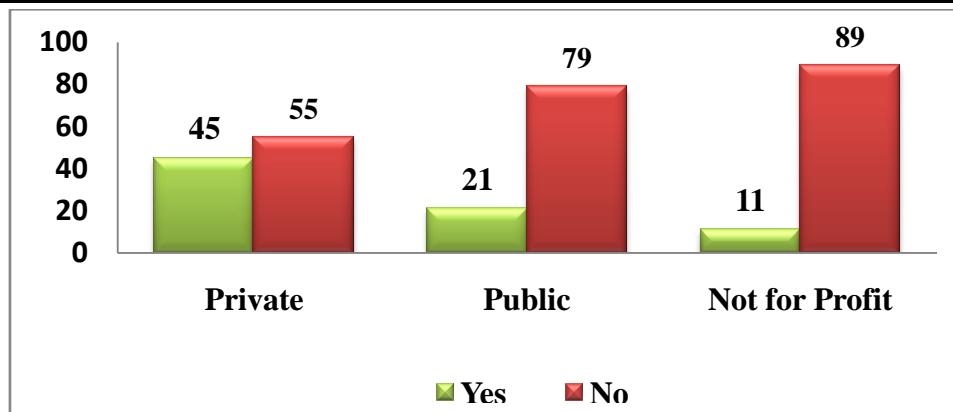


Chart4. Percentage (%) Evaluation-Results by sector

Source: Field Survey, 2014

#### 4.6. Barriers

We also explored the main barriers to implementing leadership development. From our review of the literature, we identified seven common barriers to implementing leadership development. Respondents then rated the extent to which these were a barrier for them, on a 5-point scale from 'always' a barrier to 'never'.

An overall percentage was taken of each of the barriers based upon the extent to which they 'always', 'often' and 'sometimes' prevented effective leadership development taking place in the participants' organisations. These are shown below in Table 3 below. 'Inability to prove direct impact' was the most common barrier and the least was lack of ability or knowledge to deliver'.

Table3. Percentage (%) of organizations rating barriers to effective leadership development

Barrier	% Rated
Inability to prove direct impact of activities	79
Organisational culture	74
Lack of support/commitment from senior managers	68
Lack of interest of those taking part	64
Lack of financial support	62
Not linked to Business or HR strategy	61
Lack of knowledge, expertise and experience to deliver leadership development	60

Source: Field Survey, 2014

There are really major challenges. Our findings on evaluation are linked to the barriers that people perceive in promoting leadership development. In particular, it would appear that those who advocate it are challenged to prove that it will benefit the bottom line.

But the barriers are not limited to these. Participants were asked to outline any other barriers or obstacles to leadership development found in their organisations. One third responded to this (33%), and sample comments are as follows:

#### 4.7. Illustrative Quotations from the Survey Responses (Interview)

- "Time, pace of change, other work commitments "
- "Time constraints on individual managers. No spare staff to cover"
- "Shortage of finance. Running a very tight ship means leaders can only be spared from their posts for a limited time. "
- "Programmes too expensive, poor value for money, unsure as to how to assess benefits and outcomes "
- "Main barriers are time and money"
- "Capacity to free staff to participate "
- "Day to day pressures. Sometimes people don't understand the need to take an overview and train for something that will impact them and the business in the future when they have deadlines to meet this week"

These data show that a perceived lack of time for leadership development, whatever form it takes, is a huge issue for organisations of all kinds. This is a critical problem. As Kerr (2004: 118) has noted: '...nothing is more vexing to organizational leaders than attempting to ensure that the generation of leaders that follows them will actually be able to lead.' Most organisations know that they must accord it attention. Yet they also feel that time constraints render this virtually impossible. We suspect that, paradoxically, one reason for this is - a lack of sufficient leadership development. Such development would embed strategic dialogue at deeper levels of the organisation, draw more people into important decision making roles, address the problem of 'delegation upwards', and ease the pressure on top managers in particular. It may be that part of the reason people feel they have problems in seriously addressing this issue is that they are busy frantically 'fire-fighting' - and fighting fires that often arise because the leadership talents of key people have not been sufficiently developed. Meanwhile, fire-fighting becomes regarded as 'real' work, and the assumption grows that this activity constitutes the essence of the leadership role.

In our view, this reflects some serious misconceptions about the function of leaders. As part of our survey, we asked people how much management and leadership literature they read. The responses, while scarcely astonishing, were worrying. Most managers reported that they read very little, other than occasional magazine articles. One senior executive that we spoke with told the following illuminating story:

'I was at my desk the other day and just glancing at the business pages of the local newspaper. Two colleagues walked past, and I heard one say to the other: 'X has not got much to do, has he, sitting just reading the paper, (Pause). I won't be doing that again.'

Yet we would argue that this is precisely what leaders should be encouraged to do as part of their development and as part of their leadership role. Leaders bring in new perspectives, ideas and challenges - or they ought to. Thinking is a critical part of the job description. But it appears that anything which resembles thinking is widely ridiculed and dismissed, thereby ensuring that less of it occurs. It might be that many people in leadership roles, if offered the choice between being caught thinking or shoplifting, would choose the latter, feeling that there is less disgrace in it.

Our suggestion here is that while the problem of 'a lack of time' for leadership development undoubtedly arises in part from the pressures most organisations are under, it also reflects this limited mindset about how leaders should spend their time. It is critical that this view is challenged - and set aside.

## 5. CONCLUSION, REFLECTION AND THE WAY FORWARD

There are a number of important lessons that we believe organisations can draw from our research. The first might be: do not assume that other sectors are doing this already, are doing it well, and that you just need to copy what you see them doing. Our data shows that there are huge variations in practice, significant obstacles across all sectors, general conceptual confusion about both leadership and leadership development, and few ready-made models that can be transplanted to organizational settings.

We believe that all organisations should be quite clear about what they mean by leadership, and have clear statements about how they expect their leaders to behave. As we have shown, most do not. Yet this makes it difficult to design well focused programmes, and renders evaluation much more problematic. A clear statement by itself changes nothing, unless it is lived up to. But without it, little real progress is possible.

Key questions that can be asked to assist with this refocusing include:

- How much time do you spend on strategic thinking?
- How much time do your colleagues spend on this?
- How much time do you put into it collectively as well as individually?
- What *precisely* can you do in order to get more of it?
- How, *precisely*, can you get your senior colleagues to do likewise?

Without change on this front, at an individual, team, organisational and systemic level, no prolonged leadership development will really occur. It follows that leadership and leadership development

should be declared a priority, a clear vision of what leadership means to you needs to be developed and clear statements about how organisations expect their leaders to behave should also be articulated. In turn, this should be linked to appropriate forms of leadership development, aimed at producing the kinds of leaders and behaviours that the organisation needs to achieve its goals.

We also believe that more information about best practice in leadership development needs to be disseminated. Our study found, repeatedly, that many organisations had very little idea of what other organisations were doing and what good practices they had developed that could be usefully copied, and then improved upon.

More widely, there is significant evidence that the best forms of leadership development create opportunities for people to learn from their experiences, and then apply this to solving real and pressing problems in their organisations (McCall, 2004; Thomas, 2008). This suggests that although organisations should certainly employ leadership development programmes they must take care to ensure that such programmes focus people's attention on those issues they are experiencing at work, draw out appropriate lessons, and equip them to make a real difference on their return. Often, 'the lessons learned from traditional classroom development programs do not last much beyond the end of the program. Soon after the course ends, people slip back into their previous behavioural patterns, and little lasting change or developmental progress is achieved' (Day, 2001: 601). Formal programmes should therefore be supplemented by mentoring, coaching and other interventions designed to sustain deep reflection and learning in the real world of work. In short, there is no single magic bullet, and leadership development will never achieve its potential as a tool of organisational development if it is out-sourced to a provider in order to absolve senior managers from their responsibilities in this area.

Finally, there are lessons on the issue of evaluation. Our study shows that most organisations are failing to do this well, where they attempt it at all. In particular, too few gauge the effect of leadership development by its impact on organisational performance – a much more important criteria than the 'happy sheets' which those attending leadership development courses routinely complete. This is a key challenge in the field, and one where much can be done. For example, Hannum et al (2007) suggests that organisations intent on good evaluation should:

- Involve all stakeholders to consider multiple needs and perspectives
- Design evaluation before the initiative is implemented.
- Clarify desired outcomes with stakeholders
- Discuss the purpose of evaluation and how it will be used beforehand
- Use multiple measures to get information about complex or vague outcomes

## 6. RECOMMENDATION

There is the need to create some mechanism for the provision of indisputably world class leadership development programmes, tailored to individual and organisational needs, and to which people could look with confidence. Certainly in Ghanaian organisations, very little of this exists at present.

There are many excellent development programmes capable of giving people a different perspective on how to lead their organisations. But a common problem arising from our research is that people find it "difficult to differentiate between the useful and the useless". While only five people we interviewed were positive about leadership development programmes they had experienced, the rest were not. We are therefore recommending that organisations take advantage of useful leadership development programmes available.

As part of this, the authors think that, organisations should also identify barriers, problems and opportunities that those designated as leaders are expected to address, and then evaluate the effectiveness of leadership development by the extent to which these challenges are met. This would also enable them to create an environment in which people are compelled to confront their experiences, address real organisational problems, and learn from both their successes and setbacks. If nothing of significance changes as a result then this means that the development has failed - and another strategy is required.

None of this is easy, and all of it demands time. However, if leadership is genuinely important for organisations these are the kinds of challenges which must be addressed. Ultimately, people are the

most important determinant of any organisation's future. It is time their development as leaders assumed a much greater priority than it has in the past.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The major limitation concerns the sample size which is too small for generalisation. We targeted 150 organisations out of which 19 responded representing just 13%. In addition, only 111 employees took part in the study which we think is not a fair representation of the Ghanaian organisations. Also, only descriptive and qualitative analyses were made which is not enough hence we hope that future research in this area should address some of the issues raised.

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