

LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

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The Implementation of the Army's Leader Competency Framework in an Educational Setting (Part 2).

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In part one of this *Insights* paper, I explored why educational leaders have considered the Army's Leader Competency Framework (LCF) as a way of implementing a fully rounded leadership development programme across educational settings. Although there are a range of educational leadership programmes already available, none of these fully support the development of both the leaders' professional knowledge as well as their personal development. These programmes focus excessively on the 'how' of leadership without allowing time to consider the 'why'. As a result, many leaders in the education sector become experts in leading their area of expertise but then struggle to apply these skills within the complex aspects of leading their team and themselves. To explore this issue further, in part two of this *Insight*, I will focus on the LCF concepts of leaders knowing and leading themselves as well as knowing and leading their people, and why these are vital aspects of any leadership development programme.

The prototypical leader

In their recent research of the most common challenges faced by leaders across 7,000 organisations worldwide, the Center for Creative Leadership (2024) separated leadership into four different levels: frontline, mid-level, senior, and executive. In frontline leadership, they noted that frustrations about managing peer groups and dealing with resistance from team members were the most common issues. At the mid-level, this was replaced by concerns about the leaders' own personal limitations and feelings of inadequacy. The study noted that when a mid-level leader 'has an ineffective interpersonal style, they struggle with relationships' (p. 4). At senior level, leaders reported more issues around limited awareness of how others perceive them and difficulties in recognising their own impact on others. When required to take on a wider leadership role, executive leaders struggled with 'the ability to adapt their style for

varying situations or stakeholders' (p. 7) and to influence and gain the co-operation of former peers or more experienced colleagues. The study reveals that self-awareness and leadership of people are common and recurring themes. The question is: why are they so fundamental?

Imagine being able to zoom in and zoom out of any situation. What would you learn about the relationships and interactions of those involved by examining the different aspects of the interaction. In a similar way, when considering leadership behaviours and knowledge we can do the same thing. If we start with the social interactions within the team, we can identify what skills and knowledge leaders need to lead their team effectively. We can also begin to understand why some leaders struggle to lead in new situations, finding it difficult to gain the respect and following of team members.

Hogg & Vaughan (2022) describe leadership as 'a relationship where some members of the group are able to influence the rest of the group to embrace as their own, new values, attitudes and goals' (p. 344). Effective leaders know how to use this relationship to transform individual action into group action. They pull members of the team together, helping them to identify with other members of the group and to forge a team identity. As individuals identify more strongly with a group, they pay closer attention to what is known as the group 'prototypes'. These 'usually do not identify average or typical members or attributes, but ideal members or attributes' (Hogg, p.133). In a cohesive team, individual members internalise these prototypes, governing how they act towards and are perceived and treated by others. Equally, team members pay close attention to who in the group is more prototypical. These individuals 'tend to be more influential within the group than less prototypical members' (Hogg, p.344).

This is a crucial aspect of leadership development. If leaders display more of the prototypical behaviours, individual team members feel and behave more positively towards them. They are considered more effective than less prototypical leaders, and in turn these leaders identify with and commit more to the team. In their evaluation of group prototypical behaviours, Barreto and Hogg (2017) noted that prototypicality accounted for 24% of positive leader evaluation. In addition, their analysis noted that when evaluating how much team members trust their leaders, rather than just how effective leaders were, prototypicality was seen as even more relevant (p49). This process helps to create effective followership and supports leaders to bring about change or to enact command, as outlined in the *[Followership Doctrine Note](#)*. Research suggests that leaders can strategically shape how group members perceive them by emphasizing or downplaying certain traits, behaviours, or areas of expertise that align more or less closely with the group's identity. By managing how they present themselves, leaders can reinforce their legitimacy and guide the group more effectively (Hogg & Reid, 2006). However, to do this, leaders need to understand which aspects of their own personal or professional identity will potentially increase or decrease their influence within the group. This requires high levels of self-awareness and emotional intelligence.

This can often be a challenge for younger leaders who take on the leadership of more experienced colleagues or for female leaders who are promoted to positions which are more traditionally male dominated. In both cases, the new leaders need to bridge a wider gap between their leadership style and what is considered prototypical in the group they are asked to lead. To consider this issue further, we can zoom in and consider leaders' self-knowledge and self-leadership.

The critical importance of self-awareness and reflection.

Dr Tasha Eurich (2017) describes self-awareness as 'the will and the skill to understand yourself and how others see you' (p. 24). Eurich states that one of the first and most important steps in self-awareness is developing a core set of principles, or values, that guide how you want to live your life. These values act as a compass, helping with decision making and your response to challenging situations. The more self-aware you are and the stronger your core set of principles, the less likely you are to be swayed by external pressures. For example, if one of your core values is integrity, you are less likely to take the credit for one of your team members' efforts and are more likely to highlight their contributions to others. In doing so, you strengthen trust within the team and reinforce your leadership credibility and authenticity.

In addition, we need to take the time to understand the past experiences and behaviours that we bring with us to the role and the impact that these will have on our leadership ability.

Denzin (2014) refers to these experiences as 'epiphanies', interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people's lives. These can be, although they are not always, dramatic events. Indeed, they may be repeated, subtle interactions which shape an individual's identity in different ways. Over time, these epiphanies become part of an individual's personal identity and influence the type of leader they become. For example, an individual who has experienced the impact of positive recognition may be more likely to include this as a natural aspect of their leadership style. In contrast, if an individual has experienced a more negative approach, where the only way to be recognized is by diminishing others, this may influence the way in which they interact with their team members, peers, or superiors.

The opportunity to explore what leaders know about themselves is an extremely valuable aspect of the LCF. By providing the time for leaders to be critically self-aware, looking back at past experiences, and understanding the influence they may have on future behaviours, we can help to personalise the support leaders need to become more effective. Using tools such as personal and professional coaching, leaders can uncover aspects of their character that they may not have been fully aware of.

In addition, Eurich (2017) states that 'to be truly self-aware, we must also understand our impact; that is, how our behaviour affects others' (p37). Building regular opportunities to review actions and events, identifying what went wrong or could have been done better, gives leaders the space they need to intentionally develop their leadership expertise. This is vitally important. Eurich's research found that employees who were less self-aware brought down team performance. She noted that 'when leaders are out of touch with reality, they're six times more likely to derail' (p52), and this was not just confined to new or inexperienced leaders; in fact, she found that as leaders grew in rank and seniority, their self-awareness often decreased.

In his book, *Rebel Ideas* (2021), Matthew Syed talks about the importance of leaders surrounding themselves with team members that can bring diverse views or opinions on a subject. He speaks about the need to create 'conceptual distance' (p144) by understanding what something looks like from an outsiders' point of view. He applies this thinking to the importance of leaders taking the time to understand their personal views or situations, 'stepping outside the walls, permits a new vantage point. We do not have new information; we have a new perspective' (p144). By having the opportunity to explore your knowledge of yourself as a leader and the impact this has on your knowledge of your people with someone who is external to the situation is an invaluable experience.

It is clear then, that in leadership of all sectors, the importance of leaders understanding themselves and understanding how this helps them to lead their teams, is essential. In leadership development, cultivating self-reflection, self-awareness and emotional intelligence is essential for long-term growth and effectiveness. Through structured reflection, leaders gain deeper insight into their behaviours, motivations, and the impact they have on others. This awareness helps them to identify patterns, adapt their approach, and lead with greater authenticity. When paired with emotional intelligence, the ability to perceive, understand and manage emotions, leaders are better equipped to build trust, navigate complex interpersonal interactions, and make measured, values-driven decisions.

Conclusion

Within the educational sector, recruitment and retention are an increasing concern. Teachers are no longer staying in the career for life and the number of teachers who want to take on additional leadership opportunities is decreasing. In addition, there remains a significant gender divide in senior leadership positions in both primary and secondary schools. Women are more likely to remain in middle leadership positions in secondary schools, and although the number of female teachers in primary schools is higher than males, the proportion of male headteachers is significantly higher. Female teachers often do not see themselves as senior leaders. By adapting the LCF to an educational context, we hope to provide the opportunity for aspiring, new and experienced leaders to learn how to lead in their subject or specialism alongside learning about their individual leadership identity. We need to create leaders who are confident, personally, and professionally, and therefore display the prototypicality needed to lead their teams well. Furthermore, by implementing this approach across all levels of staff, we will establish effective followership and inspire leaders of the future.

While initially designed for the Army context, the LCF provides an accessible, research-informed foundation from which to build leadership development at all levels across a variety of other sectors. Its focus on the three areas of *what leaders are, know, and do*, delivers opportunities to step beyond the technical aspects of leadership and to focus on the fundamental behaviours of the individual leader. Regardless of the sector, the basics of human development and social interaction are the same. The LCF foregrounds the importance of getting this development right before moving on to the more technical aspects of the role. Furthermore, the power of the LCF lies in its ability to foster a common language about leadership across all sectors. It has strong potential to enable a national framework for leadership to emerge and it is a great contribution from the Army to our society at large.

Discussion points:

1. Consider a leader that you have willingly followed and one that you have struggled to connect with. What behaviours did they display and what impact did this have on their leadership?
2. Think of a leadership situation where you have felt like you didn't 'fit'. Why was this? What changes did you make to help you feel part of the team?
3. Take some time to consider events in your past that may impact on the leader you are now or the leader you aspire to being. Identify those that will make you a successful leader and those that might hold you back. What steps could you put in place to help you overcome any negative experiences?

Additional resources:

Sharratt, Lindsey (2018): [Leadership and Identity: Solving the People Problem](#). TEDxTelford
Sinek, S. (2014): [Why good leaders make you feel safe](#). TEDTalk
Sudmann, L. (2016): [Great leadership starts with self-leadership](#). TEDxUCLouvain

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Center for Creative Leadership. 2024. [The Top 20 Leadership Challenges](#).