



## Leadership Development Programs

Generally speaking, “leadership development” can connote many different things depending upon the organization and its goals regarding the investment in its human capital. These goals may include one or several of the following outcomes:

- Decision-making for promotions and/or leadership assignments
- Talent identification and planning
- Succession management
- Input for significant re-organizations
- Developing high potentials
- Developing critical leaders
- Improving leadership team alignment and group dynamics
- Management development

Obviously, the organization’s goals determine its approach to leadership development. However, a general approach to designing a leadership program will guide an organization in its quest to build a customized program aligned to its organizational goals.

## Aligning Your Leadership Development Program With Your Business Strategy

The first step in creating a leadership development program is to explicitly outline the organization’s leadership strategy. The organization’s leadership strategy and goals will provide the blueprint for the actual program. Of course, the leadership strategy must be derived from the business strategy. For example, if the business plans to grow organically by expanding to new foreign markets, then the leadership development strategy must include building and/or acquiring leaders with significant global/cross-cultural experience. While this assumption appears obvious on the surface, it is a step often missed in organizations.





To accomplish this task, the creation of a Leadership Development committee or a series of key stakeholder interviews will provide the necessary input. A simple review of business strategy documents will also be useful in this process. Some key factors to consider are:

- Will the business strategy impact the organizational design?
- What types of leaders are needed?
  - Experiences required
  - Competencies needed
- How will leadership roles be filled? (internal, external, or a mix)

The answers to these and other key questions will result in an explicitly stated leadership development strategy. The leadership development strategy will provide the basic design principles for the leadership development program – resulting in a blueprint for success.

### **Baptist Leadership Group's Approach to Leadership Development**

With a clear leadership development strategy in place, the next step is to clearly articulate the goals of the program. These goals will vary widely depending upon the leadership development strategy. Following the previous example (i.e., expansion through new foreign markets), the program could be focused on assessment, selection, and on-boarding of newly hired leaders if an external talent acquisition model is desired. If the leadership development strategy is focused on the development of internal candidates, then the program goals will be geared towards assessment, development and international job rotations. The program goals must be clearly defined as they will provide the foundation for design and evaluation of the program's effectiveness.

Once the goals of the program are in place, the organization will then determine the program components that will most effectively accomplish the goals. The program must be viewed as a systemic process that will facilitate leadership development that is aligned with the program's goals. Best practices include a variety of potential program components:

- Assessment, feedback, and development planning
- Coaching and/or executive mentoring
- Action learning teams focused on real business issues
- Exposure to the strategic business agenda
- Job assignments or rotations
- Group learning activities
- Team building/development



Program components must be chosen based on their alignment with the program's goals. Furthermore, each component should be customized to the organization's culture, business environment, and leadership strategy. As such, a purely off-the-shelf leadership development program has many limitations and may limit the organization's ability to achieve its goals.

## **Baptist Leadership Group's Approach to Assessing Leaders**

A key component of nearly every leadership development program is leader assessment, feedback, and development planning. A critical factor in the success of individual and team development is the appropriate identification of needed leader competencies or behaviors. If a leadership competency model already exists, a quick check to ensure it is aligned with the business and leadership strategy is a useful exercise. If a model does not exist, identifying the required competencies is a critical step in building a customized assessment framework.

Baptist Leadership Group's approach to leader assessment consists of four key facets of leadership: multi-rater behavioral assessments, experiences, personality, and cognitive ability. It should be noted that cognitive ability may not be appropriate for all applications, especially those focused on individual development. However, it is a valid predictor of leader performance and is highly recommended for applications with decision-making implications (e.g., leader selection).





The integration and interpretation of these various assessment components is both an “art” and a “science”. While a clearly defined assessment framework provides a scientific foundation for the interpretation of the data, skilled assessors must contextualize the information and prioritize individual and/or team development opportunities. So whether or not the organization uses external, internal, or a mix of assessors, the selection and training of those assessors is critical to the program’s success.

## Conclusions

Leadership development programs can provide a valuable resource to organizations for managing their human capital and ensuring its organizational capabilities are aligned to its business strategy. These types of programs are most successful when the organization takes a systematic approach to designing a program. Over the years, the sophistication and effectiveness of these programs has evolved significantly. By leveraging “lessons learned”, best practices, and applied organizational research, organizations can build effective leadership development programs to help achieve its business goals.

Authored by: Shane Douthitt, PhD and Scott Mondore, PhD

*Douthitt and Mondore are the Co-Practice Leaders of the Baptist Leadership Group, a healthcare consulting practice owned by national service excellence pioneer Baptist Health Care. They are experts in leader development, executive assessment and coaching, measurement, training, talent management and organizational development.*