



INTERVIEW

# Dialogue on leadership development

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## KEYWORDS

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Indian approaches;  
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**Abstract** Sharing our considerable experience as teachers who have designed and conducted leadership development programmes, we discuss the challenges in the field of leadership development. We distinguish between leader development and leadership development; differentiate leadership theories from leadership development theories; discuss the goals of leadership development programmes and their implications for the design of such programmes – the *knowing, being* and *doing gap* and how the goal, cognitive understanding vs. deeper internalization vs. transformation would impact the design; the need to synthesize Western and Indian approaches to leadership development; and the importance of designing coherent leadership development programmes which combine multiple methods and approaches.

## Context note

Leadership development is an important aspect of the learning and development function of large professional organizations. Globally, leadership development is a multibillion-dollar industry. While *leadership* is a topic that has been extensively researched over the last half a century and more, *leadership development* has not received the same degree of attention. In fact, the distinction between leadership and leadership development is often not made by researchers and practitioners and the two are

thought to be synonymous. The lack of clarity between the two concepts has led to confusion in the design of leadership development programmes. Inadequate clarity regarding the definition of leadership could result in competing assumptions regarding the objectives and goals of leadership development programmes.

In the ensuing dialogue on leadership development, we draw upon our experience as teachers and trainers who have designed and conducted leadership development programmes over the last few decades, to address some key issues which we believe are critical for the success of leadership development programmes. Some of the issues on which we have focussed are: (i) the difference between leader development and leadership development; (ii) differentiation of leadership theories from leadership development theories; (iii) differences in the goals/objectives of leadership development programmes: cognitive understanding vs deeper internalization and transformation of a participant;

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(iv) the gaps between *knowing*, *being* and *doing*; (v) the importance of coherence in the design of leadership development programmes while combining multiple methods and approaches and; (vi) the need for meaningful synthesis between Western theories and Indian approaches.

In our quest for deeper understanding of the leadership development process, we have been eclectic in drawing on research and theory from different traditions in the field of leadership development.

### Leader development vs leadership development

As noted by Day (2000), the distinction between developing leaders and developing leadership is an important one. Leader development focusses on developing individual leaders whereas leadership development focusses on a process of development that inherently involves multiple individuals (e.g. leaders and followers or peers in a self-managed work team). Scholars make a distinction between the processes of leader development and leadership development (Hart, Conklin, & Allen, 2008). Leader development is “mostly directed at expanding an individual leader’s capacity” (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2005), whereas leadership development involves interaction between individual leaders and the social-cultural environment in which they function (Ardichvili & Manderscheid, 2008). Leader development is a necessary but not sufficient condition for leadership because “leadership requires that individual development is integrated and understood in the context of others, social systems, and organizational strategies, missions and goals” (Olivares, Peterson, & Hess, 2007). Leader development is about intrapersonal competence; leadership development involves building and using interpersonal competence (Day, 2000; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). Day (2000) also discusses the linkages with social networks by suggesting that while leader development is linked to protecting and enhancing human capital, leadership development is linked to building and enhancing social capital.

Given that leadership development is a dynamic process involving multiple individuals spanning various levels within and outside the organization, the process of leadership development is inherently interpersonal and long term in nature. Leadership development is the building and enhancement of a collective capacity to lead among members of a team. This collective capacity occurs through interactions, processes, and reciprocity anchored on trust.

### Leadership theories vs leadership development theories

Leadership as a topic has been written about, researched and discussed so extensively that one wonders if there is anything new to say at all! It is almost impossible to summarize the vast expanse of the literature that populates the field. As new ideas emerge on leadership, questions on which of the paradigms of leadership are relevant and meaningful continue to confront managers. With the emergence of new theories of leadership, learning and development professionals keep experimenting with emerging methodologies of leadership

development. In spite of these efforts, over the years there seems to be a growing disconnect between what is propounded by the leadership school and the leadership development school.

The history of leadership theory and research spans nearly a century (Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, & Chan, 2009). Over the many decades, several leadership theories have emerged including trait theories, behavioural theories, contingency/context/situation based theories, leader–member exchange theories, and other theories such as servant-leadership, charismatic leadership, and transformational leadership. However, the dominant focus of these leadership theories has been on identifying traits/behaviour/characteristics required of a person to be an effective leader in a given context. One of the reasons leadership theory and research have contributed little to leadership development is possibly the long-standing focus on linking personality with leadership (Day et al., 2014). As Day notes, “If personality is conceptualized in terms of traits that summarize relatively enduring dispositional tendencies (House, Shane, & Herold, 1996), then its relevance for studying development (i.e., change) is questionable”.

Another popular approach in leadership research is the behavioural approach. It is well understood that behaviours can be learnt and modified based on the context; the focus of this school has dominantly been on training rather than on development. There is also a widespread misconception that if one could agree on the “correct” leadership theory then the development piece would inevitably follow (Day et al., 2014). Developing individual leaders and developing effective leadership processes involve more than deciding which leadership theory is to be used to motivate effective development.

In comparison to the century-long research on leadership, the history of scholarly work on leader/leadership development is relatively short. Further, leadership development is inherently longitudinal and multi-level (Day et al., 2014). Scholars in the field of leadership development have been more eclectic and have drawn on a range of theories to explain the process of development: these include theories from the field of ongoing adult development (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009), constructive development theory (McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor, & Baker, 2006), and individual leader and follower skills and attributes leading to team development (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004). Since leadership is a dynamic process occurring longitudinally, there is a need to focus on process theories to explore the phenomena more meaningfully. The call for research in the field of leadership development is towards a focus on personal trajectories of leaders, broadening the range of leadership development methods studied and identifying the outcome variable that is impacted through this process (Day et al., 2014).

### Cognition vs internalization and deeper transformation

An implicit assumption in many of the theories mentioned above is cognitive – that if we *know* what it takes to be an effective leader, we can *choose to behave* in the most appropriate way as suggested by the specific theory and

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