

# **HOW TO GROW LEADERS THE SEVEN KEY PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

**Author** : **John Adair**  
**Publisher** : **Kogan Page, UK & India**  
**Year** : **2005**  
**Pages** : **184**  
**ISBN No.** : **0-7494-4527-0**

## **Book Review**

### **Main focus and approach by the Author**

John Adair, an authority in his own right on leadership, sets out to prescribe 'How to Grow Leaders' in a deft style. Adair's distinctive quality is his simplistic presentation of views, which are practical and relevant. He repeatedly questions his own assertions, and counters them with conclusive arguments. He refers to his experience as a trainer with the British armed forces, and quotes heavily from Greek history and recent thinkers on leadership. Throughout the book Adair repeatedly criticizes the American academicians/consultants for creating a 'leadership' industry.

In Part 1 of the book, Adair presents his *Three Circles* (Team, Task, Individual) model. He also introduces the three intertwined approaches to leadership – Qualities, Functional, and Situational.

Part 2 deals with the seven principles for growing leaders – how to select, train, and develop those who have the ability to facilitate the achievement of organizational, team and individual goals.

## **Chapter-wise Summary**

### **Part 1: Exploring Leadership – A Personal Odyssey**

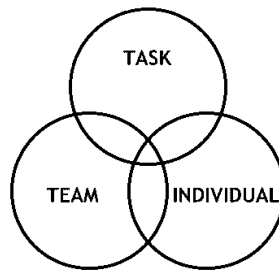
Business success demands excellence at all three levels – strategic, operational, and team. The three leadership approaches (Qualities, Functional, and Situational) should be treated as a whole, not separately.

## **The Qualities Approach**

*Confidence* is the chief ingredient of a leader. Other leadership qualities are *ambition, courage, determination, energy, dignity, magnetism, coolness, and self-discipline*, along with taking every ‘opportunity of gaining experience in leadership’ (page 12).

## **The Functional Approach**

All working groups – together for some time – develop a ‘group personality’. They also have group needs like the need to achieve a common task, the need to be held together as an entity, and the individual needs. Adair represents these needs by the following model:



### **The *Three Circles* Model**

The ‘meeting of the three circles’ can be achieved by carrying out leadership functions like *Planning, Initiating, Controlling, Supporting, Informing, and Evaluating*, for which the designated leader is accountable, though he needn’t perform them all alone.

At the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, an officer cadet’s leadership performance was assessed on Adair’s *Three Circles* model and leadership functions. An appointed leader had to acquire the knowledge and qualities to be accepted as a natural leader.

## **Leaders or Managers?**

Adair blames US academics for advancing the notion that organizations should have leaders not managers, which he laments has been a ‘wild goose chase’ (page 26). Adair acknowledges that the academics have begun coming out of this confusion, converging to the theory outlined in his 1968 book ‘Training for Leadership’.

The word 'leader' comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *laed*, which means a path, or way. Thus leadership is more of a journey.

Leadership qualities can be 'representative' or 'generic'. The leader is expected to exemplify/personify 'representative' qualities in his field. *Enthusiasm* and *courage* are the key 'generic' leadership qualities. However 'inspiration' isn't a leadership quality, rather a culmination of factors or circumstances like 'the nature of the task, greatness of people in the team, and fire within the leader' (page 31).

The leadership attribute of those in leadership roles should be investigated. Adair dubs a majority of managers 'victims of tunnel vision', for which the 'inept organization' that appointed them is to be blamed.

### **The Situational Approach**

Leadership is more of a relationship than a quality, with the leader possessing appropriate knowledge required in a given situation. 'Knowledge of men' is the supreme pre-requisite of a leader.

### **Levels of Leadership**

Even large organizations with many ranks/grades, have leadership at three broad levels – *Team*, *Operational*, and *Strategic*, working in harmony towards organizational goals. Though each organization is unique vis-à-vis group personality or culture, but the three areas of interactive need – task, team, and individual – are common to them.

The generic role of the strategic leader includes the following functions:

- vision/purpose
- strategic thinking/planning
- operation/administration
- organization fitness to situations and partners/stakeholders
- teaching today's and mentoring tomorrow's leaders

In spite of uniqueness of organizations, strategic leaders can be transferred from one organization to another. Field-related knowledge and experience are key to leadership; with leaders at lower levels needing more of it.

Leaders at the top face greater complexity than those at the team or operational levels. Many CEOs fail to handle the stress and pressures, having 'risen to the level of their incompetence'. Leaders should have practical wisdom, which includes intelligence, experience, and goodness.

## **Part 2: How to Grow Leaders – The Seven Principles**

Adair underscores the need for a partnership between the individual (aspiring leader) and the organization to apply the seven principles.

### **Principle One – Training for Leadership**

A person should be appointed to a leadership position only after training. Most organizations plunge into leadership development without understanding 'leadership' or fully committing to it. Organizations shouldn't rely too much on consultants as they aren't clear about leadership either. At best the consultants should work on the periphery, assisting individuals to 'own' their self-development.

Leadership development should begin at the team level, closest to where all the action is. Team leaders also exercise maximum control. Wise organizations facilitate natural and slow but steady growth of leaders, so that transition of team leaders to operational and strategic levels is smooth.

### **Principle Two – Selection**

People with potential for leadership should only be selected. Selection of people for leadership roles depends on their

- ability to enable the group to achieve its task and maintain its cohesiveness/harmony,
- professional/technical capability to command respect with relevant experience, and
- the 'generic' qualities.

Wise organizations grow their own leaders because judging an outsider's leadership potential through interview/aptitude tests is difficult. The Group/Functional approach should be used to select leaders. The focus should be on 'task achievement' and 'group cohesiveness'. Adair warns against resorting to 'competencies' lists most organizations have for selection.

An individual's potential as a leader should be evaluated against:

- Leadership and teamwork

- Decision-making
- Communication skills
- Self-management (including organizing, time-management and learning skills)

### **Principle Three – Line Managers as Leadership Mentors**

In any organization, the line of command is the principal line of communication between strategic, operational and team leaders/levels. Line leaders (at each level) should act as teachers of their subordinates, to fulfill the ‘individual’ circle needs, sharing their own experiences in this endeavour.

Line managers at all three levels should provide one-to-one attention to their ‘apprentices’ to grow them as leaders. Professional (external) mentors, cannot observe the client at work as a leader, and also lack leadership experience. The age-old *apprenticeship* model, starting as a teacher-learner one, gradually progresses to become a learner-learner one.

Line managers should identify training needs of and courses for their people, brief them before and debrief them after leadership training, check their progress after some time, and finally, give a feedback to the HR department.

### **Principle Four – The Chance to Lead**

Whether organizations grow in size, or downsize, they provide more leadership opportunities and challenges to their managers. The challenges stimulate and stir leaders’ creativity, thereby enabling their learning.

An aspiring leader should be prepared for the unforeseen and unexpected challenges. S/he should be aware of one’s vocation/talent/field, so as to acquire the qualities or attributes required to excel in that field. Those not satisfied to remain within the narrow realm of specialisation, move up further in the organization.

Organizations should review the career aspirations of individuals annually vis-à-vis the available leadership opportunities. The needs of an individual may be in conflict with those of the organization. Furthermore organizations are task-oriented, reducing opportunities for leadership growth. Adair however believes that ‘it remains an ideal to strive for’ (page 114).

### **Principle Five – Education for Leadership**

People learn through *Teaching, Training, Educating, Instructing, Tutoring, Coaching, and Mentoring*. An individual derives his value system from his family. People then learn and gain *experience in leadership* from their school/university, imbibing key attributes of integrity, enthusiasm, compassion, curiosity, clarity of thought, and creativity. Finally, organizations facilitate the process of learning at the workplace to continue the leaders' growth by creating necessary conditions like careful selection, training, and chance(s) to lead, for that growth.

### **Principle Six – A Strategy for Leadership Development**

Organizations should review their strategy for leadership growth, the key pre-requisites for which are:

- Clarity about leadership development and roles of leaders at all levels
- Assigning leadership role only after training/education/preparation
- Mentoring of apprentice-leaders by line leaders
- Equal distribution of resources for leadership development across all levels

A liberating and empowering organization structure provides people in leadership roles the freedom to take decisions, develop their potential, and work creatively with others as a team. Such leaders empower and develop their team members.

A leader should have integrity, which engenders trust. Lack of trust in managers damages an organization's reputation. Most organizations fail because hoarding of knowledge is considered as power.

### **Principle Seven – The Chief Executive**

The chief executive leads the process of leadership development. S/he should be prepared for the strategic leadership role through training. There aren't any bad strategic leaders, only bad teachers of leadership, creating 'leaders' who are ignorant of their leadership role.

A strategic leader has only one 'generic' function – selecting and developing both today's and tomorrow's leaders. S/he has to 'lead by example' (page 154).

Top strategic leaders should mentor their senior team members through day-to-day running of business, provided there is an openness and willingness to learn. Having followed Principle Two, the organization is supposed to have selected people with a high yearning for learning.

The strategic leaders also learn from their operational leaders, through dialogue and asking questions. This in turn encourages the operational leaders to mentor and learn from team leaders.

The chief executive should endorse the training of team leaders and their trainers through personal involvement and encouragement, clearly articulating his vision for the future, and inspiring future leaders.

### **Conclusion / Summary**

The central theme of John Adair's *How to Grow Leaders* is how people with potential grow as leaders. They learn by an unconscious taking-in of knowledge, and through practical experience.

An individual cannot become a leader outside the context of the organization. Organizations too cannot find individuals to fill leadership roles unless they themselves are willing to grow as leaders. However, primarily, it is society that grows leaders. Individuals should look to society for leadership experiences. Organizations within the framework of society need to develop leaders for their own sake, and at all levels.

### **Learning Points**

The thrust in growing leaders, as in growing plants, is on selecting people with the potential for leadership, having a corporate culture facilitating growth, instilling good values, providing opportunities and challenges, shifting to areas where they do their best, etc.

Organizations provide 'people who merit it the chance to lead' (page 107)

The whole should not do what the parts are doing perfectly well. Operational leaders should be responsible for the whole as well, as they are part of the strategic leadership team.

Every manager should be keen to seize the 'opportunities on offer' for which a 'climate of hope, confidence and commitment' (page 147) is required.

### **Points that can be implemented at BSP**

- Apprenticeship model of one-to-one mentoring
- Identification of potential leaders through an effective appraisal system
- Job rotation on promotion to provide leadership opportunities
- Full involvement of line managers in identifying training needs/courses for their team members