

Developing your leadership skills

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Leading a team with a small or large number of people can be difficult and it requires time and experience to develop and apply the necessary skills. This paper includes a number of learning activities designed to start you off on the road to becoming a leader and to hone those skills through reflection.

Learning activity 1: Learning about leadership

The aim for this activity is to read, listen or view a resource and while working through them take notes and at the end ask yourself a number of questions.

- What have I learnt from this? You don't have to agree with everything they say but have you come away from the experience knowing more about leadership.
- How could I apply this to my personal situation and career development? Some things can easily be applied others are aimed for specific circumstances that won't match yours.

The aim of this activity is to increase your knowledge and understanding of leadership but also think about how you can apply this in your development as a leader or how you can help as part of a leadership team.

Examples of resources includes:

- Academic papers: Search for papers about leadership plus adding in your own specialisation so; Leadership and healthcare, and clinical photography, and video production using Google Scholar [<https://scholar.google.co.uk/>] different combinations will give different numbers of suitable references.
- TED talks for inspiration <http://www.ted.com/search?q=leadership>
- Look for podcasts from iTunesUniversity or other online resources about leadership development for example New Direction in Leadership [<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/itunes-u/new-directions-in-leadership/id420491736?mt=10>] check link for leadership in iTunes and other podcasts e.g. Michael Hyatt's podcasts [<https://michaelhyatt.com/?s=leadership>] there is a lot of choice.
- Websites like Mindtools [<http://www.mindtools.com>] which has a number of quizzes and other materials about leadership.

As part of this activity do make sure you make notes for yourself about which resource or resources you have read or watched including references for your reflection as you will need these to include with your Personal Development Planning (PDP) or Continuing Professional Development (CPD) records.

Learning Activity 2: Reflection and observation of leaders and leadership

The idea behind this activity is to think about a time past or present when you were either a leader or being led by someone. This could be at work, playing as a team either as a team member or captain, as part of a team or group in education or a social activity.

When thinking back to when you have been led or been a leader follow the process below which helps distinguish between what happened (Description) and your thoughts and feelings about what happened (Reflection).

Description

First describe the situation where you experienced leadership including the background, whether you were the leader or were led by someone. This is really to set the scene for the process of thinking and reflection. Part of this description should include any events, often called critical incidents, that occurred and affected what you experienced either as a leader or team member for example things that went well or things that went wrong, indeed anything related to the experience of leadership.

Reflection

Now thinking about the situation reflect on how you felt either in trying to manage the people under you i.e. lead or as someone who was led. This might not be about you it could be about other people in the team and how they were led or how they reacted. The importance of this is that you are thinking about the impact of what people do on how you feel and in terms of leadership either what you could do differently as a team member or as a leader.

The following questions are often useful when it comes to thinking and reflecting on experiences:

1. What happened that most surprised you?
2. What patterns can you recognise in your experience?
3. What was the most fulfilling part of it? And the least fulfilling part of it? What does that suggest to you about your values?
4. What happened that contradicted your prior beliefs? What happened to confirm your prior beliefs?
5. How do you feel about that experience now compared with how you felt about it at the time?
6. What does the experience suggest to you about your strengths?
7. What does the experience suggest to you about your weaknesses and opportunities for development?
8. How else could you view that experience?
9. What did you learn from that experience about how you react?
10. What other options did you have at the time?
11. Is there anything about the experience that was familiar to you?
12. What might you do differently as a result of your experiences and your reflections?

Don't forget to record your thoughts and reflection towards your CPD.

Learning activity 3: Design a leadership activity

Leadership seminars, activities, camps, away days are big business in today's corporate world. If you are already a leader think about developing a leadership activity that would help develop leadership or team building skills in your team and that relate to your team's needs.

In this activity is important to think about what the team and you as a leader might gain, what they would learn from the experience as you develop your activity.

- Which specific skills would your activity develop?
- How would you tell whether the activity has been successful?

The idea behind this learning activity is to apply your knowledge and understanding of leadership. If there are gaps in your knowledge or you're not sure what kind of activities are good look at the research and use the research as a source of inspiration for your development activity.

If you are looking for other ideas please see earlier Learning and CPD activities published in the journal, Team based review and reflection (Bryson 2010), Sharing good practice (Bryson 2006) and Developing and sharing your CPD (Bryson 2012).

References

Bryson, D., 2010. Team based review and reflection. *Journal of visual communication in medicine*, 33(1), pp.39-40. <https://doi.org/10.3109/17453050903554513>

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