Non-Governmental Organization Leadership And Development. A Review Of The Literature

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Abstract: *Leaders of the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) often face extraordinary challenges – both at a personal and organisational level. These challenges are demanding, and distinct from those faced by governments or the for-profit sector.*

NGO leaders are often isolated and unsupported. There is talk of a leadership deficit, because of the shortage of talented leaders and the growth of the non-profit sector generally. As a result there is some urgency in attempts to develop a new generation of leaders, and to provide relevant support to existing and future leaders. Leadership development programmes designed for NGO leaders must as a consequence incorporate best practice and current experience rather than rehashing tired, traditional approaches to leadership training.

This paper examines the role of leaders and leadership in NGOs. It draws on the analysis of recent research into the characteristics of NGO leaders, and explores the challenges of designing leadership development programmes appropriate to the needs of NGOs. This paper identifies the elements of successful leadership development, and assesses the skills or competencies that need be developed.

Key words: NGO, skills and competencies, leadership, capacity building, leadership development programmes, change and transformation

Introduction

Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) leaders often face extraordinary challenges – both at a personal and organisational level. They work long hours with limited resources in uncertain and volatile political and economic circumstances to help the most marginalised and disadvantaged members of their communities. The complex managerial challenges they face have been documented in a small, but growing, body of research (Smillie, 1995; Fowler, 1997; Eade, 2000; Lewis, 2001; Smillie & Hailey, 2001; Edwards & Fowler, 2002; Hailey & James, 2004; James et al., 2005). Reviewing this literature one can but conclude that these challenges are demanding, and distinct from those faced by governments or the for-profit sector.

NGO leaders are often isolated and unsupported. There is talk of a leadership deficit, because of the shortage of talented leaders and the growth of the non-profit sector generally. As a result there is some urgency in attempts to develop a new generation of leaders, and to provide relevant support to existing and future leaders. Leadership development programmes designed for NGO leaders must as a consequence incorporate best practice and current experience rather than rehashing tired, traditional approaches to leadership training.

Perspectives on Leadership

Definitions

There are a wide range of definitions of the concept of leadership and the role of a leader. Dictionary definitions identify a leader as one that provides guidance by going in front, or causes others to go with them. Leadership is defined as the capacity to lead. In a recent review of leadership theory Northouse (2004) identified four common themes that run through much of leadership theory: 1) leadership is a process; 2) leadership involves influence; 3) leadership occurs in a group context; 4) leadership involves the attainment of goals. Based on this analysis leadership was defined as "a process whereby an individual influences a group or individuals to achieve a common goal". But it is clear that no one definition encapsulates all the facets of leadership. Consequently we must accept there will be a range of different interpretations and perceptions of leadership and what leaders do.

Another way of trying to identify the different elements of leadership is to create a typology of different kinds of leadership. This typology is derived from the research reviewed in this paper, and outlines four different types of NGO leader: 1) Paternalistic; 2) Activist; 3) Managerialist; and 4) Catalytic.

1. Paternalistic leaders typically demonstrate a patriarchal or matriarchal style of leadership. Their approach is often built on established personal or kinship relationships. They can inspire great loyalty, and have strong, close, possibly even a familial relationship with staff and volunteers. But to outsiders they can appear autocratic, reliant on hierarchical ways of working or top-down organisational structures, and overly-dependent on traditional relationship which may not be sustainable in the long run.

2. Activist leaders are actively engaged in advocacy and lobbying work. They are highly motivated, often charismatic, and typically focused on a single issue. They have the ability to channel the anger or concerns of local communities and solidarity groups to

achieve political imperatives. In practice they energise and inspire "followers" with clearly articulated messages – sometimes at the expense of dealing with more mundane managerial or organisational issues.

3. Managerialist leaders are rated for their managerial and administrative abilities. They typically demonstrate an instrumental ability to manage organisations, and can effectively establish reliable systems and appropriate structures, as well as manage a diverse workforce with established roles and responsibilities. While they may not be comfortable with change or coping with diverse partners and external stakeholders, they demonstrate a "professional" approach to development, have a track record in raising funds, meeting deadlines and undertaking commissions as a "contractor".

4. Catalytic leaders typically act as strategic catalysts within the NGO context, and have the ability to promote and implement change. They demonstrate a wider world-view, and the capacity to take a longer-term strategic view while balancing tough decisions about strategic priorities with organisational values and identity. Their success as change agents depends on their ability to delegate work to talented colleagues, so freeing time to engage actively with external stakeholders and partners, build coalitions and strategic alliances, and be involved in a variety of networks.

The value of such a typology is that it goes beyond simple definitions and gives an insight into the variety of different leadership styles around. The typology highlights the complexity of trying to identify the characteristics of successful leaders – if only because, in their own ways, each of these different leadership types is successful in the particular context in which it operates. However, as will be explored later, the "catalytic" leadership type is more likely to generate longer-term, sustainable, strategic growth than the others.

Leadership Traits, Styles and Competencies

Our attitude to, and understanding of, leadership has developed and evolved over time. Early thinking about leadership has been influenced by the belief that leadership was innate and that some individuals were born with certain traits that made them effective leaders. This led to much interest in the personality and charisma of what came to be known as "heroic leaders". Researchers assumed that it would be possible to identify and isolate a definitive list of leadership traits (Stogdill, 1974). This ambition has never really been fulfilled. But a review of the research on leadership traits suggests that leaders score higher in such areas as ability (intelligence, relevant knowledge, verbal facility), sociability (participation, co-operativeness, popularity), and motivation (initiative and persistence).

However, this emphasis on leadership traits was open to the criticism that it underplayed or overlooked the influence of external factors. For example, there was concern that the focus on the individual was at the cost of an understanding of the impact of distinct organisational cultures on the way different leadership styles evolved and developed. In the 1970s researchers therefore began to focus their attentions on what leaders did in practice and how organisations shaped different leadership styles, rather than attempting to identify or measure

leaders' underlying characteristics or traits. In particular, researchers were interested in the way leaders adapted their public persona and leadership style to suit the situation they found themselves in or the people with whom they were involved (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Mintzberg, 1998).

In the 1980s there was renewed interest in those leaders who actively promoted organisational change. Arguably such transformational leaders enabled ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Bass, 1985). In some ways this was a return to the trait-based analysis of the "heroic leader" with its focus on a leader's ability to communicate and inspire, or act as a catalyst for change. Interestingly in the late 1990s there was a reaction against this approach, partly because only a few of such transformational leaders achieved sustainable success and partly because as organisations became flatter, more decentralised, and less bureaucratic their leaders needed a new skill-set based around networking, negotiation, delegation and team building. This reaction is reflected in recent research that endorses the value of "quieter", humbler, less charismatic leaders who are keen to be seen to be part of a broader management team and actively encourage others to succeed (Bennis & Nanus, 2004). In a similar vein Mintzberg (2006), drawing on his work with local leaders in enterprise development agencies in West Africa, argues that the future lies with "fostering" a new generation of leaders who can practise what he refers to as "engaging management". Such leaders have the ability to engage with or inspire others through their thoughtfulness and humility.

Whatever the ebb and flow of researchers' interest in leadership there seems to be an ongoing fascination with efforts to identify the key characteristics and core competencies of successful leaders. In particular, interest has focused on the role and importance of individual competencies. Such competencies are seen as distinct from general skills in that they are considered to be the underlying characteristics found in any individual that lead to, or are causally related to, effective or superior performance. This interest has led to what is now referred to as the "competency approach" to leadership.

The development of the competency approach is partly the result of the growing interest among organisations as to how to attract talent and how best to identify and recruit a new generation of leaders. It is also partly driven by the needs of those involved in designing and running leadership development programmes who want to identify the skills, competencies and capabilities that they should be trying to encourage and develop. The interest in this approach reflects a desire to identify and harness the leadership competencies and management skills that lead to effective performance. This has resulted in organisations, and human resource specialists in particular, placing great emphasis on measuring, monitoring, appraising and comparing core competencies. As a consequence they have created a range of typologies or frameworks which identify the mix of skills and competencies needed .[1]

However, this emphasis on measurement and ranking may be at the cost of

[1] Examples of such typologies or frameworks can be found on the following websites:

•CEML Framework of Management and Leadership Abilities www.managementandleadershipcouncil.org

•Investors in People Leadership and Management Model www.investorsinpeople.co.uk

valuing less tangible leadership behaviours such as intuition or good judgement (Bolden & Gosling, 2006)

While these competency-based typologies commonly paint a picture of leaders as multi-talented individuals, there is some concern that they under-play the negative aspects of strong leadership and over-idealise the role and character of strong leaders. The impact of "bad" or incompetent leaders must not be ignored or overlooked. The downside of strong leaders is that they can exploit their power for their own benefit or agenda. Their central role leads to a degree of dependency among their staff that in turn may lead to their disempowerment and de-skilling. Such strong leaders have been characterised as out of touch with reality, inflexible, egocentric, and isolated. This in turn can lead to poor judgement, abuse of power, confusion between personal and organisational interests, and corrupt and unethical behaviour (Kellerman, 2004).

Such poor performance or unethical behaviour can threaten the viability, credibility and sustainability of any organisation. In the context of the non-profit sector these concerns highlight the importance of identifying appropriate leadership competencies that reflect the values of the sector and the needs of individual staff and volunteers. They also suggest that one should be cautious about becoming over-reliant on mechanistic competency frameworks – in particular those that don't incorporate intangible personal competencies such as how personal judgement is applied, and how personal relationships with teams, colleagues and "followers" develop.

Followers and Teams

Despite this concentration on the character and competencies of successful leaders, many researchers and commentators argue that you cannot understand the dynamic role of a leader unless you see it in the context of their relationship with their "followers" (colleagues, subordinates, or team members). Such "followers" can play a crucial role in reinforcing the power of individual leaders, influencing their behaviour, and helping construct internal systems and structures that act to enhance the status of those they see playing a leadership role (Howell and Shamir, 2005). The success of most leaders is determined in part by the resources, energy, expertise and knowledge that such "followers" can muster. Leaders can attempt to control or manipulate them through fear or coercion, but more often than not, they have to work with their "followers" or colleagues in an egalitarian and co-operative manner.

Appreciation of the influential role of such "followers" is critical in informing our understanding of the socialisation process that shapes the leadership style adopted.

This relational or team-based approach to leadership is supported by the concept of "distributed leadership", in which there is a shared sense of purpose and ownership of issues at all levels of the organisation. This concept suggests that leadership is a collective task based on shared decision-making and delegated authority. Leadership is therefore a social process in which everyone is engaged. As such leadership development should be seen as an investment in building human capital and developing the "collective capacity" of organisation members to "interact and work together in a meaningful way" (Day, 2001). As will be explored in the following

sections this emphasis on leadership as a collective process, rather than something that is specific to one individual, means that leadership development is as much about how best to manage teams and delegate authority, as it is about building networks and maintaining good personal relationships. It should be seen as an investment in building the social capital of an organisation.

These different theories and concepts of leadership provide insights into the different facets of individual leaders and the dynamics of leadership. We can only conclude that leadership is a complex phenomenon. It is also something we need to understand and develop because of its crucial role in mobilising resources and motivating people. This is particularly true for many civil society organisations (including NGOs and community-based organisations). For too long capacity builders have neglected the key role that local NGO leaders play in the development process, and overlooked the complex and collective dynamics of leadership within many NGOs. They appear to have underestimated the influence of the particular culture and context in which many NGO leaders operate, and as a result many capacity building initiatives designed to support a new generation of NGO leaders have been inappropriate and irrelevant.

NGO Leaders: Context and Culture

This section focuses on the evolving role of NGO leaders and the way the environment in which they work impacts on this role. It draws on research from a variety of sources, and sees leadership in the particular cultures and contexts in which NGOs operate. What is clear from this research is

that not only do individual leaders play a central role in shaping the destiny of many NGOs, but that their role and effectiveness is in part determined by the environment in which they work (Kelleher & McLaren, 1996, Fowler, 1997, Smillie & Hailey, 2001, Hailey & James, 2004, James et al. 2005).

There are also worries about the lack of leadership talent to be found within the context of the non-profit sector as a whole. This "leadership deficit" will become a matter of urgency as the sector expands over the next twenty years. It is estimated that in the US alone over half a million new senior managers will have to be developed for leadership positions in the period 2007–2016. What is also apparent is that many of these jobs will be filled by individuals recruited from outside the sector who will have had limited experience of running non-profits at a senior level. Currently it is estimated that only 40 per cent of senior management positions in US non-profits are filled by internal appointments, and that the remainder are recruited externally (Tierney, 2006).

In the 1990s the International Forum on Capacity Building, which was an international coalition of NGOs concerned with building the organisational and managerial capacity of the sector as a whole, consistently voiced its concerns at the quality and availability of appropriate leadership. It argued strongly for increased investment to develop a new generation of NGO leaders (1998 and 2001). CIVICUS, an international alliance of civil society organisations, similarly identified the lack of NGO leadership talent as a matter of particular concern. It suggested that this was partly a consequence of the rapid turnover of senior staff and the difficulty in replacing them, and that NGOs needed to

do more to recruit and retain effective leaders (CIVICUS, 2002).

Unfortunately much of our understanding of the way leaders work and what motivates them is based on research into the role and character of leaders in the business, political or military sectors. Furthermore, much of this research is based on studies in the developed industrialised countries of the North, with a particular focus on the individualistic, low power distance cultures of North America or Europe (Kotter, 1996, Adair, 2002, Bennis & Nanus, 2004). Relatively little research has been undertaken on leadership in the non-profit or public sector, and what research there is has mainly been based on the experience of US non-profits and has focused on the work of Boards rather than individual leaders. Allison (2002) reviewed the number of books concerned with non-profit management carried by Amazon.com, and estimated that only about 10 per cent were concerned with non-profit leadership – virtually all of which were based on the US experience and were concerned with Board and Governance issues.

Much of the current leadership research is therefore not relevant to the different social, cultural and political environments in which NGO leaders work (Hailey & James, 2004). While NGO-specific research and writing on leadership may be in short supply, it does exist and is growing. Some of the conclusions of this work are analysed below.

Responding to Culture and Context

Clearly leadership styles are contingent on the context in which they are applied. But they also depend on the ability of the individual's diagnostic skills and judgement to know what style to adopt and when to adapt their style to suit the circumstances. This influence of culture and context on leadership styles is highlighted in the recent research into NGO leadership in South Asia (see for example Smillie & Hailey, 2001) or sub-Saharan Africa (see for example Fowler et al., 2002; James, 2005a). The conclusions are supported by the findings of researchers analysing the characteristics of leadership styles of African managers generally. Mintzberg (2006) refers to what he calls their "engaging" management style, while Jackson (2004a) highlights the importance of a "humanist" style in the African cultural context.

Any understanding of the role and performance of NGO leaders must incorporate the environment in which they work. Recent research into NGO leaders in Kenya, Malawi and Uganda highlights the way in which they operate simultaneously in three different worlds – the global aid world, the urban context in which they live and work, and the rural village setting where many of their extended family still live (James, 2005a). This research reveals how NGO leaders have to adapt to new leadership roles, the stresses arising from pressure of work, and the demands of organisational crises – commonly around financial shortfalls, internal conflicts or tensions between the staff and the Board. Kaplan (2002) concludes that the unrealistic and artificial demands placed by aid donors adds to the pressure faced by local NGO leaders. The donor's emphasis on tight project schedules, over-hasty timeframes and quick results is both unrealistic, developmental bad-practice, and has a negative impact on the credibility and confidence of NGO leaders. Such demands have a detrimental effect on the ability of many NGO leaders to

pursue long-term goals or develop a degree of financial sustainability.

There is an ongoing debate as to the influence of culture on management strategies and leadership styles (Jackson, 2004a). Contradictory evidence suggests that on the one hand, the more participative and collective leadership style that many NGOs espouse is shaped by the collectivist nature of society found in much of the developing world; on the other hand, the more autocratic approach adopted by individual NGO leaders is the product of the high power distance dimensions common to these cultures. However benign this role may be, it detracts from their ability to make hard decisions or play a more "professional" managerial role (James et al., 2005). In turn this places individual leaders under great personal pressure. They have to meet the expectations and financial demands of family members, and manage the "power distance" relations between themselves as managers and their staff. It has also been suggested that the paternalistic nature of many NGO leaders is a natural consequence of the high levels of commitment and shared sense of ownership common to many NGOs (Fowler, 1997).

The paternalistic nature of some leadership in the NGO sector is a matter of some concern. There are many anecdotal stories about the detrimental impact of paternalistic founder leaders, "charismatic autocrats" or "the guru syndrome". On the one hand such leaders demonstrate drive and commitment, and a remarkable ability to mobilise people and resources; on the other hand they are criticised for dominating organisations, being unaccountable, and failing to adapt to changing circumstances. Chambers (1997) suggests that many NGO leaders achieve

things through their "guts, vision and commitment", but the way they use (or abuse) power is a "disability" that jeopardises organisational effectiveness. He argues such charismatic leaders are "vulnerable to acquiescence, deference, flattery and placation". They are not easily contradicted or corrected. As a result they actively suffocate promising initiatives that may threaten their power base, relationships or position of patronage.

Despite these concerns most of the recent research into NGO leadership emphasises the significance of good leadership. An effective leader can transform an organisation by providing direction, inspiring staff, mobilising new resources while still maintaining a clear organisational identity, and promoting shared values.

Working Relationships and Participation

As has already been noted leadership behaviour is directly influenced by leaders' definitions of themselves in relation to their colleagues and work teams. As such leadership is not so much about individuals as it is about relationships. It is a dynamic process of mutual influence between leaders and followers. A noteworthy finding of the recent research among NGO leaders has been the way in which leaders have embraced a more participatory leadership style. Traditionally dominant leaders are increasingly sharing decision-making with their staff and encouraging a more participatory culture in their organisations (James et al., 2005).

One of the paradoxical issues that research has uncovered concerns the way in which successful NGO leaders manage the tensions inherent in being a strong

individual lead while still appearing to be highly participative and collegial in they way they manage. Many NGOs espouse collective decision-making and participatory management, yet have clear hierarchies and accept strong leadership. To some, the concepts of leadership and participation seem incompatible. Yet what has emerged is that strong leadership and participatory management can be complementary and compatible.

What is also striking from any review of this research is the different roles that such leaders have to play whatever the culture or context. Their success is determined by their ability to work in a participative manner, be comfortable with sharing their leadership role, and work in a collective style. As a result many NGO leaders have a chameleon-like ability to play different roles and adopt different leadership styles. Yet they are also capable of undertaking the most basic management tasks, as well as balancing the demands of different stakeholders in ways that do not compromise their individual identity and values. These "development leaders" display an extraordinary set of skills and competencies because of the complexity of the contexts in which they have to operate and the challenges they have to face.

NGO Leadership: Evolving Roles and Characteristics

This section focuses on the key characteristics and competencies shared by NGO leaders.

Competencies and Characteristics

Typical of the competencies commonly associated with leadership are the ability of a leader to communicate vision or strategy, inspire teams, motivate individuals, and identify opportunities and initiate transformation. Recent research in the UK sponsored by ACEVO, which represents and supports the leaders of non-profit organisations in Britain, suggests that they exhibited an unusually broad range of competencies compared to leaders in the public and private sectors (Bolton & Abdy, 2003). They need a rare balance of inward-looking (management) and outwardlooking (influencing) skills, with exceptional communication and networking skills, as well as resilience and emotional attachment.

This finding reflects the belief that effective leaders display high levels of "emotional intelligence", and their performance is determined by their emotional maturity and ability to mobilise their emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000). Emotional intelligence describes one's innate ability to feel, use, understand and learn from your own emotions and those of others and of groups. Those with high levels of emotional intelligence have an ability to motivate both themselves and others. Many effective leaders demonstrate high levels of self-awareness, are capable of self-management, are socially aware and are well able to manage a diverse range of relationships. Emotional intelligence represents the intangible aspects of leadership that are all so important.

Many international NGOs have created assessment tools that try to capture both hard skills and some of these softer, more intangible, attributes. For example, the International Federation of the Red Cross introduced an "Effective Leadership Inventory" of over seventy questions both to elicit and to reinforce the leadership qualities the Federation believes its leaders will need to demonstrate in

order to ensure the continued success of the organisation. Similarly, the Save the Children Alliance has established a set of Leadership Standards that apply to all levels of the organisation, independent of function or country. The list of standards is selfmeasurable, and has been designed to encourage learning and self-improvement. It is based on the individual leader's ability to envision (create and communicate individual strategy), enable (identify and apply appropriate tools, processes, and people), empower (develop effective teams), and energise (communicate and inspire through personal leadership).

As was identified earlier, there is also a small but growing body of research whose findings give practical insights into the character and capabilities of NGO leaders in both Asia and Africa. For example, research in South Asia highlighted the distinct character and leadership style common to the leaders of large NGOs in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan (Smiley and Hailey, 2001). This research emphasised the crucial role of individual leaders in the development and growth of these organisations. The leaders studied had a highly personalised and distinctive leadership style. They appeared pragmatic, rational and aspirational. They also demonstrated a striking ability to balance competing demands on their time and energy with their own values and ambitions. They appeared both managerial and value-driven. They had clear and ambitious development aspirations, as well as an ability to understand and work with what resources they had and the volatile environment in which they found themselves.

Such "development leaders" could be characterised as being value-driven, knowledgebased, and responsive. In practice this meant that they had:

• **a clear vision and a firm personal value-set.** This gave them a strong sense of commitment to helping the rural poor that they were able to share with, and use to inspire, others;

• **a willingness to learn and experiment**. This meant they were comfortable applying new technologies or developing innovative organisational forms, and keen to draw on science or other sources of applied or professional knowledge;

• **a curiosity and ability to scan the external environment.** As a consequence they were able to track changes, analyse trends, and identify ways to respond to changing circumstances;

• **strong communication and interpersonal skills.** These enabled them to motivate staff and engage with a cross-section of society in a proactive and positive manner;

• **the ability to balance competing demands** on their time and manage the pressures from a range of different stakeholders.

NGO Leadership and Change

As has already been noted, strong leadership is most needed in times of change when organisations are experiencing rapid growth or operating in a volatile environment. NGO leaders demonstrate a chameleon-like ability to balance competing demands and a diversity of roles according to the circumstances and the individuals involved; for example, balancing their personal vision with the practical needs of local communities, as well as the demands of donors or the vested interests of local politicians.

But it should also be noted that many NGO leaders have built their reputation by effecting change in very traditional, static,

even paralysed, communities. In other words they are the source of change, and the cause of instability. Such "catalytic" leaders (see the typology in Section 2) are change agents who promote innovation and mobilise new resources. This is well-exemplified in Uphoff and Esmans (1998) review of "successful" rural development programmes, which highlighted the catalytic role of key individuals in leadership positions. These individuals played a crucial role in initiating change and guiding innovation; a role made somewhat easier because they were "outsiders" themselves, coming as they did from outside the rural community studied, and as a result better able to promote new thinking or argue for change. Uphoff and Esman describe this group of unusually able and motivated individuals as "development entrepreneurs" or "social innovators".

The capacity to play different roles and balance competing demands, as well as develop strategies that enable them to cope with the exigencies of complex and difficult external environments appears to be one of the hallmarks of many successful NGO leaders. Interestingly this echoes the findings of the ACEVO survey of non-profit leaders in the UK, who demonstrated an unusually broad range of competencies to handle the demands of competing stakeholders and organisational change.

One consequence of this interest in the role of individual leaders in promoting change is that there is greater awareness of the need for these individuals to become more self-aware and change their own behaviour and attitudes if genuine change is to take place. In other words leaders have to change themselves, not just try to change the organisations. As Nelson Mandela famously commented "you can never change society if you have not changed yourself".

Research in both the private and non-profit sectors reinforces the point that such personal change is crucial. For example, Quinn (2000: 116) notes that "the bottom line is that they (leaders) cannot change the organisation unless they change themselves". Edwards and Fowler (2002: 42) writing about developments in civil society note that "it is rarely possible to generate substantial change in human behaviour simply by altering the rules and institutions that govern our lives. The missing ingredient is personal change which acts as a well spring of change in other areas". While James (2003) also noted the way behavioural changes are preceded by highly personal internal changes in his research among local NGO leaders in Malawi. The crucial question is how to ensure such personal change occurs? This challenge seems to lie at the heart of the work of those designing and running leadership development programmes.

The Challenge of Leadership Development

This section focuses on some of the issues which need to be considered by those involved in developing a new generation of leaders. There is now much greater recognition of the importance of personal change, individual empowerment, experiential learning, and face to face support. Leadership Development Programmes (LDPs) have evolved over time from formal, structured, one-off training courses to more process-based, experiential programmes with an emphasis on personal development and self-directed learning. This shift reflects

frustration with the limited impact of traditional one-off training courses with little real follow-up, and a greater appreciation that more holistic, self-learning programmes spread over time are better able to develop personal confidence and new leadership competencies.

The varied challenges which NGOs are up against have focused attention on how to develop a new generation of NGO leaders. In practical terms this is reflected in the increased investment in LDPs. For example, Save the Children Fund is in the process of identifying core leadership competencies for its senior staff, and is currently developing in-house leadership development courses. Similarly the Organisation Development Department of the International Federation of the Red Cross has introduced a series of leadership development workshops for the senior staff and Board members of different Red Cross societies. CARE, and a consortium of US-based NGOs, are developing a virtual NGO university (LINGO – Learning for International NGOs) whose initial programmes will focus on NGO leadership development. These are not just one-off initiatives but part of a growing awareness of the importance of developing the role and skills of NGO leaders (Lewis 2001; Smillie & Hailey 2001, Hailey & James 2004, James 2005a).

Empowerment and Transformation

The primary purpose of any NGO-based LDP is to develop a new generation of NGO leaders. All the indicators are that not enough talented natural leaders are either attracted to, or remain in, the sector. Recent research suggests that one of the biggest challenges facing the non-profit sector is the dearth of leaders – a problem that is only going to get worse as the sector expands (Tierney, 2006). The task of any LDP is to both mobilise existing talent but also to develop and motivate new leaders – in part by helping ordinary managers or administrators to become effective leaders. So LDPs prepare people to play roles beyond their normal experience or frame of reference. One measure of the success of any LDP is to what degree it helps transform personal behaviour and change attitudes.

Such personal transformation is dependent on greater self-awareness and willingness to engage in new ways of working or thinking. Raising awareness and promoting personal change is therefore a crucial component of any successful LDP. Unfortunately too many NGO capacity building programmes have overlooked this obvious fact. They have focused too much on organisational and institutional issues rather than trying to promote changes to the attitude and behaviour of individual leaders. One implication of the current interest in emotional intelligence, as well as team-based or collective leadership, is the need to develop competencies that promote collaboration and networking, but also which ensure real personal change.

This focus on individualised self-development raises the question as to whether leadership behaviours and competencies can actually be developed through some form of taught training course. Or do we just accept that leadership is an innate characteristic that some individuals are lucky enough to be born with and which can merely be refined – like the natural balance that a gymnast has or the sense of perspective that a great artist enjoys. The consensus today is that while

some leadership qualities can be developed, there are some personal characteristics that are less amenable to change through a leadership development process (drive, perseverance, emotional resilience, etc). Thus we need to accept that LDPs cannot develop the 'complete leader', but they can go a long way in developing key leadership skills and behaviours.

Some of these skills cannot be taught in the traditional sense of the word, but can be developed through promoting greater self-awareness and generating some insight into the impact of personal behaviour or leadership style on others. Experience suggests that such insights can best be developed through some process that builds on participants' own experience, and provides feedback through mentoring and coaching sessions, 360-degree appraisals, learning sets, or team building exercises. 360 degree is an increasingly popular feedback mechanism, as it enables individuals to gauge the attitudes and perceptions of their colleagues (superiors, peers and subordinates) as to their management style and behaviour in a systematic and facilitated manner. It acts as a reality check based on external sources, but for it to be effective it needs to be administered by trained facilitators. If badly administered it is not worth doing, because it alienates participants, creates artificial tensions between work colleagues, and casts doubt on the efficacy of other appraisal or feedback mechanisms. But if done well it can be of immense value in raising self-fawareness and acting as a catalyst for personal change.

Practical Experience and Strategic Reality

One of the challenges for those involved in such capacity building work is how to design interventions that will develop NGO leaders who can thrive in, and not just cope with, the complex environment in which most NGOs operate. There is also greater appreciation of the role that leaders play in organisational change. As a result those in leadership positions have to gain insights into both the context in which they operate as well as the organisational challenges facing local NGOs. LDPs need to develop an understanding of these strategic challenges, and help participants become more strategic in their thinking and entrepreneurial in their actions. The current interest in social entrepreneurship has highlighted this dimension of leadership development work. Successful LDPs ought therefore to be rooted in the practical experience and strategic reality of those running CBOs and NGOs, but also incorporate the findings of recent research in this area.

Methods and Approaches

Leadership development therefore isn't about a single training event, it is about a process that incorporates a range of activities including:
- coaching and mentoring;
- self-assessment questionnaires;
- psychometric testing (such as Myers Briggs or 16PF);
- journaling and narrative description;
- photographs and video diarying;
- cases and simulation exercises;
- specialist workshops and seminars;
- learning sets and peer group support;
- internships, attachments, secondments and observation exercises.

This mix of inputs and approaches not only provides participants with specific skills

and experiential learning, but also insights and feedback that help promote greater self-awareness and self-confidence in their role as leaders. Of the activities identified it is apparent that coaching and mentoring play an increasingly important role in leadership development – to the extent that it is commonly expected that most individuals in leadership positions should have the support of some kind of coach or mentor.

International experience suggests that there is a move to support such developmental processes with new web-based e-learning opportunities. Such e-learning initiatives are attractive because of their flexibility and low cost to deliver internationally. But there are commonly high attrition rates with web-based programmes. The success of such distance-learning initiatives depends on regular feedback and intermittent face to face contact, as well as access to the wider 'communities of practice'. It seems that because of the innovative nature of many e-learning initiatives, participants need to work at their own speed, and slowly build their confidence in the process and the technology involved. It is not a process that can be forced or imposed.

In conclusion, the current thinking suggests that leadership development should be seen as an emergent, experiential and bespoke process. LDPs should be seen as providing a safe space to explore new issues, receive feedback and reflect on personal performance and behaviour. Because of the emphasis on experiential learning, many successful programmes incorporate a planned programme of secondments, attachments and job rotation. As such they should not be seen in the same light as traditional training courses, but more as a mix of methodologies that help generate self-awareness, build

confidence, analyse options and explore ways of implementing alternative solutions.

Conclusions

All the evidence suggests that the leadership of NGOs is an issue of some importance. Such leaders can shape the destiny of not just the organisation itself, but also the communities with which they work. Effective NGO leaders do have a pro-poor agenda, and can impact the lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Unfortunately there is some concern about a growing "leadership deficit", and where the next generation of leaders will come from and how they will be developed or trained.

Leadership Development: A Personal Challenge

Experience tells us that NGO leaders don't want or need traditional skill-based training programmes with fixed and finite structures. Instead they want flexible, personalised, process-based programmes that are geared to their own needs; programmes that are concerned with the strategic and operational issues they have to cope with on a daily basis. As a result there has been a move away from generic, skill-based traditional approaches to leadership training to more bespoke, process-based programmes designed to develop the untapped potential of individual leaders.

One consequence of this shift to a more personalised, process-based approach is that many different methods and techniques are employed, including coaching and mentoring, personal reflection, diarying, learning sets and peer group support. Thus the design of LDPs is increasingly based around a

modular mix of inputs, with greater emphasis on experiential learning, personal learning or "learning from within".

This reflects the realisation that leadership development cannot be reduced to a checklist of characteristics or competencies to be worked on and ticked off. LDPs build confidence, offer alternative solutions, and help individuals deal with issues of personal concern. As a result they incorporate techniques and group processes to help overcome common psychological barriers such as low self-esteem, lack of selfconfidence, fear of failure, and stress.

Another aspect that is often overlooked is the role of LDPs in attempting to alter unacceptable behaviour or attitudes. As has already been noted there are issues about the dark side of leadership behaviour. This is not just about the abuse of power for personal benefit, but also about the way autocratic behaviour displayed by some NGO leaders becomes 'addictive' and disempowering (James, 2005b). Such negative behaviour, which may have a highly detrimental effect on small organisations, can be addressed through self-awareness and consciousnessraising as well as ongoing mentoring or coaching. It also implies that LDP programmes should not merely be available to established leaders but also to a new generation of potential leaders early in their careers, before inappropriate behaviour has become the norm, or autocratic habits have taken hold and solidified into addiction.

There is also a more sophisticated understanding of the range of social skills and leadership competencies that such programmes should be developing. This has been reinforced by an appreciation of the importance of emotional intelligence as a core competency. Research in the different dimensions of emotional intelligence has emphasised the centrality of the way we manage ourselves and our relationships, and brought out the role of a few fundamental capabilities (self-awareness, selfmanagement, social awareness and social skills) as crucial determinants of effective

leadership (Goleman, 2000). There is therefore much greater appreciation that leadership development is a complex, dynamic and highly personal process. Leadership skills develop and evolve to suit the context and culture in which they operate. They cannot be simplistically transferred.

Leadership Development: A Capacity Building Priority?

This paper has identified some of the challenges that NGO leaders face, and concludes that they need a set of attributes above and beyond those commonly found. In particular they need integrity, personal strength, political acumen and managerial ability to balance the competing pressures they face as well as the judgement and insight to know what leadership style or strategies best suit the circumstances. They also need to maintain their personal values and deep-rooted contacts with the community within which they work. As a result they will develop a remarkable ability to adopt different management styles while remaining true to their values and aspirations, and where appropriate work in a participative and consensual manner.

The future of many NGOs depends on their ability to recruit and retain effective leaders who are self-starters, can inspire others, and have the ability to effect real change.

Such 'catalytic' leaders (see typology in Section 2) have the ability to take a longer-term strategic view while balancing tough decisions as to strategic priorities with organisational values and identity. Their success as change agents depends on their ability to delegate work to talented colleagues so freeing time to build coalitions, develop strategic alliances, and work as 'boundary spanners' across organisational divides. Above all they are effective and committed networkers who can lever up resources and enhance status and impact by actively engaging with external stakeholders and working with a range of partners.

It is also clear from any review of the research that leadership and management in the NGO sector is different from leadership in other sectors. NGOs are vulnerable to the exigencies of donors, the political sensitivities of governments, and the needs and imperatives of the local community. Development NGOs are susceptible to the unpredictable demands of an uncertain development environment. The question for the future is how will such organisations find or develop a new generation of managers or leaders who can meet these challenges. Thus, leadership development needs to become a priority issue on the NGO agenda – an issue of central importance for all those concerned with capacity building.

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