

Guidelines for Succeeding in The Leadership Room

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Introduction

This document provides information about a place called “The Leadership Room”.

Of course, others know it as a classroom on the Mikkeli Campus of Aalto University, Finland. However for the next three weeks it is “The Leadership Room” for everyone present there each day of Block 8, 2019.

In “The Leadership Room” the initial motto for action is “*take charge where you can, identify where you can’t, and then help those who can*”.

This may not remain the motto for long, especially since it is likely to be affected by what happens as the actions it proposes are put into action (more or less) effectively. Perhaps along the way a new motto will emerge that more accurately defines how The Leadership Room operates.

This document provides an initial set of guidelines. It does not offer any direct advice or information about ‘Leadership’. The key resources for such information are provided in the textbook, additional readings in MyCourses and all the materials selected and provided by the members of The Leadership Room.

The textbook (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2015)¹ and readings suggest **why** things work out as they do in regard to leadership as a human activity. The first half of Day Two of the program will be spent helping everyone acquire insight into **how** The Leadership Room operates. Our collaborative efforts will uncover **what** it means to be a leader.

Our product

The products everyone is working on are unique combinations of knowledge about – and ability to perform - Leadership functions and roles in various situations.

A characteristic of the product is that it is formed as much by **mistakes** occurring during the learning process, as it is shaped by concentrated attention on acquiring knowledge (Putzel, 2013). Learning about leadership is no substitute for being able to be a leader, and as with most things in life mistakes are an inevitable part of such learning. And mistakes are only a problem when they are not analysed for the learning they provide.

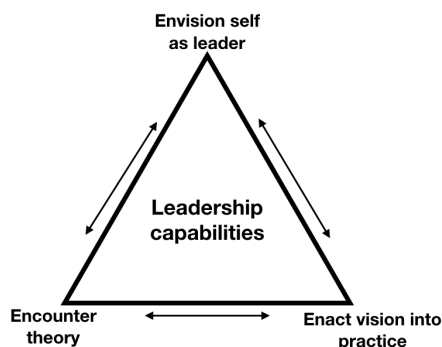


Figure 1 - Triangle of factors creating quality Leadership performance

key forces namely a) how you engage with (i.e. encounter)/read about/understand theory; b) imagine and speak about (envision) yourself as a leader; c) take action (enacting) to make the theories and your vision visible to others.

The quality of this product will not be measured by the nature of the mistakes – nor the attention they receive. Quality will also not be measured merely by successes achieved. Quality will be measured by the ways in which mistakes **and** successes are identified, responded to, and learnt from. In effect - this course is aimed at bringing into focus the reality that four factors - process, the leader as individual, followers, situation - are working together to create your own unique version of knowledge about - and capability for - Leadership.

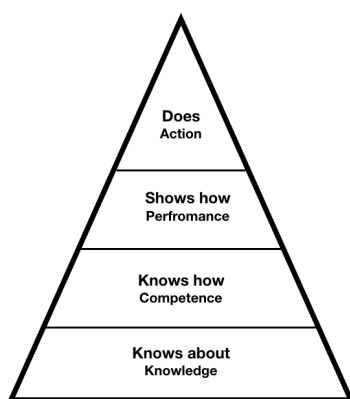
In this course you need to pay attention to the way you manage, and work to integrate, your understanding of the three components arranged around the triangle in Figure 1. The image suggests that Leadership Capabilities are developed through the integration of three

¹ This reference is to the 8th edition - any edition from 5th onwards is acceptable.

Educational theories informing our practice

Two educational theories inform this course. These are firstly the 'novice to expert' trajectory (Benner, 1984), and second the concept of 'deliberate practice and Expert Performance' (Ericsson, 2008). Together they propose that each context requires a reassessment of our capabilities for performance. We may be a 'novice' as a sports team leader, while having demonstrated 'expert' capabilities as a choir leader. So this course provides an opportunity to explore and refine your capabilities as a leader through deliberate and repeated practice.

It is not that capabilities disappear, or are suddenly irrelevant. It is, rather, that each new context in which we will be a leader (e.g. in the work to be done in this course) must be considered as setting new challenges, where we will initially be a 'novice' at addressing them, until we have engaged with information about the context (theorising), thought about (envisioned) how we want to operate here and now, and begun practising (enacting) the vision we have of ourselves as leaders, as shown in Miller's pyramid (Miller, 1990).



Miller's pyramid of knowledge

The assessment tasks require you to engage with the trio of 'encountering/envisioning/enacting'. They will not ask you merely to recall/remember facts and theories in isolation. They need you to *do something* with your knowledge - only that way can you demonstrate to yourself and others that you are moving on, from being a 'novice' towards achieving skilled expertise.

This process models what can be expected to happen as you enter new roles and positions at each stage in your career. Each one is new - you are temporarily a novice again. Your process of improving your performance as a leader will move through from encountering, to envisioning, to enacting behaviours unique to the context. Students who have completed their Finnish military training have acquired expertise as leaders in that context. Testing that knowledge against what is

required in this course will help to revise the understanding of that experience, while also realising how some aspects of what was learned there, are applicable to this new context. It is the same for each prior experience of being a leader.

What is learning - in this context?

Sometimes 'learning' is understood to simply mean 'being able to memorise and recall'. Such learning requires a passive, albeit attentive, approach to acquiring knowledge. In this Leadership course recall (remembering, writing about) is only the first step towards 'being able to' apply knowledge, about being a leader, to new processes and contexts. As a future Leader you will need to do far more than read 'about' (memorising) theories of leadership. The course includes time spent on all three aspects of leadership, without which you will not be a leader. Thus, in no particular sequence, the work to be done here requires you to

- a) **encounter** - read, discuss, analyse, understand and critique information about leadership, and recognise that 'knowing about' is merely the first step in becoming a leader and/or recognising, and working with, the kinds of leaders you admire
- b) **envision** yourself as a leader - establishing for yourself a clear concept about the kind of leader you are/want to be, being able to describe that vision and provide a reasoned argument for its viability and validity
- c) **enact** - putting into practice your understanding (recall of theory) and your vision (how you want to be) - being a leader as a member of the Leadership Room is an every day activity for everyone. There will be multiple 'micro moments' of leading - and part of your own learning involves recognising that others are leading and *also* when it is time for you to do so.

Working in Groups

Primary Group - R&D (Learning - thinking/analysing)

In the Leadership Room there are four R&D groups, each of which is in charge of one segment of the textbook as follows –

Group P – is in charge of the Section called “Leadership is a Process”

Group L – is in charge of the section called “Focus on the Leader”

Group F – is in charge of the section called “Focus on the Followers”

Group S - is in charge of the section called “Focus on the Situation”

Together all four sections create the knowledge necessary to understand leadership as involving all of the processes, actions, relationships and events where leading is taking place. No one of these is useful without the other three. Just as a car needs four wheels to achieve motion, effective leadership needs clear awareness of how to combine essential facts about each of these four components.

As members of the Leadership Room everyone chooses one of these four sections as a key focus for Research and Development of knowledge about Leadership. Quite a lot of time will be spend in this Group as there is a lot to learn about each section.

Everyone has a two-fold responsibility -

1. discuss your chosen materials with your peers to learn about the key ideas
2. work together to devise how to convey your knowledge so that others successfully learn what you have now learnt

Of course you will quickly see that everyone is learning and preparing, so it is important to share knowledge about both *how* you are doing so, as well as *what* you are learning. Sharing ideas and knowledge is a vital Leadership task and attribute.

Two Key Tasks for R&D groups

Task One

R&D groups develop knowledge and understanding about their responsibilities and create ways to ensure that - as members of an Operational Group (this is a different group) – they are competent to teach new knowledge to their peers in their Operational Group. This occurs over several cycles to be managed by the class as whole, since each R&D Group *also* has classroom management responsibilities - see Task Two.

Task Two

These tasks relate to classroom management. There are no pre-set requirements in regard to how each Group works to achieve its tasks. Each Group will develop its own way of working, with a key criterion being the capability of explaining to the class the rationale for their approach. This will become clearer as we discuss and enact the process of Leadership.

This begins on Wednesday – Elysabeth will manage Monday and Tuesday and work with each group to develop their capabilities as leaders of the assigned work.

Group P manages the daily **agenda** – how we work together.

Group L manages **feedback** and **communications** activity – how well we are doing and communicating to achieve effective management of communications.

Group F manages **assessment** processes – recording information about how everyone is working. The work includes collecting and recording data provided by Leadership Room members.

Group S provides regular reports about **overall performance** of the Leadership Room in relation to theories and concepts we encounter.

Guidelines for succeeding in The Leadership Room

Secondary Group - Operational

Operational groups are responsible for ensuring the quality of the teaching and learning processes in the Leadership Room. They are cross-functional groups, as their members come from the R&D groups and there must be representatives from all four R&D Groups in each Operational Group.

This creates a Matrix organisation - to learn more, check out the links in the 'Links for Leadership' document and then find more for yourself.

There will probably be five 'Operational Groups' - membership of each group is drawn from the members of the R&D groups. Thus, members of all R&D Groups are also a member of an Operational Group. R&D Groups decide among themselves how to assign their members to an Operational Group.

The task for all Operational Groups is the same -

Operational Group members are responsible for helping their peers understand the key points of the new knowledge they are gaining in their R&D Group.

R&D groups *collectively* design a means of explaining the information they are responsible for. Then they *individually* implement these designs to introduce their Operational Group members to the knowledge involved.

The goal is to ensure that everyone acquires relevant skills and knowledge about all 4 aspects of leadership. This happens through the sequence of first learning and practicing knowledge (R&D group), then helping others learn i(Operational group).

Our roles

In The Leadership Room everyone will occupy the following key roles at some time -

- Leader
- Learner
- Follower

The following additional roles will also be experienced at various times

- Customer
- Group member
- Representative/Service Provider
- Colleague/Peer
- Risk taker/Avoider

A note about 'roles'

We are all unique. Part of our unique human nature is a capacity to occupy many different 'roles'. While it seems that we concentrate on one role at a time, it is possible to see ourselves, and others, performing bravely in multiple roles.

In the Leadership Room we will all be occupying multiple roles and thus learning about a key characteristic of effective leaders and followers - the capacity to observe ourselves closely enough to recognise which role/s we are in at a given moment, and which ones we may need to take up as conditions change.

For example - in the R&D Group individuals are

- a) group members
- b) colleagues and peers working together to gain new knowledge and (perhaps)
- c) risk takers/avoiders depending on the nature of each contributor

The first two roles are more obvious. The third may not be so evident depending on how well we can manage personal emotional responses to the learning challenges.

A key feature of our product (see note above) is learning from mistakes - if you observe yourself avoiding taking a risk (e.g. not speaking your heart and mind; and/or accepting too quickly what others are saying; and/or wishing you were somewhere else) your *risk-taking/mistake avoidance* task is to acknowledge this and then abandon such behaviour.

Similarly, if you observe yourself speaking a lot, 'and/or taking charge' and and/or 'just doing it' all for everyone - you have the responsibility to identify and reduce your over-use

Guidelines for succeeding in The Leadership Room

of such behaviour in order to provide space for others to speak up. In a way all this focus on behaviour is like a dance - everyone is taking small actions to move towards *and away from* risk taking/aversion.

Learning to perform this dance efficiently and effectively makes you an excellent leader. There are two key roles you may not have previously consciously experienced in a learning context: these are a) being a **Customer** and b) being a **Representative/Service** provider. Some introductory information about these two roles is provided below.

Customer

In the Operational groups you will be at certain times a 'Customer' of the work of the other R&D Groups. Take this role seriously.

- Do ask questions, suggest what else you might need to know, give encouragement and feedback.
- Don't accept work that does not help you to learn more about their aspects of Leadership theory. Be a critical friend, as well as a customer. In past classes there has been post-course criticism of some work done by peers. This is a *spectacular* example of risk avoidance. The only time that criticism of work is valid is at the time it is being encountered, and when it is given to the person doing the work.

Be hyper aware that you need this knowledge to succeed in your career goals, and it is their responsibility to give the best possible support for the learning involved.

Representative/Service Provider

Equally clearly it is your responsibility to do the best you can do at all times for others. In the role of service provider, you represent the collective work of your R&D team. Whether you find it easy to talk to others and explain things, or you find it challenging, you must do the best you possibly can, on behalf of those whom you represent.

A message from a member of the 2016 Leadership Room showed the writer's awareness of their own and others' uncertainties: '*... not everybody else in the class is sure about everything, either - most of us are still learners of this new learning process.*' And they offer a vital insight into what lies ahead: '*I am realising that being wrong and making mistakes is just part of the process.*' Keep these words in mind as you work. Your customers are sympathetic and keen to learn. Give them your best work, and then work with them to make it even better.

Sharing Experiences

When the Operational Groups have all finished sharing their first round of teaching a new task for the R&D groups will be to plan how to proceed to the next stage of helping others learn what you have been reading and learning about.

There are likely to be many suggestions about how to proceed. There will be time to review these, and develop plans that allow for *emerging* ideas and experiences.

Functioning as an Organisation

By the time the first week is over we *should* have a reasonable idea of how well The Leadership Room is functioning both as an organisation and as a teaching/ learning context.

Reviewing progress is a regular part of all organisational life. At the beginning of Week 2 (and again in Week 3) we will pause and review our achievements and plan how to improve. Keep this in mind from the beginning. If it is not happening often enough for your liking - stop everyone and ask for it! Watch for chances to make improvements, and if they have not occurred (or perhaps you have implemented them yourself) before we arrive at a review point, ensure you bring them to everyone's attention. Responsibility for improving overall performance is everyone's task, and making evident your own contributions is a key leadership skill - learn to use it now.

The Leadership Room is an entity of a special kind. Its design represents - but is not - an actual organisation such as a business, military unit, NGO, charitable body or sports club. In this organisation all the usual things that occur in real entities will be experienced - with one important difference.

Guidelines for succeeding in The Leadership Room

We have the time and opportunity to examine everything, speak up about what is observed and experienced, and learn from the actions we take, and the actions taken by others, as we all try to develop, control and learn from and with each other. This is a unique opportunity. We are fully responsible for our own learning and our performance as leaders. The challenge then is to two what kind of leader we intend tob and then practising everyday to become that kind of leader.

Peter Senge, and others, have written about the quality of Learning Organisations, but few have actually experienced one. This is your chance not only to build one but also to learn from doing so.

“.... mastery is not about perfection. It’s about a process, a journey. The master is the one who stays on the path day after day, year after year. The master is the one who is willing to try, and fail, and try again, for as long as he or she lives.”

George Leonard
(1923 – 2010)

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