This chapter defines leader developmental readiness, presents a conceptual model, and discusses implications for practitioners supporting leaders before college, during college, and in early career stages.

In Pursuit: Mastering Leadership Through Leader Developmental Readiness

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Imagine a student—Damian—who enters a co-curricular undergraduate leadership program bursting to learn as much as he can about leadership, viewing himself not only as a leader but as a developing leader with a high degree of confidence that he can improve. Now imagine another student—Devon—who enters the same program but lacks purpose and sees himself as a follower who was born that way and will always be that way. Devon lacks the skills needed to learn and possesses only vague “do my best” goals for completing the program. Both Damian and Devon are offered the same developmental opportunities throughout their undergraduate studies, but only one of them has a positive developmental trajectory, seeks out additional stretch experiences, and ultimately develops the confidence, complexity, and skills needed to lead effectively. It is no mystery who develops as a leader. We all know it is Damian. Damian is consistently in pursuit of his leader developmental goals, fully tapping into a reserve of personal and social resources referred to as leader developmental readiness (LDR).

Universities and organizations alike are pouring resources into the development of the leadership capacity of their members, with resulting programs demonstrating a varying degree of return on development investment (Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, & Chan, 2009). Research suggests a number of reasons why some efforts fail while others succeed at developing leaders. For example, leader training grounded in strong leadership theory and programs spanning a longer duration have a larger likelihood of success. Yet, even the impact of those programs varies. We argue that a critical but often ignored input into developmental programs is the preparedness of the leaders, called leader developmental readiness (LDR). So,
why not consider LDR in preparing individuals for expensive leader development programs? The purpose of this chapter is to (1) clearly define LDR, (2) describe the main components of LDR, and (3) explicate how these components interrelate to result in the development of leaders across adolescence, college, and early career.

What Is Leader Developmental Readiness?

Although introduced in the literature a decade ago (Avolio, 2004; Reichard, 2006), only recently have scholars explicitly defined LDR, resulting in two complementary approaches. First, Hannah and Lester (2009) formally define LDR as “both the ability and motivation to attend to, make meaning of, and appropriate new knowledge into one's long-term memory structures” (p. 37). Of note in this definition, LDR is a multidimensional, individual-level construct composed of two higher-order constructs—motivation to develop and ability to develop (Avolio & Hannah, 2008, 2009). Motivation to develop as a leader includes such aspects as interests and goals, learning goal orientation, and leader developmental efficacy (i.e., belief in one's ability to develop as a leader), whereas ability to develop as a leader includes components such as self-awareness, self-complexity, and metacognitive ability (i.e., skill at thinking about thinking; Hannah & Avolio, 2010). Finally, support for development is the third and final component of LDR. Central to the premise of this chapter, we argue that motivation to develop and ability to develop interact, and their multiplicative effects maximize success in leader development when there is a high level of support for development.

Second, Day, Harrison, and Halpin (2009) define developmental readiness as how prepared an individual is to benefit and learn from a developmental experience and make the distinction between typical and maximum performance. Typical performance (one's usual level of functioning with regard to leading) and maximum performance (best performance given when one knows one is being evaluated and thus intentionally gives extra) are not highly related for novice leaders. In other words, under scrutiny, novice leaders will perform much better than they do on a day-to-day basis. Day et al. (2009) argue that the gap between typical and maximum performance is an indicator of the leader's readiness for a developmental stretch experience, an experience that pulls on existing ability and draws out new, untapped potential. The smaller the gap in performance, the more expertise the leader has, and the more ready that leader is to jump to the next level or challenge. Although both of these approaches refer to readiness, the Avolio approach is specific to readiness for leader development and the Day approach is specific to readiness for leadership experiences (e.g., a promotion with widened span of control), which may also be developmental in nature.
Conceptual Model of Leader Development Readiness: Tying It All Together

Combining these two approaches, we developed a conceptual model of LDR as shown in Figure 1.1. The purpose of this model is to display a simplified, linear depiction of the leader development process incorporating the various components of LDR and to provide an integrative foundation of the concepts discussed throughout the various chapters in this issue. It is important to note that in reality the developmental process is cyclical and non-linear (Day et al., 2009). With these limitations in mind, we will describe the various components of the model and how they are expected to relate.

**Motivation to Develop.** The first component is the discovery and/or development of one's passion and purpose as a leader. Without first knowing, or more likely feeling, the why behind enacting leadership, there is a lack of drive to lead (see Chapter 2). Take, for instance, Leilani. Before her father developed Parkinson’s disease, Leilani had little involvement in community activities, and did not demonstrate leadership or identify as a leader. In fact, she would have laughed if someone had called her a leader, and she possessed no motivation or goals to develop her leadership. However, the life experience of her father’s diagnosis drove Leilani to learn as much as she could about Parkinson’s, find and organize a group that supports families who suffer from the disease, and eventually stand up as a leader to mobilize community support for her cause. Discovery of her passion and purpose in a specific domain was the impetus of Leilani’s development as a leader. It
is the reason underlying the leader’s motivation to lead and to develop as a leader as well as her vision for the future that inspires followers.

It is clear from Leilani’s story that passion and purpose drive the development of one’s identity as a leader and the motivation to lead. When we say “leader identity,” we are referring to the extent to which one’s self-concept includes the definition as a leader (see Chapter 3). In other words, Leilani would endorse the statement “I am a leader” as part of her multifaceted identity, which may also include being a daughter, a woman, and a lawyer. DeRue and Ashford (2010) theorize that the development of a leader identity involves an iterative, generative process of supported claims of leadership and empowered granting of leadership. Although likely a nonlinear process, positive (or negative) spirals of claiming and granting allow an individual to define oneself as a leader over time. Take, for example, Stephen, who during meetings claims leadership by speaking up, suggesting solutions, and asserting himself. Members of the organization may support (or not) Stephen’s attempts to lead. Group members may grant Stephen leadership by soliciting and following his opinion or even simply stating that he is a legitimate leader, thus increasing the likelihood that Stephen will again attempt to claim leadership in the future. Over time, this reciprocal and interactive process would propel the development of his identity as a leader.

Along with defining oneself as a leader, another LDR component is the motivation to lead. Motivation to lead is thought to affect one's decision to accept or pursue leadership roles and responsibilities (Chan & Drasgow, 2001), a key precursor to development of leader efficacy, complexity, and skills. Motivation to lead is viewed as having three dimensions—affective identity, social normative, and noncalculative. Affective identity motivation to lead aligns closely with our previous description of leader identity. Individuals are motivated to lead simply because they see themselves as leaders. Social normative motivation to lead, in contrast, implies that one is motivated because of a feeling of responsibility to the larger group to lead. Finally, noncalculative motivation to lead simply refers to individuals who lead not because of the tangible rewards available to leaders.

Furthermore, the stronger a leader’s identity and motivation to lead, the more motivated the leader will be to develop as a leader. As described in the previous section, motivation to develop is a key component of LDR (Avolio & Hannah, 2008, 2009) and refers to “the desire to develop or improve leadership skills and attributes through effort” (Maurer & Lippstreu, 2005, p. 5). Motivated effort toward development varies in intensity (see Chapter 4 of this volume). Individuals possessing a high-intensity motivation to develop as a leader are most likely to possess challenging and specific developmental goals and to seek out challenging stretch experiences in which they persist in the face of obstacles. High levels of effort and persistence are undoubtedly necessary to maintain development as a leader over one’s lifetime. Thus, LDR requires not only motivation to lead, but also motivation to develop leadership capacity.
Coupled with the motivation to develop as a leader, the leader’s approach to leadership opportunities is a defining factor in the occurrence of actual development (see Chapter 5). This approach toward development consists of both one’s implicit theory of ability and relatedly one’s confidence (or efficacy) in the ability to develop as a leader. Entity and incremental theories reflect opposing views about the stability of intelligence, and thus align with the debate over whether leaders are born or made. Leaders endorsing entity theories believe that ability is fixed (leaders are born); they tend to approach task situations with the desire to demonstrate that ability (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997) and regulate task activities according to a performance goal orientation (Dweck, 1986). This orientation reflects the leader’s motives to outperform others or attain outcomes that signify high leadership ability (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996). In contrast, those endorsing the incremental theory believe that ability is malleable (leaders are made). They tend to perceive leadership situations as opportunities to develop skills and improve (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). In this case, the leader frames performance situations with a learning goal orientation. Goal orientation drives the types of goals a leader pursues—performance or learning goals, respectively—and thus anchors the feedback that the leader seeks. It is important to note that empirical research demonstrates that leadership entails a mix of both born and made elements, with a larger portion (around 70%) stemming from the “made” side of the equation (Avolio, 2005).

Thus far, we have focused on the motivation to develop component of LDR. To make these concepts more concrete, let’s track the developmental paths of two leaders, Carol and John. Carol possesses an incremental theory of ability, believes that leadership is a skill that can be developed, and holds a learning goal orientation. As a result, she has established clear and challenging goals for her development as a leader over the next 5 to 10 years. As cofounder of a tech start-up, she knows she must seek out stretch experiences that take her out of her comfort zone, continue to persist toward these goals in the face of obstacles, and seek feedback to improve upon her leadership. John has dedicated himself to creating change in low-income communities, but he sees no reason to create change in himself. He possesses an entity theory of ability, believes that he was born as an effective leader, and holds a performance goal orientation. His leadership goals emphasize demonstrating his effectiveness with his current leadership ability and avoiding tasks he feels are beyond him. He is open to positive feedback that confirms his current level of leadership effectiveness, but that is about it.

Fast-forward 10 years. Carol has succeeded and failed as a leader. There were times she bit off more than she could chew, but she learned so much and was able to experiment with and apply refined leadership strategies over the years. She has a lot of confidence in herself as a leader and understands the complexity of leadership challenges. John has succeeded consistently,
but his experience has been limited to his domain of expertise. Many community members he serves view him as having the same approach to every leadership challenge. Playing it safe, John has failed to develop. The patterns of how an individual approaches leadership opportunities result in a positive (or negative) growth trajectory.

**Ability to Develop.** Motivated effort toward development is great if the leader also possesses the ability to develop. Metacognitive ability interacts with motivation and goals to impact actual effectiveness of leader development efforts. Metacognitive awareness and regulation involve higher-order thinking related to the cognitive processes of learning. Such “thinking about thinking” enables leaders to be effective learners through planning an approach to a learning task, monitoring learning comprehension, and evaluating progress toward learning. Often associated with cognitive ability, metacognitive awareness and regulation, in contrast, are skills that leaders can develop throughout the life span (see Chapter 7). When a leader is missing either motivation or ability, development becomes very difficult if not impossible. The best-case scenario in terms of LDR reflects the multiplicative effects of motivation to develop and ability to develop; when both are high, leader development outcomes are maximized, including the development of leader efficacy, complexity, and skills.

**Leader Development Support: Implications for Practice**

In addition to motivation and ability to develop, a final key component of LDR is support for development. How can educational and organizational administrators set up an environment in which LDR is more likely to flourish? Next, we emphasize specific actions, policies, and practices that support LDR from pre-college to early career (see Chapter 8).

**Pre-College.** As described in depth by Murphy and Reichard (2011) in their edited book *Early Development and Leadership*, during the formative years of pre-adolescence and adolescence, promising future leaders acquire leadership experience both directly through extracurricular activities and indirectly by observing influential adults. Moreover, this time frame is critical for the formation of beliefs that will frame and shape future development behavior. Administrators, parents, teachers, and coaches can support LDR by praising effort and progress, instead of pure performance, to instill a learning focus. In fact, longitudinal research found that children whose parents praised their effort rather than their fixed qualities as toddlers were more likely to possess a learning goal orientation as a 7- or 8-year-old (Gunderson et al., 2013). Adults also might help young people clarify causes they care about and identify local ways of making a difference, fostering passion and purpose for leadership. To support motivation to develop, key people in youths’ lives can showcase how developing as a leader has allowed them to attain valued outcomes, such as a building a satisfying career and being able to impact important causes and groups.
College. Moving forward in the life span to the college years, higher education administrators can continue to carry out the support mechanisms started in pre-college. Offices that sponsor off-campus leadership experiences might encourage students to critically reflect on, rather than summarize, their experience to foster learning orientations. University administrators can support motivation to lead and passion and purpose by offering volunteer opportunities, financial resources, and advice to students exploring how they can make a difference in global and local communities. Situational cues like perceived quality of learning outcomes and learning climates also impact motivation to learn (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000). Finally, fostering metacognition and other self-regulatory mechanisms through teaching not only leadership theory but also strategies for development may help college students gain the intrapersonal skills necessary to plan, regulate, and evaluate their own growth as leaders over time.

Early Career. Early career support mechanisms for LDR are critical, as leaders will likely not be entering into formal supervisory roles in their first jobs. Nonetheless, organizations will want to capitalize on their motivation and ability to continue to develop as leaders. Reichard and Johnson (2011) suggested a number of organizational support mechanisms to foster leader development, especially self-directed growth. In particular, career support for LDR can come from human resources systems such as selection, training, and performance appraisals, which work to create a learning culture in the organization. For example, selecting on stable traits that predict success in development such as openness to experience, cognitive capacity, and need for achievement (Avolio, 2004); training malleable skills needed to develop such as self-regulation, goal setting, and progress evaluation; and rewarding both performance and the pursuit of development will not only ensure that employees have the capacities needed to pursue leader development, but will also create organizational norms of learning, responsibility, and openness (Reichard & Johnson, 2011).

To turn pursuit of development into actual development, organizations need to provide resources to developing leaders (Reichard & Johnson, 2011). For example, organizations can leverage technology (i.e., access to websites, shared drives, databases, and online journals) as an information-rich platform for storing up-to-date, evidence-based leadership resources. Direct supervisors can provide guidance and structure for leader development by supporting developing leaders through individualized consideration and identification of stretch opportunities. Finally, professional networks give developing leaders opportunities to make meaning out of experiences and learn in a nonevaluative context. In these networks, leaders can seek out peer-to-peer support and mentors, and even look for opportunities to test out new leadership styles while operating outside of formal work constraints.

However, even leaders highly motivated to develop can lose motivation if they form low expectations of training content or believe they cannot take
time out of their busy schedule to attend training. Toward that end, training that is voluntary and perceived as valuable has been shown to be positively correlated with motivation to attend training (Beier & Kanfer, 2010; Tsai & Tai, 2003). Those looking to develop LDR in young leaders should remember the power of context and framing in molding expectations about leader development. Quiñones (1995) demonstrated that labeling training as “advanced,” as opposed to “remedial,” can profoundly increase pretraining self-efficacy and motivation to learn. Therefore, the social information communicated to leaders, both formally through performance appraisals and informally through cultural norms, sets up and reinforces individual beliefs that can shape LDR.

Outcomes of Leader Development

Attending to LDR in program design may facilitate greater return on investment for institutions financially supporting leadership programs, as LDR fosters the outcomes of leader efficacy, leadership skills, and cognitive complexity. First, leader efficacy—or the confidence one has in the ability to lead effectively—has been linked to leader effectiveness and is an outcome of development. LDR drives learning, and learning coupled with small wins builds leaders’ confidence and gives them experiences out of which they can make new, increasingly complex meaning and develop any number of leadership skills.

Leadership skills—or effective leader behaviors—have been extensively studied in the leadership literature. Depending on each leader’s goals, skills may include structuring tasks, building relationships, or enacting transformational leadership behaviors (Avolio et al., 2009). Taking any one skill or set of skills, LDR might increase the pace and depth at which these skills can be learned. We have already noted that leader development occurs in a lifelong cycle of learning and relearning. Although it is true that leader development is not a race (even if it were, surely not all leaders would be heading toward the same finish line!), possessing more effective leaders offers clear benefits to society and organizations. Therefore, developing leaders faster would unlock more leadership potential sooner. Leadership involves putting oneself at risk, and it places a particular burden on the leader’s personal resources that can even decrease one’s performance as an individual contributor (Day, Sin, & Chen, 2004). LDR means less time waiting for floundering leaders to take the risks required for learning, and more time supporting leaders who are unsure but step up and try their best.

Nevertheless, there may be a trade-off between quickness and quality, and both are essential. In terms of leader development, we define quality as cognitive complexity, or the depth to which concepts and skills connect to a relatively permanent and personally significant part of a leader’s schema. Lord and Hall (2005) proposed a model for leader skill development, differentiating the readily observable and straightforward “surface structures”
(p. 598) that novice leaders gain from the “deeper structures” (p. 602) that more advanced leaders create. In this framework, surface structures refer to leaders’ overt behavior, often grounded in idealized and normative beliefs about what leadership means. As leaders develop deep-level complexity, they acquire a more nuanced and flexible approach to leadership, including proficiency in areas such as higher-order principles, social skills, and emotional regulation. However, getting past unquestioned assumptions and normative ideas about leadership to this deeper level requires intentional, motivated, and highly skilled effort—it requires LDR.

Finally, as noted, LDR may help programs achieve better return on development investment (RODI), which may be particularly salient for university and organizational boards of directors who want to see evidence that expensive leader development programs actually have a benefit. Avolio, Avey, and Quisenberry (2010) define RODI as the financial impact from spending time and money on developing employees. Depending on the type of outcome sought, the length of the intervention, and the underlying theoretical model used, certain interventions can reliably attain a range of effect sizes (magnitude of impact) across groups of people, even if those groups have varying levels of LDR. Holding the quality of a leader development intervention constant, to the extent that participating leaders have greater LDR, the program may attain stronger effects and help the program sponsors reap even more of the benefits they seek.

**Conclusion**

The pursuit of mastering leadership is a lifelong process and requires motivation, ability, and support for development, or LDR. Emerging theory and research point to the essential yet often ignored role of the developmental readiness of leaders engaged in formal or informal leader development programs. In this chapter, we have provided a simplified conceptual model of the linear relationships between various LDR constructs and outcomes with the caveat that in practice development is a nonlinear, recursive, and cyclical process that unfolds over time. Our goal was to provide an integrative overview of the various aspects of LDR, each of which is covered in subsequent chapters in this volume. We urge researchers and practitioners alike to take into account LDR when designing and implementing both formal and informal leader development programs in both the university and organizational context to maximize the return on development investment for developing leaders like Damian, Leilani, and Carol.

**References**


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