

10 CRITICAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IN THE OVERALL CONTEXT OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leadership as a discipline has been widely studied for a long period of time. Many theories of leadership have emerged, each with its own attempt to help us better understand and develop leadership capability.

The six main categories of theories include trait, behavioral, power and influence, situation, charismatic, and transformational. This paper discusses each category in turn, then Skillsoft's modern, evidence-based approach to leadership development and "the 10 critical SLDP competencies."

CATEGORIES OF LEADERSHIP THEORY

TRAIT

The trait approach to leadership emphasizes the personal traits of leaders. The underlying assumption is that certain people possess innate characteristics that make them better leaders than others. Theories included in the trait approach include the "Great Man" theory of leadership, Stogdill's leadership traits, and the theories espoused by Maccoby, John Gardner and Jim Collins.

BEHAVIORAL

The behavioral approach switched the emphasis to observations of what effective and ineffective leaders do on the job, so this approach takes a more pragmatic application approach. Theories included in the behavioral approach include Mintzberg's 10 managerial roles, Kotter's leadership factor, Stewart's three-part theory of management, Kouzes and Posner's leadership challenge and Ulrich and Zenger's Results-Based Leadership.

POWER AND INFLUENCE

The power and influence approach studies the influence processes at work between leaders and other individuals, including those they lead. The theories included in the power and influence approach include "the two faces of power," Winter's theory of leadership, The West Point Way of leadership, social exchange theory, and the strategic contingencies theory.

SITUATIONAL

The situational approach pays attention to the contextual factors and asks the question of how the larger contextual situation affects the leadership task by examining the nature of the work performed by leader and team, the individual characteristics of members of the team, etc. Theories included in this approach are Blanchard's situational theory of leadership, House's path-goal theory of leadership, Fiedler's contingency model, Leadership substitutes theory, the multiple-linkage model, and the cognitive resources theory.

CHARISMATIC

The charismatic approach to leadership studies followers' perceptions of the leader's traits and behaviors, the situational context and the needs of the followers. Theories included in this approach are House's theory of charismatic leadership, attribution theory of charisma, and the self-concept theory.

TRANSFORMATIONAL

Finally, the transformational approach is viewed as a process by which leaders and their direct reports inspire each other to elevate moral conduct. The Warren Bennis theory of leadership, James Macgregor Burns' theory of leadership, Bass' theory of transformational leadership, Tichy and Devanna's transformational leadership process and Schein's model of organizational culture and leadership are all included in this approach.

THE SKILLSOFT APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

While each of these approaches and each of the theories within an approach has merit. Skillsoft prefers not to design a leadership program around a single idiosyncratic leadership theory. However, the approach taken comes closest to the behavioral approach and includes aspects of the trait approach. There is a major emphasis on developing competencies and mindsets that facilitate collaborative and collective leadership practices. These practices are the lynchpin for effective leadership in the digital economy where team members can rise, at any given time, to the top when their particular skills or expertise are needed to boost the levels of creativity, agility, innovation and speed of decision making. Collaborative leadership draws upon the notion of "servant" leadership but with service to the team and collective leadership relies upon the self-organizing of teams to solve problems more quickly in an environment of uncertainty and complexity.

Instead of narrowly developing the program to reflect only the specific theories of Mintzberg, Zenger, Kotter, Posner or others, The Skillsoft Leadership Development Program espouses 10 critical evidence-based behavioral competencies in an overall portfolio of 30 modern leadership development competencies. Skillsoft uses an evidence-based approach to arrive at the set of competencies and, more importantly, the design and instructional strategies used in the program to make sure that the content is effective.

The 10 "critical" leadership competencies are based on the results of a sub-set of well-executed and highly regarded studies from both industry and academia, ranging from The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership espoused in LPI to Google's rigorous Project Oxygen research which informed the discussion of critical management and leadership competencies. The eight attributes that Google found in their original Project Oxygen research provide a comprehensive (although incomplete) picture of the essential elements of effective management / leadership. Below is the list of the eight competencies resulting from Google's Project Oxygen work.

Since the original research concluded, Google subsequently added two additional competencies: diversity / inclusion and collaboration. Google included these additional competencies as a result of the work that specifically highlights the importance of psychological safety in teams, research on diversity and inclusion, and the importance of establishing very clear performance expectations.

It is important to highlight that the attributes for improving manager / leader effectiveness rest on a number of evidence-based assumptions. These assumptions include the following:

- **1.** Management consists of a set of describable, articulable behaviors.
- **2.** These behaviors are broadly applicable to diverse functional groups and to differing nationalities and cultures with only minor adaptation, if at all.
- **3.** Managers can become more effective at these behaviors through a combination of feedback, training & development, reflection, and practice.
- **4.** Effective management is as much about developing people as it is about getting the work done.
- **5.** Effective management is more about raising the employees' level of accomplishment than removing sub-par performers or limiting dysfunctional behaviors. These assumptions are heavily supported by research.

A number of scholars have studied managers operating in the workplace and have described, at a highly granular level, the actions, interactions, and behaviors they have observed. Scholars have noted the existence of common behaviors across diverse functions, positions and cultures. Studies have shown that people can learn and improve their management and leadership competencies through a combination of feedback, reflection, training & development and practice. Organizational scholars have long argued that developing people and creating deep bonds with employees are among the most important responsibilities of managers and leaders at companies seeking high performance.

The eight attributes from Project Oxygen rest on a firm foundation of rigorous research. Widespread adoption of the eight attributes at Google led to quantifiable improvements in management effectiveness, raising manager "favorable scores" across all categories and geographies. Improvement was most dramatic among the least effective managers, who are often the source of deep employee dissatisfaction.

The results of the Project Oxygen study, together with well-researched studies done by McKinsey, Gallup, and a team of academics at Harvard Business School (including recent work on effective teaming by Amy Edmondson) and several other studies (Gallup, etc.) all provide the theoretical and evidence-based selection of the 10 critical competencies. These 10 constitute a third of the total competencies we have developed as part of our Skillsoft Leadership Development Program (SLDP.) These 10 competencies are highlighted in the chart on the following page.

GOOGLE'S PROJECT OXYGEN: DO MANAGERS/ LEADERS REALLY MATTER?

- Multi-year research project
- Eight Key
 Management
 Attributes, broadly
 consistent with
 academic research
 on managerial and
 leader behavior and
 effectiveness.
- Be a good coach
- Empower the team
- Express concern for team members' success and well-being
- Be productive and results-oriented
- Be a good communicator
- Help with career development
- Have a vision
- Use your technical skills to advise¹

¹ "Google's Project Oxygen: Do Managers Matter?" David A. Garvin, Alison Berkley Wagonfeld and Liz Kin. Harvard Business School Case Study.

THE SKILLSOFT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TOPICS		
Coaching	Influence and Persuasion	New Leader Transitions
Building and Leading Successful Teams	The Accountable Leader	Leading Through the Challenge of Change
Creating a Successful Business Execution Culture	Developing People	Leading with Values and Ethics
The Emotionally Intelligent Leader	Leading Innovation	Leading with Executive Presence
Leading with Mindfulness	Embracing Diversity in Your Leadership	Leading with Digital Technology
Critical Thinking and Cognitive Flexibility	Setting and Managing Priorities	Leading Across Cultures
Problem Solving and Decision Making	Coordinating with Your Leader Peers	Leading Through Disruption
Leading a Customer-Centric Culture	Judgment and Decisiveness	The Agile Leader: Perseverance and Flexibility
Leading Virtually	Leading Organizational Vision	Motivational Leadership
Strategic Thinking	Managing Conflict	Women in Leadership



Sample Leading Through the Challenge of Change Course: Leader Mentor



Sample Agile Leader Course: Host as Learning Agent

FOUNDATIONAL VIDEO-BASED COURSES COVERING THE 10 CRITICAL COMPETENCIES

Building and Leading Successful Teams	Teamwork is essential to successful business practice. Permanent or temporary, workgroups need to function efficiently and effectively. In this course, you'll learn how to construct and lead teams, while avoiding and mitigating dysfunction.
Creating a Successful Business Execution Culture	Leaders must execute the strategies they help create. Without execution, a strategy is just an idea. In this course, you'll learn how to build and lead an "execution culture" that empowers employees to translate strategy into action.
Becoming an Emotionally Intelligent Leader	Building emotional intelligence can help you make better decisions and improve your business relationships. In this course, you'll learn skills and behaviors to develop your emotional competency and become a more mindful and capable leader.
Developing Successful Coaching Relationships	Leaders must support a culture conducive to coaching and be capable of stepping into a coaching role at any time. In this course, you'll learn how to build dynamic and purposeful coaching relationships.
Leading through Problem Solving and Decision Making	The hallmark of leadership is being able to work through problems and make tough decisions using the skills and experience of your team. In this course, you'll learn how to use a three-stage approach to engage your team in this effort.
The Agile Leader	Even a small shift in direction can accelerate success. In this course, you will learn how to adopt a focused and flexible mindset; respond quickly with adaptive techniques; and empower others to reach goals.
Accountable Leadership	Accountability is about taking ownership of your own actions, and it is key to your organization's success. In this course, you'll learn how to foster and determine accountability, in your workplace, your team, and yourself.
Leading by Developing People	Good leaders promote development so that everyone can reach their highest potential. In this course, you'll explore myths and challenges of development and learn ways to encourage, perform, and set standards for development of others.
Leading Diversity	Diversity is a fact of life and a source of great benefit in the modern marketplace and workforce. In this course, you'll learn skills to help you manage and leverage diversity for the advantage of the organization.
Leading through Shared Vision	A powerful vision, clearly articulated, motivates people to take action and drives business results. In this course, you'll learn how to create and communicate a realistic and actionable vision that inspires commitment from people.

IN SUMMARY

The set of 10 competencies represent a very thoughtful, evidence-based selection of the critical competencies all individuals should seek to master for meaningful improvement in management and leadership capability. We offer 30 competencies in our overall solution in order to round out the development opportunities for managers and leaders across a fuller range of competencies, especially those most critical for leading in the digital economy. However, if a learning and development professional seeks to mandate development against a smaller set of competencies, these 10 are the ones that should be developed for the greatest positive benefit to the organization.

Click here to learn more about the Skillsoft Leadership Development Program.

RECOMMENDED SOURCES

"Google's Project Oxygen: Do Managers Matter?" David A. Garvin, Alison Berkley Wagonfeld and Liz Kin. Harvard Business School Case Study.

Why Good Managers Are So Rare. Harvard Business Review. Randall Beck and James Harter.

What Great Managers Do. Harvard Business Review. Marcus Buckingham.

Decoding Leadership: What Really Matters. McKinsey Quarterly. Claudio Feser, Fernanda Mayol, Ramesh Sriniyasan.

The Leadership Challenge, 4th Edition. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. 2007.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HEIDE ABELLI

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Heide is Senior Vice President of Skillsoft's training and development content and is also responsible for its Leadership & Business Skills content portfolios. She joined Skillsoft in 2016 and is responsible for driving innovation across all content areas.

Heide has extensive experience in the publishing, media, educational technology & corporate training sectors. Prior to joining Skillsoft, she spent almost a decade working at Harvard Business Publishing, where she developed award-winning eLearning products in the leadership and business skills content areas, including interactive simulations, video-based courses, case studies and experiential learning solutions. Prior to that, she held several roles at the global publishing and media giant, Bertelsmann.

Heide is passionate about leveraging technology to improve the practice of management. She is also a thought leader in the areas of training and development and management and leadership. She has been quoted in numerous publications including Forbes, The Economist, CLO Magazine, HR Drive, Business Insider, INC., Deal Crunch and Learning Solutions, to name a few. She is also a frequent participant in panel discussions and presenter at leading industry conferences. Because Heide has also held leadership roles in product development, innovation and product management at Fortune 100 companies, she truly has her finger on the pulse of what organizations need to train and develop today's leaders, especially in a digital economy.

Heide holds an MBA with distinction from Harvard Business School and is on the faculty of the Management and Organization Department of Boston College's Carroll School of Management.



ABOUT SKILLSOFT

Skillsoft delivers online learning, training, and talent solutions to help organizations unleash their edge. Leveraging immersive, engaging content, Skillsoft enables organizations to unlock the potential in their best assets — their people — and build teams with the skills they need for success. Empowering 36 million learners and counting, Skillsoft democratizes learning through an intelligent learning experience and a customized, learner-centric approach to skills development with resources for Leadership Development, Business Skills, Technology & Development, Digital Transformation, and Compliance.

Skillsoft and SumTotal are partners to thousands of leading global organizations, including many Fortune 500 companies. The company features three award-winning systems that support learning, performance and success: Skillsoft learning content, the Percipio intelligent learning experience platform, and the SumTotal suite for Talent Development, which offers measurable impact across the entire employee lifecycle.

Learn more at www.skillsoft.com.



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