

# Leadership Development: What Role for Vocational Training?

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the factors that could influence leadership development and employee retention in private sector organizations. In this research, we will seek to determine the nature and extent of the impact of professional training on leadership development. This research project is one of the new topics that some researchers have started in recent years. The novelty of this subject is the inclusion of the vocational training factor. This factor is likely to have a positive impact on leadership development. Some of the factors already known for their impact on leadership development such as personality, power, and material and moral incentives will be adopted. It is assumed that the results of this research will have a positive impact on the development of leadership within companies.

## Keywords:

*leadership, leadership development, training, events triggers*

## 1. Introduction

Companies are looking, and will continue to look in the coming years, for strong leaders able to face many challenges. They should therefore have effective leadership development programs that produce the desired outcomes. To this end, they should design and maintain systems within the organization to support it in achieving its objectives and thus enable it to improve its performance. New leaders should quickly adapt to changing environments. In this regard and in the current context of globalization, a high level of transfer is crucial for the survival of organizations. It is those organizations that succeed in effectively developing their leaders that will be in a better position thanks to this competitive advantage difficult to replicate. It then becomes important for a company to select and develop leaders who will be able to satisfy, with their personal skills, the needs of all of the organization's stakeholders and ensure long-term performance (George, 2003).

In such a context, old top-down management models are becoming obsolete. In new organizations, employees at all levels are being brought into management positions and are more involved in decision-making than before (McCrimmon, 2010). Ambiguity and complexity in the exercise of leadership also forces today's managers to make greater use of their own knowledge and interpersonal skills

(McKenna, Rooney and Boal, 2009). As such, it is more than necessary to develop skills, focus on behaviors that guarantee the quality of services, build effective communication systems, and align leadership with the activities implemented in order to make organizations evolve (Bowerman, 2003). Moreover, if the exercise of leadership has a significant impact on the work of members of an organization, employees' perception of the form of leadership exercised by their leader can be of decisive importance (Dirks and Fenin, 2002). Indeed, several studies show that the type of leadership and support provided by the superior has an impact on the fundamental dimensions of employees' well-being in the workplace, such as commitment, performance and satisfaction of needs at work (Forest, Crevier-Braud and Gagné, 2009; Darvish and Rezaei, 2011). Leaders are increasingly held accountable for unethical behavior and face growing intolerance by stakeholders for the discrepancies between what they say and what they do (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This high expectation of integrity from leaders reflects the need to look at leadership from a new perspective. To this end, several authors have recently turned their attention to positive forms of leadership that can restore members' trust in the organization. Thus, leadership, characterized by leaders' self-awareness, the transparency of their intentions and the high degree of consistency between their beliefs and actions (Avolio and Gardner, 2005) and likely to generate sustainable organizational performance (George, 2003), comes at the right time in a context of uncertainty and a decrease in trust and optimism of individuals within the organization (Luthans and Avolio, 2003).

Today, organizations are placing increasing emphasis on leadership. As a result, a growing share of training budgets is now allocated to this effect (Ardichvili and Manderschied, 2008). However, it has not been shown that leadership training programs are producing satisfactory results. Moreover, related concepts are rarely addressed in academic programs. It seems that traditional training programs are not able to bring about the changes in leaders' life skills and personal abilities that are necessary for leaders (Cooper, Scandura and Schriesheim, 2005). A major challenge for companies therefore lies in the development and implementation of unconventional training programs for leadership development for managers.

In this vein, some authors suggest that leadership development programs would be more effective if they contain planned trigger events (Roche 2010, Cooper, Scandura and Schriesheim, 2005; Luthans and Avolio, 2003). Trigger events represent important, though sometimes subtle, changes in an individual's outlook that promote personal development and growth (Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005). In this regard, it seems that a determining component of leadership development bears on the significant events that take place throughout an individual's life and that help shape his or her experience and leadership skills (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). The same authors suggest that it is also possible to adopt a proactive intervention strategy by planning triggering events aimed at developing specific authentic leadership skills. It is therefore possible to think that trigger events can be replicated under the framework of a leadership development program, through experimentation during training sessions or in the application of some learning and experimentation objectives in a work context. This study aims to answer the following two questions: 1) Through what process do managers develop the skills necessary to exercise leadership in a training context? and 2) what are the active ingredients of the training program that promote the emergence of significant trigger events in the development process? This study falls under the discipline of management and compensates for the lack of knowledge of leadership development practices through trigger events. Consequently, it contributes to equipping professionals in the development of effective leadership training programs for companies.

## 1.1 Theoretical background

### 1.1.1 Leadership

The concept of leadership has gained considerable popularity in recent decades in both popular and scientific literature. It has been approached from different perspectives for more than a century and continues to raise questions by the academic research community. A recent review of the literature by Barling, Christie and Hopton (2011) shows the different stages that led to the construction of the main theories that are currently available. While the first theories attempted to identify the physical and psychological traits of leaders, as well as the universal behavior underlying leadership, contingency approaches subsequently made it possible to also consider the situational components that may influence the traits and behavior of leaders.

In the late 1970s, many researchers called for relational approaches to study leadership. The leader-member exchange theory (LMX) evolved around the relationship between the leader and his or her members or followers (Ardichvili and Manderschied 2008, Barling, Christie and

Hopton, 2011). According to this theory, it is the quality of the relationship between a leader and their members that brings positive results for the organization. Moreover, among the main leadership styles proposed in the literature, transformational leadership (Bass et al., 1987; Bass and Avolio, 1994) is without a doubt the one that has received the most attention from researchers since 1980. This theory refers to different types of behavior that can be adopted by leaders, particularly those of a transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire type. While transactional leadership is built around the exchange relationship between the leader and their members, as well as the distribution of rewards and punishment based on performance, laissez-faire leadership is more a form of passive management where the leader does little to intervene with their members to allow them to move forward on their own. These last two forms of leadership are criticized in the literature in that they contribute to impoverishing the quality of the relationship between the leader and their members (Ardichvili and Manderschied, 2008). In contrast, transformational leadership refers to the leader's ability to communicate a vision and exert influence on their members by strengthening their motivation, commitment, and their recognition of their accomplishments. The relationship fostered by transformational leadership provides the necessary support for members to develop their potential and skills within the organization, while ensuring their well-being (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Some theories have focused more on the role of the leader's personality in the exercise of leadership. According to charismatic leadership theory, these leaders rely on their members' perception of them in order to change their attitudes or to acquire their adherence to a vision (Conger and Kanungo, 1987). Many authors argue that the foundations of this theory are largely similar to those of transformational leadership, yet the main difference lies in the attribution of the leader's behavior by its members (Barling, Christie and Hopton, 2011). In line with previous theories and following the increase in the number of scandals within organizations, some authors have also looked at the ethical dimension of leadership. Thus, the ethical leadership theory (Brown, Trevino and Harrison, 2005; Gregory, 2010) suggests that the leader is perceived by its members as an attractive, credible and legitimate in his or her role as a guide, who engages in generally appropriate behavior and promotes ethics-related values. Among other recent conceptions of leadership, servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) bears on the notion of the delegation of the leader's power to their members. According to this theory, leaders perceive themselves as being at the service of their members in order to achieve organizational objectives. By bringing together the often contradictory concepts of "leader" and "servant", Greenleaf

has raised a paradox that reflects a desire to improve the quality of the conditions under which individuals work within organizations. According to this theory, the leader is characterized by, among other things, a great capacity to listen, empathy, benevolence, awareness, commitment and foresight.

### 1.1.2. Leadership development

"Leadership development involves all forms of growth or development phases in a life cycle that promote, encourage and contribute to the development of the required knowledge and expertise to optimize the individual's leadership potential and performance. »(Collins and Holton, 2004, p. 218). Several authors have shown that leaders prefer learning in action and in the workplace (Conger and Benjamin, 1999, 2003; Collins and Holton, 2005, Allio, 2005). According to Naquin and Holton, "traditional classroom training does not develop skills" and andragogy techniques should be adopted since adults learn best in action and if they understand the relevance to their work (Naquin and Holton, 2006, p. 156). It is therefore important to integrate different types of experiential learning strategies (Naquin & Holton, 2006, p. 156). Ruth Boaden explains that these strategies allow participants to be at the center of learning and to take responsibility for their own development.

In fact, Boaden explains that "leadership" is not linked to an exceptional innate gift, that the main skills it requires can be acquired through learning, and that an individual's personal qualities can be improved. However, learning the role of "leader" is not limited to a simple academic exercise either. It is a long-term task that is fostered by the opportunities for learning and practice that arise throughout life. It is not easy to teach "leadership" that empowers other abilities and harnesses existing or potential human energies in order to achieve change. This "leadership" can certainly not be taught by manuals or simple guidelines. It is an interactive process, in which the individual learns from success and failure, and through others, and in which he or she must develop and exploit his or her own qualities, values and beliefs while improving his or her knowledge and skills.

However, it is also important that "leaders" acquire new knowledge about their work, and the skills to become effective agents of change and motivate others; they will also need to learn to change their behavior from "acting for others" to "empowering others to act on their own" by trusting and delegating responsibility to them. Liaison skills are also important (linking individuals, groups and organizations), as well as training skills (developing "leadership" in others by devoting time and priority to it), and teamwork skills (collaborating and promoting teamwork in any situation). The "leader" should also be able

to clearly see the distant goal while seizing the opportunity. Most important, however, is the ability to motivate and mobilize others, to arouse their interest, to inspire and encourage them, to broaden their horizons and to teach them to make the most of their abilities and means.

#### 1.1.2.1 Learning Theories and Leadership Development

Development theory through experiential learning proposed by Kolb (1984) suggests that human development and learning cannot be considered independently and that learning is in fact the process by which an individual achieves development. Similarly, Grint (2007) suggests that some aspects of leadership cannot be taught and that there is a need to focus on other ways with which an individual can learn. According to this author, leadership is the acquisition of wisdom, not knowledge, and can only be learned through experience. There is a growing belief among researchers and practitioners that workplace experiences are the best way to develop individual leadership skills.

In addition, some authors suggest that the 'challenging' nature of an experience (e.g., one that involves unfamiliar responsibilities, brings about change and an increased level of responsibility, requires going beyond the usual political boundaries, involves managing diversity, etc.) can foster the development of leadership skills, as it provides a context for managers to try out new behavior and review their ways of doing and thinking (DeRue & Wellman, 2009). It also helps to identify gaps between the individual's current skills and those needed to take on the leadership role in a challenging situation. At the same time, learning in action (Revans, 1979) is a paradigm that has gained much popularity among researchers in recent decades. In training programs adopting this paradigm, participants work with other managers, in small groups and with the help of a facilitator, on real, complex and stressful problems. The basic structure of learning-by-doing programs, as proposed by Revans, involves four distinct but complementary types of activities: the application of a scientific method, the search for rational decision-making, the exchange of advice and honest criticism, and the learning of new behavior. The author argues that this form of learning forces participants to become aware of their own value system, since the problems they face present personal risks of failure. Moreover, it leads them to act in a manner consistent with their new ways of thinking. Thus, the author argues that learning in action does not promote development by itself, but rather the development of oneself. This form of learning would have the advantage of allowing a back and forth movement between action and reflection that seems necessary for the development of personal leadership skills.

In addition, some researchers suggest that learning in action is a means of developing transformational leadership

for managers. Marsick and Cerderholm (1988) studied a program developed by the Management Institute of Lund (an institute offering organizational, business, and leadership development programs in Stockholm) and showed that adults learn best through exchanges and by trying to solve real-life problems. One of the principles on which this program is based is that people have an unlimited capacity to learn and question themselves (insight), but that they retain a limited amount of the theoretical concepts taught. Furthermore, the more managers are involved in management functions at a higher organizational level, the less structured the tasks are and the more complex the relationship with stakeholders and the fuzzier the objectives. The authors consider that it is in this context that learning in action is most relevant for developing management skills. Learning in action therefore allows individuals to create their own leadership models based on their position in the organization. This process is accomplished through a combination of approaches, including working on real-life projects, participating in seminars, conducting personal reflection activities and exchanging perspectives, etc. Moreover, some authors suggest that reflective learning methods are particularly relevant for learning from experiences that are complex and take place sporadically.

### 1.1.3. Leadership development programs

The literature argues that training programs for leadership development should be designed to bring about cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral changes in participants (De Vries & Korotov, 2007). Thus, a combination of practices, directly or indirectly related to leadership development (e.g., multi-source feedback, coaching, mentoring, networking, job assignments, etc.) can be effective in this regard (Day, 2000). Training for leadership development can be designed as a place of experimentation where participants can test their new knowledge, emotions and behavior before transferring them into their real lives (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007). Indeed, several studies highlight the effectiveness of training programs in helping to create an environment conducive to experimentation where exploration is allowed and encouraged. When this laboratory context fosters a culture of challenge and support, it then allows participants to develop courage and expand their comfort zone by practicing new ways of being in a safe and encouraging environment (Eich, 2008). This type of context also fosters the development of self-confidence and in others. Several techniques can be used for this purpose, such as positive reframing (i.e., allowing a situation to be perceived differently), encouragement, anticipation, or the repeated use of difficult situations (Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2007).

Kets de Vries and Korotov (2007) also suggests that trainers need to find unconventional methods to overcome participants' resistance to take a deep look at themselves or

to see the organization's issues through their own leadership development path. According to the authors, participants should also learn to recognize and overcome their defense mechanisms. They argue that the process of confronting and clarifying ideas with others leads to more in-depth solutions to organizational and personal problems, refining ideas and action plans, increasing self-awareness and awareness of one's reactions to others, and reducing ambiguity about what the participant really wants to accomplish. It seems that empathy, support and encouragement from others play a key role in the participant's appreciation of the experience and eventually in taking control of his or her behavior, which can be reinforced through activities that promote the development of small group relationships, peer coaching, etc. (Eich, 2008; Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2007).

#### 1.1.3.1 Factors affecting program success

Some studies have shown that the success of leadership development programs is also affected by the choice of trainers. It seems that when trainers adopt a therapeutic approach (i.e., they have skills and abilities related to or are familiar with the practice of psychotherapy), show empathy and psychological support, and have themselves previously undertaken a process of introspection, they contribute more significantly to the development of leaders (Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2007). Selecting competent trainers also clarifies participants' understanding of leadership and provides them with a role model, thus promoting holistic development, courage, authenticity, and congruence in their leadership practice (Eich, 2008). In addition, some authors suggest that the choice of participants in the training program is also important to the success of participants' leadership learning. On the one hand, the reasons that inspired an individual's participation in such a program may be several, then it will affect the individual's commitment and motivation to change while training (Long, 2004; Cooper, Scandura & Schriesheim, 2005; Kets de Vries v. Korotov, 2007). The literature suggests that there are intrinsic reasons for this disposition. On the other hand, level of involvement and ability of participants to collaborate and support other participants in their development will contribute to the success of the program (Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2007; Eich 2008).

Some studies also highlight the importance of the workplace in professional development, as organizational learning can take many forms, including formal and informal experiences. Some authors suggest that an effective organizational leadership development experience should include sufficient assessment protocols, challenge, and support (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004; Copper, 2005; Eich 2008). It also seems that corporate climate and culture play an important role in the transfer of learning (Cooper, Scandura and Schriesheim, 2005). Other authors also argue

that the sustainability of the changes brought about by a training program is promoted when a problematic situation occurs in the participant's workplace and that the participant can use it as part of the training to put certain learning into practice (Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2007).

## 1.2 Research Methodology

This section presents the methodology adopted as well as the research instruments used during our investigation. We will present the research design that will help us observe and study the evolution of socialization practices during the integration of a newcomer. In what follows, we detail the observed sites, data collection methods and analysis.

### 1.2.1 Research Approach

A method is "an integrated set of procedures aimed at producing scientific truth" (DURAND J.P, ROBERT, W 1994). Therefore, the use of the qualitative method is the most appropriate given the nature of the objectives of our research topic, which is to explore the characteristics of training programs likely to foster the development of authentic leadership of managers in leadership positions within a company. As such, the qualitative research method is "a research strategy using various techniques of collection and qualitative analysis in order to clarify, understand a human and a social phenomenon." (Mucchielli A .2004). As noted earlier, we opted for the qualitative method, which uses an interview, defined as "a technique used in qualitative studies. The individual interview consists of a free discussion between the interviewer and the interviewee" (BERTIER. N. 2002). The interview is a direct technique of scientific investigation used with an individual, but also, in some cases, with groups, allows to question them in a semi-directive manner and to take qualitative samples in order to gain an in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. The interview is a technique that allowed us to come into oral and direct contact with the company's employees. In order to give a certain freedom to the interviewee, we opt for the semi-structured interview. The latter "is based on an interview guide consisting of different question topics", with open-ended questions formulated with the aim of answering our main questions and providing explanations for our research questions. These semi-directive interviews allowed us to obtain deep information, through the freedom they gave to our respondents to express themselves and gave us the possibility to intervene in a way to calibrate our intervention in order to have more details and more information. Thus, the processed data were collected from a sample of second-level managers and executives, working in large companies and SMEs, who were enrolled in a training program. A proximal non-probability sampling method was used to gather the data. The individuals were chosen because they

were accessible at the time of this study, namely during the training program.

Our sample was chosen in a probabilistic, simple random manner. In order to carry out our study, we were able to interview (13) employees. We deemed this number as sufficient because in a qualitative study, more than (13) ideas are repeated. Additional units were selected for different reasons: to complete missing information, to cross-reference data with contrasting information or to clarify previously collected data. We applied the saturation principle (Bardin, 1980; Bertaux, 1980; Bogdan and Bilken, 1982) according to which data collection ended once the additional information collected became redundant. (Guerfel-Henda,s, el Abboubi, M and el Kandoussi, F 2012). The total of 13 respondents include 5 women and 8 men, whose ages range from 40 to 50 years old. With regard to their education, 8 have obtained a Master's degree, 6 have completed a Bachelor's degree. The people we met hold positions in different types of organizations, including 10 in private companies and 3 in public organizations.

We chose these professionals because they represent a good cross-section of the parent population, in terms of status, years of experience and expertise. These individuals are known to be excellent professionals by their senior managers. The meetings took the form of 13 semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted at the respondents' work place with the support of an interview guide. Respondents were informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected. However, we anticipated that our respondents could, at one time or another during the interviews, adopt a "social desirability" behavior (Lemaine, 1965 cited by Pascal Martin, 2014 ). Then, we took the time necessary to question and delve deeper into the interviews in order to obtain answers that would be as accurate as possible. To facilitate our analysis, we transcribed the interviews and processed them through a thematic content analysis (Point and Retour, 2009; Thiétart, 2006 cited by Pascal Martin, 2014).

## 2.2. The results

The first inductive results bear on the analysis of the content of employees' verbatim output. It allows us to better understand the dynamics by which participants have been led to go through different significant stages in the development of their leadership skills and how some elements included in the program have favored - or even made possible - this development.

## 2.2.1 The development process

### 2.2.1.1 Self-awareness development

In this study, participants reported that increased self-awareness was essential to the development of their leadership skills. Some participants identified moments in their personal journey-inside and outside of training -where it was more difficult to increase awareness. They then felt that they were stagnating in their development. These moments apparently occur when participants face their areas of discomfort. On the other hand, several participants mentioned that part of the development of their consciousness was their ability to better name who they are and how they act. Thus, the acquisition of an accurate vocabulary to express their states and behavior seems to have helped participants make sense of what they have been learning. It allowed some to confirm or refine the ways in which they perceived who they are.

*“One becomes able to name more accurately who they are. ...] At first, you don't feel like naming your discovery. Because obviously, there's a side of it that gets you angry. It's not a great discovery after all. Looking back, you say: "I always knew I was like this. " But it's becoming very, very clear”. (Interview 1)*

*“I'd tell you we're putting words to cases. You realize, "Ah, that's it! "I'm talking to you tonight, but I realize how much knowledge I've acquired since then... In terms of certain patterns, meanings, ways of looking at things... That's more like it. "When I'm talking to you, I realise all that. That's a nice toolbox. That's how I see it. I see it very well, and then integrated”. (Interview 2)*

By increasing the participants' ability to name their attitudes and behavior, the training program seems to have accelerated the awareness phase by facilitating a clearer positioning of the participants with respect to their development issues. In the training program, the development of participants' awareness took different forms. Thus, in the course of their journey, they were led to increase their awareness of the ways they behave on a daily basis, as well as their awareness of the fundamental personal elements (i.e. emotions, needs and values) that control their behavior.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that in order to develop their leadership skills, participants also had to identify a particular sub-dimension of self-awareness, namely awareness of the impact of their behavior on others.

### 2.2.1.2 Awareness vs other dimensions

Since leadership involves at its core an interpersonal relationship between a leader and one or more members, it was essential for participants that the development of their

self-awareness leads them to realize the effect they can exert on others. Thus, it was necessary for the participants to realize the impact of their actions on the people around them. It seems that this was made possible, among other things, by improving the participants' ability to recognize and understand the behavior of others. The awareness phase involves understanding the impact of behaviors at several different levels. During their development, participants revealed that they have become more attentive to reactions to others and to themselves that they have not perceived before. In this vein, it seems that increased awareness allows for change since it leads the participant to see the changes in his or her impact based on old and new behavior. Since the participant was not or only very partially aware of his or her real impact, both negative and positive, at the outset, it is difficult, if not impossible, to change it without this awareness. The process also made the participants aware of their ability to impact. Thus, understanding the consequences of their actions on others led participants to realize that they are able to choose to change themselves in order to create the impact they wish to have.

*“All of this leads you to realize the impact you can have on people, whether you do something or do nothing. Because sometimes when you don't do anything ... there are people who are given feedback: "You're like not there, you're not in the group, you're transparent, we can't see you, we can't hear you". It's not better either. You have an impact when you don't do anything. All this allows me to say, well, if I don't do anything, I can also have an impact, but if I do what ... Then I can turn up the right corner. Learn to realize that you're making an impact. When you learn, when you realize that your person has an impact, whether you do what you do or not, that's the awareness of it. I know more about my strengths, my weaknesses, my capacity for impact”. (Interview 3)*

*As you connect with yourself, as you connect with others, as you connect with your organization, then you can really start to have influence, impact. Sometimes you have an impact, but it's very limited, because you don't understand that you've been doing it in the wrong place”. (Interview 4)*

*“Okay, now I see the impact, I see... It's been a special year this year, seeing the impact I could have on people. I thought I had no more, without diminishing myself, without being small, I didn't see the impact I could have. Now I taste it, it tastes good. And then it's fun, it's a lot of fun. I know why I'm here today, I'm able to have an impact on others and by default I'm able to have a very, very big impact on myself. That's worth gold”. (Interview 5)*

From these testimonies, it therefore emerges that the development of the awareness of others seems to be part of

that of impact. It seems that in order to understand the reactions and behavior that can be provoked by one's own actions, participants had to be led to realize and understand the personal dimensions underlying the ways the people they are close to act. During the training under study, participants were led to look not only at themselves, but also at others. It seems that an awareness leading to the exercise of authentic leadership among participants goes beyond the recognition of their own behavior and that it also needs a sharpening of the ability to interpret the behavior of the people with whom they are in contact, thus aiming at a better disposition to affect them. Several participants mentioned that becoming aware of their own behavior and emotions, as well as of the fundamental components of their personality (their needs and values), led them to better understand these same elements in the individuals they work with.

*"And if you learn to respect your own needs, it's a big thing; you're going to respect the needs of others around you. So that's the whole basis of the program, that's what it's all about". (Interview 6)*

*These are all discoveries I've made. To allow me after that to understand all that and then to tell myself that I'm not alone in these situations, that each of the employees, without being aware of it, has behavior, has ... The understanding of that, the understanding of myself leads me to better understand others". (Interview 7)*

*"It used to bug me, no question why it was like that. Or if the person did that, I could judge the person or I would say to myself: "Come on, she's very tiresome with that. "At this moment, I can see where that's coming from. ...I don't stop at the situation. So I kind of learned that. ...I understood better myself how I was reacting. By understanding myself, by seeing the people who had done all these things, I understand a little bit better what's going on here. Whereas I didn't have any notion of that before". (Interview 8)*

The development of their self-awareness seems to have given managers a better understanding of how human beings function in general. Most participants mentioned having developed the ability to listen to others, to discern their way of being and acting, or to be receptive to understanding their context. In addition, witnessing the development of one's own consciousness, but also that of many others during the training, seems to have led participants to identify a range of identity traits that may exist in a group of individuals, including those that are more commonly found. Moreover, it seems that the context of co-development fostered by the program led the candidates to better understand the dynamics of these traits in the context of interpersonal interactions that occur within a group.

Several of them mentioned that they are now more willing to identify and understand behavioral phenomena related to group dynamics.

*"Also, what is interesting is the analysis of people's behaviors. I love to see that a person is like that. And we have a lot of models here. I have 19 people with me, 19 different people. Then we see them working in different workshops. We see them, then we analyze them. Sometimes we compare, "Oh, he reminds me of such a person, with whom I work." And it is to understand, he works the same, the same, then: "Why is he the same? Because he often tells it why he is the same, that's where it all comes from. What motivates him, what makes him react the same way, what makes him do it. What's the cost he has to pay to walk the same way too. Ah, that's the impact it has... "It's a way of understanding people's different systems". (Interview 9)*

*"It's fair to say, he's not doing this just to piss you off, he's doing this because he needs something. What's that need? It gives you ways, after that with people here to deal with the more difficult behavior. It's like an army, we're not in the army, but we don't all have the same... It's really basic needs. That leads you to say, what's behind that?" (Interview 10)*

During the development process, increasing the awareness of others was thus seen as a significant step in enabling participants to identify the behavior they wish to improve. Thus, by better understanding the behavior of the people around them and what motivates them, participants were led to target more adequately the ways of acting that is likely to improve their impact and foster their ability to exert a better impact on them. Thus, this study shows that the development of self-awareness as a whole is an essential preliminary step in identifying the behaviors that will enable them to exercise authentic leadership. It contributes to building participants' willingness to take the next steps in the development process.

*"Once you know what you know, you can no longer pretend you don't know, you know it. If you don't take the actions to try to improve them, you know what the repercussions are". (Interview 11)*

*These are realizations, it's not just, "Oh, I did that, I'm not going to do it again. ». You realize that's how you have this feeling. [ ... ] If you decide not to change, you'll see it all the time!" (Interview 12)*

*"The moment you make a realization, which was honestly made, it will always follow you. You can't go back anymore. The moment you know that what you do to the people around you has an impact, every time you do it, you're going to get slapped in the face. If you don't change*

*your ways, then! You get a slap in the face. If you change it, you get incredible benefits". (Interview 13)*

The development of self-awareness also makes it possible to position the candidate globally in their development process, by providing themselves with a real view of their situation and by providing them with enlightened avenues for improvement. Thus, it allows them to better understand their ways of being and behaving, as well as the fundamental traits of their own personality. It seems that the acquisition of these reference points allows the candidate to identify appropriate and realistic areas that need development. In order to increase his or her leadership skills, it is also important for the participant to learn to better understand the individuals with whom he or she works and to become aware of the impact of his or her actions on them, in order to better target the behavior that he or she wishes to change, that he or she has the potential to change. This will bring the desired benefits at an interpersonal level.

### 3. DISCUSSION

This study suggests that the development of leadership skills in a training program for managers is carried out through a process that leads learners to progressively go through different development levels. This study confirms the essential role that increased self-awareness plays in the development of the skills required to practice leadership. As predicted by the development model proposed by Luthans and Avolio (2003), it seems that self-awareness is a prerequisite and unavoidable phase in an individual's self-regulation and the eventual modification of his or her ways of acting. This study reveals that the participants' past life events contributed to the development of self-awareness and their conception of their own leadership, as previously suggested in the literature (Luthans and Avolio, 2003; Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Sparrowe, 2005). In this study, it seems that the participants were able to transfer to new ways of acting by gradually internalizing the beneficial effects experienced or initiated by the training. Thus, it can be assumed that a training program that does not lead participants to be personally convinced of the benefits of a new behavior, that would lead them to adopt a particular type of behavior in line with the will of the organization, would not lead them to transfer it in a sustainable way. The analysis of the collected testimonies also revealed that the positive impacts of behaviors that foster the development of participants' deep-seated willingness to adopt them essentially relate to states of well-being. The latter can be linked to positive changes at the personal level, but also to their organizational environment. The recognition of these beneficial effects thus appeared to be a key element of the pathway, which allowed participants to spontaneously lead them in transferring these new ways of acting outside the training program. This study supports Eich (2008) results

which indicate that a culture that promotes both challenge and support allows for the expansion of the participant's comfort zone in training and encourages them to try out new behaviors. The study also highlights the need raised by some researchers to find unconventional methods to get leaders to overcome their resistance to look at their issues and to ward off their defense mechanisms (Kets de Vries and Kotorov 2007). This study shows that the relevance of creating a development context in the laboratory lies in the fact that it succeeds in getting participants to explore a multitude of new ways of acting that can contribute to the development of their leadership skills. While only some of the behaviors observed during the training seem to be transferred to the organizational environment under the terms of the program, it seems that the program led the participants to become aware of a large number of ways of being and acting. In other words, by allowing them to explore and experiment in a very intense and profound way, the training led them to discover all the development possibilities available to them, so that they could then choose the ways of acting that suit their aspirations and needs in terms of development and the current circumstances of their transfer environment.

This study points to the considerable importance of having participants increase their self-awareness and awareness of others in the process of developing leadership skills. The importance of the awareness development phase seems to lie in the program's ability to help participants identify their strengths and weaknesses and to distinguish between those they let others see and those they choose to hide. This study looked at the development of participants' leadership skills during a training program of a specific duration. The interviewed participants had just completed part, or all, of the program. The fact that they had not completed the entire program when they were interviewed may constitute a bias in that it may affect their ability to build a large perspective on some aspects of the program, such as its structure, progression, duration, etc. In addition, the collected data are subjective perceptions, as participants were asked to share their experiences with respect to self-perceived leadership skill development and transfer. Moreover, the analysis of the collected testimonies was conducted by a single researcher. Inter-judge agreement in a qualitative research context can help to ensure greater precision of analysis. The main limitation of this analysis is that it sheds light on the transfer of learning by participants who are currently in training or who have completed the training during a short period of time - i.e., between one and four months. Additional research would be relevant to evaluate the transfer of skills over a longer period of time - i.e., more than one year -, thus validating the sustainability of learning.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the process by which managers acquire the skills necessary to be leaders through an innovative training program. To our knowledge, this is the first empirical study to explore the effects of the characteristics of a training program on the triggering events experienced by managers and their effect on the development of their skills. This study is the result of a major undertaking, gathering in-depth testimonies from a number of managers. A rigorous emerging thematic content analysis was carried out to shed light on a complex and, until now, still ill-defined phenomenon. This study contributes to management knowledge and confirms the need to move towards non-traditional training approaches to develop leadership within organizations. It highlighted the effectiveness of combining several training techniques with learning-by-doing approaches to develop the personal skills required for leadership. Finally, it showed the need to adopt methods that allow today's leaders to own their leadership and take in charge their development

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