Why is leadership important
for high school & college children?

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17th November 2010

When preparing for our Careers, Education & Leadership Excellence seminar, we have been criticized and asked, "Why bother with the whole concept of leadership, when kids are only interested in passing examinations in high school and college? They are too stressed with the pressure of examinations let alone completing the curriculum on time. Likewise, their parents are too busy trying to make a living to think about whether their children will be leaders or not. They have gone to school and college to learn and pass exams, not become leaders"

While this argument is true, this exactly is the challenge and problem many are choosing to ignore to their peril. Parents should send children to school simply to "pass examinations". Current academic programs are heavy, with a very strong emphasis on examinations. If one does well, their "future" is secure. If they fail, they are in trouble, and will be punished for this for a very long time. This is why the popular university "*parallel programmes*" have been so successful, raking in millions for the universities as they meet the expressed felt need to offer an opportunity to those that have been "punished" with a chance to "redeem" themselves academically.

50 years ago when African countries attained independence, all that mattered was that one went to school. The generation that completed school soon after independence were employed simply because they had finished standard 7 or form 4, and many rose to very prominent positions in society. Those proceeded further and obtained degrees were even better off. In the 50 years after independence, things have changed drastically, and continue to do so. We therefore need new skills and abilities to tackle new and emerging challenges, and proactively prepare our youth to successfully meet these issues over and above "just going to school and passing examinations"

The pressures of modern life, especially in metropolitan cities like Nairobi leave little time for anything else we engage in. It is literally a "rat race". This is why those who choose to live strategically, based on having a vision beyond "going to school" are better able to attain their missions and goals – presuming they know what these are. Their chances are far higher than those who leave things to chance or hope that the school or college will provide these necessary ingredients for "success".

David V. Day, a lecturer at Pennsylvania State University, USA has reviewed issues of leadership development in the Leadership Quarterly journal, vol 11 No. 4 of year 2000 from pages 581–613 from which I wish to draw some lessons for our stressed Kenyan students in high school and college. The first issue is that of "conceptual confusion" regarding the distinctions between **leader and leadership development**. Following this, I look at the disconnect between the "practice of leadership development and its scientific foundation" – and how building human and social capital can be done using the following;

- The 360- degree feedback and executive coaching,
- Mentoring & networking

- Job assignments and action learning.

Leader development, such as that through our proposed Youth training, is primarily based on enhancing the human capital of our students. It is from here that creation of social capital can occur, so that our youth can eventually get to live in a climate and environment that delivers basic needs, let alone their wishes, dreams and aspirations are. For those in the "know", they can further appreciate how leadership is a source of competitive advantage and worthy of one's investment socially and organizationally (McCall, 1998; Vicere & Fulmer, 1998). This is seen in the success of the Asian Tiger economies (like South Korea & Singapore) which has been attributed to the power of good, visionary leadership. On the other hand, the poor leadership on our African continent has left us poorer, if not worse than we were when our colonial masters left. Some of the infrastructure in place today is no different from what the white man left, such as our railway lines, which were built over 100 years ago!

There is no reason why our cities should not be as modern as those of the Asian Tiger economies, yet we have had far greater resources than they have ever had. Poverty, ignorance and disease should have been eliminated long ago. We owe it to our future generations to get this right, and not comfortably leave behind an inheritance of poor infrastructure, management, disease and apathy. The question is, what are we going to do in the next 50 years in Africa? What legacy will we leave behind when it is our time to leave this earth?

Leadership development is defined as expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes (McCauley et al., 1998).

Leadership roles are those that come with and without formal authority. Leadership processes generally enable groups of people to work together in meaningful ways that are mutually beneficial. The best example I can think of is the manner in which top schools, such as Starehe Boys Centre are run. This school has a leadership structure that involves students - complete with a parliament. Here the pupils learn to lead themselves, and have successfully done so for the last 50 years of the school's existence. Therefore even at the height of popular school uprisings, in which up to 300 schools were burnt within one month (2008), Starehe Boys Centre had no such challenges at all.

Leadership development involves building the capacity for groups of people to learn their way out of problems that could not have been predicted (Dixon, 1993). A leadership development approach is oriented toward building capacity in anticipation of unforeseen challenges (i.e., development). For our High Schools and Universities, which experience regular riots and are constantly being closed due to delinquent behaviour, the answer lies in developing the *capacity of the students to be able to see problems and anticipate challenges* which for us, the older generation, are totally unforeseen. We the older generation had our own issues at the time; we were happy to just have the opportunity to go to school! The youth of today have their own issues, and need to be capacitated in a manner in which they will handle unforeseen problems – without resorting to the regular burning down schools and loss of life.

Leadership has been traditionally conceptualized as an individual-level skill. Within this tradition, development is thought to occur primarily through training individual, primarily

intrapersonal, skills and abilities (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Neck & Manz, 1996; Skarlicki & Latham, 1997; Stewart, Carson, & Cardy, 1996). These kinds of training approaches, however, ignore almost 50 years of research showing leadership to be a complex interaction between the designated leader and the social and organizational environment (Fiedler, 1996).

Yes, we do need to build individual leaders capacities by training; training a set of skills, abilities and providing management capacity. But leadership is also a social process that should engage everyone in the community (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). This way, each person – each student in a crisis laden high school or university - is considered a leader in and of themselves, because they are first and foremost, leading themselves personally, then are able to positively influence and lead others in their class, dormitory, team and school. Leadership is therefore conceptualized as an effect rather than a cause and an emergent property of effective systems design – which in this case, will help to prevent the regular burning down of Kenyan schools because students lack the skill and ability to control themselves, while responsibly expressing their anger and resentment at authority (Salancik, Calder, Rowland, Leblebici, & Conway, 1975).

Parents, authorities and stakeholders need to attend to both **individual leader and collective leadership development**. The table below shows the difference between leader development and leader**ship** development;

Table 1.
Summary of Differences between Leader Development and Leadership Development;

Comparison Dimension Leader Leadership

Comparison Dimension	Leader	Leadership
Capital Type	**Human**	**Social**
Leadership Model	**Individual** Personal power Knowledge Trustworthiness	**Relational** Commitments Mutual respect Trust
Competence Base	**Intrapersonal**	**Interpersonal**
Skills	**Self-awareness** Emotional awareness Self confidence Accurate self image	**Social awareness** Empathy Service orientation Political awareness
	Self-regulation Self-control Trustworthiness Personal responsibility Adaptability	**Social skills** Building bonds Team orientation Change catalyst Conflict management
	Self motivation Initiative Commitment Optimism	

Surely it is in the heart of every parent to have their child develop the above skills? Surely every society would desire to have these qualities not only in their leaders, but in their society as well?

Leader development typically emphasizes the individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities as in the above table. These are often associated with formal leadership roles, such as when one is a school prefect or student leader - with acquired capabilities enabling our school students (and others) to think and act in new ways that add value to themselves (Coleman, 1988). It should not be about who can shout loudest and therefore get others to listen to him or her while campaigning in the school or college. It should not be about who can master the rowdiest crowd of sycophants. Leader development results as a function of purposeful investment in individual human capital, whose strategic primary emphasis is to;

1. Build the intrapersonal competence needed to form an accurate model of oneself (Gardner, 1993, p. 9). This is why our training begins with Prof Koi Tirima, PhD taking students through their individual Personality, Learning styles and Aptitudes (which many students may not fully understand or appreciate),

2. To engage in healthy attitude and identity development (Hall & Seibert, 1992) through our program of learning the above;

3. To use that self-model to perform effectively in any number of school and external organizational roles – such as the professional careers we are then going to expose the students to. This bears in mind that our aim in offering career guidance with the students developing a vision of being professionals in current and emerging professions.

Specific examples of intrapersonal competence associated with leader development initiatives include;

1. *Self-awareness* (e.g., emotional awareness, self confidence),

2. *Self-regulation* (e.g., self-control, trustworthiness, adaptability); this is where – for example – our training on Negotiation and Dispute Resolution requires that the students learn how to negotiate what is best for all, and regulate themselves when in disputes with each other and the authorities. One who can regulate him or herself will not rush at the opportunity to purchase petrol to burn down the school or university, or throw stones at pedestrians, etc

3. *Self motivation* (e.g., commitment, initiative, optimism) – a student who KNOWS why he has come to school, why his or her parents are sacrificing to pay fees, will think twice about burning down their school or engaging in activities that will potentially injure or kill fellow students, let alone destroy their long term career prospects (Manz & Sims, 1989; McCauley, 2000; Neck & Manz, 1996; Stewart et al., 1996). We have not heard of students burning down their parent's homes – so why are they feeling free to burn down schools and educational institutions??

These capabilities contribute to enhanced individual knowledge, trust, and personal power, which have been proposed as the fundamental leadership imperatives (Zand, 1997), at least from a traditional, individualistic leadership perspective.

The *emphasis with social capital is on building networked relationships among individuals that enhance cooperation and resource* exchange in creating organizational value (Bouty, 2000; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Social *capital is based on relationships, which are created through interpersonal exchange (Bourdieu, 1986).*

It is important for us, as stakeholders, to create environmental opportunities for our children to interact within safe environments with "like minded" peers. Networked relationships help create positive peer pressure, rather than negative peer pressure that only leads to destructive behaviours that include alcoholism and unsafe sexual relationships. We regularly hear of our youngsters involved in tragic road accidents that result in hospitalization and death. Yet some of these situations could have been alleviated through leadership, when one or more students are socially responsible and not willing to quietly watch while bad decisions are being made.

The opportunities of trainings such as our Careers, Education and Leadership Excellence training create opportunities for youth to make commitments in the form of mutual obligations, supported by reciprocated trust and respect (Brower, Schoorman, & Tan, 2000). Commitments, trust, and respect correspond roughly to three different aspects of social capital proposed by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998):

1. The **structural dimension** pertains primarily to social interactions typically assessed by means of network ties (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998).

2. The **relational dimension** of social capital refers to functional assets that are rooted in networked relationships, such as trust and trustworthiness (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998), which describe the kind of personal relationships developed through a history of interactions.

3. **Cognitive dimension,** which refers to resources embodied in shared representations and collective meanings among people.

Expressions of the cognitive dimension to social capital can be found in group and organization culture of having a shared vision based on a set of common values that produces and is a product of mutual respect. This is why, with all due respect, the social culture at top academic Kenyan schools such as Starehe Boys Centre, Alliance High Schools and Makini Schools result in students excelling academically year on year. Some of these even obtain entry into top Ivy League Universities such as Harvard and MIT in the United States of America. These are students that have developed key components of interpersonal (leadership) competences which include;

> 1. *Social awareness* (e.g., empathy, service orientation, and developing others) – these students do not just live for themselves, but are interested in what happens around them. They get involved in social activities and differentiate themselves so that these top universities are happy to admit such students.

2. Social skills (e.g., collaboration and cooperation, building bonds, and conflict management) (Goleman, 1995; McCauley, 2000). Such top students are not just passively going through life, but choose to collaborate, cooperate and as earlier stated, are able and wiling to proactively prevent conflict due to their conflict management / dispute resolution skills. Only true leaders think beyond themselves and care enough to reach out to others, knowing that whatever happens in the environment, impacts them as well.

How does our training add value?

Our theme is Excellence in Career, Education and Leadership; the first two will occur only when the latter (leadership) is invested in and within the rightful context. Leader development is a form of individual-based *differentiation,* helping individuals enhance a unique self-understanding and construct independent identities (Hall & Seibert, 1992; McCauley et al., 1998). Leadership development can be thought of as an *integration* strategy by helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives. Leadership is a continuous process that can take place anywhere (Fulmer, 1997), and requires one strategically plan to learn from their school, studies, work and careers. The methods available include;

1. 360-degree Feedback

The 360-degree feedback / multi-source feedback / multi-rater feedback are all terms used to describe this method of systematically collecting perceptions of an individual's performance from the entire circle of relevant viewpoints (Warech, Smither, Reilly, Millsap, & Reilly, 1998). Rating sources typically include peers, direct reports, supervisors, and, occasionally, such external stakeholders as customers and suppliers.

The advantage is that a more complete and accurate picture of an individual's performance can be obtained. The 360-degree feedback is strong on assessment but typically weak on challenge and support. Sadly this is one aspect that is totally lacking in our school and college educational systems, especially when students are delinquent and can never be rebuked when they are wrong! As a result, behavioral change may not follow from feedback because we have taught our students to have well-developed defense mechanisms that protect them from feedback that is perceived as too threatening (Chappelow, 1998). The blame is always put on someone else, and the students fail to learn how to take personal responsibility. Then there are belligerent students who might recognize feedback as accurate but do not want to change their behavior. These are expelled from one school to another, yet never learn that they need to adapt their behaviour accordingly – and are in a society that does not enforce the need to adapt their behaviour accordingly.

For any leadership development effort to be effective—particularly one based on 360-degree feedback— *a participant must first be willing to accept feedback as relevant and useful, and be open to change. They must also be realistic and*

resilient in that change is rarely a simple path forward; a large investment of time and energy is required before the needed change becomes part of an individual's behavioral repertoire.

A willingness to accept and use feedback might be insufficient for change, if the feedback is complex or inconsistent, or if the recipient lacks the requisite skills to interpret the data and translate it into behaving in a different manner. For these reasons, executive coaching can be used as a further development tool. And this is where we – through the training of Prof Koi Tirima – are in a position to help break down and interpret data on personality, aptitudes and learning styles in a manner in which the students can understand and own. From here we can help the student identify which careers best fit their personal styles, and in future, literally help coach them on the way forward on personal and social leadership. The Akad Education Group in particular helps coach students in leadership traits when seeking entry into top universities, such as Harvard in the United States of America.

2. The **Coaching for Effectiveness** consists of three major phases:

- Diagnosis,
- Coaching
- Maintenance/support—similar to the assessment, challenge, and support perspective on how to enhance the potency of developmental experiences (Van Velsor et al., 1998).

3. Action Learning

This is a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with a corresponding emphasis on getting things done. Action learning is based on the assumption that people learn most effectively when working on real-time organizational problems (Revans, 1980).

Each application of action learning is unique, with participants collectively sharing realities in a community of practice. Action learning tends to provide a good deal of challenge and support. Students are encouraged to try new things and to trust themselves and others to stretch their thinking and behavior. Great opportunities for this are found in clubs and activities – for which we in particular, are providing even greater opportunities – such as mountain climbing – that differentiate students "from the rest". When one is able to overcome significant feats – such as climbing Mt. Kenya or Mt. Kilimanjaro for instance, the action learning that comes from this experience stays with such students for life, and they own the principles which help them succeed further in life. For maximal effect, action should be accompanied by reflection about the action; otherwise, there is little structured guidance for learning from experience (Froiland, 1994).

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