



ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: [www.ijirss.com](http://www.ijirss.com)



## Assessing the effectiveness of leadership development programmes in improving the service quality in public institutions: An integrated review

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### Abstract

The public sector is continually confronted with the imperative to enhance service delivery while addressing the diverse needs of its constituents. This dynamic environment necessitates leaders who are adept at managing complex responsibilities and steering essential processes of change, restructuring, and transformation. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership development programs in improving service quality within public institutions. Grounded in Behavioral Theory, which asserts that effective leadership arises from a blend of learned skills, this research employs an integrated literature review to synthesize existing knowledge on the subject. The findings revealed that leadership development can be categorized into two primary approaches: the structured approach, which includes leadership coaching, formal mentorship, and self-development, and the experiential learning approach, which emphasizes learning through experience-based learning and colleagues' experiences. The implications of this study suggest that leadership is not confined to individuals with formal authority; rather, it encompasses the capacity to influence, inspire, and guide others. This potential exists within every individual, contingent upon the nurturing of their inherent capabilities. Based on these insights, it is recommended that public institutions invest in comprehensive leadership development initiatives that foster both structured and experiential learning opportunities, thereby cultivating a more effective leadership culture that can adapt to the evolving demands of public service.

**Keywords:** Behavioural theory, Coaching, Experiential learning, Leadership development programmes, Leadership development, Mentoring, Self-development.

**DOI:** 10.53894/ijirss.v8i3.7388

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**History:** Received: 25 March 2025 / Revised: 28 April 2025 / Accepted: 30 April 2025 / Published: 26 May 2025

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**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Transparency:** The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

**Publisher:** Innovative Research Publishing

## **1. Introduction**

Matloga et al. [1] state that public sector institutions are characterised by centralised decision-making, insufficient transparency, time limitations, and inadequate leadership qualities. Moreover, the challenge is intensified by the competition for top talent with the private sector, which often offers more attractive salaries and benefits [2]. These characteristics led to inefficiencies in service delivery and a diminished trust among the public. Asian Productivity Organization [2] reported that to tackle the numerous challenges facing the public sector, governments must recognise and cultivate the necessary leadership capabilities. The effectiveness of an institution is fundamentally linked to its leadership, Eagle's Flight [3]. Zamalloa [4] states that the public sector is not exempt from this necessity. Backhaus and Vogel [5] concur with researchers and professionals in public administration on the beneficial impacts of leadership. As a result, a significant number of studies focused on leadership within the public sector tend to end with recommendations for enhancing leadership skills in public institutions [6-9]. State that leadership is the art of leading others to deliberately create a result that would not have happened otherwise. However, Em [10] emphasises that leadership is not solely defined by one's title. Shorobura and Dolynska [11] underscore that leadership is an integral aspect of the entire management framework. Leadership extends beyond the upper echelons of senior executives; it is essential for public servants at every level of the bureaucracy to engage in administrative leadership [2]. The successful execution of planning, organisation, motivation, and control functions is unattainable without competent management and strong leaders [11]. Contrary to common misconceptions, true leadership involves enabling others to achieve their success, as well as contributing to the overall goals of the institution [10]. Consequently, leadership within the public sector is a collective obligation, though its expression will differ based on individuals' positions within the bureaucratic structure [2]. Hence, leaders at all levels, from those on the front lines to executives in the C-suite, play a pivotal role in shaping strategy, establishing goals, fostering organisational culture, and influencing all other essential aspects of the business Eagle's Flight [3]. Brown [12] asserts that a leader is someone who holds her/himself accountable for finding the potential in people and processes. Spears-Jones et al. [13] add that contemporary leaders must navigate the challenge of implementing priorities while ensuring that employees remain engaged and productive in a constantly changing work landscape. Additionally, they are required to embody qualities such as innovation, creativity, flexibility, and resilience [13]. However, these qualities are not inherently present in individuals but often require intentional development and cultivation. To enhance leadership capabilities, every institution must implement an effective leadership development strategy (LDS) [3].

Leadership development (LD) refers to the enhancement of individuals' abilities to perform effectively in leadership positions and engage in leadership processes Coers et al. [14]. Roupnel et al. [15] observe that there exists a significant demand for LD within both public administrations and the broader society, driven by the necessity for institutions to discover innovative solutions that ensure their continued effectiveness. This aligns with initiatives focused on enhancing service quality, organisational performance, and the skills of managers responsible for addressing these challenges [15]. LD is crucial due to the necessity for skilled and well-trained public managers across all levels of the public sector, who are responsible to citizens for delivering essential services [16]. The enhancement of leadership skills among managers and professionals is a significant focus for institutions. Hence, they employ various strategies to develop leadership skills. To promote LD, institutions implement various practices such as structured training and development programmes, as well as coaching and mentoring initiatives [17]. These integrated approaches aim to optimise the development of leaders [18]. This raises the critical question: Are these strategies truly effective? Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effects of leadership development programmes (LDP) on enhancing service quality within public institutions through a comprehensive review of existing literature and practices.

### **1.1. Problem Statement**

Substantial evidence underscores the critical role of leadership within institutions. However, Halliwell et al. [19] argue that the field of leader development is currently underdeveloped, failing to yield the necessary insights to tackle the escalating crisis in leadership talent. Additionally, modifications resulting from leader development initiatives tend to be temporary, and many of these programmes do not deliver sufficient benefits with their expenses [19]. Moreover, Ntakumba and de Jongh [20] comment that empirical research on leadership predominantly focuses on organisational contexts, leaving the public sector largely unexplored within the existing literature. Nkwana [16] argues that the public sector faces ongoing challenges to enhance service delivery while catering to the varied needs of a diverse population. Consequently, there is an increasing need for leaders who can effectively manage these responsibilities and navigate essential processes of change, restructuring, process enhancement, and transformation [16]. In addition, public sector leaders are tasked with shifting the organisational culture from a rigid, bureaucratic framework to a more flexible, post-bureaucratic approach that prioritises outcomes and the generation of public value [2]. The scarcity of effective leaders across various institutions complicates this task significantly Asian Productivity Organization [2]. Zamalloa [4] notes that currently, the state entities are populated by administrators rather than true leaders. In the public sector, leaders are typically viewed as politicians instead of executives, leading to a lack of recognition for the significance of professional leadership [4]. LD is beneficial and advantageous for all employees, playing a crucial role in the advancement of an institution. Nevertheless, when LDP do not align well with the expectations of participants, they can be detrimental and lead to adverse experiences [21]. The study of Arnulf et al. [22] demonstrated that while participants generally welcomed developmental activities, their responses were not entirely favourable; they expressed reservations when such activities were not tailored to their specific organisational and personal circumstances. Furthermore, even in an effectively structured LDP, participants may feel disconnected from their institutions, potentially leading to their departure. This disconnection can stem from a simplistic "one-size-fits-all" approach that neglects the intricacies of the context in which these programmes are implemented [23]. Institutions have increasingly adopted various LDP aimed at enhancing leadership capabilities; however, LD continues to be one of the most under-researched areas within the broader

field of leadership studies [15, 24-26]. To address this significant gap in the literature, the current article focuses on the specific LDP designed to cultivate effective leadership skills.

### *1.2. Significance of the Study*

This study holds significant importance as it seeks to illuminate the critical role that effective leadership plays in the delivery of high-quality services in public institutions. The integrated review of existing literature on LDP aims to identify best practices that can inform policy and practice. This study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which emphasizes the need for effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Improving the leadership capabilities of public servants is high on the agenda of governments around the world. Public institutions can foster transparency, enhance service delivery, and ultimately contribute to the establishment of just and peaceful societies, thereby aligning with the broader objectives of sustainable development.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Theoretical Foundation*

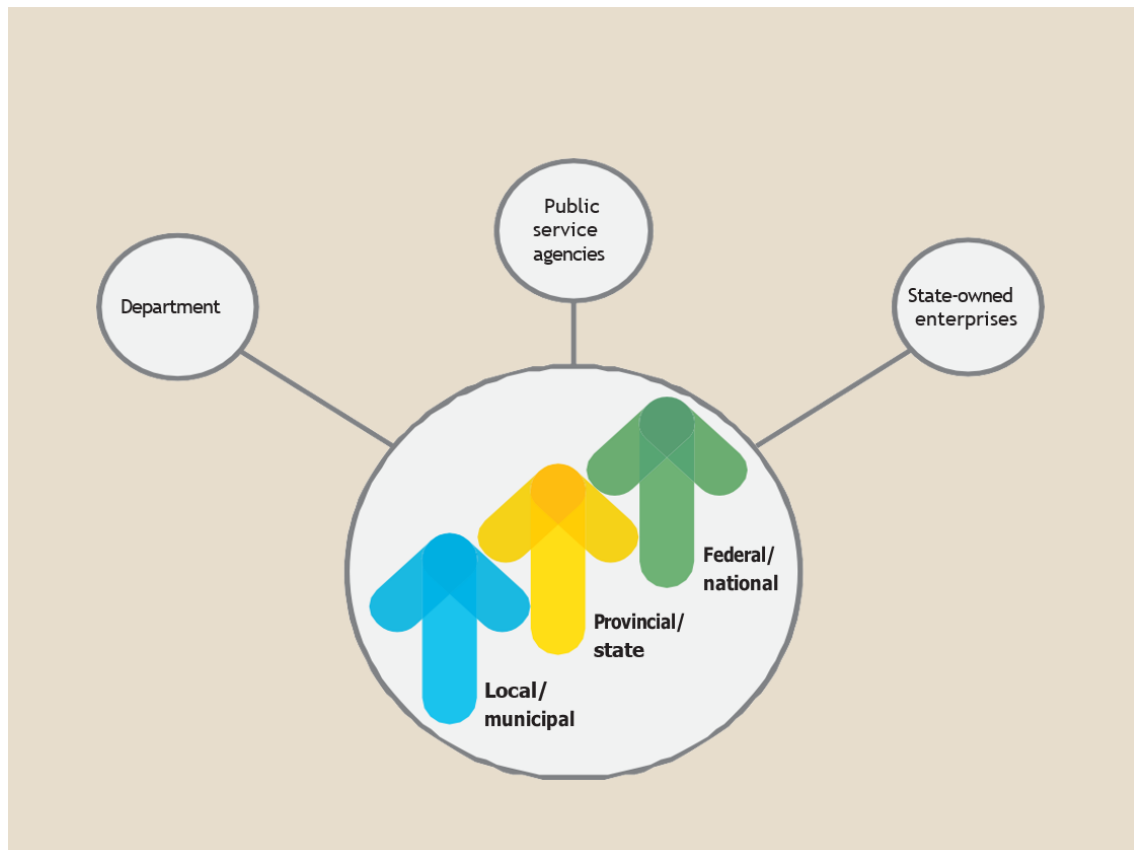
Behavioural Theory stipulates that successful leadership stems from a combination of acquired skills. A study conducted by Kapoor [27] on the characteristics of effective leadership highlights that an effective leader should embody qualities such as honesty, integrity, confidence, commitment, resilience, emotional intelligence, and alignment with the institution's vision and mission. To effectively guide their followers, individuals must possess three essential competencies: technical, human, and conceptual skills [28]. Technical skills encompass a leader's understanding of specific processes or techniques, while human skills pertain to the ability to engage and communicate effectively with others. Conceptual skills, on the other hand, empower leaders to generate innovative ideas for the efficient operation of an institution [28].

Additionally, Shen and Lei [29] point out that the intrinsic values, communication styles, actions, and competencies of good leaders are observed, replicated, and assimilated by employees. In institutions, communication occurs both formally and informally among individuals. Kapoor [27] notes that leaders must ensure that they effectively influence the behaviour of their subordinates through both communication styles. This influence should be timely and incorporate the use of technology, effective communication, problem analysis, solution provision, critical thinking, conflict management, sound decision-making, adherence to work ethics, and strong presentation skills [27]. However, when leaders exhibit negative behaviours, these tendencies propagate through the management structure, leading subordinates to adopt similar conduct [Shen and Lei [29]. Ma et al. [30] state that abusive leadership can incite deviant behaviours and foster a culture of feedback avoidance within the workplace.

This behavioral theory stipulates that effective leadership behaviors can be learned and developed through training and experience, which suggests that LDP can be designed to trigger specific behaviors that directly influence service quality.

### *2.2. Understanding Leadership Within the Public Sector*

Leadership is defined by an individual's capacity to leverage their authority to effect desired changes in the beliefs and behaviours of their followers, either by nurturing a dedication to the leader's objectives or by encouraging the adoption of their values [2]. At first glance, the leadership demonstrated by public-sector employees appears to parallel that found in private-sector institutions. However, exercising leadership within public sector institutions presents distinct challenges compared to leading in the private sector. A key difference lies in the dual administrative structure, which involves both elected and appointed officials alongside senior career bureaucrats occupying leadership roles in many public entities [31]. The authors specify that this does not imply that public institutions should disregard the importance of leadership due to these challenges. On the contrary, effective leadership is essential for these institutions to achieve optimal performance, especially in the context of constrained resources exacerbated by state budget crises, and emerging issues stemming from the necessity to oversee public employees within increasingly flexible and performance-driven management frameworks [31]. Regardless of the sector, public, private, or nonprofit, effective leaders must enable their followers to successfully carry out their duties [2]. However, Nkwana [16] notes that public sector leaders navigate a complex landscape characterised by rapidly changing socio-economic and political conditions, which contrast significantly with the challenges faced by their private sector counterparts. Their accountability lies primarily with elected officials, and they function within governance frameworks that are markedly distinct from those found in the private sector [16]. Thus, Roupnel et al. [15] state that leadership within the public sector is characterised by a diverse array of competencies that foster specific behaviours, including the ability to make a personal impact, engage in strategic thinking, and prioritise effective delivery. Furthermore, leadership can be viewed as a dynamic process of mutual social influence, where various stakeholders engage collaboratively to achieve shared goals [26, 32-34]. Asserts that the public sector possesses a distinct organisational structure that influences employees' work practices both directly and indirectly. Public institutions are inherently political, as their operations and strategic decisions are governed by political entities within the government and local communities [34], as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.**  
Focus on developing public-sector leadership.  
**Source:** Asian Productivity Organization [2].

Figure 1 presents the diverse range of public-sector institutions across all tiers of government. Government departments serve as the primary organisational entities responsible for delivering programmes and services to citizens, whether at the national, state, or local levels. Public service agencies, which offer a variety of public goods and services, can be categorised under several designations such as agency, board, commission, tribunal, advisory committee, and foundation, and they possess varying levels of autonomy from governmental oversight [2]. State-owned enterprises (SOEs), also known as public enterprises or crown corporations, function similarly to private-sector institutions, but they are either wholly or partially owned by the government, typically holding more than 50% of the shares [2].

Public trust plays a crucial role in ensuring effective governance. A reduction in this trust can undermine the legitimacy of institutions and, consequently, the democratic process [35]. Therefore, the author suggests that leaders must be aware of the necessary measures to enhance citizens' trust in their governance. In recent times, the prevalence of business scandals and unethical behaviour has led to a heightened focus on ethical standards and leadership accountability, Jonck [35]. Muff et al. [36] agree that the continuous wave of ethics-related scandals has significantly diminished public trust in both businesses and institutions. Furthermore, Gracia and Ariño [37] argue that global trust in public administration has been declining, largely attributed to current economic challenges and corruption, among other factors. Moreover, Soeardi et al. [38] argue that leaders in public institutions often encounter employees whose service mentality falls short of expectations. As a result, Mischewski [34] explains that public institutions are subject to stringent transparency requirements, which are partially mandated by law. To ensure compliance with these transparency standards, government oversight bodies are established to monitor and evaluate the operational processes of these institutions [34]. This regulatory environment underscores the necessity for effective LDP within public institutions, as strong leadership is crucial for fostering a culture of accountability and openness.

LD refers to the enhancement of an individual's capacity to perform effectively in leadership roles, predicated on the belief that acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities will lead to improved leadership effectiveness [21]. This process emphasises the importance of human capital and the development of capabilities that empower individuals to adopt innovative ways of thinking and acting [21]. In public sectors, Soeardi et al. [38] note that leaders must exemplify the behaviours and attitudes they wish to see in their subordinates. Effective leadership involves motivating team members to align their efforts with the institution's objectives, particularly in government institutions where the primary aim is to deliver quality service to consumers and the community [38]. Effective leaders not only navigate the complexities of compliance but also inspire their teams to prioritise service quality, thereby enhancing public trust and satisfaction. Leaders can align organisational practices with transparency mandates, to significantly improve the overall effectiveness and credibility of public services. Therefore, public institutions need to establish well-defined objectives for their LDP, ensuring these initiatives are closely aligned with the overall organisational strategy. Additionally, it is crucial to identify existing gaps in leadership skills, knowledge, and competencies. This alignment is vital as it guarantees that the LDP effectively supports the institution in achieving its goals [16].

Furthermore, non-profit organisations (NPOs) identified the productivity framework comprising five key thematic areas deemed critical for enhancing productivity within the public sector [2].

- a) Service quality emphasizes the pursuit of excellence through continuous improvement in the services provided by public-sector entities.
- b) E-government highlights the strategic application of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance efficiency, accessibility, transparency, and overall productivity in public institutions.
- c) Regulatory reform aims to remove unnecessary barriers to competition, innovation, and growth while ensuring that regulations effectively address essential social objectives.
- d) Citizen-centered service delivery focuses on maximizing citizen satisfaction by understanding their expectations, measuring service performance, ensuring accountability, and enhancing the public sector's capacity.
- e) Innovation leadership pertains to guiding others in fulfilling government mandates, executing public tasks, and developing more efficient and effective policies and services that align with public interests and preferences.

### 2.3. Core Concepts of Leadership Development Programmes

Many LDPs are founded on a fundamental conceptual framework that encompasses three key components, namely leadership, management, and governance, as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

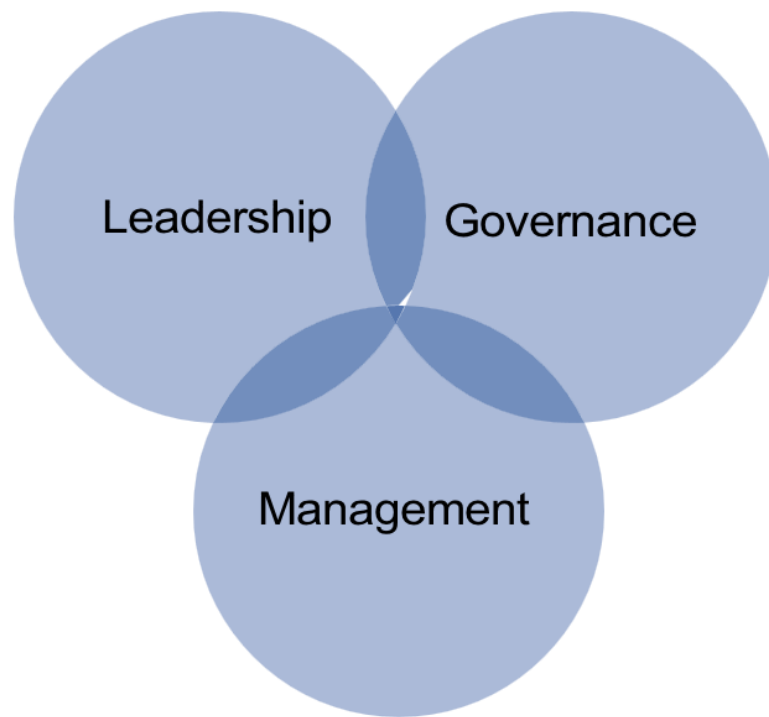
Topics covered by leadership development programmes.

	<b>Topics frequently covered</b>	<b>Topics less covered</b>
Leadership	Development of personal skills Communication Leading change	Power & politics
Management	Financial matters Human resources IT	Quality assurance and performance Technological transfer Infrastructure Risk and crisis management
Governance	Organisational structure and culture Decision-making processes Policy frameworks and regulations	Governance models Higher education landscape (system dynamics) Responsibility Accountability Liability

Source: Bunescu, et al. [39].

Based on Table 1, Kjellström et al. [21] note that management development encompasses training aimed at equipping managers with established strategies to address familiar challenges, thereby enhancing their task performance through the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills. This developmental process is specific to individuals in managerial positions and can be characterised as the journey through which aspiring managers acquire the interconnected competencies essential for their effectiveness in these roles [21]. Governance provides the necessary structure for decision-making, enabling both management and leadership to operate within defined parameters while aligning their objectives with the broader goals of the institution. To effectively and efficiently serve the public, government officials must engage in sound governance practices. This entails adhering to moral and ethical standards, upholding the rule of law, and encouraging accountability, transparency, and responsiveness [2]. Additionally, it is essential to promote inclusivity, facilitate public participation, and build consensus among diverse stakeholders, Asian Productivity Organization [2].

Bunescu et al. [39] explain that the extent to which leadership, management and governance are conceptually distinguished varies; often, there is some degree of overlap between these three elements, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.**  
Three main thematic elements of leadership development programmes.  
Source: Bunescu, et al. [39]

Zamalloa [4] stresses that management is essential for the effective functioning of a system, as it facilitates the execution of tasks that individuals are already skilled at performing. In contrast, leadership is focused on the creation of new systems or the revitalization of existing ones, driving innovation and change within an institution [4]. Governance plays a crucial role in overseeing and guiding the institution's processes. It establishes the frameworks and policies that ensure accountability, transparency, and ethical conduct within institutions.

#### 2.4. Different Levels of Leadership Development Programmes

Kjellström et al. [21] suggest three distinct levels of complexity and inclusiveness, namely leadership defined as role-based authority, leadership viewed as an influence process, and leadership conceptualised as a collective attribute of a social system that encompasses the interdependencies among individuals, teams, and institutions. Each of these perspectives necessitates unique approaches to leader development [21]. Hence, the study of Bunescu et al. [39] revealed that leadership manifests across various tiers, encompassing personal leadership, team leadership, and strategic leadership as displayed in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.**  
Dimensions of leadership addressed at leadership development programmes.  
Source: Bunescu, et al. [39].

From Figure 3, self-leadership emphasises an introspective approach aimed at attaining personal mastery and effectiveness [39]. At the individual level, Mulat and Singh [40] explain that self-leadership involves the ability to guide oneself, fostering personal growth and accountability. This foundational aspect serves as a precursor to effective team leadership, where the focus shifts to influencing and motivating a group towards shared objectives. Team leadership centers on the ability to inspire and motivate a collective towards a shared objective [39]. Furthermore, strategic leadership operates at a higher echelon, emphasising the formulation and execution of long-term visions and goals that align with organisational aspirations. Strategic leadership refers to an institution's capacity to foresee, conceptualise, and maintain adaptability while enabling others to create strategic opportunities and a sustainable future for the institution, Yuguda et al. [41]. Add that strategic leaders are responsible for establishing the institution's objectives and strategies, shaping its structures, processes, controls, and core competencies. Each level of leadership plays a critical role in shaping the dynamics of influence and direction within both personal and collective contexts. Bunescu, et al. [39] point out that it involves engagement with both internal and external stakeholders, necessitating the formulation of a vision for the institution that ensures its continued relevance and success, particularly in times of disruption.

### 2.5. Determining the Participants and the Specific Leadership Development Programmes

LDP are essential for nurturing various types of leaders within an institution, each with distinct roles and objectives as displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2.**  
Determining the participants and the specific leadership development programmes.

Types of leaders	Definitions/roles	Objectives of the LDP	LDP outcomes
Emerging leaders	Individuals categorised as emerging leaders may not hold formal leadership roles yet, but they represent a vital talent pool from which institutions can draw for future leadership positions.	By proactively investing in the development of these employees, institutions can cultivate a workforce of skilled contributors who are well-prepared to assume leadership roles in the future.	1. Interpersonal communication 2. Time management 3. Managing stress 4. Having difficult conversations and resolving conflict 5. Teamwork and collaboration
Mid-level leaders	Mid-level leaders necessitate a structured development pathway for two primary reasons: they possess the potential to transition into senior leadership roles, and they significantly influence workforce engagement due to their close interactions with employees.	The objectives of LD for these managers include mastering effective communication of expectations, providing constructive feedback, fostering a culture of accountability, and supporting their direct reports to enhance overall productivity.	1. Taking accountability for personal development 2. Giving and getting feedback 3. Coaching for results
Senior leaders	Senior leaders play a crucial role not only in managing teams and operations but also in shaping the organisational culture, strategic vision, and long-term success.	LD at this level must focus on broadening their perspectives and enhancing their capabilities to achieve exceptional organisational outcomes.	1. Accountability 2. Influence 3. Communication 4. Empowering others

Source: Eagle's Flight [3].

Soeardi et al. [38] observe that becoming a model leader is a challenging endeavour, requiring individuals to perceive their role as a profession grounded in ethical principles. This entails (1) possessing a blend of knowledge, social and technical skills, and relevant experience; (2) demonstrating competence in fulfilling their responsibilities and tasks; (3) exhibiting moral integrity and maturity, alongside a strong sense of social responsibility; (4) displaying the capacity for self-regulation; (5) managing both their emotions and impulses effectively; and (6) committing to ethical values, such as decency and kindness [38].

## 3. Research and Materials

The literature review concentrated on publications released between 2014 and 2024. Nevertheless, a selection of works published before 2014 was also included, considering their significance and theoretical contributions to the field.

Exclusion: Academic, Health LDP

## 4. Findings and Discussion: The Formats and Designs of the Leadership Development Programmes in the Public Sector

Kirchner and Akdere [42] articulated that LDP primarily encompass three fundamental types: leadership coaching, self-development, and experiential learning. Additionally, Rounpel et al. [15] contributed to this framework by including

mentorship as a key component. However, Kulkarni et al. [9] state that LD can be understood through multiple frameworks, notably the structured approach and the experiential learning approach.

#### *4.1. Structured Approach*

##### *4.1.1. Leadership Coaching*

Kirchner and Akdere [42] state that leadership coaching has emerged as a crucial element within contemporary LD frameworks, serving as a distinct yet complementary aspect that emphasises the individual learner's growth. Woodruff et al. [18] comment that leadership coaching serves as a focused and intentional intervention designed to assist leaders in fostering and sustaining positive changes in their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of personal development and leadership practices. This process emphasises the collaborative relationship between the coach and the individual being coached to enhance the leader's effectiveness. Throughout the coaching journey, the coach employs various developmental resources and training methods to support the emerging leader in reaching defined objectives, which ultimately fosters sustainable behavioral transformation Spears-Jones et al. [13]. Ganesh et al. [43] note that a coach serves as a facilitator of experiential learning, fostering skills that are oriented towards the future. This role encompasses being a trusted role model, an advisor, a source of wisdom, a friend, and a guide [43]. The coach monitors the emerging leader as they engage in leadership-related activities, providing guidance, enhancing their strengths, and delivering constructive feedback. Additionally, the coach assists the emerging leader in connecting theoretical knowledge with practical application [44]. A standard coaching session typically allocates time for reflection, planning, and goal setting, whereas the overall coaching experience encompasses skill enhancement, performance optimisation, and preparation for future roles [18].

Moreover, Ganesh et al. [43] posit that coaching as an instructional approach focuses on the direct enhancement of performance and the development of skills through guidance and teaching. It serves to unlock an individual's potential, enabling them to optimise their performance while fostering a learning environment rather than merely imparting knowledge. Hence, Gray et al. [44] argue that the coach monitors the emerging leader as they engage in leadership-related activities, providing guidance, enhancing their strengths, and delivering constructive feedback. Subramony et al. [24] stress that coaches assume a facilitative role, providing essential feedback and assisting in the creation and implementation of action-oriented strategies. Kulkarni et al. [9] confirm that the coach plays a crucial role in providing constructive feedback; on formulating action-oriented plans, s/he focuses on leveraging strengths while addressing areas for improvement. This approach enhances development by ensuring that feedback is pertinent to the relevant tasks and concentrates on the actions of the leader rather than their identity [9].

Additionally, Roupnel et al. [15] explain that coaching is offered across diverse professional contexts, predominantly in high-pressure scenarios that impact either the individual being coached or their institution, typically spanning an average duration of six months. The coach assists the candidate in connecting theoretical knowledge with practical application [44]. Thus, Kirchner and Akdere [42] acknowledge the significant influence that managers exert during their interactions with employees, thereby enhancing overall organisational effectiveness. This support enables coachees to independently recognise their developmental objectives and the challenges they face while attempting to navigate specific situations and make necessary adjustments [24]. Additionally, the coach collaborates with evolving human and organisational dynamics to harness new energy and purpose, develop innovative visions and strategies, and achieve desired outcomes [43].

Leadership development initiatives (LDI) that integrate executive coaching play a crucial role in guiding organisational change. Consequently, leadership coaching is recognised as one of the most impactful practices for leader development, with research demonstrating its efficacy in producing emotional, skills-oriented, and individual-level results. It aims to overcome the temporary effects of other development methods by fostering enduring behavioural changes that enhance leader effectiveness over time [45]. It primarily aims to improve knowledge and skills Ganesh et al. [43] and facilitate behavioral changes that align with the values and belief systems of the institution [18]. Such attributes of leaders are crucial in public institutions, as they foster a culture of accountability and commitment to service excellence. Ayaz et al. [46] conclude that leaders who adopt this approach not only guide their team members in their professional growth but also clarify the connection between the employees' personal objectives and the overarching strategic aims of the institution. This LDP is particularly effective when team members are highly motivated and eager to enhance their skills for improved job performance [46].

##### *4.1.2. Leadership Mentorship*

According to Woodruff et al. [18], leadership coaching is fundamentally related to mentoring; however, the terms leadership coaching and mentoring are frequently misused and used as synonymous. Mentoring is generally characterised as a professional relationship in which a seasoned leader supports the professional growth of a colleague who has less experience [47]. For McIlongo and Strydom [48], it is described as a dynamic and transformative relationship that influences both the mentor and the mentee, or protégé, along with their individual careers and personal and professional growth. Andersson and Tengblad [47] note that mentorship programmes offer a platform for individuals to contemplate daily practices and challenges with the guidance of a senior colleague who serves as a role model. Ganesh et al. [43] define a mentor as an individual who facilitates the transfer of specialised knowledge to less experienced individuals, making implicit understanding more explicit. Brungardt [49] explains that leadership mentoring is characterised by a profound relationship in which a mentor fulfils two primary roles for a less experienced individual. The first role involves offering guidance and modelling behaviours related to career development, while the second focuses on providing personal support, particularly in the psychosocial domain. Hence, Valero et al. [50] complement that mentoring has two primary functional domains, namely career development functions that equip mentees for professional advancement, and psychological functions that foster both personal and professional growth by establishing trust, intimacy, and reinforcing the relationship between mentor and mentee. Andersson and Tengblad [47]



emphasise that establishing trust within this relationship requires time, which is essential for facilitating open dialogue that transcends hierarchical boundaries and promotes personal growth.

Mentoring programmes can take on various formats, encompassing both formal and informal structures Roupnel et al. [15]. Additionally, [5] states that various scholars have identified different types of mentoring processes, including peer mentoring, formal and informal mentoring, and supervisory mentoring, where a supervisor acts as a mentor. This research examines both formal and informal mentoring practices, with a particular emphasis on supervisory mentoring. The aim is to understand how these mentoring relationships contribute to professional development and organisational success. Roupnel et al. [15] explain that in formal mentoring, the institution dictates the mentor-mentee pairing, while informal mentoring arises organically between individuals, often with organisational support. However, the author comments that research suggests that informal mentoring relationships tend to yield higher satisfaction for both mentors and mentees, as these pairs choose each other and engage in advice-sharing without the constraints of a formal agenda. Whether mentoring is informal or formal, its core functions generally include vocational support, psychosocial support, and role modelling [5].

The importance of pairing emerging leaders with seasoned mentors who possess a proven track record becomes increasingly evident as they advance in their training and development. This relationship allows mentees to gain insights into the subtleties of effective leadership while providing a platform for informal inquiries [3]. Thus, Ganesh et al. [43] identified seven key characteristics of mentoring that frequently emerge: an active relationship, a supportive process, a teaching and learning dynamic, reflective practice, a focus on career and personal development, a structured approach, and a role defined by the mentor for the mentee. (1) An active relationship emphasizes the importance of engagement and communication between the mentor and mentee, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas. (2) A supportive process highlights the mentor's role in providing encouragement and guidance, creating a safe environment for growth. (3) The teaching and learning dynamic signifies the reciprocal nature of mentoring, where both parties share knowledge and experiences. (4) Reflective practice encourages continuous self-assessment and improvement, allowing mentees to learn from their experiences. Additionally, (5) a focus on career and personal development ensures that mentoring addresses both professional aspirations and personal growth. (6) A structured approach provides a clear framework for the mentoring process, enhancing its effectiveness. Finally, (7) the mentor's defined role establishes expectations and responsibilities, guiding the mentee's journey toward achieving their goals. This indicates that mentoring can be multidimensional.

Okoye [51] argues that leadership mentoring establishes a link between good governance and effective leadership by fostering a foundational growth process that emphasises bottom-up development. This nurturing approach paves the way for effective leadership, which in turn contributes to the realisation of good governance [51]. Moreover, mentorship plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of leadership excellence, as it enables new leaders to observe and emulate the application of company values demonstrated by their experienced counterparts [3]. Furthermore, Bang and Reio Jr [52] assert that mentoring is recognised as a catalyst for fostering creative expression and innovative work methods. Okoye [51] concludes that mentoring plays a crucial role in fostering effective and successful leadership. Leadership mentoring significantly contributes to the establishment of a generation of thoughtful, skilled, and pragmatic leaders who are attuned to the unique needs of society. This process not only enhances their understanding of societal challenges but also empowers them to enact meaningful change through intentional and purpose-driven leadership [12]. Assert that the effectiveness of leadership and mentoring relies heavily on the quality of relationships. Unlike other methods of knowledge transfer, mentorship is fundamentally relational. Both leadership and mentoring fundamentally encompass the interactions between individuals in senior and junior positions within institutions [17]. However, [14] highlight that while the belief in the necessity of a strong mentor for achieving career success as a leader is prevalent in career counselling, there is a notable lack of empirical evidence to support this belief.

#### *4.1.3. Self-Development Through Self-Directed Learning*

Kirchner and Akdere [42] posit that self-development leadership programmes represent an alternative form of LDI. Self-development emphasises the importance of individual initiative in pursuing growth opportunities, allowing leaders to improve their skills and competencies through self-directed learning [18]. Leader self-development can be understood in more expansive terms that extend beyond traditional formal roles. Kirchner and Akdere [42] argue that while the focus on individual growth is important, it is essential to recognise that individuals often assume both formal and informal leadership positions within the workplace. Consequently, a broader range of competencies must be harnessed across three key areas, namely self-leadership, leading others, and organizational leadership, Kirchner and Akdere [42]. According to Kohn [53], integrating interdisciplinary approaches into leadership education enhances adaptability. The author found that leaders who engage with diverse fields are more prepared to tackle change and uncertainty, as they possess a broad array of knowledge and skills. This flexibility is crucial for successfully maneuvering through the fast-evolving realms of business and technology [53].

A distinct approach to LD is leader training, which focuses on equipping leaders with specific skills. According to An and Meier [54], Jacobsen et al. [55] and Seidle et al. [56], this training is an extensive process that encompasses the phases before, during, and after the training sessions. Kirchner and Akdere [42] state that these training sessions emphasise self-assessment learning, wherein the individual leader assumes the principal role in their leadership growth. The leader identifies the specific knowledge, skills, and competencies that require enhancement and subsequently selects the most suitable approach for their development [42]. The research conducted by Abner et al. [57] demonstrates that intentionally crafted training programmes can produce positive results for leaders, followers, and institutions. Individual skill development programmes typically include the evaluation of a leader's personality, values, and behaviours, frequently utilising a 360-

degree feedback assessment to pinpoint the leader's strengths and weaknesses [9]. Such comprehensive assessments are essential for fostering personal growth and enhancing leadership effectiveness.

Research by Jacobsen and Bøgh Andersen [58] indicates that leaders in this category often tend to overrate their leadership abilities in contrast to how colleagues perceive them. Backhaus and Vogel [5] argue that this overconfidence can hinder leaders' capacity to achieve a comprehensive understanding of their developmental needs.

#### 4.2. Experiential Learning Approach

Grimard and Pellerin [59] state that effective leadership is crucial for the success of institutions, enhancing leadership capacity is a continuous priority. Traditionally, LD has taken place in classroom environments, whether through workshops organised by institutions or courses offered by universities, treating it similarly to subjects like mathematics or English that necessitate formal instruction for mastery [60]. A survey conducted by the American Society of Training and Development revealed that 85% of institutions surveyed rely on classroom-based LD [60]. Concerns are growing about the limited applicability of these expensive programmes [59]. Consequently, Abner et al. [57] emphasise that determining whether the benefits justify the substantial financial commitments is a complex challenge.

##### 4.2.1. Experience-Based Leadership Development

According to Kulkarni et al. [9], experience-based learning represents an alternative strategy that emphasises the importance of navigating and learning from challenges in leadership roles. It is defined by Waller et al. [61] as “the process of knowledge creation through the transformation of experience”. It is closely linked to the enhancement of essential leadership competencies, including cultural intelligence, and serves as an effective means of equipping individuals for future leadership challenges and personal growth as leaders [61]. Experience-based learning offers significant advantages across multiple aspects of LD. Through active engagement in real-world situations, learners encounter complex challenges that enable them to investigate a range of strategies and solutions [53]. Kulkarni et al. [9] explain that this method focuses on identifying employees with significant leadership potential and exposing them to more complex and targeted organisational challenges. This approach not only deepens their understanding of theoretical principles but also hones their skills in applying these principles in genuine contexts, as they navigate the complexities of human relationships, conflict resolution, and empathy [53]. The effective development of leadership skills hinges on the careful execution of these initiatives. However, for employees to grow into effective leaders, current leaders must incorporate action learning into their existing responsibilities [9]. Such assignments often necessitate the application of skills like conflict resolution, team dynamics, and problem-solving, which may not be part of their existing job functions. The insights gained from these experiences are vital for cultivating effective leaders. Kulkarni et al. [9] and Day et al. [60] argue that experiential learning beyond the classroom involves conducting experiments in authentic, real-world contexts. In contrast to traditional classroom-based LD, which is often limited to specific timeframes and locations, experience-based LD is continuous and can occur in a variety of settings [60]. In the simulation exercise, Fisher et al. [62] adopt a competency-based approach to leadership, incorporating techniques for developing leadership competencies. This exercise mimics a real organisational scenario, where participants encounter intricate stimuli and are required to exhibit sophisticated behaviours. Specifically, it involves a one-on-one role-playing format, allowing for the evaluation of participants in key areas such as people management, planning, and organization Fisher et al. [62]. The study of Boak and Crabbe [17] revealed that learning through experience was particularly effective in enhancing leadership skills related to addressing substantial challenges and participating in key decision-making processes. Moreover, Kjellström et al. [21] comment that leader development is shaped by experiences within various contexts, and the associated learning and growth processes can be applied to enhance leadership across all domains. This process encompasses a wide array of practices deemed essential for optimising organisational potential, as evidenced by the \$31 billion invested by American firms in LDI in 2015 [63]. Therefore, Bunesco et al. [39] argue that the learning format should be adapted to the content, as well as to the actors involved; they should be appropriate instruments for conveying the knowledge, skills, attitudes, or leadership styles to be gained. Wakefield et al. [63] inform that the experience-based learning process is time-consuming and requires the complete engagement of participants. However, Kulkarni and Mohanty [64] observe that this method emphasises the creation and execution of LDI that prioritise employee expectations regarding their experiences. Hence, Table 3 illustrates the differences between the structured approach and the experiential approach to LD.

**Table 3.**

Comparison between structured and experiential leadership development approach.

<b>Structured leadership development approach</b>	<b>Experiential leadership development approach</b>
Focus on the institutional needs of the business strategy	Focus on employee expectations of development to meet institutional goals
One-size-fits-all approach to development	Combination of personalisation and uniform approach to development
Systems and organisational leadership competency framework based	A flexible approach and agility in the design to provide an experiential outcome
Impact the institution's competence to achieve business goals	High impact on employee motivation to achieve institutional goals

Table 3 reveals that the structured leadership development approach emphasises aligning training programmes with the specific needs of the institution's business strategy, often employing a standardised method that may not cater to individual differences. In contrast, the experiential leadership development approach prioritises the expectations of employees regarding their growth, blending personalised elements with a consistent framework. This latter approach is characterised by its flexibility and adaptability, aiming to create meaningful experiences that significantly enhance employee motivation and engagement, ultimately driving the institution towards its goals. The study of Boak and Crabbe [17] confirms that the experience rated highest for fostering leadership skills was "addressing a substantial challenge or challenges," closely followed by "making or contributing to significant decisions."

#### *4.2.2. Learning Through Others' Experiences*

In a review of 25 years of research into Day et al. [60] observe the importance of workplace experiences for individual development and note: "[...] we lack a clear idea of the ongoing ways in which people practice to become more expert leaders. Such practice may not be intentional or mindful, which may make it more difficult to study. But this notion of ongoing practice through day-to-day leadership activities is where the crux of development resides." The authors underscore the idea that leadership development is a continuous process shaped by daily experiences rather than formal training alone. It suggests that much of the learning occurs organically through routine leadership tasks, which may not always be consciously recognised or studied. Hence, Kirchner and Akdere [42] stipulate that workplace learning is a fundamental aspect of numerous LDP. Participants leverage their individual life experiences to illustrate their impact on peers, fostering a collaborative learning environment. Life in general, as a source of development, is apparent in this way of viewing leader development, similar to the definition of leader development as "every form of growth or stage of development in the life cycle that promotes, encourages, and assists in one's leadership potential" Brungardt [49]. Andersson and Tengblad [47] argue that this LDP is characterised by informal and reactive tasks rather than deliberate and planned activities. Consequently, there is a need to enhance the integration of interventions like action learning and on-the-job training, as work environments are typically contextual and unstructured. The shared experiences of learners are examined and critiqued, creating valuable educational opportunities for everyone engaged in the process [42]. In action learning, participants engage in projects and, with guidance from a coach or trainer, reflect on their actions and outcomes to facilitate learning. Similarly, on-the-job training involves collaborative reflection with seasoned managers or trainers who possess effective strategies for navigating ambiguous situations. It is important to recognise that both action learning and on-the-job training are relatively well-established components within the field of LD [47]. Learning through colleagues' experiences highlights the significance of real-world situations in shaping a leader's understanding and approach, as practical experiences often provide invaluable insights that theoretical knowledge alone cannot offer [42]. Integrating employee experience into LD and fostering essential business behaviours result in an LD centered on employee experience. This strategy emphasises the design and execution of LDI that prioritise employee expectations regarding their experiences, Kirchner and Akdere [42].

Waller et al. [61] opine that practical experience in the workplace may hold greater significance than formal training. The authors argue that leaders, corporate executives, and entrepreneurs gain more insights from actual work and life experiences than from structured LDI or MBA programmes. McCall Jr [65], long associated with LD through experiential learning, argues: "The role played by training and other formal programmes is relatively modest in comparison to other kinds of experiences". Boak and Crabbe [17] note that there is a significant consensus that workplace activities can enhance LD. While there is no definitive agreement on which specific activities are most beneficial, it is generally acknowledged that those presenting a certain level of challenge are likely to be crucial. Additionally, factors that offer support are essential for individuals to effectively learn from these more demanding experiences [17].

## **5. Implications of the Findings**

The findings suggest that every individual possesses the potential for leadership, which can be developed through targeted leadership development programs (LDP). The importance of this statement is amplified when considering the complexities of the 21st century, a time marked by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and shifting social dynamics. This era necessitates a novel breed of leaders equipped with a diverse set of skills and competencies since the challenges faced are multifaceted, requiring them to possess a wide array of skills and competencies that extend beyond traditional management practices. Moreover, the evolving landscape of societal, technological, and organizational challenges underscores the importance of adaptability and a multifaceted approach to leadership, thereby emphasizing the need for individuals to actively engage in the development of their leadership skills to meet the demands of an increasingly complex world. Kohn [53] stresses that the interdisciplinary leadership development approach underscores that leadership is not a one-size-fits-all concept but a dynamic amalgamation of diverse perspectives. To ensure that leadership development programs are pertinent, practical, and captivating, their content must align harmoniously with the specific needs of the institution. The experiential approach of leadership development enables learners to examine leadership through multiple lenses, enriching their understanding of real-world leadership scenarios [53].

The implications of the tailored LDP for enhancing service quality in public institutions are significant. This study presents a more nuanced understanding of leadership, thereby allowing public institutions to train leaders who are better equipped to address the unique challenges of modern workplaces and technological advancements. These leaders, informed by diverse LDPs, are likely to implement innovative strategies that improve service delivery, enhance stakeholder engagement, and ultimately lead to a more responsive and effective public service. Experiential learning opportunities can be effectively incorporated into a well-structured LDP. However, a significant concern surrounding experiential learning pertains to the design and organization of these developmental initiatives [17]. The challenges associated with structuring

learning through others' experiences in LDPs have important implications for enhancing service quality within public institutions. Specifically, if these programs are not thoughtfully designed, they may fail to equip leaders with the necessary skills and experiences to address the complexities of public service, ultimately hindering the overall effectiveness and responsiveness of these institutions. Therefore, careful consideration of the program structure is essential to ensure that experiential learning translates into tangible improvements in service delivery [17].

## 6. Conclusion

LD is understood as an ongoing learning journey that extends throughout an individual's lifetime. In an organizational context, this perspective is particularly significant as it encourages a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability among leaders. The study recognizes that leadership capabilities can be promoted through targeted training, mentorship, and experiential learning; public institutions can foster an environment where individuals are empowered to develop their leadership skills. This approach not only benefits the individuals involved but also contributes to the overall effectiveness and resilience of the institution, as leaders who are committed to personal growth are more likely to inspire and motivate their teams, drive innovation, and navigate the complexities of the modern business landscape. Thus, the emphasis on the developmental nature of leadership aligns with the strategic goals of institutions seeking to thrive in an ever-changing environment. The originality of this study is rooted in the understanding that leadership transcends the traditional boundaries associated with formal titles or designated positions of power. It highlights the notion that true leadership is characterized by the capacity to influence, motivate, and direct others, irrespective of an individual's official status within an institution.

## 7. Recommendations

To improve the quality of services provided by public institutions, it is crucial to implement comprehensive leadership development programs that address the unique challenges faced in the public sector. This begins with a thorough evaluation of the specific leadership skills and competencies necessary to navigate contemporary issues effectively. The identification of these requirements will help institutions tailor their training initiatives to ensure they are both relevant and impactful. This targeted approach will, on one hand, enhance the effectiveness of the training and, on the other hand, align the development of leaders with the strategic goals of the institution, fostering a more responsive and capable workforce.

In addition to focused training, the integration of mentorship and coaching into leadership programs is vital for nurturing emerging leaders. Pairing less experienced individuals with seasoned mentors allows for the transfer of knowledge and the cultivation of essential skills in a supportive environment. Additional to these structured initiatives, institutions can facilitate collaborative projects that can serve as a valuable platform for experiential learning, enabling participants to apply their skills gained in real-world scenarios while working alongside peers and managers. This combination of coaching, mentorship, practical experience, and targeted training creates an effective framework for developing effective leaders who can significantly enhance the service quality of public institutions.

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