

BEACON RESEARCH ON YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

As part of developing its Theory of Change (Appendix 1, page 14), the Beacon commissioned a literature review to validate the assumptions behind the following five key interventions in its Leadership Development Programme:

1. Identifying leadership potential in young children with financial need
2. Providing scholarships to enable them to access world-class schools and universities
3. Matching each scholar with a faculty or professional mentor to help develop their leadership potential
4. Coaching scholars on how to set goals and targets and monitor their own performance using the Beacon Target Sheet
5. Conducting leadership workshops and overseeing summer community service projects

These interventions have evolved organically over the past eight years, as the Beacon seeks to fulfil its mission of developing a group of ethical 'change-makers' who have a multiplier effect to generate positive social change.

The research goes some way towards validating The Beacon's holistic approach to leadership development in children. The next planned intervention is to build a 'Transitions Programme' to effectively create a vertical pathway for Beacon Scholars into leadership positions.



SUMMARY FINDINGS FROM INTERROGATING BEACON KEY ASSUMPTIONS

(Full research available on request)

- 1. Is there evidence to suggest that it is possible to identify leadership potential at a young age and, if so, what are some of the criteria used to determine this? Is there evidence to suggest that leadership development works best when it is 'started young and repeated often'?**

Five key areas for identifying and developing leadership in youth have been identified; all these validate the view that leadership development should begin early, and guide practitioners in how to nurture it.

The five areas are: (a) Giftedness (b) Creativity (c) Personality (d) Early Experience, and (e) Involvement in Service & Youth Leadership Programmes.

(a) 'Giftedness'

Leadership has been retained in the US federal definition of giftedness, across many revisions, since 1972.

Specific qualities identified in the leadership component of giftedness are:

- Assumes responsibility
- High expectations for self and others
- Fluent, concise self-expression
- Foresees consequences and implications of decisions
- Good judgment in decision making
- Likes structure
- Well-liked by peers
- Self-confident
- Organized

The contemporary view of giftedness as applied to leadership suggests the following:

- Early identification of giftedness is important, but should not just be based on an IQ score; one needs an IQ of at least 115 or 120 to be a successful leader, but not necessarily higher.
- General intellectual ability is one important factor, but other psychological measures should be included, such as those associated with leadership behaviour (e.g. verbal expressive skill).
- The measures used to assess giftedness must change as a child gets older, more aligned with a domain-specific focus on leadership.
- The goal of gifted education becomes finding ways to nurture and optimize bright students' development in one or more culturally-valued field – in this instance, the development of leadership; the goal is promoting leadership competence and expertise.
- Not all children identified at an early age as gifted will continue on a success path or trajectory toward leadership expertise – only a select number of individuals reach the highest levels of eminent status in any domain or field, including leadership.
- However, almost any adolescent, if provided appropriate opportunities and adequately motivated, can learn new, and refine existing, skills and values which are associated with effective leadership; even young children can learn the nuances of social judgment and become more adept at recognizing the feelings of others.

(b) Creativity

Creativity is seen as a key component of the unfolding of talent in any field, including leadership:

- Bright students require a variety of structured and real-world learning experiences before we can expect that they will display the imagination, originality, and resourcefulness which are hallmarks of creative leadership.
- One expects to begin to see creative thinking and creative performance as the youngster moves from a level of competence to an elite or expert level in any field, including leadership.
- If students of uncanny ability continue to successfully progress along the talent development trajectory to expertise and even eminent status as a leader, the following factors become increasingly important: specific interpersonal skills, drive, persistence, self-confidence, passion for leading others, facilitative motivational beliefs, a willingness to listen and learn from others, and the dream of becoming a leader.
- Sustained interest in pursuing one’s dream of becoming a leader and a commitment to excellence are critical to reach the highest levels; creativity is much easier to nurture and encourage if the student is passionate about becoming a leader and has a ‘rage’ to learn.
- A substantial investment of time is necessary to reach the highest levels as a leader.

(c) Personality

There is a statistically significant correlation between personality traits and leadership, with extraversion being the most highly correlated trait. Conscientiousness and openness to experience were the next strongest correlates, with conscientiousness emerging as the strongest predictor of leadership in the analysis.

(d) Early Experience

Two main reasons why early experiences create the foundation for future leadership development to build on:

- Early points in life represent a ‘sensitive period’ for development; reflect a time in life when skills are more easily and rapidly developed;
- One's development to eventually become a leader is a self-reinforcing process. For example, as one gains greater leadership efficacy, or confidence in one's ability to lead a group, that individual is more likely to engage in leadership experiences, which will serve to increase the individual's leadership efficacy. A self-fulfilling prophecy is when others' high expectations for another cause that individual to meet those high expectations because of increased attention, access to resources, or self-efficacy.

The *Center for Creative Leadership* 2012 US conducted research among 462 individuals from all sectors of the economy, at all organizational levels, and across the age range:

<i>At what age do you think leadership development should begin?</i>	
5 years old or younger	21%
Ages 6-10	29%
Ages 11-17	40%
Ages 18-21	7%
Over 21	4%

(e) Involvement in Service-based Leadership programmes

Participation in community-based and youth leadership programmes can provide unique opportunities for early exposure to leadership roles and observing important skills associated with leadership. Youth who were active in highly effective youth development programmes developed the following characteristics:

- Pro-civic/pro-social values
- Strong locus of control
- Independence in reading for pleasure, seeking out non-school classes and opportunities
- Motivation to seek bases for acquiring and adapting knowledge
- Self-images that place themselves as effective learners making use of higher education resources
- Stable high academic achievement
- Strong sense of self-efficacy for future tasks and goals
- Trust in the value of high-risk behaviours for learning and performing
- Sense of commitment to community service and volunteering
- Desire to work to correct economic inequalities

In summary, there is a growing body of evidence that it is indeed possible to identify leadership potential at a young age; and the evidence also suggests that leadership development is best when started young and repeated often because (1) childhood represents a 'sensitive period' for positive development and (2) given the reinforcing nature of leadership development, starting earlier allows leadership experiences and opportunities to be repeated and amplified through a 'snowball' effect over time.

2. Is there evidence to suggest that graduating from a leading educational institution increases a student's chance of taking up leadership opportunities?

Little research has been conducted to study the role formal education might play in leadership development; higher levels of education do positively correlate with higher levels of managerial positions, but no actual causation has been proved. Three ways in which an educational institution may contribute to the human capital in its graduates:

1. Scholastic capital (the amount of knowledge acquired)
2. Social capital (personal contacts, network ties)
3. Cultural capital (the value society places on symbols of prestige, e.g. educational brands)

The researchers found all three components help to explain how graduates get leadership positions. The quality of education itself significantly helped to benefit a graduate's leadership prospects, but even controlling for quality, they also found that reputations of educational institutions mattered in graduates' leadership prospects. Not only does a quality education increase earnings and the likelihood of being able to take on a leadership position, but going to the very best educational institutions with name recognition contributes to that aim as well.

Incidentally, at the collegiate level, many scholars believe that a liberal arts education is the best preparation for potential leaders. With higher education's movement toward specialization, a liberal arts background provides the broader educational experience essential to leadership.

There are three distinct theories of **social capital** (i.e. network access):

1. **Weak tie theory:** focuses on the relative strength of the social tie used by a person in the process of finding a job. Ties among members of a social clique are likely to be strong (defined as emotionally intense, frequent, and involving multiple types of relationships, such as those with friends, advisors, and co-workers); the information possessed by any one member of the clique is likely to be either shared quickly or already redundant with the information possessed by the other members. By contrast, ties that reach outside of one's social clique are likely to be 'weak' and can often serve as a bridge between densely interconnected social cliques, thus providing a source of unique information and resources
2. **Structural holes approach:** focuses on the pattern of relations among the alters in ego's social network; a structural hole is said to exist between two alters who are not connected to each other. It is advantageous for ego to be connected to many alters who are themselves unconnected to the other alters in ego's network. Networks rich in structural holes provide an individual with three primary benefits: more unique and timely access to information, greater bargaining power and thus control over resources and outcomes, and greater visibility and career opportunities throughout the social system.
3. **Social resources theory:** focuses on the nature of the resources embedded within a network. It is not the weakness of a tie per se that conveys advantage (nor, by extension, is it the bridging property of weak ties), but the fact that such ties are more likely to reach someone with the type of resource required for ego to fulfil his or her objectives. An alter who possesses characteristics or controls resources useful for the attainment of the ego's goals can be considered a social resource.

Access to and building 'loose networks' in top educational institutions provide an excellent opportunity for individuals to develop critical social ties to advance their development.

In summary, while the search for the root causes of education's value are controversial, there is consensus that education at a top institution does lead to career success across an array of important objective metrics.

3. What kinds of youth mentorship models exist and how do they complement the classroom experience to produce better educational outcomes and enhanced leadership development?

Though researchers found that most gains from mentorship programmes are limited, and that the mere existence of a mentorship programme does not necessarily guarantee positive effects, specific aspects of individual programmes can make a significant difference.

Mentorship programmes are most effective when:

- Mentors and youth have been paired based on similarity of interests; also when there is a good fit between the educational or occupational backgrounds of mentors, and the goals of the programme.
- Although spending more time with mentees is better than less time, even more important is what youth and mentors do together during that time; activities could include: (1) engaging in social activities (2) engaging in academic activities (3) decision-making shared by mentor and mentee
- In particular engaging in social activities is key to developing close and supportive relationships; building emotional closeness matters.
- The longer the mentoring relationship, the better the outcome.
- Youth are more likely to benefit if mentors maintain frequent contact with them and know their families: there are mechanisms for support and involvement of parents.
- Young people who perceive high-quality relationships with their mentors experience the best results; quality of mentoring relationships is more important than sheer quantity of hours spent together.
- Mentoring programmes need structure and planning to facilitate high levels of interaction between young people and their mentors; also, the best programmes have been structured to support mentors in assuming teaching or advocacy roles with youth
- Mentoring programmes that are driven more by the needs and interests of youth – rather than the expectations of the adult volunteers – are more likely to succeed.
- Overall, young people who are the most disadvantaged or at-risk seem to benefit the most from mentoring.

To date, research has focussed on the link between mentorship and educational outcomes, where the impact is often beneficial; the link between mentorship and leadership development has not yet been much explored.

4. Is there evidence to suggest a link between goal-setting and leadership, especially in children? If so, which models for cultivating goal-setting are most effective and how are they implemented in order to retain intrinsic motivation?

Early Goal theory identifies four mechanisms by which goal-setting affects performance:

- 1) Goals serve a directive function - they direct attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities and away from goal-irrelevant activities
- 2) Goals have an energizing function - high goals lead to greater effort than low goals.
- 3) Goals affect persistence - when participants are allowed to control the time they spend on a task, hard goals prolong effort
- 4) Goals affect action indirectly by leading to the arousal, discovery, and/or use of task-relevant knowledge and strategies

Mastery Goals vs Performance Goals:

Goal theorists have identified two dimensions of goal orientations:

i) **Mastery vs Performance:**

- **Mastery-oriented goals** are defined in terms of a focus on learning, mastering the task according to self-set standards, or 'self-improvement'. This also encompasses developing new skills, improving or developing competence, trying to accomplish something challenging and trying to gain an understanding or insight.
- **Performance-oriented goals** represent a focus on demonstrating competence or ability and how ability will be judged relative to others. For example, trying to surpass normative performance standards, attempting to best others, or even avoiding judgments of low ability or appearing dumb, are examples of performance-oriented goals.

ii) **Approach vs Avoidance:**

- **Approach-oriented goals** are goals in which individuals are positively motivated to look good and receive favourable judgment from others;
- **Avoidance-oriented goals** are goals in which individuals can be negatively motivated to try to avoid failure and to avoid looking incompetent.

		Definition	
		Absolute/ intrapersonal (mastery)	Normative (performance)
Valence	Positive (approaching success)	Mastery- approach goal	Performance- approach goal
	Negative (avoiding failure)	Mastery- avoidance goal	Performance- avoidance goal

The research highlights the following:

- Generally mastery goals are more productive than performance goals, and approach goals are more productive than avoidance goals; mastery-approach goals were found to be associated with the most positive learning attitudes and with some of the most desirable learning outcomes.
- While performance-approach goals were associated with greater exam success than master-approach goals, this was accompanied by negative attitudes and stress such as fear of failure and parent-conditional approval.
- However, in one study individuals low in achievement orientation responded most positively to mastery goals, whereas performance goals proved optimal for achievement-oriented subjects.
- Students should be encouraged to set primarily mastery-approach goals, as they are associated with higher levels of self-belief and maintain intrinsic motivation for thinking about why it is important to achieve a goal.
- Mastery-approach goals relate each goal with the student's own interest and focus on their own personal learning and development as opposed to comparing themselves to others. For example, setting a goal to learn a language because the student is interested in foreign peoples and cultures and would like to be able to speak with others and read literature in a foreign language, as opposed to because they want to impress peers, teachers, or parents, or because the student wants to get good grades. Mastery-approach goals involve the intention behind the goal, which affects how the goal is determined and evaluated.
- Students can hold multiple goals simultaneously; thus, it is possible for a student to be both mastery-approach-oriented and performance-approach-oriented. Such a student truly wants to learn and master the material but is also concerned with appearing more competent than others.

The research also identified a number of moderators that can impact the effectiveness of goal-setting:

- 1) **Goal Commitment:** The goal–performance relationship is strongest when people are committed to their goals. Two drivers:
 - a. **Importance:** Making a public commitment to the goal enhances commitment, presumably because it makes one's actions a matter of integrity in one's own eyes and in those of others; by allowing subordinates to participate in setting them they, at least in part, own the goals. From a motivational perspective, an assigned goal is as effective as one that is set participatively provided that the purpose or rationale for the goal is given. However, if the goal is assigned tersely (e.g., "Do this...") without explanation, it leads to performance that is significantly lower than for a participatively set goal.
 - b. **Self-efficacy:** Self-efficacy enhances goal commitment. Leaders can raise the self-efficacy of their subordinates (a) by ensuring adequate training to increase mastery that provides success experiences, (b) by role modeling or finding models with whom the person can identify, and (c) through persuasive communication that expresses confidence that the person can attain the goal.
- 2) **Feedback:** For goals to be effective, people need summary feedback that reveals progress in relation to their goals. If they do not know how they are doing, it is difficult or impossible for them to adjust the level or direction of their effort or to adjust their performance strategies to match what the goal requires.
- 3) **Task Complexity:** do-your-best goals are more effective than distal (far) goals, but when proximal (nearer) outcome goals were set in addition to the distal outcome goal, self-efficacy and profits were significantly higher than in the do-your-best condition or in the condition where only a distal outcome goal had been set.

How satisfaction impacts one's attitude towards continuing to set new goals:

- For any given trial, exceeding the goal provides increasing satisfaction as the positive discrepancy grows, and not reaching the goal creates increasing dissatisfaction as the negative discrepancy grows; the more goal successes one has, the higher one's total satisfaction
- People with high goals produce more because they are dissatisfied with less. The bar for their satisfaction is set at a high level. This is why they are motivated to do more than those with easy goals.
- People are motivated to set high goals because they can expect many psychological and practical outcomes from setting and attaining those goals.

Goal theory has been extensively researched since 1968, giving rise to many different models; these provide useful guidance as to what type of goal-setting would be appropriate for different types of children, but there is as yet little research as to the effectiveness of goal-setting in education over a medium or long-term period. However there is overall consensus that personal goal-setting is extremely beneficial for children, encouraging self-awareness and intrinsic motivation – both crucial characteristics for leadership development.

One study did specifically test the effects of a single-session, intensive goal-setting programme for undergraduate students experiencing academic difficulty. Compared with the control group, students who completed the goal-setting exercise experienced three benefits in the post-intervention semester:

- (a) increased GPA,
- (b) higher probability of maintaining a full course load, and
- (c) reductions in self-reported negative affect.

Given the lack of successful interventions for improving academic performance in university students, the study indicates that personal goal setting deserves greater attention as an effective technique for improving academic success.

5. Is it possible to develop leadership, self-awareness, and/or good citizenship through trainings and/or community service? If so, what are the best models for doing so?

Service learning (or ‘experiential learning’) has taken many forms but is characterized by a pedagogy that combines community service with reflection on action. Numerous studies have reported the beneficial effects of service learning on students, including their personal, moral, social and civic development, and their understanding of social issues.

There are four conditions for experiential learning to be successful:

- 1) The learner must be willing to be actively involved in the experience
- 2) The learner must be able to reflect on the experience
- 3) The learner must possess and use analytical skills to conceptualize the experience
- 4) The learner must possess decision-making and problem-solving skills in order to use the new ideas gained from the experience

Further research on Service Learning:

- When students had real responsibilities, challenging tasks, helped to plan the project, and made important decisions, involvement in service-learning projects had significant and substantive impacts on students’ increases in self-concept, political engagement, and attitudes toward out-groups. This suggests that the more students are involved not only in conducting service activities, but also in planning them and making important decisions, the more valuable their service experiences will be.
- Various studies have shown that service-learning has a positive impact in the following ways:
 - Attitudes toward social responsibilities and civic engagement
 - Communicative competence and meaningful relationships with adults
 - Growth in the kind of awareness that extends to empathic understanding, altruism, giving, and caring
 - Breadth of students’ career aspirations and opportunities
 - Future involvement in service activities and civic leadership
 - The maturation process from adolescence into adulthood
 - Breaking down cultural barriers and forming positive relationships with people beyond one’s usual social reach
 - Reduction in health risks and/or at-risk behaviours
 - Academic achievement and student motivation

Thus there is much evidence that service learning contributes strongly to development of the kinds of character traits and skills needed for leadership development.

Research on formal leadership trainings is less conclusive, viz:

- While leadership training is almost always incorporated into youth leadership development programmes, it is sometimes difficult to determine the effectiveness of training programmes alone.
- Trainings may have a limited role in changing actual leadership behaviours or attitudes, but may serve a function in increasing leadership skills or knowledge as a part of a holistic leadership development programme.
- The areas of leadership ability which may be most amenable to instruction incorporate (a) interpersonal skills or persuasive ability and (b) perceived self-efficacy, self-assuredness, or self-knowledge.

Leadership can be trained beyond concepts of leadership knowledge, but there are limitations to leadership training that would aspire to affect aspects of leadership behaviours or motivation.

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