Leadership Training

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is leadership training?

Leadership training is a broad term with no universal definition. For the purposes of this review, it refers to "programs that have been systematically designed to enhance leader knowledge, skills, abilities, and other components" and it includes "all forms of leader, managerial, and supervisory training/development programs and/or workshops" (Lacerenza et al., 2017, p. 1687). As with all training, leadership training can vary in many ways. Below are some of the more common aspects that have been empirically evaluated:

▷ Needs analysis: whether a systematic process was used to identify training needs and design the training accordingly
▷ Content: intrapersonal, interpersonal, leadership, or business skills
▷ Learning outcomes: affective, cognitive, or skills
▷ Trainees' leadership level: low, middle, or high
▷ Instructor: self-administered, internal trainer, or external trainer
▷ Training method: information based (e.g., lectures, presentations, advanced organizers, text-based training materials), demonstration based (e.g., case studies, in-person modeling, computer-generated avatars), practice based (e.g., role-play, simulations, in-basket exercises), or a combination
▷ Feedback: none vs some
▷ Source of feedback: from a single person or multiple people at different levels (known as 360-degree feedback)
▷ Delivery modality: face to face or virtual (i.e., via computer without a live instructor)
▷ Location: on site or off site
▷ Schedule: whether training is distributed across multiple sessions across time or concentrated in one mass session
▷ Attendance policy: voluntary vs. involuntary/mandatory
▷ Duration: total amount of time spent in training

Why is leadership training valuable?

Leadership training is valuable because it impacts a number of important training outcomes. Research on leadership training has explored the following outcomes: 1) trainee reactions (attitudes about training), 2) learning (a change in attitudes, motivation, knowledge or skills), 3) transfer (on-the-job behavior and performance), and 4) subordinate or organizational outcomes (e.g., subordinate perceptions of supervisor, financial or productivity outcomes; Lacerenza et

al., 2017). Overall, leadership training has positive, moderate effects on all four outcomes: reactions, learning, transfer, and results (Lacerenza et al., 2017). For the training-specific features described in the previous section, some findings are fairly straightforward and some are more complex. Based on all the different findings, below are the conclusions and recommendations that can be offered (Lacerenza et al., 2017).

▷ Reactions: Leadership training can improve participants' attitudes about training itself. Despite their popularity in practice, reactions measures are infrequently included in the research, so additional findings for this outcome are limited.

▷ Learning and transfer outcomes: Leadership training leads to improvements in all types of learning outcomes (affective, cognitive, and skill based) and transfer outcomes (affective, cognitive, skill based, and job performance). The strongest effects are for cognitive learning and skill transfer.

▷ Results outcomes: Leadership training leads to improvements in long-term results, but has a much bigger impact on organizational outcomes than subordinate outcomes.

▷ Needs analysis: Developing training on the basis of a needs analysis leads to greater learning and transfer and does not affect results outcomes; thus, it is a recommended first step.

▷ Content: All four types of content (intrapersonal, interpersonal, leadership, or business skills) lead to improvements in learning, transfer, and results (effects on reactions are unknown). More specifically, programs focused on business skills have the strongest effect on learning and transfer. In contrast, the other three types of content, which focus more on soft skills, have a greater impact on results.

▷ Trainees' leadership level: Leaders of every level benefit from training, but transfer is most strongly improved for low-level leaders, relative to middle- or high-level leaders, who are less likely to change on-the-job behavior after training. Thus, training should be offered to all leaders, with greater emphasis on transfer for middle and upper leaders.

▷ Instructor: Leadership training leads to improved outcomes for all three types of instructor (self-administered, internal, and external), but the impact is much smaller for self-administered training. Thus, if circumstances allow, instructor-led training is recommended over self-administered training.

▷ Training method: Generally speaking, outcomes are best when training involves information-, demonstration-, and practice-based methods. If only one delivery method can be used, practice is recommended.

▷ Feedback: Inclusion of feedback in leadership training does not affect reactions, learning, or results but does improve transfer, whether the source is a single person or multiple people at different levels (i.e., 360-degree feedback).

▷ Delivery modality: Face-to-face and virtual training have an equal effect on learning, and the effects on reactions and results are unknown. Transfer, however, is greater with face-to-face training, which makes it a recommended approach.

▷ Location: Training location does not affect learning or transfer but results are better when training is on site versus off site.

▷ Schedule: When training is spread across multiple sessions across time, it is no better for learning than when it is delivered all at once, but it does improve transfer and results. Thus, a spaced schedule is recommended.

▷ Attendance: General recommendations cannot be made here because the findings are mixed. Whether attendance is voluntary or mandatory has no effect on learning outcomes, but voluntary attendance improves transfer outcomes yet compromises results outcomes. Regarding this last finding, it is speculated that because attendance is much lower in voluntary training, there are fewer participants able to contribute to organizational results, which are more of a collective outcome.

▷ Duration: The overall duration of the leadership program does not affect reactions, learning, or transfer, but does affect results; longer programs lead to greater improvements in organizational and subordinate outcomes.

Researchers have translated the main findings into more practical indicators, reporting that leadership training programs can lead to a 25% increase in learning, a 28% increase in leadership behaviors performed on the job, a 20% increase in overall job performance, an 8% increase in subordinate outcomes, and a 25% increase in organizational outcomes (Lacerenza et al., 2017). For practitioners, the process of selecting or developing a training program can be informed by the empirical evidence thus far, even though not every finding leads to a simple recommendation; the relevance and value of different findings may depend on the goals of the training. In addition, it is further recommended that leadership training programs be evaluated, to examine program-specific reactions, learning, transfer, and long-term results.

QIC-WD Takeaways

► Leadership training programs can lead to a 25% increase in learning, a 28% increase in leadership behaviors performed on the job, a 20% increase in overall job performance, an 8% increase in subordinate outcomes, and a 25% increase in organizational outcomes.

► The first step in developing or selecting a leadership program should be to conduct a needs analysis.

► All four types of content (intrapersonal, interpersonal, leadership, or business skills) are valuable, but business training has the strongest effect on learning and transfer, whereas the other three types have a bigger impact on results.

► Leaders of all levels can benefit from training, but middle- and upper-level leaders need more support for transfer.

► Instructor-led training is recommended over self-administered training.

► Outcomes are best when training involves information-, demonstration-, and practice-based methods.

► Feedback and face-to-face training are recommended because they improve transfer.

► When designing a schedule, it is best to spread training across multiple sessions across time, versus concentrating it in one mass session.
► Holding training off site and making it longer both improve organizational and subordinate outcomes.

References

Lacerenza, C. N., Reyes, D. L., Marlow, S. L., Joseph, D. L., & Salas. E. (2017). Leadership training design, delivery, and implementation: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 102,* 1686–1718.

Author(s)

Megan Paul, PhD, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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