

Leader Development and Education in Afghan Ministries

Reid B. Lohr and Robert Stapp, - April 2012

“There are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and cost of comfortable inaction.

- John F. Kennedy

Overview

The role of Ministers and their management teams in today’s environment is quickly changing from one of senior management and being the decision-maker to one of helping people face reality and to mobilize them to make change. Up until recently, the subject of leadership and the area of leadership development have generally been ruled by academics from the behaviorist school of thought.

Unfortunately, much of this has been in the form of misunderstood guidance by so-called capacity development agents. Simply put, the behavioral theorists taught that, by learning how to effectively perform the right “behaviors” (planning, organizing, directing, controlling, delegating, motivating, influencing, visioning, developing, coaching, etc., etc.) and by mastering the skill sets and subject matter associated with those behaviors, anyone could be an effective leader.

Moreover, the vast majority of popular books on leadership make the assumption that individuals who hold senior positions in large and successful organizations (government, military, academia, or corporations) are, de facto, great leaders, and the books are thus devoted to studying and documenting the behavioral characteristics of those individuals, clearly implying that anyone can be a great leader if you only follow their example.

As we all know – change is often not easy, either internal to the organization or individually for those who must take risk and provide direction to others, especially when role-models are few. In the complex operating reality of Afghanistan, donors often get a rude awakening when faced with the realities of different cultures and ethnicities, deeply embedded organizational precedents and systemic imperatives, be they domestic or international. This complexity and the reality it presents require

Leader Development and Education in Afghan Ministries

Reid B. Lohr and Robert Stapp, - April 2012

leaders of today and tomorrow to make an attitudinal shift to one of systemic thinking and strategizing and the ability to respond to the behavioral complexities of multiple individuals and groups.

Situational Analysis

Mustering the fortitude and building the capacity to deal with this reality is a central function of a Minister trying to lead and develop a Ministry – especially in an environment which only knows dysfunctional behavior. The current hierarchical structures are extensively interconnected; however secondary impacts of decision-making are often unrealized until situations become critical when effective remedial action is either too late or simply no longer possible. Linear decision-making must be set aside in favor of facing multiple interconnected elements that often must be faced immediately with each having an impact on the other. With that said, there are three elements of reality which often must be faced simultaneously. 1) What values do ‘we’ stand for and where are the gaps between our behavior and our values? 2) How do we access, utilize and/or leverage the resources, skill and talents within our organization. 3) What opportunities does the future hold and are there gaps between those opportunities and our ability to capitalize on them?

While learning new behaviors, skills and subject areas are undeniably important, what the behaviorist school has traditionally left out is that leadership virtually always takes place in the context of an organization; that organizations are complex systems; and that organizations, like nested Russian dolls, contain numerous complex sub-systems which are embedded in increasingly complex larger systems. Ministry leaders, unless they are systemic thinkers by nature, will be less than effective unless they fully take into account that changes in any part of even one of those systems can impact any or even all the other parts of those systems in often unpredictable and surprising ways.

Leader Development and Education in Afghan Ministries

Reid B. Lohr and Robert Stapp, - April 2012

In the past it was common practice for Ministers to model a behavior where they influenced or more often demanded that the organization follow the their own often restricted and myopic vision.

Afghanistan today is quickly transitioning to a social system and a country where this approach will have limited shelf-life. Ministry leaders must now “influence’ those in the Ministry under their leadership to face problems, identify common threads, and recognize and rise to the challenge of opportunities.

Building this capacity along with the ability to mobilize people to tackle tough challenges is what defines the new job of the Minister if the country is to stand on its own and, ideally, prosper. Ministry leaders of today will empower ordinary people to create extraordinary results, whereas Ministers of yesterday, if they produced results at all, were results predetermined by rigid systems and the specifications of donors.

Ministry leaders of today need to have the stomach for inter- and intra-organizational conflict and uncertainty both as individuals, within their organizations and certainly when facing their critics. The days of unilateral thinking and decision-making have passed. Understanding and dealing with the reality of complex situations demands viewing issues and seeking solutions using a diverse set of lenses. These may include but not be exclusive to: historical, religious (and variations within), ethnic, tribal, political, regional, socioeconomic, moral, and of course national policy and the interpretation thereof. Few of these will synch but they all deserve understanding and consideration. Throughout this process, the leaders seek the best path forward without ever really knowing which ideas are going to flourish and which will die. The job of the Minister is to lead the dialogue about what is essential to be considered and what is not.

This broadening of perspective on Ministry leadership development and education that so desperately needs to take place in Afghanistan is that leadership effectiveness cannot be built exclusively around *controlling* the future; rather it depends on being able to foster an environment in which information

Leader Development and Education in Afghan Ministries

Reid B. Lohr and Robert Stapp, - April 2012

flows freely and in which interactions happen frequently and often spontaneously, an environment that *enables* a productive and effective future. Ministers and the ministry leadership must understand systems and complexity so that they can cultivate largely undirected interactions among individuals, groups and sets of groups to create desirable but largely uncontrolled – and uncontrollable – futures.

As Ministry leaders transition, as they inevitably will, the constant that needs to be maintained is dynamic listening, genuine curiosity and empathy about “what is going to happen here”. A key flaw among many leaders is getting seduced into trying to provide all the answers. Ministry leaders will need to assemble confidants and allies – for emotional support, as sources of information, and to draw fire on their behalf. However, in the process of attempting to influence the organization to move forward in the same direction, the leadership should never let consensus stand in the way of making a decision. Leadership is about taking responsibility, making a decision– and moving forward while continually access, utilizing, and capitalizing on organizational dynamics.

Beginning the Transition

Phase 1: Ministry Leadership Team

This critical and needed transition will not come easily. There is no quick fix or off-the shelf solution. Be it in a developing country or post-conflict environment, few Ministers have a realistic grasp of the complexity of their ministry, its multiple cultures and well-being, much less of the complexity of the larger government and social system in which it is embedded. However, through a series of workshops, practical exercises, remote learning and adult teaching techniques, progress to a desired end-state of effective organizational connectivity and functionality can be achieved. Initially, it is recommended that work with a Ministry leadership team is focused in eight fundamental areas which will enhance

Leader Development and Education in Afghan Ministries

Reid B. Lohr and Robert Stapp, - April 2012

leadership development and promote a continuous evolution and growth which will be applicable in most organizational scenarios.

1. Taking Responsibility – owning their own behavior, results and consequences, and not blaming circumstances
2. Taking Action – making the necessary decisions in a timely manner in spite of uncertainty and, often, unresolvable ambiguity
3. Acknowledging Progress – achieving benchmarks and celebrating successes as achieved
4. Promoting and Affirming Relationships – developing people, engaging others and being attentive to their needs and concerns
5. Understanding Communications Styles – learning to speak with clarity while “seeking first to understand” through active listening
6. Decision Making – consensus vs. inclusive vs. autocratic and when to use each
7. Team Building – what is a team and how to build diversity at home and in global contexts
8. System Thinking – the art vs. the science of leadership

In each of these eight fundamental areas, seasoned experts will lead discussions, assist in expanding the definition of leadership, explore leadership issues, and help develop an understanding and options for addressing the complex environments in which leaders find themselves. These capacity development experts discuss in depth the nature of the challenges the leadership will face – both individually and as leaders and demonstrate the necessity for adapting leadership approaches based on situational dynamics. Most importantly, the capacity development team will strongly emphasize that Ministry leadership must understand the tolerances of those they lead: *the perfect may be the enemy of the good-enough.*

Leader Development and Education in Afghan Ministries

Reid B. Lohr and Robert Stapp, - April 2012

In addition to the basic leadership education training, the importance of continuous learning and knowledge sharing – in particular, learning from the experience of colleagues and others – will be repeatedly stressed. To begin to build an organizational learning dynamic, the capacity development team will propose to create a Leadership Development and Education Community of Practice (LP&E/CoP), either within the particular Ministry or across a selected group of Ministries.

Drawing lessons from successful USAID initiatives in this area, the Leadership Development and Education LD&E CoP would bring together emerging leaders (aka LD&E CoP members) in a series of trainings and events to discuss leadership challenges, establish and fortify professional relationships, and identify and leverage opportunities. All activities would support participants to improve their core leadership skills and to apply these skills to their careers.

The LD&E CoP would also feature an interactive, on-line professional community portal. This portal would serve multiple purposes. It would maintain the links between participants, experts, and learning institutions. It would provide access to niche groups as well as topical teleconferences and webinars – keeping participants connected both to ideas and to a larger community of professionals and experts who can support them as they implement lessons learned in their organizations, or when they just need motivation.

The LD&E CoP would also empower members to catalyze change by supporting them to build their professional networks. The CoP approach creates a dynamic two-way dialogue with emerging leaders, while also facilitating peer-to-peer value creation. Members directly influence the content and discussions, leveraging the site to identify and contact peers likely to have information relevant to their specific needs when they need it, uploading practices for peer review and feedback, and launching discussion threads and blogs to surface contrary views and opinions regarding their most urgent

Leader Development and Education in Afghan Ministries

Reid B. Lohr and Robert Stapp, - April 2012

concerns. The technology and approach is available and can be expanded and customized over time to meet changing needs and objectives.

Phase 2: Organization Development in the Ministry

The Leadership, Management, and Team Development for a stronger and more productive ministry is critical for the future development of Afghanistan and is an educational and learning process which must start now.

With the quickly changing role and increasing responsibilities of the Ministry, including the direction and implementation of GIRoA and Ministry policy, coupled with significant increases in new staff to meet these critical demands, there is a need to address leadership, management and team building skills within the ministry and in its inter-government commitment. Without a concerted focus on thoroughly developing the leadership and management skills of its own human resources necessary to address the demands of its changing role, the potential of the leadership of the Ministry as a critical and strategic player in achieving Afghan development goals and objectives will not be realized.

Below is the framework for a program that can be institutionalized within a Ministry – be it in Afghanistan or any other transitioning country. It will be delivered individually and in groups through specialized training, and effectively merged with technology to deliver a comprehensive organizational development program.

Leader Development and Education in Afghan Ministries

Reid B. Lohr and Robert Stapp, - April 2012

Human Capital Lifecycle:

Attach & Access

<u>Step 1:</u> <i>Attract & Access</i>	<u>Step 2:</u> <i>Develop</i>	<u>Step 3:</u> <i>Engage & Align</i>	<u>Step 4:</u> <i>Transition</i>
<u>Scope of Services</u>			
• Talent attraction planning	• Coaching	• Employee engagement and retention	• Outplacement
• Competency Modeling	• Leadership development	• Employee branding	• Career Decisions
• Individual assessment	• Team Development	• Career management	• Organizational transitional planning
• Team assessment	• Professional skill development	• Strategy implementation	• Organizational transitional implementation
• Organizational assessment	• Succession management	• Change management	• Redeployment
		• Performance management	

Within this framework will be targeted develop and capacity building in the areas of:

strategic planning • tactical planning • strategy implementation • change management • team building • management and leadership styles • situational leadership • communication techniques • crisis management • new leadership • decision-making • participative management • industry shifts • effective meeting • culture • goal setting • facilitation and intergroup relationships.

It is not expected that anyone will be an expert in all of the above areas as all training, education and skill enhancement must be complemented by practice and application through daily interactions.

However, the Ministry and its staff will be better position to provide and fulfill its leadership role for Afghanistan.