

# Developing the Leader Within

## Foundations of Effective Techniques



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## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

There is a growing need in the transit industry to develop new leadership talent. This study aims to promote the development of new leaders so as to preserve and enhance the transit industry as a whole in tackling the inevitable challenges that lie ahead.

The increasing number of impending retirements from transit executives and the need for improved succession planning are common industry concerns for both public and private sector transit organizations. At the same time, higher educational institutions and technical training schools have limited programs focused on the technical and management nuances unique to the public transportation industry. The opportunity and need for leaders to develop and grow within organizations is greater than ever before.

*If your actions inspire  
others to dream more,  
learn more and become  
more, you are a leader.  
~ John Quincy Adams*

Recognizing the need to develop and retain leadership in order to further advance public transportation as a preferred transportation alternative, elevate public transportation as a career of choice for young professionals, and provide continuity for leadership changes within organizations, our team focused our research on how organizations and executives foster leadership development. We also studied, and outline in our report, the challenges faced in developing strong leadership, the benefits realized by focusing on leadership development and effective ways to enhance leadership development both for the organization and its individual employees.

Leadership is an evolutionary process both for individuals and for organizations. To better understand how leaders emerge and develop within organizations, we first looked at the internal and external factors that influence leadership growth and development. For purposes of discussion, our research divided the factors into the individual, the executive or supervisory team and the organization. This research included an understanding of how the leadership development process continues for individuals already in executive positions to better understand how executives sharpen and develop their personal leadership skills and management approaches even at the pinnacle of their careers.

Since the organization is the overarching influencer of both the executive management team and the emerging leader, we wanted to also study the organizational culture and what types of work environments are more supportive of leadership development which in turn could result in greater opportunities for new leaders to emerge. Another area of our research was to explore how executives create opportunities to develop leaders throughout the organization and the benefits achieved by creating a culture within the organization that encourages personal leadership growth and development. Our research compiles various source data from books,



Before you are a leader,  
success is all about  
growing yourself. When  
you become a leader,  
success is all about  
growing others.  
~ Jack Welch

papers and interviews from industry leaders, executive management coaches and individuals identified as emerging leaders.

Public transportation is increasingly becoming a mode of choice for various generations. Through focused organizational and professional development, public transportation can also become the career of choice for the younger generations. There are many qualities that make a good leader, and instilling those qualities in a future leader requires strong mentorship, preparation, and effort. Catering to a new generation of leaders is essential to the continuation of excellent transit service throughout the country.

With strong leadership across the generations, the industry and its public and private organizations will sustain, thrive, innovate and continue to provide safe, efficient, reliable, and customer focused mobility solutions.



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## LEADERSHIP, A BROAD PERSPECTIVE

Leadership is not a new topic. Leadership is a point of discussion in every industry, time period, and region in the world throughout history. As a result, it is important to recognize the necessary steps that must be taken to ensure strong leadership throughout the organization and the industry and an understanding of successful strategies to create an organizational environment that allow leaders to emerge, develop and advance.

Studies of leadership have produced theories that touch on ideas surrounding the traits, situational interactions, functions, behavior, power, vision, values, charisma, and intelligence that make a good leader. Some define leadership as the act of inspiring people to perform and engage in achieving a goal. A simpler definition is “a leader is someone who people follow, and who guides or directs others.” Others define leadership as “organizing a group of people to achieve a common goal.”



Leadership stories are all around us. If you turn on SportsCenter, you might hear about how a certain individual was pivotal in guiding a team to victory. If you look in your social media streams, you will see someone sharing a leadership quote or recommending a leadership book. Politics is built upon the idea of leadership and demonstrates the direct and

indirect impacts that leadership quality can have on individuals and organizations in society.

After filtering through the various points of view on leadership, we have elected to view leadership as the ability to create an environment where individuals willingly apply their unique abilities to a common mission. For us and the executives we interviewed, leadership is not about organizing and delegating responsibilities. It is "a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others and the accomplishment of a common task".

Leadership is all about people. Extracting the full potential from the workforce is the job of a leader and speaks to the impending industry workforce challenges our study is attempting to address. As a leader, the executive's responsibility goes beyond merely organizing and maintaining business processes. Collectively inspiring a group to share a common vision, work ethic, and sense of dedication to a project or service delivery is equally important to maintaining order and organization within a team.

Leadership and learning  
are indispensable to each  
other.

~ John F. Kennedy

During our interviews with leading transit executives, we heard them describing people-centric leadership. They, along with others who worked under them, noted examples of the executives allowing people to try new things, embrace change, overcome fear, and step outside of their comfort zone. They challenged their employees while also encouraging them and fostering their growth.

Perhaps the strongest quality a leader must possess is the thirst for knowledge and self-improvement. We found that leaders we interviewed love to learn to be better leaders and in turn love to teach and inspire their colleagues or subordinates to continuously learn and grow. Jeff Arndt, CEO of VIA Metropolitan Transit in San Antonio, TX (VIA) noted that he learns by teaching others.

Leadership maturation and development happens through continued education and training. Executives and managers who attend leadership training programs develop more fluidly and gain the ability to learn from other leaders, social networks, leadership books or seminars. Executives encouraged developing leaders to remember this is a process that takes time, dedication, and hard work. Becoming an exceptional motivator requires more than the desire to excel professionally. A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and most importantly shows the way. Core to leadership is a message that must be conveyed in a manager's every decision, request or demand.

- Be true to your passion
- Preserve the desire to move forward
- Others will follow and believe in your message as you grow.

There are many challenges that a manager will face in his or her ascendancy into becoming a strong leader. The following excerpt does well to show the contradictions and challenges in maintaining good leadership: *Leadership has always been in high demand while simultaneously being in short supply. Quality leadership is rare and special care and attention must be paid to the continuous development of strong, moral, and exceptional leaders. The importance of quality leadership cannot be understated, the methods with which this level of leadership will be achieved, however, is a different challenge in and of itself.*

## RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS

Our research efforts focused on investigating what goes into the growth and development of good leaders in conjunction with that which enables their continued success. To better understand how leaders help others grow within their organization is pivotal to this effort. We also wanted to study how executives can create an organizational culture that allows other



leaders to emerge. Building an organizational platform from which good leaders will launch is often overlooked.

The touch points shown in the adjacent graphic exemplify our approach to better understanding the cultivation of strong leadership within organizations. During our study and as laid out in this paper, we looked at leadership development within the individual, within the organization and for individual employees. Our paper will discuss what we have learned about leadership development from executives, executive management coaches and emerging leaders, techniques used, challenges that need to be overcome and the benefits realized both for the organization and the individual.



## INTERVIEW PROCESS

The purpose of the interviews was to collect personal perspectives on career evolution, leadership style, leadership growth, leadership opportunities and leadership development. A sample of our interview questions is included in the appendix of our report.

To ensure a broad understanding of leadership development within the transit industry, we initially started with seasoned

### Interview Topics:

- Career Evolution
- Leadership Style
- Leadership Growth
- Leadership Development

**A great leader's courage  
to fulfill his vision comes  
from passion, not  
position.  
~ John Maxwell**

leaders in the transit industry from both public and private organizations. We then asked those leaders to recommend additional executives to interview along with individuals within the industry that were emerging as future leaders. We then interviewed two executive leadership coaches to bring depth to our understanding of leadership and organizational development.

The transit industry is fortunate to have such a depth and breadth of leadership examples. The executives

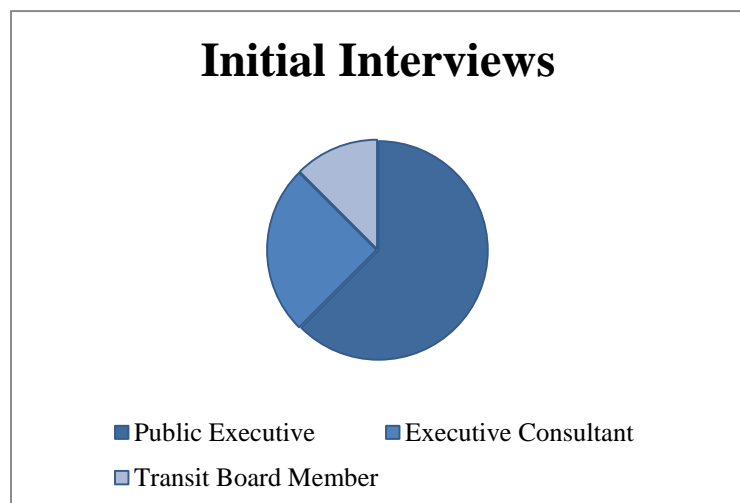
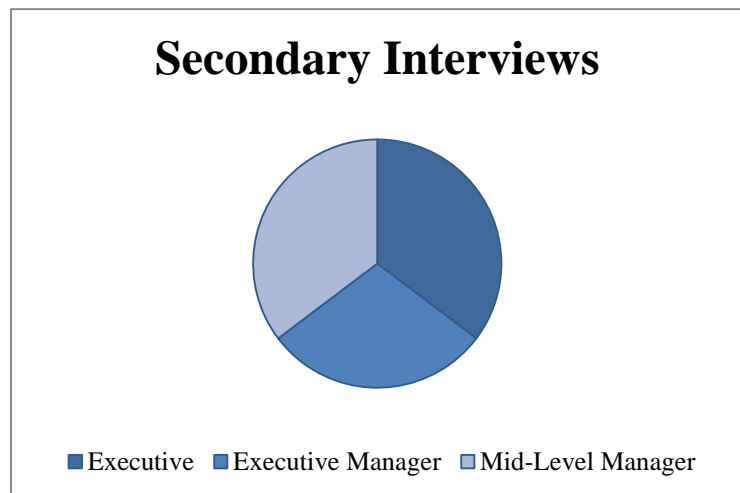
interviewed offered a rich history of leadership evolution in the transit industry. During our interview with Peter Varga, CEO of Interurban Transit Partnership, he mentioned that he was in a Leadership class of what was then called Urban Mass Transportation Administration. The Section 10 Training Class was conducted by former General Manager Frank Lichtanski at Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, CA. The grant funding for this program was enacted on September 8, 1966.

The leaders in both our initial and secondary interviewees had some of the same conclusions about leadership. These similar beliefs included having courage, communicating effectively and believing strongly in what you are doing.

We used the interviews to take our study a step further by also exploring if situations added an opportunity to develop or identify future leaders. The interviews also concentrated on their leadership style, their traits, what they would look for in others to become potential leaders, and how they develop leadership potential.

Of the sixteen initial interviews, twelve were transit CEO's or Board Members. Twenty secondary interviews were also conducted. The charts give a representation of the individuals selected and whether they were in the public or private sectors.

The majority were transit executives. A quarter was from the private sector and the rest were Board members. The additional interviewees were split almost equally.



## LEADERSHIP TRAITS

Leadership is about setting a new direction or vision for a group. A leader steps up in times of crisis, and is able to think and act creatively in difficult situations. Leaders need to gradually change leadership style from more direction to less direction and more support, and finally to less direction and support. Leadership skills can be enhanced through coaching or mentoring.

A good leader uses their talent to lead, guide, direct and/or inspire other people to perform and engage in achieving a collective goal. Leadership is about creating an environment where individuals willingly apply their unique abilities to a common mission and building strong relationships. Leadership is about looking beyond oneself to make a difference.

All of the leaders that we spoke to in our interviews said that having a vision was very important to becoming a leader. In our interview with William W. Millar, Retired President of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), his vision of leadership revolved around several guiding principles:

- Establishing a clear vision
- Sharing that vision with others so that they will follow willingly
- Providing the information, knowledge and methods to realize that vision
- Coordinating and balancing the conflicting interests of all members and stakeholders

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

During our interviews, we heard many thoughts regarding leadership and personal growth and development. We found that there were three keys to leadership growth and development.

1. Be a visionary with a sense of purpose with strong and clear communication skills. Listening is an important part of communication. Listening allows you to know what is happening and keeps one grounded.
2. Develop a support network. Leaders need industry peers to be their mentors and, likewise, need to nurture and support others within their organization.
3. Be Authentic. Recognize that one's career path, decisions and leadership style is not going to mirror peers and the same is true for the leader who is mentoring. Be true and allow the same for employees as they develop. This requires a sense of confidence and a recognition of guiding principles which shapes integrity.

# Leadership Development

Vision

Support

Authenticity

Sense of Purpose

Clarity

Mentor & Coaching

Peer Network

Integrity

Confidence

A life isn't significant  
except for its impact on  
other lives.

~ Jackie Robinson

Vision is one of the fundamental foundations in leadership development. Emerging leaders must push toward this goal while realizing that risk and initiative is necessary to fulfill the vision. Leaders must make commitments, follow through and have a sense and clarity of purpose around a vision. Believe in the vision. Ask the question, what can be done to be better? As John Shedd, President & Chairman of the Board of Marshall Field & Company once said, "Opportunities are seldom labeled." An emerging leader must create

the opportunity to lead or find someone to assist in the creation.

Mentoring and coaching are necessary foundations of successful leadership development. All of the executives that were interviewed talked about the importance of these foundations. In our interview with William Millar, he talked about the importance of having mentors in every area of responsibility. He also mentioned the value of walking with the executive to see how he/she interacts with people. He talked about the importance of finding someone to emulate. In our interview with Mike Scanlon, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer, San Mateo County Transit District, San Carlos, CA, he said "know what you don't know." Recognizing that one can learn leadership from a variety of formal and informal relationships, Phil Washington, noted that his first mentor was the church janitor from whom he learned about hard work and dedication. He also noted that conversations with mentors do not have to be structured, even though the venue might be a conference. "Grabbing someone and sitting down and chatting is a great way to be yourself and the person who you are talking to can be themselves.

Michael Melaniphy, President & CEO of the American Public Transportation Association told us that one should replenish the pool of network individuals. He mentioned how important it is "to keep up your network of people. People are always evolving, moving to other organizations, other industries."

In his book "Everyman Foot Prince in the Snow" by James Whitfield Ellison, Robert Prince, retired General Manager of MBTA (the T), Boston, MA talks about building an internal group of people from disciplines across the MBTA, now known as the kitchen cabinet. Mr. Prince states that "we would hold meetings periodically for coffee and to discuss the inner workings of the T. Opportunities and personal coping strategies were topics, but the camaraderie was most important; it was how we survived..."

Coaching and peer networks are two more foundations to leadership development. All the leaders we interviewed developed and created opportunities for emerging leaders. Phil Washington, indicated how vitally important it was to "educate and train successors." Flora Castillo, Board Member, New Jersey Transit, told us to develop a rapport with an individual and to "keep an on eye on them." Spending time discussing work styles, personalities and

backgrounds can build on trust that could pay off later, both for the individual and the organization.

The last foundation of leadership development is authenticity. Authenticity is supported by having integrity and confidence. Paul Skoutelas, Sr. Vice President & Market Leader, Transit and Rail, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Pittsburgh, PA told us during our research that “a person should always conduct oneself appropriately and to be cognizant that people are watching.”

**Preparation time is the most valuable time.**  
~ F. Charles Emery,  
DCTA Board Chairman

There is an inter-relationship between integrity and communications. Employees want honest messages and are sensitive to any hypocrisy. Deliver results, establish credibility, embrace flexibility and treat people with dignity and respect. Phil Washington noted that “integrity is a common thread amongst good leaders. Good leaders must be decisive, competent, technically and tactically proficient, and have personal courage, commitment and compassion.”

Transit leaders’ actions must model behavior that is wanted. If the leader does not act consistently with a vision or communications, why should anyone else.

## EXECUTIVE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Leadership is an evolutionary process both for individuals and for organizations. To better understand how leaders emerge and develop within organizations, our first step was to



understand how successful transit executives advanced in the industry, mature as leaders and techniques they use to continue to foster their own growth and development.

### *Career Progression of Executives*

There were many similarities in the progression of the executives interviewed in terms of both career advancement and leadership development.

Many of the CEO’s interviewed started being a leader at a young age. Leadership characteristics were



demonstrated whether in elementary school, boy/girl scouts, or team captain in sports. This natural tendency for leadership continued on into their career.

**It is okay to make mistakes, just don't let them be big ones.**  
~ Roger Snoble, Retired CEO

Once in the transit industry they set a trajectory for the brass ring. The CEO's always had a career advancement or development plan in order to achieve their goal. Many were strategic, and sometimes risky, about career moves by seeking positions that would address a recognized professional development need or provide more exposure to different transit modes. However, many of the CEOs interviewed did not start with that office in mind. This

desire developed because someone somewhere saw potential and mentored them allowing them to see the possibilities.

And while we saw many similarities in how the CEOs advanced within their careers, many noted that the path to the top is not as clearly defined as it once was. "In the past, specific employees were groomed to be promoted to a specific position, but this assumes that the future of your agency will mirror the present," stressed Jarod Varner, Executive Director of Central Arkansas Transit Authority. He stressed that a push for innovations will drive agencies to seek candidates with different, broader skill sets.

### *Personal Development Techniques*

Most of those CEO's interviewed had a career goal and a plan on how to get there. But once in the executive suite, how did the executive continue to hone and develop his or her leadership skills? The leader never accepted that learning stops, it is a continuous process throughout their career.

One of the questions asked during the interview process was how do you get out of your comfort zone and expand your horizons. Executives responded by discussing the need to further develop skills that the leader needs in order to be better rounded. The leader does not have to be an expert in all disciplines. The leader just needs to be able to recognize the principles of the transit industry and have good people in supporting roles.

A leader should be able to recognize what is not known, recognize his or her opportunities for improvement and seek opportunities to learn from others, whether it is a mentor or a subordinate. Learning could also include professional training provided by the industry or through books, articles and Ted Talks series. Most of the executives interviewed dedicated some time to their own personal growth and development.





As part of their personal development, executives noted that they welcomed feedback and input and specifically how listening skills plays into the feedback. In our interview with Peter Varga, CEO, Interurban Transit Partnership, Grand Rapids, MI, Peter reiterated the importance of having good listening skills.

As an example, Peter talked about Doris Kearns book “Team of Rivals.” The book discusses how Abraham Lincoln made decisions. “Lincoln would always listen to people first, he’d say, ‘what do you think about this or that?’ Lincoln would take that all in and he might change his mind or he might not change his mind but that was the exercise to taking in of different kinds of points of view”. Leaders need all the information from different viewpoints to make sound decisions. Listening is essential to a leader as it can open doors for new opportunities, new knowledge and potential partnerships. Listening is a crucial part of leadership and is a key element of personal growth.

**You may not be in control of situations that arise, but you are in control on how you handle situations.**

**~ Peter Varga,  
CEO, Interurban Transit  
Partnership**

Roger Snoble, Retired CEO, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, CA, provided tremendous insight into leadership development, career progression and mentorship, all from both a personal and organizational perspective. Key suggestions from his interview included being honest with yourself and having courage to step outside of your comfort zone. One specific example from his early career development happened during a board presentation where he spoke very fast. Someone within his agency gave him some advice...use a metronome. Roger took this advice to heart and practiced and practiced until talking fast was never an issue again. Leaders are in a perpetual state of self-improvement. Reinventing themselves to fit with the times and the people is good advice for leaders at any stage of development.

### ***Personal Development Challenges***

Some of the overarching challenges that inhibited executives from further leadership growth had to do with interpersonal relationships. These challenges include:

- Ego
- Self-Doubt
- Risk Aversion
- Transition Adjustments
- Ineffective Communication
- Fear
- Balance
- Resources



Our interviews not only helped identify challenges but also discuss methods to overcome those challenges. Grace Crunican, Chief Executive Officer, Bay Area Rapid Transit, San Francisco, CA provided advice when self-doubt leads to fear. She stated, “I think fear keeps people from moving on and that’s why courage needs to be there to say to the fear ‘get the hell out of here, I can do this’ or failure isn’t so bad.” Peter Varga provided similar advice to overcome one’s aversion to risk. He remarked “It is okay to make mistakes, just don’t let them be big ones.”

**If the chair is empty, sit  
in the seat.  
~ Michael Scanlon,  
General Manager/CEO,  
San Mateo County  
Transit District**

Not believing in yourself will become an obstacle; gain confidence with small victories, one at a time, and take the time to celebrate them as they come. Studying how other leaders made decisions will lend itself to improving one’s own decision-making abilities and building confidence. There is no playbook for leading in extraordinary times. Rely on past leadership “moments” in how to deal with the situation can help move past these times.

Forgetting where you came from can bring its own set of challenges. Networking and cultivating relationships across the organization and industry will pay dividends for aspiring transit leaders. Having the respect from individuals across the organization and the industry does not come by accident; it comes by working hard and having mutual respect.

Executives also noted some basic challenges including limited time and resources to focus on their own personal and professional development. Funding will play a role in the development of the next transit leaders; it will not only take a commitment from the individual but from the organization supporting the individual as well.

## **AN ORGANIZATION FOCUSED ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Leadership development is strongly influenced by the organization. Developing a leader requires a strong commitment from the organization, a strong commitment from the executive and a strong commitment from the emerging leader. As we advanced in our research and built off of the personal development strategies of executives, we began looking at the methods used to nurture leaders within an organization and the characteristics of organizations that allow leaders to emerge.

For leaders to emerge within an organization, personal growth and development must be a foundation of the organizational culture. An audience member during our July Capstone session noted that “CULTURE EATS LEADERSHIP FOR LUNCH.” To create a leadership

development culture, one must understand that a culture is more than formal rules and procedures established by the Board of Directors or defined by the Executive Team.



While the culture is built off of the organization's vision, values and practices, the organizational culture is the way people think and act within an organization. As noted in the book, "Change the Culture, Change the Game," a culture is built by employee experiences, beliefs, and actions. Experiences and beliefs drive action. The collective actions of employees determine results. The results measure performance and indicate if the organization's mission is being achieved. "Your culture exists and it can either work for you or against you."

Executives we interviewed stressed that creating an organization that works for you has the same benefits of as investing in individual employee's growth and development. These benefits included increased productivity, growth, efficiency and employee retention. Innovation was another benefit to a development-centric organization. This finding was noted by both executives we interviewed and identified in a recent study conducted by the Alliance for Innovation and the Arizona State University. This study looked at characteristics that distinguish innovative, high-performing local governments.

### *Characteristics of a Supportive Work Environment*

What does a high-performing organization look like that centered on employee growth and development? The best indication was provided when talking with those that have most recently benefited from leadership development, the emerging leaders.

When talking with the emerging leaders, they described not only how they were being developed and supported by the Executives of the organization, but also how their experiences within the organization were supportive of personal and professional growth. The individuals described the work environment as supportive of people trying



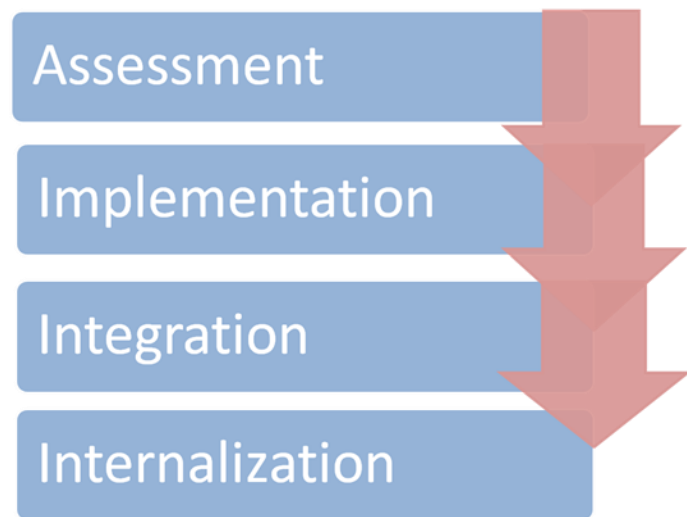
new things and being open to new ideas. The environment supported collaboration between departments and empowered employees throughout the organization to make decisions and take on additional tasks. The leadership team often modeled “quiet leadership” which means they improved the employee’s individual decision making process without making the decision for them. And while these organizations offered a great deal of flexibility and empowerment, they also maintained focus on the core mission and accountability.

As referenced in a recent article in *Public Management*, The Alliance for Innovation found similar characteristics of the high performing local governments studied but noted that internal collaboration was central to organizational success. The study noted that organizations that support internal collaboration and cross-functional teaming arrangements “produces effective results that a manager wouldn’t otherwise be able to achieve following the old school “silo” mentality of problem solving.” The article further summarizes that successful cross functional teams benefit from diverse ideas and leverage that diversity to create new solutions to everyday problems. To successfully function, the organization needs to be comfortable with mistakes and offer encouragement to try again.

## ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How can the executive team create an organizational culture that fosters leadership development and creates a work environment that inspires action and positive results? Based on our research and discussions with executives, we have identified four steps to building an organizational culture that cultivates leaders. Those steps include: assessment, implementation, integration, and internalization. The latter stage is when the desired culture truly becomes second nature and is capable of being sustained over time.

To achieve the ultimate goal, the executive team develops a baseline understanding where the organization is and what are the employee’s beliefs and experiences. VIA in San Antonio did this by conducting a survey of their organization as part of their culture mapping effort. The Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) surveyed staff to define their ideal organization and gauge the current organization’s alignment with that ideal. Others used a SWOT analysis to assess the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that influence the organization’s work environment.



This information can then be used to collectively define what type of culture is desired and then develop an action plan for implementation. Some organizations such as DCTA used the action plan to detail what needs to be done and how the results will be measured and reported. Executives we interviewed that have led cultural changes noted that communicating expectations was critical. People need to understand their role in the implementation, they will be held accountable for their participation, and results will be measured. Shirley DeLibero, former APTA Chairperson and currently President of DeLibero Transportation Strategies, recommended including the board members and key stakeholders in the discussion. They also need to understand their role in the organization and how they influence its culture.

Once the action plan has been developed and is underway, the organization moves into the integration phase. The desired results are incorporated throughout the organizational systems and processes. The executive management team is being trained not only on technical skills needed to do their jobs but on the soft skills as well. They are equipped to carry out the vision of employees' personal growth and development. The executives we interviewed stressed the importance of clarity and consistency when communicating one's vision. The vision, or desired results, for the organization and expectations of employees should be stated and restated continuously.

Finally to understand where you are in the process, assess often and seek feedback throughout. Monitor and report the results so everyone can understand your progress. Survey employees to understand where the organization is in regards to its goals. Regular monitoring will help the executive team understand whether or not the desired culture has been internalized throughout the organization. Remember it is a process. Once it becomes part of your culture, it still has to be sustained and maintained.

Jeff Arndt, Chief Executive Officer, with VIA, described an organizational development process that started with a culture mapping exercise and resulted in five organizational characteristics that describe the desired organizational culture. The process included the creation of multi-disciplinary teams from throughout the organization to support the effort and resulted in a desired organization where employees see themselves as owners, are focused on the customer and collaborate and communicate between departments (see appendix). Other organizational elements included an organization that has creative value, encourages new ideas and adapts to changing market conditions and an organization of constant learning. Many of the same desires noted by VIA employees also reflect the characteristics of a supportive work environment mentioned by emerging leaders during interviews and referenced by the Alliance for Innovation in their study.





Based on our conversations with transit executives and emerging leaders and our review of literature, we have developed a list of recommended techniques for creating an organization that fosters personal growth and development and methods you can use to sustain it.

- Be transparent about decision making processes. Involve multiple layers of managers and leaders in the organization in the discussions regarding key decisions. This process also allows people throughout the organization to better recognize victories.
- Eliminate silos by encouraging collaboration between departments and allow for training opportunities outside of an employee's functional area. DART takes this process a step further by encouraging employees to apply for openings in other departments.
- Recognize failures and mistakes as opportunities. Use a lessons learned approach or an after action review to collectively understand what went well, what could be done differently, how the agency should move forward and how risk can be managed. People should be held accountable but avoid the blame game.
- Hire people that fit the culture. Hire people willing to check the egos at the door, work in a team setting and willing to grow and evolve. Shirley Delibero stressed that Executives should hire to their weakness to create a balance in the organization and the executive team.
- Create and encourage balance for yourself and employees to sustain your organization over the long-term. Not everyone's definition of balance is the same so organizations need to recognize the unique tipping points.
- Be deliberate about development opportunities. According to "Change the Culture, Change the Game," being deliberate about creating the right experiences helps foster the desired beliefs which produce the most effective actions. DCTA hosts a monthly Ted Talks breakfast as part of a personal wellness initiative and VIA holds quarterly meetings for managers and invites outside leaders to discuss various topics focused on personal growth and development

Joe Gonzalez, a leadership coach, noted that an organization should always assume that every employee has value and leadership potential and should be given the opportunity to develop and lead. You can outline opportunities for individual development at all levels by using performance reviews to outline career development plans. This allows employees to grow in place first before advancing. Shirley DeLibero also recognized the importance of personnel evaluations as a tool to





recognize and develop leaders. She noted that annual reviews should be about looking forward and identifying ways future leaders can emerge.

Culture building should involve every single leader in your organization and those leaders should practice the habits you want others to practice within the organization. If the top models the desired behavior, it is easier to achieve buy-in throughout the organization.

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES

Executives noted that once leaders emerge within an organization, the management team must be prepared to create formal development and training programs and be open to informal growth and development opportunities for those individuals.

In developing people to be leaders, our research has yielded some techniques that might be used to ensure that leaders are well-rounded. Executives noted the importance of enhancing a person's flat side by developing stretch goals – goals that make people get out of their comfort lane or current area of responsibility. Moving promising leaders to other parts of the organization in order to broaden their base of experience is another well-known thought about developing leaders.

**Stretch Goals:** Personal development goals that get people out of their comfort lane or current area of responsibility.

Sharpening personal development skills can help a leader become more effective. An effective leader needs to have good people skills. A leader always should be open to change and willing to grow as both an authority figure and an individual. It is important to continuously work to improve leadership skills to keep the skill set properly aligned with the constantly changing goals and priorities of the industry.



Other techniques as told to us by our interview panel would be to step aside and carefully coach and challenge – lending expertise when needed - - giving room to grow, succeed and sometimes even letting the emerging leader make mistakes. Becoming a strategic thinker, seeing the big picture and taking a longer range view of a boarder business perspective is another technique. Growing and learning to be a leader one should step back from the day-to-day tactical details and focus on the strategic

planning. Lastly, but certainly not by any means least is formal or informal meeting attendance, whether inside the organization or within the industry. Allowing team members to interact with

A man's mind stretched  
to a new idea never goes  
back to its original  
dimensions.

~ Oliver Wendell Holmes

their network will influence the organization, the community and the industry and it is important for personal growth.

Finally, encourage and inspire team members to attain their own personal goals and reach their potential.

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

With the knowledge that the transit industry is faced with many, many people retiring over the next several years, the need to develop leadership programs in the early part of a career is extremely necessary. The task of identifying and developing high-potential leaders has been rated as a top three priority.

Emerging leaders need an established path to gain exposure to leadership. Leadership programs are powerful methods to prepare up-and-coming talent to operate at the next level. Leadership programs also provide exposure to sponsors and accelerate the formation of networks.

Many industries have their own leadership development programs and the transit industry is no exception. These programs, led by industry experts, can jump-start thinking, share leading practices, offer fresh perspectives, and can provide an emerging leader pipeline as seasoned transit leaders retire.

#### *APTA Leadership Development Programs*

APTA recognizes that challenges exist for individuals early in their career and have taken steps to develop several leadership programs for transit industry professionals. One such program is called the Early Career program. The program's focus is to provide professionals with the skills, knowledge and networks needed for advancement. This 12 month program includes a variety of skill building workshops, round table sessions, online collaborations and unique access to the industry's leaders through a mentoring program.



Another such program, targeted to individuals who are at a mid-point in their career, is the Mid-Level Magnification program. This area of leadership development is designed as a series of workshops, sessions and learning opportunities weaved throughout APTA's major conferences. Future leaders will have the ability to learn from experienced leaders. Get the right experiences on the job, will ultimately give the emerging leader new executive skills.

At the top of the leadership development learning cycle, but no means the last one, is Leadership APTA. This program's focus is to identify develop and support future leaders of APTA and the next generation of senior and executive leaders of the public transportation industry. This

program as with the other programs mentioned here help to define and refine leadership competencies. This year-long program engages class participants with teamwork, class projects, presentation skills and knowledge about APTA committees and other such avenues to get involved.

### *Other Industry Programs*

In addition to APTA, there are a variety of other programs offered industry-wide. Those programs are offered through:

- Community Transportation Association of America
- Transit Cooperative Research Program
- National Transit Institute
- South West Transit Association
- ENO Foundation
- Women in Transportation Seminar
- Council of Minority Transportation Officials
- Various Universities

**Reach back and help  
people. Do not reach back  
and block people.  
~ John Catoe, The Catoe  
Group**

### *State Programs*



Small urban and rural transit systems often benefit from programs offered through the state department of transportation. The Texas Department of Transportation in partnership with Texas A&M Transportation Institute and local transit properties formed the Texas Transit Leadership Initiative. This initiative is designed for Transit Directors, General Managers, and senior-level managers in rural and small urban transit districts who are recipients of state transportation

grant funding and is focused on providing current and aspiring leadership with an opportunity to develop and strengthen their individual leadership capabilities.

The Eno Transportation Foundation Center for Transportation Leadership and Dr. Barbara Gannon have worked with TXDOT to develop the curriculum and course work that focuses on the industry, the organization and the individual. The program includes classroom instruction, leadership workshops and seminars, executive briefings, reading assignments, feedback assessments, and coaching/consultation. Since the initiative started in 2010, over 70 individuals have completed the Seminar and 30 Seminar alumni have participated in Study Groups in targeted areas of interest to them.

### *Local Programs*

Agencies, such as Orange County Transportation Authority, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, (LA Metro), Dallas Area Rapid Transit, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) and Houston Metro are a few examples of transit properties that have local programs designed specifically for public transportation and the needs of their agencies.

MAX is a leadership development and learning exchange program offered jointly by Denver Regional Transportation District, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority. Other agencies, like CATS in Charlotte, North Carolina, participate through their local chamber of commerce or regional economic development organizations. Smaller urban and rural transit systems often benefit from programs offered through the state department of transportation.

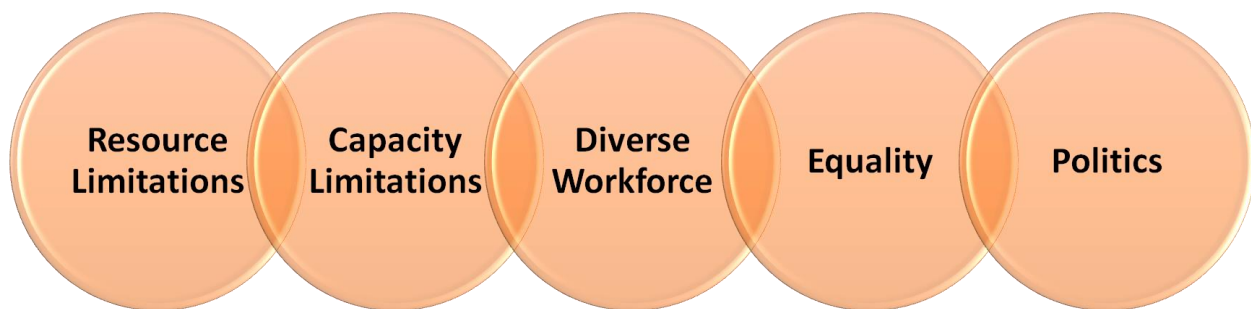
More detailed information about local programs is provided in the appendix.

## **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES**

In our research, we discovered there are many challenges to develop leaders that can be stumbling blocks for organizations, for executives and for the emerging leader.

Challenges can be in the form of

- good, consistent succession planning,
- time management and prioritization
- Financial constraints
- Limited resources to invest in formal external training opportunities



Politics can influence leadership development and executive decision making. Executives often have layers between them and the emerging leaders. As we mention resources for formal training can be a challenge. However, training managers to recognize opportunities by engaging and empowering developing leaders can be a positive step.

Several of the more obvious challenges are that a person could be good at one position, but not necessarily good at another position. Sometimes there is just no real pipeline to develop future leaders, and lastly, executives can have an aversion to risk – not wanting to make changes in case of failure.

Equality is important in the public sector – sometimes developing leaders within the organization can appear to be playing favorites. In smaller organizations, it is difficult to build from the bench because there are limited opportunities for project involvement. There are many



generations in the workforce today and each one of them have a different type of style. It is very difficult to manage those differing styles for a unified organization.

The baby boomer generation is very loyal and will be hard to replace because of their strong knowledge base. Generation X wants to feel in control of their work environment and need independence. Generation Y expects work to be fun and they want to serve people. In order to provide the best leadership to all these sets of generations, a leader needs to be skilled and agile in how they develop their emerging leaders.

## **BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN EMERGING LEADERS**

All of the individuals we interviewed stressed that the benefits of investing in emerging leaders far outweigh the challenges. By investing in leaders, executives better understand the strengths and weakness of their team and therefore can develop succession planning that can strengthen both the individual and the organization. This leads to retention of skilled staff, a more loyal and committed staff and stronger team dynamics.

**Never underestimate the power of picking the right team.**  
~ Shirley DeLibero,  
President, DeLibero  
Strategies, LLC

Developing a leader can have immediate rewards for the employee. The employee has renewed commitment to the job and immediate engagement; the team dynamics will remain in tack, and employee morale will be high. The employee is more likely to focus on the work plans which in turn will lead to greater productivity. Stretching the employee to ensure growth is a must, but work to ensure there is adequate support in new assignments. Frequent feedback and coaching will assist to alleviate stress on the emerging leader.

The deliberate interaction with emerging leaders also results in better engagement of staff which can result in happy employees. Happy employees serve happy customers. Leaders will be able to recognize the intangible benefits this type of culture creates that money simply cannot satisfy. Leaders can show a personal interest in the next generation of the organization. By interacting with the emerging leader, the executive can learn new ideas and techniques, stay abreast of the latest trends and get a better understanding of the generational differences in the workforce.

The next generation of leaders requires a strong commitment from the organization. Without the organization as a basis, the hierarchy of developing leaders will crumble. Investing in emerging leaders is a good business practice. The benefits can range from supporting innovated ideas and collaboration to a better understanding by the current leaders of the skills and behaviors of the staff.





## CONCLUSION

Recognizing the need to create a more diverse pool of talent in the transit industry, our research focused on the techniques used to develop a new generation of leaders so as to preserve and enhance the transit industry and strengthen organizations within the industry. While there are a few challenges to leadership development, the benefits to the industry, the organization and the individual employees are worth the effort. The following provide a summary of the key takeaways from our report.

- Take risks. Take risks when making career decisions. Take risks on employees by creating stretch opportunities for them. Finally, create an organization that manages risks and sees opportunities in failures.
- Encourage and model authenticity. Many of the leaders we spoke to have been mentored throughout their career. Yet they did not try to replicate their mentors. Instead, they applied what they learned and created their own unique approach to leadership. The same is true when developing employees and organizations. Each employee has potential and each organization is unique. Understand the uniqueness including the strengths and weaknesses, leverage them and celebrate them.
- Maintain a vision or clarity of purpose. Most executives charted their path to the executive suite well before they got there. Those executives are now working with employees to establish career plans and help those employees grow in place, advance within the company or move on to another organization within the industry. Organizations also need to have clarity of purpose and vision so that the employees at all levels are working towards the same desired results.
- Learn continuously. Leadership development for oneself, for others and for the organization is a continuous process. Successful executives see learning opportunities in everything they do. Emerging leaders have benefitted from learning opportunities beyond their functional areas and the more successful organizations we studied embrace learning throughout and are deliberate about creating learning opportunities,





## REVIEW OF TECHNICAL MATERIALS

### Previous Leadership APTA presentations and papers

- Class of 2006
  - Team 3 - Leading in Both Good Times and Tough Times
- Class of 2007
  - Team 2 - Leadership: The Next Generation
  - Team 4 - Leadership: Leadership when Facing Insurmountable Odds

### Articles and Textbooks

- “Altrocentric leadership skills for the year 2030” by Jena McGregor, Washington Post
- “Change the Culture, Change the Game,” by Roger Connors and Tom Smith, Penguin books, 2011
- Chemers M. (1997) An integrative theory of leadership. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- “Developing the Next Generation of Leadership” – by Michael G Winston, published by the Linkage Leader at [www.linkageinc.com](http://www.linkageinc.com)
- “Everyman foot Prince in the Snow” by James Whitfield Ellison, Robert H., Prince, Jr., Book Surge, LLC
- “Fast-track to the top, Developing the next generation of leaders to drive future growth,” Human Capital Trends 2012
- Goodwin, Doris Kearns, “Team of Rivals”, published by Simon & Schuster
- “How Storytelling Builds Net-Generation Leaders: - by Douglas A. Ready, founder and president of the International Consortium for Executive Development research, a leadership think tank in Lexington, MA
- How to Develop Future Leaders – published in the Wall Street Journal-  
[http://guides.wsj.com/management/managing-your-people/how\\_to\\_develop-future\\_leaders](http://guides.wsj.com/management/managing-your-people/how_to_develop-future_leaders)
- Innovation is Allowed, Public Management, by Karen Thoreson and Sallie Ann Burnett, August 2014, 96 (7), 23-24.
- “Leadership by the New Generation, Bridging the Age Gap” – Mindtools.com
- Linchpin by Seth Godin, Portfolio Trade, 2011
- Rohn, Emanuel James, “The Art of Exceptional Living”, published by Simon & Schuster
- Texas Transit Leadership Initiative Final Report by Linda Cherrington, Jeffrey Arndt, Suzie Edrington, and Ryan Taylor, Texas Transportation Institute, August 2010.

## APPENDICES

### *Interview Questions*

#### **Question 1**

1. How did you first develop your leadership ability and skill?
2. Did you have a leadership moment that defined you as a leader?

#### **Question 2**

1. What is the one characteristic that you believe every leader should possess?
2. Describe three components of your philosophy of leadership that demonstrates what you values in a leader?

#### **Question 3**

1. How do you further develop yourself as a leader?
2. What role does networking play in developing leaders?

#### **Question 4**

1. What are your thoughts on pushing one's self out of their comfort zone to achieve a leadership role?
2. What obstacles prevent people from achieving leadership roles?

#### **Question 5**

1. What role does mentorship play in the part of developing leaders?
2. In developing others to be leaders, how do you create opportunities?
3. Do you talk to our peers and/or mentors about lessons learned or best approaches?

#### **Question 6**

1. Given the leadership situation, do you modify your leadership style?
2. Why?

#### **Question 7**

1. Someone on your staff steps up during a critical time and demonstrates that he/she can lead with results, how do you then leverage that single time into leadership growth potential?
  - a. What did the Executive Team then do to assisting with the grooming of that leader?
  - b. Are those people still leading now?
  - c. Who would you recommend us to speak to?

### **Question 8**

1. We are all human and misconstruing a situation can happen, is there an area where you think some leaders make mistakes more frequently?
2. What challenges do you face with coaching individuals to be leaders?

### **Question 9**

1. What advice would you give someone going into a leadership position for the first time?

### **Question 10**

1. What is the biggest challenge facing industry leaders today?

### **Questions for our second tier interviews**

1. What leadership qualities were evident to you or to others first?
2. What opportunities to lead were you given before becoming a leader?
3. There can be challenges in disconnecting yourself from your peers when you rise to a leadership role, what do you see as those challenges and what would you recommend to any potential leader?





## *Local Development Programs*

### **Orange County Transportation Authority**



Orange County Transportation Authority currently offers the Leadership Development Academy which is a one-year leadership development academy, focusing on senior-level managers. Participants receive exposure to various departments, from transit operations to government relations; training in presentation and writing skills; and understanding how transportation projects are financed.

OCTA also partners with other programs such as:

- Transit Paratransit Management Certificate
- Mineta Transportation Institute Certificate/Master's degree
- Leadership Orange
- ENO Transit Executive and Mid-Manager Seminars
- Leadership APTA

OCTA also participates in the Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS) - Transportation Academy which is a two-week immersion into different facets of the transportation industry. This program is designed for undergraduate and graduate university students. Like the Leadership Academy, participants will be exposed to management, finance, operations and planning, as well as engineering, construction management and transit-oriented development principles. In addition to hearing from top executives within the transportation field, the students will experience transportation first-hand through a series of onsite tours including live construction projects, Los Angeles and Long Beach Harbors via boat, a rail yard, and tolling facilities.

### **Dallas Area Rapid Transit**



Dallas Area Rapid Transit has a comprehensive training and development program focused on “enhancing individual learning and professional growth” that touches employees at all levels of the organization. The programs range from self-paced curriculum and open-lecture series to more structured, class-room style session. DART Academy is a self-paced development option for all DART employees provided in partnership with Dallas County Community College District. DART Development Series is an open-lecture format taught by internal subject matter experts held monthly and open to all employees. Leadership DART is an accelerated 12-month development program for supervisors and managers provided in cooperation with Southern Methodist University. Management DART and Supervisory DART are development programs targeted to preparing mid-level managers for

future growth opportunities and equipping them with the tools needed to improve in their current roles. DART Executive is a quarterly event designed for DART's leadership to enhance executive performance through additional professional education. The goal of these programs is to develop best practices and a pool of professionals capable of leading DART into the future.

### **Multi-Agency Exchange**

In addition to DART's internal development initiatives, DART also participates in the Multi-Agency Exchange Program (MAX). MAX is a leadership development and learning exchange program offered jointly by DART, Denver Regional Transportation District, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority. Each year, the partner agencies select participants to attend four-day information and exchange sessions at the headquarters of each partner agency. This program is intended to develop a broader understanding of the public transportation industry, share and spark innovative ideas, share lessons learned and industry best practices, and better prepare developing leaders to manage future challenges. This program has proven so successful that other agencies are considering joining or creating their own partnership exchange.

