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# **Personal Leadership Development Plans: Essentials and Practicum**

Personal leadership development plans are fluid documents that open up opportunities, beget more impact, and lead to greater overall satisfaction.

**Olivier Serrat**  
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Personal leadership development plans guide people through their careers: this involves defining a vision, setting goals with timelines, committing to specific actions for achieving them, and re-evaluating those actions (including accomplishment of the plan itself) at regular intervals. Toward a clear purpose—understanding also that plans are worthless but that planning is everything—personal leadership development plans are fluid documents meant to open up opportunities, beget impact, and lead to greater overall satisfaction.

## Essentials of Personal Leadership Development Plans

Prominent characteristics of leaders are that they know their business and their people, set goals and priorities, insist on realism, follow through, reward doers, and expand people's capabilities; leaders can bind these building blocks of behavior together because, above all, they are self-aware and constantly work to better themselves and their situations. Some leaders keep a tab by articulating and updating personal leadership development plans, readily accessible as both reminders of and guidelines for the goals they have set for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

"Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality through planning," said Warren Bennis. There are, of course, many kinds of plans: but, to begin, a leader must know what he/she wants to create for the organization he/she leads and the wherewithal of what will take him/her toward that. And so, at the very least, a leader must have a vision, shared to inspire others; he/she must then formulate personal actions, anticipate obstacles and barriers, leverage strengths,<sup>2</sup> hold himself/herself accountable, and find ways to both celebrate accomplishments and reflect on shortcomings. Box 1 makes out the essentials of a personal leadership development plan.

### Box 1: *Personal Leadership Development Plan—Essentials*

<i>Personal Leadership Development Plan</i>	
<i>Why: My Vision</i>	
What personal vision guides my life to provide the direction necessary to chart a course and make choices?	
<i>What: My Personal Leadership Development Goal</i>	
What can I do, better or differently, that would improve my leadership competencies to deliver the greatest positive outcome for my organization's performance?	
<i>How: Actions I Will Take to Accomplish My Personal Leadership Development Goal</i>	
1. Plan Actions	
Desired/Required Behavior	Response
•	•
•	•
2. Anticipate Obstacles/Barriers	
Obstacle/Barrier	Resolution
•	•

<sup>1</sup> Some leaders also have personal development plans, tailored to achieve peak performance and life satisfaction; such plans are characterized by a vision of where these individuals want to be and why, understanding of the skills needed to achieve the vision, a good idea of the standards that should be achieved, a level of priority for each skill area, and a road map to get them from where they are to where they want to be.

<sup>2</sup> Many personal leadership development programs are prefaced by self-assessments: there are 360° assessment tools, tests of emotional intelligence, the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator, the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, etc.

<i>Personal Leadership Development Plan</i>	
•	•
3. Leverage Strengths	
Strength	How Will This Strength Help Me Accomplish My Goal?
•	•
•	•
<i>Who: Resources and Support for Achieving My Personal Leadership Development Goal</i>	
How will I draw on peers and others to track progress, gather feedback, and support my learning?	
Who will I ask to support me? Who do I know who already possesses the competencies I want to build?	
With whom should I share my personal leadership development plan?	
4. Accountability	
When will I take actions to meet my goal?	
When do I expect to see significant progress?	
How will I evaluate my progress?	
When and how will I update my personal leadership development plan?	
How will I leverage what I learn?	
5. Acknowledgement	
What might be the personal impact of meeting my goal?	
How might my organization benefit from the changes and improvements that I identified?	
How will I celebrate when I accomplish my goal?	

*Note.* Full versions of personal leadership development plans would—where relevant—incorporate measures of success and associated means of verification, depending of course on the nature of the personalized content. For example: Is the work being completed to standard? Is the quality of work improving? Is the team (or the organization) becoming stronger? Is the team (or the organization) developing a sense of pride? Is the leader delegating more work? Is the leader sharing authority with those prepared to assume it? Is the leader making sure that systems and routines are in place for all major processes and functions? Is long-term planning relevant, efficient, and effective? Is the team (or the organization) learning new things? Are people recognized and rewarded for their contributions?

### **Integrating Emerging Theories of Leadership**

Interest in traits and styles harks back to the 1930s–1940s and 1960s, respectively; contingency became a subject of interest in the 1970s. Supposedly "new" leadership theories feeding off interest in charisma and transformation came into being in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively, both related to the Great Man Theory. (Not surprisingly, transformational leadership is probably the most well-researched concept.) Leader–member exchange is a more recent addition from the mid-1990s. Ethics and authenticity joined the family in the late 1990s and early 2000s. From the mid-2000s, applications of complexity science to leadership theory represent the most radical departure compared to previous explanations.<sup>3</sup>

Owing to information and communication technology and the related synergies of globalization, organizational boundaries have been stretched, morphed, and redesigned to a degree

<sup>3</sup> Complexity leadership theory has been defined as a "leadership paradigm that focuses on enabling the learning, creative, and adaptive capacity of complex adaptive systems within a context of knowledge-producing organizations," (Uhl-Bien, et al., 2007, p. 298).

unimaginable 20 years ago. Hence, from among emerging theories of leadership, it is those that are not conditioned by organizational boundaries and most pertinently enable us to address the quickening complexity of our modern times that should resonate with us: complexity leadership is certainly one, as mentioned earlier; neuroscience leadership and paradoxical leadership are two others.

### Outline of a Personal Leadership Development Plan

Lord and Hall (2005) posited a theory of leadership development suggesting that changes in leadership skills may be viewed from the perspective of learning and expertise, with consideration of the associated changes in information processing and underlying knowledge structures that occur as skill develops. More specifically, they propose that leadership performance is organized in terms of a progression from novice to intermediate to expert skill levels: at each level, the emphasis is on qualitatively different knowledge and information processing capabilities. Because leadership skill development requires proaction on the part of the leader, Lord and Hall (2005) proposed that identity, meta-cognitive processes, and emotional regulation are critical factors in developing the deeper cognitive structures associated with leadership expertise. Lord and Hall (2005) also posited that expert leaders may develop unique skills in grounding their identities and leadership activities in coherent, self-relevant, authentic values. Box 2 presents the outline of a personal leadership development plan that springs from Lord and Hall's (2005) theory.

#### Box 2: *Personal Leadership Development Plan—Practicum*

<i>Personal Leadership Development Plan: Olivier Serrat</i>	
<i>Why</i>	
We live in a digital age in which business and societal interaction increasingly takes place online. Organizational boundaries have been stretched, morphed, and redesigned. Combinations of hierarchy, market, and network (or community) forms of organizing have appeared across the public, private, and civil sectors. Leadership styles and frameworks—designed for the closed systems of yesteryear—are consumed by fire-fighting and seem to contribute less and less to the success of collective effort. My vision is to become a thought leader in organizational metagovernance: specifically, I aim to develop leadership management systems for metagovernance of hierarchies, markets, and networks, this to help interested parties develop and apply situation-specific intervention strategies based on combining, switching, and maintenance of the three organizational forms.	
<i>What</i>	
Throughout Year 2 and Year 3 of my doctoral studies, I will endeavor to ground and develop my identity and thought leadership skills in coherent, self-relevant, and authentic values.	
<i>How</i>	
1. Plan Actions	
Desired/Required Behavior	Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Values have utility for self-regulation and for evaluating others. I will identify what coherent, self-relevant, and authentic values, inspired by Schwartz (1992), best speed the accomplishment of my vision. (Ethics and authenticity would count prominently among these.)</li> </ul>

Personal Leadership Development Plan: Olivier Serrat	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thought leaders must have skills. I will become increasingly cognizant of the fact that skill acquisition depends on both the ability to access problem-specific knowledge and on processing skills. I will also make continuing efforts to appreciate the qualitative changes in process and knowledge that are associated with the development of expertise. Lastly, I will make explicit efforts to record the progression of my skills from novice to intermediate to expert levels.</li> </ul>
2. Anticipate Obstacles/Barriers	
Obstacle/Barrier	Resolution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subject Matter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The doctoral dissertation that I have in mind, provisionally titled <i>Leading Organizations of the Future</i>, will from the outset entail reference to a vast body of literature on governance; next, it will call for an ambitious fusion of related concepts; lastly, it will invite generation or development of a new model for metagovernance. Considerable discipline will have to underpin all related efforts. In addition to complexity leadership and paradoxical leadership (about which more below), I expect that neuroscience leadership will help me elucidate what elements of trust and relationship building can encourage engagement and positive working relationships in hybrid organizations.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I will develop greater awareness of tools and techniques for general time management, prioritization, scheduling, concentration and focus, goal setting, and self-motivation.</li> </ul>
3. Leverage Strengths	
Strength	How Will This Strength Help Me Accomplish My Goal?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research Networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am a member of research networks such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu, where I rank among the top 2.5–3%, sometimes higher. Membership allows me to receive answers to research questions, share my expertise to other members and my followers, and find collaborators. I also have a presence on Google Scholar, which recorded close to 1,250 citations of my work</li> </ul>

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	as of June 2018, thereby enhancing academic standing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to Synthesize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From much reading across disciplines, I have developed the ability to synthesize—or combine elements of several sources—to help make a point. Writing a strong researched paper requires such ability. In the face of information overload, some have even called the ability to synthesize (joining the dots, making out patterns, sifting the relevant from the irrelevant, and seeing contrasts) the No. 1 survival skill of the 21st century. As organizational ecologies become increasingly dynamic, complex, and competitive, we will face intensified contradictory, or seemingly paradoxical, demands: every one of us—not just leaders—must develop paradoxical leadership understandings and behaviors so we might visualize and reframe paradox (and thereby produce superior outcomes). I will work to strengthen my ability to synthesize. To manage the many paradoxes I experienced in prior work engagements, I adopted the principle of yin–yang, which accepts that seemingly opposite or contrary forces might actually be interconnected, complementary, and even interdependent. The principle of yin–yang serves well when one must synthesize.</li> </ul>
<i>Who</i>	
<p>To gather feedback and support my learning I will leverage my research (and other) networks. To track progress I will rely on what scores and citations my research networks advertise as well as the grades and advice I receive at school. I have identified the primary authorities in the fields of complexity leadership and metagovernance. Familiarizing myself with their work will be the object of the literature review I must conduct toward my doctoral dissertation. My qualitative research will also be "grounded" in data gathered through interviews with four or five of the said authorities. Because NVivo is suited to gaining rich insights from unstructured data I may conduct text analyses of the work of experts in metagovernance of hierarchies, markets, and networks, this to ground-truth of sorts what insights the interviews may produce.</p>	
<b>4. Accountability</b>	
<p>All actions to meet the goal are ongoing. I am monitoring progress on a daily and weekly basis, the principal instruments being rising scores and numbers of citations on Academia.edu, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate, as well as what grades I achieve and what feedback I receive at school. One other measure of progress is the number of followers on Academia.edu and ResearchGate. This personal leadership development plan is designed for three years: it is purposeful and self-contained and I do not anticipate having to update it. I</p>	



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will leverage what I learn in the form of the doctoral dissertation I must write (and will continue to self-publish spin-offs in personalized formats every now and then).

5. Acknowledgement

I expect the personal impact of meeting my goal to be increased visibility as an expert leader in the field of metagovernance. Beyond one single organization, the parties that would benefit from the changes and improvements that I can identify in the doctoral dissertation would be those who make sense out of the Leadership Management System I will develop.

Understanding that celebration gives closure and provides encouragement to continue, reflecting on the path I took will be my way of celebrating the accomplishment of the goal.

## Personal Philosophy of Leadership

"The basic practical–moral problem in life is not what *to do*, but *what kind of person* to be," (Cunliffe, 2009, p. 94). Assuming no one will disagree with such a statement of the obvious, it follows from Cunliffe's (2009) maxim that personal leadership development plans are necessary but not sufficient: personal philosophies of leadership must underpin them. Anchored in a previous discussion of theory, principles, attitude, and behavior for leadership, what follows is a—perforce simple—personal philosophy of leadership to convoy the personal leadership development plan I wrote up earlier, next, move beyond it (Serrat, 2018a, 2018b):

*Organizations exist to make people's skills and capabilities effective. From the philosophy that leadership is a responsibility that must be shared by all parties to the act of organizing, I aim in a process of social influence to grow more leaders to bring out the best in fellow knowledge workers so they accomplish more together, in more meaningful ways, than they imagined they might. Implicit in this statement are directions about how I lead and choose to influence, what I value, what I expect from partners, what I do not accept, and—especially—what type of environment I am committed to creating.*

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