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Leadership development

In this chapter:

The implications of this review for how leaders and leadership are developed are examined. We return to the 'Warwick Six C Leadership Framework' and use each of the elements to inform thinking and practice about leadership development, drawing on the previous chapters on concepts, characteristics, contexts, challenges, capabilities and consequences and using these to critically think about, design and evaluate leadership development practices. The chapter defines leadership development and presents a framework for comparing how far leadership development is focused on individuals and how far it is focused on teams, groups or organisational capacity. The framework also presents a continuum from intentional development (for example, education and training programmes, mentoring) and emergent development (for example, job challenges and hardships). The implications for selecting staff for leadership development opportunities, for designing leadership development, and for evaluating leadership development are explored.

Figure 8.1: Leadership development

The Six C analytical framework, presented at the beginning of this book, is now used to examine leadership development. Figure 8.1 shows the same structure of elements of leadership but with leadership development rather than leadership in the centre of the figure. In other words, the Warwick framework is used to reflect on how the understanding of leadership affects thinking and practice in relation to leadership development. Leadership development is a large area in itself, deserving greater space than a single chapter (for example, Hartley and Hinksman, 2003; McCauley and van Elsor, 2004; Mabey and Finch-Lees, 2008; Gold et al, 2010). The focus here is limited to particular implications of the framework for selecting staff for leadership development, the design of leadership development and the evaluation of leadership development.

This book has reviewed some key literature about leadership – what, then, are the implications for leadership development? Research (for example, Alimo-Metcalfe and Lawler, 2001) shows that leadership development is often embarked on with insufficient attention to the implicit or explicit model of leadership that is being used, and without attention to the evidence about 'what works' in leadership development. There is sometimes an implicit belief that leadership development is 'a good thing', without clear objectives and without clear planning to ensure that it fits with the strategic direction and priorities of the organisation, or that it is supporting relevant skills and values, that it is efficient and effective in resource terms, and contributes not only to individual development but also to organisational change and improvement.

There is sometimes also a view that there is a 'right' or 'best' (universal) approach to leadership development. A number of writers (for example, Buchanan, 2003; Hartley and Hinksman, 2003; Burgoyne et al, 2005; Benington and Hartley, 2009) have argued instead for the alignment of leadership development with organisational purpose, practices and people. In addition, different stakeholders may value and emphasise different aspects of leadership development (Mabey and Finch-Lees, 2008). This chapter aims to ask appropriate questions about leadership development by using the Warwick Six C Leadership Framework.
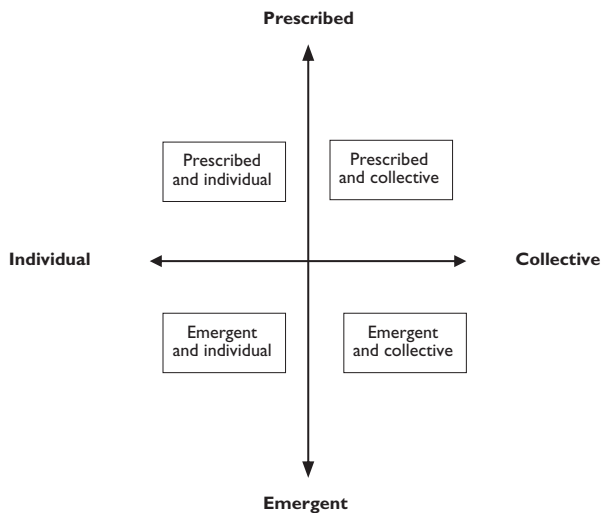
What is leadership development?

Leadership development describes the activities and experiences that are used to enhance the quality of leadership and leadership potential in individuals, groups, teams, organisations and networks.

Traditionally, the emphasis in leadership development has been on formal training and education programmes. While these are still important, there has been increasing recognition that a wider range of knowledge-generating activities, including formal and informal, intended and emergent, activities and experiences, can be very formative in developing the skills of leadership (McCauley and van Elsor, 2004; Burgoyne et al, 2005; Benington et al, 2008).

Rodgers et al (2003) provide a typology for both leadership development and its evaluation. Their first (horizontal) dimension is based on the extent to which leadership is focused on developing the individual or on developing collectives (for example, teams, boards, distributed leadership, shared leadership). The second (vertical) dimension is based on the extent to which leadership is prescriptive or emergent. Prescriptive approaches to leadership development can design the inputs (for example, skills, competencies, traits and so on) or the outputs (for example, standards, performance) required for leadership (and therefore leadership development) in particular organisational settings. By contrast, emergent approaches to leadership development view leadership as a dynamic process, with a set of interactions between leaders, followers, context and so on, and therefore that leadership has properties that arise from these interactions and that cannot be predicted in advance. The combination of these two dimensions provides four quadrants of leadership development (and leadership development evaluation), as shown in Figure 8.2.

Figure 8.2: A framework of leadership development

Prescribed

Prescribed and individual

Prescribed and collective

Individual

Collective

Emergent and individual

Emergent and collective

Emergent

Source: Rodgers et al (2003)

This figure is a reminder that leadership development can be achieved in a range of ways, both formal and informal, focused on the individual or the group. So, leadership development may consist of a range of initiatives including formal training courses, psychometrics, fast-track cohorts, job experiences, coaching, secondments and so on.

The concepts of leadership

Chapter 2 on the concept of leadership noted that leadership is often assumed rather than defined, and that there are a variety of ways of conceptualising leadership. A number of writers have warned of the difficulties for leadership development that can arise if the model of leadership is not clear, or if the approach to leadership is based on following fashion rather than promoting a purpose. For example, Alimo-Metcalfe and Lawler (2001) found that the definition of leadership was nebulous and ill-defined in the 30 organisations they studied and that this is problematic for leadership development for a number of reasons. Without a clear and agreed approach to the conceptualisation of leadership, leadership development practices may be inappropriate for the kind of leadership outcomes that the organisation is aiming for (for example, developing transactional leaders when the organisation needs transformational leaders), or old and outdated practices may be relabelled as 'leadership' to suit the current rhetoric. In particular, if the leadership development designers are not clear about where the boundaries lie between leadership and management then some leadership development may actually confuse the situation and lead to reduced performance because it is really traditional management development (Rost, 1998). Alternatively, in the 'rush to leadership' (Rodgers et al, 2003), courses may be designed to enhance a diffuse understanding of leadership where actually practical management skills may be more fit for purpose.

It was noted in Chapter 2 that clarifying the relationships between leadership and management can be important, given the degree of confusion between the two concepts and the varied ways in which they are used. Day (2001) suggests that:

> Leadership development is defined as expanding the collective capacity of the organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes.… Leadership roles refer to those that come with and without formal authority, whereas management development focuses on performance in formal managerial roles. Leadership

processes are those that generally enable groups of people
to work together in meaningful ways, whereas management
processes are considered to be position- and organization-
specific. (p 582)

He notes an overlap between leadership development and management
development, but suggests that management development tends to
focus on enhancing task performance in management roles, whereas
leadership development involves building the capacity of individuals
and teams to help staff learn new ways of doing things that could not
have been predicted.

On the other hand, too rigid a distinction between leadership and
management can be problematic: "erecting this kind of dichotomy
between something pure called 'leadership' and something dirty called
'management', or between values and purposes on the one hand and
methods and skills on the other, would be disastrous" (Glatter, 1997,
p 189).

Some balance is needed in clarifying the distinction between
leadership and management, while also recognising the degree of
overlap (see Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2). It is possible to characterise
leadership as the compass and management as the map – both are
needed in conjunction with each other on difficult journeys.

Chapter 2 distinguished between the person, the position and the
process as approaches to the concept of leadership. There can be value
in considering how to develop the skills and resources of persons.
However, if the concept of leadership is a 'heroic' one – that is,
about exceptional individuals – then there is a danger that leadership
development will focus on personal development to the exclusion of,
for example, analysis of the context, or leading with others. It runs the
risk of focusing more on selecting the 'right' people, that is, people
with exceptional gifts or exceptional potential, for development
opportunities, rather than widening the opportunities for development
across a group or organisation.

If the concept of leadership is about position, then there may be a
focus in leadership development on providing opportunities to those
in specific ranks or roles. This can be valuable in that leadership is
likely to vary according to level in the organisation and scope of the
post. However, if leadership development is entirely about those in
formal positions, there may be a lost opportunity to think about how
to develop informal leaders within and outside the organisation.

If leadership is thought of as a set of processes between individuals,
groups and organisations, then leadership development activities may

be focused on activities that enhance influence and mobilisation skills. But a focus on 'process' alone may create a rather lop-sided approach to leadership development, which under-emphasises context, roles or resources.

Thus, clarification of the conceptualisation of leadership being used in any given setting is an important prerequisite for effective leadership development. This is an important issue for commissioners and providers alike.

The characteristics of leadership

In Chapter 3, it was noted that leadership characteristics may vary according to the role (for example, degree and type of authority; whether the people to be influenced are near or distant to the leader; the degree to which professional expertise is relevant to leadership). Leadership development activities need to be geared to the roles and resources of those in leadership positions. For example, where a leader is a 'near' leader, with daily interaction with those they influence, then the focus may be particularly on the interpersonal and social skills of influence. Where the leader is 'distant', leadership development may need to focus in addition on how to influence people indirectly through strategy, communicating the vision, and thinking about how to have an impact on the organisational culture and systems. For clinical leaders, different skills need to be developed as they move from clinical practice to clinical leadership (Clark et al, 2008) and this needs to be factored into the design of the programme.

Chapter 3 also considered how far leadership is seen as an aspect of a leadership constellation (Denis et al, 2001), shared or distributed leadership, or leadership configuration (Gronn, 2009). This may affect the approach to leadership development. Day (2001) makes the distinction between leadership development programmes that aim to build human capital (individual leaders), and those that aim to build social capital (leadership as shared within a group or community):

> Leadership has been traditionally conceptualised as an individual–level skill. A good example of this is found in transformational leadership theory which proposes that transformational leaders engage in behaviours related to the dimensions of Charisma, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration…. Within this tradition, development is thought to occur primarily through training individual, primarily intrapersonal, skills and abilities….

These kinds of training approaches, however, ignore almost 50 years of research showing leadership to be a complex interaction between the designated leader and the social and organizational environment.

In addition to building leaders by training a set of skills or abilities, and assuming that leadership will result, a complementary perspective approaches leadership as a social process that engages everyone in the community.… In this way, each person is considered a leader, and leadership is conceptualized as an effect rather than a cause.… Leadership is therefore an emergent property of effective systems design.… Leadership development from this perspective consists of using social (i.e. relational systems) to help build commitments among members of a community of practice. (p 583)

While the conceptual distinction between leader development and leadership development is a useful one, both types of development are important, according to the context and the needs of the organisation. The implications for leadership development are spelt out by Day (2001) and shown in Table 8.1 overleaf.

The increasing recognition of the value of distributed leadership (Bennis, 1999; Bennis et al, 2001; Gronn, 2002) suggests that leadership development may be effected in part through organisation-wide initiatives, not just programmes for individuals (O'Connor and Day, 2007). This suggests that if leadership is partly about organisational change, then situations of organisational change and development may help to foster leadership skills and the social capital of leadership. There may also be the need to think about cohorts learning and developing together (Benington and Hartley, 2009), such as the fast-track and/or graduate entry cohorts that have been developed in health, in central and local government, and in policing (Hartley and Hinksman, 2003). Increasingly, in order to improve services in a joined-up way, there is also a need to think about leadership development as joined up across, not just within, services (Benington and Hartley, 2009), such as in the Leicestershire Leadership in Partnership programme run with Warwick Business School.

Overall, leadership development requires careful thinking about who is to be developed, and what their potential roles and contributions are within and for the organisation. Different types of leaders use different sources and processes of influence, and it is helpful for leadership

Table 8.1: Human capital and social capital approaches to leadership development

Development target		
Comparison dimension	Leader	Leadership
Capital type	Human capital	Social capital

Leadership model	Individual
	    Personal power
	    Knowledge
	    Trustworthiness
		Relational
		    Commitments
		    Mutual respect
		    Trust

Competence base	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal

Skills	Self-awareness
	    Emotional awareness
	    Self-confidence
	    Accurate self-image
	Self-regulation
	    Self-control
	    Trustworthiness
	    Personal responsibility
	    Adaptability
	Self-motivation
	    Initiative
	    Commitment
	    Optimism
		Social awareness
		    Empathy
		    Service orientation
		    Political awareness
		Social skills
		    Building bonds
		    Team orientation
		    Change catalyst
		    Conflict management

Source: Day (2001)

development to be designed appropriately. Some focus may be on individuals, some may be on a whole team, unit or organisation. The exact balance will depend on any given setting, and will also relate to the contexts and the challenges, covered in the next sections of this chapter.

The contexts of leadership

The growing recognition of the importance of analysing context means that leadership development that helps people to 'read', understand and interpret the existing context, patterns of change and potential future scenarios is particularly important (Glatter, 2004; Mole, 2004; Leach et al, 2005).

Chapter 4 argues that the context, in the case of healthcare, is not just the internal NHS organisation but also the wider political and economic context and the strategic context of the health economy. Effective leadership development needs to be able to help leaders and potential leaders to understand and work with a complex, adaptive whole system. The context also includes the growing need to work

with other organisational partners and inter-organisational networks, so there is a need in the NHS for leadership development across sectors, services and levels of government, where sharing and comparing across organisations is seen as a key element of the leadership development approach.

Developing the skills of 'leadership with political awareness' is relevant to enhancing skills in 'reading' and interpreting context. Political awareness skills have, until recently, been developed primarily on an experiential basis, because there have been no recognised development routes, although there are now a number of actions that individuals, organisations and training organisations can take and tools that can be used to assess and to develop skills in leading and managing with political awareness (Hartley et al, 2007).

The internal context of the organisation (its structure, culture and history) is also important. The organisational context shapes how formal leadership development programmes are used and also how informal and emergent experiences are drawn on, and how people are selected for such experiences (Alimo-Metcalfe and Lawler, 2001; Hartley and Hinksman, 2003). Leadership development can be considered both in terms of formal programmes (for example, training courses, development programmes, educational programmes) and also in terms of informal activities that support leadership development (for example, on-the-job experiences chosen to create 'stretch' for the participant, mentoring and so on), and different organisations have different preferences for emphasis on each. The organisational context may also influence whether the main focus is on the individual, the team or group, sets of roles (for example, medical directors, aspiring chief executives; fast-track programmes), or concerned with the whole organisation (for example, organisation development). The organisational culture and procedures may also have an impact on who is seen as potential 'leadership material' and who gets access to formal leadership development activities.

Organisational context and conditions (for example, organisational structure, resources, culture, HR strategy) may have an impact on how leadership potential is identified as well as developed (Hartley and Hinksman, 2003). An initial stage of any leadership development programme or set of activities is to identify (and then recruit) individuals or groups for leadership development. There are a number of ways in which this may occur in organisations and this is also often closely related to the (implicit) model of leadership – for example, whether the organisation is making assumptions about strong (single, individual) leadership or distributed leadership. How far down or into the

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organisation there is a search for leadership potential is a key strategic decision of organisations, although not always recognised as such.

A practical difficulty may be in getting staff released to go on a training programme, either to get the time to go, or to have duties delegated in order to free up the time to go. As organisations become more team-based and decentralised, being away from the office can create pressures for colleagues, leading to reluctance to go away even on short courses in leadership development (see for example, Hartley, 2002a).

The organisational context is often critical in affecting how far there is a transfer of the development learning back into the organisation after the leadership development programme (Day, 2001; McCauley and van Elsor, 2004). Difficulties may arise in identifying how to apply ideas and practices back on the job, or in losing motivation once having left the hothouse of the leadership development programme. Difficulties can also occur in winning the hearts and minds of immediate line managers or more senior managers who have not been part of the leadership development programme (Huczynski and Lewis, 2007), and/or working in an organisational culture that is not conducive to the new approaches (Alimo-Metcalfe and Lawler, 2001).

The challenges of leadership

In Chapter 5, we examined a range of challenges, also called the tasks or purposes of leadership. At a general level, leadership development can be used to help distinguish between adaptive and technical problems (Heifetz, 1994), also called wicked and tame problems (Grint, 2005b). Deciding whether a problem is 'tame' or 'wicked' and therefore whether it requires technical or adaptive leadership is an important skill, with enormous consequences for how the context and purpose is defined, and how the leader works with groups and individuals relevant to solving or addressing the problem. How can leadership development programmes focus on and help leaders to tackle these issues? A focus on problem-identification not just problem-solving is increasingly being thought of as a key skill for leaders and managers (Sparrow, 2000; Gardner, 2004). Interpreting the type of challenge and the ways of leading responses is an important issue for leadership development. Glatter (2008) reinforces this: "Raw experience is not a sufficient guide to learning: leaders may need help in structuring and analysing experience to be able to use it as a resource for learning" (p 6). Interpreting leadership challenges requires conceptual models, but also the flexibility to adapt mental models and mindsets where the changing context requires this.

A further type of challenge relates to leading and managing organisational and cultural change through programmes of improvement and innovation. Such challenges require technical knowledge and skills (for example, lean management, value chain analysis, improvement science), while also needing the skills for the leadership and management of change. Knowing how to influence others to change accepted patterns of thinking and established work practices in the workplace, how to encourage innovation and the management of risk, are important leadership skills. These may be a mix of 'adaptive' and 'technical' challenges. Leadership development in healthcare, therefore, needs to help develop the mental models and skills for change management in healthcare.

Some challenges lie outside as well as inside the organisation. There is more work to be done in understanding the effective leadership of partnerships, of working with local communities and of working with elected politicians. How far are the current leadership development programmes in healthcare addressing these challenges? And what can be passed on from those who have led major challenges (mergers, reconfigurations, turnaround situations) to help those who have not yet faced these testing situations? There is also more work to be done on designing development programmes that develop leadership cadres across the whole public service system (Benington and Hartley, 2009).

One approach to emergent leadership development is through designing stretching job assignments, or through using secondments and other job-based experiences. How far do healthcare organisations capitalise on learning from job challenges by carefully analysing the different kinds of leadership challenge they may represent?

The capabilities of leadership

Leadership development is based on the assumption that capabilities (competencies, qualities, skills, mindsets) can be learned; that they can be acquired rather than given or inherited. There is now considerable evidence from a variety of sources that many leadership qualities can be learned, even for many of those skills where some people have a more natural aptitude than others (Burke and Cooper, 2006).

Many organisations have developed their own leadership capabilities framework, including the NHS and the police service. The models on which these are based will influence the approach to leadership development, including the qualities that are sought in effective leaders and how these are evaluated. Kelloway and Barling (2000), for example, show how focusing on each different dimension of transformational

leadership (the four elements of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration) provides different implications for the focus of leadership development.

Some have argued that increasingly there is a need to think of post-transformational leadership development where the focus is less on influencing the immediate individual or group and more on shaping the organisational structure and culture in ways that support particular goals and behaviours and enhance organisational learning (Fullan, 2001; Storey, 2004; Yukl, 2009).

Capability models lie at the heart of many leadership development programmes, with a great emphasis on first defining a skill set (or more widely defined as a mindset) and then designing activities to foster and enhance those skills. However, this book has suggested that there may be dangers in this approach if leadership is not seen in a wider perspective, which includes consideration of context and the challenges of leadership. If there is anything we know about effective leadership, it is that it is dependent on the specific context and challenges. The idea of a universalistic response, based on universal qualities, is not upheld by the evidence.

Consequences of leadership development

If the question about consequences for leadership theory is whether there is evidence that leadership has an impact on organisational performance, then the parallel question for leadership development is: how do we assess whether leadership development makes a difference not just to individuals but also to organisational change and improvement?

Unfortunately, for a number of leadership development approaches, evaluation is still quite rudimentary. Problems range from an inadequate theory of leadership and leadership development such that evaluation is not possible, to inadequate data collection or the wrong type of data collection, to making inappropriate interpretations from the evidence collected. Others argue that politics means that evaluation is risky for the organisation, both because different stakeholders have different priorities and also because of the problems if the evaluation were to reveal substantial weaknesses in a flagship programme of leadership development (Mabey and Finch-Lees, 2008).

In order for evaluation to occur with any degree of robustness, there is a need for a reasonably clear specification of what forms the basis of the leadership development. In other words, what is the model of

leadership being used, and how is the development hypothesised to impact on leadership performance and organisational performance?

There is a range of leadership development tools and techniques being used to try to enhance leadership and organisational performance, such as: 360 degree feedback; mentoring; coaching; networking; action learning; job challenges; secondments; formal and educational programmes; fast-track cohorts; organisation development; and partnership working. Some of these are methods of identifying leadership potential as well as means of enhancing leadership for the organisation (Hartley and Hinksman [2003] examine these for the health sector). However, an explicit model of leadership and leadership development is not always articulated and it is sometimes assumed that the initiative by itself is automatically going to improve leadership.

As each method is used, consideration might be given to whether the impacts of leadership development are expected to be planned or emergent, and whether building human or social capital, drawing on Figure 8.2 earlier in this chapter. The quadrants imply different approaches to leadership development and therefore they are likely to require different approaches to evaluation. Where the focus in leadership development is on prescription, then evaluation is able to use a scientific approach, with the clear specification of goals, performance standards, competencies and so on. Where the focus is on emergent properties, then evaluation will need to take a more qualitative and more formative approach, as the outcomes cannot be pre-specified.

The research design for evaluation will also be influenced by whether the focus is on the individual or the social group (team, organisational service unit, whole organisation, critical mass of professionals). Reviews of evaluation approaches in healthcare, commissioned by the NHS Leadership Centre (Williams, 2004a, 2004b), are valuable in setting out possible evaluation approaches and their strengths and weaknesses.

Evaluation of leadership development has both subjective and objective elements. The objective elements may come from organisational performance measures (although these are themselves influenced by human factors such as performance pressure and expectations). The subjective elements come from the perceptions and mental models that individuals and groups hold about leadership and leadership development.

The purpose of the evaluation is also important. Is the key purpose to 'prove' or to 'improve' the leadership development approach? If the former, more rigorous evaluation designs can be important in order to be able to interpret the evidence with reasonable confidence in relation to alternative explanations of the data. If improving the

leadership is the goal, then qualitative evidence, based on perceptions and experience as well as hard data, may be important to fine-tune and develop the approach.

The contingent nature of leadership (that it is affected by and affects the contexts, the challenges, the characteristics and the capabilities) means that leadership development is also likely to be contingent, and this suggests searching for leadership development impacts using a realist evaluation perspective (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Tilley, 2010) based on 'what works, for whom, when, in what circumstances and why' rather than seeking universal principles.

Policy and practice implications:

- Clear thinking about leadership development is essential. Using the analytical framework presented in this book will help to ask critical questions to ensure alignment between strategic purposes and leadership development practices.
- There is no 'one best way' to achieve high-quality leadership development. Clear planning is needed to ensure that leadership development fits with the organisation's strategic direction and priorities, supports appropriate skills and values, is resource-efficient, and contributes not only to individual development but also to organisational change and improvement.
- It is useful to think about how far the emphasis in any particular leadership development approach is focused on planned (for example, formal training and programmes) or emergent (for example, job challenges) features; also whether the focus is on individuals or groups (for example, teams, units, cohorts).
- Planning leadership development needs to cover: how people are selected; the curriculum design; the pedagogical principles; the actual activities; the organisational framework; and how leadership development is evaluated.
- Clarifying the concept of leadership underlying the leadership development is essential, otherwise the approach may be inappropriate for the needs of the organisation. How clear is the organisation about its views of what constitutes effective leadership and what constitutes effective management? For example, if the organisation relies on a 'heroic' concept of individual leadership then it may miss opportunities to develop shared or distributed leadership.
- Thinking about characteristics focuses on the roles that leaders occupy. The sources and resources for influence are important so that the appropriate skills can be developed. Direct leaders may require different skills from indirect leaders. Clinicians need different skills if they are to move from clinical practice to clinical leadership. And, to take another example, shared leadership has implications for the ways in which leadership development may be structured.

- Leadership development that helps leaders to understand and interpret existing contexts and potential future scenarios is important in preparation for leading in a complex and changing world.
- If healthcare benefits from a 'whole-systems' perspective, then leadership development might incorporate that view, with some programmes deliberately linking people across different levels of government and across services and sectors.
- The organisational context has a large impact on the effectiveness of leadership development – who gets selected as leadership material, how transfer of learning back to the workplace happens. Paying attention to pre- and post-leadership development activities is critical.
- More attention could be paid to using job challenges and real-life dilemmas more effectively as an emergent approach to leadership development. These require support for reflection from the experiences.
- The challenges of leadership emphasise the need to distinguish between technical and adaptive (tame and wicked) problems. Using leadership development to enhance not just problem-solving but also problem-identification is increasingly important. Interpreting the type of leadership challenge and the ways of leading responses is an important issue for leadership development.
- The key skills of leadership will be influenced by the capabilities model being used. But capabilities need to be seen in the context of job demands and organisational context. Developing universalistic models of capability may not be helpful.
- Cross-sector leadership development may be particularly important to help develop skills in emotional intelligence and leadership with political awareness.
- It is worth paying attention right at the design stage of leadership development to the potential consequences of leadership. What are the outcomes being sought?
- Organisational outcomes are important but so are the wider outcomes for the public and for the public sphere.
- Designing in evaluation at an early stage will help ensure that leadership development is focused and that it can be modified over time using systematic feedback.