



Desmond Tutu Centre for Leadership



20 Questions for C4L about Leadership

1. Why leadership?

There is a difference between “leader” and “leadership”. One is an individual, the other is a group. One has a face, the other has many faces. The question used to be whether leaders are born or made. That put the focus on individuals, heroes, conquerors. C4L wants to put the emphasis on a role, a service, a calling. Wherever people bond together, leaders will emerge, but there needs to be a social contract that sets boundaries and timelines. At this point, leadership emerges as a solution that best serves the purposes of any group.

2. Why leadership development?

Africa is suffering from capacity shrinkage. This is caused first and foremost by the Brain Drain. For example, over half of Mozambicans with tertiary degrees work outside of their own country. Many posts in key sectors like health are vacant in African countries, because those qualified have emigrated. Then there is the AIDS pandemic, which has not yet reached the peak of its infection rate. Immunologists say that the peak of the death rate follows that by ten years. So the loss of people - especially in the 20-40 age bracket - will continue, even though it is already pinching the work force. Lastly, African countries are still clinging to affirmative action policies that include restrictions on immigration. This keeps qualified people from other countries and continents out. So it is mission-critical in the human services to ensure that an African cadre of leaders and managers emerge.

Remember that as recently as 1982 - when the Sullivan Code was introduced by the private sector in South Africa - only whites were allowed to be supervisors and managers. If leaders are made, not born, then they need to be prepared as such. And what Africa really needs is not just leaders, but leadership.

3. Why youth leadership development?

Africa's population is very young, unlike the North's which is relatively old. More than half the population of Africa is under the age of 18. Any and every demographic group needs its own leaders. And anywhere you go, youth culture differs from societal culture. But in the midst of the AIDS pandemic this is accentuated. For example, there are now hundreds of thousands of child-headed households. Youth become the guardians for their younger siblings when their parents pass away. They have to lead their families. To help them, peer educators and peer counselors have been found to be most effective. The secret is to find the "attitude shapers" and provide these with the desired skills and message, so they can influence their peers and pass on the gift.

4. Why NGO leadership?

Every sector has its leaders. The public sector has mayors, premiers, parliamentarians, diplomats and presidents. The private sector has supervisors, managers, executives, and tycoons. Nonprofits organizations mobilize activists, volunteers and missionaries. They need leaders who can inspire and envision their members and donors while at the same time relating to the beneficiaries in their target group. This is a different kind of leadership. Unlike government, NGOs do not try to do everything for everybody. They try to specialize and focus on a relatively narrow Vision and Mission. Unlike the private sector, their bottom line is not profit but *changed lives*. So NGO management is quite unique.

5. Why servant leadership?

Jesus left a great legacy – his teaching – although he never wrote a book. Rather, he trained leaders. His best-known technique was discipling, although he was a great lecturer and an amazing story-teller. What he taught his disciples is that leaders should expect to serve, not to be served. But in Africa, being a President or even a bishop usually follows the local proverb: "A goat eats where it is tethered". Lao Tzu told leaders that if they despise the people, they will be despised. A number of surveys confirm that NGO leaders are the only ones left that enjoy the trust of the public. So many scandals have emptied both government and business of credibility that people despise them. But they still see NGOs as servants.

6. Why values-based leadership development?

There are three facets to all training – knowledge, skills and attitudes. One relates to the head, one to the hands, and the other to the heart. If you give people who are already corrupt good leadership skills, they end up plundering the people instead of serving them. So you need to bring about attitudinal change and that involved values. But neither is leadership just a question of character. Leaders do need good practical skills and tools to perform their duties. They also need to be well informed and accustomed to reflection and changing their mind. This takes humility, and that comes back to values.

7. Why team leadership?

Two heads are better than one. At the highest level, you have corporate governance. By definition it's a group, and that's where you get quality decision-making. At executive level, senior management teams (SMT's) are the order of the day in NGOs. Participatory processes reign, and that applies to both administration and field work. C4L is strong on team building. It has built an obstacle course on its campus to challenge groups to work together as teams. It emphasizes organization development not just human development because corporate bodies need "social organs" to function. There is no substitute for the team approach.

8. Why board leadership?

Nonprofit governance is quite different from company Boards because of the separation of powers between voluntary Board members and paid executives. Board members of charitable organizations must not benefit themselves – they are basically trustees who act on behalf of the beneficiaries, in the target group. Among other tools that it has designed, C4L recently launched a web-based facility for NGO Board called *Boardware*. It exists to improve the standards of corporate governance among NGOs. To help Board members work together, even when they are scattered.

9. Why not lead by example?

Beware people who say, "Do as I say, not as I do"! It is important to practice what you preach about leadership. C4L has a voluntary Board, and an SMT (senior management team). Its organigram is drawn in team circles – not in individual boxes. It has a basis of faith and a code of practice. It works more with youth than with adults. It is formulating a succession plan, to encourage the emergence of a new generation of leaders and managers. This is not to say that it has no challenges – like any organization it is human and as such, imperfect. But its constant prayer is: "Lord, help me finish better than I started." It is a learning organization, not just a training organization!

10. Why cultural congruence?

Management is not like math that works the same in any setting. It is more like music – that varies considerably from one place to another, but serves a similar purpose in every culture. Sociologist Gerte Hofstede was once hired by IBM to study management and culture. His work has become renowned and is often explained in training at C4L. Africa has had an overdose of foreign interference in the past – with slavery and colonialism. Nkruma said that Africa does not need to look to the West, or to the East – but to look ahead. Good leaders will take his advice, look into the future, and find African solutions to Africa's problems. Any and all leadership and management development at C4L has to pass through the filters that Gerte Hofstede has published.

11. Why rotational leadership?

Democracy has emerged at different times in history. First, it was among the ancient Greeks. In their culture, age was revered, so the elders met in round structures called *ecclesia*. The word for men with grey hair was *presbyter*. Centuries later, when the Christian movement broke away from Judaism at the Council of Jerusalem, it needed some new terms to distinguish itself. So it adopted some Greek terminology – like the term *ecclesia* or church and *presbyter* or elder. No more synagogues and rabbis! It was sort of like the Communists organizing themselves in Soviets and calling everyone Comrade! In Acts 15, James was clearly the head of the church. Then after some time it passed on to Peter. And so forth. Rotational, circular, consultative, open, inclusive leadership style replaced the exclusivist hierarchy of high priests and a holy of holies. The significance of these changes, especially on social norms like the status of women, cannot be understated.

12. Why leadership and not just leaders?

Out of dealing with individuals comes recognition of patterns. Out of dealing with organizations comes what is called Best Practice. It emerges. So C4L does not stop at the human development level – training and equipping leaders. It creates conditions for leaders and managers to meet and compare notes, to learn from one another. This is not pedagogy – it is adult learning or androgogy. Patterns are noted by practitioners. These become standards. C4L becomes a storage tank of leadership know-how. In this sense its faculty members are more privileged than its course participants are, as learning arises from the exchange, from the marketplace of ideas and experience. Participants at C4L are informed learners. The impact that C4L offers is to harmonize and standardize, bringing coherence between sectors, cultures and countries in terms of leadership.

13. Why leadership not management?

In some parts of the world, CEOs are called Managing Directors or even General Managers. In Africa, however, it is not so. Leaders are called Directors or Executives. Even the term Coordinator is used if the role is less directive and more integrative. Fortune magazine said that *managers do things right, but leaders do the right thing*. That sums it up. C4L does train managers also – in financial management, project management, personnel management, time management, etc. Managers have to learn *to do things right*. But training leaders on an NGO's voluntary Board of Directors or executive directors (CEO's) is different – they have to learn *to do the right thing*. To do so, they have to see further ahead and to think strategically. C4L makes a clear distinction between governance, leadership and management.

14. What level leadership?

Every NGO has a Board of Directors, a top executive, an SMT (senior management team), department heads, programme managers, project managers, and planners. These colleagues operate at different levels, but they all need to envision their colleagues, not just to cross the T's and dot the I's. C4L works mainly with middle managers, providing a combination of skills and tools for doing things right, with a sprinkling of leadership know-how. C4L also works a lot with NGO Boards, which tend to be marginalized in Africa's culture of demagogues. It does work with top executives from time to time, but more so with middle managers and Board members.

15. What leadership standards?

There are various codes of practice that C4L uses to try to bring coherence into the sphere of leadership. For example, SANGOCO (South Africa NGO Coalition) has a code of conduct which includes a section on governance. The King Report on Corporate Governance is also relevant. The Department of Social Development (DSD) also has a code of practice for nonprofit organizations. One can also refer to faith and literature. Lao Tzu the Chinese philosopher had some wise advice for leaders in 500 BC. So did Jesus (e.g. John 13) who is the C in BC. That says something about his historical influence! John Kennedy said that the decision to send men to the moon was made "not because it was easy, but because it was hard". Some leadership standards are hard – like humbling yourself from a position of power to serve others who are powerless, marginalized and despised. But that is what makes it worthwhile.

16. Why the Desmond Tutu Centre for leadership?

The archbishop emeritus has been called a rabble-rouser and the *Voice of the Voiceless*. C4L approached him for permission to use his name as a way of honouring him. For he is a great leader, a great African, a great man of faith and a great inspiration. He never left the church for a cushy post in business or government – he remained rooted in faith and civil society. He is living proof that Africa has its share of famous leaders, as well as the infamous. He stands among great African churchmen like Athanasius and Augustine, who have emerged at defining moments in faith history to illuminate the path forward.

17. What style of leadership?

There are said to be three basic styles – directive, democratic and permissive. Directive leadership is favoured in the military. Democratic is favoured in government, and permissive (decentralized) is favoured in business, which stresses delegation. The truth is that NGOs need to learn all three styles. In emergency responses like earthquakes, the directive style is typical. In decision-making, NGOs tend to be democratic or even consensual – trying to eliminate dissent and find solutions that everyone can live with. In operational mode, NGO leaders and managers like their space (particularly if they are unpaid volunteers with a deep

sense of “sweat equity”) so the permissive style is also ubiquitous. In Africa, the work force is very different from “donor countries” in that it is less educated, with high illiteracy still, and not multi-skilled. Africa still offers employers including NGOs mainly unskilled workers, not knowledge workers. As a result, there is still much more room for directive leadership in Africa than in the North.

18. Why long periods of work punctuated by short periods of study?

Leadership and management development does not happen for most NGO workers in a university – but in an interspersity! In other words, by reading books, attending workshops, traveling on exposure visits, or enrolling in distance education. You get a promotion, so you suddenly need supervisory skills. Then you may need some technical training or project management skills to move forward in your career path. Later in your career you may need leadership development or even corporate governance training to sit on a church or NGO Board. It is a process, not an event. So C4L tries to provide a full slate of governance, leadership and management training, in a way that can be consumed in bite-sized pieces.

19. What training techniques suit leadership best?

C4L has found that while workshops, seminars and conferences are very useful, they have their limitations. It has found coaching and mentoring to be as good or better – but the best of all is to combine occasional workshops with follow-up mentoring visits to help learners put into practice what they have learned. One point in favour of off-the-job training is that it is the best setting for changing attitudes. Mentoring is better for on-the-job application of newly acquired skills. To acquire knowledge, guided reading is good or lectures (even on audio-tape or video). Learning always works best when a combination of senses are being used (sight, hearing, handling) and when the variety of techniques is stimulating.

20. Why doesn't C4L take the lead?

Doubting Thomas, when he first heard about Jesus, asked if anything good could come out of Nazareth?! C4L has a range of similar cynics to answer to... City people wonder if anything good can come out of the Lowveld?! Government professionals ask if anything good can come out of NGO amateurs?! Secular agencies ask if anything good can come out of faith-based organizations like C4L?! People in the North ask if anything good can come out of Africa?! Nevertheless, C4L takes heart in its own endorsement of *leading from behind*. You don't have to be out in front to find the way forward. You don't have to be the biggest to be the best. You don't have to be the leading light to shine in darkness.