

# Leadership Learning Path



*A Learning Path s International Whitepaper*

## Overview

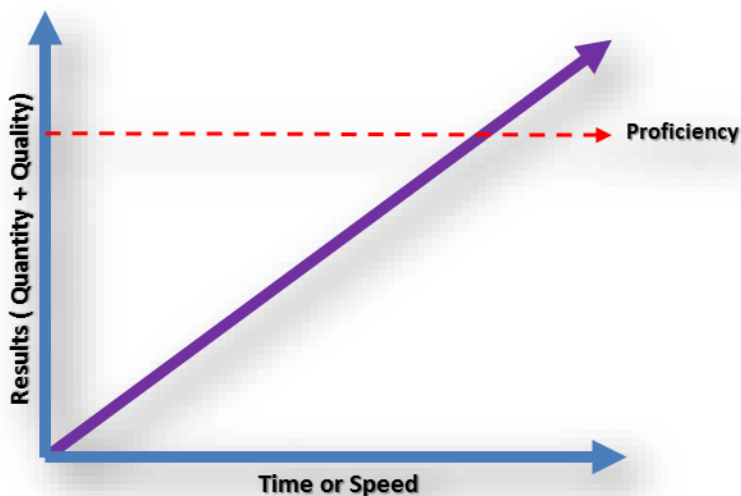
The purpose of this whitepaper is to show how to apply Learning Paths principles and techniques to developing highly effective leaders. The challenge is develop leaders at all levels of the organization and for the various positions that leaders hold. From executive leaders guiding the organization to team or project leaders with a specific task or mission, the Learning Paths methodology can put them on a fast track to success.

The key elements of the Learning Path methodology we will be exploring in this whitepaper are:

- Defining and measuring proficiency
- Mapping and accelerating a Learning Path
- Applying the Learning Path across the organization

## Defining Proficiency

Proficiency is a measure of performance. It sets a level for the quantity and quality of results over time. The challenge becomes to determine the results of leadership.



At a very high level the results of leadership are to achieve goals and vision set out by the organization. There are a lot of quality indicators that can be used to further describe and measure these results such as:

- Acting in a manner consistent with organizational values and vision
- Allocating resources in a cost effective manner
- Building a capability to sustain these results over time

With each measure of proficiency there is also an element of time or speed. Effective leaders need to get results quickly and within the time allowed. In other words, decisions need to be made and problems need to be solved.



**“Define the results of Leadership”**

To get a full definition of proficiency, the next step is to look at what other results and measures influence or add up to the end results. This chart shows some of the other general areas.



Let's look at decision making. In a leadership proficiency definition, you can set measures for the quality and speed of decision making. You can also look at the different types of decisions such as financial or strategic decisions. You can look at both the end result of the decisions and use the decision making process and a quality measure. For example, you can have a financial decision made in a timely manner that is a result of rigorous research and analysis. There can often be professional standards such as accepted accounting practices that add more to the proficiency definition.

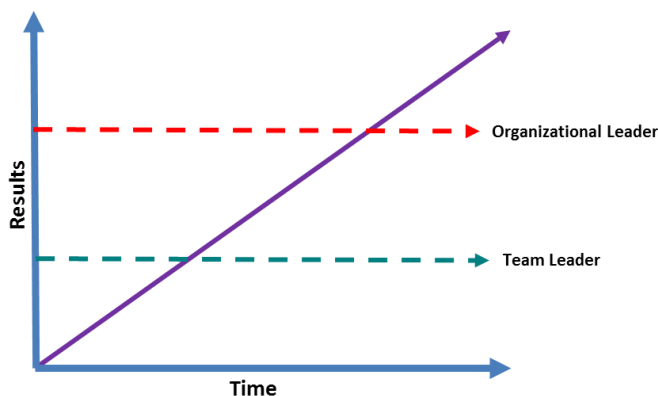
So an example of a statement around decision making might be:

- Makes timely decisions based on rigorous analysis that follows general accepted accounting practices.

A full proficiency definition for leadership will consist of about 50 to 60 statements divided into 6 or 7 general categories such as planning or team building.

## Proficiency Levels

As responsibilities grow and situations become more complex, proficiency needs to increase. Leading a large organization requires a higher level of proficiency than leading a small team. As a result, there will be more proficiency statements for higher levels of leadership.



**“Leadership becomes more complex as leaders move up in the organization”**

Below is an example of statements from a team leader proficiency definition.

**Team Formation**

Proficiency Statement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies and recruits team members that includes or represents key stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assigns and gains agreement on key roles for team members based on skills, expertise and communication styles.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishes and gains agreement on team norms and ground rules.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishes and continues to build high level support for team efforts including the necessary resources.</li> </ul>

**Team Visions, Mission and Goals**

Proficiency Statement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds and creates consensus for a team mission and vision that is in alignment with the team charter.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads a team through a team planning session to identify team goals and an action plan for meeting those goals.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds support for team vision, mission and goals from a high level sponsor and other stakeholders.</li> </ul>

**Team Problem Solving and Decision Making**

Proficiency Statement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads a team through a disciplined problem solving approach using the appropriate problem solving tools.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads a team through to make decisions using a disciplined decisions making process that ensures team support and consensus.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops and implements a strategy to ensure that team decisions are supported within the greater organization.</li> </ul>

**Team Management and Development**

Proficiency Statement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies and resolves team conflicts through managing communications and interpersonal styles</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides training to team members on how to resolve conflicts and make the team more cohesive.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes the causes of team conflicts and takes appropriate actions to resolve those conflicts.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creates and uses team events and activities to improve trust, sustain momentum and improve team morale.</li> </ul>

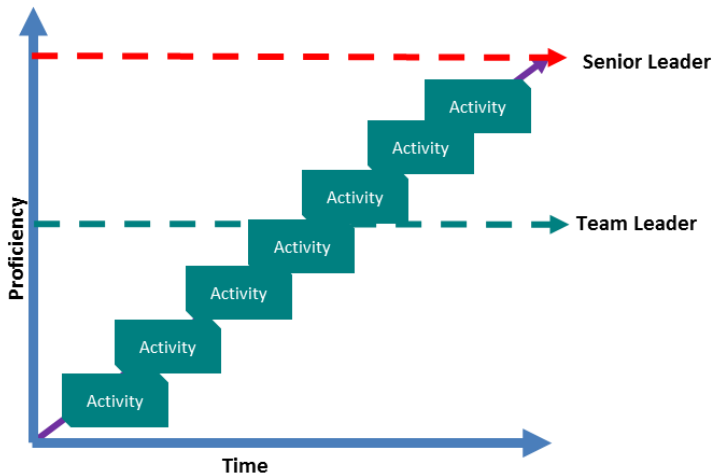
For higher levels in the organization this definition becomes more complex and more robust. Here is an example of how proficiency statements change:

Team Leader	Senior Executive
Builds and creates consensus for a team mission and vision that is in alignment with the team charter.	Builds support for the organization's mission and vision with the executive leadership team.



## Create a Leadership Learning Path

A Learning Path is a series of learning activities that start on day one and goes to proficiency. The proficiency definition describes the goal or end point so a Learning Path for a team leader will have a different end point than one for an executive leader.



The traditional approach to developing leaders is to start with a list of all the skills leaders need and then build a course for each one. That's an approach that's easy to teach but it's not how people really learn to be leaders.

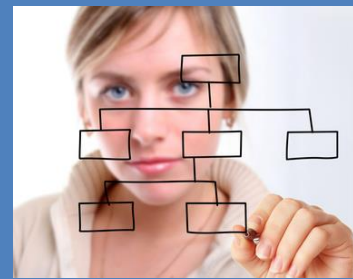
While formal training is an important part of learning leadership, it's probably no more than 20% of the equation. What's missing is all of the application, practice and experience required to put leadership skills into action in the wide range of situations leaders will face.

One of the major reasons it takes so long to develop a leader is that it takes a long time to encounter all of the leadership challenges. Putting these challenges on the path ensures that learning happens earlier and by design.

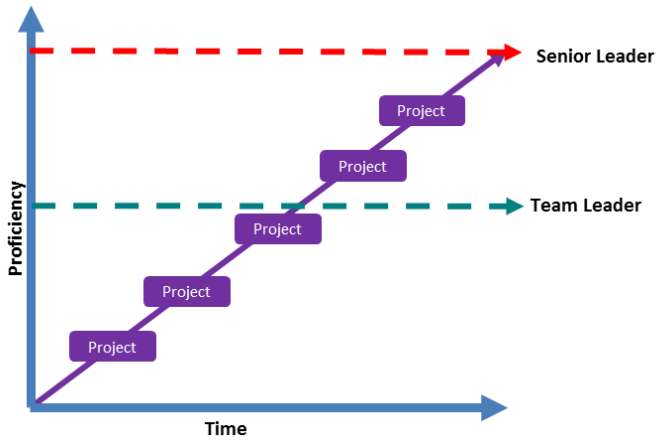
## Organizing Principle

As we build a Learning Path, we usually start by identifying an organizing principle. We are looking for a sequence of key events or situations that we can lay out from simple to complex or easy to hard. For leaders this might be a series of projects or assignments that require different levels of leadership. This might mean going from leading small task teams to quality improvement teams to executive teams. For leaders these sequence will probably take years to complete but it will be a logical progression of development.

An alternative to looking at types of teams, a path might be organized around leading different functions in the organization or levels within a single function. Asking those who have become successful how they learned to be a leader will help identify the best way to organize the path.



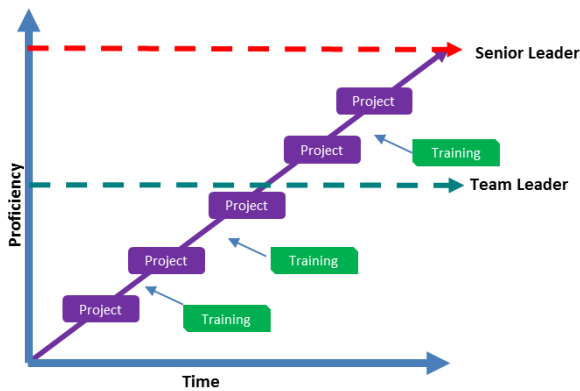
**“Structure training so that it’s just-in-time.”**



### Just-in-Time Training

Once the structure of the path is mapped out, the next step is to add training so that it is just in time. For example, there might be a basic decision making process taught early but a complex financial analysis tool won't be taught until it is going to be used years later. Remember that anything that isn't used immediately will most likely be forgotten. This is a waste of time and money.

This also allows for reinforcement and upgrading of skills. A leader might learn how to reduce conflict on a project team using communications styles. Then repeat this training to resolve conflicts at an executive level. The skills might be the same but the situations and people are different.



### Add Practice and Experience

Learning to be a leader requires a lot of practice and experience. It's critical to find out from other successful leaders in the organization what experiences they had to become leaders and then add those to the path for new leaders. In addition, just handling a situation once is often not enough practice. Try to set a number of assignments or projects needed to really refined leadership skills.



**“Learning to be a leader is more than just sitting in a classroom.”**

## Applying the Learning Path across the Organization

Leaders across most organizations are at different levels of experience and skills. They all don't need to start at the beginning of the path or go through every training program or experience every situation. Therefore, before starting a leader on the Leadership Learning Path it's important to do an assessment.

Start by comparing the leader to the Leadership Proficiency Definition. Ask, what's already been accomplished. Then do the same thing with the Learning Path. Then create a custom Learning Path by eliminating anything that the new leader has already accomplished or shown proficiency in. You can also use other types of leadership assessments to provide more in-depth analysis or provide more measurable data.

When done right a good Leadership Learning Path can be used as both a career path and a succession plan. The more detailed the Learning Path the easier it will be to put each leader on a custom path.

### Summary

Learning to be an effective leader is similar to learning anything else. It takes training as well as a lot of practice and experience. A Learning Path approach is more effective than just a series of courses because it makes sure that leaders get the guided practice and experience they need. It also sequences the training so that transfers what happens into the classroom on to the job.



**“Learning Paths can be used as both career paths and succession plans.”**