Leadership in Action
A Leadership Curriculum for College Students

Understanding Our Values & Character
Workshop Guide

Module 2

University of Wisconsin - Madison, Purdue University, & University of Illinois
Understanding Our Values & Character
Workshop Guide

Objectives

Participants will be able to
1. Identify personal values and character attributes that guide their lives and leadership behavior;
2. Understand how values and character become internalized and how one behaves congruently with one’s values;
3. Consider how values and character affect leadership.

Materials Needed

- Flipchart
- Several color markers for each small group
- Rolls of scotch tape, enough for each small group
- Copies of the following materials for each participant:
  - Blank sheets of paper
  - “Clarifying Our Values”
  - “Examining My Core Values”

Workshop Outline

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Icebreaker – 10 Minutes – “Wearing Your Values”

Distribute a blank sheet of paper to each participant, along with a color marker. Place a roll of scotch tape on each table.

Have you ever heard the phrase, “she wears her emotions on her sleeve” to indicate a person cares about what she is doing? If we want people to know what we value, what is important to us, sometimes we have to do or say things to make it really evident. Even though it is not really possible to wear our emotions or values on our sleeve, we are going to try it and see what it is like.

I’d like you to think about what values drive you. What values make you who you are? On the sheet of paper, write down the values you feel are at your core. Use the color markers, and write large enough that others can see the words clearly. Tape the piece of paper to your chest, or hold it so that others can see it. Now, mingle with others. Share your values, and ask others in the group to share stories about how they developed a value or why a particular value is important to them.

Introduction – 5 Minutes

The key question we will be considering in this workshop is how values and character are related to leadership.

The development of positive values and character attributes can have a large effect on the type of leader a person becomes. The legacy of a leader does not rest solely in his or her accomplishments. Leaders are also judged on what they value and how they conduct themselves as they confront difficult decisions brought on by trying to balance the interests of others and the practical demands of challenging issues. A person's values and character act as powerful guides for decision-making and behavior; therefore, the development of positive values and a strong character helps leaders use their skills and abilities to make positive contributions.

Understanding our own values and character is an important component of leadership development. Kouzes and Posner in *The Leadership Challenge* suggest that leaders need to know what they believe in and stand for if they are to have an influence. If leaders are unsure about their values and character, then others will also be unsure, and the leader will lose credibility.

In this section we will discuss the concepts of values and character, and we will consider some ideas regarding how values and character develop and become internalized. After the discussion, we will focus on how values and character relate to leadership.

Topic Discussion – 20 Minutes

Values

Ask participants how they define values. Allow a few participants to respond. Record their thoughts on the flipchart.

Values are principles or standards we believe are important or worthwhile. They form the underlying priorities that guide our decisions and behavior. Values we consistently rank higher than others are what we call “core values.” These are what define our character and remain relatively stable across contexts.
Character

Ask participants how they define character. Allow a few participants to respond. Record their thoughts on the flipchart.

Character is the combination of attributes, traits, and values that defines us and differentiates one person from another. These qualities or attributes regulate our behavior. Character is relatively consistent across time and context.

Where do values and character come from? How do they develop, become internalized, and guide our actions?

Allow a few participants to respond. Record their thoughts on the flipchart.

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Model of Development

Over the course of history, philosophers and psychologists have addressed different aspects of value and character development. There are many different perspectives on this issue. Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Model of Development can give you a sense of how values and character might develop. Although Bandura’s theory is only one set of ideas, it captures the complexity of value and character development and it has empirical support.

In this model, all development, including the development of values and character, is the result of three factors: a person’s environment, a person’s behavior, and personal/cognitive factors such as motivation or beliefs. For example, the family and community in which a person lives and grows (his or her environment) will emphasize some values more than others and will attempt to socialize people toward particular character traits.

At the same time, a person’s own behavior elicits a response from his or her surroundings. For example, if a child exhibits prosocial behavior in the classroom, his or her teacher may reward the behavior, making it more likely the child will repeat the behavior. Over time, the prosocial behavior may become a character trait that is not contingent upon the behavior being rewarded.

The third factor, personal characteristics such as beliefs, also affects the development of values and character. Self-efficacy beliefs, for example, refer to our beliefs in our own ability. People are more likely to act according to their values when they have the ability to do so and expect to achieve positive outcomes. If leaders develop the confidence that, even during difficult situations, they are strong enough to act according to their guiding values, then they are more likely to achieve their desired standard of conduct.

An important component of Bandura’s theory is vicarious learning, or modeling. Bandura proposed and tested the notion that people model the behaviors to which they are exposed. If people have peers, family members, and mentors who display particular values, they are likely to act in a similar manner.

These three factors contributing to development—environment, behavior, and personal/cognitive factors—interact with each other, making the development of values and character complex and dynamic. Bandura’s theory suggests how values and character may develop; being aware of these processes can help us understand our own values and character, strive for desired changes, and learn to influence the values and character of others.

What does this have to do with leadership?

Richard L. Daft, who wrote the textbook on leadership development, The Leadership Experience, believes leadership is inseparable from our values and moral actions. He says, “Leadership is not merely a set of practices with no association with right or wrong” (Daft, p. 222).

Values act as filters when we are making decisions, and character provides a stable base or anchoring from which to act. In order to move people toward improvement, leaders must have a positive value
system and a strong character. There are a number of leadership models rooted in values and character. The following is a brief summary presenting a few popular ideas about character and leadership. You can find more information in the reference list.

**Josephson’s Six Pillars of Character**

The Six Pillars of Character were developed by The Josephson Institute, a nonprofit organization “dedicated to improving the ethical quality of society by changing personal and organizational decision making and behavior.”

The Six Pillars are:

1. Trustworthiness (honesty, integrity, reliability, loyalty)
2. Respect (civility, courtesy, decency, dignity, autonomy, tolerance, acceptance)
3. Responsibility (accountability, pursuit of excellence, self-restraint)
4. Fairness (process, impartiality, equity)
5. Caring (compassionate, forgiving, helpful)
6. Citizenship (cooperate, involvement, considerate of neighbors and community)

**Covey’s Principle Centered Leadership**

Stephen Covey’s model of Principle Centered Leadership has four dimensions that he calls “natural laws” or “principles”: Wisdom, Guidance, Security, and Power. He argues that we need to focus on natural laws because they endure and hold everywhere; natural laws do not change or shift. They provide principles that act as a compass and can guide us.

He separates these principles from human values. He says these principles, unlike our values, are objective and external, and the more our values align with the natural laws, the more useful they will be. Covey writes that when we are guided by Wisdom, Guidance, Security, and Power, “we gain the strength to break with the past, to overcome old habits, to change our paradigms and to achieve primary greatness and interpersonal effectiveness (p.30).” The idea is that these four principles should guide our value system and our character development.

According to Covey (1991):

- Security represents our sense of worth, self-esteem, and personal strength.
- Guidance is the direction we receive, the standards and principles that govern how we make decisions and what we do.
- Wisdom is a sage perspective on life, balance, a deep understanding of how principles apply and relate to each other.
- Power is the capacity to act and the courage to accomplish a task.

**Greenleaf’s Servant Leadership**

Robert Greenleaf developed the notion of Servant Leadership. Greenleaf believes true leadership emerges from people who are intrinsically motivated to help others. Servant Leaders transcend self-interest to serve the needs of others. They help others grow and provide opportunities for others to gain materially and emotionally. Servant leadership is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work.

Greenleaf wrote about the need for a different approach to leadership. He suggested that serving employees, customers, and the community should be a leader’s first priority. Characteristics of Servant Leaders are that they listen, empathize, heal, persuade, and build community. They exhibit foresight, stewardship, and commitment to the group.
If time permits, lead the participants through a discussion of these ideas. Possible discussion questions include:

What do these ideas (Six Pillars of Character, Principle Centered Leadership, and Servant Leadership) have in common?

- How are they distinct from one another?
- How useful are they?
- What do they add to the knowledge base of leadership?

These three models are based on values and character. They are popular frameworks that provide important ideas regarding the nature of leadership and the personal characteristics of good leaders.

**The Relationship Among Values, Character, & Leadership**

Research helps us to better understand the relationship among values, character, and leadership. Gillespie and Mann (2004) investigated leadership practices and how they affect trust in the leader. They found values have a significant role in the development of trust; sharing common values was among the three variables that accounted for 67 percent of the team members’ total trust in the project leader.

Character is popularly conceptualized as a group of constant and unchanging traits. Peterson and Seligman (2003) investigated the conditions under which character may change. Following the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, they found increases in seven character strengths: gratitude, hope, kindness, leadership, love, spirituality, and teamwork. This indicates there are conditions under which character can change. One questions with very large implications for leadership is whether or not people can intentionally change their own character without a life-changing event. Although research has not addressed this specific point, there is evidence that long-standing, habitual behavior can change when people are motivated to change.

In another study, Hogan and Kaiser (2005) reviewed a study by Peterson and Seligman (2004) regarding the characteristics people look for in their leaders. The top four characteristics in order of importance were integrity, decisiveness, competence, and vision. People tend to accept leadership from people with these attributes, and each of these involves values and character. This research supports the importance of values and character in leadership.

**Activity – 20 Minutes – Clarifying Values**

Break the participants into small groups for the Values Clarification activity. Pass out the “Clarifying Our Values” activity sheet to each participant. Read the instructions on the sheet.

After 15 minutes, ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. If your values conflicted with those of another group member, how did you resolve the decision?
2. Were there values you would concede and some you would not?
3. What did you think about some of your group members’ values, especially if they seemed to conflict with your own?
4. How is this exercise like “real life” when you are faced with decisions in which values come into play?

**Activity – 10 Minutes – Examining Core Values**

Pass out the “Examining My Core Values” activity sheet. Read the instructions at the top of the page, and ask participants to think about their core values individually and respond to the questions. If time allows, ask if anyone would like to share their core values or what they learned in doing this activity. Ask if they identified the same values as in the Icebreaker activity, “Wearing Your Values,” or if they were able to identify other core values.
**Reflection, Application, & Summary – 10 Minutes**

Have the participants apply the content of the workshop by discussing some or all of the following:

1. What do the people you consider to be leaders value? How do you know?
2. How would someone know what you value?
3. How did you make decisions in the value clarification exercise? What does this tell you about your values?
4. Does courage have a role in leadership based on values? If so, what is the role?
5. Why might it be important for leaders to understand their own values and character attributes?
6. How can you continue to develop positive values and build a strong character?
7. How can you help others develop positive values and a strong character?
8. When you are in situations that challenge your values, from where will your courage to act in accordance with your values come?

Values and character attributes are at the center of who we are and therefore affect all aspects of our lives, including our leadership capacity. Many people who write about leadership indicate values and character are central to creating a positive influence. We have discussed different views regarding leadership based on values and character, and you have had time to think about some of your values and character attributes. As you continue to develop your leadership style and ability, consider the role your values and character play.

**References**


Clarifying Our Values

You are on a cruise ship off the coast of South Africa. A very bad storm damaged the vessel, and it is taking on so much water that it is going to sink. There are not enough life rafts for everyone; some will be left behind and likely drown or be eaten by the sharks circling the sinking ship. You are part of the rescue team and must decide which five or six of 10 people will be allowed into a small rescue boat. Five of the people can fit easily, and the small rescue boat should make it safely to the coast. Six people may fit, but that would exceed the boat’s capacity and possibly jeopardize the ability to get to shore safely. The team has only 10 minutes to make the decision.

As you discuss which six people to allow into the rafts, be aware of the values that underlie your reasoning. For example, if the pregnant woman is to be saved, what is the underlying value guiding your decision? Here are your choices:

- A recent university male graduate who works in an accounting firm.
- The recent graduate’s wife who is eight months pregnant.
- A second-year Latina medical student who is also a community advocate.
- A middle aged man who is an accomplished writer.
- A Hollywood actor who has played the lead in award-winning movies.
- A female geneticist who had an important role in mapping the genome.
- A middle-aged member of the clergy who has four young children.
- An Olympic athlete who is likely to bring her country a great deal of recognition.
- A college student who plans to become a civil rights attorney.
- A Supreme Court Justice who is writing the majority opinion on the use of stem cells for cloning animals.
Exercising My Core Values

The purpose of this activity is for you to think more deeply about core values that you hold. In the spaces below, write about your values.

1. Identify a value that governs your behavior or life.

2. Write about something or someone that supports your value.

3. Describe how the value protects you.

4. Describe a time when the value has been difficult to hold onto and it would have been easier to release it.

5. Write about how you came to that value, how or why it developed.
6. Describe what someone would see if they witnessed you behaving according to the value.

7. Describe a time you invited others to share your value, or describe how you could do that.

8. Describe a situation in which you hid or would have rather hidden your value. Or describe a situation that could make your value hard to live by.
About Leadership in Action

Leadership in Action is a multi-state leadership development program for college-age students. It was funded in part by an USDA/CSREES HEP Challenge Grant, 2005-2009 to the University of Illinois, Purdue University, and the University of Wisconsin – Madison. Undergraduate students from those universities participated in a 21-month program during which the workshop modules were developed, used during the two cohort programs, reviewed, and revised.

We intend that students who have been trained in conducting effective workshops use these materials for leadership workshops with various student organizations. The materials can be used separately for individual workshop sessions, in any combination for a short-term program, or in their entirety for a long-term program.

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