Leadership for the future – Improving existing management training for better leadership development.

Are leaders born or are they made? – The question continues to dominate the study of leadership development but the conclusion remains elusive - it is widely acknowledged that no leader worth their salt can be continually effective without evaluating and developing their skills on an ongoing basis. No leader will ever grow without gaining the experiences and development impetuses required for navigating or more importantly, thriving in today’s dynamic business environment. Effective management training in today’s VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world is a double edged sword - if you are not into it, one end of it will pierce through you and if you are into it and do not know how to do it right, the other end will get through you. Organizations today talk about many workforce centric challenges, but perhaps one that concerns them like no other is the mandate to nurture lasting growth and development across the employee base and handle the myriad roadblocks that make development of a robust leadership pipeline increasingly difficult.

This paper examines the existing concept and practice of management training for better leadership development in the public sector and recommends improvements to ensure greater benefits from management training interventions for leaders at all levels. The key idea is to move away from traditional classroom training, to multi-faceted leadership development initiatives. It is Aon Hewitt’s strong belief that this can greatly help leaders enhance and apply their knowledge, skills and abilities and play a pivotal role in translating visionary strategies into meaningful actions.
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Section I: Significance of the Public Sector

“The competence, integrity, and sensitivity of those who work in public service will determine the quality of life for all of us.” – Bill Bradley, Former U.S Senator

The economic growth of a country is vital for the welfare of its national economy, and often entails deliberate actions to help promote the growth. There are a number of factors that help improve the economic growth of a country within a local, regional, national and global framework. A majority of these factors are linked to the efforts made by the Government in improving standards of living for the public. Thus, the public sector plays a very crucial role in enabling, reinforcing and advancing the economic growth of a country. It is collectively the world’s largest service provider and any incremental changes in services provided by these organizations to the public, will positively impact billions of people across the world.

To meet the growing demands of public, the public sector needs to find ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the services being delivered. Providing the right level/ quality of service while consciously spending the tax payers’ money remains a constant challenge for these organizations. The performance of the public sector is a key driver of a country’s economic growth as it provides a competent workforce who serves the public; a regulatory and investment environment conducive to business and the infrastructure that helps in the movement of goods and information. Thus by having an effective, cost-efficient and accountable Government that delivers high quality services, the overall economy of a country can be significantly improved.

Section II: Challenges Faced by the Public Sector in the Middle East

The public sector of any country is shaped by various factors including its economic performance, political philosophy, extent of collaboration outside the organization and the demand from its public for services. Before understanding the approach that can help public sector organizations in providing meaningful services to its public, we need to be aware of the challenges faced by public sector organizations.

• Budget cuts – doing more with less:
According to a public service news website, the biggest challenge affecting the public sector institutions globally is funding cuts – doing more with less. With significant reduction in costs and budgets, the growing demands of public pose a great challenge for public sector organizations. This is also seen as a trend in the Middle East region, where public sector organizations are expected to perform within the strained government budgets. According to research carried out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on the opportunities and challenges in the MENA region, public sectors in the Middle East and North Africa region are under tremendous pressure to revitalize the economy within the restricted public budgets. The instructions “to do more with less” are pushing Governments to identify areas of improvement, weed out inefficiencies and bridge the identified gaps by focused developmental efforts – in both people as well as systems.
• Quality of the management:
With heavy budget cuts along with demands for improved services, the need for a capable management team becomes apparent. The World Public Report, a UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs research study, highlights that no progress can be made in the public sector until there are effective managers and competent civil servants. The public sector in the Middle East region has started realizing the importance of this aspect, and many organizations are now taking steps to improve the quality of their management through leadership development interventions. At Aon Hewitt, we have come across, as well as partnered with many Government and public sector organizations that have shown interest in putting in place structured development programs for their current and future leaders. However, there is still a long way to go when it comes to leadership development and the unique challenges they face, as elucidated in the latter sections of this paper.

Further, public sector employees themselves do not seem to perceive their organizations to be providing adequate support in their development. This was revealed in our pioneering research study Qudurat™, where we found that only 37% of GCC public sector employees were satisfied with the learning & development opportunities provided by their organizations. Also, a mere 37.4% of employees felt that they received adequate support from their own managers towards their development\(^1\).

• Increasing demands of the public:
Improved performance of public sector organizations has taken on a new urgency in recent years as organizations are facing mounting demands on public expenditure, coupled with pressure of higher quality services within the reduced budgets. For example, during the ‘Arab Spring’, many Governments in the region were challenged by the public in unprecedented manners which emphasized tensions in some countries. During this crisis situation, Governments in the Middle East region have adopted strategies to increase the salaries and jobs in the public sector as an immediate response to the social discontent. Although such measures are helpful in mitigating challenges in the short term, they also add pressure to already strained public budgets. Thus public sector organizations are facing high pressure to find realistic long term solutions which address these challenges. What this highlights for the Human Resources teams, is a need to develop leaders who can have a clear vision of the future and deliver on ways of meeting the growing needs of the communities they serve.

• Lack of external collaboration:
In this era, where public sector performance is affected by the changes in the external environment, collaboration is vital. According to global research carried out by a 2012 GovDelivery Poll, 96% of the public sector workers believe that having strong partnerships with external consultants, other Government agencies, private sector companies and the public would benefit their organizations. Governments in the Middle East region are planning to spend over half a trillion dollars on national development plans aimed at promoting the growth of private sectors and encouraging a shift from excessive reliance on hydrocarbons. One way of effectively investing this money is through Public Private Partnerships (PPP) where a Private Sector company and a Government agency partner to complete a project that will serve the public. However in the Middle East, only Kuwait has a well-established PPP framework of legislation, governance and execution structures. There is perceived to be a lack of innovation and effective collaboration between the public sector leaders currently. Thus, these organizations need to develop leaders who are dynamic and able to challenge the status enable them to do this.
• **Employee engagement:**

According to a research done by CIPD, managers in the public sector need support in their attempts to motivate and engage their work force to deliver services during budget cuts. This was highlighted in our Qudurat™ research report, where we found only 39.3% of the public sector employees to be engaged in the GCC region. The study also indicates that a mere 37.1% of public sector employees in the GCC region think that their organizations motivate them for better performance and only 36.2% of employees believe that the senior management communicates with them on a regular basis, inspiring higher levels of performance. In addition, Aon Hewitt’s Engagement database shows that only around half of the employees in the Government and public sector see themselves being treated like valuable assets by the management.

Although there is only a 22.1% of attrition risk in the GCC public sector, engaging your workforce, communicating with them on a regular basis and making them more productive is the biggest opportunity which can be leveraged to deliver effective services. Thus, stressing the need for an effective management team, who can motivate and engage the workforce.

• **Learning & developmental opportunities:**

Organizations today talk about many workforce centric challenges, but perhaps one that concerns them like no other is the mandate to nurture lasting growth and development across the employee base. Aon Hewitt’s flagship research study Top Companies for Leaders™ (TCFL), with 478 participants from across the globe, indicates that one of the key factors contributing to the financial success of the Top Companies is that 100% of these companies articulate a clear business case for investing in leadership development and have formal processes to educate and develop leaders at all levels in the organization. According to Aon Hewitt Qudurat Study™, only 37% of employees in the GCC public sector are satisfied with the learning and development opportunities provided by their organizations currently and public expenditure on civil service wages is higher in the Middle East than most other regions globally. The public sector in the GCC particularly, offers higher pay, greater job security and attractive benefits and is therefore favored over the private sector by many Nationals in these countries. In this scenario, attrition is not a key concern for these organizations. However, preventing a ‘sense of entitlement’ from setting in, along with creating healthy competition and hunger for constantly raising the bar on performance becomes a challenge.

Many of the public sector organizations also lack robust methods to measure job performance, and career progression/promotions are often linked to seniority rather than purely merit. This was also reflected in our engagement studies in the sector, which showed that only 33% of employees in the public sector felt that their previous performance appraisal accurately reflected their job performance. Only 45% of this group thought that their organization had enough tools and resources which distinguished and rewarded high performers. This is also a problem that plagues many Government and public organizations in other parts of the world, and is often seen as contributing to the lack of a performance driven culture. This issue can be addressed by having the right systems as well as a strong management team capable of driving performance and accountability within the organization.

In summary, having competent, dynamic, and engaged public sector management with a strong vision for the future, will ensure that significant progress can be made. Public sector organizations must focus on building, in a structured manner, a pipeline of strong managers who can lead the sector while efficiently utilizing the available resources.
Section III: What Our Research Says on the Current State of Leadership Development in the Public Sector

Aon Hewitt defines leadership development as “a conscious effort by an organization to develop a robust leadership pipeline by providing current and future leaders with opportunities to learn, develop and transform themselves, in line with the skills and competencies required in their roles and context”. Below is a summary of our research that provides insight around the current state of leadership development in the public sector:

• A tactical approach as opposed to a strategic one:

Largely, we see leadership development interventions planned as well as driven by the Human Resources (or in some cases, learning & development) teams in organizations. Though inputs are often sought from line managers and business leaders, these are largely seen as HR initiatives rather than business ones. In many organizations, we also observe a lack of linkage of the leadership development initiatives and the larger business objectives, or the other talent management systems in the organization. Even fewer organizations have in place a clear leadership development philosophy or strategy around which these ‘initiatives’ are anchored.

• A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach:

Our research and consulting experience in the region shows that public sector organizations are struggling with the challenge of adopting differentiated talent development strategies which address the unique development needs of each learner segment across career stages. More-or-less similar leadership capabilities are deemed critical across leaders in different career stages and the approaches adopted for development are also fairly similar in nature. According to the TCFL Study, the Top Companies globally not only consistently establish formal processes to educate and develop leaders across career stages, but 96% of these companies also use highly customized leadership development initiatives to develop leaders. In their seminal work, “The Leadership Pipeline”, Ramcharan, Stephen Drotter and James Noel noted that the key to building a robust leadership pipeline lies in helping leaders at various levels in the organization successfully navigate the critical leadership passages. In our experience, we have seen that leaders are most likely to struggle when they move across different career stages, whilst shifting gears by unlearning some old behaviors and adopting new ones. Public sector organizations need to focus on supporting these career moves, by customizing their leadership development initiatives in line with the requirements of various career stages.

• Equating training with development:

Our research reveals that most of leadership development in the public sector is centered around training programs (especially classroom training), with some emphasis on one-on-one coaching for leaders at the senior levels. Increasingly, we see globally that the Top Companies are moving away from traditional class room training and coaching sessions to multi-faceted leadership development initiatives focused on providing a range of development experiences that go into making effective leaders. These development experiences include structured periodic feedback, job rotations, action learning, peer experience sharing, networking, mentoring, and wisdom transfer in addition to the traditional classroom training. The public sector needs to leverage these modes of learning to a greater extent, balancing the traditional, passive modes of development with the more active, employee-driven ones.
• Focusing on specific target groups:

In the region, we see a large number of organizations focus their learning & development initiatives on two groups – the new entrants (through induction programs) and the senior management. This also seems to be reflected in the employee opinion. Our Qudurat™ research reveals that employees’ satisfaction with L&D opportunities available to them is the highest in the first two years of service (entry level), during which structured development interventions are made available to them.

Following this, investments in L&D tend to taper off by the time employees hit the 25 to 34 years age bracket, and then the satisfaction levels only reach similar highs when employees enter senior management1. This trend is similar for the public as well as private sectors in the region. Given the fact that new entrants to the workforce come with aggressive career ambitions, sustained investments in their well-rounded development become a prerequisite for their subsequent engagement and success in the organization.

• Lack of ongoing support for development:

As a leading Human Resources consulting firm in the region, we are pleased to note that most Government and public sector organizations are now realizing the importance of the leadership development mandate, and making efforts to develop and groom their leaders through focused programs. However, we still see the approaches adopted as being ad-hoc, lacking continuity. This is reinforced by our engagement research in the region, which highlights the fact that only 34% of employees in the public sector and Government organizations agree that they have a strong on-going process which can help them continuously identify their development needs continuously. Furthermore, 56% of respondents believe that there is a lack of support in implementing the skills learnt through training initiatives3. Leadership development in Top Companies is an on-going process and not a one stop program – this is the mindset that public sector organizations need to adopt to a greater extent going forward.

• Managers’ role limited in driving leadership development:

According to our Middle East engagement research, only 48% of employees in the public sector believe that their manager provides them with regular feedback to help them improve their performance. On the other hand, 44% of public sector managers believe that they lack the capabilities required to discuss the skills their staff should develop for future success in the organization3. The public sector now needs to equip people managers to play a more active role in driving performance and developing their subordinates - making them more accountable in the future.

• Limited success in evaluating the ‘returns on investment’ (ROI):

According to the Learning & Talent survey by CIPD, post-course evaluations or ‘happy sheets’ are the most commonly used method of evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development interventions currently. Based on our research and experience, we found that the return on investment (ROI) is still not being calculated by a majority of public sector organizations to quantify the results of their leadership development interventions. Most of these organizations are still relying primarily on participant feedback in addition to the above-mentioned post-course evaluations, as the basis for evaluating the effectiveness of their efforts towards leadership development.
Section IV: Aon Hewitt’s Recommended Approach to Improving Existing Management and Leadership Development

Leadership development is all about making the journey of an employee successful, yet only a handful of companies are able to consistently groom and grow leaders across the organization. Based on our extensive research and consulting experience, both in the Middle East and globally, we would like to propose a few ways in which management and leadership development could be further improved in public sector organizations.

However, before we go into that, it is essential to highlight that leadership development is only one part of the larger talent management mandate, and as such, it can only be fully effective if it is aligned with other talent management systems like recruitment & selection, employee engagement & retention, performance & career management and succession planning. Please refer to Figure 1 – Leadership Development Linkages to other Talent Management Systems, in Section V: Tables and Figures, to understand the linkages of Leadership development with the aforementioned systems.

Aon Hewitt’s Four Phase Approach to Leadership Development:
Aon Hewitt recommends a four phase approach to effective leadership development in public sector organizations. The four phases include - Identify, Design, Deliver and Evaluate. Please refer to Figure 2 – Four Phase Approach to Leadership Development, in Section V: Tables and Figures, to understand the highlights of the four phased approach detailed in this paper.

Phase 1 - Identify:
This first phase involves clearly identifying the Why, What and Who of the leadership development interventions to be undertaken by any given organization. Developing a leadership development strategy, in line with the organization’s overall strategy is a vital factor in determining the long term success, relevance and sustainability of any leadership development initiative. A robust leadership development strategy forms an effective tool for accelerating the development of talent across the organization, and must answer the following questions:

- Why do we need to invest in leadership development? What are the business objectives we seek to achieve?
- What are the focus areas for leadership development interventions? I.e. What skills/capabilities do we need to build or hone for employees at various levels?
- Who should the organization focus their efforts/investment on?
Most leadership development interventions fail or produce minimal results in the public sector because of weak linkage between organizational strategy and the objectives of leadership development initiatives. In order to arrive at a robust leadership development strategy, Aon Hewitt recommends taking into account the following:

- Vision, mission, values and strategic objectives of the organization
- Future goals and strategy
- External environmental factors impacting the organization
- Challenges that the organization is currently facing or likely to face in the future

Involvement and input of business leaders and line managers is critical at this stage, in order to ensure relevance to the business as well as ensuring their engagement and commitment to the process. The leadership development strategy further needs to identify what aspects need to be developed across leaders at different career stages.

At Aon Hewitt, we strongly believe that effectiveness in any role is an ongoing interplay between 3 key components: (a) Technical Knowledge & Skills, (b) Behavioral Competencies and (c) Leadership Style. However, different aspects become important for leaders at various career stages. Thus, an organization’s approach for leadership effectiveness must prioritize different facets across career stages. Please refer to Figure 3 – Aon Hewitt’s Model of Leadership Effectiveness, in Section V: Tables and Figures, to understand the three important components of effective leadership.

In our experience, for individuals in top management levels, leadership styles becomes the most critical focus area as this impacts others and also defines the direction and culture of the organization. For individuals in middle management roles, behavioral competencies tend to become more important from a performance and development perspective, as at this stage leaders need to develop the ability to get work done through others. At more junior levels in the organization, technical knowledge & skills have the greatest impact on an individual’s effectiveness (as individual contributors).

When developing a strategy, it is vital that the desired technical knowledge & skills, behavioral competences and leadership styles are clearly articulated to ensure the leadership development investments are focused on the ‘right’ things. Next, the gap between current and desired leadership capabilities needs to be determined, and once this gap has been analyzed, the key capabilities that require the most emphasis can be identified. We typically see the following modes of assessment to be most effective for evaluating the three key aspects mentioned above:

- Technical knowledge & skills – manager/ performance feedback, technical tests
- Behavioral competencies – multi-source feedback, assessment centres, behavioral event interviewing
- Leadership style - multi-source feedback, psychometric testing
The leadership development strategy of an organization also helps identify the segments to focus their efforts on. This is becoming very critical for organizations in today’s scenario, with the mandate of “doing more with less”. At Aon Hewitt, we believe that investing in high potential employees can yield maximum results for the organization. Aon Hewitt differentiates high potential talent based on the following four aspects:

1. **Performance**: High Performers -
   - Consistently exceed expectations
   - Sustain high performance over time
   - Anticipate organizational demands and client needs
   - Are results oriented and creative with solutions

2. **Character**: High performers -
   - Role model the company culture and values
   - Have passion for the organization
   - Exude confidence and are well respected
   - Build followership

3. **Capability**: High performers -
   - Remain flexible with changing conditions
   - Effectively manage ambiguity
   - Are rapid learners
   - Prioritize and optimize situations to achieve results

4. **Motivation**: High performers -
   - Motivation: High Performers -
     - Aspire to higher levels of responsibility and challenges
     - Are persistent in seeking opportunities to grow as leaders
     - Work beyond the scope of their job responsibility

Public sector organizations need to differentiate and segment their talent to a greater extent than they do currently, and then identify how to address the different segments as part of the leadership development strategy. Once the strategy is in place, it can form the anchor for all subsequent initiatives.

**Phase 2 - Design:**

After identifying the Why, What and Who as part of the leadership strategy, the next step is to work out the How. As mentioned previously, we have found that most of the organizations implement leadership development initiatives as standalone programs with limited ongoing support to reinforce learning on-the-job. There is also an excessive reliance on classroom training or coaching as preferred modes of delivery.

We highly recommend a move away from these conventional methods towards multi-faceted leadership development initiatives focused on providing the whole range of ‘developmental experiences’ that go into making effective leaders. Some of these development experiences are explained below:

- **Structured periodic feedback**: Involving key stakeholders in the learning process, for providing regular feedback around the application of learning, particularly useful when it is related to behavioral change
- **Job rotations/shadowing**: Having leaders perform or observe other jobs/tasks in order to learn new skills, increase their breadth and develop greater appreciation of other functions
• Action learning: Having individuals identify and deliver cross-functional projects critical to the organization, thereby providing them with opportunities to display as well as develop skills and competencies in an experiential learning mode

• Peer support and experience sharing: Enabling opportunities for leaders from various functions (or even organizations) to collaborate, share learning and act as ‘sparring partners’ to support each other’s growth

• Networking: Enabling individuals to form and leverage effective networks with key stakeholders within the industry

• Wisdom transfer: Having experts and senior leaders share their experiences, knowledge and advice

• Mentoring: Equipping senior leaders to act as coaches & mentors to identified high potential talent

It must be noted that most of these developmental experiences do not require additional financial investments from the organization, as it shifts the onus of learning to the receiver (thereby encouraging a high performance culture) and provides more sustainable avenues for learning involving line managers. These modes of learning are definitely underutilized in the public sector today, and once identified, can be deployed fairly quickly to help increase the effectiveness of leadership development efforts.

Phase 3 - Deliver:

Many of the above-mentioned development experiences can be provided to current and future leaders without much external support. However, when it comes to some of the modes like classroom training and coaching, organizations have to choose between delivering them internally or outsourcing them to other providers. In the region, we see a definite preference towards relying on external learning & development providers when it comes to behavioral and management/leadership training (though much of the technical training is delivered in-house). However, going forward it is recommended that organizations make conscious efforts to develop and drive such behavioral/leadership development programs, to ensure they get the best out of their training spend. It is also critical for the senior leadership and line managers to play a greater role in delivery of such programs, to ensure greater effectiveness.

Phase 4 - Evaluate:

Calculating the return on investment (ROI) in leadership development seems to have become a popular topic for discussion in recent times. A number of models and constructs are being proposed and discussed, however, it is our considered opinion that before attempting to adopt some of these sophisticated models, organizations should first begin to talk about what returns they are seeking, and then identify ways in which these could be measured.

Some of the simpler ways in which public sector organizations could determine the effectiveness of leadership development interventions are listed below:

• Participant feedback on the initiatives

• Stakeholder feedback (from managers/peers/subordinates) on the changes in individual skills, attitudes, behaviors and performance
• Measuring increase/descrease in productivity/output/performance per employee or at the team level

• Measuring increase/descrease in satisfaction/engagement scores around L&D driver

• Measuring the increase/descrease in attrition of key employees

• Analyzing encouragement of attendance and verbal marketing of the initiatives by participants, to other potential participants

• Percentage of home-grown leaders compared to externally hired ones

Ideally, any organization should measure at least a few such metrics instead of relying excessively on any one. It is also critical to remember that leadership development is an investment for the future, and when done right, can have recurring returns years after the actual initiatives are taken.

Section V: Tables and Figures

Figure 1 – Leadership Development Linkages to Other Talent Management Systems

To ensure organization recruits talent that has right skills and behaviors to drive business results

To develop individuals based on their learning needs, the role demands and ensure adequate learning is imparted for enabling career movements

To identify and groom critical talent for key positions

To engage and retain employees who are identified as critical talent by providing meaningful learning platforms and guiding them in their developmental journey

To ensure the organization develops individuals based on learning needs, role demands and ensuring adequate learning is imparted for enabling career movements
Figure 2 – Four Phase Approach to Leadership Development

IDENTITY
- Strategy formulation
- Business alignment
- Focus areas
- Target segments

DESIGN
- In house / outsourced
- Ongoing support and sustainability

DELIVER
- Training Programs
- Other development experiences

EVALUATE
- Identifying critical returns
- Measurement of returns

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Figure 3 – Aon Hewitt’s Model of Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership Style
Relatively enduring patterns of behavior and preferences which impact most actions of an individual

Technical Knowledge & Skills
The technical know-how related to the function an individual belongs to

Behavioral Competencies
Skills and abilities described in behavioral terms that are coachable, observable, measurable, and critical for superior individual and organizational
Section VI: Notes and References:

Notes:

1Qudurat™ is an Aon Hewitt’s research study focused on understanding the drivers and motivation of talent in the Middle East region and representing the voice of over 20,500 respondents, across 7 countries and 130 organizations over the past 3 years. The Qudurat™ data highlighted in this paper is drawn from our analysis of the 2012 Qudurat study results. The total number of nationals who participated in this research study is 8274.

2Aon Hewitt Top Companies for Leaders Research 2011 (TCFL) is the most comprehensive, global research on leadership in the market, examining the link between leadership practices and financial results. With more than 50,000 data points and 900 executive interviews, this study explores how organizations assess, select, develop, and reward leaders, and examines the execution of leadership practices, as well as the strategy that guides it.

3Aon Hewitt’s Employee Engagement Survey is a quantitative and robust methodology which evaluates an organization’s employee engagement levels and the drivers impacting the same.

The Engagement data highlighted in this paper is drawn from our analysis of Employee Engagement levels in Government and Public Sector organizations from 2008 to 2012 across the MENA region.

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About Aon Hewitt

Aon Hewitt empowers organizations and individuals to secure a better future through innovative talent, retirement and health solutions. We advise, design and execute a wide range of solutions that enable clients to cultivate talent to drive organizational and personal performance and growth, navigate retirement risk while providing new levels of financial security, and redefine health solutions for greater choice, affordability and wellness. Aon Hewitt is the global leader in human resource solutions, with over 30,000 professionals in 90 countries serving more than 20,000 clients worldwide. For more information on Aon Hewitt, please visit www.aonhewitt.com.

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