Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP TRAINING

a summary of research literature

January 2020

Culture Review **Implementation**

our journey of positive change

ACT Government

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What is a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)?

Rapid Evidence Assessments (REAs) use a specific research methodology to comprehensively identify the most relevant studies on a given topic, and select appropriate studies based on explicit criteria. In addition, two independent reviewers assess the methodological quality of the studies. In contrast to a conventional literature review, REAs are transparent, verifiable, and reproducible, and as a result, the likelihood of bias is considerably smaller.
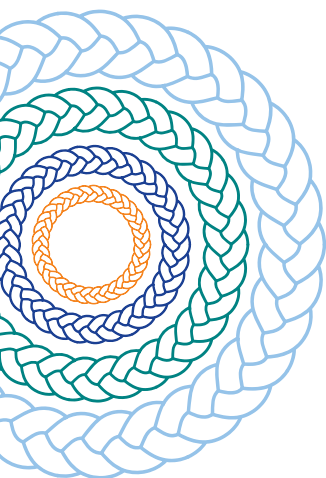
Background

In 2013, a group of Dutch hospitals appointed the Center for Evidence Based Management (CEBMa) to conduct a REA of the most trustworthy scientific research on the attributes and key characteristics of effective leadership training programs. This REA is an update by the CEBMa to take into consideration other forms of scientific research and its applicability to ACT Health.

Main findings

1. What is leadership?

This REA confirms that despite the thousands of management books with 'leadership' in their titles, there is no consensus of what the term encompasses. As a result, there are many definitions of what 'leadership' means. This varies from the Oxford Dictionary defining it as 'the ability to be a leader or the qualities a good leader should have,' whilst Wikipedia defines it as 'a process of social influence in which a person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.'

In addition, the term can be limited to 'personal influence resulting in enthusiastic commitment of followers' (Schyns, 2013). For example, some management thinkers simply define it as 'the capacity to translate vision into reality' (Warren Bernis), or 'empowering others' (Bill Gates). Further, there remains ongoing controversy of the distinction between 'leadership' and 'management.' It is widely noted that 'managers are concerned with how things get done, whereas leaders build commitment and vision (Kotter, 1990). However, Yukl in 1989 stated that 'Nobody has proposed that managing and leading are equivalent, but the degree of overlap is a point of sharp disagreement.'

The terms 'leadership' and 'management' are used interchangeably throughout the REA.

2. How can leadership be measured?

Many assessment tools and questionnaires claim to measure leadership. However, the REA notes that most of them focus on a specific element or type of leadership. A recent systematic review that evaluated the psychometric properties of 17 leadership scales, found that the majority lack a degree of rigour. Therefore, most studies noted in this REA will not measure leadership, but rather the impact of leadership training programs using Kirkpatrick's model (Collins, 2001; Fritch, 2015).

Kirkpatrick's assessment model includes four sequential levels:

1. **Reaction** – what participants think and feel about a training program.
2. **Learning** – increase in knowledge, skills and change attitudes.
3. **Behaviour** – changes in practice and behaviour.
4. **Results** – organisational benefits (impacts on performance, service delivery and clinical outcomes).
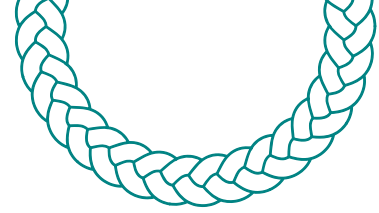
3. What is the effectiveness of leadership training programs?

Several findings of the effectiveness of leadership training programs include:

1. Overall, leadership training has a moderate effect, on a range of outcomes.

2. The effects on learning outcomes tends to be larger than effects on performance outcomes.

3. Only slight improvements on the effectiveness of leadership training over the last 20 years, despite advances in numerous innovations in leadership theory and training techniques.

4. The evidence on a strong Return on Investment (ROI) of leadership training is unclear.

5. Lower level of effectiveness of leadership training for nurses and physicians. The research shows causes of this may include programs focusing on the 'know' and 'do' elements of leadership, rather than the 'be' – which some argue is fundamental in gaining the capacity to lead.

Conclusion

Leadership training programs are effective, but it depends on various design, delivery and implementation characteristics.

More information

You can access more information in the *Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) - The Effectiveness of Leadership Training – a summary of research literature, January 2020.*
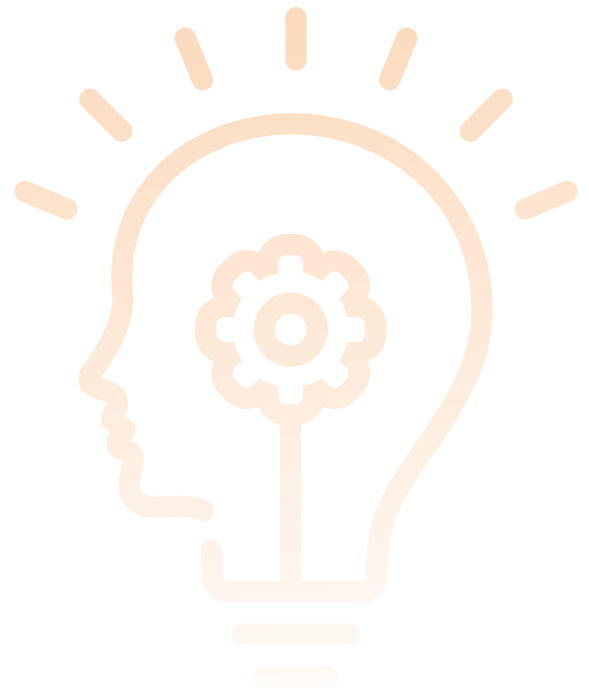
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