

# Developing Public Service Leaders in Singapore

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A RESEARCH OVERVIEW  
BASED ON THE LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE – SINGAPORE PUBLIC SERVICE STUDY

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## ■ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How can we develop leaders for public service? Are there experiences that would prepare them? And what lessons would they need to learn to become effective public servants? To address this issue, we present relevant research findings and implications for leadership development from the *Lessons of Experience – Singapore Public Service* research project.

This research was initiated in July 2007, and jointly undertaken by the Center for Creative Leadership with support from the Civil Service College and Public Service Division. We interviewed a total of 36 public service leaders from the levels of Director to Permanent Secretary. The interviewees represented a total of 12 ministries and 18 statutory boards across the various functions of government.

The research methodology adapts the critical incident technique and has been replicated over the years in the U.S, the Netherlands, and Japan. With the launch of the *Lessons of Experience – Asia* project in 2006, this core knowledge is being extended to include how business leaders learn, grow, and develop in India, Singapore, and China. The Singapore project breaks new ground by including public service leaders.

Some perspectives provided by this study on leadership development in the Singapore public service are that:

- **Challenging assignments at work are the most significant stimuli for leadership development.** 92% of interviewees cited challenging assignments as having a lasting impact on their development as leaders. Only 11% of interviewees cite coursework and training as a source of leadership learning.

*Implications: How can challenging work assignments be leveraged above coursework and training to develop public service leaders?*

- **Bosses are key drivers for leadership development.** 53% of interviewees report a relationship with a boss or superior as a significant source of leadership learning. This is the most frequently cited developmental experience. The unique lessons learned from bosses are : (i) *Accountability*, (ii) *Managing and motivating staff*, and (iii) *Developing others*. These lessons are learned primarily from bosses and not through challenging assignments or coursework.

*Implications: How can bosses become aware that their impact on subordinates is far greater than they realize? How can leaders be developed to produce more leaders?*

- **The leadership lessons on managing and motivating staff and accountability are critical in the public service.** The most widely cited leadership lessons learned by interviewees are on managing and motivating staff (61%) and accountability (53%). The primary driver for these two lessons was a developmental relationship with a boss. This suggests the significance of relationship-based leadership, leading with accountability, and developmental relationships in the Singapore public service.

*Implications: How can the public service complement its selection of top analytical talent by developing their capacity for managing and motivating staff and their accountability?*

## ■ INTRODUCTION

In Singapore, as elsewhere, the sustainability and success of public service agencies and the country depends on the development of effective leaders. To increase the supply of future leaders for the public service, senior public service leaders need a deep understanding of how leader development happens, both inside and outside the classroom.

We need to know what kinds of events leaders experience as developmental and what it is they learn from these key events. And we need to know what lessons leaders must learn over time to improve their effectiveness in the face of ever increasing work and life complexity.

To investigate these important questions, the *Lessons of Experience – Singapore Public Service* research project was jointly undertaken between 2007 to 2008 by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL-Asia) with support from the Civil Service College and the Public Service Division of the Prime Minister's Office. Based on the findings of this study, we propose that the essence of leadership is learned from specific work experiences, and not primarily from business and management schools or from ad hoc training programs.

This raises the question of which experiences matter. The public service in Singapore has relied on a successful model of job rotations, informal mentoring, and coursework and training to help leaders develop the craft of leadership. While the model has been successful over time, there has not been documented evidence concerning which leadership development practices have had the greatest impact on developing effective public service leaders, while achieving the strategic objectives of the Singapore public service.

In this context, our research and this preliminary report is an initial effort to provide systematic knowledge about how leadership development takes place in the Singapore public service.

### **Purpose of report**

In this overview, we provide evidence of specific work experiences from which leadership lessons can be consciously extracted. Based on the analysis of key events in the lives of Singaporean public service leaders, we propose that leadership capability development has two drivers: Challenging assignments and developmental relationships. Working in tandem, these twin drivers can help the public service strengthen its bench strength and pipeline of leadership talent.

We also identify the critical leadership lessons, of which some may not be taught at management schools -- such as the commitment to managing self and relationships, and a network mindset to work effectively across agencies and with multiple stakeholders.

Our aim is to share knowledge that can assist current and future leaders in the public service to provide those appropriate experiences that develop other leaders – thereby creating a virtuous cycle of leaders developing other leaders.

## ■ BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

At the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), one research question has been a core focus for nearly thirty-five years: What are the processes by which executives learn, grow, and develop over the course of their careers? Our original “lessons of experience” (LOE) research in the U.S. has been replicated over the years within and outside CCL, including Japan and the Netherlands. The research methodology adapts the critical incident technique and has been enormously fruitful. Many publications, assessment instruments and reports have been developed describing pathways to effective leadership for different populations such as women, high potentials, and global managers. Among them:

- *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America’s Largest Corporations?* (1987) by R. P. White, A.M. Morrison, and E. Van Velsor.
- *High Flyers: Developing the Next Generation of Leaders* (1998) by M.W. McCall, Jr.
- *The Job Challenge Profile Facilitator’s Guide* (1999) by C.D. McCauley, P.J. Ohlott, and M.N. Ruderman.
- *Developing Global Executives: Lessons of International Experience* (2002) by M. W. McCall, Jr. and G. P. Hollenbeck
- *Key Events and Lessons for Managers in a Diverse Workforce* (2003) by C. A. Douglas.
- *Developmental Assignments: Creating Learning Experiences Without Changing Jobs* (2006) by C.D. McCauley.

With the launch of the *Lessons of Experience – Asia* research studies in 2006, we are extending our core knowledge about how business leaders learn, grow, and develop in India, Singapore, and China. The Singapore project breaks new ground by including public service leaders.

### **Research methodology**

Experience tells us that face-to-face conversations are required to obtain clear and extensive information about how development happens over time. With the objective of gaining in-depth information, 60 – 90 minute semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview questions were provided in advance, so that the senior executives participating in the study would have time to reflect on their career and life history in preparation for the interview session.

### **Who was interviewed?**

A total of 36 public service leaders were selected from 30 government agencies (representing 12 Ministries and 18 Statutory Boards). They were intentionally chosen to represent a cross-section of Singapore public service leaders. Findings discussed in this report are based on the analysis of these 36 interviews (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Demographics and Levels of Public Service Interviewees**

| DEMOGRAPHICS             |    | LEVEL                  |    |
|--------------------------|----|------------------------|----|
| <u>GENDER</u>            |    | Permanent Secretary    | 3  |
| Male                     | 29 | Deputy Secretary       | 5  |
| Female                   | 7  | Chief Executive        | 10 |
| <u>Length of Service</u> |    | Deputy Chief Executive | 5  |
| > 15 years               | 24 | Directors              | 13 |
| > 25 years               | 12 |                        |    |

**What were they asked?**

For gathering their lessons of experience, we asked two questions:

- Looking back over your career, what are the three key events or experiences that had a lasting impact on you and influenced how you lead and manage today?
- What did you learn from these events or experiences?

Responses have been analysed and the most relevant findings to developing public service leaders are identified in this report.

**How was the data analysed?**

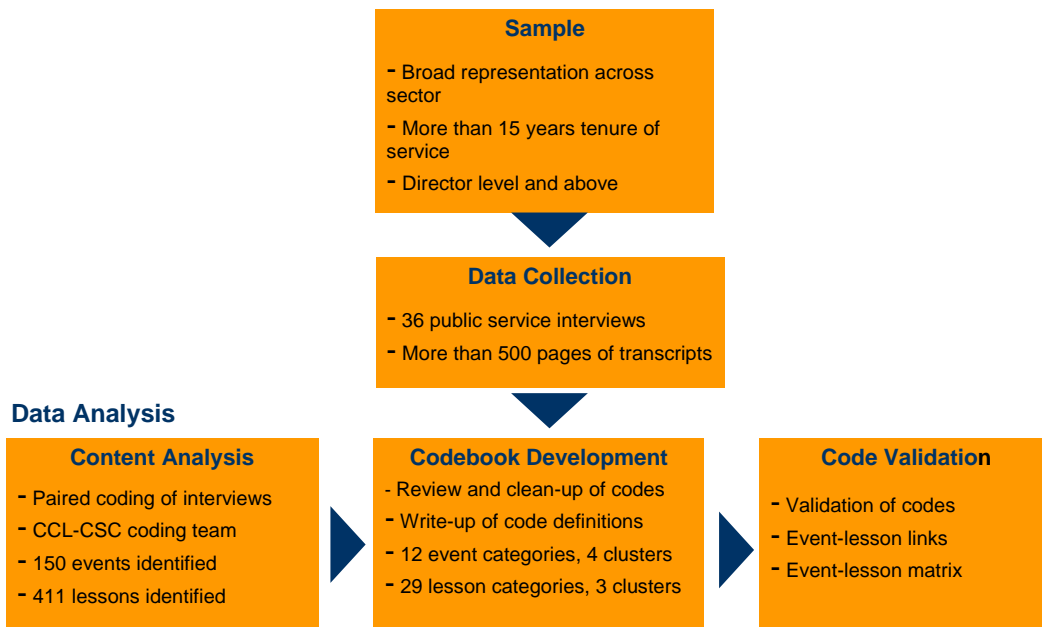
A four person team of researchers from the Center for Creative Leadership and the Singapore Civil Service College analysed the interviews and worked in coding pairs to identify salient themes. Content analysis was used to develop a detailed taxonomy of *key events* and *lessons* from the interviews. (The findings were also compared with data on business leaders in Singapore, the U.S., India, and China.) The definition of key events and lessons are as follows:

*Key events* are experiences that drive learning and change. They are critical or memorable experiences that develop the managerial and leadership skills of the executive in a significant way. (Table 4 provides a breakdown of the key events analysed.)

*Key lessons* represent a shift in attitudes, values, knowledge, skills, or behaviour. Lessons are generated from events. (Table 10 provides a breakdown of the key lessons analysed.)

Analyses were conducted to assess the relationship between the events, and the lessons described within each event, to determine if predictable patterns could be established. That is, were some lessons significantly more likely to be tied to certain events? Event-lesson matrices were developed to highlight the relationships between each of the key events and its associated lessons. (Figure 9 and Table 10 provide analyses of the event-lesson links.)

**Figure 2**  
**Data Analysis Process**



## Overall results

Our qualitative and quantitative analysis of the LOE data yielded 150 events and 411 lessons learned. These were initially sorted into 12 distinct event and 24 distinct lesson categories and further sorted into four clusters of key events and four clusters of lessons learned (see Figures 2 and 9). The top-line findings with immediate practical value are presented next.

### ■ KEY EVENTS THAT DRIVE LEADER DEVELOPMENT

*Key events* are experiences that drive learning and change. They are critical or memorable experiences that develop the managerial and leadership skills of the executive in a significant way.

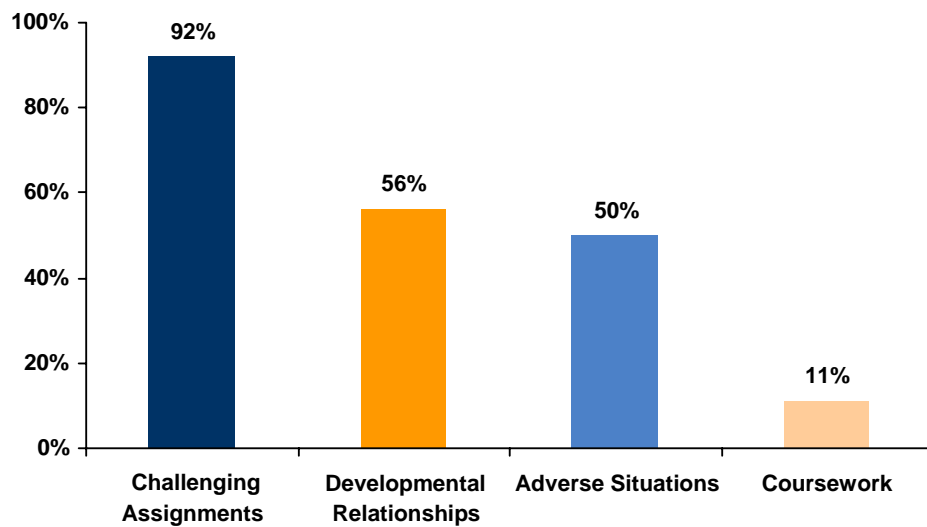
Four event clusters will be described and all 12 key events listed by cluster (see Figure 3 and Table 4). Within clusters, we focus on the 5 events that are most widely cited as sources of learning, and most feasible for an organisation to leverage (see Table 5).

The four event clusters are as follows.

- **Challenging assignments (CA)** come from a posting, promotion, or task assigned to the manager by their organisation. The assignment is typically difficult and sometimes requires struggle. Different kinds of assignments sharpen different leadership abilities. Challenging assignments were cited by 92% of interviewees.
- **Developmental relationships (DR)** directly and indirectly support (or do not support) learning and the learner. The influence of developmental relationships is possibly more powerful than generally realized, and was cited by 56% of interviewees.

- **Adverse situations (AS)** are imposed by the environment. Usually, the difficulties experienced during the event are not within the control of the organisation or its executives. Adverse situations were cited by 53% of interviewees.
- **Coursework and training (CT)** include graduate and training programs taken at work or through external providers. Coursework and training were cited by 11% of interviewees.

**Figure 3**  
**Prevalence of Events Among Interviewees**  
**(by cluster)**



N = 36 interviewees

**Table 4**  
**The Variety of Experiences of Singapore Public Service Leaders**

| CHALLENGING ASSIGNMENTS (92%)  | DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS (56%)   | ADVERSE SITUATIONS (53%)   |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Increase in scope (44%) *</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First supervisory responsibility</li> <li>- Supervisory responsibility</li> <li>- General management</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Job rotations (39%) *</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Across functions</li> <li>- Across organizations</li> <li>- Across sectors</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Boundary spanning (39%)*</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Within the organization</li> <li>- With other organizations</li> <li>- With external stakeholders</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>New initiative (25%)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Special project</li> <li>- Starting a new business</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Lead change (19%)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Turnaround</li> <li>- Drive organizational growth</li> <li>- Merger and acquisition</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Work across cultures (3%)</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Boss and superiors (53%)*</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Catalyst</li> <li>- Negative role model</li> <li>- Positive role model</li> <li>- Guide</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Non-work role models (3%)</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Crisis (33%) *</b></li> <li>● <b>Mistake (11%)</b></li> <li>● <b>Ethical dilemma (8%)</b></li> </ul> |
|  |   | <b>COURSEWORK AND TRAINING (11%)</b>   |

\* Top 5 Events

**Table 5**  
**Descriptions of Top 5 Events**

| Events, Percent of Interviewee Citations, & Cluster |           | Event Descriptions  |
|---|-----------|---|
| <b>Bosses and superiors (53%)</b>                   | <b>DR</b> | Bosses and superiors impact leadership development in different ways, such as by being a catalyst, role model, or teacher. Specifically, a catalyst boss offers a distinctive combination of a stretch assignment, autonomy, guidance as needed, loyal support, and recognition. Other examples of behaviours describing effective bosses include: providing a clear vision and sense of direction; taking personal interest in staff, watching out for them and guiding them in the basics; being loyal – which includes not dwelling on their mistakes; modelling effective tactics for execution; and setting audacious targets.   |
| <b>Increase in scope (44%)</b>                      | <b>CA</b> | Increases in scope involve a significant increase in numbers of staff to manage, people related responsibilities, and complexity of tasks. This results from: first supervisory experiences, promotions into formal management positions, and general manager assignments. The importance of learning to manage and communicate differently with different levels of staff (such as first-time job holders, professional and non-professionals) becomes apparent.   |
| <b>Job rotations (39%)</b>                          | <b>CA</b> | Job rotations involve moves across functions, organisations, or sectors. This can be self or organisation initiated and can also involve multiple moves. The manager typically experiences a different culture involving different systems, processes and nature and purpose of work. The extent and intensity of interaction with internal and external constituencies also changes. The purpose of these assignments is to develop leaders in a diversity of agency operations and strategy. Examples include switching from work to academic life, statutory board to ministry environment, one agency to another, private to public service, and multiple job transitions |
| <b>Boundary spanning (39%)</b>                      | <b>CA</b> | Boundary spanning events involve the manager with various external constituencies such as representatives from other countries, economic and social sectors, and governmental agencies. The job itself typically has higher stake outcomes, greater visibility, and the possibility of controversy. Examples include: multi-lateral negotiations involving trade, security, or public health; regulatory work to protect the public interest or manage scarce resources; policy implementation; re-structuring of an entire organisation or industry; and appointments to roles that involve significant PR responsibilities.   |
| <b>Crisis (36%)</b>                                 | <b>AS</b> | Crisis events can have considerable negative impact on the country, organisations, and individual. Sources of the crisis can be natural disasters, fraudulent or illegal activities, poor ethical practices, or negligence. Examples of country-wide events are financial turmoil and business setbacks, national security or public health and safety threats (terrorism, SARS, collapse of construction project), and potential loss of jobs or housing. Examples of organisations-level events are corruption scandals or loss of life due to supervisory negligence. Crisis events have the potential for creating much negative publicity.                               |

**Table 6**  
**Examples of Top 5 Events Cited in Interviews**

| Events, Percent of Interviewee Citations, & Cluster |           | Event Descriptions   |
|---|-----------|--|
| <b>Bosses and superiors (53%)</b>                   | <b>DR</b> | “What made that work for me then was that we had a boss, who give us the space because he trusts us. He gave us the space. He led by example - lots of energy, lots of ideas, ‘never say die’ attitude. So, I learned the value of mentorship because he was a wonderful mentor. He spent time with us. That is something I try to do with my own people. I spend time with my young officers because he spent time with me, guiding me, teaching me.” |
| <b>Increase in scope (44%)</b>                      | <b>CA</b> | “The one major milestone that I always take reference from is the very first time I took on supervisory responsibilities...One of my first lessons as a leader was that you cannot copy other people’s leadership style. I worked people really, really hard and I tried to be as clever as my former boss was and as driven as he was. Leadership is something that’s actually personal. That was one of my first lessons.”                           |
| <b>Job rotations (39%)</b>                          | <b>CA</b> | “I found it very useful when I had my community posting and had to work with very senior people. Senior in the sense that they are not senior in rank, but they are senior in experience...one thing which I learned is humility...you must acknowledge who they are. And only when they feel that sense of certain genuine posture from you would they then be very open and help you in the things you want to achieve.”                             |
| <b>Boundary spanning (39%)</b>                      | <b>CA</b> | “I was asked to lead a team to review policies with many agencies involved. I had to make sure that their interests are protected. I strongly agree with the need to make sure that when we look at an issue, all the different perspectives are taken into account. If you don’t have that in the very beginning, everybody will have a different view of what is the national interest.”   |
| <b>Crisis (36%)</b>                                 | <b>AS</b> | “When SARS hit us, we were dealing with an unknown virus and all we know is that it is highly contagious. So we had to put all means and measures in place. As a young officer, I knew about sticking things on charts, writing incident reports, developing plans, exercising plans. We knew these plans and we had to modify them.”  |

## The role of bosses in leadership development

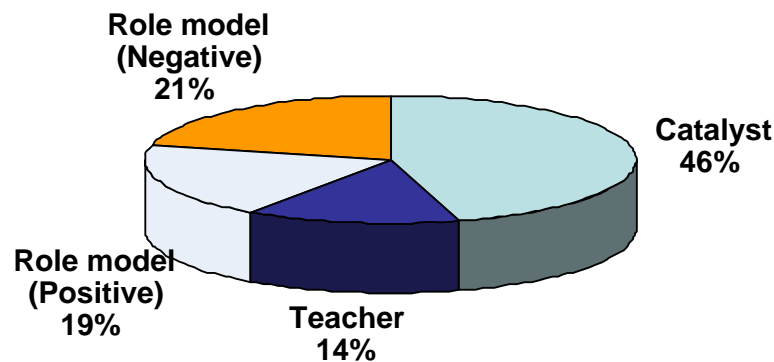
Among the variety of events mentioned by interviewees, the role of bosses and superiors was the most significant in making a lasting impact on their development. This was the most widely cited event, with 53% of all interviewees citing a boss or superior as a source of learning about leadership.

In analysing the data, we found three salient roles that effective bosses and superiors play and a fourth role played by bosses who are negative role models – all four roles make leadership learning possible. The first is the role of the boss as a catalyst for development – these bosses intentionally challenge their staff to move out of their comfort zone, or act as brokers for challenging assignments, and then provide trust, autonomy, protection and cheer-leading. The second is the role of boss as a model of positive behaviours that staff strives to emulate. The third is the role of boss as teacher - these bosses coaching their staff by providing direct advice or instruction on how they can improve. Interestingly, even bosses who model negative behaviours have a developmental impact, causing the subordinate to promise him or herself to never behave in a similar way with their own staff.

Table 8 below provides greater detail about the boss category – by noting the percentage of interviewees citing each of the roles. The quotes that follow provide examples of each category.

**Figure 7**

### Bosses Who Drive Leadership Development



N = 42

**Table 8**  
**Examples of Bosses Cited by Interviewees**

**Boss as a catalyst for development (46%)**

"We were in the midst of negotiations and I was with my boss and he kept silent, and left it to me. His purpose was really to make me lead."

"I recall at that time, the day before we were to unveil or to implement that project. My boss then was telling me that he and the other bigger bosses were sitting around and chatting and saying, 'If it really falls flat, we should start looking for a next job.' It was a signal of the kind of risks we were willing to take. Someone asked him the question, 'What gave you the guts to do things?' And his answer was 'Well, you know, if it didn't go well, I would just quit.' You really thought about what is it that you really want to achieve and work in the government for. Then it was something that you wanted to achieve for the country, as opposed to for your personal advancement. So that was a very important thing, to have the guts, to believe in it, and to have the guts to take those decisions."

**Boss as a negative role model (21%)**

"This person is almost Teflon coated. He didn't take any of responsibility for the shortcomings of the outcome. We didn't like the fact that, you know, at the end of the day when there is blame to be attributed, our great leader wasn't there to defend us in that sense. That left a very deep impression on me and I was a very young officer and I told myself, 'I will never be this person.'"

**Boss as a teacher (19%)**

"I got a very good boss, who basically told me the Ten Commandments -- what to do and what not to do when working with community leaders. He shared how the role of the civil servant is to avoid politics, even when there is credit to be claimed."

**Boss as a positive role model (14%)**

"I had an extremely good boss. She was very clear, very objective about things, and had certain warmth about her. It's not like she tells you this is the leadership lesson -- we watch and learn."

**The role of coursework and training**

One finding of particular interest is the role that coursework and training plays in leader development. Cited by 11% of interviewees, coursework and training seems to have significantly less impact than the more frequently cited events clustered under challenging assignments and developmental relationships. This does not mean that coursework is not important; however, we suggest that in order to have lasting impact, the curriculum for leadership development needs to incorporate aspects of challenging assignments and developmental relationships.

**Appropriate assignments plus effective bosses – a combination for unlocking leadership potential**

Overall, we point out that it seems more feasible to provide challenging assignments and to educate bosses and superiors on how to manage, motivate, develop and inspire staff; and for the most part, it is less feasible to control adverse situations. So we recommend that to accelerate leadership development, the Singapore public service focus on intentionally offering early career managers a combination of appropriate assignments and bosses who are aware of the basics of effectively managing, motivating, developing and inspiring staff. Perhaps not an easy goal to achieve, this still seems to be a worthy goal to strive towards.

## ■ LESSONS LEARNED FROM EVENTS

**Key lessons** represent a shift in attitudes, values, knowledge, skill or behaviour. Lessons are generated from events.

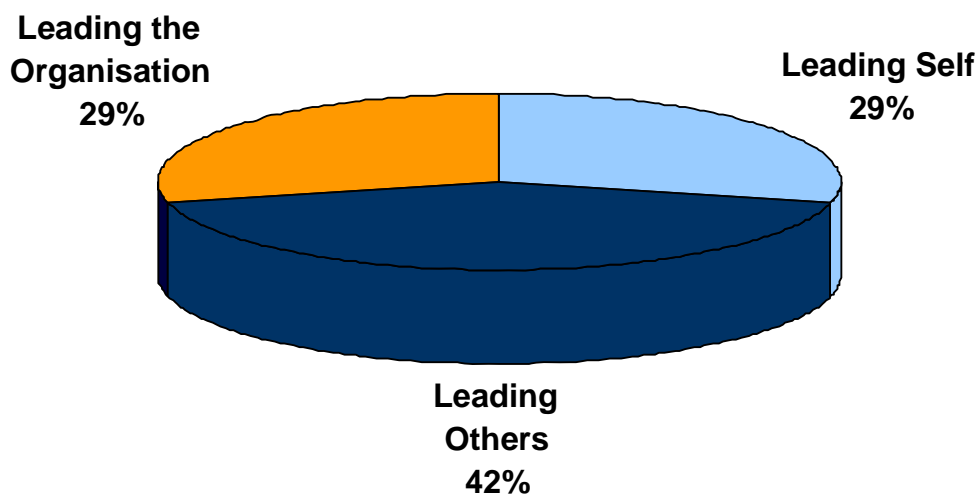
Three lesson clusters will be described, and 25 lesson categories listed (see Table 11). For the lesson clusters, 29% are related to self, 42% to other people, and 29% to leading the organisation (see Table 10). We will also provide descriptions and examples of the top 10 lessons noted by interviewees (see Tables 12 and 13).

The three clusters and most frequently cited 10 lessons are as follows.

- **Leading Self (SEL)** lessons relate to the inner world of leaders and effective ways to manage themselves—their thoughts, emotions, actions, and attitudes over time. The top three lessons in this cluster (in order of frequency of citation) include: *Accountability*; *self-awareness*; and *understanding the leader role and responsibility*. These are the essentials of self-management.
- **Leading Others (OTH)** lessons relate to the world of people and involve interpersonal and social skills that equip leaders to connect with people. The top four lessons in this cluster (in order of frequency of citation) include: *Managing and motivating staff*; *developing staff*; *inspiring higher performance*; and *managing stakeholders*. These are the essentials of relationship management.
- **Leading the Organisation (ORG)** lessons relate to work in organisational systems and develop skills and perspectives to address strategic, systemic and cultural issues. Leaders learn how to manage and transform their organisation. The top three lessons in this cluster (in order of frequency of citation) include: *Execution and operations savvy*; *client/public focus*; and a *network mindset*. These are the essentials of organisational effectiveness.

Figure 9

### Distribution of Lessons Learned by Public Service Leaders



N = 411 lessons

We underscore that 42% of lessons learned fall into the Leading Others cluster. In other words “soft skill” lessons are cited more frequently than other clusters of lessons. This suggests the importance of relational aspects of leadership in the public service and in particular the ability to *manage and motivate staff*, *develop staff*, and *manage stakeholders*. These are the top three relationships-based lessons cited by public service interviewees.

Based on analysis of the interview data, we suggest that the clusters of lessons on *Leading Others* be especially emphasized during the process of developing leaders. In our view, the high frequency of citations within this cluster indicates that learning to work with other people is significantly important for Singapore’s public service leaders.

To extract maximum learning from job experiences, tools and processes will need to be developed, particularly for the lessons identified in Table 11 below.

**Table 10**  
**The Variety of Lessons Learned by Singapore Public Service Leaders**

| LEADING SELF   | LEADING OTHERS   | LEADING THE ORGANIZATION   |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Accountability*</li> <li>● Self-awareness*</li> <li>● Understand the leader role and responsibility*</li> <li>● Capacity to learn</li> <li>● Resilience</li> <li>● Adaptability</li> <li>● Self-confidence</li> <li>● Action orientation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Manage and motivate staff *</li> <li>● Develop staff*</li> <li>● Inspire higher performance *</li> <li>● Manage stakeholders*</li> <li>● Manage teams</li> <li>● Build and maintain trust</li> <li>● Influence others</li> <li>● Empathy</li> <li>● Manage upwards</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Execution &amp; Operations Savvy*</li> <li>● Client / public focus*</li> <li>● Network mindset*</li> <li>● Drive and manage change</li> <li>● Manage trade-offs</li> <li>● Strategic perspective</li> <li>● Innovation and risk taking</li> </ul> |

\* Top 10 Lessons

**Table 11**  
**Descriptions of Top 10 Lessons**

| Lessons, Percent of Interviewee Citations, & Cluster |            | Lesson Descriptions  |
|--|------------|--|
| <b>Manage and motivate staff (61%)</b>               | <b>OTH</b> | Lessons relate to delegating work and getting the best possible results from staff. These include methods for motivating, directing and managing performance. The most common motivational guideline is to back up your staff -- give them support, care for them, and avoid blaming them for mistakes. Other insights about motivation refer to the nature of interactions with staff – this includes blending informality with formality, being personal and professional, and being open to learning and being informed by staff. Lessons for managing staff includes providing purpose, reasonable targets, clear instructions, time to learn, and autonomy to get the job done. |
| <b>Accountability (53%)</b>                          | <b>SEL</b> | The value of responsibility and integrity is learned. Responsibility means accepting the obligation to: make decisions and anticipate consequences; provide direction and support; and ensure that work processes are smooth and deliverables timely. Integrity means being honest, standing up for personal beliefs, leading by example, showing consistency between words and actions, and not abusing power by pursuing self-interest.  |
| <b>Develop staff (47%)</b>                           | <b>OTH</b> | This lesson concerns the importance of having a philosophy and following an approach to developing staff. The focus is on the people in the organisation, and not the business of the organisation. Development practices are expressed as a balancing act: Grooming and stretching, but not overstretching; helping to handle high expectations while recognizing personal limitations; delegating responsibility while acknowledging that accountability is still with the boss; sharing the potential and the pitfalls of an assignment; and blending structured promotion-based development with self-initiated development.   |
| <b>Execution and operations savvy (42%)</b>          | <b>ORG</b> | The central lesson is how to get the job done by paying attention to costs, constraints, and goals in mind. One theme is that execution and ops savvy is acquired from “walking the ground” and is a necessary complement to policy work. The importance of functional, technological, financial and business knowledge is also noted. Tactics include understanding feasibility, attending to details and process, improving process through education, the importance of documentation, and focusing on targets from beginning to end.   |
| <b>Self awareness (42%)</b>                          | <b>SEL</b> | Lessons involve self-discovery and a heightened awareness of oneself. One important theme is awareness of the need to keep ego under control – by developing humility in relationships with others, and learning to listen and rely on others. Examples include awareness about: one’s abilities, preferences, limitations, and preferred leadership style.  |

**Table 11**  
**Descriptions of Top 10 Lessons (continued)**

| Lessons, Percent of Interviewee Citations, & Cluster       |            | Lesson Descriptions   |
|--|------------|---|
| <b>Understand the leader role and responsibility (42%)</b> | <b>SEL</b> | Lessons are realizing what the leader role and responsibilities involve. One theme is that leadership is personal and distinctive – there is no model or “one size fits all” style of leading; and different contexts require different styles of leading. Generally, however, lessons are personal and idiosyncratic, with a variety of views concerning the most important commitments and tasks of leaders.  |
| <b>Inspire higher performance (36%)</b>                    | <b>OTH</b> | The central insight concerns the importance of paying attention to what motivates individuals and adopting empowering behaviours. In general, there is a higher level of personal engagement with individual staff. Practices include: Giving individuals respect, serving them and shining a spotlight on their achievements; engaging continually in conversations; taking individual differences into account; and encouraging ownership of ideas and action.  |
| <b>Manage stakeholders (36%)</b>                           | <b>OTH</b> | This lesson involves engaging with multiple stakeholders by means of numerous informal and formal communications. Typically several objectives need to be met, such as: managing perceptions and expectations; reconciling differing perspectives; increasing receptivity to policies and decisions; and ensuring that public communications are timely, accurate, and effective. Examples include making stakeholders aware of resource constraints, lobbying to win them over to a point of view, communicating pro-actively to contain anxiety, and addressing emotional reactivity on the part of individuals or groups.  |
| <b>Client focus (31%)</b>                                  | <b>ORG</b> | Lessons include learning to listen to, learn from, and serve the public. A concerted effort is made to continually maintain contact and discover and meet the needs of constituents. Examples include insights that policy must respect the needs of individuals, families, and groups; and that excellence in implementation is critical. Client focus in the public service is essentially about becoming a solutions provider in response to the needs of the people and the country.  |
| <b>Network mindset (31%)</b>                               | <b>ORG</b> | Lessons concern an in-depth understanding of inter-agency interdependencies and implications for collective decision-making and action. A network mindset typically develops through boundary spanning assignments or in response to crisis events. Approaches that help and hinder interdependent work are learned. For example, open discussions that are not driven by a hierarchical mindset, multi-level engagement across agencies, exercising a diplomatic approach rather than command and control, and decision making with stakeholders is helpful. An uncooperative or over-cooperative attitude to working with other agencies, an over or under-dominating style of interacting with other agencies, and agency-based pressures created by performance indicators are not helpful. |

**Table 12**

**Examples of Top 10 Lessons Cited by Interviewees**

| Lessons, Percent of Interviewee Citations, & Cluster           |            | Lesson Descriptions   |
|--|------------|---|
| <b>Manage and motivate staff<br/>(61%)</b>                     | <b>OTH</b> | “My take from that has been that whenever I work with any people, any persons, I first try to get a sense how they feel about themselves, how confident they are about themselves and if there is any lack of confidence, I will try to adjust that first, because otherwise there are too many issues that you are dealing with, you are not really focusing on getting the job done well.”  |
| <b>Accountability<br/>(53%)</b>                                | <b>SEL</b> | “First lesson I learnt was the need to get back in together and get the job done. The first thing I did was really to offer to resign, you know, offer to be replaced. I would say that is accountability to me. I felt that I needed to make that offer at least to ensure that I had the mandate to carry on that rebuilding.”  |
| <b>Develop staff<br/>(47%)</b>                                 | <b>OTH</b> | “I learned a lot, something you would never learn from just technical experience. I think that it is a lesson where I learned the need to nurture and to develop officers and this is really a very important task for any manager, if you want to develop a strong organisation, you really need all the support you can get and you also need to nurture people so that they can provide you with the support. And you must have confidence and you must have trust in them, otherwise things will not move.” |
| <b>Execution and operations savvy<br/>(42%)</b>                | <b>ORG</b> | “I learned the virtues of focus and the virtues of concentrating your resources on a problem to fix it, and then moving on as opposed to trying to do too many things at the same time. I also learned that to really get headway, you have to focus on not more than three things and that’s where you put your energies and then make it happen. Because otherwise, you just diffuse your energies trying to achieve too many things.”  |
| <b>Self awareness<br/>(42%)</b>                                | <b>SEL</b> | “I would say that I am more self-aware of what I can do and my style of leadership. It helps a lot, Because if you talk about the rah-rah kind of leadership where you rah-rah people - I can do that a bit, but I won’t be the best in the game.   |
| <b>Understand the leader role and responsibility<br/>(42%)</b> | <b>SEL</b> | “Leadership is something that’s actually extremely personal and extremely distinctive. That was one of my first lessons - it’s personal and is distinctive. You can’t just force-fit into somebody else’s style, you have to develop your own style. It’s got to fit who you are, what you believe in, and it has to fit your strengths and actually your weaknesses too.”  |

**Table 12**

**Examples of Top 10 Lessons Cited by Interviewees (continued)**

| Lessons, Percent of Interviewee Citations, & Cluster |            | Lesson Descriptions   |
|--|------------|---|
| <b>Inspire higher performance (36%)</b>              | <b>OTH</b> | “Leadership is very much about inspiration and actually also very much about loyalty. As long as a leader can inspire that, subordinates will do anything. From then onwards, what I have always thought as a leader is that I must trust my subordinates. Then I back myself, often up to the hilt. Whatever happens, even if I have take a career hit because of it, as my subordinate, he is working, he is doing things on trust with me. And I have to value the trust. And actually I think that is one of things that defines me as a leader too.” |
| <b>Manage stakeholders (36%)</b>                     | <b>OTH</b> | “I realised the importance of managing stakeholder perceptions because they can be quite volatile and emotional. It is important to develop relationships with various constituencies and also independent voices, so that when faced with a confrontation from one particular voice, you are able to balance their views.”   |
| <b>Client focus (31%)</b>                            | <b>ORG</b> | “It helped me realize that in order to do my job in the public service, I really needed to engage the people whom I am to serve, you know. And the experience in the private sector helped me in that way to realise that. How shall I say - the people out there are not your enemies, you know. And your role is really to serve them. And they can think and appreciate what needs to be done for the good of the country.”  |
| <b>Network mindset (31%)</b>                         | <b>ORG</b> | “In my present capacity, I understand how stability, security, foreign policy, economic policy, social policy are all interlinked. You do not know which gear in that big bureaucratic machinery is going to give way, but that gear can make things unravel and lead to contagion. So now I take a broader and a much more network approach.”  |

## ■ THE EVENT-LESSON LINK

For the public service in Singapore to continue to achieve world class impact and standards, talent pools must become broad and deep today. Two important steps can be taken; both are based on synchronising events and lessons (see Table 13).

The first step is to pay attention to which events, or work experiences, are the most developmental. Senior leaders can be more intentional about providing such experiences to their early and mid-career staff. The second step is to pay attention to which lessons are the most relevant to individual staff. This will vary, based on individual need. Senior leaders can then match their staff's developmental needs with appropriately challenging assignments and dedicated support.

For the development of future leadership for the public service, we suggest that a systematic approach will be most fruitful. These research findings may be used as a starting point. Lessons can be matched with events that teach that lesson. Illustrative examples follow:

- **Accountability (SEL).** A striking finding of this study is that the lessons of accountability are learned through relationships, in particular through observing or working with bosses or superiors.
- **Develop staff (OTH)** Similar to how accountability is learned, the lessons in developing others were most often cited in the context of learning from a boss or superior. This represents a form of analogous learning where the behaviour of developing and nurturing staff is learned primarily from having observed these behaviours in a boss or superior.
- **Manage and Motivate Staff (OTH).** This lesson emerged as by far the most frequently cited lessons learned, noted by almost half of all interviewees. The lessons are learned primarily from relationships with their *boss or superior* and an *increase in scope*.
- **Network mindset (ORG).** This is a unique set of lessons learned by public service leaders about how to work effectively in an interagency context. Our findings show that this ability is learned primarily through being immersed in a boundary spanning role. Unlike the lessons above, network mindset is acquired through work experience and not through relationships or coursework.

An important caveat: This research is a launching point for understanding the event-lesson link; but the sample size permits us to connect events with lessons in an exploratory, not definitive way. Additional data is needed to undertake rigorous quantitative analysis.

However, the approach we have adopted -- of linking events and lessons learned -- can help set the direction for more intentional and fruitful leadership development practices.

**Table 13**  
**Linking Events and Lessons:**  
**Lessons Learned from Top 5 Events**

| Events                   | Strong Link*  | Moderate Link**  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Boss or Superior</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Develop staff</li> <li>• Manage and motivate staff</li> <li>• Understand the leader role and responsibility</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Execution and operations savvy</li> <li>• Inspire higher performance</li> <li>• Self awareness</li> </ul> |
| <b>Increase in Scope</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage and motivate staff</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Client focus</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Job rotations</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self awareness</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management &amp; leadership</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Boundary spanning</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network mindset</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage trade-offs</li> <li>• Manage stakeholders</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Crisis</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage stakeholders</li> </ul>   |  |

\* 10 or more links \*\* 7- 9 links

## ■ IMPLICATIONS: ACCELERATING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN SINGAPORE

Alvin Toffler (2006), the renowned futurist, reminds us:

*As we advance into the terra incognita of tomorrow, it is better to have a general and incomplete map, subject to revision and correction, than to have no map at all.*

Our intent has been to share critically important knowledge – the best we currently know -- about how leadership can be developed in the Singapore public service. The advantages we expect are that:

- Senior leaders will understand what lessons are most important for their staff to learn to become effective public service leaders; and the developmental experiences and relationships needed to acquire these lessons.
- Early career staffs who aspire to become senior leaders will be better equipped to develop a plan for progressing themselves.
- Singapore public service leaders can share a well-articulated model of leadership development practices with public service leaders from other countries – communicating beyond Singapore in regional and global forums.

In summary, we have aimed to simplify, but not be simplistic about, the complex phenomenon of learning, growth and development toward assuming senior leadership roles. The specific insights in this report are offered as a basis for devising practical approaches to leadership development.

Knowledge is clearly not enough. This research raises several questions that must be addressed in order to evolve existing good practices of leadership development in the Singapore public service toward yet another level of excellence. These are:

- How can challenging work assignments be leveraged above coursework and training to develop public service leaders?
- How can bosses become aware that their impact on subordinates is far greater than they realise? How can leaders be developed to produce more leaders?
- How can the public service complement its selection of top analytical talent by developing their capacity for managing and motivating staff and their accountability?

Suggestions for future research include the following:

- A public service survey that documents best practices and identifies gaps for which leadership development interventions are needed; and
- Case studies of public service agencies with exemplary leadership development practices, particularly in the use of developmental assignments and relationships.

We invite you to join us in research and practice to tackle one of the most compelling issues of our time: Developing effective leadership for public service.

## ■ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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|--|--|
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Previously, as Interim Managing Director, CCL-Asia-Pacific, and Director, Asia-Pacific Relations, Meena was on special assignment in Singapore to heighten CCL® presence in the region. She completed the launch of the CCL-Asia-Pacific office in Singapore in July 2003. While working on the Center's Singapore initiative, she also completed collaborative research with the Singapore Economic Development Board, studying their leadership and leadership development practices.

A native of India, a current resident of Singapore and a former resident of California, New York, Alaska, and North Carolina, her previous work experiences include project work at the Xavier Labour Relations Institute in Jamshedpur, India. Meena completed her undergraduate studies at Mills College in Oakland, CA. and holds a M.S. degree from Syracuse University in television-radio journalism and a Ph.D. in adult and organisational development from UNC-Chapel Hill.

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Drawing on CCL research, Jeffrey conducts various workshops for leaders, educators, and HR executives in the region. He has presented in conferences such as the *Asia Pacific Leadership Development Conference*, the *Singapore Human Resource Congress*, the *Annual Teacher's Summit*, and the *Academy of Management*. Jeffrey is also co-author of two books: *Leadership Wisdom: Discovering the Lessons of Experience* (2008) and *Youth.Sg: The State of Youth in Singapore* (2003).

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## ■ ABOUT CIVIL SERVICE COLLEGE & PUBLIC SERVICE DIVISION

### Civil Service College

The Civil Service College (CSC) was inaugurated as a Statutory Board under the Public Service Division (PSD), Prime Minister's Office on 1 October 2001. As the heart of learning excellence and development, CSC plays a central role in forging shared values and ethos, building core competencies and nurturing leadership capacity in the Singapore Public Service. Through our training programmes, consultancy and advisory services, and research and development activities, we help to develop a First-Class Singapore Public Service.



CSC brings together public service officers from diverse backgrounds and provides them opportunities to plug into a service-wide network to exchange views, build shared ethos and perspectives, creating a rich environment for dialogue, knowledge sharing and learning.

Through its research, programmes and services, CSC aims to build strategic capacity in governance, leadership, public administration and management for a networked government, for the Singapore Public Service.

### Public Service Division

The Public Service Division (PSD) aims to build a first-class Public Service for a successful and vibrant Singapore. It does this through public service leadership development, capacity and capability building, and the promotion of whole-of-government coordination in strategy and implementation. PSD will continue to ensure that suitable human resource practices and capacity building efforts are in place to support whole-of-government initiatives.



The Singapore Public Service needs strong and bold leaders who can anticipate future issues and chart directions to safeguard the nation's interest. PSD grooms and develops these top public service leaders from a central pool of the best civil servants in the Administrative Service.

PSD also works closely with other public agencies to determine their talent needs and develop leadership capabilities in the professional services and at all levels. High potential officers across all schemes of service are groomed and exposed to work beyond their own agencies. These officers are trained, guided and nurtured to fulfill their fullest potential.

## ■ ABOUT THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

For nearly 40 years, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL<sup>®</sup>) has been helping people become more effective leaders. Through our esteemed faculty of behavioural scientists, researchers and coaches, we offer unparalleled expertise in solving the leadership challenges faced by individuals and organisations around the world. We believe leaders are made, not born, and that they can adapt and change.

Founded in 1970 as a non-profit, educational institution, CCL helps clients worldwide cultivate creative leadership - the capacity to achieve more than imagined by thinking and acting beyond boundaries - through an array of programmes, products and other services.

Each year more than 20,000 managers and executives, educators, government administrators, community and volunteer leaders around the world attend our programmes. Our publications, products and research initiatives reach a global audience as well. The Center employs more than 600 faculty members and staff at its Greensboro, NC headquarters and on campuses in Colorado Springs, San Diego, Brussels and Singapore.

### May 14<sup>th</sup> 2008 - News Release

#### **The Center for Creative Leadership Ranked in Top 10 in *Financial Times* Executive Education Survey for Fourth Consecutive Year - Greensboro, N.C.**

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL<sup>®</sup>) ranked No. 8 overall in the 2008 *Financial Times* worldwide survey of executive education released today. CCL is the only institution in the survey focused exclusively on leadership education and research, placing it in the company of many of the world's elite business schools.



CCL, which operates campuses in North America, Europe and Asia, is also ranked No. 6 worldwide for open-enrolment programs - the seventh straight year in the Top 10 in this category. The Center's open-enrolment programs also placed among the Top 5 in five categories: aims achieved, course design, teaching materials, faculty and follow-up.

"We're proud to be ranked so highly among such prestigious institutions once again," said CCL President John Ryan. "At CCL, creating impact for clients is our top priority. These new rankings show our work consistently makes a difference for leaders and organisations."

The *Financial Times* executive education rankings were based on surveys of organisations and individuals from around the world who rated leading executive education providers for quality and impact. The full report is posted in the [Executive Education](#) section of FT.com.