

**SPECIAL ISSUE ON WATER GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP**

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# Growing as a Water Leader: Beware of Six Traps

André Taylor<sup>A</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This paper describes six leadership-related “traps” that developing leaders in the water sector commonly fall into, as well as ways to avoid or escape them. It draws on the experience of the author who has worked as a leadership development specialist over the last 10 years to build the leadership capacity of water practitioners so they can initiate and drive positive change. This experience includes working closely with several hundred developing water leaders from around the world through a variety of leadership development programs and short courses, and conducting over 500 coaching sessions.

A consequence of this experience has been the identification of a number of common patterns of behaviour that emerging water leaders exhibit as they seek to grow as leaders. These patterns are surprisingly similar given they occur in people working in different geographic locations, organisations, professional roles, and cultures. In this paper, these patterns are referred to as leadership-related “traps”, as they represent barriers to growth.

This paper describes six of the most common traps that can significantly hinder the ability of water leaders to grow their leadership capacity and improve their leadership effectiveness. It also explains why these traps are a problem and provides practical advice on avoiding or minimising the impact of them using guidance from the leadership development literature as well as the author’s experience of working closely with these people and evaluating the results. This guidance should assist developing water leaders directly, as well as people who nurture such leaders such as supervisors, mentors, and leadership development specialists.

**Keywords:** Developmental traps, leadership, leadership development, professional development, water leadership.

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## 水务领袖的成长：当心6种陷阱

本文描述了6种与领导力相关的“陷阱”，发展中国家的水务领袖经常陷入这样的陷阱，同时本文还提供了避免或逃离此类陷阱的方法。本文运用作者经历，讲述了其在过去10年中作为领导力发展专家，帮助建立水务从业人员的领导力，以便他们能发起并驱动积极改变。作者的经历包括通过一系列领导力发展计划和短期课程，从而和几百名发展中国家水务领袖密切合作，以及操作超过500次培训课程。这样的经历得到的结果则是，新兴水务领袖在寻求成为领袖的过程中展示了一系列共同模式和行为。惊讶的是，这些模式在不同地理位置、组织、专业角色和文化下都显示了相似性。本文将这些模式称为与领导力有关的“陷阱”，因为后者给发展带来了阻碍。本文描述了6种最常见陷阱，这些陷阱能对水务领袖发展其领导力和提高其领导效力造成显著阻碍。本文还解释了为何这些陷阱是一个问题，同时通过将领导力发展文献和作者在和领袖密切合作并评价结果的经历作为指导，从而提供了关于避免或最小化问题影响的实际建议。这一指导不仅对发展中国家的水务领袖，还对培养领导的人士提供直接协助，后者包括监管者、导师和领导力发展专家。

关键词：发展陷阱，领导力，领导力发展，专业发展，水务领导力

### RESUMEN

Este documento describe seis “trampas” relacionadas con el liderazgo en las que los futuros líderes del sector del agua caen usualmente, así como maneras para evitarlas o escaparse de ellas. Se basa en la experiencia del autor que ha trabajado como especialista en el desarrollo del liderazgo en los últimos 10 años para construir la capacidad de liderazgo de los expertos del agua para que puedan iniciar e impulsar un cambio positivo. Esta experiencia incluye el trabajo de cerca con cientos de líderes del agua en desarrollo de todo el mundo a través de una variedad de programas de liderazgo y cursos breves, y llevando a cabo más de 500 sesiones de entrenamiento.

Una consecuencia de esta experiencia ha sido la identificación de un cierto número de patrones de comportamiento comunes que los futuros líderes muestran a lo largo de su crecimiento como líderes. Estos patrones son sorprendentemente similares dado que ocurren

en personas que trabajan en diferentes puntos geográficos, organizaciones, roles profesionales y culturas. En este documento, estos patrones son llamados “trampas” relacionadas con el liderazgo, ya que representan barreras contra el crecimiento.

Este documento describe seis de las trampas más comunes que pueden debilitar seriamente la habilidad de los líderes del agua para incrementar su capacidad de liderazgo y mejorar su efectividad como líderes. También explica por qué estas trampas son un problema y otorga consejos prácticos para evitar o minimizar su impacto al utilizar la guía de los textos de desarrollo de líderes, así como la experiencia del autor en el trabajo de cerca con estas personas y la evaluación de resultados. Esta guía debería ayudar a los futuros líderes del agua directamente, así como a la gente que entrena a estos líderes, tales como supervisores, mentores y especialistas del desarrollo de líderes.

*Palabras clave:* Trampas del desarrollo, liderazgo, desarrollo del liderazgo, desarrollo profesional, liderazgo del agua.

## 1. Introduction

Approximately 1,400 children die each day from diseases associated with unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation (Water Aid 2015). Approximately 663,000,000 people do not have access to safe drinking water, while approximately 2,400,000,000 people do not have access to adequate sanitation (World Bank 2017). Sobering statistics such as these highlight the urgent need for significant change in the water sector.

In cities, common drivers for change include population growth and densification, increased climatic variability, and global warming, which lead to a greater need for water security and resilience (Cettner et al. 2014; Deletic et al. 2013; Wong & Brown 2009). At a time when the twenty-first century is being referred to as “the century of cities and urbanisation” (Wong & Brown 2009, p. 673), it is now widely accepted that conventional systems of centralised urban water management are not sustainable in developed or developing countries (Poustie et al. 2015; Wong & Brown 2009).

Drivers for substantial change also exist in non-urban areas. For example, the philosophies of “integrated water resource management” and “integrated river basin management” (see Lenton & Muller 2009; Rijke et al. 2012) are a response to

the view that traditional ways of managing water in river basins are not sustainable (see te Boekhorst et al. 2010). Drivers for change commonly include the need for greater resilience to flooding, water security, equitable access to water, and environmental protection.

The need for substantial change in the water sector is also reflected in several of the United Nation's (2015) 17 sustainable development goals. For example, goal 6 is to "ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all". At the 2016 International Water Association's World Water Congress and Exhibition (IWA 2016) delegates highlighted the need for greater "global leadership" to achieve such goals.

Leadership is needed to initiate and drive change (Kotter 2006). In the context of this paper and drawing on definitions by Ernst and Chrobot-Mason (2011), Drath et al. (2008), and McCauley (2014), "leadership" is defined as a *process of influence* that accomplishes three outcomes. The first is direction—a shared understanding of common goals and strategy (e.g. a shared vision for a new water management project or team). The second is alignment—the joint coordination of resources and activities (e.g. aligning people, projects, funding, and research to deliver a vision). And the third is commitment—a commitment to collective success (e.g. motivating and inspiring others to achieve mutual interests). From this perspective, the term "leader" is used to describe people who engage in such processes of influence irrespective of their formal organisational role.

Numerous research projects and case studies have highlighted the importance of people playing different leadership roles in initiating and steering processes of positive change in the water sector (e.g. Brown & Clarke 2007; Herrick & Pratt 2012; Howe & Mukheibir 2015; Huitema & Meijerink 2010; Lincklaen Arriëns & Wehn de Montalvo 2013; Taylor et al. 2011). For example, Meijerink and Huitema (2010) conducted an analysis of 16 international case studies where water leaders ("policy entrepreneurs") successfully initiated and steered processes of change to improve water policy and practice. Similarly, research on the transitional steps that cities typically take as they progressively embrace principles of "water sensitive cities" (Brown, Keath & Wong 2008) has identified the key role that networks of leaders (e.g. champions) play to facilitate change (Brown & Clarke 2007; Mukheibir, Howe & Gallet 2014; Taylor et al. 2011).

Awareness of the significance of leadership as a catalyst for change has led to calls for improved leadership and a greater emphasis on building leadership capacity in the water sector (IWA 2016; Lincklaen Arriëns & Wehn de Montalvo 2013). For example, at the Fourth Delft Symposium on Water Sector Capacity Development in 2007, delegates called for capacity building activities to develop 1,000 water leaders in Asia and Africa (Lincklaen Arriëns & Wehn de Montalvo 2013).

As water practitioners have deepened their understanding of the need for leadership in the sector, we have seen increased investment in activities to strengthen the capacity of individual leaders and groups of leaders (see Lincklaen Arriëns & Wehn de Montalvo 2013; Taylor 2010a; Taylor & McIntosh 2012). These interventions have been tailored for water practitioners by drawing on a growing knowledge base of the nature of leadership roles we see in the water sector, and the leader attributes and leadership strategies needed to successfully perform those roles (see Taylor, Lincklaen Arriëns & Laing 2015). Leadership development is now a component of modern and comprehensive postgraduate educational programs that aim to build “T-shaped water professionals” in order to deliver more integrated and sustainable outcomes (McIntosh & Taylor 2013).

This paper shares some of what has been learnt by the author over the past 10 years as he has worked as a leadership specialist to help water practitioners from around the world to build their capacity to initiate and drive change, and to play different leadership roles. This experience has included working as a leadership coach, trainer, researcher, mentor, and leadership development program co-ordinator to deliver and evaluate a variety of development programs, short courses and coaching sessions. For example, this paper draws on the author’s experience of coordinating the delivery of the feedback intensive, nine-month, International Water Centre (IWC) Water Leadership Program which has been running annually from 2011 (see Taylor & McIntosh 2012). To date, this program has helped to build the leadership capacity of 144 emerging water leaders, and has included 432 individual coaching sessions.

An outcome from this experience has been the identification of repeating patterns of behaviours that are commonly seen when working with developing water leaders. These behaviours are described as “developmental traps” in this paper. The frequency that these traps are observed has been a surprise to the author, as he works with a diverse group of water practitioners (e.g. people who come from different professional disciplines, parts of the water sector, organisational and national cultures, and organisational roles). This outcome, however, represents an opportunity, as it becomes possible to generate some focused developmental guidance to address a relatively small number of leadership development traps that water leaders commonly fall into.

Consequently, the primary aim of this paper is to describe six common traps that have the potential to inhibit the growth of emerging leaders and limit their effectiveness, describe the impacts associated with these traps, and provide guidance on ways to avoid them or minimise their impact. It is hoped that this information can be used directly by developing water leaders to build self-awareness, identify which traps they are vulnerable to, and engage in “self-leadership” (see Neck & Manz 2010) to avoid or escape them. It is also hoped that supervisors, mentors, coaches, and other leadership development specialists can use

this information to help emerging water leaders to accelerate their professional development.

## **2. Methodology**

**T**he observations and guidance presented in this paper primarily draws from the author's experience from 2008 to 2017 working with a diverse group of non-executive, emerging water leaders who have participated in the following activities:

1. A customised, 6-month, feedback-intensive leadership development program (see Guthrie & King 2004) for Australian, champion-type water leaders in 2008 (see Taylor 2010a). Designing and delivering this program was part of the author's PhD research. It involved 20 participants and 40 one-to-one coaching sessions.
2. The 9-month, feedback intensive IWC Water Leadership Program which has been run annually since 2011. One hundred and forty-four (144) water leaders have graduated from this program. Each participant has three formal, one-to-one coaching sessions with an IWC leadership coach (i.e. 432 sessions). The vast majority of these have been conducted by the author. Most of these participants are Australian, although some have come from Indonesia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Lao, the Philippines, and New Zealand. The average age is mid-30s with equal participation from males and females. Participants come from a wide variety of work contexts (e.g. consulting firms, Commonwealth, State and local government agencies, water utilities, and non-government organisations).
3. Customized IWC water leadership development programs. Three large programs were run for small groups (typically eight people from the one organization) over 2013–2016. These programs also involved 2–3 rounds of one-to-one coaching.
4. Customised leadership development short courses, masterclasses, and on-line courses over 2010–2017. These activities typically ran over several days for groups of domestic water practitioners in Australia and visiting international study groups (e.g. from Indonesia). They have included: a series of five workshops held around Australia in 2010 in partnership with the Australian Water Association; and annual masterclasses with a diverse group of students entering the IWCs Master of Integrated Water Management; and a 5-week online team leadership course that has been run twice a year from 2016 for young water professionals. Overall, these activities have involved approximately 675 water leaders from a diverse range of workplaces.
5. One-to-one coaching and mentoring activities with emerging water leaders since 2008 that occur *outside* of formal programs. Typically, the author would participate in 6–12 of these sessions per year.

While all of these activities provide opportunities to better understand the challenges facing developing water leaders, the most useful information to identify common barriers to development and patterns of behaviour originates from the one-to-one coaching sessions. For example, in a typical leadership development program run by the IWC, leadership coaches work with emerging water leaders in three confidential one-to-one coaching sessions spread over several months. These sessions provide a good opportunity for the coach to develop an in-depth understanding of the coachee's context, strengths and weaknesses, behaviours, and barriers to their development.

While the six leadership-related traps that are communicated in this paper are the most common, it should be noted that other they are not exclusive. In addition, no claims are made about these traps being unique to non-executive leaders from the water sector.

### **3. Common Leadership-Related Traps and Ways to Manage Them**

Figure 1 describes six leadership traps that are commonly seen when working with water leaders at the project leader, team leader, and middle management levels. These traps will be discussed in turn. It is suggested that most developing water leaders, including the author, will have fallen, or will fall, into some of these traps during their career.

#### **3.1. The Chaotic Leader**

##### **3.1.1. Description**

The chaotic leader struggles with several aspects of “self-leadership” (see Drucker 2005; Neck & Manz 2010), including time management, managing their own career, and professional development, and having a “big picture” vision of the kind of leader/professional they want to be. They typically have difficulty clarifying their highest priorities (in life and in work), distinguishing between tasks that are urgent and those that are important, using day to day time management tools (e.g. time budgets and scheduling), delegating, and politely saying “no” to requests for assistance.

A substantial proportion of these people are highly intelligent with post-graduate degrees (e.g. PhDs), which may have contributed their tendency to focus on the details but lose sight of the “big picture”. They often display symptoms of “burnout” (i.e. low levels of personal resilience; see Coutu 2002; Petrie 2014) when their workload becomes difficult for them to manage. These leaders also commonly fall into several other traps shown in Figure 1 (i.e. the individualistic leader and the non-strategic leader). Most of these leaders are aware that they have a significant self-leadership problem, but have difficulty changing deeply ingrained habits.



**Figure 1.** Six leadership-related traps that developing water leaders commonly fall into

<p><b>The chaotic leader</b></p> <p><b>Description:</b> Struggles with self-leadership, especially time management. Has difficulty clarifying their “big picture” priorities, managing their career and professional development, distinguishing between urgent and important tasks, using day to day time management tools, delegating, saying no, etc. Their tendency to be highly reactive and non-strategic adversely affects their ability to effectively lead teams.</p>	<p><b>The timid leader</b></p> <p><b>Description:</b> Struggles with self-confidence. More commonly female than male. May have had a poor supervisor who has damaged their confidence. May also work in an organization that does not support their development or offer positive role models. They hold back from taking opportunities to grow as a leader (e.g. volunteering to take on a more senior role or asking a senior leader to mentor them). They may also find it difficult to adopt a “leader identity”.</p>
<p><b>The stunted leader</b></p> <p><b>Description:</b> These leaders are missing one or more important ingredients that hold back their development as a leader. “Missing ingredients” usually relate to: their work role/environment (e.g. there is a lack of opportunities to engage in leadership); a lack of self-awareness; a lack of work colleagues who they trust; a propensity to avoid getting feedback from colleagues and responding positively; a non-supportive supervisor; a tendency to dwell on problems rather than solutions; and/or a propensity to avoid taking personal responsibility for the leadership development process.</p>	<p><b>The non-strategic leader</b></p> <p><b>Description:</b> Struggles to be forward thinking, see the ‘big picture’, and strategically plan for the future. A common scenario is a team leader who is very good at addressing the day-to-day issues within their team at a task and relationship level, but is poor at thinking about what the team will need in the longer term and working outside of their team. They have difficulty seeing the “big picture” and engaging in scanning behaviors, strategic social networking, strategic thinking and strategic planning.</p>
<p><b>The individualistic leader</b></p> <p><b>Description:</b> Struggles to bring people with them on leadership initiatives. They tend to be comfortable in the champion leadership role, where they are good at initiating change but often move too quickly for their colleagues/stakeholders, fail to build a coalition of support, fail to build a generally <i>shared</i> vision, take excessive risks, and can leave the initiative too early. They also have a tendency to avoid and/or underperform in the team leadership role.</p>	<p><b>The directive leader</b></p> <p><b>Description:</b> Struggles to enable others to solve problems. They have a tendency to tell (direct) people how to address problems. They usually come from a highly technical background, may be seen as a “technical guru”, and have developed a problem-solving style which has served them well when working as an individual to address technical challenges. This style inhibits the growth of people in their teams, and is ineffective at addressing complex challenges (also known as wicked problems or adaptive challenges).</p>

Individual impacts typically include poor physical and mental health during periods of intense work, feelings that they are letting their team down, stagnating professional/career development, and below average progress in leadership development activities (as they struggle to make time to do the work). In the 9-month IWC Water Leadership Program, these leaders are at most risk of not completing all elements of the program and consequently failing to earn a “Certificate of Excellence”.

Their chaotic working habits also adversely impact people around them. They often struggle to hold teams together as some members of their team find the work environment they create to be stressful. They can also model poor practices to their staff/colleagues (e.g. working excessive hours, not being able to distinguish between urgent and important tasks). Data collected from 360° feedback processes indicates that their colleagues typically perceive them to be poor team leaders.

Other impacts on their leadership performance include not making time for important, non-urgent activities which are essential to leadership such as strategic networking (see Ibarra & Hunter 2007). Their personal power can also be diminished as a result of failing to deliver on commitments (e.g. not meeting deadlines). In addition, the quality of communication with colleagues is often affected by their poor time management ability (e.g. they frequently reschedule meetings that are important to others).

### ***3.1.2. Developmental Guidance***

Ideally, these emerging leaders would be provided with training on self-leadership skills, especially time management, early in their career before deeply ingrained habits develop. Groups like the International Water Association’s “young water professionals” network provide mechanisms to achieve this. Relevant self-leadership skill sets include: time management; guiding one’s own professional development and career; building resilience and managing stress. The recognition of the importance of time management as a critical self-leadership foundation skill has resulted in the IWC Water Leadership Program providing participants with access to a comprehensive online training module at the start of the program.

In the opinion of the author, these leaders are not suited to formal team leadership roles until they have improved their self-leadership capacity. Supervisors and mentors can play a role preparing them for such roles, by guiding their professional development progress and providing incentives for them to build new skills, use new tools and change their behaviour. Organisational incentives could include linking career/salary progression with progress against relevant professional development goals (e.g. completing a leadership development program that has a strong emphasis on self-leadership), and requiring the emerging leader to fully commit to professional development activities (e.g. a developmental plan,

coaching, mentoring, and 360° feedback; see Day 2000; McCauley, Van Velsor & Ruderman 2010). Supervisors and mentors also have the potential to frequently encourage chaotic leaders to focus on strategic priorities, and carefully consider where to best use their time and energy.

The importance of organisational support and accountability mechanisms has been highlighted within the IWC Water Leadership Program. The participants that usually benefit the most are those that come from organisations that carefully select which participants they will send, require these participants to earn a full “Certificate of Excellence” from the program, and require them to report back to the executive management team on their experience. Such an approach provides a strong incentive for chaotic leaders to fully commit to the developmental process, try new approaches, receive some feedback from colleagues, and start to establish new habits.

Finally, chaotic leaders are encouraged to take responsibility to identify their strengths and weaknesses, learn new approaches (e.g. time management techniques; see HBS Publishing Corporation 2006), build a developmental plan, get ongoing support from a mentor, coach and/or supervisor, and perhaps most importantly get frequent and ongoing feedback from their colleagues on their behaviour (see Kirkland & Manoogian 1998). Such feedback should remind these leaders of the positive and negative impacts of their behavior and the need to stay committed to behavioural change.

## **3.2. The Timid Leader**

### **3.2.1. Description**

The timid leader struggles to find the self-confidence to take on leadership challenges, including formal leadership roles. This trap includes reluctance to take on a “leader identity”, which is a critical early step in the leadership development process (see Day, Harrison & Halpin 2009). People who do not see themselves as “leaders” are less likely to engage in leadership development activities such as volunteering to take on leadership responsibilities, and work with a mentor or coach. This mindset significantly inhibits the rate of their development.

In the author’s experience, this trap is more commonly seen in the emerging female water leaders. Some of these leaders have experienced poor supervision which has significantly degraded their confidence. Others have worked in organisations that provided little support for their development and few female role models in senior leadership positions.

This lack of confidence has the potential to affect their leadership performance, growth as a leader, and career progression. For example, they are often reluctant to: ask a senior leader to mentor them; volunteer to act in a more senior position; or take on a challenging leadership development project that significantly

stretches their leadership capabilities and requires them to be outside their “comfort zone” (see Ibarra 2015). They are also hesitant to apply for leadership-related scholarships or awards—both of which have the potential to enhance their profile, credibility, and personal power.

This trap can be related to the “stunted leader” trap (see Figure 1), as some timid leaders can get “stuck” in a role that they can do well but there is limited potential to grow their leadership ability. They may also lack the confidence to move to a new role or organization where they can be better supported and build confidence.

### **3.2.2. Developmental Guidance**

There is great potential to help timid leaders break out of this trap. The primary strategy relates to support. This support can come in several forms. Coaching and mentoring can help to encourage these leaders to find a more supportive work environment. In some cases this may mean leaving a poor supervisor, or moving to an organization with a more supportive culture and influential role models. In the opinion of the author, no developing leader should tolerate poor supervision that saps their confidence or an organizational culture that does not support their development.

Another strategy to build confidence includes finding challenging roles that are aligned with one’s personal values to unleash intrinsic motivation and resilience, and which generate tangible outcomes in the short term. These outcomes can help to progressively build confidence, especially when combined with frequent feedback from colleagues, support from competent mentors and supervisors, and reflection. Becoming a “reflective practitioner” (Schön 1983) by learning sustainable methods of reflecting (see Petrie 2014; Pulley & Wakefield 2001) is also a valuable developmental strategy. Reflection can help to build confidence, as it can reframe a setback into a positive learning opportunity.

Personal networking can also help to build confidence. Personal networks are a set of relationships that provide benefits relating to personal, professional, and career development (see Ibarra & Hunter 2007). Timid leaders often place a priority on building and maintaining relationships with people who are positive, encouraging, energising, and have an interest in their development. These relationships may occur inside or outside of work. Such networking can include getting involved in activities outside of work which help to build confidence. For example, joining a Toastmasters International club to practice communication skills in a safe and supportive environment, or volunteering to take on an assigned leadership role in a community group with enthusiastic, supportive colleagues.

### **3.3. The Stunted Leader**

#### **3.3.1. Description**

The stunted leader is missing one or more important ingredients in their mix of leadership development activities which holds back their development. These “missing ingredients” may include: their work role/environment (e.g. there is a lack of opportunities to engage in leadership); a lack of self-awareness; a lack of work colleagues that they trust; a supervisor who does not want to support their development (or does not know how to); a propensity to avoid getting feedback from colleagues and responding positively to that feedback; a tendency to dwell on problems rather than solutions; and/or a proclivity to avoid taking personal responsibility for the leadership development process.

Broadly we can categorize these inhibiting factors into two groups—those that relate to self-leadership (e.g. lack of self-awareness) and those that relate to their environment (e.g. a lack of trust in their workplace that inhibits leadership development activities, such as feedback). Stunted leaders who primarily suffer from a non-supportive work environment usually conclude that they need to move to a new workplace (e.g. a new role or organisation). The decision to do so typically follows discussions with a coach and/or mentor, comparing their situation to other participants in a leadership development program who are working in a more supportive environment, and reflecting on the results of a 360° feedback process (see Day 2000). For these leaders, anonymous feedback from their peers is often a source of motivation to move from their current role.

Stunted leaders whose development is being inhibited by aspects of self-leadership have more difficulty escaping this trap. For example, they may struggle to overcome a strong propensity to avoid getting feedback from their colleagues. This may have deep psychological origins, or they may be unaware that they tend to blame others for leadership setbacks, rather than taking partial responsibility. These developing leaders usually represent the most challenging coachees the author works with.

Impacts potentially associated with this leadership development trap include relatively slow leadership development progress, sustained levels of mediocre leadership performance, and strained relationships between the leader and their colleagues (e.g. when they respond poorly to feedback). The stunted leader can also become a “timid leader” in work environments with little support, especially if their supervisor does not want to support their development or does not have the necessary skills. Another impact is that leadership development activities can become a catalyst for their decision to change roles, which some supervisors view as an undesirable outcome. The author, however, does not share this view as such a decision usually benefits the developing leader and their organization in the longer term.

### **3.3.2. Developmental Guidance**

For stunted leaders who are suffering from a non-supportive work environment, the developmental strategies are similar to the timid leader (see Section 3.2.2). Coaches, mentors, and peers play an important role to help the stunted leader to recognise the barriers to their development and explore possible new roles and work environments. Career counsellors also commonly play a role. In the IWC Water Leadership Program, some of our most distinguished and highly respected executive ‘group mentors’ have been influential in helping stunted and timid leaders to make the sometimes difficult decision to move from their current work role.

For stunted leaders who are struggling to overcome self-leadership impediments, developmental strategies include increasing the frequency of feedback to build self-awareness, one-to-one coaching and mentoring, and building individual leadership plans that focus on self-leadership (e.g. frequently reflecting and using different methods to solicit feedback). Some of these leaders also choose to get support from counsellors and psychologists to explore some of the underlying reasons for their behaviour (e.g. why they strongly avoid feedback or struggle to respond positively to it). For these leaders, it is recommended that the temptation to move beyond self-leadership to address other aspects of leadership that involve influencing others (e.g. team leadership) be resisted during the developmental process until fundamental self-leadership abilities such as self-awareness have been secured.

## **3.4. The Non-Strategic Leader**

### **3.4.1. Description**

The non-strategic leader struggles to be forward thinking, see the “big picture”, and plan for the future. They typically come from technical backgrounds, like solving technical problems, and have a propensity to “get into the detail”. As they move into leadership roles that require strategic thinking and planning, these strongly developed tendencies become an impediment to their development. A significant number of non-strategic leaders also suffer from the “chaotic leader” trap, as they allow urgent, not important tasks to dominate their schedule at the expense of longer-term, important, non-urgent leadership activities.

A common scenario is a team leader who is very good at addressing the day-to-day issues within their team at a task and relationship level, but is poor at thinking about what the team will need in the longer term and working outside of their team. They have trouble seeing the “big picture” and making sense of the work context. They also avoid or struggle with “scanning behaviours” (see Anderson & Bateman 2000), strategic social networking (see Ibarra & Hunter 2007), and strategic thinking and planning (see Porter 1996; Sull 2007).

This trap is easy for relatively inexperienced leaders to fall into, as they have not yet experienced the “pain” associated with failing to plan for the future. Ac-

cordingly, they have not yet developed a mindset of investing time in the short term for benefits that may accrue in the long term. Such a mindset is critical for many leadership activities. For example, this mindset is needed to invest the time to build a genuinely shared vision at the start of an initiative, build strategic networks for future collaboration, and prepare an influence strategy which is ready to use when a “window of opportunity” opens (see Kingdon 1995).

Typical impacts associated with this developmental trap include their teams becoming redundant, losing executive or political support, or losing funding over time. Non-strategic leaders are usually very good at solving technical problems, but struggle to make significant progress on long term, complex/adaptive challenges (see Heifetz & Laurie 1997; Snowden & Boone 2007). This adversely affects their credibility (a form of personal power; see Northouse 2015) and therefore their ability to exert influence. It also limits their career options, as complex challenges are common in the water sector (see Deletic et al. 2013; Dunn et al. 2016; Taylor, Lincklaen Arriëns & Laing 2015) and most senior organizational roles require strong strategic leadership abilities.

### **3.4.2. Developmental Guidance**

The first step in helping non-strategic leaders to improve is to help them recognize they have a capability gap. Facilitating a 360-degree feedback process (see Day 2000) can help to highlight the need to work in this area. The need to become more strategic may also be affected by the leader’s career ambitions. For example, if they plan to move into executive roles they will need to place a high priority on building knowledge and skills in strategic thinking, networking and planning.

At the team leader level, Susan Kogler Hill’s (2015) conceptual model of team leadership is a useful tool to help leaders recognise that team leadership involves working in three broad areas—tasks, relationships and the external environment. Often non-strategic team leaders are good at working internally on task and relationship issues, but ignore the external environmental work of a good team leader (e.g. advocating on behalf the team, strategic networking, garnering resources, identifying threats and opportunities, etc.). Using this model to inform their day to day team leadership activities can help them to broaden their perspective and include more strategic work.

Specific skills also need to be strengthened. These include building strategic networks (i.e. relationships that help their organisation to meet its strategic goals), strategic thinking and planning (e.g. using a variety of tools such as scenario planning and backcasting), systems thinking (i.e. learning how to analyse a complex problem from a holistic perspective), and engaging in scanning behaviours (e.g. reading broadly to raise awareness of broad industry trends, threats and opportunities). Time management skills are also valuable, such as the ability to distinguish between important and urgent tasks, and scheduling time to work on important,

non-urgent tasks such as strategic planning.

Coaching and structured training are effective developmental methods for building leadership capacity in these areas. Working closely with mentors who excel at strategic leadership is also beneficial. Supervisors also play an important role. For example, a supervisor could work with a non-strategic leader to develop a “time budget” (see Morgenstern 2004), and as part of this process ensure that an appropriate amount of time is spent on strategic activities.

### **3.5. The Individualistic Leader**

#### **3.5.1. Description**

The individualistic leader struggles to bring people with them on leadership initiatives. They tend to be comfortable in the “champion” leadership role (see Howell 2005; Howell & Higgins 1990; Taylor, Lincklaen Arriëns & Laing 2015), where they excel at initiating change but often move too quickly, fail to build a genuinely shared vision, struggle to build a coalition of supporters, take excessive risks, and can leave the initiative before the change is fully delivered.

These leaders tend to be very competent as individual knowledge workers, confident, energetic and highly motivated to drive change. They are, therefore, a great potential asset to their organisations and the water industry. They are usually in their 20s when they appear in the IWC Water Leadership Program. At this early stage in their career, they have realised that they need some new strategies to improve their leadership effectiveness. Typically, their organisation has also recognised their potential but also the need for them to learn to become more effective at driving group-based processes of influence and leading teams.

Their tendency to work on their own and move quickly means that they often fail to do some of the “basics” of leadership well. For example, at the start of a leadership initiative they may not invest the time to understand the needs of affected stakeholders and work with them to build relationships and a genuinely shared vision for the initiative. Consequently, they are good at initiating change, but often fail to get support from others (including authorising leaders) to fully implement the initiative. This can result in leadership failures, personal frustration, “burnout” (see Roger & Petrie 2016) and even career derailment.

#### **3.5.2. Developmental Guidance**

From a coaching perspective, this type of leader is relatively easy to work with as they are highly motivated to improve and usually have a strong work ethic. Traditional approaches such as 360° feedback, training, coaching, mentoring, using leadership projects, and individual leadership development plans all help individualistic leaders to try new approaches and establish new habits. In particular, learning about the nature of the champion leadership role by exploring rel-



evant guidelines, models, and case studies (see Howell 2005; Taylor 2011; Taylor, Lincklaen Arriëns & Laing 2015) helps them to choose appropriate leadership behaviours to use at the right time. In addition, experienced mentors who are good at playing this role can be effective at helping them to slow down, collaborate more with others, be more strategic, invest time early in initiatives to build a shared vision and trusting relationships, build personal resilience, and adapt their style to suit the situation.

Strengthening their ability to engage in self-leadership is also valuable, given their potential for ‘burnout’ when working environments with little support and considerable resistance to change (see Taylor 2010b). Typically this includes building knowledge and skills in reflection, stress management, and strengthening personal resilience.

To some extent this developmental trap is a consequence of the enthusiasm and inexperience of young water champions. These individualistic leaders can, however, make some significant mistakes early in their career which can damage their reputation and their organisation (Taylor 2010b). Identifying these leaders early in their career and directing them to developmental activities that are designed with an understanding of the ‘champion phenomenon’ (Taylor et al. 2011) is a key to success. Supervisors have a major role to play in this process as they are in the best position to identify emerging leaders who may be at risk of falling into this trap.

### **3.6. The Directive Leader**

#### **3.6.1. Description**

The directive leader struggles to enable others to solve problems. They have a tendency to direct people how to address problems rather than using a coaching, supporting, or delegating style (see Blanchard, Zigarmi & Zigarmi 1985). They usually come from a technical background (e.g. science, engineering, or information technology) and have developed a problem-solving style which has served them well when working as an individual to address predictable technical challenges (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky 2009). This style is reinforced by being seen as a “technical guru” by their colleagues and having significant expert power. In most Australian water agencies “technical gurus” have great status.

This developmental trap commonly becomes a problem in two circumstances. The first is when they become an assigned team leader with staff and their problem-solving style leads to their staff being dependent on them. This can stifle the professional growth and confidence of their direct reports, and results in the problem-solving leader having to spend a lot of their time reacting to requests for help.

The second circumstance relates to addressing complex challenges (also known as adaptive challenges or wicked problems; see Heifetz & Laurie 1997; Rittel & Webber 1973). Directive leaders find it difficult to switch their leadership

style to an enabling/adaptive style where they need to create environments for people experiencing the problem to come together, experiment, and learn by doing (see Fien & Wilson 2014; Heifetz & Laurie 1997; Snowden & Boone 2007; Taylor, Lincklaen Arriëns & Laing 2015). This style requires the directive leader to empower others to find solutions, be patient, cope with uncertainty, respond positively to failures, and play a facilitation role. This leadership style places an emphasis on local stakeholders who are experiencing the problem finding solutions rather than relying on solutions from external experts.

### **3.6.2. Developmental Guidance**

Developmental strategies for directive leaders include getting feedback from colleagues so they are aware of the implications of their tendency to solve technical problems for others, and learning how to switch their leadership style to suit the situation they are facing. The second generation Situation Leadership Model (see Northouse 2015 after Blanchard, Zigarmi & Zigarmi 1985) is a useful tool to help them identify when to direct, coach, support, or fully delegate tasks to a direct report or colleague. Training and coaching to build the skills necessary to use these four leadership/supervision styles are also valuable. For example, learning how to effectively delegate tasks to colleagues.

Helping directive leaders to accurately diagnose the difference between technical and complex challenges (see Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky 2009) is a valuable form of “vertical” leadership development (see Petrie 2011). “Vertical” leadership development refers to the different cognitive stages that leaders move through as they make sense of their world, such as adopting new mindsets or ways of looking at a leadership challenge. This contrasts with the more traditional “horizontal” form of leadership development which focuses on the acquisition of new skills, abilities, and behaviours (e.g. learning specific communication skills).

In addition to accurately diagnosing complex challenges, directive leaders also need to develop the ability to perform the behaviors associated with the adaptive/enabling style (e.g. facilitation, conflict management, sense making, and systems thinking). Challenging job assignments with elements of feedback, support, and reflection are ideal for building these abilities (e.g. short-term “leadership projects”). For most directive leaders, challenging job assignments that require them to use an enabling/adaptive leadership style are located well outside their “comfort zone”, so they need significant support throughout the process.

## **4. Implications and Limitations**

**T**here are three practical implications of the content of this paper. First, the descriptions of the six leadership traps (see Figure 1) can be used by supervisors, human resource professionals, mentors, coaches, and other leader-

ship development professionals as a simple *framework* to help identify water leaders who may be at risk of falling into the traps. Identifying these people early in their careers can be particularly valuable, as an early intervention should result in a significant return on investment over their careers.

Second, the guidance provided in this paper can be used by the same group of people to help emerging water leaders to build the self-awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to avoid or escape these traps. For example, a supervisor could work with one of their direct reports who is falling into the “individualistic leader” trap to jointly agree on a set of professional development activities that will help to improve their leadership performance (e.g. working with an experienced mentor who excels at playing the champion role and collaborating with others).

Third, the framework and guidance provided in this paper represents an instrument for self-leadership. Specifically, it could be used by emerging water leaders to reflect on their own leadership-related mindsets, personality traits and behaviors, and assess whether they are currently in any of these traps, or have the potential to fall into them. This should help to build self-awareness, which is a pre-requisite for effective leadership and leadership development (Avolio 2005). The guidance should also help them to design and steer their own leadership development activities, which is a best practice principle of leader development (Adair 2005).

There are also two significant limitations of the information presented in this paper. First, the six leadership traps shown in Figure 1 are not exhaustive. There are others. It is suggested, however, that the six described in this paper are the most common and a manageable set to advance our knowledge base of leadership development traps that can limit the growth of emerging water leaders.

The second limitation is that the conclusions of this paper are primarily based on the experience of the author as a leadership development specialist who has worked closely with a diverse group of water leaders at the project leader to middle management level over the last 10 years. As such, no firm conclusions can be reached about the extent to which these development traps are also present in other groups of leaders who work in different contexts.

## **5. Conclusions**

**T**he primary aim of this paper has been to share some of the author’s learnings from working as a leadership development specialist with a diverse group of emerging water leaders to help improve our collective ability to enable these leaders to drive positive change. The water sector is facing many profound challenges, some of which affect the lives of the most vulnerable people on

the planet. In order to address these challenges we need more people who have the capacity to exercise influence and drive change in different leadership roles.

Building the leadership capacity of emerging leaders is underway in many parts of the world (Lincklaen Arriëns & Wehn de Montalvo 2013), but we have a limited knowledge base of some of the leadership development strategies that are most relevant to people playing different leadership roles in the water sector (Taylor, Lincklaen Arriëns & Laing 2015). This paper aims to strengthen this knowledge base by highlighting six common leadership development traps that emerging water leaders commonly fall into, and specific interventions that can be used to help them avoid or escape these traps so they can grow as influential change agents.

The six trap framework shown in Figure 1 and the guidance provided in the body of this paper represents a resource that can be used by emerging water leaders themselves as a self-leadership instrument. It can be used to prompt reflection, build self-awareness, and identify specific leadership development strategies to apply. It can also be used by those people who wish to enable emerging water leaders, such as supervisors, coaches, and mentors. For these people, the information provided in this paper can help to identify emerging leaders who may be at risk of falling into these traps, and to identify practical ways to support their growth. Taking such action is consistent with the principle that exemplary leadership aims not to generate more “followers” but to grow more leaders.

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