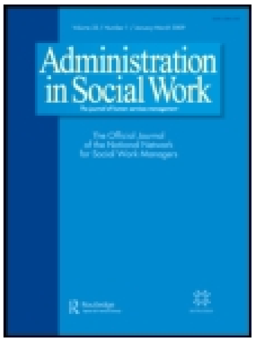

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Building Managerial and Organizational Capacity in Nonprofit Human Service Organizations Through a Leadership Development Program

MICHAEL J. AUSTIN, KATE REGAN, MARK W. SAMPLES, SARA L. SCHWARTZ, and SARAH CARNOCHAN
Mack Center on Nonprofit Management in the Human Services, School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley, California, USA

Highly skilled managers are needed to lead organizations and enable them to survive in changing times, especially in this era when members of the baby boom generation are retiring from senior positions. Most short-term in-service management training programs for practicing managers reflect the abbreviated versions of content found in either undergraduate or graduate degree programs in nonprofit management. Recognizing the limitations of these traditional approaches to training future senior managers, a group of directors of nonprofit human service agencies serving children and families collaborated with a university to develop and implement a training program for their middle and senior managers to enhance their managerial leadership capacities. The program design and evaluation differs from traditional professional development programs in terms of the: 1) extensive involvement of agency directors and program participants in the program design; 2) learning projects that address agreed-upon agency issues that focus on both managing and leading; 3) participant-centered learning with individualized coaching; and 4) outcome-focus

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Address correspondence to Michael J. Austin, Mack Center on Nonprofit Management in the Human Services, School of Social Welfare, University of California, 120 Haviland Hall #7400, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA. E-mail: mjaustin@berkeley.edu

with respect to identifying new conceptual frameworks for training. This case study of the training design, implementation and evaluation concludes with implications for effectively preparing future generations for leadership roles in nonprofit human service organizations.

KEYWORDS leadership, managers, nonprofit, capacity building, in-service training

INTRODUCTION

While nonprofit human service organizations face multiple challenges in these times of economic uncertainty, the limited training opportunities for nonprofit managers is of particular concern. Visionary, effective leadership is critical to ensure organizational survival in the face of financial turmoil. However, opportunities for in-service managerial and leadership training programs have been scarce in the past several decades, a situation compounded by retirements among the baby boom generation and the need for leadership succession planning across the nonprofit sector. This case study captures the efforts of a group of directors of nonprofit human service agencies in the San Francisco Bay Area to address the managerial leadership training needs of middle and senior managers in agencies serving children and families. A three-module training program lasting 15 months was designed and implemented with the support of two local foundations that recognized the need to build managerial leadership capacity in nonprofit organizations. This effort was also supported by the endowment of the Mack Center on Nonprofit Management in the Human Services located in the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley.

Management and leadership development programs are being called upon to pay attention to both staff and organizational capacity building. The training program described in this analysis was designed to build both managerial and organizational capacity. Given the limited literature on in-service training programs for human service managers (in contrast to the predominance of university-based pre-service programs), the literature review highlights the pioneering work of Blumenthal (2003, 2007), who seeks to integrate managerial and organizational capacity building and provides the theoretical foundation for designing this training program. The literature review is followed by an overview of the training program. The next section presents key findings from the training program evaluation and concludes with implications for the design of in-service managerial leadership programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The United States has undergone considerable political, economic, and social shifts in the last several decades that have altered the ways that human service organizations deliver services and have brought a unique set of managerial challenges to administrators at all levels. To respond to these challenges, human service organizations have begun to develop in-service training programs or to collaborate with training institutions to meet the educational and training needs of their middle management employees. Middle management positions have been filled historically by staff members who have moved up through the organizational ranks, without much attention to training for the duties of the new position. The following brief literature review on management training for nonprofit human service organizations features the structure and content of training programs as well as the theoretical frameworks used for training program design.

A number of studies have focused on the specific skills that human service administrators and middle managers need to develop in order to be effective, including: management technology, leadership skills, organizational change, decision making, management of diversity, cultural competence, program monitoring and accountability, financial management, personnel administration, and supervision (Cashman, 1978; Dane, 1983; Dolan, 2002; Doueck & Austin, 1986; Fong & Gibbs, 1995; Gutierrez, Kruzich, Jones, & Coronado, 2000; Hyde, 1998; Perlmutter, 1988). Some training models provide a bridge for clinicians to move into management positions by helping them expand their knowledge and skills in administration and management (Dane, 1983).

Preston (2004) notes that training programs should attend to management and technical skills while also facilitating the development of a larger, macro-level awareness and sensitivity to how the external environment influences the organization and those that it serves. Hart (1988) looks beyond the traditional training needs of human service managers and considers the importance of leadership in human service organizations, recognizing that traditional university programs do not emphasize the concept of leadership in course curriculum or course readings. Helping managers become visionary leaders calls for a focus on self-awareness, self-directed learning plans, capacities to differentiate between good and great performance, and finding time to reflect, practice, and learn (Genis, 2008). These perspectives emphasize issues that are broader than managerial skill sets, particularly organizational environment and leadership capacity.

Preston (2005) developed a training model that highlights flexibility and control in relationship to the internal and external dimensions of management: 1) internal flexibility, i.e., the development of individuals and groups in the organization; 2) external flexibility, i.e., building the capacity to engage effectively with the external environment; 3) external control, i.e., setting and realizing high standards of organizational performance; and 4) internal control, i.e., the stabilization of workflow processes and data management (Preston, 2005).

Similar to Preston (2005), Glisson (1981) suggests that the manager's role is to facilitate the functioning of the interrelationships between the internal and external aspects of the organization based on the following organizational subsystems: 1) the psychological subsystem, i.e., the psychological and social relationship factors in the workplace; 2) the structural subsystem, i.e., the formal structure of the organization; 3) the technological subsystem, i.e., worker techniques and knowledge; and 4) goals and values, i.e., constraints or limitations on organizational policy, planning, and behaviors. The four internal subsystems interact in a reciprocal relationship with the external environment, consisting of other organizations, the organization's clients, and interested community groups. Glisson (1981) contends that organizations have the potential to ensure their own survival and promote change in their environments, provided that managers understand the organization's internal subsystems, the external environment, and the interactions and interrelations between the two, enabling them to effectively coordinate and manage the systems and lead the agency.

Building on the concepts of Preston (2005) and Glisson (1981) regarding the role of manager as leader of change and facilitator of relations between the organization and its external environment, it is important to also note the ideas of Blumenthal (2003), who focuses on the critical relationship between managerial capacity and organizational capacity. Blumenthal (2003) defines capacity building as "actions that improve nonprofit effectiveness" in four performance domains: 1) organizational stability, i.e., an organization's ability to "deliver its programs and services . . . over the long run" (p. 9); 2) financial stability, i.e., "sufficient working capital to meet normal fluctuations in cash flow and sufficient reserves to meet capital needs"(p. 10); 3) program quality, i.e., long-term impact on clients; and 4) organization growth, i.e., expansion of an organization's services and programs in a way that is "healthy" and leads to quality services throughout the organization. Also included in Blumenthal's analysis is a fifth dimension of capacity building relating to systems management, that is, "improving an organization's skills and systems, or . . . new management strategies or structures" (p.55). Key inputs to organizational capacity building include: 1) capacity to generate financial/human/informational resources, 2) capacity to manage/change organizational culture, 3) capacity to identify/support/demonstrate organizational leadership, and 4) capacity to create/support attitudes toward change. Blumenthal (2003) also identifies the following capacity-building tools: 1) research tools to determine the readiness of an organization to go through a capacity building process; 2) planning tools; 3) implementation and monitoring, including coaching and workshop sessions; and 4) evaluating the impact of the capacity-building process on the organization itself.

Blumenthal's model of organizational capacity-building processes informs her views on the optimal design for management training programs. While most programs focus on individual development (e.g., leadership roles, management skills, and peer learning and support), Blumenthal (2007) argues for training that simultaneously promotes organizational learning and change. As summarized in Figure 1, Blumenthal (2007) outlines four components that shape the design of a management training program that seeks to expand organizational capacity: 1) making explicit the organizational capacity-building goals; 2) creating a supportive practice environment within the training program and in the agency; 3) training approaches that include multiple approaches to learning, e.g., didactic, experiential, reflective, self-assessing, and life-long learning; and 4) the use of different training tools such as self-assessment inventories, online resources, videotapes, observational checklists, etc.

After assessing organizational capacity-building goals and environmental constraints and supports, Blumenthal (2007) identifies four major pedagogical approaches that training program designers should consider:

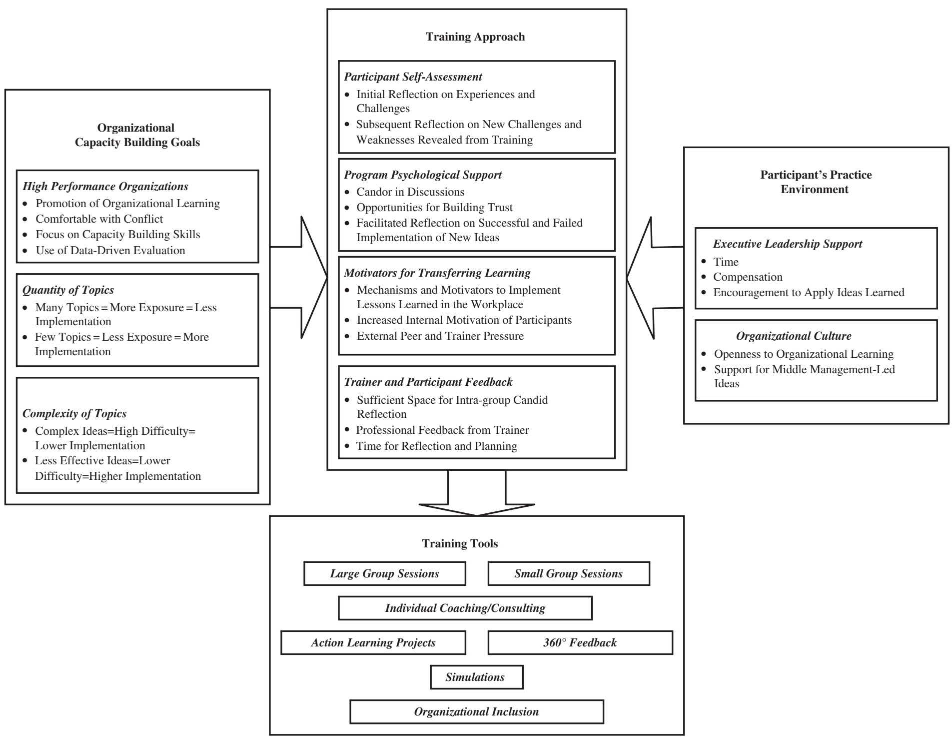

FIGURE 1 Factors impacting training elements and tools.

1) participant self-assessment, 2) psychological support, 3) motivation for transferring learning, and 4) feedback. Participant self-assessment often begins with reflection on workplace experiences and challenges, expanding to a more comprehensive self-evaluation identifying more sensitive issues. In order to create a safe context to address challenges and share professional concerns, the self-assessment process needs to be linked to the provision of psychological support during the training program to promote motivation for transferring learning back to the workplace, particularly learning related to organizational change.

Finally, the following training tools noted in Figure 1 can be used to link the organizational capacity-building goals of the training program with the realities of the participant's practice environment:

- **Large group sessions**: Focus on predetermined topics; aimed at describing, defining and clarifying.
- **Small group sessions**: Emphasize discussing, reflecting, brainstorming, analyzing, supporting individual members, or developing projects.
- **Individual coaching/consulting:** Focuses on the participant in his/her organizational environment.
- **360 degree feedback:** Requires participants to get feedback on performance from others in and outside of their organization.
- **Action learning projects:** Focus on improving some aspect of organization performance, designed by individual participants.
- **Simulations:** Structured roleplay of mock organizational situation, with observation and debriefing.
- **Organizational inclusion:** Involves other members of participants' organizations in training sessions; focuses on adapting ideas to the realities of each participant's organization.

These training tools can be adapted to support the training program design and the needs of participants. For example, action learning projects designed to promote the transfer of learning (Austin, Weisner, Schrandt, Glezos-Bell & Murtaza, 2006) AND organizational change can often be combined with small group sessions to provide psychological support for participants as well as trainer and participant feedback.

A CASE STUDY OF A MANAGERIAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM

Drawing on Blumenthal's framework of training grounded in organizational and managerial capacity building, a managerial leadership development training program (MLDTP) was designed to address two major goals: 1) build the individual capacities of participants to move from reactive crisis management to managerial leadership based on a vision of organizational change; and 2) promote continuous organizational improvement in the areas of organizational stability, program quality, financial stability, organizational growth, and systems management, while taking into account the organizational culture and climate. The MLDTP was launched in 2008 through the efforts of the Bay Area Network of Nonprofit Human Services Agencies (BANNHSA), established in 2006 by the executive directors of nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving the outcomes for children and families in their San Francisco Bay Area communities. The following program overview describes the design process, key program components, and program participants.

Designing the MLDTP

Based on an agency-university collaborative between BANNHSA and the Mack Center on Nonprofit Management in the Human Services, the design of the training program sought to balance the organizational needs identified by the agency directors with the learning needs articulated by participants in the first phase of the program. The agency directors identified four priority areas for skill development (leadership development, external relations, management capacities, and executive-board relationship development), as illustrated in Figure 2.

Leadership Development
- Recognition of the differences between leading and managing
- Ability to identify when to ask for help
- Meeting management skills
- Strategic planning skills
- Ability to give/receive mentoring
- Ability to balance internal and external demands

External relations
Community -building skills
- Understanding and ability to work with government and its policies and regulations
- Understanding how to influence policies and regulations
- Ability to access and utilize community resources (consultants etc.)
- Collaboration skills
- Ability to establish relationships with grantmakers and understand their role and responsibilities as grantees

Management capacities
- Ability to manage volunteers
- Ability to manage relationships with superiors
- Ability to manage change
- Ability to assess and manage risk
- Business skills (i.e. budgeting and finance, etc.)

Executive-Board relations
- Understanding Board/Executive relationships

FIGURE 2 Inventory of management knowledge and skills identified by agency directors.

The program participants came from a variety of cultural, experiential, and educational backgrounds and worked as supervisors and managers of the organizations. (Participant characteristics are summarized in Note 1.) Participants were asked at the beginning of the training program to identify their professional development goals. Summarized in Figure 3, the most commonly cited goals related to expanding personal capacities, increasing managerial competence, and dealing with current job challenges that affect one's confidence and capacity as organizational leader. Other issues included time management and workload prioritization skills, as well as managing with limited resources and maintaining staff morale.

I. Personal Capacities	
Improve Work and Grow in Current Position	7 Participants
Take on More Responsibility in Organization, Seek Higher Position in Another Organization or Start Own Organization	4 Participants
Develop a Healthy Work/Life Balance	3 Participants
Develop Professional Development Plan	2 Participants
Take Time to Reflect	2 Participants
Develop/Grow Professional Network Base	2 Participants
Balance Current Job with Clinical Work	1 Participant
Seek a New Educational Degree	1 Participant
II. Management/Organizational Capacities	
Develop Confidence in Leadership and Improve Leadership Skills Capacity	7 Participants
Learn Time Management/Task Prioritization Skills	4 Participants
Learn How to Develop Systems and Structures for Continual Organizational Learning and Improvement	3 Participants
Wanting to Learn how to Strategically Grow Programs	3 Participants
Have Opportunity to Learn Best Practices from Peers	3 Participants
Have Opportunity to Spur Creativity and Innovation (e.g., "Fresh Ideas" for the Organization)	2 Participants
Build Knowledge Management Base	1 Participant
Wanting to Learn how to Supervise and Motivate Staff Better	1 Participant

III. Dealing with Challenges of Doing My Current Job	
Time/Workload Management/Balance/Prioritization (Multitasking)	7 Participants
Limited Resources/ Sustainability	6 Participants
Too Many Day-to-Day Activities to Focus on Big-Picture Thinking	5 Participants
Staff Supervision (multiple work styles, etc.)	3 Participants
Staff Turnover/Hiring	2 Participants
Changing Issues in the Community	1 Participant
Managing in Times of Uncertainty	1 Participant
Weak Administrative Systems and Infrastructure	1 Participant

FIGURE 3 Topics of desired growth for participants.

As these two figures reflect, there were significant differences between the skills identified by the participants (e.g., increasing leadership skills and managing day-to-day operations that included crisis management) and the perceptions of agency directors related to acquiring "big-picture" skills (e.g., community relations, strategic planning, and developing professional networks for collaboration). The training program designers incorporated the perspectives of participants and directors into the design of the three modules in the training program as highlighted in Figure 4.

Module I featured the experiences of veteran agency directors who reflected on their career trajectories, lessons learned along the way, and

Module I – Learning from the Veterans (four half-day monthly sessions)

- Four veteran human service organization executive directors reflected on career experiences and big-picture issues (e.g., organizational values, organizational change, community impact, and policy advocacy).
- Participants reflected upon their own career experiences and completed a self-shadowing exercise in which they documented how they spent their time on a typical workday and identified what they learned from the exercise and wanted to change. Feedback was based on Kotter's (1990) framework that distinguishes between managing (coping with complexity related to planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, and evaluating and problem solving) and leading (coping with change related to setting directions, aligning people, and inspiring).
- Participants developed a brief memo on an organizational change project that they would like to lead within their organizations based on discussions with their executive leadership based on the principles of change management (Proehl, 2002).
- The results of these activities were used by the program designers in structuring Modules II and III.

Module II: Managerial Leadership Knowledge and Skills (four 2-day sessions over a 4-month period)

- Major components: 1) experiential activities, 2) skill-focused didactic presentations from experts in nonprofit human services, 3) supplementary reading materials, and 4) consultation with the training facilitator to refine organizational change projects (see Figure 3 for summary of organizational change projects).
- Session 1 focused on understanding nonprofits in their environmental contexts and the role middle managers play within those nonprofits.
- Session 2 involved a two-day experiential "conference learning model" designed to help participants understand systems analysis through the processing of their own roles in a simulated group setting that featured the roles they played in their organizations, in their communities, and in society, and with all stakeholders in human service work.
- Sessions 3 and 4 focused on the development of specific skill sets for human service nonprofit management that included: program evaluation, evidenced-based decision making, fundraising, financial management, and communication and presentation skills.

Module III - Leadership in Action:

- Support for participants in the implementation of their organizational change projects through the use of individual and small group coaching sessions.
- Coaching also included the integration of the didactic and experiential activities of Module I and II, culminating in a one-day session in which participants presented their projects to the group and agency directors for feedback and discussion.

FIGURE 4 MLDPProgram Components (January 2008 to April 2009).

areas of expertise related to the use of values in managing the agency's culture, managing change, responding to changing community needs, and carrying out the policy advocacy dimension of managerial leadership. Module II included both didactic and experiential content related to managerial leadership skills and knowledge (e.g., simulated organizational analysis, program evaluation, fundraising, financial management, presentation skills, and evidence-informed decision making). Module III involved both individual and small group coaching related to the implementation of participant-designed organizational change projects, culminating in a one-day session on presenting the change projects to peers and agency directors (Ross & Wright, 2001).

Reflections on Program Design

The two most important features of the program design involved the creation of a safe space for participants to experiment with their roles and learn from candid feedback and the integration of didactic and experiential learning. The program facilitator helped to create the safe space by: 1) being clear about the purpose of the program and program expectations; 2) being supportive of individual learning needs and interests; 3) creating small groups for project feedback that had no direct reporting relationships in them; 4) modeling how to effectively integrate person and role by providing organizational examples taken from her personal, lived learning experiences in management, leadership, and consulting roles. This modeling encouraged participants to talk about real experiences and helped them recognize that their experiences provided the basis for learning in addition to the didactic material provided by presenters.

The safe space also provided opportunities to build trust that led to more candid peer feedback and receptivity to coaching in Module III. In addition, the shared role-playing experiences created by "the conference model" in Module II also helped to build trust and bonding among group participants (Ramsay, 1999; Rayden, Skalbeck, & Snyder, 1994). While participants were initially apprehensive about some of the experiential activities of the conference model, upon reflection they expressed an appreciation for the level of intimacy created by working closely with their peers, especially the increased level of candor in speaking openly about how participants felt about themselves and each other. As a result of providing fellow participants with candid feedback about how they perceived each other's organizational change projects, the participants were better able to reflect on implementing their own projects. For example, a team of participants discovered that their presentation to upper management required more planning and strategizing than they realized when the project was not readily received because they had not accurately considered the power, politics, and authority structures in the organization. Direct feedback from participants, as well as the facilitator, led to a very successful subsequent presentation that was followed by a commitment from the executive director to support the project.

In addition, the development of a safe environment supported effective group coaching processes in which honest and courageous conversations took place. For example, it was possible to give a participant feedback about the breadth and scope of his change project in such a way that he was able to recognize his difficulty in narrowing the focus of this project because of his propensity to focus exclusively on the big picture, which, while certainly a strength, at times made him less effective in his current role as manager.

The conference model experience included activities such as using a systems analysis to examine the participants' organizations; assessing the group dynamics and the informal roles that participants were cast into in their organizations; experiencing the process of shifting into and out of various roles; and distinguishing between person and role to re-enforce insights expressed by participants. The training facilitator sought to shift the group's focus from the "person in role" focus to an "organization in its environment" perspective. For example, in the systems analysis event, one participant was able to move from seeing herself as a manager "under siege" to recognizing that the shift in funding priorities was placing her program in a favorable spotlight as innovative and a direction-setter for new programs. She then linked this organization in environment perspective to the experiences of participants in the conference model exercise. By picturing themselves outside of their roles in their own organizations, participants were able to view their organizations with a big-picture lens as well as see the relevance of the supplemental reading material.

The process of group and individual coaching in Module III addressed the barriers that participants faced in implementing their organizational change projects summarized in Figure 5. In addition, the training facilitator was able to link the didactic information presented in Module II with specific dilemmas faced by program participants in Module III. It was during this process that many participants experienced a number of "moments of clarity" or "aha!" moments. For example, it became very clear to one participant that different roles are played by leaders, managers, and facilitators in terms of how they are perceived, how groups respond to each role, how to use each role, and how to shift roles when necessary.

EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

The design and methods used to complete an evaluation of the training program are described in Note 2. This section captures some of the highlights of the participant's perceptions as well as those of their executive directors. It then summarizes the training facilitator's assessment of the major program outcomes.

Number of Participants	Project Overview
3 Participants	*Description*: The creation of collaborative middle management teams designed to respond to environmental shifts in the agency in order to communicate among the teams and with upper management. *Background and Progress*: This project involves three managers from three different units in three different locations who all report to the same supervisor. It was developed because the supervisor's span of control was too broad and she requested that team members step into peer leadership roles. Participants have focused their project on: the development of a strong sense of team as a way of helping managers feel more connected to one another and the organization; bringing new ideas from middle-manager groups to upper management as a response to changes in the environment; and connecting these groups to one another in order to reduce redundancy and generate greater collaboration in response to environmental changes.
3 Participants	*Description*: Development of an implementation plan for the organization's strategic plan at the program manager, mid-level manager, and line staff levels. *Background and Progress*: This project is aimed at upper and mid-level managers as well as line employees and is broken into three complementary pieces taken on by each participant. Together, these projects will create a mechanism for implementing an organizational strategic plan in which: upper-level managers will develop work plans that will make it clear how the strategic plan will be implemented and according to what time frame; mid-level managers will be trained on policies and procedures in order to implement them consistently across the agency; and employees will be trained on how to create individual goals and objectives related to the annual work plans that enable them to meet individual development goals and provide a standard against which to evaluate their work.
2 Participants	*Description*: Development, implementation, and institutionalization of organizational staff feedback on issues that emerge from the work and culture of the organization that impact the morale of employees. *Background and Progress*: This project focuses on the creation and maintenance of a "morale committee" to solicit and respond to suggestions for improving the morale and retention of employees. The committee created a process for categorizing, prioritizing, responding to or referring suggestions to the groups and departments that were able to make the changes. Participants also created a method of reporting back and disseminating information about the changes that were being implements.
1 Participant	*Description*: Development and implementation of a training program for new employees that would reduce job adjustment times and improve retention. *Background and Progress*: This project involved the creation of a design group, a needs assessment, as well as a program design and implementation plan. It determined which areas were most important in helping new employees get up to speed and feel confident in their knowledge and skills regarding policies, procedures and a solid understanding of the population being served. It is currently in the beginning stages of implementation.
1 Participant	*Description*: Design and implementation of a data system that assists senior management with evaluating programs in relationship to the agency's mission. *Background and Progress*: This project was designed to: 1) engage in research to determine which data base might provide the data collection and analysis capabilities required by the organization in order to meet the needs of the management team to review programs; and 2) develop a plan to determine if the management team is meeting the mission and objectives of the organization for the reduction of poverty in the neighborhood.

FIGURE 5 Organizational change project topics.

1 Participant	*Description*: Creation of an infrastructure for accountability to enhance practice decision making and program support. *Background and Progress*: This project was designed to create a culture shift in the participant's department so that there was a stronger sense of team providing greater support for managers and, at the same time, greater accountability for following policies and following through on work agreements. It was anticipated that greater accountability would generate increased clientele and increased income.
1 Participant	*Description*: Development and implementation of new reporting and meeting infrastructure based on the goals of strategic program growth, program compliance requirements, and staff support. *Background and Progress*: This project was designed to completely restructure an agency program. In doing so it aimed to: 1) develop a new vision and philosophy of service; 2) create new program offerings; and 3) provide the leadership and management support so that decision making and responsibility could be moved further down the department's chain of command.

FIGURE 5 Continued.

Program Participants

The participants shared their perceptions of both the strengths and limitations of the program. The highlights of strengths include an appreciation for bringing veteran executive directors into the program as guest lecturers, providing access to a skilled facilitator throughout the program, the use of experiential learning, and the use of self-reflective exercises. The limitations included insufficient time devoted to discussing the readings and uneven support from their agencies for participation in the program. Several participants also noted that they did not allocate enough time away from the job to fully participate in the program. Some of the lessons learned by the participants included: understanding the importance of organizational roles; prioritizing time for reflection; paying attention to communications; understanding organizational dynamics and culture; comprehending the process of organizational change; and having increased confidence in the leadership role. Some of the specific changes that the participants attributed to the program included: stepping outside of their individual comfort zones; feeling more self-confident and able to contribute more to group discussions; delegating more effectively; taking things less personally; thinking more globally about management by staying focused on the big picture; increased capacity to manage a difficult change process; and increased valuing of peer learning.

Executive Directors

The executive directors were also pleased with the outcomes of the program as they could see participants reflecting a broader understanding of managerial leadership in the nonprofit sector, particularly those participants who were described by their directors as "accidental managers"—those who had moved up the organizational ladder with little or no preparation in management. Some of the limitations described by the executive directors included the need for the program to provide more guidance on engaging and mentoring their participants, as well as suggestions on how to help participants protect the time for training from competing job demands. The major outcome identified by the executive directors was the increased capacity of the participants to take on leadership roles, reflecting new ways of thinking and greater self-awareness about the use of goals and strategies. Additional outcomes identified included: thinking more broadly about the role of management; taking more initiative; offering to mentor a younger recently hired manager (demonstrating a tremendous change in the way that this manager viewed his role in the agency); facilitating relationships in a more proactive and less reactive manner; developing a broader understanding of the organization and their roles in it; and using more critical thinking skills to address organizational issues.

Program facilitator

The program facilitator who was able to observe participants throughout the program as well as review their written work identified some of the most significant findings. The two major outcomes related to: 1) understanding managerial roles and developing a managerial identity, and 2) making the transition from crisis management to managerial leadership.

The understanding and abilities of participants related to understanding how their identities as practitioners impacted their role as managers evolved over the course of the program. In the early stages, managers came to understand the many roles that they assume in their organizations. Next, they developed an understanding of the roles that complement and conflict with their own sense of identity. Finally, managers began to see how to draw upon and, at times, compensate for certain aspects of their identity in order to play the managerial role necessary to improve their leadership within the organization. In essence, participants learned how to consciously step in and out of their organizational roles in order to maintain a healthy work/life balance that both protected personal identity and supported strong managerial leadership.

A number of exercises promoted an understanding of personal identity and managerial roles. The self-shadowing exercise asked participants to observe and record how they spent their time on an average day. This data enabled them to observe not only how they spent their time engaged in crisis management with the staff, but to understand what this behavior meant. They were able to admit that they missed working with clients, and that they had recreated their client-related experience in the ways that they were managing staff. In examining why they wanted to recreate their direct service experience, they realized more fully that they, indeed, were part of management and that they actually had mixed feelings about this fact. While they liked the power and authority that came with being a manager, they found it difficult to be part of the administrative "hierarchy" and to use the related power and authority. The extensive amount of time they devoted to counseling staff was an indication of their ambivalence about their management roles and made it difficult for them to step fully into a role that required the capacity to see the big picture and the mission of the organization within it.

The combination of self-shadowing and learning from the veteran executives helped participants to make the transition from rarely reflecting upon their identity as managers to focusing on the roles of organizational leadership (the fundraiser, the financial manager, the public speaker, the human resource manager, the staff motivator, and the program evaluator). They learned to assess the barriers they personally faced in taking on new roles when these conflicted with the identity that they had formed as managers dedicated to human service work. For example, one participant asked one of the veteran executive directors how she handled the demands of "dressing-up, putting on heels, and going to a cocktail party" to raise funds. With disbelief etched across her face she asked, "Do you like it? How can you do it? Doesn't that put you in conflict with who you are and what you believe about serving poor people?"

The use of the conference learning model in Module II also helped participants learn about their own managerial identity and the accompanying leadership roles. For example, the conference model activities helped participants to move from viewing personal identity as deriving solely from an individual's beliefs and behaviors to understanding how groups generate role expectations for individuals. Participants learned how individuals in groups and organizational settings audition for roles through the use of interpersonal behaviors. These activities helped participants understand the use of personal power and the choices associated with taking or rejecting particular roles.

The conference model also provided participants with an opportunity to practice stepping in and out of the roles they played within the simulation in order to compare that experience with similar experiences within their own organizations. The simulation provided ways for participants to see how they were perceived and examine how they perceived themselves. The differences between the perceptions of the participants in terms of how they act in their organizations and those of the participants in the conference model gave participants the power to identify new ways to take on familiar roles in their organizations. For example, a female participant led a discussion complaining that she remained confused about what she was supposed to have learned from the conference model. She felt strongly that it could and should have been designed differently and that the facilitators should have told her what she was supposed to learn. In an angry tone, she clearly challenged the design and facilitators of the conference model. This same woman was later selected by her team members to make the presentation about their organizational change project to upper management based, in part, on her colleagues' perception of her clarity, presence, and courage in speaking "truth to power." Upper management perceived the project as challenging their authority. The conference model experience enabled this participant, as well as her team members, to recognize the ways in which everyone in organizations tends to develop predictable perceptions/projections based on nothing more than age, gender, race, or position/status/title. They recognized that peers seeking to recognize/recruit informal leaders might perceive and label behaviors one way, while leaders in position of authority in leadership positions in the organization may perceive and label behaviors in another way. They were able to recognize that these perceptions/projections were simply part of human interaction, that they were not personal, and that it was possible to choose not to step into these roles or take on the projections. This woman had a choice as to how to play her role and her team members helped to develop the strategies needed for launching their project by using perceptions that were useful and leaving aside those that would not be helpful. The ability to recognize and work with perceptions/projections is an art that those in leadership are rarely taught, yet those who are effective leaders understand it intuitively.

Throughout discussions of personal identity and leadership roles in the three modules, participants displayed a willingness to take on the often uncomfortable or negatively perceived aspects of playing a leadership role within their organization. The discussions surfaced three major challenges. The first challenge related to carrying the negative projections of staff members about the manager that arise as she creates and maintains organizational boundaries, without damaging the manager's self perception in terms of lower self-esteem (e.g. when a manager who establishes program standards to be consistently enforced in contrast to previous inconsistent enforcement creates competition and perceptions of favoritism among staff). The second challenge involved working with negative projections in order to deepen connections to staffwhen making unpopular managerial decisions. In one example, a manager was required to deliver the news that salaries had to be cut. A staff member responded very negatively, arguing that her credentials entitled her to a higher level of compensation. This staff member had functioned as a close confidant of the manager up to this point. The decision to cut salaries provided the opportunity for a conversation that helped the manager and the staff member sort out organizational boundaries needed to maintain professional roles and personal relationships.

The third challenge involved building alliances within the organization by using negative perceptions to help staff understand organizational realities, while at the same time remaining open to hearing their perspective. When a manager recognizes staff resistance to an agency decision, it can provide an opportunity for teaching and delegating (rather than becoming angry and defensive). For example, staff became very angry with one manager about changes in the location of a program. Rather than becoming defensive, the manager brought some of these angry staff members into a discussion designed to explain the situation, gather their ideas, and delegate both responsibility and authority for the change to this new team. These changes in organizational and role clarity as well as in management style were significant for this manager who had been managing through a process of creating close personal relationships. These interrelated challenges were understood by most of the participants.

The second major outcome identified by the facilitator was the transition that participants made from crisis managers to managerial leaders. Participants exhibited varying degrees of progress (along a continuum from less advanced to more advanced) toward managing the day-to-day operations of nonprofits in stride while still holding the bigger picture of the organizational dynamics that affected their organization's mission and their vision of change. Some participants developed a deeper psychological understanding of what was required to take on a role, integrating personal strengths with role competence so that they were able to move from constantly "putting out daily fires" to coaching others to take up their roles more effectively. Another set of participants learned to understand their organizational environment within a systems perspective and displayed an understanding of the politics and culture of the internal environment, but did not necessarily grasp how to navigate the system or promote organizational change. Other participants learned to identify the underlying logic connecting what needed to be addressed in their organization with the process or action steps needed for successful implementation of change initiatives. Finally, some participants developed the capacity to integrate their vision of change into the organizational culture of their organization, thus demonstrating the understanding and skill set necessary to manage both complexity and change.

Understanding the relationships between outcomes

As the program evolved, it became increasingly apparent to the program designers that the transition from crisis managers to managerial leaders is often a subtle and overlooked shift in how managers perceive their job. Most participants in the program entered with a belief that their positions as managers were based on their ability to use their experience, personal relationships and personalities to motivate staff and clients. Their view of their work and their alliances with others were often grounded in the perception that they were being themselves as opposed to playing a role. Thus, managers engaged in a common motivation technique that communicated to staff the need to perform a task "because I'm a nice person" or "because we share the same passion for this work" as opposed to motivating staff by linking these tasks to a broader organizational mission.

However, the use of personal identity to motivate staff often contributed to a crisis management environment where participants acknowledged having little time to take in the big picture, and often led to an unhealthy work/life balance. For example, very nurturing managers often perceived their caretaking characteristics as personality traits. They moved from coaching and supporting others to offering endless hours of emotional support, counseling, and conflict resolution to staff members without recognizing this phenomenon. In the self-shadowing exercise, many program participants observed that they spent their days supporting staff, and had to work extra hours, either before anyone came to work or after everyone had gone, in order to complete the tasks required by their own jobs.

The major program outcomes identified by the training facilitator are highlighted in Figure 6. In this conceptual map, Process A summarizes the transition from relying on perceived managerial identity to developing the ability to see the job as the product of stepping in and out of management roles. Successfully navigating between one's own personal perceptions and the staff's projections of the role of a manager requires balancing: 1) the manager's own understanding of personal identity and boundaries; and 2) the leadership roles they are asked to play as managers. This dynamic is based upon the realization that in order to do their jobs well, managers need to understand the roles they play within the organization and the roles they are perceived as playing.

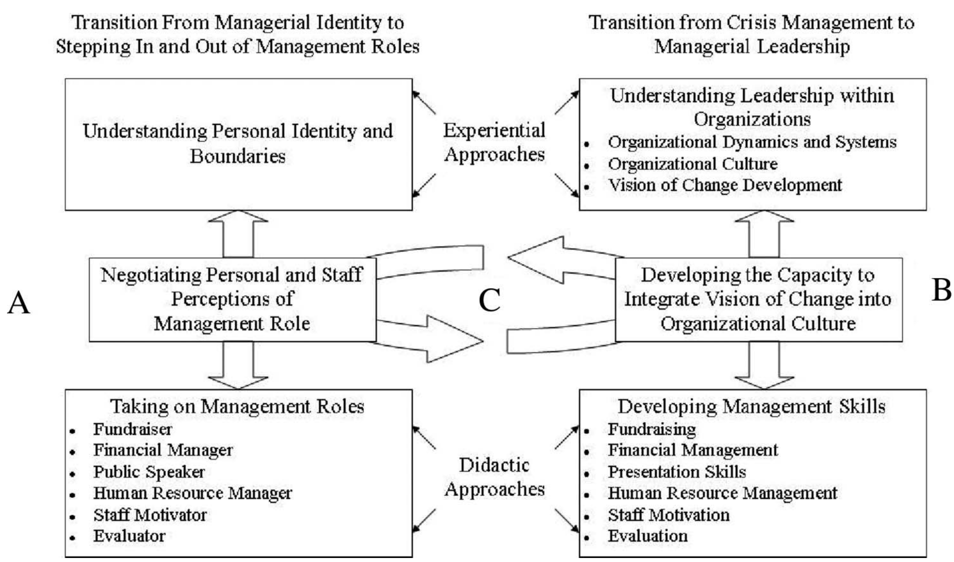

FIGURE 6 The relationship of major outcomes for management leadership training.

Process B features the transition from crisis management to managerial leadership. In order to develop the capacity to integrate a vision of change at the organizational level, managers need to develop an understanding of how to link their vision of organizational change to their daily use of management skills. Finally, Process C captures the inter-relationship between the processes of learning how to negotiate personal and staff perceptions of the management role and the process of developing the capacity to integrate visions of change into existing organizational cultures. For example, one of the participants, in making the transition from being a manager to becoming a managerial leader within her department, transitioned from identifying with and standing in solidarity with her staff in rebellion against the existing organizational structure to building upon the existing organizational structure in order to make dramatic changes in her department. This act increased her status as a leader, but she also had to revisit aspects of her former managerial identity (that of a manager in solidarity and friendship with her staff) and renew the relationships she had in her old role within a new set of boundaries. Moving to the role of managerial leadership required her to implement her vision of change within existing organizational dynamics and systems.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All stakeholders (participants, agency directors, program designers, and the facilitator) viewed the managerial leadership training program as a success, facilitating growth and change at the individual and organizational levels. Despite the time demands associated with the program and the unexpected decline in the national economy beginning in the middle of the program, all agency participants reported that they benefited from their involvement in the program. The evaluation process generated a series of recommendations and ideas related to enhancing the program in such areas as program guidelines, managing time and expectations, dealing with identity/role conflicts, and accounting for stages of individual development.

Program Guidelines

Participation guidelines are needed at both the organizational and individual levels. Executive directors and supervisors need more clarity about their expected level of involvement in terms of supporting program participants and serving as partners in the organizational change project. Participants were unclear as to how much of their learning process should be shared in meeting with their supervisor. Guidelines related to program expectations and agency support would provide executive directors and the participants with greater clarity about how to provide and receive support.

Particular challenges arose as participants sought to balance current workloads with the expectations of the training program. Participants often worked late nights and weekends to complete their work tasks and would have benefited from task-related support that would allow them to focus on the training program during designated days/times. The participants also reported that they could have used more assistance related to time management, especially early in the program.

Role Versus Identity

The training program surfaced an important conflict that middle managers experience between their individual occupational identity and the demands of their organizational role, one that can hinder the ability of managers to move forward and take on increased leadership responsibilities. The conference model learning related to organizational roles and power dynamics, as well as the opportunities for participants to examine their own personal identities, enabled them to discern how identity and work roles can be confused. Providing networking opportunities and facilitating open discussions about personal and work identities earlier in the program would strengthen the program. Since participants noted the importance of peer learning and support, activities designed to facilitate group cohesion should begin earlier in the program. This could be achieved by providing both formal and informal opportunities for connecting, networking, and discussing the individual identities and work roles of the participants.

Stages of Development

Participants began the program at different stages of professional development and moved through the program at their own pace. While one overall measure of success involves completing the program and launching an organizational change project, future assessments need to take into account the starting point for each individual and his or her personal learning path. Designers should develop methods for measuring the specific lessons learned by each individual at the end of the program. The framing of these lessons and measures should be based upon a continuum model of managerial and leadership development involving the following stages: 1) moving out of the direct service practitioner mindset into the managerial mindset; 2) experimenting with stepping into a leadership role while having the opportunity to step back into the manager role; and 3) completely stepping into a new leadership role that includes the manager role.

Implications for Future Training Design

The nonprofit human service organizations participating in the program typically attract employees with strong client-centered values who are often pulled, cajoled, or persuaded to take on management roles, becoming "accidental managers."Client-centered values often include a strong belief in democratic, consensus-based decision making, a distrust of authority, a dislike of hierarchy, a passion for community, a desire for organizational families, the perception that certain segments of the population (women, children, the elderly, people of color) are often excluded from the privileges of society, the belief that speaking "truth to power" is part of their job, and that this "calling" gives them status, privilege, and position of their own. The outcomes of this training program suggest that it is not simply a lack of management skills that prevents nonprofit managers from moving into leadership positions, but rather a conflict between personal identities based on client-centered values and professional identities requiring closer contact with senior management, board members, and funders. This shift in contact from clients to funders may, for some, require a significant change in how managers frame their personal identities and values. The beliefs that underlie their professional identity need to become conscious, broadened, and re-integrated in such a way that the tasks required by a senior manager can be performed without the cognitive dissonance generated by a role that does not match their self-perception.

Based on this training evaluation, the program has been redesigned to offer nonprofit middle managers an opportunity to understand how they personally encounter and takeup the roles of manager and leader. The central learning objectives for participants in the redesigned program relate to: 1) understanding managerial roles and the use of power and authority needed for leadership, and 2) leading change based on an understanding of organizations and organizational change processes. Through readings, reflection on their organizational experience, and assessments of time management, as well as psychological and role dynamics in groups, participants will gain a deeper understanding of how they currently function in their roles as managers and what is required to step into a leadership role in their organizations. They will learn about the process of analyzing organizational problems from a systems perspective, as opposed to maintaining a primary focus on interpersonal tensions, in order to generate more creative solutions to organizational dilemmas. Specific features and experiences incorporated into the program will include: 1) creating a temporary learning organization to simulate the roles that managers take in groups and organizations;2) reflecting on the organizational dynamics and staff experiences within nonprofit organizations that serve underserved, vulnerable, and traumatized populations;3) pursuing learning opportunities related to the integration of key management functions (human resources, financial resource development, and information management)in order to support clients and staff; and 4) integrating learning through the use of coaching related to project design, implementation, and presentation, accompanied by career development planning.

NOTES

Note 1

Two local foundations and the endowment of the Mack Center on Nonprofit Management in the Human Services located in the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley, supported the training program. Kate Regan provided the vision and glue as the program facilitator that kept the sessions moving forward as she gathered the learning needs of the participants to help shape the program as it was unfolding, as well as provided input as a participant-observer. The administrative support of Stan Weisner and Jonathan Gill at University of California Extension was invaluable, as they provided a supportive home for the program.

The profile of the program participants from five nonprofit human service organizations with annual budgets ranging from $5 million to $40 million included the following: population of program managers (enrolled – 22; graduated – 12; dropouts due to job demands – 10);gender of graduates (women – 9; men – 3); ages of graduates (early 30s – 2; early to late 40s – 6; early 50s – 4); and educational levels of graduates (some college – 4; bachelors degree – 4; masters degree – 4).

Note 2

The design of the program evaluation addressed the following questions: What was the decision-making process used by executive directors to identify program participants and the ways that they supported their participants? What were the factors that contributed to participant retention? What learning content and strategies were the most useful for the participants? To what extent did the program facilitate change at the individual and organizational levels? And, what are the recommendations for program improvement?

The perspectives of the key stakeholders, i.e., program participants, agency directors, and the program facilitator, were collected using the following methods: individual interviews (30- to 60-minute in-person and telephone) included the six agency directors or program managers who supervised the twelve participants and the training program facilitator; focus groups (one-hour sessions of 5-6 participants held concurrently on the final day of the program); and web-based survey questionnaires (sent approximately two weeks before the end of the program using Survey Monkey with additional opportunities to respond with hard copies). A detailed description of the findings can be found in Austin, Regan, Schwartz, & Samples (2009).

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