S-5 Formula for Leadership Development

Author

Adkoli B.V., Director, Centre for Health Professions Education, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University), Pondicherry 607402

[bvadkoli@gmail.com](mailto:bvadkoli@gmail.com),

M- 9873029295

Competing interest : Nil

Funding Support: Nil

Author: Balachandra V Adkoli

S-5 Formula for Leadership Development

**Abstract**

Leadership is an area of perennial interest cutting across all fields of knowledge. The current models of leadership emphasize the traits of leadership or skills and techniques derived from behavioural sciences. Based on a developmental perspective, and drawing from ancient Indian wisdom, I have proposed S-5 Formula for leadership development. The leadership journey starts with a strong *Sankalpa* (Setting Goal) to achieve some thing big, different and useful. This journey is aided by a self - determined process of *Svadhyaya* (Self-study) and *Satsanga* (Synergy) through collaborative learning with mentors and peers. The next phase is *Seva* or Service which becomes self-less, when extended to community or society. Finally, the leader should offer *Samarpan* (Surrender ego) to the humanity, and become an instrument of change. I have outlined some major implications of S-5 Formula on leadership training in medical education and attempted a self-appraisal of this approach.

**Key words:** Leadership, Mentoring, Feedback, Reflection, Competency Based Medical Education, Professionalism, ‘S-5 Formula of Leadership Development’

**Introduction**

Leadership is a profound topic haunting the mankind ever since the beginning of human civilization. Every society and every civilization was led by leaders who were instrumental in bringing evolution or revolution. However, explaining the dynamics of leadership was a jigsaw puzzle for the authors. Because, the leaders came from diverse backgrounds, belonged to different ideologies, and adopted different styles of leadership. Hence the attempts to explain their phenomenon under the framework of theories, have remained inconclusive.

The current approaches to explain leadership fall under two categories. Those who focus on the business management or corporate sectors consider leadership as a tool to reduce cost, increase productivity and ensure organizational effectiveness. They bank upon Western models derived from economics, commerce and business management and behavioural sciences to develop managerial skills and techniques, like a recipe book (1, 2). The second approach taken mostly by social scientists is to observe and study the attributes and traits of leaders to develop theories (3,4). Of late, there have been attempts to apply ancient Indian wisdom to explain leadership (5). However, these models do not emphasize the developmental aspects of leadership, which is needed for augmenting leadership training. This gap in the knowledge stimulated me to view leadership as a developmental process which would be helpful for leadership training.

**The search for a new paradigm**

The S-5 Formula of Leadership Development which I have proposed, is an attempt to view leadership as a long developmental journey (Fig 1). It identifies the goal and the major milestones to reach, in the development of leadership keeping in mind the ancient Indian wisdom. The fives stages of leadership development begin with letter ‘S’ in English and Sanskrit. They are *Sankalpa* (Setting Goal), *Svadhyaya* (Self-study), *Satsanga* (Synergy), *Seva* (Service) and *Samarpan* (Surrender) respectively. They are not necessarily in sequential order, but interconnected and interrelated. They function as sub-systems of a system, thus, giving a holistic approach. I prefer to use the Sanskrit words for sake of authenticity in their meaning, though I often switch over to English for sake of user-friendliness with target audience. Imagine you are on a journey to a particular destination which you wish to reach. How do you start?

**S-1: Make a *Sankalpa* (Set Goal)**

The word *Sankalpa* in Sanskrit or *Sankalp* in Hindi, refers to the process of making a firm resolution (6). It is setting up a goal which is tough and seemingly impossible. Look at the leaders who dedicated their entire lives in making a difference to the lives of mankind. All of them began with a *Sankalpa* and started chasing their goals for a life time, braving innumerable odds and failures. While setting the goal, examine *your* purpose of life, and *your* unique identity and strengths. The second consideration may be to foresee how *your sankalpa* or goal is going to benefit the *society*. Once you make a *sankalpa,* you need to stick to it. The *sankalpa* acts as a driving force for conducting day today activities.

Looking from an organizational perspective, every organization has its vision and mission to guide its functioning. It is always better to see that your goals are in alignment with the vision and mission of your organization. If not, better quit the organization and join the one which is cut out for your goals. Otherwise, your leadership journey is likely to be hampered.

Once you set your goal, translate them in to tangible objectives and short term outcomes. Prioritization is very important. Work on one mile stone at a time putting your cent percent efforts. Once you achieve it, celebrate your success and move ahead.

**S-2:** **Engage in** ***Svadhyaya* (Self-study)**

The word *Svadhyaya* in Sanskrit means self-study, but it has profound spiritual meanings in the ancient Indian texts (7). With my limited understanding I use this word to embrace all kind of reading activities for promoting self-awareness and self-development. It includes self-learning, self - practice, self - reflection, self-audit, self-accountability and self - assessment using one’s power of self-determination. *Svadhyaya* is also akin to another word *Sadhana*, which means rigorous pursuit of a goal. A pursuer *(Sadhaka)* should pursue rigorous practice *(Sadhana)* in order to attain the goal *(Siddhi).* Though this process is facilitated by Guru during later schooling, the early childhood experience or *Samskara* which is somewhat means ‘good culture’ in English, makes it possible. It builds a strong foundation for the development of personality including leadership skills. A budding leader acquires the basic life skills, attitudes and human values by watching others and reflecting upon one’s own action.

Focus on key skills, reflection, critical thinking, emotional control, empathetic listening, problem solving and creativity. Promote human values such as truthfulness, honesty, forbearance, obedience, humility, kindness, compassion, fellow feeling, brotherhood and love. This requires a holistic approach to your life style management by a) cultivating healthy food habits *(Aahar)*, b) exercise and relaxation (*Vihar*), c) control over the mind (*Vichar*) and d) good practices (*Vyavhar*). Techniques such as Yoga, meditation, and prayer are very helpful techniques, but you can add more depending upon your choice.

With the abundant availability of digital media, the scope for *svadhyaya* can be infinite, but you need to strike a balance with physical inter personal communication *(satsanga)* for achieving an optimum learning curve.

**S-3: Engage in *Satsanga* (Synergy)**

*Satsanga* in Sanskrit *(or satsang in Hindi)*, is nothing but interpersonal communication aided by collaborative learning process with peers, colleagues, teachers, mentors and Gurus, to bring synergy to one’s learning. Identify mentors by chance or choice. Indeed they are learning partners (LPs) in a futuristic world. Learn to establish rapport, give feedback, receive feedback and act on the feedback to improve your learning. The mentoring in its new *avatar*, will be a learning partnership on equal footing, because no one can claim superiority in the overall potentiality of a human being (8,9,10).

Exploit the uses of both formal learning, e-learning and blended learning in a collaborative environment. Develop effective interpersonal communication, team building, networking with other learners in schools, colleges and workplaces. The inter personal communication, mentoring and feedback form the core of *satsanga.*

While networking within professional circle is crucial, extending the network with other professionals and civil society members would speed up your personal and professional growth.

**S-4: Offer *Seva* (Self-less Service)**

As the journey continues, it is now time for you to apply the knowledge and skills learnt through *Svadhyaya* and *Satsanga* to life situations. *Seva* is the core element of leadership. While service is indispensable for sustaining operation in any system, a service beyond self, or self-less service is the spirit behind *Seva*. The *sankalpa* or the goal which you have set would obviously require engagement of services by a large number of people with different skill sets. You need to extend your network within the profession as well as beyond your profession. Use appropriate quality assessment and enhancement strategies such as team building, effective communication and delegation of tasks wherever possible. Exploit the power of information technologies, social media, combined with your core humanistic and professional competencies to deliver your products and services.

This stage may pose a lot of threats and challenges because of the ‘silos’ in the system and resistance to the change which is inherent in any organization. You need to use appropriate conflict management strategy to resolve conflicts and prevent conflicts (11). Being proactive, acting as a role model, taking responsibility for your actions and ethical approach to resolve dilemma become important at this stage. Always share credit with your team mates. Support good governance. Give your cent percent effort in every act. Be focused on the present. Expect success as well as failures. Learn from your failures as much as you learn from your success. Be equanimous and cultivate positive thinking. Do not compare yourself with others, because you are a unique person. Be humble and genuine. Watch your words, action, thought and character. Reassess your life style and try to maintain work-life balance to prevent burn out at this stage. Shift your gear from self-service to self-less service as you put a ‘ceiling on desires’.

**S- 5: End with *Samarpan* (Surrender)**

This is the final stage of leadership development which many leaders may find it most difficult to handle. *Samarpan* means the process of giving back to the society, with unconditional love. This involves renunciation. At this stage you will detach yourself from the results and fruits of your action and remain equanimous, the state which is described as *Sthithaprajna* by Lord Krishna in Bhagawad Gita (12). By this time as an established leader, you would have attained your *sankalpa* partly or fully. It is time to exit gracefully instead of sticking on to the chair, under the false impression that you are indispensable! Surrender your ego and handover the leadership to the next team who are ready to take over. You can offer help if asked, but don’t interfere or force your ideas, because you lived in another time and your trick may not work! Harness your spiritual strength to shower unconditional love and exit from the scene with dignity and honour. Realize that you are merely an instrument of change. The world will move on without you and that is your true success!

**Implications of S-5 Formula for medical education**

The medical education in ancient India has been extensively hailed for its holistic approach, thanks to the Samhitas propounded by Charaka, Susruta and others. However, the system of medical education during post-independent India has not emphasized leadership development, as it is supposed to be acquired by following the role models. The increased emphasis on boosting the number of doctors to serve the growing population (quantity) rather than addressing the quality of doctors stripped off the genuine role of a medical person as a leader and a professional committed to lifelong learning. This has resulted in the dilution of ethics and professionalism, bringing down the reputation of medical profession at large.

Of late, there is a resurgence of interest in re-casting the Indian Medical Graduate as a clinician, leader and member of health team, communicator, lifelong learner and a professional. S-5 model is in alignment with the competency based approach recommended by the Medical Council of India (13). This involves defining competencies and goals *(sankalpa)*, team work and communication *(satsanga),* professionalism *(seva)* and lifelong learning (svadhyaya). The focus on feedback, mentoring and reflection are the common areas of concern in CBME and S-5 Formula.

The emphasis on 5th S, that is the need for medical education to surrender ego *(samarpan)* has come to surface thanks to Covid pandemic, which has exposed the vulnerability of medical profession and the need to establish links with other professions and the civil society. Since medical education cannot be considered in isolation, there is a need to address leadership education at all levels, if the ideals of National Education Policy 2020 are to be implemented in letter and spirit (14) Towards this end curricular reforms should go along-with Faculty Development.

**Self - Appraisal of S-5 Formula**

The merit of S-5 Formula lies in its developmental focus. It recognizes that leaders are not special people. They become special by their commitment to their *sankalpa* and rising gradually from *svadhyaya* and *satsanga* to perform *seva* or self-less service to the fellow beings. In this journey, they continuously learn new things and unlearn their old habits till they reach *their* final state of *samarpan*, surrendering ego and becoming instrumental in bringing about change.

S-5 Formula is not specifically designed for any narrow domain or field. It is applicable for all fields of knowledge. It has far reaching implications for redesigning curricula and leadership training right from early childhood till higher and professional education. The conventional literature on leadership focuses on the tools and techniques. But S-5 formula emphasizes that leadership training is a joint responsibility of society, besides formal and informal education.

The formula reflects the demands and realities of the Post-Covid era in which collective involvement, collaboration and communication are most important ingredients for community mobilization and participation.

Finally the S-5 formula stresses the development of an ethical leader grounded in the Indian philosophy of *Dharma* and value systems, who can take stand according to the demands of the situation, rather than vested interests of economy, profit or productivity.

Looking at the flip side of S-5 Formula, it looks like leadership oversimplified. Indeed it requires a lot of further deliberations by the academic fraternity, to give a concrete shape to to guide implementation at all levels. It is necessary to collect further evidence to see whether S-5 is a feasible proposition or mere rhetoric. In a competitive society where in leaders are expected to come out with short cut solutions and quick fix solutions, it may be utopian to insist on *sankalpa* or setting up hard hitting goals to pursue life time. The implementation of *svadhyaya*, including development of healthy life style requires a cultural shift rather than individual mindset. In a world dominated with hierarchy of intellectuals, it is difficult to implement *satsanga,* the equal partnership of learners. In view of free market forces playing their role, how can we talk about *seva*, self-less service? Last, but not the least, the spirit of *samarpan*, or surrender can be realized only when the society respects, recognises and reinforces these values, which is an evolutionary process.

In conclusion, S-5 Formula is a small attempt to shift the attention of scholars from reductionistic approach to a more holistic approach. When the world is undergoing most difficult times, it is prudent to bank upon our strengths and wisdom, which we gained in the past. We need to explore in what manner we can make a small difference to the society. However, in a complex world with full of contradictions, it is extremely difficult to raise a voice. I will not be surprised therefore, if the modern management Gurus think that S-5 Formula is utopian, regressive and cynical! However, nothing stops us from positive thinking. Let’s begin.

Acknowledgments:

JIPMER, Pondicherry, AIIMS, New Delhi, and Shri Balaji Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University), Pondicherry, for giving me an opportunity and some insight in to leadership in medical education.

Figure 1 S-5 Formula for Leadership Development (Adkoli BV, 2020)

**References**

1. Miller, P. ‘Leadership Communication – the three levels’, *Today’s Manager*, Singapore Institute of Management, Issue February- March 2012, pp. 19-21. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254664129>
2. Mahapatra K. Are we leading? Chennai, Notion Press; 2020. 164pp.
3. Covey Stephen R. The 7 Habits of highly effective people. Great Britain, Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 1989.391pp.
4. Sharma R. The leader who had no title. Mumbai, JAICO; 2010. 203pp.
5. Vas, L., Vas A. Secrets of Leadership: The Panchatantra way. New Delhi, Pustak Mahal, 2015
6. Sankalpa. Dictionary meaning. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/hindi-english>
7. Sovik R. Understanding Yourself: the path of Svadhyaya, Himalayan Institute Press, ISBN 978-0893892470. 2014, pp191-197
8. Salagre S, Supe A. Communication Skills for the Leaders in Health Professions Education. In Parija, SC, Adkoli BV (eds.), Effective Medical Communication, The A,B,C,D, E of it. Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2020 <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3409-6_1>
9. Parija S.C., Adkoli B.V. (2020) Role of Mentoring in Developing Communication Skills. In: Parija S.C, Adkoli B.V. (eds) Effective Medical Communication. Springer, Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3409-6_2>
10. Adkoli B.V., Parija S.C. (2020) Feedback: How to Give and Take? In: Parija S., Adkoli B. (eds) Effective Medical Communication. Springer, Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3409-6_3>
11. Adkoli B.V., Pawar S. (2020) Conflict Management and Communication. In: Parija S., Adkoli B. (eds) Effective Medical Communication. Springer, Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3409-6_17>
12. Adkoli B.V. Teaching professional values in medical education. [Natl Med J India.](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27132730) 2015; 28(4):194-7.
13. Medical Council of India (2017). Medical Council of India Competency Based Undergraduate Curriculum for The Indian Medical Graduate 2018

https://www. mciindia.org/CMS/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/UGCurriculum-Vol-II.pdf Accessed on 8/12/2019

1. National Education Policy 2020. Ministry of Human Resources Development, GOI, <https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf>

Accessed on 16/8/2020