This extract of the ebook 'Strategic Swiping' was translated from Dutch to English using ChatGPT. It is provided as a supplementary resource to accompany Learning Uncut podcast episode 173. You can access the full ebook in Dutch via the podcast show notes.

Strategic Swiping

Better searching in the world of leadership development
A pocket guide by Prof. Dr. Hannes Leroy & Robrecht Janssens

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Preface

Commissioned by Europa WSE (Work & Social Economy; the former European Social Fund), Agoria worked together with various expert teams and the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM) on a project around leadership. The project aimed to map the effectiveness of leadership development programmes and to develop a method to evaluate that effectiveness objectively.

Our enthusiasm for this project was considerable: seeking quality in the world of leadership developers; collaborating with several expert teams, each with its own leadership model; concrete projects with multiple Agoria members and other professional organisations.

Such collaboration may not be entirely new, but it is certainly unique. The expert teams, with their substantiated methodologies, were willing to undergo critical evaluation. Various companies were eager to develop their (frontline) managers in leadership, and Agoria committed to translating the acquired insights and opportunities into benefits for organisations.

One of the insights from both research and practice relates to what is often called the "pre-phase": preparation for a development activity, context analysis, etc. From RSM, Prof. Hannes Leroy took up the challenge of collecting scientific insights about this preparatory phase, which he tested against practice with Agoria expert Robrecht Janssens as sounding board and sparring partner. Together they wrote this pocket guide about successfully building partnerships with leadership developers.

Investing in the development of leaders' competencies and skills should be a no-brainer. At the same time, finding the right offering is not straightforward. Different learning styles, models, and guidance approaches are combined, making it difficult to see the forest for the trees. Yet investing in leadership is crucial, as leaders above all shape (or break) the evolution, innovation, and engagement of employees.

The place managers take and the way they interact with people determines whether a company is agile, dynamic, or innovative. Today, managers face additional challenges in their leadership role—think of digitalisation and other rapidly successive technological evolutions, climate challenges, labour market shortages, competency needs, and employee career development. At Agoria, we address these challenges with our "Be The Change" programme.

Making targeted and well-founded choices in selecting development offerings is the first task of L&D and HR professionals, but also of every leader, to create an offering that truly has impact. And with a solid checklist in hand, so that trainers can really be screened, choosing does not have to mean losing.

In a digital world full of tempting stimuli designed to capture your attention, it is difficult to distinguish between high-quality and low-quality information. You will notice that this world of "swiping" for content is a prominent metaphor in this book. This pocket guide embraces complexity while at the same time trying to reduce it to a simple model and a limited set of questions you can ask yourself when selecting or evaluating leadership development programmes. The questions in the matrix checklist are meant to help you reflect and come to your own answers.

Lifelong learning can be enjoyable, though the experience of fun is fleeting. The experience of insight and growth (an "aha" moment, or a breakthrough insight if you will) lasts much longer.

Good luck!
Bart Steukers, CEO Agoria

<u>Introduction</u>

Leadership development continues to entice organisations into spending significant resources. Understandably so! Wherever people come together to achieve collective goals, energy is required that is directed at the collective purpose – in other words, leadership.

However, we cannot assume that people are predestined for the challenge of leadership. If only because the world in which they lead keeps evolving. The challenges for organisations and the people within them have increased exponentially over the past decades. As complexity grows, it becomes necessary to equip leaders with the right toolbox (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to meet those challenges. And this is not a one-off process. As the world keeps evolving, leaders and leadership development must evolve along with it.

In response to this organisational and personal demand for more and better leadership development, a growing industry has emerged. As complexity increases, the wide range of (sometimes eccentric) solutions also seems to grow. Some have even called the world of leadership development the *Wild West*, where snake oil can be sold as a cure.

People may raise an eyebrow at hearing about programmes such as horse coaching, near-death meditation, or survival training. Do these truly develop leadership? Or are they just entertainment to keep people happy and engaged? With the right supporting evidence, such programmes might prove to be exactly what leaders need to adapt to the challenges of their world. But often that evidence is missing. And this does not only apply to the more "quirky" programmes out there, but also to many of the more standard approaches to leadership development: we simply do not know what works and what does not!

That does not mean no evidence exists. There is ample research into the effectiveness of leadership development programmes (LDPs), but this evidence is hardly ever taken into account when individuals or organisations make decisions about leadership development.

This pocket guide therefore seeks to integrate and translate some of the developed scientific insights, alongside practical experiences, in order to help individuals and organisations make better decisions about leadership development.

Chapters 1 to 9 have not been translated

Chapter 1 – Looking for a leadership development programme on Tinder?
In this chapter, we share insights on how to search...

Chapter 2 – The Integrity Framework for Leadership Development
In this chapter, we explain the analysis model...

Chapter 3 – Vision: How does the programme define leadership (or not)?
What is the programme's (and the developer's) view...

Chapter 4 – Method: Does the programme have a clear method?
In addition to having a clear vision of effective leadership...

Chapter 5 – Impact: Does the programme consider a broad spectrum of results?
In addition to a general vision of leadership...

Chapter 6 – Impact and Vision: How do people enter and how do they leave?
To evaluate the alignment between vision and objectives...

Chapter 7 – Vision and Method: What is the unique DNA of the programme?
To evaluate the alignment between vision and method...

Chapter 8 – Method and Impact: How will behavioural change be achieved?
To assess the alignment between method and impact...

Chapter 9 – Method, Impact, and Vision: How does the cycle of improvement continue?
To evaluate whether a programme has real integrity...

Conclusions and Recommendations

We have presented the **Integrity Framework for Leadership Development**, with its three key elements — **vision, method, and impact** — and the cyclical process that binds them together. This framework is designed to help organisations, HR professionals, and leaders make more deliberate, evidence-based choices about leadership development programmes (LDPs).

Main Insights

1. **Leadership development is too important to leave to chance.**
   LDPs shape how leaders think and act, and therefore how organisations evolve. Poorly chosen programmes waste resources and risk undermining credibility.
2. **Integrity matters.**
   Vision, method, and impact must align. A mismatch between what a programme claims, what it does, and what it achieves undermines effectiveness.
3. **Evidence-based decisions are possible.**
   While much leadership development still relies on intuition or "gut feeling," there is ample scientific and practical evidence about what works. Using the framework and its guiding questions, organisations can bring greater rigour to their choices.
4. **Continuous improvement is essential.**
   Neither providers nor organisations should treat LDPs as static products. Systematic evaluation and adaptation are critical to staying relevant and effective.

Recommendations

- **Ask deeper questions.** Go beyond surface features or charisma. Probe providers on their vision of leadership, the methods they use, and the evidence for impact.
- **Check for alignment.** Ensure the programme's vision, method, and outcomes are consistent and fit your organisational context.
- **Look at readiness.** Assess participants' motivation and maturity before they enter the programme, and adapt the design accordingly.
- **Plan for transfer.** Build mechanisms to ensure learning moves from the classroom to the workplace, supported by managers and organisational systems.
- **Demand evidence.** Ask providers how they measure effectiveness beyond satisfaction, and how they use data to improve their programmes.
- **Think long term.** Treat leadership development as an ongoing cycle of improvement, not a one-off intervention.

Final Thought

In a world of endless choice, it is tempting to "swipe" quickly through leadership development offerings, making decisions based on appearances or instinct. This pocket guide invites you to pause, ask better questions, and make more strategic choices.

By doing so, you not only invest more wisely in leadership development but also contribute to shaping leaders who can guide organisations — and society — through the complex challenges of our time.

Annex – Pocket Guide Checklist

The following checklist is designed to help you evaluate leadership development programmes (LDPs) using the **Integrity Framework**. Each set of questions corresponds to the links between **vision, method, and impact**, as well as the cyclical improvement process.

You can use this checklist as a conversation guide with providers, as a reflection tool within your organisation, or as an evaluation framework for comparing multiple programmes.

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1. Vision

- How does the programme define *leadership*?
- What behaviours, attitudes, and assumptions underpin this definition?
- What is explicitly **not** considered leadership in their model?
- How does the vision align with our organisation's context, strategy, and challenges?

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2. Method

- Which unique methods are used, and how do they reflect the vision?
- How does the programme combine short-term training with long-term development?
- How are feedback, reflection, and practice embedded in the design?
- How does the programme address both individual and organisational development?

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3. Impact

- What measurable outcomes does the programme aim for?
- How are these outcomes tracked (e.g., behavioural change, organisational KPIs)?
- What **side effects** or **by-products** might occur, and how are they managed?
- How do participants enter the programme (skills, readiness, motivation), and how should they leave (desired behaviours, impact)?

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4. Vision ↔ Method

- Do the exercises and design reflect the leadership vision?
- Is the vision consistently embedded throughout the programme flow?
- What is the provider's *unique DNA* — and does it fit our needs?

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5. Method ↔ Impact

- How do the methods lead to the intended behavioural changes?
- How is **transfer to the workplace** ensured and reinforced?
- What role do feedback, reflection, and measurement play in sustaining change?

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6. Impact ↔ Vision

- Do the objectives logically follow from the vision of leadership?
- Does the programme align with our organisational strategy and culture?
- How are participants prepared and motivated before entering the programme?

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7. Continuous Improvement

- How does the provider collect data beyond satisfaction scores?
- How do they adapt the design based on evidence and feedback?
- How do they integrate new organisational and societal challenges (e.g., digitalisation, sustainability, diversity)?
- How do they help the organisation itself learn and improve from the programme?

How to Use the Checklist

- Treat these questions as a **conversation starter**, not a rigid scorecard.
- Use them to compare different providers and programmes.
- Adapt them to your organisational context and leadership needs.
- Remember: the goal is not to find "the perfect programme" but to make **better choices** that fit your strategy and context.