

Module: Leadership Training Workshop for Health Professionals
Organization: East Africa HEALTH Alliance
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Session 5: From Problems to Leadership Challenges

The Role of a Challenge in Leadership Development

The basic task of a leader is to lead people to face challenges. While the manager focuses on routine problems, the leader focuses on new challenges

You are faced with a challenge when there is a gap between your desired performance and results and your current situation.

A challenge forces you to stretch beyond your current capabilities.

For a group of people, a challenge may mean that they are committed to addressing an obstacle that in the past has been seen as someone else’s problem to resolve

Definition of a Challenge

A problem turns into a challenge when you take ownership of the problem.

As the saying goes, *“if you don't own the problem, you cannot find the solution.”*

A challenge is essentially the reframing of an obstacle by turning it into a question that starts with *“How can I/we...”* and ends with *“given that...”*

For example:

A service delivery program might select:

- How can we improve TB case detection rates despite low resources?
- How can we increase immunization rates for children when our outreach program has no dedicated staff?

It has two main parts:

- The issue that we want to take on
- The obstacle that we want to overcome

Some of these challenges are bigger than others

However, if you keep thinking that it is someone else's problem to solve, or that it is your problem but the obstacles are too great you will have a very long wait!

From Here to There

Leadership is a process of bringing a new reality and guiding a group of people to move from an unacceptable current state to a desired future state

On this journey, a leader advances the change process using the four leadership practices

Of course, to make sure that routine work gets done, the leader has to exercise the four management practices

Moving from the current state to the desired state is the challenge that the team faces.

A *leader* has to help the group analyze the gap between the current and desired situations

This process is driven by the strength of the vision of the desired state

This path is represented in the graphic below:



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Not Just Any Challenge

Leaders develop when they have an opportunity to address a leadership challenge.

Leadership challenges have three important characteristics:

- A leadership challenge is not part of routine work. It cannot be addressed by being simply a good manager.
- Successfully addressing a leadership challenge requires a profound change in the way things are done.
- To get others to join in facing a leadership challenge, they will have to be led through a change process.

Leaders do not identify and address the most important challenges by themselves. They do it together with the teams they lead.

They must develop skills that allow them to work in an environment that may be full of conflict or otherwise emotionally charged with different personalities

Selecting the Right Challenge for Your Level

The first step in leadership is to identify which critical challenges you need to address in order to fulfill the promise of better health

You then need to make a commitment to overcome the challenge and produce results.

For example, an internal challenge might be a work climate that is characterized by conflict, poor leadership, or inefficient management processes leading to wasted energy

External challenges could come from the overall political climate, decentralization, unions, epidemics, or high morbidity and mortality and low motivation.

Having an impact on health will only be possible when the internal and external challenges are dealt with successfully

The challenge that you and your team choose will depend on the type of organization, department, and level at which your team works, as well as the work context

For example, policy questions cannot be resolved by personnel at the operational level.

It is very important for each level in the organization to identify and effectively deal with realistic and appropriate challenges they face.