

The Magic Spark Model: The Future of Transformational Leadership Succession Planning

By

Mostafa Sayyadi, The Change Leader Consulting Inc.

Michael J. Provitera, Barry University

As management consultants, one of the profound problems we found that executives are facing is that they are wrong. After years of management consulting, there was a huge number of leaders to create an effective and ongoing succession planning model for transformational leadership. The crucial role in developing transformational leadership skills for the future is at the heart of business acumen today and while our model worked in this environment, we encourage additional experimentation using the magic spark model. In our experiment, we found a new way of leadership succession planning which is cru-

cial for business success. Without the selection and progression of leadership, the organizational life cycle will end with death. The magic spark model will help organizations better plan leadership succession and help them stay vital to the organizational life cycle. This article offers novel insights into the future of leadership succession planning. As executives across the globe develop a solid foundation that builds upon the idea of passing the torch (i.e., Succession Planning), they will be able to withstand any tumultuous activity facing organizations in our hypercompetitive work environment.

How can companies implement an effective transformational leadership succession plan? Answering this question will determine their success in the future.

Keywords: Magic Spark Model, Transformational Leadership, Leadership Succession Planning, Human Resources Development, Organizational Learning, Systems Management Theory, The Future of Work

Leadership succession planning has begun to take on a new turn as organizations need to strengthen the transformational effects of the great resignation and quiet quitting's impact on leadership. A more systemic way to make an impact on leadership succession planning can enhance the recruitment and selection of future leaders (Keller, 2018; Lamm et al., 2021; Drysdale & Gurr, 2022; Lu et al., 2022; Samans & Nelson, 2022; Zapata-Cantu et al., 2022; DeSimone & Roberts, 2023). The magic spark model uses transformational leadership theory and systems management theory and focuses on leadership succession planning and mentoring methods by implementing patience, benevolence, and building real friendships between the current and future leaders. The goal is to use innovation to optimize existing processes and activities by developing transformational leadership skills. Interpersonal relationships between mentors and trainees, or future leaders, working together on projects from multiple parts of the organization will also strengthen the systemic approach needed for future leaders. Using theories and case studies enhances relationships between leaders and followers, encouraging future leaders to innovate not only themselves but also their organizations. This is important today because the Organizational Life Cycle, if not managed well, will result in the elimination of leading organizations. Succession planning coupled with the organizational life cycle consists of four phases: planning, growth, maturity, and decline. To avoid decline, we feel that the answer is succession planning for the planning, growth, and maturity phases to keep an organization vital and current. In the next section, we will look at the educational content of a transformational leadership succession plan based on the magic spark model.

The Magic Spark Model's Transformational Leadership Succession Plan

We found that managers' failures in the implementation of their leadership succession plans led to inertia. Our magic spark model utilizes the captured experience of years of management consulting in various companies and shows that each company, big or small, needs to have an expert system that encapsulates knowledge built up over time and is stored in case studies and decision-making suggestions. This model is easier to implement when compared to other leadership succession planning models such as Caudron's (1999) Succession Planning model and Brandt's (2001) Executive Succession model. We suggest that leaders use what works but consider all models available before deciding on one and, in some cases, take something from each model to build their own unique model that fits their organization. Leaders must also be aware that depending on the type of industry and activities of each

company and its business environment, the content of the leadership succession plan of each company will be specified directly for that organization (Hildebrand, 2016; Islam, 2017; Holt et al., 2018). Transformational leaders who show themselves as pioneers to create changes that inspire employees and improve their performance and their followers will succeed while others will be left behind (Hayati et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2020). In terms of transformational leadership skills, leaders should also know that transformational leadership includes four main aspects: the idealized influence aspect that improves relationships with subordinates (Lorente & Salanova, 2014; Schwarz, 2017; Den Hartog, 2019); the inspirational motivation aspect that inspires employees to achieve better results (Sekhar et al., 2013; Erden, 2020; Moon et al., 2020); the intellectual stimulation aspect that develops better and more innovative ideas and solutions for problems (Gogus, 2012; Sharifirad, 2013; Khan et al., 2020); and the individualized consideration aspect that focuses on empowering followers (Helmold, 2021; Kehr et al., 2022).

When using the magic spark model, leaders first must take the following two steps:

1. Intermittent and gradual development of the trainee's transformational leadership skills from the beginning of the training to help them become an innovative leader which we call a step-up program; and
2. Creating a systematic and integrated approach to their organization by conducting an in-depth interview, or gap-analysis, before beginning the training with each participant to better understand what they feel about the current problems for better collaboration among departments.

In doing these two steps and by providing basic training and awareness of the theoretical principles of the four aspects of transformational leadership, the magic spark model will work. The reasoning behind this finding is that simultaneously, with the gradual development of transformational leadership skills and practical case studies that are related to projects provide the trainees to form more cohesive relationships to solve real-world problems.

As management consultants, we have an interactive interest in helping CEOs from around the world on current issues that need to be addressed, and these issues become the basis for a leadership succession plan. Case studies will improve the two aspects of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation, by creating a spirit of learning and innovation among trainees. Solving these case studies also improves the idealized influence aspect, by searching among different parts of the organization and gaining a systematic and integrated view of the entire organization (Carlsson, 2004; Pratelli, 2019; Sieber et al., 2022; Cardona & Rey, 2022). Also, providing

these case studies is a step-by-step training platform that will become more rigorous at each stage. These case studies become more difficult as the trainees progress in their position as leaders, and collaboration and sharing of ideas among trainees is encouraged to improve innovation and collaboration. To better inspire each participant (i.e., the inspirational motivation aspect), the steering committee matches each participant with the best actual case study to develop the higher skill levels. This idea of continuously raising the bar builds upon prior improvement.

The following three steps of the magic spark model are also needed to perpetuate changes:

3. In the third step, leaders analyze the current situation and assess the future needs of participants coupled with the organization. Attempting to ascertain an understanding of the organization's strategy and competitors. Based upon the gap between the current situation and long-term goals, leaders identify the skills necessary to meet the future needs of their organization.
4. Next, by blending into the training and development principles and concepts of applied theory and case studies, the magic spark model begins to formulate structure and camaraderie. Building a cadre of presenters in the leadership succession plan by establishing mentors and

external professionals adds value to the current set of vendors by bringing to the table more experts. After introducing theoretical knowledge and case studies, leaders establish role models and share their experiences with members. This process invites successful company managers as pilot studies and examples of successful external managers in the industry that can share their experiences with trainees.

5. The magic spark model is designed to enable projects that trainees will face in the future. The fifth step is to build steering committees within the framework of the training so that future leaders of different departments explore different areas of the organization and share ideas with each other to suggest innovative solutions to solve problematic issues. Designing future projects and gradually making them more difficult by implementing gradual increases, and then sharing ideas by disseminating information across business units enables knowledge management. Steering committees are responsible for making decisions about planning, supporting those plans, approving the plan's budget to solve the problems, and monitor the progress of the leadership succession plan. Based on these ideas, we depict an applicable model for executives as Table 1 and Figure 1.

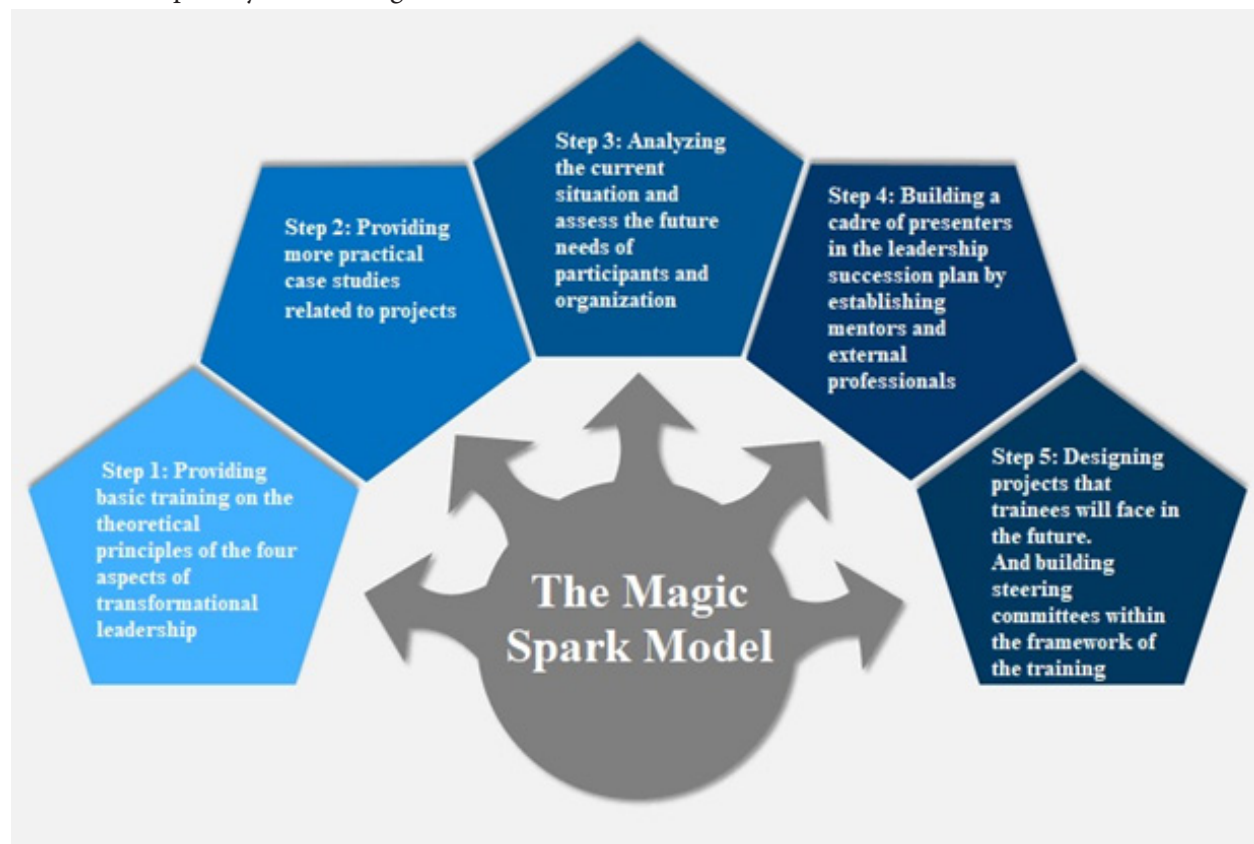


Figure 1: The Magic Spark Model

Table 1: The Five Steps of the Magic Spark Model	
Step 1	Provide basic training on theoretical principles of the four aspects of transformational leadership
Step 2	Provide practical case studies related to projects
Step 3	Analyze the current situation and assess the future needs of participants and the organization (Gap Analysis)
Step 4	Build a cadre of presenters in the leadership succession plan by establishing mentors and external professionals.
Step 5	Design projects that trainees will face in the future. And building steering committees within the framework of the training

Pilot Study and Application of the Model

A few years ago, we provided management consulting services to an international financial organization in Australia. Our initial assessment showed that despite the organization's rapid growth in the market and its significant share of the Australian financial market, the company still suffered from mismanagement in its human resource department and a lack of a systemic approach. To improve the systemic approach, we suggested a full-scale development of transformational leadership skills throughout the organization. We identified through a gap analysis that a lack of required training caused the company, which was mostly made up of Southeast Asian immigrant staff and Australian executives, to lack the required skills to perform adequate leadership. In some cases, leaders were unfamiliar with management concepts such as planning, leading, and organizing, and this caused a level of inertia. Thus, the organization was not performing to its full potential.

After initial meetings with the CEO, we decided to create our presentation of the magic spark model, and the explanations of the potential financial benefits of this model. The CEO showed interest in this model and decided to employ us to develop the leaders throughout the organization. We explained in detail each step of the model and how the implementation of the model would positively impact on the organization's performance. We then implemented the magic spark model which lasted ten months and advanced the organization. Mentors were selected as top creative award holders of the company by the board of directors. Under the monitoring and budgeting of the steering committee, these mentors, with the help of our program implementation of leadership succession planners, several executives were able to perform their duties and get team members well involved in the learning process, and as a result, positive change was imminent.

After covering theoretical concepts about transformational leadership and engaging in case study analysis, the cross-functional teams were selected from

91 participants who belonged to different departments of the organization so that the sharing of ideas among their members would lead to the growth of a systemic approach. Continuous communication of mentors and sharing their experiences with trainees led to the greater effectiveness of the leadership development program. Mentors, as well as successful managers, challenged the trainees as much as possible to strengthen their exploratory and innovative approaches. Team members' communication with the company's external stakeholders also helped develop their communication and facilitated a best practice benchmarking relationship.

To further the scholarly literature in leadership, we distributed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) as a pre- and post-test, among the participants, to determine whether the spark model had an impact on transformational leadership. The results showed that the model was proven to be empirically effective with not only an increase in Likert scores but also commentary that extended the leadership development endeavor resulting in qualitative data that supported the transformation. Thus, comparing our initial assessments (before conducting the project) and our last assessments (after conducting the project) indicated a significant change in the four aspects of transformational leadership. Our open-ended questions, at the end of the MLQ questionnaire, participants shared their ideas about the training experience. One trainee wrote an assessment note that: "Attending this learning program opened our eyes to the real problems that arose from the lack of the team working among us and the lack of integration among the various departments of the company." Another comment indicated: "I think this is a better place to stay and make my dreams come true now." "The most challenging period of learning took place from the onset of the training, peaked in the middle, and ended with great takeaways," commented one executive. And one trainee even wrote that this learning program "has not only improved my performance in the workplace but also, the intense learning improved my relationship with my spouse."

We established an association via social media for the trainees that completed the learning program so that we maintain a strong network of these participants in which dialogue could continue within the company. This continuous communication and sharing of experiences and ideas led to further breakthroughs beyond the training platform as a continuous improvement sentiment was ongoing. "This group led to a constant sharing of experiences and enabled us to innovate after this training program," said one member. Members' problems, stories, and ideas were shared via social media and e-mail in the form of a monthly newsletter among the members of the association. This led to a continuous improvement of communication between the members and the growth of their innovation and creativity.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Model

As our measurements of the transformational dimensions indicated, the magic spark model created for this consulting assignment led to the improvement of the transformational leadership skills of the participants. The growth of the systemic approach and teamwork built a more integrated and innovative system that could better solve organizational problems, providing more innovative and creative collaboration. Our observations also showed that the challenges of each department were better understood by both senior leaders and the other departments, which created greater camaraderie among the workforce. Thus, this training in leadership development led to a better collaborative culture. The benefits of this training exceeded our expectations and both management and senior leadership prospered.

However, we suggest that more theories and models be used to train executives. Just as the magic spark model worked, we would like to hear about further investigation of this and other models so that the dialogue of continuous leadership development prospers. The limitations of the magic spark model resided in the difficulty to encourage many CEOs and managers or even employees to participate in this model and invest in human resources development to gain financial interests. However, once we proved that the return on investment was fruitful, the leaders began to foster the necessary strategic insight to acknowledge and encourage the human resource department and other management units to participate. We provide this limitation for future scholars attempting to employ the transformational leadership model or any other leadership model the way we conducted our training.

Conclusions

The business world that we once knew no longer exists. The new world includes digital technology, knowledge management, and continuous leader-

ship development. This article proposes a cadre of ideas in a world that has completely changed from one decade ago. This change calls for new models of change. The magic spark model is a new model that could be used in the same context or with another leadership theory or model of choice to foster continuous growth in leaders and organizations.

References

- Brandt, J. R. (2001). Happy endings. *Industry Week*, 250, 17.
- Cardona, P., Rey, C. (2022). Different Ways of Viewing an Organization. In: *Management by Missions*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83780-8_2
- Carlsson, S.A. (2004). Strategic Knowledge Managing within the Context of Networks. In: Holsapple, C.W. (eds) *Handbook on Knowledge Management 1*. International Handbooks on Information Systems, vol 1. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-24746-3_32
- Caudron, S. (1999). The looming leadership crisis. *Workforce*, 78, 72-75.
- Chen, Y., Ning, R., Yang, T. & Feng, S. (2018). Is transformational leadership always good for employee task performance? Examining curvilinear and moderated relationships. *Frontiers of Business Research in China* 12(1), 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s11782-018-0044-8>
- Den Hartog, D.N. (2019). Transformational Leadership. In: Poff, D., Michalos, A. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Business and Professional Ethics*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23514-1_57-1
- DeSimone, J.R. & Roberts, L.A. (2023). Nonprofit leadership dispositions. *SN Business & Economics*, 3(2), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43546-023-00420-9>
- Drysdale, L. & Gurr, D. (2022). Finding and Promoting Effective Leaders. In: *The Palgrave Handbook of Educational Leadership and Management Discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39666-4_24-1
- Erden, N.S. & Yaşlıoğlu, M. (2020). Transformational Leadership: A Qualitative Study for the Practical Usage. In: Bilgin, M., Danis, H., Demir, E., Aysan, A. (eds) *Eurasian Business Perspectives*. Eurasian Studies in Business and Economics, vol 13/2. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-40160-3_11
- Gogus, A. (2012). Brainstorming and Learning. In: Seel, N.M. (eds) *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_491

- Hayati, D., Charkhabi, M. & Naami, A. (2014). The relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement in governmental hospitals nurses: a survey study. *SpringerPlus* 3(1):25, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-1801-3-25>
- Helmold, M. (2021). Change Management as the Trigger for New Work. In: *New Work, Transformational and Virtual Leadership. Management for Professionals*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63315-8_3
- Hildebrand, U. (2016). Performance and Talent: Essentials of Succession Planning. In: Zeuch, M. (eds) *Handbook of Human Resources Management*. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-44152-7_43
- Holt, S., Hall, A. & Gilley, A. (2018). Essential Components of Leadership Development Programs. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 30(2), 214–229. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45176579>
- Islam, M.S. (2017). Entrepreneurial Governance in Succession. In: Farazmand, A. (eds) *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31816-5_2617-1
- Kehr, H.M., Graff, D. & Bakaç, C. (2022). Followers' Motives as Moderators of the Effects of Transformational Leadership Behaviors on Follower Outcomes and Leaders' Influence. *Journal of Business and Psychology*. 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-022-09826-y>
- Keller, J. (2018). Succession Planning Management. In: Gordon, P., Overbey, J. (eds) *Succession Planning*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72532-1_4
- Khan, H., Rehmat, M., Butt, T.H. & Asim, J. (2020). Impact of transformational leadership on work performance, burnout and social loafing: a mediation model. *Future Business Journal*, 6(40), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-020-00043-8>
- Lamm, K.W., Sapp, L.R., Randall, N.L. & Lamm, A. (2021). Leadership development programming in higher education: an exploration of perceptions of transformational leadership across gender and role types. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 27(1), 297–312. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-021-09076-2>
- Lorente, L., Salanova, M. (2014). Transformative Leaders. In: Michalos, A.C. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_3046
- Lu, F., Kwan, H.K. & Ma, B. (2022). Carry the past into the future: the effects of CEO temporal focus on succession planning in family firms. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 39 (5), 763–804 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-020-09748-4>
- Moon, T.W., Youn, N., Hur, W.M. & Kim, K. (2020). Does employees' spirituality enhance job performance? The mediating roles of intrinsic motivation and job crafting. *Current Psychology*, 39(1), 1618–1634 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9864-0>
- Pratelli, C. (2019). Theoretical framework. In: *CEO Succession, Leadership, and (Dis)similarity. Familienunternehmen und KMU*. Springer Gabler, Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-24819-2_2
- Samans, R. & Nelson, J. (2022). Business Leadership Priorities for Implementing Stakeholder Capitalism. In: *Sustainable Enterprise Value Creation*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-93560-3_3
- Schwarz, G. (2017). Transformational Leadership and Job Performance: The Role of Organizational Identification. In: Muenjohn, N., McMurray, A. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Leadership in Transforming Asia*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-57940-9_28
- Sekhar, C., Patwardhan, M. & Singh, R.K. (2013). A literature review on motivation. *Global Business Perspectives*, 1, 471–487. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40196-013-0028-1>
- Sharifirad, M.S. (2013). Transformational leadership, innovative work behavior, and employee well-being. *Global Business Perspectives*, 1(3), 198–225. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40196-013-0019-2>
- Sieber, M.R., Malý, M. & Liška, R. (2022). Conceptualizing organizational culture and business-IT alignment: a systematic literature review. *SN Business & Economics*, 2(9), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43546-022-00282-7>
- Zapata-Cantu, L., Sanguino, R., Barroso, A. & Nicola-Gavrilă, L. (2022). Family Business Adapting a New Digital-Based Economy: Opportunities and Challenges for Future Research. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-021-00871-1>

Review

This article was accepted under the *constructive peer review* option. For further details, see the descriptions at:

<http://mumabusinessreview.org/peer-review-options/>

Authors



Mostafa Sayyadi works with senior business leaders to effectively develop innovation in companies, and helps companies—from start-ups to the Fortune 100—succeed by improving the effectiveness of their leaders.



Michael J. Provitera is an Associate Professor at Barry University. He is an author of *Level Up Leadership* published by Business Expert Press.