



Why Leadership Skills are Essential for the Future of Laboratory Medicine?

Sedef Yenice¹

Published online: 24 October 2019

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The importance of good leadership to the health of an organization is evidenced by investment many organizations are willing to apply to leadership development. A recent article published in Harvard Business Review March–April 2019 issue (<https://hbr.org/2019/03/educating-the-next-generation-of-leaders>) focusing on “The Future of Leadership Development” stresses that the need for leadership development has never been more urgent. It is no exception for the laboratory medicine realize that to survive in today’s volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment, they need leadership skills and organizational capabilities different from those that helped them succeed in the past.

When it comes to the laboratory medicine, primarily, people who are in leadership positions need to possess three core capabilities to steer a laboratory: mindset, curiosity, and determined to adapt to organization management and leading the clinical laboratory practice. In that respect, the clinical laboratory environment is one of diversity, with the scope of services ranging from relatively simple phlebotomy units to large reference laboratories applying cutting-edge techniques and esoteric analyses. Leadership in the laboratory requires interaction with other front-line health care providers towards the management, maintenance, and development of clinical laboratory services to meet needs. Because the major contribution of laboratory medicine to health care is information. Leadership in the laboratory also involves oversight to ensure that this is provided in an appropriate and legible manner

leveraging where possible opportunities to add value to services. Most importantly, laboratory leadership requires effective interactions with individuals within the laboratory, suppliers, and manufacturers, higher administration, and those relying on the services provided. Therefore, it is also crucial for laboratory leaders to focus their energy on the right people and to invest in developing intellectual skills which can critically improve a leader’s ability to build strong collaborative relationships.

As we all agree, leaders are not developed overnight. Rather, leaders develop competencies across a continuum over time. Indeed, leaders mature along a curve based on experiences and the skills and competencies that they develop along the way. The organizations including the clinical laboratories that win in the 2020s will be designed to constantly learn and adapt to changing realities, combine artificial and human intelligence in new ways, and harness the benefits of broader business ecosystems. There is no doubt that reaching this necessary future state will require a fundamental transformation. Hence, the key point is that leadership transformation begins with a change in mindset and it requires commitment at all management levels of a clinical laboratory.

According to Dr. Wendy Becker, professor of Management, Shippensburg University (Shippensburg, PA), a successful laboratory depends upon its “people assets”—the intellectual capital of one’s employees—are inimitable and should be highly valued (Lab Manager January/February 2019, p. 10). Consistent with this statement, the dynamic nature of laboratory medicine will require clinical laboratories to build capabilities for ongoing large-scale change to keep up with evolving technology and competition and to invest in developing those same “people assets”.

✉ Sedef Yenice
sedef.yenice@florence.com.tr

¹ Chair, IFCC Committee on Clinical Laboratory Management, Milan, Italy

Given the facts that most medical laboratories are vulnerable if key managers suddenly leave and few clinical laboratories have a current succession plan in place, leading through ambiguity becomes a critical leadership skill. Like every generation that came before it, the next generation of leadership will inherit a world for which it cannot fully prepare; all we can hope for are caring, supportive, effective leaders who take an active interest in developing the next generation. Much of the leadership development of these newer leaders—and ultimately, their success—will require them sharp attributes, such as the abilities to navigate through uncertainty and to manage others by demonstrating strong emotional intelligence.

On the one part, with the proliferation of collaborative problem-solving platforms and digital tools that accentuate individual initiative, leaders across the board are increasingly expected to make consequential decisions that align with organizational strategy and culture. It is important, therefore, that the next generation of leaders engaged in laboratory medicine have to be equipped with the relevant technical, relational, and communication skills. To successfully meet the challenges of today's business world, education and training are the most powerful for effective leadership development along with leadership management that both consequentially lead to an immense impact on one's transformation. In recognition of the importance of

effective leadership to the success of a clinical laboratory, this has become a major area of focus for the IFCC Committee on Clinical Laboratory Management (C-CLM). We developed a *Clinical Laboratory Leadership Training Certificate Program* to help bridge any knowledge gaps challenging good and effective leadership in the clinical laboratory environment specifically. Therein, the Manual on “Leadership Basics for Clinical Laboratory Professionals” is one installment as part of the required reading list for this program. The Manual is downloadable at <http://www.ifcc.org/ifcc-education-division/emd-committees/c-clm/7-c-clm-publications-and-survey-reports/>.

Just as important, traditional approaches to enacting organizational change are generally not very effective. The next generation of leaders in laboratory medicine needs to take a new approach to change and embrace an agile strategy which prioritizes a team-centered, iterative, and cross-functional approach.

The bottom line is ongoing change will be necessary to succeed in the next decade. But successfully enacting organizational change is highly challenging. Ultimately, by recognizing the complexity of change, embracing uncertainty and using lessons from science and analytics to identify the right talent to execute change, the leaders of next generation can ensure their laboratories are best-positioned to win in the future.