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GLOBAL QUALITY STANDARDS FOR WATER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Adopted by the 5th Delft Symposium on Water Sector Capacity Development

A Call for 1,000 Water Leaders

In June 2007, the 4th Delft Symposium called for 1,000 water leaders in Africa and Asia. Six years later in 2013, development practitioners, researchers, sector specialists, policy makers, and capacity development specialists returned to UNESCO-IHE in Delft to take stock of progress made in capacity development to increase water security, focusing on challenges, experiences, and innovation. With a theme of Who's Taking the Lead in Developing Capacity from Rio to Reality, the 5th Delft Symposium explored leadership development to make a difference.

Leadership to Influence Change

As water management has become more complex, professionals are challenged to go about their work in a different way, engaging with different government agencies, the private sector, and civil society stakeholders. They deal with a wider range of interdependent water security issues, from household level to the economy, from increasing scarcity and inter-sector competition to higher risks of floods and droughts in an uncertain climate, and from urban development to environmental conservation. Water professionals now have to take leading roles, individually and collectively, to bring about change and adapt daily water management practices to a changing world. This requires leadership abilities that many professionals have not developed yet. Leadership can be conceptualised as a process of influence that involves articulating visions, aligning resources, and motivating and inspiring others to achieve such visions. The challenges to be addressed and the changes needed require leaders more than managers.

A Pioneering Water Leaders Program

A significant milestone since the 4th Delft Symposium has been the creation of a dedicated water leadership program by the International WaterCentre (IWC).¹ The modern design of this program was based on recent international research into leadership development, including the proven principle of the '70:20:10' rule of leadership development,² which broadly states that only 10% of development occurs from structured training, 20% from coaching and mentoring feedback, and 70% from on-the-job experience through challenging assignments. This principle marks a significant departure from the design of earlier programs. In the new approach, challenging assignments (projects) are part of the program, supported by individual leadership development plans that include expected behaviours at work.

¹ [The Water Leadership Program – Developing Emerging Leaders for Tomorrow's Challenges](http://www.watercentre.org/leadership), by the International WaterCentre (IWC) in Brisbane, Australia (www.watercentre.org/leadership).

² Lombardo, M. & Eichinger, R. (2000). *The leadership machine: Architecture to develop leaders for any future*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Lominger Ltd Inc.

Three Leadership Shifts

The field of leadership development is fast evolving. First, the emphasis is now on leaders who can reach across boundaries to enable collaboration. Second, the focus is increasingly on nurturing non-executive and younger leaders, who can influence change faster and collectively. Third, where earlier leadership programs 'filled the glass' with new skills, modern transformational programs let leaders engage in experiential learning that will 'expand their glass' as well as fill it. Fully-fledged leadership development programs therefore aim to incorporate the critical elements of challenge (e.g. challenging job assignments/projects), assessment (e.g. feedback from colleagues) and support (e.g. coaching and mentoring) using individual development plans. They also incorporate elements of training, feedback, and the on-the-job application of new knowledge and skills.

A Collaborative Project

To carry water leadership development activities forward, UNESCO-IHE has engaged in a project with the Asian Development Bank to develop global quality standards and initiatives for the water leadership development programs for adoption during the 5th Delft Symposium. Survey results confirmed the need for water leadership development at junior up to senior levels.³ The adoption of standards will help to create more high-quality programs for developing countries. Quality standards will also help to mobilize the necessary funding for such programs from governments, development projects and the private sector, including private foundations.

Global Quality Standards for Water Leadership Development Programs

With its mandate as the world's largest post-graduate educational institution for water, the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education: (i) calls for the establishment of transformational water leadership development programs to expand the leadership abilities of water professionals in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere; (ii) requests governments, development financing agencies, private companies and foundations, and civil society organizations, to mobilize funds for such water leadership development programs; and (iii) invites interested organizations to join UNESCO-IHE in a collaborative network (Community of Practice) for water leadership development programs that embrace the following quality standards:

1. **Expanding opportunities for emerging leaders** with special attention for participation by women and youth leaders, and focusing on non-executive roles such as project champions, enabling water leaders, and team / project leaders;
2. **Applying the '70:20:10' rule of leadership development** in designing long-term programs that combine challenging on-the-job assignments (projects) with feedback from colleagues, coaching and mentoring services, and course work, supported by individual development plans;
3. **Combining transformational leadership with cognitive competencies** including deep knowledge of integrated water resources management (IWRM) and water security, and the acquisition of new skills that help leaders influence outcomes individually and collectively;
4. **Sharing knowledge through a Community of Practice** on water leadership to support research, innovative approaches, program evaluations, reflection and regular review of standards; and
5. **Supporting aspiring water leaders at all levels** through modules on leadership in master degree programs, IWRM proficiency certification initiatives, and short training for individuals and teams.

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³ Boelee, E. & Reiziger, M. (2013). *Empower Water Leaders*. Final report for UNESCO-IHE and ADB on standards and initiatives for water leadership development programs.