

Laidlaw Leadership Essay

In this essay I will seek to explore how my leadership has developed and flourished over the course of my participation in the Laidlaw Scholarship. I will first start by reflecting on how I felt as leader prior to the scholarship, what I knew about my leadership style then and the positions of leadership I had held prior to the scholarship. Then, I will explore the training that I have received during the scholarship. This will include the leadership training weekends, first year research output and second year leadership in action project where I went to Fiji to do charity work as a part of Think Pacific. I will discuss how these events have allowed me to learn more about my leadership style and subsequently use my leadership attributes to best effect in whatever leadership setting I face. Finally, I will discuss how I plan to use the leadership skills in which the Laidlaw Scholarship has nurtured to good effect into the future. At this juncture, I think it would only be appropriate to give a tremendous thank you to The Right Honourable the Lord Laidlaw for the fantastic opportunity he has afforded to me, as well as a huge thank you to the staff working for the Laidlaw foundation which have made the implementation of the scholarship possible, in particular Alexander Stanley, Celina O'Connor and Hayley Mathews.

As I reflect retrospectively about my attitude towards leadership and how I felt as a young leader prior to the Laidlaw Scholarship, I would say that I considered myself a young leader or certainly I had held positions of leadership in various contexts. For example, in sport, I was captain of the Yorkshire golf team at an under sixteen level, captain of the Junior section of Woodsome Hall Golf Club and captain of the school football team etc. Through my heavy involvement in junior sport, I believe that I had already developed certain important leadership characteristics such as resilience, integrity and self-discipline. However, at this stage I did not fully understand my own strengths and weaknesses as a leader and perhaps I was unable to identify my leadership style per se but rather just identify certain good characteristics. It's only throughout the course of my Laidlaw scholarship that I have been able to better understand myself as a leader using useful tools and software provided by the Scholarship, for example, my DISC profile and my Belbin report.

During my first leadership weekend with the scholarship in early 2021, we received our DISC Workplace profile based upon a series of questions we answered prior to the session. The Disc profile characterises your leadership style into one of four categories: Dominance (D), Influence (I), Conscientiousness (C), and Steadiness (S). Dominance tends to include people who are more direct, firm and strong willed. Influence includes those who are outgoing, enthusiastic and optimistic. Conscientiousness includes people who are analytical, reserved and precise and finally steadiness includes people who are even tempered, accommodating and patient. All DISC styles are equally valuable and everyone will have some form of blend of all the above styles, moreover, the tool is

extremely helpful in understanding yourself better which is essential when working with others. It also allows you to understand and appreciate other people's leadership styles and how they may differ from your own. It is this understanding of yourself and others which allows an individual to build more effective working relationships. The report which was generated and personalised to me reported that I was in the centre of the D category indicating that I was moderately inclined and probably related fairly well to the D style of leadership. The report stated that one of the words that best describes people with my style of leadership was driven. I found it thoroughly interesting to do some in depth analysis about my own leadership style and I felt afterwards that understanding my own style better will allow me to work more effectively in a team context moving into the future.

In the summer of 2021, my first summer of the scholarship, I embarked on my academic research in which I investigated personnel attrition within the United Kingdom's military. I would like to thank Dr Bridet for his supervision and guidance of my research project. Prior to starting, I was initially rather apprehensive about the large task of independent research which lay ahead of me, however, after drafting my plan and splitting the 6 weeks into bitesize chunks I felt rather more confident that I knew what I was doing. However, in line with the old military saying, 'No plan survives first contact,' my research immediately hit an unforeseen stumbling block. I had initially planned to conduct a regression analysis based on a data set of individuals, then, I had hoped to use statistical methods learnt during my time as an Undergraduate here at St Andrews University to draw interesting insights into their attrition from the military. Perhaps there was a shared common characteristic into why people left after a 12-year commission as opposed to staying for 20 years. However, my plan to conduct this statistical analysis myself quickly became impossible as I could not find a suitable data set to work with due to the sensitive nature of military records. So, after only one week of researching, it was largely back to the drawing board but I think this stumbling block taught me a lot about doing something independently that hasn't been done before, progress and a meaningful output would not come easily and perseverance and resilience would be necessary if I was to publish a significant research output. After speaking to Dr Bridet about a new plan I had devised, we decided that the best course of action would be to peer review other papers and try to draw my own conclusions thereafter. I concluded that recruitment and retention of highly skilled personnel will always be essential for an effective military and it will always prove difficult for policy makers so long as they don't fully understand people's motivations for entering and exiting service. Reflecting on my research, I believe the project improved my independent study significantly and also boosted my resilience and critical thinking.

In early 2022, we embarked on our first leadership weekend at the tremendous setting of Hostpitalfield House in Arbroath, Scotland. Prior to attending the weekend each of us filled in our Belbin self-perception surveys which resulting in each of us receiving a Belbin team role report.

Through Belbin's research into team roles, he has developed a number of labels which describe different people's team roles which are as following: Plant, Resource Investigator, Co-ordinator, Shaper, Monitor Evaluator, Team Worker, Implementer, Complete Finisher and Specialist. Each of the different team roles provides a unique contribution towards the team's overall effectiveness. For example, the Plant could be thought of as the big ideas person and the Complete Finisher is the polisher and perfectionist. The report based on your self-perception inventory delivers your team roles in order of preference based on your answers. My top three roles were Implementer, Shaper and Monitor Evaluator. The implementer is someone who turns ideas into actions and organises work that needs to be done, although, their allowable weakness could be inflexibility. The shaper is someone who has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles, although, their allowable weakness is the prospect they could hurt someone's feelings in the process. Finally, the Monitor Evaluator is someone who sees all options and judges accurately but their allowable weakness is that they can be overly critical. I believe the report has been tremendously successful in aiding my ability to work in a team, I now have a better idea of where I can contribute the most while being simultaneously more aware of what weaknesses to look out for when I'm performing these roles.

The next leadership weekend of 2022 took us to the equally beautiful Falkland Estate, Scotland. This leadership weekend was more practical focussed and outdoor activities were used to great effect to develop our communication and leadership skills. A memorable exercise from the weekend was an orienteering competition whereby we were split into pairs and we had to plan how we would make our way across the various rendezvous points as a team trying to maximise the number of points gained. This required a high level of planning and good communication skills, all essential for an effective leader. Another exercise was a simulated mountain rescue effort whereby we had to locate a casualty and make time critical decisions about what course of action to take allowing us to develop our leadership skills in a high-pressure scenario.

Moving on to the Summer of 2022, I was selected by Think Pacific to do my Leadership in Action project in Fiji as part of the Youth and Community team. A group of 18 students and 3 project leaders travelled to the rural village of Toga in the Sigotoka Valley region of Fiji. Upon arrival we were met by the whole village who were so welcoming and friendly towards us and quickly accepted us as a part of their community. The project itself was split into two halves; the first half was a build project where we embarked on a 3-week mission to construct a medical centre in the village. The structure was to be made from wood and we worked on every stage of the construction from the concrete foundations right through to the carpentry at the end and the painting of the building. The build manager named Tevita did well to instruct, teach and motivate us in what were rather difficult building conditions with temperatures frequently exceeding thirty degrees Celsius. The second part of the project was the youth empowerment stage where we gathered in the community hall and received

Isaac Turner

lectures from a Fijian charity who specialised in empowering the youth. Our role in the sessions was to simply participate in the discussion as lots of the topics we discussed regarding climate change were things that are much more frequently spoken about in the United Kingdom than in Fiji so it was great to assist the Fijian charity in the delivery of their sessions. My overall experience in Fiji however goes much further than just the sessions, the overall immersion in a vastly different culture to our own is something I will remember forever. The kindness and generosity of the people of Toga Village was quite staggering, in particular the family whose household I stayed at and I am extremely appreciative of the hospitality they extended to me. My leadership in action project in Fiji no doubt improved my leadership capacity as well as resilience after being forced to lead in an unfamiliar environment.

Moving on into the future, I am looking forward to the additional Laidlaw Leadership sessions that are scheduled for my fourth year here in St Andrews and I anticipate they will be just as helpful in developing my leadership skills as previous sessions. Beyond University, I will look back upon my Laidlaw Scholarship journey here at St Andrews University with fond memories and safe in the knowledge my Leadership experience is vastly improved from it. I will also seek to engage in everything the Laidlaw Alumni network has to offer.