

Name: Maseng Moumakwa

Summer 1- Leadership and Research report

Leadership attributes and personal development:

To me a good leader is someone who is able to effect change, encourage others, and be a positive influence to those around them. They are critical thinkers, who are able to handle difficult or dynamic situations with integrity and grace; and make effectual decisions. A good leader will always strive to do the best, not only for themselves, but also for the greater good of those around them.

Prior to starting the Laidlaw programme, I used to think that in order to be a good leader you had to be autocratic or authoritative, at least to some extent. But, after my 1 to 1 coaching session over the summer, I realized that a very important aspect of deciding what type of leader you are is knowing who you are as a person, accepting who you are, and then improving on areas you are not satisfied with. This changed my outlook on my type of leadership style. As a naturally reserved person and more on the quieter side, I realized that I could still be an effective leader while staying true to who I am. Leaders are authentic, and generally people are more influenced by authenticity than authority. This was something that came up in our session with Professor Linda Doyle, who discussed her challenges as a woman in leadership and her journey to being the Provost of Trinity College.

I believe that this is part of the self- knowledge and awareness leadership attribute of the programme, which requires you to be honest with your own limitations, leadership styles and preferences. I can now confidently say that my leadership style is a mixture of Affiliative, Coaching and Democratic. I think these leadership styles are very beneficial in a group setting, because all 3 are about involving the entire team and collaborating, rather than placing anyone on a pedestal. It allows everyone to feel seen and listened to, which is particularly important when in such a diverse group of individuals in the Laidlaw programme.

Defining who I am as a leader has been one of the many things I have learned throughout my time as a Laidlaw Scholar. And it was one of many reasons I applied for the programme. As well as this, other motivations to apply included wanting to be completely challenged to step outside of my comfort zone, advance my career as a future medical doctor by carrying out research on a topic that is so relevant and important in our world today, and have the amazing opportunity to work with such a prominent supervisor in a different field to my own.

Throughout the various leadership development experiences we have had I have learned so many practical skills that I now employ in my own life, such as the organizational skills that we learned in the Project Leadership essentials workshop. I have employed some of the tips shared there to manage my college workload this semester, as I have now started clinical rotations and also have classes and assignments to keep on top of. From the “Building your network skills” workshop, I used a lot of what we learned to upgrade my LinkedIn page and my Laidlaw Network page; which has resulted in my networks on both platforms growing. It has also made me realise the huge impact that professional networks can have on career progression. I have been able to connect with individuals who I could potentially collaborate with in the future, as well as opening up doors of opportunities that would otherwise not be available to me.

Through the interactive leadership sessions, I have become more aware of my communication style and also how I engage in a large diverse group. I find that I tend to be listening a lot throughout the sessions and not engage as much. However, I think that I do better in smaller groups, as I have noticed that I participated a lot more when we were broken up in to smaller break out rooms. Nevertheless, this is something that I want to work on and feel that I can develop further in the second half of the programme. As well as this, I would like to further refine my time management skills and ability to prioritise activities.

For my Leadership in Action project, I really want to collaborate with an international NGO and intermingle with those outside of my academic environment and country. I have enjoyed connecting with other members of the 2021 Laidlaw cohort through Whatsapp, the Laidlaw

network and on social media. I've especially loved connecting within my ALS group that we have been placed in. I have really gotten to know the members in my group, and we have all stayed in touch over the summer, which helped a lot when there were any issues or if I had any questions regarding my project. However, something I really look forward to is being able to meet in person with the entire group and further build relationships and networks.

Research project experience:

My research project topic is something that I am really passionate about, and something I feel is very relevant given the current statistics in Ireland and the Western world at large. Friends and family further validated this passion, when telling them about my research project, they all agreed that it was an important topic to tackle, especially because it has never been carried out in Ireland. I hoped by the end of the project, to get a clearer picture of the situation in Ireland and possibly look at ways in which a change could be initiated (if required).

Prior to starting the project, my supervisor and I had a 6- week plan laid out outlining what I would like to achieve each week. The first week was set aside just to get my entire questionnaire and interview questions together and get my ethical approval from the school of Social Sciences and Philosophy. This went to plan and without any issues, and I was able to get my ethical approval within two days.

The initial plan was to get questionnaires from 10 participants per racial group, and this did not seem overly ambitious at the time of planning. However, when we sent out the questionnaires, it became apparent that it would be more difficult than we thought. I ended up having an oversampling of 2 racial groups, and not enough participants from 2 other racial groups. As well as this, not many of the participants were willing to take part in the interviews. I even ventured to face-to-face interactions and asking people to fill in a hard copy version of the survey, which was completely out of my comfort zone. But, I think it shows the level of determination I had in getting the responses I needed for the survey.

What was also included in my 6- week plan was how often my supervisor (Prof. Daniel Faas) and

I would have meetings. The plan was to have a meeting every 2 weeks, and an update via email every week. However, some weeks we ended up having more than one meeting. It really depended on the amount of work that needed to be done at the time. Throughout the process of this project, I would say that my supervisor and I had a really good understanding and I found the engagement process with him very easy going. He was always willing to help with any challenge that I faced on the project, always very forthcoming with tips and information and always easy to communicate with. Overall, I would say that we worked well together, and given that this was my first time carrying out any sort of ethical research; I have learned a lot from him and would see myself collaborating with him in the future.

Unfortunately, the project was not completed in my original 6- week plan and I ended up working for around 8 weeks on it, and requiring an extension. This was due to personal reasons, when my whole family got the Covid-19 virus. This was an unexpected hiccup in my plan that made me slow down a little bit. At the time I was quite upset, however a good leader understands that life doesn't always go to plan and that being able to progress in less than ideal circumstances is what's important. As well as this setback, as previously mentioned, I found it quite difficult to get responses to my survey from certain ethnic groups. Which was very disheartening.

However, there were some positives too. I have to say that I really enjoyed the interviews I had with the 4 participants. I enjoyed connecting with the ladies and really discussing the issues in a very informal setting. Doing these interviews really put a human factor to the research project, these were not just strangers filling in an online survey, but women who had birth experiences in Irish maternity hospitals and as a result of this had negative or positive things to say. Throughout the interview process, I was so surprised at how much the women were willing to share with me about their experiences.

Given the shortcomings of this research project; I feel that with a larger sample size the results would be very important and could potentially impact how Irish healthcare providers interact with women of ethnic minority backgrounds.

For the second summer of this programme, I would love to work with an NGO with the focus on improving maternal outcomes for women of minority backgrounds. This could be carried out through various ways such as:

1. Improved diversity training
2. Improved training on diseases and health factors that specifically affect different ethnicities; such as pregnant women with sickle cell anaemia. Or how internal scar tissue is different in women of colour following a C-section.
3. Educating all women on their rights and also providing more information to them regarding their labour and birth process. This is something that was brought up by all four interview participants. That they were reluctant to ask questions, as they didn't know enough to question the healthcare providers.

In conclusion, I would say that I have learned so much throughout this research project; about my topic, about myself and importantly about the type of leader I am and hope to be. Although, there were certain factors about the project that didn't go as planned, I still feel very proud of what I was able to achieve and I know that my results are still very relevant to a very significant real life problem. Other than the research aspect of things, throughout the various leadership development sessions I have also learned a great deal about leadership styles, collaboration, networking and organizational skills and prioritizing. I would say that after the first summer of the programme, I have gained so much more than I expected and I really look forward to challenging myself further through future leadership sessions and my Leadership in Action project next summer.