

A JOURNEY INTO THE SELF - INPUT

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is first and foremost personal development (Muff et. al.), so we start with focus on ourselves as individuals. How are we to understand, mobilize, and get results from others if we lack self-knowledge and awareness ourselves? Ignatius in his own way seems to have understood this principle. In his *Spiritual Exercises* he sought to develop our interior freedom as he emphasized the importance of interior freedom from “inordinate attachments and disordered affections”; in other contexts he stressed prudence in judgment, and the flexible, yet principled ability to adapt to one’s circumstances. Peter Drucker, a leadership expert, celebrated Ignatius’ emphasis on this conscious and purposeful self-management.

Leading others starts with leading ourselves and growing our self-understanding. This includes learning more about the daily choices we make, our personal behaviour, exploring our key motivations and drivers, as well as identifying our core beliefs and the values underlying our decisions. It also means continuously developing our potential by honing our skills and talent but most importantly accepting and respecting ourselves as individuals with gifts and limitations. As much as it is rewarding, this exercise is far from being simple. Understanding oneself is a never-ending and complex process that cannot be covered in a few pages. The purpose of this module is to develop leaders’ self-awareness and initiate a journey of development and growth that would hopefully extend beyond this formation.

MAIN IDEAS

Different layers to our self-understanding

The things we do and the way we do them are a consequence of many things (our context, knowledge, psychological traits, attitudes and dispositions, emotional intelligence, values...). The more we understand these various layers, the more we will be able to understand our guiding principles and ways of being.

A journey with different paths

There is no one-shot, magic formula to self-awareness. It is more of an on-going practice of introspection, reflection and experimentation, rather than something one can formally learn by reading or through passive means. It requires time, energy and effort on the part of the individual trying to grow. This growth process can be nourished by journaling, external support, and by setting a concrete growth plan.

Benefits for leadership development

Investment in knowing ourselves enables us to better understand and manage our thoughts, emotions and behaviours. It can uncover blind spots in our interactions and leadership practice. Self-examination increases our humility and resilience and better prepares us to face future challenges. Most importantly, self-awareness helps us live an authentic life of purpose and joy. Finally, it inspires us to invite others on the same path.

Our gifts, skills and various attributes play a key role in who we are as person and affect our leadership. The Ignatian style of leadership embodies values and principles that cultivate first the growth and development of the entire person thus promoting an integrated way of living (an alignment between our Being, our Doing, and our Knowing). This is taken to practice in many ways, for instance: the Spiritual Exercises, the practice of the Examen, and *Cura personalis*, the respect for all that forms the individual...

IGNATIAN NOTE

This love of our holy Father [Saint Ignatius] was not weak and fickle without life and efficacy, but with the sweetness, ardour, and tenderness of a mother he joined the solid and robust love of a father, striving that his sons each day should grow and advance in grace and virtue. Our Holy Father accordingly took an especial care of those under his charge that they should excel in the attainment of all virtue, and not content themselves with that which they had acquired, but that they should endeavour to advance each day more and more. In the attainment of which he used to help them, treating each one according to his capacity and strength.

This text from Fr. Peter of Ribadeneria SJ, who met Ignatius first hand, says many interesting things that will be important for this journey of self-knowledge. First of all that we are called to “grow and advance in grace in virtue”, secondly, “not to be content with what we have already acquired”, thirdly, “to advance each day more and more” and, fourthly we need to start from where we are today as individuals not as who someone else is today “each one according to his capacity and strength”.

FINAL THOUGHT

“Know yourself” is good advice. But to know ourselves doesn’t mean to analyse ourselves. Sometimes we want to know ourselves as if we were machines that could be taken apart and put back together at will. At certain critical times in our lives it might be helpful to explore in some detail the events that led us to our crises, but we make a mistake when we think that we can ever completely understand ourselves and explain the full meaning of our lives to others. Solitude, silence, and prayer are often the best ways to self-knowledge. Not because they offer solutions for the complexity of our lives but because they bring us in touch with our sacred centre, where God dwells. That sacred centre may not be analysed. It is the place of adoration, thanksgiving, and praise.

Henri Nouwen

EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Introducing the module, exploring personal desires and reality at the start of the programme and expressing personal goals for the module
2. Increasing awareness of the importance of understanding ourselves as a key pillar in exercising leadership
3. Introducing various components of understanding one’s self

“Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.”

C.G. Jung