

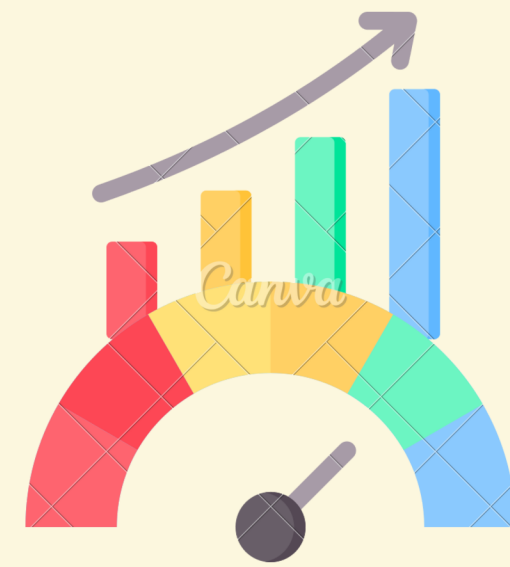
Critical review of the impact of leadership development initiatives on individual and organisational performance – A case study of Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDUHB) and Health Services in Wales and England.

1 Why this Research?

Performance in HDUHB is unsatisfactory.

- £51.1m overspend (HDUHB, 2025a)
- Welsh Government rating for leadership of needing ‘enhanced monitoring’ and for performance of ‘Targeted intervention’.

This research is needed to understand how best, individually and collectively, Workforce and OD can support managers, clinicians and all staff to deliver a compassionate service that meets organisational performance requirements.



2 Research Questions

- 1.What is the relationship between leadership, leadership development and performance?
- 2.How does leadership development affect performance?
- 3.What are the views of senior leaders about the nature of leadership and performance?
- 4.How to improve the effectiveness of leadership development activities?



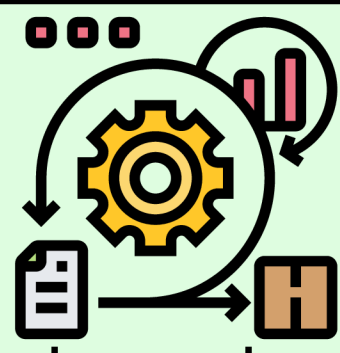
3 Methodology

Use of Saunders (2019) ‘research onion’ as a broad template: -

- The **primary qualitative research** has been collated using **semi-structured interviews** with purposive sampling (Tajik, *et al.*, 2024) of **eight** senior leaders from across HDUHB (finance, operations, nursing, medical, workforce, planning, quality and improvement)
- A **thematic analysis** of common views was conducted (Ahmed, *et al.*, 2025).
- The **secondary research** involved examining already existing evaluation material from a recent leadership development initiative (LEAP) to explore its impact on performance.
- A **literature review** explored the concepts of leadership and performance and informed the conduct of the research.

Limitations

The validity of this research is influenced by the absence of accepted definitions, researcher bias (mitigated by self-awareness and reflexivity (Karcher, *et al.*, 2024)), and the objective of the recent leadership development initiative was not directly to improve performance.



4 Key Findings

Literature review: -

- An absence of agreed definitions of ‘leadership’ and ‘performance’ makes studying the effect of leadership development on performance challenging (Barends, *et al.*, 2023).
- Leadership is reported to be vital to achieving high performance (De Waal, 2012; Barends, *et al.*, 2023; Bonini, *et al.*, 2024).
- Kaplan and Norton (1992; 1996a) created a widely used balanced scorecard model that accommodates differing perceptions of what performance is. It is widely used and valid today (Tawse and Tabesh, 2023).
- The purpose and structure of leadership development activity will largely affect the outcome (Barends, *et al.*, 2023).
- Sandhu (2017) and Kempster (2006) identified that using current issues and experiences of delegates improve the impact of leadership development.
- Holm *et al.* (2025) found that content and facilitation programmes must be based on the organisation’s strategic and operational challenges to be effective.
- Hudson (2025) concluded that a balance between depth of content, length and number of participants must be achieved to create organisational change.
- Dawson (2003) concluded that changes in structure, systems and processes alongside behaviour are needed to improve performance.



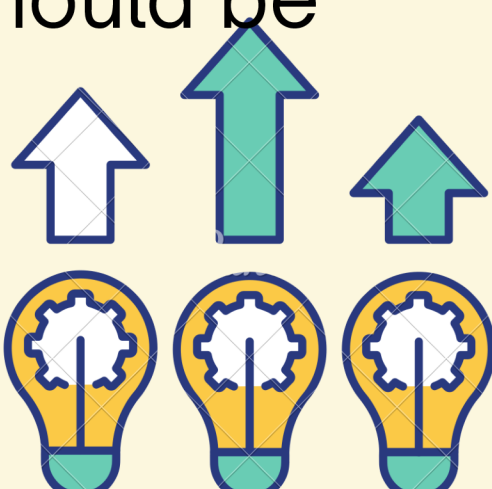
5 Analysis - The research confirmed: -

- The findings of the literature review.
- That Leadership is vital to achieving high performance (Bonini, *et al.*, 2024).
- That relationship and confidence between leaders and with staff affect performance (Fisher and Phillips, 2021).
- That the effect of leadership development on performance depends on the definitions and metrics used (Barends *et al.*, 2023).
- There was an absence of shared definition of leadership and performance in HDUHB to guide behaviour and action.
- The LEAP programme met its declared objective of promoting compassionate leadership. Performance improvement was not directly addressed as it was not a declared objective.
- Delegates were asked to apply self-determined learning on return to work with mixed support and success.
- Delegates appreciated content that addressed current work issues and lived experience.
- Non training barriers are not always addressed (Dawson, 2003), for example, poor technology or disinterested line managers.



Conclusions

- Leadership development initiatives will have limited impact on organisational performance unless:
 - Improving organisational performance is a declared priority (Karauri and Kyongo, 2024).
 - Shared definitions are established and used in organisations (Deng, *et al.*, 2023).
 - The content of the development activity assists balancing the needs of task/objectives with needs of staff (Day, *et al.*, 2021) utilising delegates lived experiences (Moldoveanu and Narayandas, 2019).
 - Delegates feelings of hope should be understood and nurtured to accelerate performance improvement (Zulfqar, *et al.*, 2021).
 - Delegates feelings should be explored and influenced (Goleman, 2020).
 - A programmes length and depth must be balanced with number of participants needed to create organisational change (Hudson, 2025).
- Barriers that reduce the impact of leadership development initiatives on performance should be addressed (Barends, *et al.*, 2023; Geerts, 2024) for example: -
 - the confidence gap between senior leaders and the front line,
 - engaging clinicians; and
 - poor technology.



Primary and Secondary Research Findings – 5 Themes have emerged:

- Participants: -
- 1.Were disappointed with HDUHB’s performance and way of working.
 - 2.Had hope that performance and culture can be improved.
 - 3.Identified gaps to be closed if performance and culture is to be improved for example, poor teamwork, system inefficiency.
 - 4.Understood the factors affecting organisational sustainability for example waste, poor, budget management, poor clinical engagement.
 - 5.Had a good understanding of how leadership can improve performance and culture for example, listen to and empower staff develop teamwork between leaders (collaboration), help staff deal with their circumstances, model desired behaviour, and ensure staff know ‘why’ they are doing ‘what’ they are doing.



For a full list of references for this research or if you would like any further information, or require the content of this infographic in a different language or format, please scan the QR code above or contact 2415705@student.uwtsd.ac.uk