LEADERSHIP TRAINING

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Leadership is the social influence process that creates shared norms and values, unites groups with a collective purpose, and directs group efforts toward the realization of common goals. The important role of this guiding force in determining which businesses flourish and which ones flounder in the modern global economy is widely recognized. Yet a recent *Conference Board* survey indicates that nearly half of *Fortune* 1,000 companies regard their leadership capacity as fair to poor (Csoka, 1997). Accordingly, leadership training and development for managers is a booming enterprise, an approximately $40 billion a year industry in the U.S. alone (Walter, 1996). A review of the impact of managerial development interventions, however, suggests that traditional approaches may be minimally effective (Burke & Day, 1986). Similarly, the survey of *Fortune* companies mentioned above suggests that the content and delivery of leadership training is largely out-dated, focused more on classroom approaches to functional business and traditional management skills and less on leadership per se.

This review covers the field of leadership training broadly and focuses on some of the more promising methods and tools. It is structured around three key steps in creating leadership training systems: 1) identifying training needs, 2) selecting from alternative training methods and techniques, and 3) evaluating the impact of training.

Identification of Training Needs

Leadership development, like all training initiatives, should be informed by a formal needs analysis (Goldstein, 1993). This includes conducting an assessment of the organization's leadership needs and an analysis of prospective trainees' capacities to meet those needs. There are many ways of identifying organizational leadership needs, such as through succession planning, performance reviews, and culture and satisfaction surveys. Recent surveys indicate that forward-looking companies are increasingly linking leadership development efforts with organizational culture and strategic business needs (Fulmer & Wagner, 1999; Walter, 1996).

The managerial job is more complex than most occupations, which makes it unusually difficult to assess the leadership development needs of managers (Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). Nonetheless, these needs can be identified systematically as part of formal succession plans, through career planning, and with a variety of diagnostic tools (see review in Clark & Clark, 1990) such as 360-degree/multi-rater feedback systems. Despite frequently outsourcing the development and delivery of leadership training programs, organizations rarely use these content-experienced professionals to help identify training needs (Walter, 1996). It is ironic that training needs are rarely explicitly identified through a formal method, given that knowing what needs to be developed is the cornerstone of the whole process. This is surely one reason why so few leadership training programs have been demonstrated to improve leadership effectiveness.

Organizations noted for exemplary leadership development practices are creating leadership competency models—defining qualities and characteristics of their outstanding leaders—against which to assess individual development needs. Although one can rightly question the rigor with which these are developed and implemented, it is important to explicitly state what leader behaviors an organization needs for success, and therefore values and wishes to call attention to. Executives from a variety of firms generally agree on the widespread need for such leadership basics as self-awareness and understanding of leadership styles, team dynamics, developing employee motivation, and inspiring enhanced performance.

Methods and Techniques

There is a bewildering array of approaches used to develop organizational leadership. One way to bring order to the diversity of methods is to draw a distinction between formal training programs and techniques that capitalize on job experiences.

Leadership training programs. Formal training programs are the dominant approach used in leadership development. These programs occur away from the immediate worksite and take many forms, ranging from afternoon workshops to week-long courses to multiyear university programs. Human resource professionals and consultants typically deliver these programs, but some innovative companies (e.g., Ameritech, Ford Motor Company, General Electric) have their senior management conduct the activities (Tichy & Cohen, 1997). Many companies' human resource departments offer workshops and courses, while some standard-setting firms (e.g., General Electric, McDonald's, Motorola) have developed their own managerial training centers and corporate universities. By far the most common are short courses focused on specifically defined topics delivered in a classroom environment. These courses range from being designed and delivered in-house through the human resource department to commercially available programs offered by independent training and development organizations.

The substantive content of leadership training programs is varied, although for the majority of programs it consists of functional business and general management skills (Csoka, 1997). Rare is training content focused on leadership fundamentals like self-awareness and personal insight, character and personal growth, communication and interpersonal skills, group process and team dynamics, and the application of certain leadership theories (e.g., Bass' Transformational Leadership theory, Fiedler's Contingency theory).

Training designers are encouraged to make use of principles from learning and development theory when matching training content with delivery methods (e.g., Kolb's 4-state learning model, Knowles' andragogy theory of adult learning, Argyris' "double-loop" learning, Kegan's constructive-developmental theory). However, there is little empirical research to inform this process. Notwithstanding the danger in blind adherence to tradition, Yukl (1998) notes that the following techniques are often used (1) to teach technical skills: lectures, demonstrations, procedural manuals, videotapes, equipment simulators, and interactive computer tutorials; (2) to impart conceptual and administrative skills: cases, exercises, business games, simulations, and videotapes; and (3) to develop interpersonal skills: lectures, case discussion, videotapes, role playing, and group exercises.

Most training programs are designed with sequenced combinations of different techniques. For example, one publicly available program designed to raise self-awareness of leadership skills and developmental needs includes a lecture presentation of leadership theory, 360-degree feedback and personality inventories for identifying personal strengths and weaknesses, a complex two-day business game simulation followed by group discussion for illustrating how strengths and weaknesses played out, and time with trainers to chart an action plan for personal development.

No matter what technique is used, it should be designed with an understanding of motivation in mind, such as goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1984). This increases the likelihood that the training content will be put into practice and lead to a sustained improvement in performance. Of the numerous and varied techniques used in leadership training, two are highlighted: behavior role modeling and business simulations (for comprehensive reviews of techniques, see Bass, 1990, Wexley & Latham, 1991; Druckman, Singer, & Van Cott, 1997).

Behavior role modeling, based explicitly on social learning theory, is a technique used to develop interpersonal and self-management skills. The rationale is that informing managers of the need to behave differently is unlikely to lead to behavior change unless they have working mental models for how to perform alternative behaviors. In a typical behavior role modeling exercise, trainees are presented with a discussion about the target behaviors and their relevance to performance in a specific and challenging interpersonal matter (e.g., addressing a subordinate's performance deficiencies) and then observe a role model demonstrate the target behaviors. Trainees are next given a chance to practice the behaviors in role-play exercises. Afterward, trainers and other trainees provide constructive feedback about the performance and how it may be enhanced. This is one of the most well-researched leadership development techniques and empirical data suggest that it is often effective (Burke & Day, 1986).

Business simulations are designed to provide a context-rich learning environment for assessing current managerial and leadership skills as well as an opportunity to work on decision-making, strategic, interpersonal, influence, and general leadership skills. The centerpiece to a simulation is a hypothetical multidivision organization in which trainees assume managerial roles and are responsible for making strategic and operational decisions over the course of a few days. Embedded within the simulation are several—often more than can be addressed—issues and problems which provide considerable challenge for participants. After the simulation, participants receive feedback from observers and engage in group discussions to better understand their performance, gain insight into strengths and weaknesses, and review learning. Research evidence to date indicates that simulations may facilitate skill development—albeit modestly so (Keys & Wolf, 1990).

Learning from experience. Pioneering studies in the 1980s found that many senior executives believed they grew most as leaders in dealing with varied and challenging on-the-job experiences rather than in formal training programs (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). These unplanned real-time developments happened informally and haphazardly as job demands would tax or exceed the manager's leadership skills. Successful executives learned through adapting to these stretch situations by recognizing their personal limitations and working on a stronger and more differentiated skill set. Reflecting on these experiences appeared to be key to development and learning important lessons. Over the last decade, innovative strategies have been sought for capitalizing more systematically on the learning opportunities afforded by *in vivo* job experiences. Three of the more common and promising are discussed.

Inspired by research revealing a link between the breadth and diversity of challenging job assignments early in a manager's career and rapid career progression at AT&T (Howard & Bray, 1988), some organizations are customizing special assignments to strategically develop leadership talent. However, there is very little research evidence which might suggest the optimal design and use of special assignments. Important is the careful identification of the challenges and learning opportunities provided by the assignment and a linkage to the manager's developmental needs and career planning (McCauley, Eastman, & Ohlott, 1995). Some companies are involving managers themselves in creating specific learning objectives and planning assignments to fill their leadership skill gaps. These companies are also keeping track of skills developed through special assignments and use this data to inform succession planning and individual career counseling.

One of the oldest methods of using experience as a developmental tool is job-rotation. In job rotation, managers

are given a series of work assignments in different organizational departments and subunits. Research evidence suggests that this technique can enhance leadership skill and knowledge (Druckman et al., 1997). Specific benefits important for skills in establishing a vision and crafting strategy include increased understanding of unique problems facing different units, knowledge of subtle interdependent linkages between units, and frameworks for understanding problems from multiple perspectives. One potential drawback to job-rotation is the potential lost productivity incurred while rotated managers cycle through learning curves in new departments.

Formal mentoring programs—which involve having a more experienced manager form a developmental relationship with a less experienced protégé—are increasingly being used in organizations. Further, a good deal of research suggests involvement in mentoring relationships can assist in adjustment to change (e.g., a promotion, job rotation, special assignments) and lead to rapid career advancement (Druckman et al., 1997). Ideally, mentors serve two roles, one of socioemotional support through acceptance, counseling, and encouraging the protégé, and one of career facilitator through providing challenging assignments, sponsorship, and sharing skills. Research suggests that mentoring programs may be most effective when participation is voluntary, mentors get to choose their protégés, and role expectations are clarified at the outset (Druckman et al., 1997).

Emerging trends

The hottest trend in leadership development is undoubtedly the use of 360-degree/multi-rater feedback (London & Smither, 1995). This process extends traditional performance appraisal techniques by employing survey methodology to gather ratings of a target manager's performance from him- or herself and his or her peers and subordinates in addition to the typical superior evaluations. Assessments from this "full circle of constituents" are then fed back, providing managers an opportunity to systematically calibrate self-perceptions of leadership with the perceptions held by key coworkers. The power of 360-degree feedback is in its systematic and regular use as a means of informing and tracking leadership development needs. There is an abundance of commercially available feedback instruments (see Morical, 1999; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1993) and many companies are designing their own around competency models and existing leadership theory.

Executive coaching is another rapidly growing approach used to expand senior managers' ability to lead. This technique involves an ongoing relationship between an individual executive and a helping professional (typically from outside the organization). The work is one-on-one, tailored to the leader's particular developmental needs, and takes place over an extended period of time—ranging from weeks to even years (Kilburg, 1996). Coaching usually involves four interrelated steps: determining the leader's unique profile of strengths and developmental needs, making sense of the profile with the leader, establishing goals to address limiting aspects of his or her leadership, and counsel as the leader enacts a developmental plan. Coaching services vary greatly in scope and depth (see Witherspoon & White, 1997), with some focused on solving immediate business problems or developing a specific skill and others designed to foster growth in more fundamental aspects of character (Kaplan, 1998). The value of executive coaching is being affirmed by the marketplace, but little more than anecdotal evidence supports its value at this time.

Action learning is a technique developed in Europe as a way to achieve synergy by combining formal training programs with experiential methods. This technique extends over time and involves fieldwork on real organizational issues interspersed with classroom training seminars. In a program setting, concepts for leading more effectively are explained to managers who then engage in group discussions exploring how the concepts can be applied in their jobs. Trainees set goals and return to the workplace to implement the new skills and behaviors. They return periodically to the classroom to report their experiences and work with facilitators and other trainees to refine their goals and strategies for applying of the concepts. Action learning is being used increasingly in the U.S. (e.g., General Electric, Motorola, Ford Motor Company) as a technique to develop leadership competencies in large groups of managers (Tichy & Cohen, 1997). Participants of action learning report great value in it, although systematic evaluation of its impact is lacking in the published literature.

The explosion of possibilities made possible with advances in information technology is beginning to have an effect on leadership training. For example, the internet and email have made it possible to receive 360-degree feedback on-line. Managers can also now use the internet to access information and training modules targeted to a specific area relevant to a current business problem ("Just-in-Time Learning;" Johnson-Cramer, 1997). State-of-the-art leadership training of the future will likely leverage computer technology to augment existing training content and delivery methods in a more sophisticated and integrated system. The possibilities are endless.

Impact Evaluation

Reviews of the leadership training literature almost universally reach the conclusion that there is a scarcity of meaningful research on the impact of these developmental interventions (e.g., Fiedler, 1996; House & Aditya, 1997). Reviewers note that too little is known about how leadership development takes place, including what personal and contextual factors are crucial to ensuring successful training outcomes (e.g., Druckman et al., 1997). This is unfortunate for many reasons, especially because evaluation research can provide feedback for double-loop learning and the opportunity to up-date and fine-tune training activities. It also suggests that the consumers of the multi-billion dollar leadership training industry take it as an article of faith that they are getting their money's worth.

Burke and Day's (1986) exhaustive review of management training and development impact studies led them to conclude that the majority were poorly designed and used minimally

important outcome criteria. In terms of Kirkpatrick's four levels of training evaluation, most management training studies focused on the two lowest levels, namely trainees' affective reactions ("smile sheets") and learning tests that assess changes in knowledge. Neglected were the bottom-line criteria of improved job performance and enhanced organizational performance. Methodological weakness and a lack of scientific rigor is another problem with most evaluation research. This is so despite the availability of sophisticated methods appropriate for field studies that allow for stronger conclusions about how and how well the training works and the economic value it has to the organization (see an excellent example in Morrow, Jarrett, & Rupinski, 1997).

In an era of strict budgetary accountability in organizational life, practitioners and scholars alike are taking greater stock in the importance of evaluating the effects of leadership training. Encouraging are two recent studies of the impact of transformational leadership training programs. One field experiment causally linked a program designed around principles from transformational leadership theory and goal theory to enhanced subordinate perceptions of leaders' performance, an increase in subordinates' organizational commitment, and improved branch-level financial performance in one region of a large Canadian banking institution (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996). The other, a true field experiment of the effects of transformational leadership training, was conducted within the Israeli Defense Forces (Dvir, 2000). This study demonstrated that participation in a transformational leadership training program caused leaders to have a more positive impact on subordinates' development. Even more intriguing, as a result of this growth, these subordinates were able to lead *their* subordinates to higher levels of performance. This has powerful implications—transformational leaders can exert a ripple effect in the development of future leaders, cascading throughout an organization to build up the bench strength of leadership talent that is currently lacking. This example is a model for how systematic impact research can inform how theory is used in the strategic planning of training activities.

It is instructive to note that organizations regarded as standard-setters in leadership development report consistently conducting some type of impact and evaluation research (Fulmer & Wagner, 1999), although the results of these studies rarely appear in public domain publications. Also noteworthy is a recent policy decision by the Center for Leadership Studies at the State University of New York—Binghamton insisting that all organizations that purchase their training services must also consent to conducting impact evaluation research (B. Avolio, personal communication, May 6, 1999). Taken together, these recent trends paint a promising picture for the future of leadership training research and, ultimately, practice. These examples demonstrate the availability and application of sophisticated methodological designs that allow for causal inferences and rely on important performance criteria as outcome measures. This trend may be a major force in establishing accountability in the leadership training industry, a pressure which should improve the quality of these services and in turn improve the quality of leadership as it is practiced in modern organizations.

Conclusion

Especially when considering the complexity of social influence, developing leadership potential in managers may best be viewed as a necessarily ongoing and iterative sequence of life-long learning. Stated simply, leadership development is a process and not an event. Thus, lectures and seminars, 360-degree feedback, off-site programs and courses, simulations and games, coaching and mentoring programs, action learning, and various developmental job experiences all play important roles in an individual's growth as a leader over time. Each may be judiciously employed at stages appropriate to the developmental level of the person as revealed through a needs analysis.

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