



TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

“Training & Development”

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Overview

A new trend is emerging in leadership development training. Strategic planning and execution courses are quickly becoming the focus of leadership development. Current courses designed to build core leadership competencies—finance, accounting, project management, change management and visioning—are taking a back seat.

This trend in leadership training reflects the current, ever-changing business environment. Companies want to leverage the time executives have available to engage in learning, enhance the quality of the learning experience and align learning to business strategies, key issues, and work place realities.

This article will present a list of recommendations to help organizations integrate strategic planning into their leadership development curriculum.

Leadership development instructors

Leadership instructors play a critical role in the success of a leadership development program. Effective leadership development instructors must speak the language of the business to be credible and trustworthy partners in the eyes of the executive team. Other wise, they are viewed as staff people who merely follow instructions from above.

Speaking the language of the business requires a deep understanding of the company's goals and objectives, strengths and weaknesses, the strategies and key strategic initiatives, the external forces shaping the industry and competitive space, the nature of the products and services, and the company's value in the market place.

A leadership development instructor is not only responsible for the development of current and future leaders, but also for developing the organization's capabilities, by enabling participants to help the organization achieve its goals and execute its strategies.

Know your target audience

Leadership development may not be for everyone in the company. To optimize and leverage leadership development initiatives, consider three types of performers:

- Employees on a growth track. – Individuals who are dedicated workers and exhibit leadership abilities.
- Key influencers and decision makers - Executives and leaders who can impact and influence the company's key issues. .
- Loyal and high performers. Individuals who may be not at the executive level or on the future VP list, but are considered valuable contributors.

Integrate business planning into training

Strategic business plans are designed to improve the efficiencies and effectiveness of a company's operations. Leadership development should be considered during the entire transformation process—from pre-planning to post integration—to fully achieve business goals.

Involving the training organization throughout the strategic planning phase will enable the leadership curriculum designer to develop courses that support the new strategic direction. The training organization can begin analysis of existing competencies of employees early, which allows sufficient time to evaluate what skills employees will need to meet the new objectives. This early evaluation begins with identifying the difference between employees' current skills and needed skills.

Leader-led learning

In high-impact leadership development training, senior executives often serve in an instructing capacity. Many companies recognize the value of leader-led training; they don't just teach their managers and leaders—they learn from them. Leadership lessons are best learned from executives who are trusted and respected inside their own organization. Senior executives have an opportunity to model leadership and participants learn firsthand the ideas, points of view, and issues facing its executive leaders.

GE is an excellent example of how a company's commitment to leadership training resonates from the top of the organization. In the book, Jack Welch and Leadership, author, James Robinson, states that Welch's most important job was to train GE's managers of the future. In fact, he spent more time at GE's in-house university in Crotonville, New York, than he did in actually running the company. Welch fully expected other executives at GE to follow his lead—for their own success and the company's.

Action-based learning

Dr. Michael Marquardt, a George Washington University professor, defines action learning as both a process and a powerful program that involves a small group of people solving real problems while at the same time focusing on what they are learning and how their learning can benefit each group member and the organization as a whole. This approach is explained in his book, Action Learning in Action: Transforming Problems and People for World Class Organizational Learning.

In addition, he highlights that in the leadership program, leaders are heavily engaged in examining a business strategic problem, actively listening to each other and locating alternatives and solutions. The members have the power and responsibility for discussing potential avenues and

taking action. The facilitator serves as a guide to optimize learning from group process and problem solving issues that the group may face.

Monitor results

Training shouldn't be viewed as a one-time event with the completion of the course as the result. Instead, results should be defined as proof of successful integration of the course output into the organization weeks and months after course completion. Follow-through is a process of monitoring and controlling the execution of participant's plans. The end of the program is the starting line with follow-through including regular, consistent updates to the leaders.

Measure effectiveness

John Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation is a tool that can be used as a metric to gauge course effectiveness. It is one of the most widely used approaches to evaluate training effectiveness. The four levels of evaluation are:

- Level 1:** Reaction - a measure of satisfaction
- Level 2:** Learning - a measure of learning
- Level 3:** Behavior - a measure of behavior change
- Level 4:** Results - a measure of results

These evaluation levels will not only help measure the effectiveness of a delivered training program, but it can serve as a guide in developing future leadership training programs.