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Leadership Development Starts with Results

Andy Beaulieu

Most organizations that provide a suite of leadership development courses cover a broad range of topics. These same organizations also have a natural wealth of developmental experiences: problems that need solutions, strategies that need action, and results that need achievement.

And never the twain shall meet.

Bridging the Gap

Training designers have employed a variety of techniques to get leadership program participants to put learning into practice. Trainers routinely deploy action plans, learning contracts, and practice communities after a program's conclusion. The success rate of these approaches is mixed, to say the least.

Enter Action Learning

Action learning—a dynamic process for problem solving, building teams, and developing leaders—receives good press from most places that apply it with integrity. But people have “skinned down” the idea to include a host of other approaches. True action learning puts participants in nearly the same situation for which the skills are needed. Thus, action learning is not simply taking action after training, nor is it a simulation or experimental program.

Action Learning Case Study

FinCo, a financial services firm (*Note: we changed the name for this article*), built its leadership development program's action learning component around the

(Continued on pg. 2)

Creating Value: The Leader's Role As a Change Agent

Rosie DeCosmo and Curtis D. Curry

Change spans the domestic and international footprint of organizations. Today's leaders find themselves confronting challenges such as off-shoring, reengineering, adopting new technologies and processes, decentralizing, globalization, and mergers and acquisitions.

Successful leaders understand that change is vital to the company's profitable growth, and that innovation and growth are key to creating value. Common sense tells us that innovation

is not possible without change, and sustained growth needs innovation.

Strong and viable companies have leaders who implement three best practices. They:

1. position communication as an integral change vehicle during and after change initiatives
2. develop strategies to foster effective organizational culture
3. promote activities to retain talent.

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Results *(continued from pg. 1)*

following:

- Each team had an executive sponsor who needed results.
- Each program included two or more teams on the same schedule.
- Participants understood that the projects would consume 25 percent of their time during the 13-week project.
- Participants used Robert Schaffer's "Breakthrough Strategy," which requires that projects result in actual change, not just analysis and recommendations.
- Program devices included: 360-degree feedback from each individual's peer group, team feedback, project lessons learned, development objectives, and learning journals.
- Sessions with the group of teams and sponsors included a two-day launch workshop, a mid-project meeting, and a two-day closing workshop.

Reversal of Accountability

In most training programs, facilitators believe that they need to prove something to the participants. And participants perpetuate this by adopting a passive-aggressive posture: "OK, I'm here, now let's see what value you can provide."

In action learning, participants show up already briefed about the project. Facilitators help the team rise to the challenge, and the team must make progress. No sitting back, arms folded, feeling like this training class is just the same old stuff in a new binder.

Skills Gained

Action learning program participants can learn new skills in many ways.

They can:

- dust off a binder from a course they once attended
 - attend a crash course
 - get coaching from a subject matter expert
 - coach another team member.
- And the variety of skills to be learned on such projects is limitless: technical skills (marketing, quality improvement, product development, organizational design, etc.), team leadership, analytical ability, communication, influence, project planning and management, decision making, teamwork, etc. A rigorous action learning experience truly can bring together all of the classroom education that these individuals may already have completed.

Don't Redesign Your Programs

An action learning component can fit neatly into existing leadership development programs:

- It adds an application element.
- It adds a group-based component.
- It integrates many learning disciplines.
- It does not introduce any courseware.

And from the perspective of your training budget and resources, it's easy and inexpensive.

But if those benefits don't convince your organization, pass along this quote from one of FinCo's action learning team leaders: Our project "saved the firm over \$415,000 annually in direct labor."

To read the full article, click [here](#).

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"A rigorous action learning experience truly can bring together all of the classroom education that these individuals may already have completed."

Creating Value (continued from pg. 1)

Best Practices Leadership

How do leaders accomplish these best practices on a consistent and long-term basis? As OD practitioners, we are all too familiar with the many reactions to change. On one end of the spectrum, individuals may embrace the change, focusing on how it will positively affect them and the company. On the other end of the continuum, some actively seek to sabotage change efforts.

Successful leaders appeal to the heart, rather than just to the head, and effect large-scale change by guiding the organization through an eight-step process. These leaders:

1. establish a sense of urgency
2. create a guiding coalition with the credibility, skills, and authority needed to provide change leadership
3. develop a clear, sensible, uplifting vision and strategy
4. communicate frequently the change vision in a way that inspires commitment
5. empower broad-based action by removing obstacles
6. generate short-term wins so people can see the benefits of the change
7. persist by consolidating gains and producing more change
8. make change stick by anchoring new approaches in the culture.

Successful change leaders tell stories that paint a compelling picture of the need for change. These touch people on an emotional, rather than merely logical, level and create change champions.

Mid-level champions translate strategic company goals into meaningful, often inspirational visions. Their ability to engender trust

among those who must implement and live with the change initiative is a key success factor.

The OD Practitioner's Role

The OD practitioner can contribute to successful change initiatives by working closely with senior management and HR. Specifically, OD practitioners can:

- develop a change-primer session for leaders to attend *before* implementing change
- identify internal change champions and create a change steering committee
- help leaders identify obstacles
- develop problem-solving and decision-making toolkits
- train managers how to communicate on change
- conduct clinics designed to build leadership competencies
- craft illustrations that connect on an emotional level
- identify change champions, and assign them to teams formed to remove barriers
- assess the readiness of the company for delivering change management courses
- develop a playbook of best practices.

Effective leaders drive change into a company's infrastructure, align resources, involve people at all levels, and foster a culture that attends to people's emotional reaction to change.

To read the full article, click [here](#).

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Deliver Results *and* Develop Employees

Jill Ririe Walsleben

Lew is a manager at a firm that expects a lot. He is responsible for growing the business, maintaining relationships with clients, and overseeing a 10-person team. In short, Lew faces a dual mandate of delivering business results *and* developing his employees.

As he sips his coffee, Lew ponders how he can accomplish this, and he wonders how to prioritize his time. While we cannot completely solve Lew's dilemma, we can guide him to focus on activities that will accelerate development and performance.

Performance Management 101

Historically, performance management was an HR process focused on assessing performance and documenting results. Today, it often has evolved to a process that aligns individual and team goals with business objectives. Why? According to a study by Hewitt Associates, companies with effective performance management processes outperform other companies. A well-designed and implemented performance management system, the study notes, can bring measurable improvements.

Improving performance is not just a manager's responsibility. It's a shared responsibility with organizational factors—such as the performance management process—and employee factors—such as the willingness to accept feedback.

However, according to a Corporate Executive Board (CEB) study, almost half of the activities that organizations, employees, and managers conduct to improve performance relate to the role of the

manager. So if managers play such an important role, what should they do? According to the study, managers should target their efforts at activities that could improve performance by 25 percent. These activities include:

- providing feedback that will help the employee perform better
- emphasizing strengths
- being knowledgeable about the employee's performance.

Alternatively, managers should steer away from the following activities, as they likely will decrease performance:

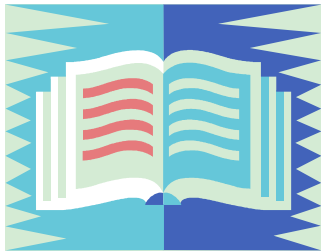
- frequently changing assignments
- emphasizing weakness.

While a well-designed and implemented performance management process will drive performance, employees perceive that their managers lack critical skills, according to an Aon study. This is troubling, as an employee's decision to stay with or leave an organization often is based on his or her relationship with a supervisor. Companies that train their managers to conduct performance improvement activities will reap a variety of rewards, including increased productivity and employee retention.

Failure to execute everything is a problem shared by all managers. Lew knew what he needed to accomplish; he just wasn't sure of the most effective way to get there. When managers get it right, they can increase performance and employee satisfaction.

To read the full article, click [here](#).

Jill Ririe Walsleben is a principal at The Wynhurst Group, LLC. To learn more about The Wynhurst Group or contact Jill, visit their Website at www.thewynhurstgroup.com.



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Build a Base for Leadership: Assess Natural Abilities

Thomas N. Tavantzis

Natural abilities—those that we are born with—are as unique as our genomic patterns. Practice or neglect does not affect these abilities, and these abilities do not measure intelligence or reflect experience. There is no right or wrong or good or bad in an individual's ability profile.

Typically, when searching for a person's natural abilities, people employ self-report or multi-rater feedbacks. The vital question: Do these provide us with the data we need?

Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

While hundreds of self-report instruments exist, most require people to respond to questions based on their memory of a behavior and their ability to quantify that behavior. These tools do have some value, but they do not describe the whole individual.

Self-reports vary with mood and setting. They ask us to reflect on ourselves and to be objective observers of ourselves. Thus, while the self-reports usually are described as objective, the responses truly are subjective.

People can distort, defend, and deceive in an effort to influence the answers. It may tell us about ourselves, but it is not the most valid source for insight into our hard-wired talents.

Multi-rater feedback surveys present a similar weakness. The multi-rater survey combines self-reported information with commentary from others' observations. Critics dismiss these as so-called reputation polls. Like the self-report tool, this has some utility in leadership development, but it will *not* find the individual's hard wiring in an objective way.

One of the best indicators of natural abilities lies in the analysis of objective work samples. A work sample asks an individual to solve a pre-defined problem or respond to a pre-defined task within a fixed timed period. The Highlands Ability Battery (THAB) uses this approach.

THAB measures an individual's abilities and helps a person understand how knowledge of these abilities can guide him or her through vital choices.

The THAB Process

The completion of the work samples is the first of a three-part process. The second consists of a 30-page analytical report that the individual shares with a consultant who interprets the report. The final part is a two-hour, one-on-one session with the consultant who helps you understand the results.

THAB identifies the unique sets of abilities within each of us. It has a simple, but powerful goal: finding our strengths as a guide for seeking work roles that allow us to excel. Think of hard-wired abilities as those productive strengths that we inherently use when solving recurring problems each day. Our strengths for leadership development are built on what we are hard wired to do!

Click [here](#) to read the full article and illustration.

Thomas Tavantzis is the director of organizational psychology programs at Saint Joseph's University, President of IMD Consulting, and a senior Highland's Company trainer. You can reach him by email at thomas.tavantzis@sju.edu.

Book Excerpt: *In Action: Developing Effective Leadership Programs*, edited by Jack J. Phillips and Franklin C. Ashby

Chapter: Developing Effective Supervisors
Carole S. Aslani and Michael Masternak

Background

Michigan's Family Independence Agency provides temporary financial assistance to needy individuals and families and protects children and vulnerable adults from abuse and neglect. FIA employs nearly 13,000 staff located in each of Michigan's 83 counties. The well-being of the most vulnerable of Michigan's citizens counts heavily on the leadership strength of FIA.

In early 1997, an early retirement program was offered to FIA staff, and by June 1 (the last date to take advantage of the early-out program), more than 1,500 employees had retired from the agency. Over the next several months, most of the mission-critical line staff and first-line supervisors were replaced.

During the same time period, FIA was revamping the New Supervisor Institute. The NSI is a competency-based training program designed to give newly promoted supervisors the skills they needed to provide effective leadership. By the time the first NSI was scheduled, more than 230 new supervisors had been appointed.

An agency reorganization resulted in the placement of the newly created Office of Professional Development (OPD) in the Office of Human Resources (OHR). The OHR director believed that it was critical to be able to offer the NSI to

all of the agency's newly appointed supervisors. The institute plan, written by the consultant, provided for up to 80 seats per year, providing 20 seats per quarter. This schedule was appropriate for the quality issues addressed in the plan. Although this schedule would meet the agency's needs for supervisory training given normal turnover, it would not address the cumulative need that had developed since the early retirements. An alternative was needed.

Changing the institute curriculum plan was not an agreeable alternative because we didn't want to compromise quality for speed. The NSI consists of 10 days of classroom training, scheduled over a five-month period, with three consecutive days being scheduled in each of the first three months, followed by a final "graduation day" in the fifth month. The institute plan also included individual training needs assessments (pre- and post-training self-assessments), interim practical assignments (participants complete these between sessions), and professional reading (participants are given texts).

Supervisors invited to participate in the institute had from zero to 18 months of on-the-job supervisory experience prior to attending. Participants were recruited from county offices statewide, state office sections, and juvenile justice institutions managed by FIA.

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"The curriculum design addresses a variety of adult learning principles. Each module involves the learner in one or more activities to ensure full participation and engage all the senses in the process of learning."

Book Excerpt (continued from pg.6)

Each supervisor was responsible for managing one or more agency programs, as well as six to 10 staff members. When asked how much experience they had as workers prior to promotion, the responses ranged from none (they were hired from another government agency) to 30 years. Attendance at the institute was completely voluntary. Each class is limited to 20 participants to ensure each participant's questions are answered. All supervisors were new to the tasks of supervising; however, in general, each had technical expertise in their program areas. FIA's focus is primarily social work, assistance payments, and protection of citizens, so each class included participants with master of social work (MSW) degrees, other human service degrees, as well as many with high school diplomas. FIA is currently staffed with 75 percent female employees. NSI participants are 40 percent male and 60 percent female, with representative diversity in all classifications.

This competency-based institute curriculum includes technical topics with faculty composed of subject matter experts (practitioners from the various units of the agency) presenting topics such as selection and hiring, budget, performance management, labor relations, internal controls, affirmative action, automation/systems, and professional development. Other "soft skills" such as mission/vision/goals of FIA, leadership, team building, communication, effective meetings, time management, listening, information management, business ethics, and diversity were to be delivered by a consultant under contract with the agency.

The curriculum design addresses a variety of adult learning principles. Each module involves the learner in one or more activities to ensure full participation and engage all the senses in the process of learning. Typical design elements found in the curriculum are games, presentation/discussion, skill practice, peer training, videos, role plays, pretests and posttests, and self-study. We were focused on the supervisor competencies, so we structured activities to promote transfer of learning. Flow of the topics was correlated with the highest-rated problem areas identified during the supervisor competency research conducted October to December 1997. We had found performance management and labor relations to be a top priority for supervisors, so we placed it on Days 2 and 3 of the institute, with a follow-up on Day 4.

Support for the curriculum design was immediate from participants because several attendees were dealing with tough employee problems. Supervisors shared the behavior problems of their staff with the office of labor relations trainers and got the policy and procedural support they so desperately needed.

Click [here](#) to read the full chapter.

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Book Review: Leadership Training, by Lou Russell

Stephanie Sussan

Conducting leadership training courses always seems to pose the same challenge. The audience asks: Who are *you*—a trainer—to tell *me*—an established leader—how to lead my organization?

Lou Russell answers that difficult question quite simply: Become a leader yourself. In *Leadership Training*, the fifth book in ASTD's WorkShop Series, Russell continually underscores the importance of taking the practical, ready-to-use programs in the book *before* delivering them. Leaving the lecture method behind, Russell focuses on experimental programs that help shape the attitude of program participants.

Based on sound research, proven training basics, adult-learning theories, and 10 core leadership competencies, this book is designed to help both the novice trainer and the experienced trainer who is new to leadership training. The book, packed with information for whatever you need—half-day, full-day, and multi-day workshops—also includes an accompanying CD with all the assessments and exercises necessary to get results from executive leaders, middle managers, project managers, and high-potential staff members who could become tomorrow's leaders.

Similar to the other WorkShop Series books, Russell litters the pages with icons that help the reader quickly find key information. In addition, each chapter begins with a section called "What's in This Chapter," and ends with

a section called "What to Do Next?" This simple outline makes it easy to navigate the book and determine exactly what you need to do to design an effective program.

Throughout the early chapters, Russell tells you where to find the related assessments and exercises—yet one more tactic that helps you quickly navigate this 200+ page book.

Lastly, the book doesn't end when your program ends. Chapter 9 outlines what follow-up work you should do, including how to conduct reviews, tips for follow-up sessions, and ideas for continuing leadership learning.

I strongly recommend this book for any trainer tasked with creating a leadership program that gets results.

Stephanie Sussan is the former editor of Info-line—ASTD's premier monthly how-to journal, and the current editor of OD/Leadership Network News and ROI Network News. You can reach her by email at stephanie_sussan@hotmail.com.

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"No one can teach another person leadership. Leadership is something you must teach yourself. Workshops can grow skills, knowledge, and attitude. Although there are skills and knowledge components to this material, it is primarily designed to affect the attitude of the participants."

Leadership-Development Resources

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