

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

UNREST

WITH OUR ECONOMY IN AN APPARENT FREE-FALL, THERE IS A LOT OF PESSIMISM SURROUNDING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND ITS USE IN ORGANIZATIONS TODAY. SO WHAT'S WRONG?

By Paula Ketter

LE

Millions of dollars are being spent annually on leadership development programs, but corporate America is in crisis, confidence in leaders is plummeting, and a recent DDI survey finds that more than one-third of all new leaders fail. What's wrong with leadership development?

"The bar is higher," says Richard S. Wellins, senior vice president of Development Dimensions International. "Leaders need to manage globally. There has been more stockholder accountability and failure at the top of organizations. The job may not be as easy as it used to be. The workforce is more diverse and more demanding."

Is it really all about expectations of a leader or is it more complex? Is there confusion about the definition of a leader? Are leadership development programs falling short in their skills development, design, delivery, and accountability? Or, are organizations falling short in our selection of high potentials?

Whatever the reason, there is a lot of pessimism surrounding leadership development and its use in organizations today.

"I think we toss around the word 'leadership' a lot, and I think all of us assume we know what it means," says Mary Key, leadership pillar director for the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp). "I think leadership means different things to different organizational

DOES NOT FIT ALL



LISTEN TO THIS FEATURE
at www.astd.org/TD/TDpodcasts.htm

cultures. Each organization, especially if it is creating a leadership development program, really needs to get clear on a definition of leadership and what a successful leader will look like within that organization.”

Organizations can't afford to wait until the need arises to develop leaders, and many recognize the importance of leadership development, but there are plenty of questions surrounding what leadership development is and how to design and deliver it.

“One of the biggest mistakes we have made as leadership development practitioners is to assume there is one model of effective leadership,” Wellins says. “I travel the world, and I like to talk to people who sit next to me on an airplane. I always ask them what they do. In the 30 years that I have traveled, no one has ever said, ‘I’m a leader.’ To me, leadership is a profession.”

There is no one-size-fits-all program that works for all people and all organizations. Daily, there are

team building events, but there is very little evidence on what works and what doesn't.

“There is such a demand for leadership development and so many people are trying to get it right,” says Jennifer Martineau, group director for global research for the Center for Creative Leadership. “One of the challenges of leadership development is that it is treated too often as a short-term fix to a problem. It can't be. To really and truly develop leaders, it has to be a longer term process.”

Leadership development programs

Leadership development programs come in many different forms. Just as there is no clear-cut definition of a leader, there are also many different ways to create an effective development program for high potentials. But all programs should have these three specific characteristics.



There are boot camps, week-long leadership retreats, and team building events, but there is very little evidence on what works and what doesn't.

articles, books, and blogs produced about everything you need to know about characteristics of a leader and how to design a successful leadership program. There are boot camps, week-long leadership retreats, and

Leadership is context and situation specific. Leadership development programs should be created around an organization's culture and should mirror the values and goals of that culture. “Many times, we pull people

Learn

out to take a course—it's like going to a monastery. You contemplate life, and then you get thrown back into the real world," says Doug Lynch, vice dean of the Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania.

"When you are in the real world, temptation is there, and it's harder not to commit sin. Yet, most programs are designed where they pull people out of the workplace. Leadership development is an ongoing process of development, not just 'we can teach you to be a leader in three days.'"

Leadership development is an intellectual endeavor. Leadership should not be reactionary, Lynch explains. "We should spend time trying to teach future leaders how to use evidence and how to ask questions," Lynch explains. "There have been a lot of books written about leadership, but how come the world is not in better shape?"

The world is flat. Globalization is rapidly changing the way business is done, and leaders need to adapt to those changes. "Doing three hours of cultural sensitivity training doesn't cut it," Lynch says. "There is a lot of that going on, and it seems quite dated and American-centric. Most people are not thinking about the

global question properly and what it means for leadership."

The organization's culture must support the individual and his new skill set, and must hold that person and his manager accountable for the new knowledge.

"This puts the onus on the workplace learning and performance professionals, managers, and participants to support an environment where high-potential individuals can continue to learn and apply what they've learned in the weeks, months, and years to come," explains Martineau. "It requires a lot of fortitude on the part of organizations. I don't see a vast amount of organizations with that fortitude."

Key agrees. "You can have the best leadership program in the world and if it is not linked to an accountability system in the organization where people are rewarded as leaders for modeling the values and acting ethically, then it will fail," she says. "How you build the organization's culture to be one of accountability for ethical behavior and for modeling values is critical."

The advent of e-learning and the excitement surrounding virtual worlds is changing the way companies are viewing global leadership brands. There is

more interest in coaching, mentoring, and action learning assignments.

"When I bought my first big screen television, I spent 80 percent of my budget on the big screen and 20 percent of my budget on the speakers," Wellins explains. "I had a great picture, but not a very good system. I think that aptly describes the state of leadership development today. I think we know what training methods work best in what environments, and I think we know the importance of coaching and mentoring, but we are falling down in execution. It's not what we do; it's how we do it. Leadership development must be incorporated into performance plans."

Interpersonal skills

High potentials tend to have the business and technical skills to create successful organizational strategy, but many are lacking the interpersonal skills to motivate employees and communicate effectively.

"It is important for learning and development professionals to make the connection between soft skills and business skills," says Martineau. "If leaders can't communicate with people, motivate employees, and help

LEADERS

individuals understand how to work with each other, then they will fail as leaders. WLP professionals need to explain how having soft skills will improve the organization overall. This puts a large burden on learning professionals, but it is something they have to do and can do.”

According to the DDI “Global Leadership Forecast 2008-2009,” survey respondents said leaders fail because of a lack of leadership skills—facilitating change, building a team, and coaching—and a lack of interpersonal skills—building relationships, networking, and communicating.

and promoting them in the first place,” Wellins says. “And they need to promote them based on not just competency but emotional intelligence as well. I don’t think enough companies are putting enough weight on that factor.”

An i4cp study, “Succession Planning Highlight Report,” finds that succession

“I travel the world, and I like to talk to people who sit next to me on an airplane. I always ask them what they do. In the 30 years that I have traveled, no one has ever said, ‘I’m a leader.’ To me, leadership is a profession.” Richard S. Wellins, senior vice president of DDI

Along with an ability to communicate, Lynch says that leaders need to have an ethical center and an ability to look outside rather than within. “If leaders don’t have the ability to understand ethical dilemmas, they are dead,” says Lynch. “Even though leaders will look different to different organizations, if we don’t think about how leaders are transparent and trustworthy, then their development will fail.

“Historically, we have a lot of leaders who are very good at operational excellence,” Lynch adds. “The world is getting very complicated. The ability to look upstream and downstream and find different and interesting partners will be important.”

“We have assessment data on thousands of leaders who go through structured assessment simulations—the SATs of leadership—and the top area of deficiency for top level and middle managers is coaching,” says Wellins. “We are finding that it doesn’t get better over time. Senior leaders do not score better in coaching than middle managers. Experience does not lead to better interpersonal skills.”

Succession planning

In the end, it’s all about selecting the right leader or person with the propensity to lead.

“I think companies need to put far more emphasis on selecting leaders

planning—which includes transparency, retention, the development of high potentials, the dilemma surrounding internal versus external successors, and the management and execution of the plan—will be among the top five challenges that executives will face in the future, followed by leadership development skills among leaders and recruiting and selecting talent.

Although most companies recognize the importance of having a succession plan, few have a succession plan in place. Of the companies that do have succession plans in place, most processes are for top-level executives.

“The evidence suggests that despite all the rhetoric about the importance

HRP

ACTION LEARNING HOW-TO

of succession planning, leaders are a commodity,” Lynch says. “What do most companies do? They buy leaders by hiring them from the outside.”

We are now in a knowledge economy where people matter. The companies that succeed have people strategies. Lynch, who teaches classes for the executive program in work-based learning leadership at Wharton, has three CEOs in the program. “Who would have thought I’d have CEOs attending?” Lynch adds. “But they are all saying, ‘For me to win, I have got to figure out this people thing and your program is the only program in the country that is stressing it.’ I find that fascinating.”

The i4cp study finds that 34 percent of organizations with more than 10,000 employees are not prepared to fill a leadership role. A recent AchieveGlobal study finds that some of the barriers that prevent companies from implementing a plan are the complexity of the process, the time investment, and the incurred budget expense.

“There are a lot of things that come into play when companies consider creating a succession plan,” Key says. “The culture in some organizations makes people uncomfortable projecting who might be in the next slot or who is being considered. In some organizations, there is still this veil of secrecy. They don’t want to discourage employees who may not be high potentials.” **T+D**

Paula Ketter is editor of T+D; pketter@astd.org.

Action Learning Projects

Participants will be involved in an action learning process that will incorporate and enable them to develop and apply the following leadership skills: teamwork, problem solving, communication, goal setting, influencing, and coaching. Each person will have an opportunity to participate in both a facilitation and presentation skill practice.

The goal of the action learning process is to encourage employee development while solving or attempting to solve real-life problems. Action learning demonstrates the power of learning while doing. The learning is based on real-life leadership projects within the organization. It focuses on complex problems that touch a number of parts of the organization.

In action learning, team members research the topic, present the plan, and execute it. Projects can last a few weeks or a year, depending on the nature of the project. The following is a list of potential projects for a range of action learning groups:

- increasing productivity
- succession planning
- improving various processes or systems developing benchmarks for performance
- strategic planning
- developing a customer profitability system
- increasing sales
- improving corporate communication
- designing a mentoring program

- developing a wellness program
- designing an employee reward and recognition program.

Benefits of Action Learning

Action learning is a very effective leadership development technique. Because it is an active learning process, individuals learn more rapidly and are able to apply their knowledge and skills immediately. Those who participate in action learning projects benefit in the following ways:

- They develop critical thinking skills along with questioning and problem-solving skills.
- They learn how to be effective team members.
- They gain more knowledge about the organization’s people, products, and processes.
- They develop presentation and facilitation skills.
- They improve communication skills, including giving and receiving feedback.
- They develop networks and relationships with others in the organization.
- They gain fresh perspectives.
- They learn new problem-solving approaches.

Excerpted from Leadership Development Basics by Karen Lawson. To order this ASTD publication, visit <http://store.astd.org>.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

T+D welcomes your comments. If you would like to respond to this article, or any article that appears in T+D, please send your feedback to mailbox@astd.org. Responses sent to the mailbox are considered available for publication and may be edited for length and clarity.



YES!

I want to subscribe for only \$99, (\$165 Outside the U.S.) to T+D magazine—12 monthly issues that keep me at the forefront of workplace learning and performance.

TD0833

Order Information

Name: _____

Title: _____ Company: _____

Address: _____ City: _____

State/Province: _____ Zip/Postal Code: _____

Country: _____ Email: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Check One: \$99 (USA) \$165 (Outside the US)
 VISA MasterCard Amex Discover Check (USD) (Payable to T+D)

Card Number: _____ Expiration Date _____

Signature: _____

Fax this form to 1.703.683.9591 OR Mail to: T+D, P.O. Box 1567; Merrifield, Virginia, 22116-9812, USA

Order online at store.astd.org
Phone: 1.800.628.2783 (1.703.683.8100 outside the US)

Orders processed within three business days.
If you have questions, please contact subscriberservice@astd.org

Prices valid through 12/31/2008. If you should wish to cancel your subscription for any reason, you will receive a refund on all unmailed issues.
Your subscription to T+D may be a tax deductible business expense.
Please allow 6 to 8 weeks to receive your first issue.

T+D is published by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)

010859.63250

