The 3 Things You Need to Know About Leadership Development

Learning Journeys for Strategy Execution

There is nothing worse than a missed opportunity, especially in today’s high-stakes environment. And unfortunately, there are a lot of missed opportunities in leadership development. HBR estimates that “only 10% of training programs are effective,” and that “the mismatch between leadership development as it exists and what leaders actually need is widening.”¹, ²

Despite this harsh reality, avoiding leadership training is not a solution. Without effective leadership development programs, companies will watch their people flock to other opportunities where they see more potential for career growth. At the end of the day, CEOs need leadership development programs that make the company an appealing place to work, build critical talent, and enable successful strategy execution.

Additionally, the lack of effective leadership training programs is costly. Trainingindustry.com reports that large companies increased their average training expenditures from $14.3 million in 2016 to $17 million in 2017.³ $17 million dollars is a lot to gamble on leadership training programs that have a 90% chance of failure. And this number only represents the cost of the training itself, not the opportunity cost of having people off the job for a few days.

The Failures of Traditional Corporate Learning

Typical corporate learning programs tend to follow a predictable pattern. It’s usually positioned as a training event, unconnected to the corporate strategic agenda, lacking the proper leadership support, and measured afterwards with smile-sheets. Unsurprisingly, participating employees, devoid of leader engagement, often find themselves in one of two clichéd categories: the “resistant employee” who feels forced to attend the training and would rather be at work or the “vacationer” who enjoys time away from work, but is there for all the wrong reasons.
Many training programs are specifically designed to build skills and capabilities based on competency models. These programs are conducted in generic, academic modules that do not incorporate the company’s strategy or business model. Additionally, most corporate training leverages traditional approaches that rely heavily on lectures, standard PowerPoint presentations, and case studies. To make things worse, these are often delivered by low-level trainers or ill-prepared internal speakers who do not have grasp of the company’s business, strategic priorities, KPIs, and culture.

Once the training program has ended, employees usually return to their job equipped with new knowledge and capabilities, but fail to apply it. The most cited reasons include: “I did not understand why it was important”; “I did not see how the program was related to my job”; “My boss did not set expectations or hold me accountable for on the job action;” and, most prominently, “It took me several days to dig out from emails that piled up while I was away – the training seems like a distant memory.” As a result, job performance remains stagnant, strategy execution stalls and delivered business impact is negligible.

So, here’s the multi-million dollar question: how can you develop your leaders in a way that actually creates on-the-job behavior change and delivers better results to the business?

**Three Key Tenets of Successful Learning Journeys**

Training today has come a long way from where it once was. Learning initiatives are designed to drive business results, and when done right, are a source of strategic differentiation and competitive advantage. A well-thought-out Learning Journey systematically addresses and overcomes the failures of traditional corporate learning programs or stand-alone modules. While each Learning Journey is unique, there are three key tenants of successful learning journeys:

1. **The Learning Needs to be Highly Contextual**
   The learning program should therefore be customized to your business context so learners can see their own roles in action and more readily link the learnings gained in the program back to workplace. Context is king and it is essential for successful knowledge transfer. What the learning looks like depends entirely on the situation of your organization. Key questions or ask: What challenges are you addressing? What results are you driving for? What does great leadership look like for your organization? What are the outcomes the organization is looking to achieve?

2. **People Learn Best by Doing**
   Experience tells us that for learning to really stick, participants need to practice new behaviors repeatedly before they will implement them. This is why business simulations and experiential learning are such powerful tools. Simulations provide leaders with the opportunity to actually experience what they will be expected to do back on the job, trying out new behaviors in a risk-free environment. This allows leaders to experience years of on-the-job learning in a few days, or even hours.

   Neuroscience proves this point – humans learn most when emotional circuits in the brain are activated, and the best way to activate these circuits is through lived experience.\(^4\),\(^5\)

3. **Learning should be Measurable**
   We also know that learning is not just a “one and done” situation, it is a continuous experience. In most cases, learning journeys, which blend a variety of learning methodologies and tools over time, are the most powerful means for shifting mindsets, building capabilities, and driving
sustained, effective results. Understanding and knowing how to measure results is an essential component of making learning journeys effective. Participants need to be assessed throughout the process so that leaders can evaluate progress, demonstrate ROI, and ensure that behavior changes are actually being implemented back on the job.

In comparison with traditional learning initiatives, the difference is profound. A one-day event is replaced by a holistic process engaging leaders, provide ongoing support, coaching and assessments, with a focus on enabling on-the-job application.

**Proven: Learning Journeys Drive Value at Leading Organizations**

An independent third-party evaluator measured the impact of a Learning Journey and found upon completion of the program:

- More than 90 percent rated it on the high-end of the training scale.
- 43 percent rated the training approach as the best they had ever experienced.
- Nearly 70 percent of a total of 161 participants, stated they had either already achieved results or expected to achieve results in the near term.

In comparison with traditional corporate learning, the difference achieved a profound 350 percent increase in training effectiveness.

The third party evaluator summarized, “The before-training dialogues between the leader and learner and the sense of accountability following the training resulted in a 70 percent training application rate. This exceptionally high impact rate attests to the thoroughness and care that the leadership team took, including special steps to ensure the program was not just a one-time classroom event, but that it included impact-enhancing tools and actions and provided additional follow-up resources and support.

Case in point: SAP, a traditional, on-premise software organization was shifting to the cloud in the face of disruptive change. To bring this transformation to life, SAP embarked on a learning journey, recognizing that trust and engagement were critical to making this shift. In putting together their learning intervention the company targeted all five levels of their leadership pipeline and created journeys that were highly contextual, experiential, and results-oriented. After touching 60% of leaders at SAP, their Leadership Trust score increased from 28 to 61, and employee engagement among first-level leaders increased 3.4%. As a result, Net Operating Income increased an estimated €40-50 million due to higher productivity, innovation, and customer satisfaction.

To drive growth and sustain a competitive advantage, today’s leading organizations are strategically increasing investments in learning and development. This investment can maximize impact by effectively linking learning to performance and by adopting a Learning and Execution Journey approach. Leveraging a holistic approach, high-impact experiential learning tools and leader involvement, Learning and Execution Journeys assure real results—overcoming the documented failure rate of traditional corporate learning programs.

2. http://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Publication%20Files/16-121_bc0f03ce-27de-4479-a90e-9d78b8da7b67.pdf