What do you wish you’d know 10 years ago? New thoughts in leadership development

International Leadership Conference
30 July – 1st August 2007
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The research process

18 months of research into leadership development.

Methodology:

1. Hypothesis generation – leadership faculty brainstorm – what is the current thinking?

2. Testing hypothesis – 17 interviews with senior leaders, HR professionals, high-potentials
Back to the drawing board…

“Ah yes.” Merlin said, “How did I know to set breakfast for two. Now ordinary people are born forwards in Time, if you understand what I mean, and nearly everything in the world goes forward too. This makes it quite easy for ordinary people to live. But unfortunately I was born at the wrong end of time, and I have to live backwards from in front, while surrounded by a lot of people living forward from behind…

‘Exceptional leaders cultivate the Merlin—like habit of acting in the present moment as ambassadors of a radically different future, in order to imbue their organizations with a breakthrough vision of what it is possible to achieve’

The research process cont..

3. Focus groups – elicit critical incidents learning

- What have been the critical incidents that have shaped your leadership development?

- What do you wish you had known 10 years ago?
Critical incidents and hindsight learning

Critical incidents
Being a manager
Being managed
Managing others
Fulfilling the mgt role
Dev corporate awareness
Where work and life meet
Self insight

Elements related to the job

Elements related to the individual
Critical incidents and hindsight learning

- Hindsight learning
- Building a career
- Relating to others
- Personal learning
- Stepping outside of the box
- Power & politics
- Focus of energy
- Sense of self
Critical incidents and hindsight learning

Critical incidents

Being a manager
Managing others
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Fulfilling the mgt role
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Hindsight learning

Building a career
Relating to others
Personal learning
Stepping outside of the box
Power & politics
Focus of energy
Sense of self
The core and peripheral model of leadership development

- Sense of self
- Stepping outside of the box
- Building a career
- Corporate awareness
- Focus of energy
- Where work and life meet
- Managing others
- Being managed
- Power and politics
- Fulfilling the management role
- Being a manager

Ashridge Business School  http://www.ashridge.org.uk
The Future Leaders Experience

In 2004 we piloted the first Future Leaders Experience. We have now run 8 programmes.

The FLE

1. Is highly experiential
2. Aims to build ‘muscle memory’
3. Supports the core-periphery model, focusing on self-awareness
4. Challenges the individual and the group to take full responsibility for their learning, and the learning of others
5. Operates on a ‘mousetrap’ principle
Future Leaders Experience

**FLE Research**

'What you wish you’d known 10 yrs ago'

**Merlin effect**

**Pre-Programme**

- Leadership learning guide
- Development journal
- Leadership coach
- Seek feedback
- Organisation sponsor/mentor

**During Programme**

Arrive evening
Briefed on scenario - 2015
Directors in an organisation

Next 2 days

Make strategic decisions
Work as a team of directors
Deal with critical incidents

**Post Programme**

- Review tape
- Review with sponsor/mentor
- Action plans
- The learning continues...

**ALP**

6 months later
- Leadership coach – 1.5 hrs

**TLJ**

1 month later
- Leadership coach – 1.5 hrs

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Our latest research...

Over the last 8 months we have continued our research, including holding interviews with 20 participants from our first FLE programmes held 2 – 2 ½ years ago. We explored a number of themes including:

1. What they recalled / applied / learnt from the programme, i.e. was long term ‘muscle memory’ working?
2. What critical incidents they have experienced since the programme
3. What specifically enabled effective long term learning
Our latest research...

Participants felt the programme helped on the following fronts:

1. Building confidence
2. Gaining a wider knowledge of different leadership styles
3. Raising self-awareness
4. Improving strategic vision
5. Building ‘muscle memory’

it’s really good that you’re not just sat in a classroom listening to somebody who’s done this, this and this and telling you about how good it is and this is what you should do. It really is as if you are working at that particular [leadership] role
Our latest research...

Critical moments since the programme seem to concur with our original study:

1. Assuming more managerial or leadership responsibility (with promotion, or when one’s manager is unexpectedly absent)
2. A career changing event which forces individuals to reflect on work / life meaning and balance (e.g. redundancy)
3. A particularly difficult leadership task (e.g. leading downsizing, recruiting key staff, difficult / political relationships and conversations)
Our latest research...

And when asked what they knew now that they wished they had known 2 ½ years ago, they answered:

1. Self belief / self awareness
2. To better understand the array of leadership styles / approaches; “there’s no one elusive leadership style”
3. To be open minded and try new things
Our latest research...

Successful long term ‘muscle memory’ seems to rely on

1. A highly experiential, and real, learning environment
2. An emotional journey
3. Time to reflect and make sense of the experience
4. A commitment from the participant to stretch themselves and take risks

Experience is very, very important and I think it’s only experience which makes people good leaders – experience provides that frame of reference – ‘this is what I did last time, this is what worked well’
The tutors’ experience...

The core tutor team spend considerable time reviewing their own experience of the programme:

1. The temptation to ‘rescue’: to intervene or not to intervene?
2. The extraordinary challenge in fully realising own responsibility for learning
3. The assumptions of boundaries and constraints
4. The journey of emotions for both participants and tutors
5. People are in different places at the end of the residential element – implications for evaluation methods
In summary

1. It is possible, and effective, in leadership development to build ‘muscle memory’
2. Helping to build self awareness and self confidence for leaders-in-waiting is paramount, as demonstrated in the core-peripheral model

Therefore the key questions for organisations are:

1. What critical incidents are your leaders-in-waiting likely to experience?
2. Does your leadership development currently give your talent a range of learning opportunities, including experiential
3. Do you support your future leaders through their critical incidents and help them to reflect and learn from them?
Thank you & questions?

Further information on this research is available at:

www.ashridge.com

On the Research and Faculty pages on Melissa Carr’s homepage

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