

# Training & Management Development Methods

## World-class leadership development takes off at aircraft manufacturer

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In summer 2001, a small team of learning designers from an aircraft manufacturer and a UK business school met to put the finishing touches to a leadership programme for aspiring executives and talent across the UK business. The team planned the design to be a unique combination of development and education, drawing the best from the partnership between a world-ranked management school and a leading technology business.

Several months of collaborative sessions between the manufacturer's managers, business-school academics and facilitators had clarified the mission of the programme:

- to improve the individual and collective capability among leaders to meet strategic and operational goals; and
- to create a network of leaders who can manage cultural and organizational diversity in a turbulent commercial environment.

The partners agreed that a programme design was needed that could attract, retain and develop talent by integrating leading-edge theory and practice into a cohesive learning experience.

### *Learning philosophy*

A strong set of values was created early in the design process and this has been sustained through the nine-year life of the programme. The

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concept of personal mastery, championed by Peter Senge, runs as a foundation to the whole programme[1].

Participants are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. The development of their leadership skills comes through engagement with fresh ideas, critical thinking and work-based application. Unlike more traditional leadership development, the emphasis is on an inside-out approach to learning, where material is aligned to individual and strategic needs. In practice, this means knowledge is introduced and timed for maximum effect in learning about leadership. From the onset, it was planned to make the impact of the programme on the business predictable through skilful design, customization of learning and regular reviews.

#### ***The impact of world events***

A few weeks after the design meeting, the events of 9/11 at the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington changed the way that airline travel is managed and experienced. The impact of these acts of terrorism brought huge pressures to the global aircraft-manufacturing industry and several key players immediately reduced their spending on training and development. The business school braced itself for the impact on the embryonic programme.

In the context of economic and political pressures, senior leadership at the aircraft manufacturer decided to launch the programme on time. Nine years later, more than 350 managers have completed the programme and its middle-manager equivalent programme targeted at team leaders across all parts of the business.

The evaluation data from this customized approach to leadership development has resulted in significant benefits to the manufacturer's managers and their teams. Joint evaluation processes and annual learning reviews have provided evidence of both the impact and sustainability of learning. The resultant network of senior and middle managers has brought practical support and confidence to a wide and diverse community of learners and enabled the manufacturer to capitalize on business relationships.

#### ***What the organization settled on***

The organization settled on a design of leadership development where knowledge is acquired through theoretical input, work-based application and action learning, supported by personal growth and coaching. The outcome is a novel blend of personal, intellectual and organizational development, which works because the delivery team encourages

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participants to take responsibility for both the process and outcome of their learning.

The measurement of the impact of learning on individuals and teams at the aircraft manufacturer was a novel creation of the partnership and was deliberately termed a business transfer to emphasize the process of learning throughout the programme.

#### ***The business-transfer process***

The business-transfer process aims to:

- demonstrate that the programme is delivering tangible benefits in the form of personal growth and organizational development;
- deliver tangible and measureable benefits in the business through self-managed project teams with senior-level sponsorship; and
- introduce a learning process into the programme that adds value for participants, sponsors, the aircraft manufacturer's HR team and executive stakeholders.

#### ***Background***

Historically, leadership development has been a field where evaluation of the benefits to the business has been largely informal and anecdotal. The danger is that evaluation is an afterthought to the design of the development programme or a mechanistic process of collecting quantitative data that delivers few insights into learning. The values of a leadership programme must become a shared commitment between all stakeholders, whatever their role and voice. A robust evaluation process, agreed at the design stage, is essential (Ready and Conger, 2003).

The business-transfer process designed into the programme is a novel, phased approach to mapping benefits and learning about leadership, which has grown in success and popularity over the past nine years.

Participants work in small, self-managed teams and conduct a consulting assignment with a business sponsor. The scoping process leads into a feasibility exercise that is reported on after eight weeks. The key sponsors and the business-school programme team assess the first reports and give feedback to enable the teams to progress to the second phase. This phase involves more extensive research and development, which involves the teams in both primary and secondary research. The teams frequently go outside the aircraft manufacturer to benchmark practice and performance in other organizations. Benchmarking can take place with a related industry or involve contact with leaders and teams in totally different settings.

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At the end of this phase (of 12 weeks' duration) the teams make a presentation and receive feedback from both the aircraft manufacturer and business-school stakeholders. This enables the transfer teams to progress to the final phase of implementation and learning transfer, which takes approximately eight weeks. At this stage, sign off is given from senior aircraft-manufacturer sponsors and there is tangible and measureable evidence of the impact of leadership development on the business.

Throughout the three phases of the business transfer, the participants are supported with taught modules, action learning and one-to-one coaching. The material is customized to support the progression of the transfer work. Some material is core to the programme and some produced on demand as the need arises.

### ***The non-traditional role of the business school***

The programme is accredited to master's level and allows participants to gain a postgraduate diploma (120 credits). This does not, however, involve a traditional pattern of lectures, classrooms or a "tell" model of learning.

The needs of mature, practising managers are distinctive. Investment in learning and development is costly and key stakeholders require evidence of value for money. The visionary leadership demonstrated by the aircraft manufacturer after September 2001 allowed the business school to experience partnership with fellow professionals in the aircraft manufacturer. The result was a leadership-development programme that made a difference to the personal and professional development of 350 managers. Research conducted in 2005 and 2007 indicates that the impact of the development has been sustainable. Certainly, the network of diverse groups and individuals after nine years is impressive.

The learning at the business school points to an urgent need for fresh thinking about how academics and practising managers work together to develop learning about leadership that can help organizations to cope with turbulence and change. The experience of working alongside colleagues in the aircraft manufacturer is that an expert model of development and education is limiting. It has the potential to disempower highly experienced managers and does not promote experimentation with new ideas and theories. The programme operates like a laboratory, encouraging participants to test out ideas, trial new behaviours and prototype strategies that would be too risky to share with the outside world. The business-transfer process allows for a

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systematic and rigorous approach to solving a business issue, which then builds confidence across all stakeholders in the final outcome.

Throughout the business-transfer process, the greatest advantage of working with a university is access to experts who can operate as an independent third party, with no vested interest in the organizational politics that affect managerial decisions

This story is possible through the dedication and hard work of key colleagues:

- the aircraft manufacturer's HR team;
- key senior leaders and project sponsors; and
- the business school's tutors, facilitators and coaches.

#### Note

1. Personal mastery is seen to be a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence and their growth areas but they are also deeply self-confident. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see the journey as the reward (Senge, 1990).

#### References

- Ready, D.A. and Conger, J. (2003), "Why leaders' development efforts fail", Center for Effective Organizations, May.
- Senge, P. (1990), *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Doubleday Currency, New York, NY.

#### Points for thought

- The business school's experience of working alongside colleagues in the aircraft manufacturer is that an expert model of development and education is limiting. It has the potential to disempower experienced managers and does not promote experimentation with new ideas and theories.
- The programme operates like a laboratory, encouraging participants to test out ideas, trial new behaviours and prototype strategies that would be too risky to share with the outside world.
- Joint evaluation processes and annual learning reviews have provided evidence of both the impact and sustainability of learning.

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**Social implications** – The paper highlights the fact that, across UK industry and commerce as a whole, some 80 per cent of employees consider their appraisals to be a waste of time because managers are poor at confronting the truth. It offers a way of cutting down communication “noise”, while promoting greater openness and honesty.

**Originality/value** – The paper details rigorous action that companies can take to combat the employee complaint of poor internal communications.

**Paper type** Case study

#### **World-class leadership development takes off at aircraft manufacturer**

**David Pollitt**

**Keywords** *Aerospace industry, United Kingdom, Leadership development, Training evaluation*

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to describe collaboration between an aircraft manufacturer and a UK business school on a leadership programme for aspiring executives.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper explains the reasons for the programme, the way in which it was designed and delivered and the results it has achieved. In particular, the business-transfer process designed into the programme, which is a novel, phased approach to mapping benefits and learning about leadership is described.

**Findings** – Over the last nine years, more than 350 managers have completed the programme and its middle-manager equivalent programme targeted at team leaders across all parts of the business. Joint evaluation processes and annual learning reviews have provided evidence of both the impact and sustainability of learning.

**Practical implications** – It is claimed that the programme operates like a laboratory, encouraging participants to test ideas, trial new behaviours and prototype strategies that would be too risky to share with the outside world.

**Social implications** – The paper demonstrates how academics and practising managers can work together to develop learning about leadership that can help organizations to cope with turbulence and change.

**Originality/value** – The paper reveals that the business-transfer process allows for a systematic and rigorous approach to solving a business issue, which then builds confidence across all stakeholders in the final outcome.

**Paper type** Case study

#### **New ethos transforms attitudes and approaches at RS Components**

**David Pollitt**

**Keywords** *Customer service management, Organizational change, Empowerment, Training*

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to describe major strategic changes – supported by training and empowerment – in the customer-services department of RS Components.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper explains what gave rise to the changes and the effects they have had.

**Findings** – Practical examples are provided of how customer-service employees, less tied to following call scripts or completing a certain number of calls in a certain period of time, now have greater freedom to put the customer first.