

Teaching Versus Facilitating in Leadership Development: Trends in Business

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Abstract

Businesses use both classroom and facilitation forms of leadership development. In this article I describe over 20 leadership-development methods, placing them in either of two categories, classroom or facilitation. I then provide the results of a quick survey of leadership development companies on the Internet, over 200 in all, about which group of methods they used most commonly. Results suggest that facilitation, of both groups and individuals (in the form of coaching), is more common than might be expected and as suggested in research by others.

Introduction

Most companies offer some method, or combination of methods, of leadership development to their employees (Drew & Wah, 1999). For this study my goal was to identify different leadership development methods and to gauge the use of the different methods by businesses. More specifically, I wanted to determine if facilitated, experiential learning methods were now more common than classroom, lecture-format teaching methods. If facilitated leadership is on the increase and classroom teaching is on the decrease, this might suggest a major trend that would be of interest to leadership development educators, including management consultants such as myself.

In this article I first review over 20 leadership development methods which I group into two major categories--teaching and facilitating--and then divide each into two minor categories--groups and individuals. Then I report on a quick assessment I conducted of leadership development providers with sites on the Internet. Responses to my interview, although of a limited population, suggest that facilitated, action learning, for groups and individuals, is now used more commonly than classroom teaching methods.

Types of Leadership Development

For this study I divided all leadership-training methods into one of two major categories--teaching and facilitating. Teaching, within the context of this article, is the transfer of leadership information to groups or individuals by instructors who are to some degree experts. Teaching may take many forms; it can be synchronous (live) or asynchronous (delayed delivery in forms like books, videotapes, or computer-program simulations). Facilitating is the development of leadership information by aiding groups or individuals to discover the knowledge and skills about leadership within a process; the process is always experiential in nature and involves action. In this situation facilitators are viewed more as helpers who serve as guides in a process of discovery. It is within the experience in the process that the learning occurs.

Within these two major categories I divide the methods of leadership development into two sub-categories: those that relate to groups and those that relate to individuals.

Teaching Leadership to Groups

A common method of leadership development has been the lecture delivered in the classroom, where groups sit in the same room listening to and observing instructors (Hollenbeck & McCall, 1999). Other group methods also use the classroom or meeting setting where groups are engaged in discussion, or view videotapes or films (Bass, 1990), or listen to guest speakers who tell stories and give examples of leadership (Zenger, Ulrich, & Smallwood, 2000).

Teaching can also come in the form of case-studies, which present real-life situations that are then analyzed (Conger & Benjamin, 1999). Games and exercises in the classroom are also a form of teaching, although they are more experiential. An example of a theoretical problem-solving exercise from a military academy classroom is to plan how to cross a piranha-infested river using rope and pieces of timber (Ballantyne, 2000). Groups can also act out role-playing simulations where one person acts out the leader role and others act as followers (Bass, 1990).

Teleconferencing and telecourses are newer teaching methods. In one form of teletraining business "stars" are broadcast live via satellite to groups as large as 100,000, who assemble in public and private locations at one time (Nemec, 2001). In the telecourse participants call a teleconference number at a designated hour, listen to the instructor and other participants, ask questions, and respond to questions (Business Wire, 2001a).

Another method of teaching to groups includes the virtual classroom in which live online-instructors make presentations to students in real-time over the Web. Participants communicate with instructors via the Internet, or phone, in the same

real-time as in the traditional classroom, but using computer technology to communicate instead of being in the same physical setting (Business Wire, 2001b).

Teaching Leadership to Individuals

Two well-known methods of teaching leadership to individuals are mentoring and coaching. Mentoring is normally about imparting knowledge from mentors (executives or managers) to proteges (employees who partner with mentors to learn from them) within the same company (Thach, 1998; Bell, 2000). Mentors are called on to help develop the knowledge and skills of proteges but also can be used for cultural change by bringing the values of new employees into the organization (Barbian, 2002). Seventy-seven percent of *Training's* Top 100 training companies in 2002 made use of formal mentoring programs (Barbian, 2002).

When mentoring is done by non-employees such as external consultants, it is called coaching. The word "coach" in English was first used in the 1500s to refer to a carriage that conveyed valuable people from where they were to where they wanted to be; people can be coached to enhance specific skills, correct problem behaviors, or prepare for promotion (Witherspoon & White, 1997).

Other methods of teaching leadership to individuals include self-study methods in the form of books, articles, audiotapes, videotapes, and the newer technologies --- CD-ROM and the Internet. For example, CD-ROM programs can be run on a computer or Web sites connected to via the Internet that teach individuals through self-assessments and interactive activities (Johnson, 1999).

Facilitating Groups

As defined, facilitating is different from teaching in that trainers usually are process guides, and the activity is more experiential, collaborative and less didactic.

Action learning is a primary form of facilitated learning that has developed over the past half century. Action learning is linked to Great Britain where Reginald W. Revans (1978) helped twenty-two managers of coal mines work together in a real-time process to solve problems; the date was 1952. As defined by Revans, action learning engages people in solving real problems that, prior to the process, don't have solutions.

Revans recommends that facilitators not interact from a position of expertise in the process, but start from a position of not knowing along with the action-learners (Botham, 2001). Leadership learning occurs when individuals meet in the process to share facts they have collected, disclose their analyses of the origins of problems, invite suggestions from others on how to solve the problems, attempt to

solve the problems, and give the group the results of their problem-solving attempts. As a result of this process, managers develop new perceptions of what they are doing and gain self-respect and confidence (Revans, 1991).

As managers diagnose their problems during action learning, they ask themselves what they are trying to accomplish, what stands in their way, and what they can do about the obstacles in their paths. As managers attempt to implement the solutions to their problems, they ask themselves if there is anyone who knows about, cares about, and has the power to do anything about their problems.

Action learning is believed to have come to the United States in 1977 after Nancy Foy (1977) wrote an article about the use of the method in one of England's largest companies. Although the company was headed towards bankruptcy in 1963, sales and profits grew to unexpected highs (Brummer & Cowe, 1998). Action learning became part of the training method for the company after it had acquired 136 other companies (Pedler, 1997). Currently, many "best-practice companies" use action learning in their leadership development programs (Fulmer & Goldsmith, 2001).

Another way of facilitating group leadership development is through physical activity. One type of program is the "boot camp" where participants may dress in military uniforms and carry out exercises that involve ropes, carpets with electric shock, and paintball-guns used to shoot enemies during simulated night-attacks (Peterson, 2001; Berta, 2001). Closely related are outdoor leadership camps where groups are engaged in a series of physical events and reflections such as trying to approximate Navy S.E.A.L.-type training in desert-island faux "Survivor"-like exercises (Zemke & Zemke, 2001) that may include being out "in the middle of a Lake District" and taking five-mile walks (Gregory, 2000).

Another facilitation method that involves physical activity is the reconstruction and "living through" of a past event: a recreated case study. This type of engagement places groups in a role where they may both understand and feel the situation that existed, and hence better analyze decisions made. One such program has participants ride horses on a U.S. Civil War battlefield while they analyze decisions made over 135 years ago (Peterson, 2001). In another program, samurai warrior situations are used (PR Newswire, 2001). Rappelling down cliffs, sailing tall ships, and rafting down whitewater rapids are other examples of physical-activity programs that engage groups (Keller & Olson, 2001).

Facilitating can also take the form of aiding others during highly emotional or sensory exercises. For example, a facilitator may take a group to visit a maximum-security prison like Attica and talk to murderers (Thompson, 2001). Facilitators also might take a group to engage in sensory exercises, such as reading poetry and listening to a symphony orchestra (Zemke & Zemke, 2001).

Facilitating Individuals

In this category, one form of facilitating individual leadership development is for the facilitator to assist the individual in the design and implementation of personal-development plans. Working with the individual, the facilitator identifies skill or competencies that are believed to be necessary for optimum performance both on and off the job. Another way to facilitate individual growth in leadership is to engage the individual in their own exploration, their own boat camp or outdoor experience. Facilitators can use a multitude of techniques, such as 360-degree feedback and performance evaluations, to facilitate the individuals leadership development (Galvin, 2001).

Personal development plans have been one of the characteristics of effective leadership development programs. They have been used in such companies as General Electric (GE) under CEO Jack Welch and ARAMARK, a Fortune 500 international outsourcing conglomerate voted one of "America's Most Admired Companies" by *Fortune* (Brown, 1999-2000; Fortune, 2002a; Fortune 2002b). In addition, nearly 95 percent of *Training's* "Top 50 Training Organizations" in 2001 were found to have personal development plans that were linked to corporate objectives. Included on this list were Capital One Financial, NCR Corp., QUALCOMM, Dow Chemical, and American Standard (Galvin, 2001).

The Study

My interest in this study developed from a recent study by Delahoussaye published in August 2001(a). The study reported that 77 percent of leadership development programs were delivered via traditional classroom, 15 percent via self-study reference materials that are non-computer delivered, and eight percent via virtual-classroom and asynchronous computer-delivery (Delahoussaye, 2001a). Where Delahoussaye's study was aimed more at understanding how the computer had changed instructional delivery, my interest was more about methods (Delahoussaye, 2001b).

Teaching and facilitating are different methods of training that require different skills. Further, where Delahoussaye had drawn his sample from the top five percent of businesses in the United States, I was interested in a different group--those who actually delivered training, much of it to the other 95% of businesses.

To gather this information I decided to direct my questions about leadership to leadership development providers on the Internet; most training companies now have Web sites. I visited the Web in the summer of 2001 and identified 289 contacts using the three most popular search engines of Yahoo, AOL, and MSN listed by *Yahoo! Internet Life*. I then contacted each Web site to acquire an e-mail address. Twenty-two of the sites were not functional, leaving a population of 267. I sent an e-mail questionnaire to these addresses; 13 e-mails were returned as

undeliverable, leaving a population of 254 that probably received the e-mail questionnaire by August 30, 2001.

The email questionnaire asked which of several methods was used most of the time. The specific methods and the form of the question were developed from pre-survey discussions with other trainers.

What do MOST (51% or more) of your leadership trainers do MOST of the time (51% or more of the time) when they are doing leadership training?

Choose ONLY ONE answer:

- *Teach leadership to groups using live-classroom*
- *Teach leadership to individuals using coaching*
- *Facilitate groups and/or individuals using action learning*
- *If other, please describe.*

For clarity purposes, the term "action learning" was used to signify any method of facilitation. Fifty-two useable responses (20%) were received.

Results and Discussion

The actual number and percentage of responses are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Response Categories

	No.	%
Teach leadership to groups using live classroom.	11	21
Teach leadership to individuals using coaching.	14	27
Facilitate groups and/or individuals using action learning	26	50
Other	1	2
Total	52	100

The results were somewhat unexpected. Although the rate of return was relatively low and the question simple, the fact that about half of the leadership development trainers are using facilitated action learning more than 51% of the time was unexpected. Further, the predominant way that many people think about training--using a "live classroom"--was third on the list after both action learning and coaching. The "other" identified by one respondent was to engage participants in action learning by listening to a symphony orchestra--an interesting way to facilitate leadership development!

The responses offer insights not addressed in Delahoussaye's study, which did not include experience-based development or coaching in its categories (Delahoussaye, 2001b). Hence, the high percentage for "teaching in the classroom" (77%) captured in his study may be correct but may capture only part of the story. Perhaps, based on the survey reported here, it might be that

classroom training is less than half of the leadership development occurring in organizations.

However, the situation might be one of definition, where some include facilitation within the definition of training and others do not. Further, as one reviewer noted, classroom training can also be action and experiential oriented. Facilitation, which necessarily uses experiential methods, may not be widely understood or discussed. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people, and their businesses/institutions, think anything not in a classroom is not leadership development. Hence, facilitated learning is relegated to a second-class status or another category, e.g. conflict resolution, but not leadership development.

The survey results may indicate that facilitation using experiential methods is increasing and that traditional classroom teaching may be on the wane. Whether this is the case or not is unclear, but some people who have studied the trend think it is happening (Hollenbeck & McCall, 1999; Brown, 1999-2000 McCall, 2002). Several reasons are offered.

First, as competition increases in the global economy, organizations of all types may be seeking ways to decrease costs in an environment of rapid change. Often, classroom teaching programs in leadership cost more money than organizations are willing to spend--in instructor's and participant's costs, including both time and money--in the absence of widely-accepted, valid measures of teachers' effectiveness. If participants of leadership-development programs don't provide valued benefits to their organizations as a result of programs they attended, then it is logical that organizations might be choosing alternate methods of development in lieu of teaching leadership.

Second, in a rapid-change environment where more and more organizations hire and layoff employees more quickly and at increasing rates, organizations may want higher returns on their leadership development investment. This may be because organizations are aware that employees cannot be expected to stay with organizations as long as they once did, either because they leave voluntarily left for better opportunities or because more and more organizations feel compelled to lay them off.

Third, facilitated learning can occur with an employee or group of employees in a real-world context. Thus the lessons and skills needed are presented "just in time" to help solve a problem of value to the business. Given the option of more theoretical learning in the classroom or more applied learning in the workplace, the latter seems more likely to produce measurable benefits.

Conclusion

In sum, one of the responses of organizations to more volatile and uncertain environments may be the choice of methods of leadership development that are

based less on teaching and more on facilitating. When facilitation engages groups and individuals in real problems within leadership development training, it fuels effective learning (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1984).

Indeed, the value of the facilitation in the form of experiential learning, as a means of leadership development, may be that it helps people explore their unconscious beliefs and values. It helps them map mental plans for behavioral change during the "reflective observation" and "abstract conceptualization" steps of learning prior to the "active experimentation" and "concrete experience" steps (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1984).

It is one thing to have an instructor explain a concept in a classroom, but yet another to directly or indirectly experience events that jar people into assimilating and integrating new information and reassessing their views of themselves, others, and the environment. While more research is needed to expand on this conjecture, it appears that the broad trend in education is away from instruction in the classroom and into the real world. The findings of this initial study suggest that companies engaged in leadership-development training have recognized this trend and have responded.

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