

Leadership Development Programs Should Be Ranked on the Results They Deliver

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The Need

From time to time, we are asked by our clients which leadership development programs deliver greater results. Although we are reluctant to provide data, our response is based on results of our evaluation of these programs. Unfortunately, this is a small sample compared to the number of programs available. Three major forces have created a need to rank leadership development programs based on the results they deliver.

The Investment in Leadership Development

Recessions exist in some countries, a few industries, such as oil and gas, are still depressed, and there is much global uncertainty about the future. Still, there is a very heavy investment in leadership development. Depending on whose estimates you examine, this number is somewhere between \$20 and \$50 billion.¹ The investment is growing sparked by the need to have great leaders with high integrity, agility, and diversity who can deliver results. With the high level of investment comes greater need for accountability to show the business value for leadership development. The more you spend, the more you need to show results, pushing the evaluation beyond the classic approach of showing the new behavior in place to showing how it has made a difference in the organization in business terms, and, in some cases, the financial ROI.

Business Connection is the Key

Various studies indicate that what executives most want to see from learning and development is the connection to the business.² This is particularly true for soft skills. Unfortunately, few leadership development programs are measured at this level because executives can easily see the need for hard skills programs, they rarely question the value for entry-level training for new employees, compliance training, or technical training. They do question the investment in leadership development (or other soft skills) where the connection to business need is not so obvious to them. The challenge for leadership development providers is to align the program to the business in the beginning, keep the focus on business impact during this program, and validate business improvement in a follow up to make sure it delivered the business value.

Lack of Relevant Ranking

Although there have been several attempts to rank leadership development programs, these rankings have not been based on the business results they deliver are designed to deliver. Instead, they have been based on volume, faculty, history, and sometimes innovation of programs. For example, the 2017 Financial times ranking of leadership development programs is based on:

- Course design,
- Teaching methods and materials,
- Faculty,
- Food and accommodations,
- Aims achieved, and
- Facilities

The aims achieved are usually at the learning level, expressed as learning objectives.³

In today's climate, a ranking is needed based on business results delivered or at least on how the programs are designed to deliver results throughout the process. If this existed, it would help internal leadership development teams to see clearly which programs have this focus and which do not. It could help guide them into a decision of which program to pursue, explore, and implement on a pilot basis.

The Ranking System

The criteria for delivering results should be based on the key success factors for leadership development. These factors are based on hundreds of studies where leadership development was evaluated at the business impact or ROI Levels.⁴ If these factors are in place, results are delivered. It is much more important for an organization to have steps in place to design for the needed results, instead of just measuring results, only to be frustrated with the lack of results.

The ranking should be based on eight condensed success factors:

1. *Start with Why: Aligning Programs with the Business.*
2. *Make It Feasible: Selecting the Right Solution.*
3. *Expect Success: Designing for Results with Impact Objectives.*
4. *Make It Matter: Designing for Input, Reaction, and Learning.*
5. *Make It Stick: Designing for Application and Impact.*
6. *Make It Credible: Measuring Business Results and Calculating ROI, if desired.*
7. *Tell the Story: Communicating Results to Key Stakeholders.*
8. *Optimize Results: Using Black Box Thinking to Increase Funding.*

The ranking of leadership programs should be based on an objective process with rating systems, document reviews, and actual case studies. The outcome is a ranking system based on the extent to which programs are designed to deliver results. What do you think about this concept? Please let us know.

References

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