

# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

By Dennis Heath



Training in management skills is no longer good enough to produce outstanding corporate leaders. Measuring and modifying behaviours within our management talent pool is key to developing Singapore's future leaders. But how can you measure something as abstract as behaviour, and is it possible to change someone's behaviour in order to shift them to a higher plane?

Moving with the times has been requisite for commercial success since time immemorial, not least in the field of human talent development. This is especially true when it comes to training the people that will steer our local companies along the path of global success, or failure.

Over the past twenty years many different approaches to management training have come and gone. I can remember my early management training in the early 80's, the focus being on the process of management and how to control and monitor your team's performance. Human needs and behaviour were accounted for in a brief module covering 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs'. Then came EQ, where the psychologists started to assert themselves in the management training arena. So we started to focus, quite rightly, on the human element of management, recognizing that pure process was not the way to motivate employees.

In today's fiercely competitive world, being a good manager and communicator is not enough to take you to the top of the corporate career ladder. To excel in today's business environment you have to be recognized as an exceptional 'leader'. In recent years a great deal of research has been carried out to discover which qualities distinguish a 'manager' from a 'leader' and to define the difference between a competent leader and a great leader. Fundamentally, a manager can 'manage' without necessarily being a 'leader'. A manager can implement processes, monitor performance, set business goals and objectives and generally take care of the day-to-day needs of his or her staff.

However, relying purely on those basic management skills does not necessarily innovate, inspire, excite, or provide a clear vision to the subordinate team. Achieving authentic leadership takes more than textbook management skills.

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So how do we advance beyond straightforward management training if we are to raise the performance of managers to the higher plane of leadership? Can we simply train new leadership behaviours into our managers? The answer is no. Modifying an individual's behaviour goes beyond the realm of training and into the realm of coaching, a longer term, supportive method of shifting the way an individual presents themselves to his or her colleagues and the outside world. But before paying for a professional coach to take a manager to the next level, how do you measure 'behaviour' to determine where the weak points are? This is where most companies now opt for the increasingly popular '360' exercise.

A 360 involves the individual manager asking a number of his peers, direct reports and boss (or bosses) to complete a structured questionnaire that asks questions about his behaviour in various aspects of his work and his interaction with colleagues. The results of the questionnaire are then compiled into a composite report, usually preserving the anonymity of the respondents. The subject of the 360 may also complete his own perceptions of his behaviour with the way the world actually sees him. In effect, the 360 is a mirror that sometimes reveals startling differences between self-perception and reality. There are many 360 instruments available and they should only be administered by trained professionals. A badly handled 360 exercise

can backfire and cause conflicts that are difficult to deal with.

Once the 360 has been completed a picture emerges of where the individual may need help to advance from 'manager' to 'leader'. Extensive research over the last thirty years has shown that the primary leadership behaviours fall into six main categories.

- Creating a Vision
- Developing a 'Followship'
- Implementing The Vision
- Following Through
- Achieving Results
- Team Playing

Within these categories there are a number of behaviours that need to be present in order for a leader to deliver effectively in each. Through the use of a structured 360 exercise, managers can be measured and compared with a benchmark determined by senior management. Thus the parameters for leadership development via coaching or other long-term intervention become apparent.

So does this mean that traditional management training is old hat and no longer necessary? No. Basic management skills of process, control and communication skills are still needed and will probably continue to be taught in the traditional way, in classrooms or through mentoring. But in order for managers to become outstanding leaders, there needs to be a different and more scientific approach to management development, one showing measuring results that ultimately has a positive impact on the bottom line.

For Singapore's budding leaders to compete with the world's best, senior managers need to embrace the latest techniques of human leadership development. The price of not doing so will leave us with plenty of managers, but very few leaders.

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