



Evaluating Leadership Learning: A Leap of Faith

By Laurie Hillis, MA, Faculty
The Banff Centre for Management

Evaluating, understanding and appreciating the learning within individuals and organizations may be the . . . *“only sustainable competitive advantage—especially in knowledge-intensive industries.”* (Stata, 1989).

Organizations world-wide invest significant resources in leadership training and learning. If they wish to recognize significant resources invested in leadership training, organizations must seriously explore the question of evaluation. They must be able to quantify and qualify the learning that has occurred and, then, build an infrastructure that insures continuous learning for individuals, teams and organizations.

In his research on transforming managers into leaders, Conger (1992) emphasized evaluation in leadership training: *“Given the critical importance of the subject and the enormous resources expended annually by corporations, we can only hope that such explorations will become more commonplace and more extensive.”*

The reasons for limited program evaluation are varied and may include:

- inadequately defined program outcomes;
- the unique individual characteristics of the participants;
- the lack of awareness on the part of program designers;
- the lack of longer term relationships with attendees at such programs results in short-term transfer evaluation only;
- the difficulty of isolating a training intervention from other organizational initiatives;

Kirkpatrick's (1994) four level program evaluation framework is well known for its simplicity, as follows:

Level 1: Reaction to the program by participants

Level 2: Learning changes of participants

Level 3: Behaviour changes of participants

Level 4: Results at an organizational level. Level 4 measurement is considered the most difficult due to the complexity of distinguishing between the learning event impact and other organizational interventions.

In completion of a Masters of Arts in Leadership and Training at Royal Roads University in April, 1999, intrigued by the evaluation of workplace leadership learning, I based my thesis on the following question:

What interventions in a leadership development program make a difference to participants' learning and their ability to demonstrate that learning on the job six to ten months post-training?

The primary objective of this action research (Level 3 evaluation) was to examine the impact of Alberta Treasury Branches' (ATB's) **Leading Toward 2000** leadership development program with a sample group from the 360 participants.

The research included a review of the specific components and modules used during ATB's Leading Toward 2000 program, a customized program designed by The Banff Centre for Management. The study focused

on learning impact by gender, by tenure in ATB, by job position held and by tenure in job position.

The research resulted in ten recommendations, developed for three audiences, as follows:

A. For Sponsoring Organizations:

1. Leadership development programs such as **Leading Toward 2000** may result in unanticipated individual and organizational outcomes.
2. Post-program organizational support must be formalized to maximize the value of the leadership program.
3. Competency development and feedback initiated during a learning event need to be continued post-program.
4. Shaping its new culture means ATB must link the future with the past to ensure it retains the best people in the organization.
5. Learning in an off-site retreat affords a higher level of reflection, integration and networking.

B. For Program Designers, Faculty and Facilitators:

6. Customized programs are crucial to successful leadership development.
7. Selection of facilitators and faculty for the program are crucial to the success of the program.
8. Experiential learning, both indoor and outdoor, are critical components to a transformational leadership development program.

9. Build self-awareness and self-assessment tools early into leadership development programs.

C. For Individual Learners:

10. Prepare yourself for transformational learning by being open to new experiences, new competency growth and perhaps unanticipated learning.

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Transformational Learning – An Unanticipated Theme

The most impactful and unanticipated theme resulting from the study was the personal impact on the learners. Individual transformation was a frequent, compelling theme expressed throughout the surveys, focus groups and one-on-one meetings and witnessed by the researcher.

The learners reported:

Being better parents:

“Leading has helped all around. It was a great course to make me a better leader at work and to make me a better dad.”

Being more focused on their personal relationships:

“... when I went home—my husband and I talked about a lot of things for a long time. We still have issues we need to get through but I have a sense of myself now . . .”

Re-evaluating:

“I feel strongly about having a direction and having purpose and knowing where I’m supposed to go . . . and I know now where I am supposed to go.”

Leading being the “glue” during change:

“I think that relationship [learning partnerships] will continue on.. things like that from Leading Toward 2000 that I think are the extra glue that is holding us together in these tough times . . .”

Making personal commitments to change:

“People that I was on the course with have quit smoking, they have lost weight, they are looking at their health ... that was part of the transformational things... real personal things for them.”

Overall benefit:

“It made a difference in the way we act, we think, do a lot of things. Everyone who goes to this course is a better person for it after and if they are not, they missed it.”

Transformations:

“That wasn’t a course, that was a life experience, that wasn’t a course.”

“I go home and my wife said how was it, and I said, you have no idea . . . how do you explain?”

Leadership from within starts with self-knowledge. Learners have reported their personal transformations have translated into increased workplace competencies and a new sense of self confidence.



The researcher is optimistic this research will result in a strategic approach to the development of "leaderly" learners within ATB and other organizations. The unique experience of being both a student and an action researcher has been a powerful reminder that we are all truly life-long learners. Transformation happens not just for the learners. It occurs at a very deep and personal level for faculty in their own pursuit of authenticity.

A series of articles will be written based on the research project results and can be viewed on The Banff Centre for Management's website newsletter, at www.banffmanagement.com. ■

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