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Linkage Inc.'s Best Practices in Leadership Development Handbook

David Giber, Louis Carter, and Marshall Goldsmith, Editors (Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, San Francisco; 2000; ISBN 0-7879-5237-0) \$68

REVIEWED BY GLENN P. ALLEN

In 1998, Linkage Inc. and Warren Bennis completed a study of more than 350 companies and their leadership development programs. Their findings, exemplified by 16 case studies, are published in this book and show that today's dynamic marketplace brings common challenges to many organizations, irrespective of industry. New regulations are increasing operating costs, customers are demanding improved services and higher quality, many organizational values are outdated, and management often lacks the competencies needed to lead in a world of work far more dynamic today than at any time over the past 200 years of relative stability and growth. With its case-study approach, this book tells us how leading organizations from a wide range of industries have designed and implemented leadership development programs in order to position themselves for sustainable growth and productivity.

This handbook is a rudimentary overview and summary of best practices, apparently meant for the reader new to the fields of leadership and organization development (OD). As such, it does not present particularly groundbreaking information for seasoned OD and management consultants who are already well versed in the importance of training, feedback, and mentoring to any organizational change initiative. When Bennis writes in the foreword that "companies that . . . successfully build their high-potential employees use structured leadership development systems," he affirms what most OD consultants already know.

This book is useful for the student being introduced to the field or for the consulting professional looking for examples of approaches to leadership development. It provides a solid overview of the characteristics of successful leadership development programs, namely, utilization of a leadership competency model, management support, and systematic education. The editors' and case writers' emphasis on the usefulness of action learning is a strong reminder that the very best way to ensure transfer of learning is to have people learn with, and practice on, real-life, real-time issues in the workplace.

Four hundred and fifty pages of case studies is a dense read, and Bennis's

foreword summarizes the results of the research project well. He and the book's editors track the most common facets of the leadership development programs they reviewed, many of which typify their own six-phase leadership development approach. The phases of that approach are as follows:

- Phase one, *business diagnosis*, focuses on developing a vision for the organization and asks: "Where are we now in relationship to our goal?" "What are some of the existing barriers to reaching our goal?" "How do we move from where we are today to where we need to be tomorrow?"
- Phase two, *assessment*, informs leaders where they stand in holding the competencies needed to meet organizational goals. Action plans are developed to help leaders drive the organization forward.
- Phase three, *program design*, identifies elements of some successful leadership development programs. For example, Colgate-Palmolive uses a learning journal, which provides participants with a method to immediately apply their learning. PECO Energy, BP Amoco, and Abbott Laboratories incorporate simulation into their programs. In the United States Army, role-playing—understanding key management, operation, and

deployment procedures—is the primary focus. Other programs build customer perspective into their training, and many stress the development of internal and external community.

■ Phase four, *program implementation*, is the process of education and training, and in top programs it is heavily supported by action learning. The MathWorks, The MITRE Corporation, Gundersen Lutheran, Imasco, and Motorola are organizations with outstanding implementation programs that expand thinking and set proper expectations for how the learning will affect the long-term value of action teams and overall business results.

■ Phase five, *follow-up structure*, creates follow-up to the implementation program. In many organizations, this phase is considered the most important element. In order to ensure continuous learning, many organizations have developed mentoring or coaching programs that share critical skills with future leaders, help develop management competencies, and measure performance.

■ Phase six, *evaluation*, measures the progress of the overall leadership development approach. Based on the results of the initial diagnosis and assessment, this is the point at which an organization either adjusts its program to more specifically meet its needs, or expands its current program by adding resources that make the training and education available to more people within the organization.

Bennis asks whether companies should invest in leadership development. The answer, of course, is a resounding yes. But perhaps it's more important to ask if the organization is ready to support a leadership development program. Each of the organizations represented in the book's case studies recognized, before implementing a program, that the development of

more competent leaders had to occur or there would be a negative impact on the bottom line. This is not the case in every organization. Many organizations invest money in leadership programs that fail because they are not viewed as essential to overall business strategy.

A serious weakness of the book is its failure to address the question of what may be missing from the many competency models described in the cases. For example, there is almost no mention of building an inclusive work culture where diversity is leveraged for higher performance. Best practices in leadership development should surely include cutting-edge experiences to help leaders turn the frequently confusing dynamics of difference into real-world capabilities that lead to better performance through people.

While it's wise to start leadership development efforts with a diagnosis of the organization and an assessment of its leaders (Phases One and Two, above), diversity issues are not typically approached with comfort, readiness, or preparedness. When important questions about critical aspects of human interaction are left out of the initial phases of program design, it is unlikely that sensitive answers will emerge on their own. For example, it is much easier for people to answer without specificity questions about the gaps in an organization's performance than it is to say something specific and risky such as, "As a person of color, I feel as though my voice is not heard in this organization and that I have been systematically excluded from opportunities for mentoring, coaching, and advancement." When such information is absent in the initial diagnosis and assessment phases, competencies for building inclusion and leveraging diversity cannot be integrated into the leadership development work that needs to be done. Leadership development professionals must design trustworthy and confidential processes where the diffi-

cult questions can be asked, truthful answers given, and all voices heard and considered. Best practices can be developed only when leaders are open to answers they may not wish to hear—answers that may point to significant reasons why parts of the enterprise don't work. Brave organizations become best-in-class by discovering and addressing that which others miss.

Still, this handbook provides much useful information and should be a valuable training tool for people new to the field of organization development. Also, because of the scope of organizations represented in the case studies, the book should serve as a solid benchmarking resource of best practices in leadership development. The training programs, models, and methodologies included in the book can help internal consultants, human resource professionals, leaders of small organizations, government agencies, and not-for-profit organizations develop a customized leadership development program.

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