What I Learned. What You Should Consider:
Leadership Development and Training Survey Results

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Over the past 19 years, I have facilitated or co-facilitated close to 100 leadership workshops in Fortune 500 companies. I have tracked employee perceptions in these workshops through the use of an electronic polling device and have found many of the participants have similar experiences. The sessions start with varying amounts of skepticism and cynicism and end with people feeling more positive and willing to apply what they learned. I have also contributed to the program evaluation process to determine what's worked and what hasn't worked in these workshops and conducted follow-up sessions.

I am one of the many consultants who have benefitted from the growing leadership development and training industry. According to a study conducted in 2012, organizations in the United States more than doubled their spending in training over a 15-year period, creating a $14 billion industry (Kaiser & Curphy, 2013, p. 294). Notwithstanding the financial investment, there is evidence that many of these programs are missing the mark. This is supported by a recent article in the Harvard Business Review (HBR). It cited a study done by the Corporate Executive Board, which found that of the 66% of companies offering programs to identify and develop high-potential employees, only 24% of these companies perceived these programs to be successful (Fernández-Aráoz, Roscoe & Aramaki, 2017, p. 87).

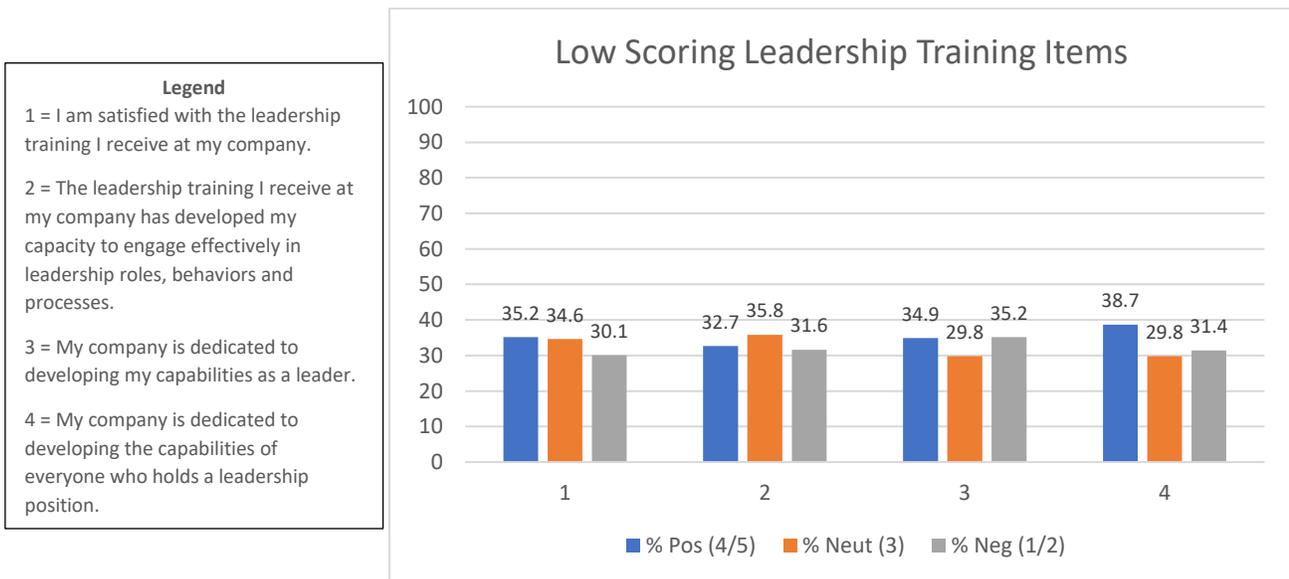| Table 1 - Survey Items |
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| 1. I am satisfied with the leadership training I receive at my company. |
| 2. The leadership training I receive at my company has developed my capacity to engage effectively in leadership roles, behaviors and processes. |
| 3. My company is dedicated to developing my capabilities as a leader. |
| 4. My company is dedicated to developing the capabilities of everyone who holds a leadership position. |
| 5. The feedback and support I receive from my immediate supervisor helps me develop my leadership capabilities. |
| 6. I am satisfied with the follow-up I receive to make sure that what I have learned in the leadership classes I attend is applied. |
| 7. I am committed to being the best leader I can be. |
| 8. I engage in self-study to enhance and hone my leadership capabilities (e.g., read books, attend workshops, work with a coach, watch TED Talks, etc.) |
| 9. I understand there are risks associated with being an effective leader and I am willing to take them. |
| 10. I view my life as a learning lab and apply what I have learned about leadership both on and off the job. |
| 11. It's the personal work I do rather than the classes I take at my company that make me a better leader. |
| 12. To improve my leadership behaviors, I systematically and deliberately process my experiences as a leader. |
| 13. I regularly reflect on my performance as a leader and make intentional choices to be better at what I do. |

It was this HBR article that prompted me to test some of the ideas I have been considering about leadership training. It is always good to start with data so I mounted a 13-item survey on SurveyMonkey (See Table 1). I generated responses through the SurveyMonkey panel and through the links I posted on social media. The data I collected are based on a sample size of approximately 500 participants[1].

Table 2 - Answer Choices
1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

The items on the survey were divided into two categories. Seven of them explored self-study and six examined leadership training received through formal programs at work. Overall, the items that dealt with self-study scored higher. (See Table 2 for survey responses).

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[1] 502 completed the first six items on the survey; 485 completed the remaining seven.

The two highest ranking items were # 7, "I am committed to being the best leader I can be;" and # 9, "I view my life as a learning lab and apply what I have learned about leadership both on and off the job." Both of these items were scored positively (a score of 4 or 5) by at least 80% of the participants. Further, the participants who took the survey believe self-study is key to their development. This is supported by 69.1% of them rating item #11, "It's the personal work I do rather than the classes I take at my company that make me a better leader;" and 64.1% rating item # 8, "I engage in self-study to enhance and hone my leadership capabilities" positively (a score of 4 or 5).

There is an interesting distribution of scores for the four items that explored the quality of leadership training programs at work. As seen in the chart below, about 1/3 of the participants were positive (a score of 4 or 5), 1/3 were neutral (a score of 3) and 1/3 were negative (a score of 1 or 2).

Legend
1 = I am satisfied with the leadership training I receive at my company.

2 = The leadership training I receive at my company has developed my capacity to engage effectively in leadership roles, behaviors and processes.

3 = My company is dedicated to developing my capabilities as a leader.

4 = My company is dedicated to developing the capabilities of everyone who holds a leadership position.

Low Scoring Leadership Training Items

Item	% Pos (4/5)	% Neut (3)	% Neg (1/2)
1	35.2	34.6	30.1
2	32.7	35.8	31.6
3	34.9	29.8	35.2
4	38.7	29.8	31.4

We look to the comments to help us understand this scoring. The positive view was best expressed by one participant when he said, *"We have a comprehensive leadership program that is open to all levels of management."* This is in contrast to those who were either neutral or negative in their survey responses. Their comments range from those who flatly say there is no training to those who say training is just for the select few or happens only after an incident to wake people up. Some offered that the training they get is of little value while others say the training is online and not experiential.

Of particular note are the items that examine what happens after the leadership sessions. Item #6, "I am satisfied with the follow-up I receive to make sure that what I have learned in the leadership classes I attend is applied" received the lowest scores with only 28.3% rating it positively (a score of 4 or 5). The other item that asked about feedback, #5, "The feedback and

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support I receive from my immediate supervisor helps me develop my leadership capabilities," scored low as well (44.1% scoring it either a 4 or 5) and received 48 negative comments out of the 60 generated. Participants explained their negative scores by writing: *"Not at all. Other than showing me how NOT to be a leader;" "There have been five immediate supervisors in the past year and none of them did much;" "I think feedback needs to be timely in order to be effective. In my position, many times, feedback is late or given months after the situation;"* and *"My immediate supervisor is greatly disengaged from any development of his direct reports."*

This data might surprise you or confirm what you already know about leadership development and training. It might also offer you some new ideas. Applying the findings contained herein, here are some questions for you to consider as you think about your existing training:

- Are you spending what you perceive to be a lot on training and not getting the desired results?
- Are your training programs reactive or proactive?
- Are they selective?
- Have you examined the means of distribution (digitalized vs. human interaction)?
- Are you setting expectations prior to the training?
- Does an immediate supervisor (not HR) follow up on the training, providing coaching and feedback?
- Is it okay for an immediate supervisor to take the time to coach and provide feedback?
- How well do you cascade the process down to make managers at all levels of the organization understand the importance of leadership development and training?
- And what about you as individuals? Do you engage in self-study?
- Do you work towards being fully integrated as a leader, applying what you learn to all parts of your life?

It is generally agreed we need more leaders both in our organizations and in the wider society. If you have identified deficiencies in your leadership development and training programs, please remember: It's not doing different things. It's doing things differently. Take your investment and explore your existing ways of training, transitioning from a model of "one and done" to one that is designed to truly nurture potential leaders.

If you want to test this survey with your workforce and/or discuss possible changes to your leadership development programs, email me at joyceschroeder@flourishingcultures.com.

Table 3 – All Items Sequentially		% Pos (4/5)	% Neut (3)	% Neg (1/2)
Item				
1	I am satisfied with the leadership training I receive at my company	35.2	34.6	30.1
2	The leadership training I receive at my company has developed my capacity to engage effectively in leadership roles, behaviors and processes.	32.7	35.8	31.6
3	My company is dedicated to developing my capabilities as a leader.	34.9	29.8	35.2
4	My company is dedicated to developing the capabilities of everyone who holds a leadership position.	38.7	29.8	31.4
5	The feedback and support I receive from my immediate supervisor helps me develop my leadership capabilities.	44.1	28.4	27.4
6	I am satisfied with the follow-up I receive to make sure that what I have learned in the leadership classes I attend is applied.	28.3	42.3	29.4
7	I am committed to being the best leader I can be.	82.9	11.8	5.4
8	I engage in self-study to enhance and hone my leadership capabilities (e.g., read books, attend workshops, work with a coach, watch TED Talks, etc.)	64.1	20.4	15.5
9	I understand there are risks associated with being an effective leader and I am willing to take them.	69.9	25.0	5.2
10	I view my life as a learning lab and apply what I have learned about leadership both on and off the job.	80.2	15.0	4.8
11	It's the personal work I do rather than the classes I take at my company that make me a better leader.	69.1	26.8	4.1
12	To improve my leadership behaviors, I systematically and deliberately process my experiences as a leader.	55.2	34.6	10.1
13	I regularly reflect on my performance as a leader and make intentional choices to be better at what I do.	71.5	20.6	7.9

References

Fernández-Aráoz, C., Roscoe, A. & Aramaki, K. (2017, November – December). Turning potential into success: The missing link in leadership development. *Harvard Business Review*, pp. 86-93.

Kaiser, R. & Curphy, G. (2013). Leadership development: The failure of an industry and the opportunity for consulting psychologists. Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research. 65. 294. 10.1037/a0035460.