

EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS

Written by Vincent Gauthier



ILLUSTRATION: WINNIE HO

Developing leaders in an Asian business landscape  
Week 9: Putting together a leadership development programme II

Programmes should be designed to suit the individual's needs and help them reach full potential in their jobs

# Tailor made tutoring

A common format for most leadership development programmes is to start with a workshop on leading yourself before moving on to a module about leading others. After that, there are many choices.

But whatever comes next should be based on a recent needs analysis of the participants. If not, the programme can easily miss the mark and become little more than a well-intentioned exercise with minimal long-term impact.

So, if most people in the group are known to have poor presentation and communication skills, make this a priority and devote more time to addressing the issue.

Alternatively, if certain executives have been marked for fast-track promotion, their main need may be to learn more about strategic planning.

Whatever the case, though, the aim from the outset should be to put together a tailored programme that teaches practical skills and really takes people forward in their careers.

To do this, companies in Asia are increasingly sending their leaders and high-potential executives on programmes run in co-operation with business schools or leading universities.

Regular faculty members usually teach the different modules, which are designed to include a challenging mix of academic theory, case studies and interactive discussion.

The topics can range from marketing and finance to supply-chain management and public relations. And because things are arranged on a commercial basis the programmes can be modified to meet the differing requirements of the company's middle or senior managers, or directors.

In general, I recommend putting executives in a "consortium" programme, with between 12 and 20 participants from three or four different companies. This gives the students an opportunity to learn how things operate in other businesses and to tackle a wider variety of problems, all of which add to the interest and value of the course.

The programme should include various "action learning projects". These allow teams of students to put into practice what they have learnt in a classroom setting and reinforce those lessons immediately.

Such projects are fairly broad in scope in most cases. The best of them also relate to finding new ways to improve the company's business, increase profitability, or create new value.

For example, such a project might be to come up with a strategy for breaking into a new market.

The team would have to conduct market research and be able to make recommendations about everything from

## If you think you can do a thing or think you can't do a thing, you're right

Henry Ford  
Founder, Ford Motor Company

packaging and price point to marketing campaigns, sales networks and distribution channels.

The team would be expected to make full use of their joint experience, and any of the tools and ideas covered in the programme, and would then present their conclusion to senior management.

Good action learning projects typically last from four to six months. The teams often have to put in long hours to develop their concepts and find workable solutions but, if things go well, there are direct benefits for the individuals taking part and the company.

The people have the chance to break new ground, while the company can end up with a viable strategy for enhancing workplace procedures, introducing a new product, or winning market share.

However, a poorly conceived or inadequately supervised project can quickly undermine all the positives of an otherwise effective leadership development programme.

If the scope is ill-defined and no one at senior level gives sufficient guidance, it can easily become a waste of time and a drain on motivation and morale.

Many companies also incorporate coaching as part of their executive development programmes. It complements the various group sessions and team activities and helps individuals understand and accept the need to change their behaviour in certain situations. One-to-one coaching is an effective way of reinforcing what has been learnt in the workshops.

However, for the relationship between coach and executive to be successful, there must be a clear agreement in advance about the objectives and willingness to proceed. Without that, there will be almost no chance of the two parties working together with mutual respect or of striking up the necessary rapport, which will doom things from the beginning.

Only when the coach and executive have agreed on a clear set of goals and a way of reaching them can they start achieving something. Otherwise, frustrations and misunderstandings will be common, and progress may be slow or non-existent.

When coaching, I like to use the method developed by Marshall Goldsmith, who was named by the American Management Association as one of the top 50 most influential thinkers and business leaders in the field of management over the past 40 years.

In his article "Coaching for Behavioural Change", he breaks his method down into

eight key steps. These are to involve the person you are coaching in identifying desired attributes for their role; involve them in determining who can provide meaningful feedback; collect feedback; analyse the results; develop an action plan; expect the person being coached to respond to "stakeholders"; develop an ongoing follow-up process; and review the results.

Almost any 360-degree assessment also entails the first five of these steps. But what makes Goldsmith's method especially interesting is his step six where the individual has to "report progress" to the people who previously provided comments and explain to them the results of the outcome of action plans and efforts to change.

For many people, this is a particularly difficult step. Executives are not used to admitting – and certainly not to subordinates – that improvements are necessary in their personal performance, or that they are taking concerted action to address their own problem areas. However, being able to do that clearly indicates to others that you are aware and willing to make changes that should be beneficial for yourself and the company.

Once over the initial hurdle, many executives find they can subsequently have a more open dialogue with colleagues at all levels and have less concern about discussing issues that relate to their style of leadership.

Proposed changes can be explained more easily and subordinates are more likely to have consideration for what the boss or leader is trying to achieve.

It also makes sense for the coach to have close contact with the various parties who have provided feedback. This helps when monitoring the executive's progress, offering advice and acting as a sounding board. At the end of the coaching period, there should be another round of feedback. This helps to determine the extent of progress and to identify what still requires improvement. Goldsmith's research shows that leaders who communicate their goals to subordinates and commit to change are far more likely to have positive results in the second round of feedback.

For a leadership development programme to be consistently effective, a company's senior management and HR team must work together to identify needs, develop the right interventions, and ensure that these support and reinforce each other. If they do that, such a programme will yield high value for the individuals involved and the rest of the organisation.

Vincent Gauthier is managing consultant at Hewitt Associates, a global human resources consulting and outsourcing company. This article concludes Hewitt Associates' series on developing leadership in Asia. Visit [www.classifiedpost.com/advancement](http://www.classifiedpost.com/advancement) for the whole series.

## Prepare executives for coaching

- 1 Understand individual needs** Identify weaknesses or problem areas and decide where coaching will help. Remember that people may be underperforming because they are in "the wrong job" or are still learning a new role, not because of any lack of basic ability or motivation. The coaching should then focus on achieving progressive improvement in agreed areas.
- 2 Consider willingness to be coached** Some companies impose a coach on an executive, but this approach can easily prove counter-productive. The executive should be part of the selection process and be clear about the intended purpose.
- 3 Ensure the coach is qualified** Find someone with a track record who has had appropriate training in coaching for performance. Check any references and discuss relevant experience. It is not essential for the coach to have specific industry knowledge, but diverse management and leadership experience is important.
- 4 Assess the methods** Most qualified coaches have a clear methodology that spells out objectives, the process and expected outcomes. Both the employer and the executive should be convinced of the methodology and involved in discussing the expected outcomes.

On the Web visit [www.classifiedpost.com/opinionpoll](http://www.classifiedpost.com/opinionpoll) to participate in our online poll: "Do you feel your organisation has the leadership succession for the future?"

## HR Trends Written by caitlin Wong

# Corporate culture can reshape a firm's future

An organisation's corporate culture directly affects its performance. The constant challenge for organisations to react nimbly to the ever-changing business environment means it is crucial they keep their corporate culture primed to support their strategic development.

Failure to do so can lead to lost opportunities and profits. If corporate culture is substantially out of kilter with an organisation's business strategies there can be a grave undermining of competitiveness or sustainability.

Reshaping corporate culture is usually the most effective solution to such a problem, but is no easy task in itself and carries considerable sensitivity as it primarily involves changing attitudes and mindsets which are notoriously inflexible. This type of exercise also tends to be meticulous and intricate, and needs to be well planned with full participation by staff and management to succeed, according to the Hong Kong Productivity Council's (HKPC) senior consultant Philippe Tang King-wai.

Speaking recently at seminar, "Striving for Business Excellence via Culture Reshape", jointly organised by HKPC and the Classified Post, Mr Tang said effective culture reshaping needed to have a lucid target, and be comprehensively researched, carefully measured, and implemented with a clear direction. He said the efforts would pay off in the long term.

"There are ample research findings abroad to show that companies with a strong, befitting corporate culture perform better in terms of productivity, profitability, stock prices,

employment growth, employee satisfaction and commitment. They also do better in attracting quality staff and retaining them," he said.

"This shows that the corporate culture can be a great competitive strength if it is consistent with an organisation's objectives and strategies."

Mr Tang said that different barriers including conservative mindsets, resistance to change, staff inertia and under-communication might sabotage culture reshaping initiatives, and a customised plan with suitable tactics was needed for the unique circumstances of each organisation.

The key common objectives of such plans would be to facilitate attitudinal change through learning, stimulate staff innovation and participation, and ensure clear communication of cultural objectives and strategies to all concerned.

HKPC has devised a culture reshape model featuring a thorough, step-by-step approach for re-engineering organisational mindsets and behaviour according to strategic development needs. The model, in four stages, employs comprehensive groundwork research, surveys and interactive focus groups to identify an organisation's strategic needs and match them with the "cultural DNA".

"We will ask the top management what the organisation's strategic direction is, and where they see performance falling short of expectations," Mr Tang said. "We will also canvass the views of staff from different levels to map out what the existing culture is like and what transformation is required to strengthen the essential core values and develop the desired cultural attributes."

The foundation thus laid, a representative body will be formed to set out a culture reshape road map and steer the exercise through to completion.

"Different methods can be used to entrench the desired behaviour. For example, there may be monthly or periodic cultural themes with set objectives and achievement targets. Staff, rather than being told what they should do, should be allowed to develop the desired behaviour through practice. They will be more ready to embrace the changes this way."

The final phase of the model focuses on continuous reinforcement and culture measurement to ensure sustainable change and benefits. Examples of commonly used reinforcement tools include workplace paraphernalia such as corporate screensavers, mouse pads, posters, newsletters, videos and CD-Roms, communication-enhancing measures such as a dedicated e-mail channel to the top management or periodic meetings with the CEO. Mr Tang said purpose-designed tools such as experiential activities, team building and experience sharing workshops might also be organised.



Philippe Tang says companies with a strong, befitting corporate culture perform well in many ways. Photo: Dustin Shum

## InBrief

### Survey focuses on influential players

Executive search firm Korn/Ferry International recently released a white paper on identifying "game changers" to transform global business and deliver on Asia's promise. The document, "Does Asia Deserve Your Heaviest Hitters?" was based on a global survey, "The Dream Team: Delivering Leadership in Asia", conducted by Korn/Ferry and the Economist Intelligence Unit late last year. The survey found that most global chief executives believed that their senior leaders in Asia, or the game changers, would need to possess a blend of western and Asian leadership qualities to succeed. The white paper states that these game changers possess the ability to understand the world around them, how it is changing and how to generate alignment. They also have passion for customers, credibility and trust, ability to build and mobilise powerful networks, and managerial courage.

### Employers reminded to award holidays

Employers have been reminded by the Labour Department to grant statutory holidays to their employees. The reminder was made after an engineering company was fined HK\$15,000 last month for failing to award statutory holiday pay to three employees within the statutory time limit under the Employment Ordinance. It was found in March during an inspection by the Labour Department that the company had failed to grant the statutory holidays of Christmas Day, January 1 and the day immediately preceding the Lunar New Year Day, the second day of Lunar New Year and the third day of Lunar New Year to three of its employees. According to the Employment Ordinance, an employee having been employed under a continuous contract for not less than three months immediately preceding a statutory holiday is entitled to the holiday pay, and it should be paid not later than the next pay day after the holiday.