Integrated Leadership Development Programmes: Are they Effective and What Role Does Coaching Play?

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Abstract

Integrated Leadership Development Programmes (IDLPs) have become increasingly popular in recent years. These programmes combine different elements such as 360° feedback, experiential learning, group coaching, executive coaching and action learning, over extended periods of many months. Very little independent research exists to show how effective they really are and this longitudinal study helps fill that gap in knowledge. Based upon a case study of 530 managers in a UK-wide public sector organisation over four years, the study uses a mixed methods approach. Findings confirm that ILDPs are highly effective and also identify current best practice design. The research also demonstrates that increasing the amount of coaching leads to increased learning transfer and retention.

Key words: Coaching, leadership, leadership development, learning transfer, learning retention

Introduction

The last ten years have seen rapid growth in the field of Integrated Leadership Development Programmes (ILDPs). Whereas organisations previously used one-off open leadership courses for their managers and executives, they now increasingly work with external providers to create highly customised ILDPs that blend multi-source feedback assessments, experiential learning, dyadic, 3-way and group coaching, and 'action learning' elements into management development programmes, sometimes running over two or three years.

However, as this is still an emerging market, very little independent published research exists (Kets de Vries *et al*, 2009). Organisations seek to create programmes that provide long-term growth of their employees' leadership skills, yet only one longitudinal study (Belling et al, 2004) exists that looks specifically at the efficacy of ILDPs. Indeed, Kleinberg (2001) identifies that further longitudinal research is needed in this area.

The purpose of this study was to identify and evaluate the critical factors that contribute to an effective Integrated Leadership Development Programme. Effectiveness was evaluated using the following indicators:

- The transfer of learning from the programme back to the workplace
- Retention and use of that learning over time and
- Leadership success as a result of attending an ILDP

The study sought to:

- Identify best practice when designing ILDPs
- Evaluate attendees' long-term views about the effectiveness of these programmes and
- Identify any further research that will add to this knowledge.

This article starts by describing an ILDP in more detail and discussing the evolution of the existing research/literature on the subject. It then explains the iterative mixed-methods research methodology used, the results obtained and how they were analysed. It concludes with a summary of findings, a description of best practice for an ILDP (combining the findings from the case study research and the literature review), the implications for organisations seeking to establish a Leadership Development Programme and two recommendations for further research.

Context and Background of the Study

From April 2008 to May 2010, 530 managers at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) participated in an ILDP. This development programme, called 'Lead the Business' (LtB), was designed jointly by the DWP and the Leadership Trust (an established leadership development provider) as an innovative programme that would enable DWP's managers to "lead large teams of people through significant change in a positive and constructive manner while still delivering the business". The Leadership Trust then ran the programme on behalf of DWP.

Structure of DWP's "Lead the Business" Leadership Development Program

Four modules over a period of approx. 6 months

- Leadership-based 360° feedback with coaching session
- Experiential Learning with group coaching (3 day residential)
- 1-3 exec coaching sessions
- Optional: Action Learning project / MBA style training

- Personal learning objectives taken from 360 into residential
- Experiential: Groups of 6-8 with a coach
- Personal development plan taken from first 2 modules into exec coaching
- Same coach used for 360 and exec coaching

Figure 1 – Structure of the DWP Integrated Leadership Development Program

Initially, for each participant, a multi-rater feedback report (360° taking input from self, direct reports, colleagues/peers, line manager etc.) is produced and this is used during a phone-based

coaching session to prepare the individual for a 3-day residential module at the Leadership Trust. This intensive element uses real-time projects as metaphoric transfer (Kemp, 2006), followed by group reviews facilitated by a coach, to maximise individual learning, especially in the areas of emotional intelligence, understanding others, transformational leadership and leadership impact. Further feedback is provided to each delegate by the other group members.

The learning from the 360° and the residential is then combined into a personal development programme that becomes the basis of the third stage – executive coaching. By re-engaging with the same coach from the 360°, this element is designed to maximise the transfer and application of learning from the previous stages back to the workplace, by the individual establishing personal development objectives and the coach supporting them in the achievement of these goals.

All managers at HEO and SEO grade within a division of JobCentre Plus (JCP, a part of DWP) were able to attend. Delegates were scheduled onto the course largely depending upon availability; they were not selected as high potential or in any other specific way. The programme was halted prematurely after two years, due to an internal reorganisation of DWP and a general reduction in public sector funding as the recession deepened, with the result that some staff who should have participated did not. In May 2010, shortly after the programme finished, the participants were asked to take an online survey to discover their views on their experience of the programme and the elements they thought most useful, with 230 responding. This survey is referred to as the 'original' survey.

One of the key challenges for these programmes is to maximise the amount of learning that is transferred back to the workplace for the longer term benefit of the sponsoring organisation. This is called 'Transfer of Learning' (Kirkpatrick, 1998).

A further important consideration is how much of the learning is still practised some time later (Phillips, 1996). Kirkpatrick (1959 and 1998) evaluates training programmes using a model with four levels as follows:

1. **Reaction**. Attendee's immediate feelings about the course (sometimes called "smile sheets").
2. **Learning**. Knowledge and skills gained during the training and demonstrated during or soon afterwards.
3. **Behaviour**. Changes in attitude and behaviour demonstrated in the workplace three to six months after attendance.
4. **Results**. Longer term performance improvements that can be attributed to the programme. These can be intangible, monetary or performance-based and should be assessed after at least a year (Phillips, 1996).

In particular, the current study looks beyond the period up to twelve months following training, where staff often have a particularly positive view of the training event.

The author of the study was not involved in the LtB programme but has worked on many other Leadership Development Programmes, some as an associate of the Leadership Trust. All the research described, including the survey, analysis and interviews, was conducted independently by the author, with the approval of DWP and the Leadership Trust, and formed a dissertation for an M.A. in Coaching & Mentoring Practice.

Literature: The Evolution of ILDPs and Transfer of Learning

Leadership Development courses have existed for decades. They were mostly one-off externally provided courses that varied from classroom style lectures to experiential learning (Kolb,

1984). Day (2000), in an authoritative and widely cited study, differentiates between individual leader development (human capital) and the overall leadership development (social capital) across an organisation. Noting that while little empirical research exists on the subject, this study concludes that 360° feedback and executive coaching, mentoring and networking, job assignment and action learning are beneficial for both human and social capital development.

However, as leading organisations increase investment in LDPs, consideration of the true value now becomes a concern. Burgoyne, Hirsh and Williams (2004) report that over 80% of large organisations are using one to one coaching for senior staff, but only 27% of these evaluate the benefits. This high percentage of firms (80%) now using coaching is taken as evidence of its increasing demand and usefulness, however Burgoyne *et al* conclude that more evidence-based research, beyond self reporting, is needed to fully assess the efficacy of coaching and mentoring.

A method of calculating return on investment (ROI) is proposed by Williams, Graham and Baker (2003) in their study of outdoor experiential training for leadership. During the training course they studied, a facilitator (coach) helped the participants through various activities, allowing them to reflect on their learning experiences and thus helping them transfer this new knowledge and skills back to the workplace. As a result, they identified level 3 and 4 outcomes (Kirkpatrick, 1998) that would not be possible to gauge for a programme such as an MBA. This shift from the reaction and learning of the participant (levels 1 and 2) to focus on change in behaviour and business results (levels 3 and 4) appears to start acceleration in the rate of development of LDPs.

Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004) also identify that traditional classroom style "teaching" has now largely been supplanted by experiential and reflective style learning as the core element of LDPs, with coaching and mentoring and 360° assessments as rare, but increasingly common, additions. This is confirmed by the only longitudinal study (Belling *et al*, 2004) that concludes that "soft" programmes (i.e. those with less specific outcomes) are more effective for transferring learning back to the workplace than "hard" courses such as business schools.

Weiss and Molinaro (2006) dismiss single or multi-option classroom-based leadership development as ineffective and identify current thought leadership to be Integrated LDPs that are not only aligned with organisational strategy but where the components "add value to each other". This definition is reiterated (Meister, 2007) using a case study of the Union Bank of Switzerland as an example of best practice. Their two year long "ASCENT" programme combines an experiential module, coaching, networking and other personal development. These are the earliest examples where the term "integrated" is now more relevant to the integration of the programme components rather than with the sponsoring organisation's direction.

In a quantitative study, Ladyshewsky (2007) evaluates a number of different elements of LDPs and concludes that an experiential focus, with coaching, reflective journaling and goal setting, appears best to support leadership competency.

Using data on three thousand participants over seven years at INSEAD, and using psychoanalytic theory and group dynamics, Ward (2008, p67) concludes that "coaching executives in groups to leverage collective experience in an experiential encounter and provide ongoing support, is an efficient and potent way for executives to transform". A further study, again based upon participants at INSEAD (Kets de Vries *et al,* 2009), suggested that group coaching, experimenting with new behaviours (experiential learning), realistic action plans and subsequent follow up were the key components. This research, limited to only 11 individuals, re-tested participants' 360° feedback surveys one year after the programme to examine behavioural change. The study concluded that more research was needed particularly covering a larger group, over a longer timescale than one year and,

ideally, with a control group of similar senior managers who did not attend i.e. exactly what this study seeks to achieve.

Burke and Hutchins (2007) estimate that 70% of trainees fail to transfer training into a sustained performance improvement in the workplace after one year. Their subsequent study of best practice (Burke and Hutchins, 2008) identifies support of the line manager and coaching as the two most effective factors to maximise training transfer, however they also highlight the limited amount of literature and research that is based upon "data-grounded best practices". Given that the American Society for Training and Development estimates that more than $125 billion is spent in the U.S. on training annually (Blume, Ford, Baldwin and Huang, 2010, p1066), they conclude that more empirically-based, longitudinal studies are vital to conclusively investigate transfer of learning.

In his survey using data from 150 learning and development (L&D) professionals, Saks (2010) found that, on average, the number of employees that apply learning to their job after training was 62% (immediately), 44% (6 months later) and only 34% one year later. This final figure is less than half of that identified above by Burke and Hutchins (2007). Saks continues on to show (2010, p30) that approximately half of training investments fail to result in any improvement for the individual or the sponsoring organisation. Abrell *et al* (2011) identified that organisations wishing to create long-term, substantive leadership development should establish long-term ILDP-style programmes and not one-off training or workshops.

In summary, the research seems to be converging upon an ideal combination of 360° feedback, experiential learning, peer feedback, reflection and one to one coaching. What is now noticeable is the high level of coaching in each step – from dyadic through group/team coaching and possibly peer/co-coaching. It now appears that the two worlds of executive/leadership coaching and experiential leadership training have largely come together to create an effective, integrated combination. What is surprising is why this did not happen earlier. This convergent view was tested in this case study to see if it truly is best practice.

Interestingly most of the research that does exist comes from the Leadership and OD (Organisational Development) publications rather than from the Executive Coaching arena.

Methodology

The study took a mixed methods approach and this is shown diagrammatically in Figure 2 below. In summary, it revolved around an online survey. This survey repeated some of the questions asked in the original survey two years before along with new questions that explored participants' current views (in retrospect). These questions mostly used a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (Bryman, 2008). Additional questions allowed a free text response thus providing both qualitative and quantitative data. Following analysis of the survey data ten participants, randomly selected from those who had indicated they were happy to be contacted, were the subject of focused interviews. This additional information generated a further, iterative analysis of the survey response data.

In parallel, a freedom of information (FoI) request was made to DWP requesting information on the number of promotions (for the relevant grades) over the period January 2008 to March 2012. This iterative mixed methods approach blends mathematical rigour with an acceptance of the constructivist nature of the participants' views and experiences. This combination appealed to the background and critical realist worldview of this study's author.
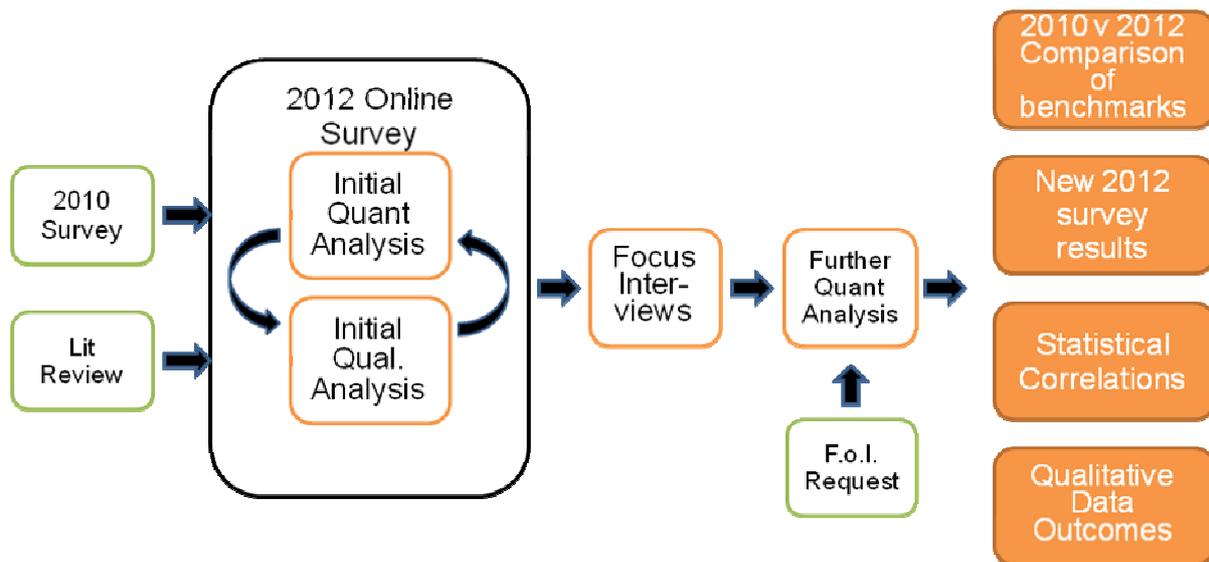
Based upon Yin's (2003) procedure of explanation building

Figure 2 – An Iterative Mixed Methods Approach .

Sample

The survey ran over two weeks in April 2012 with the invitation sent to the same 523 recipients as in 2010. From those 266 completed responses were received representing a response rate of nearly 51%, higher than the original survey. Allowing for attrition over two years (from the original 523), this represents a very positive outcome and, by itself, shows a high level of engagement with the programme. This sample size is more than sufficient to work to a 95% level of certainty or "confidence level" (Bryman, 2008).The demographic breakdown of the respondents is shown in Figure 3.

Method of Analysis

The approach to data analysis was partly constrained by the need to be able to compare the results with those obtained in the original study. This means that similar analysis is required (Saunders *et al*, 2009, p269). The study thus followed a largely deductive approach, building from some of the findings of the previous study. However the data gathered was also considered on a stand-alone basis to provide an inductive view so that new findings could also be generated if appropriate (Saunders *et al*, 2009).

Initially, averages and standard deviations were calculated for all of the Likert scale responses. A pivot table was then created that allowed certain groups of data to be selected, such as gender, number of coaching sessions, age range etc. and the average response value for that group to be compared with the average for the entire set of respondents. This provided a simple way to quickly identify where a particular subset had responded differently, thus suggesting that a link existed between the factors defining that subset and the outcome of their specific responses
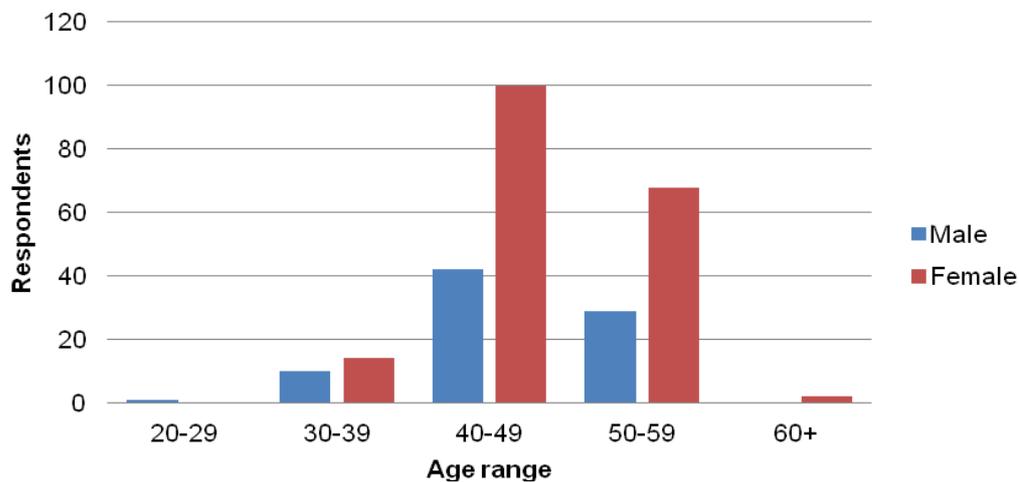
Figure 3 – Age and Gender of Respondents

Once these linkages had been identified using this simple approach, a more sophisticated statistical approach was applied whereby the correlation (Pearson's r) and covariance (Creswell, 2003; Saunders *et al*, 2009) between the two variables in question were calculated. The statistical significance of this correlation (p-value) was then calculated (Bryman, 2008).

The free-format qualitative data collected in the survey was extracted from the data download and a pattern matching approach applied (Saunders *et al*, 2009). Certain concepts and hypotheses were developed from the original report and also the quantitative survey data. Evidence was then sought in the written responses to see if these explanations were supported or should be discounted (Yin, 2003). Where pattern-based evidence was present, and a concept supported, a list of questions was developed to gather further detail through follow up structured interviews. Ten respondents were chosen at random (from those that indicated they were happy to be contacted further) and the author conducted phone–based interviews using the list of questions. This yielded more specific data thus leading to either a refinement of the explanation (Saunders *et al*, 2009; Bryman, 2008) or an additional hypothesis. This iterative process is based upon Yin's (2003) procedure of explanation building.

By having both a secondary dataset to compare with the original study, along with the follow up interviews, the study effectively has triangulation inherent within its approach (Saunders *et al*, 2009, p269; Yin, 2003, p97; Ritchie and Lewis, 2008, p43). Further triangulation was possible with the literature review.

Data Validity and Reliability

This is a longitudinal study where some of the questions re-examine and compare responses from two years before, specifically to identify if the data is reliable over time. Inevitably, some events and factors will exist that could affect reliability over the two years since participants attended the ILDP. In particular, the original LtB programme came to a premature conclusion due to the restructuring of JCP and DWP. Since then, JCP has been fully absorbed into the DWP and some job losses have occurred. Additionally, a rise in the unemployed (JCP's customers) combined with the declining economic outlook and an internal pay freeze has put additional strain on DWP. These external factors may have affected feelings within DWP and thus could have an influence upon the study's results.

Self-reporting is used in several parts of the questionnaire and this form of measure can include subject bias e.g. the tendency to exaggerate or give socially desirable responses (Donaldson and Grant-Vallone, 2003). The ideal solution would have been to survey the subordinates of those

attending the programme, but the data did not exist to permit this and self-reporting was the only realistic option. However, the comparison with the previous survey and triangulation with the structured interviews and literature review will help remove this form of bias.

Results

Comparison Against 2010 Survey

The scores for both the original survey and this follow up were generally high. Participants' views of the overall ILDP had improved slightly. For some elements of the programme, including one to one coaching, their views were marginally less positive. However when looked at as a whole, participants' assessment of the programme was largely the same as two years previously. This is quite a positive outcome, as ratings for most development programmes would show a decline over a period as long as two or more years (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Burke and Hutchings, 2007).

Many attendees cited the programme as having a profound effect upon them and viewed all elements of the ILDP as being highly effective.

"This was the best event I have ever attended, for me it all finally clicked and I understood my role as a leader and the behaviours that I display".

"The best management training I have ever had".

Furthermore, while the residential element scored the highest average rating and was cited as being the most memorable element, attendees stressed that it was the combination of all of the elements of the programme that made it so effective, and that no single component could be dropped without degrading the entire learning experience.

"You had to have what happened on the course. You had to have the 360 degree, the residential and the coaching but had you had the other two, without the coaching, then I don't think it would have fulfilled the same purpose".

This indicates that, while the one to one coaching scores are slightly lower than the residential element, this is primarily due to it being less memorable, and that the programme worked well because of the entirety of the programme and the coaching was a core constituent of that. Without the one to one follow up coaching to focus and embed the learning, the long term impact of the ILDP would have been reduced.

Attendees' Views After 2-3 Years

Respondents were asked a number of questions about themselves and the programme, looking back after two years or more since they attended. The vast majority of respondents believe they are both more confident leaders (95%) and better leaders (97%). This is an extremely high score but other external factors may have also contributed to this view, such as the role of other training and development and simple, organic self-development of the individuals concerned. However, when asked how much the LtB programme had contributed to this view, only 13 (5%) and 9 (3%) felt that the programme had made no contribution at all to them being a more confident/better leader respectively, with an average score of 3.5 (out of 5) for both of these criteria.

The response to this secondary question, combined with the primary question, appears to confirm that delegates do believe they are better and more confident leaders and that the ILDP has played an important role in this. Interviewees' opinions supported this finding from the survey:

"Yes I do believe I am a better manager today …. I think I do lead as opposed to manage. I probably take a few more risks in terms of trusting and delegating things to other people in the team to do as opposed to feeling I need to do everything myself."

When asked over two years later, "How much of the learning from the LtB programme do you still practice today?" less than 2% responded "none at all" (4 out of 266). The response to this question is shown in Figure 4 below.
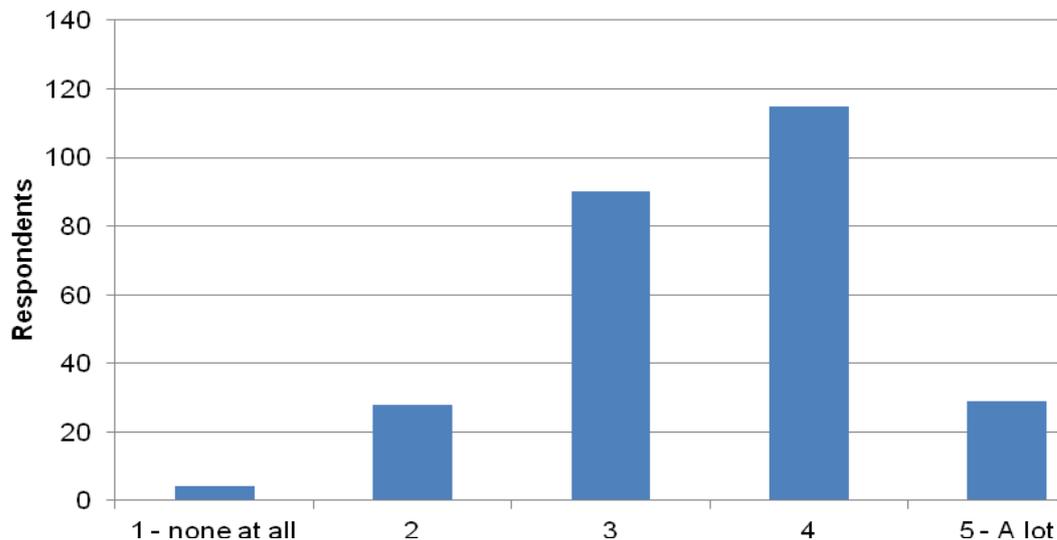
Figure 4 - Learning Practiced 2 or More Years Later

This positive view was confirmed in the interviews:

"It followed you through and how you took that learning …and how you used it in the everyday workplace. … the coaching helped you put what you had learnt into practice.

"… it (the learning) just stuck with you … and then it was also followed up with the coaching afterwards. You didn't get to the end of the course and then it was forgotten, it carried on for a couple of months afterwards so … quite often we go on training courses and you get back and get on with the day job and it gets forgotten … once you'd carried on with the programme for 2 or 3 months when you were back in the office then it sort of ingrained itself into becoming business as usual. The coaching helped embed that in back at the office."

"People in my leadership team still quote some of the things they learnt on that event, now that is very, very unusual where people recall that."

".. the one to one coaching at the end I thought (pause), I liked the follow up I think it was great that you didn't (pause), in a lot of DWP courses I've had over the past - you go on the course, the course is finished and then you come back and you might just have your own line manager. I have to say that the follow up with the one to one coach, was, to me, that was the icing on the cake."

This ability of the ILDP to facilitate the transfer of learning back to the workplace and then ensure that the learning is still used over two years later seems to set it apart from any other type of

leadership development. Indeed this programme was specifically designed and structured in a way to maximise this aspect of learning transfer. In the words of one of the programme steering group:

> *"In terms of consolidating the learning ... there was a very detailed action plan from the leadership (residential) event itself and lots of people go away with action plans, put them in a drawer and forget them, so we said we wanted something to happen afterwards (the one to one coaching) to embed it".*

When asked if how they felt about the programme now (compared with when they completed it) 29.3% were more positive, 66.9% felt the same with 3.8% feeling less positive. In interviewees' own words, many training courses are forgotten completely within a year, while this ILDP is still present in people's minds between two and four years later. Again, this shows that two of the programme's original objectives have been met i.e. to embed the learning into the organisation and to be able to evaluate and confirm that afterwards.

Additionally, the survey also compared the ILDP with other personal development programmes that staff had attended, with 86% rating it more effective, 12% about the same and 2% less effective.

Success of Attendees

The attendees may consider themselves to be better leaders but the key question is, is that perception congruent with other perspectives on competent leadership/measurements? One method of judging success in an individual's career is to look at the number of promotions that have taken place compared to a control group. Fortunately, in this case, a ready control group (Creswell, 2003) exists due to the premature cessation of the LtB ILDP, leaving a large cohort of DWP managers who did not attend the programme.

An FoI request was made to DWP requesting information on the number of promotions over the period January 2008 to March 2012. The number of promotions gained by ILDP attendees (between attending the programme and March 2012 a period of 2-4 years) represented 23% of that group. For the cohort that did not attend the number of promotions represented 8% (over the longer period of 4 years and 2 months). This indicates that ILDP attendees were nearly three times more likely to have been promoted then non-attendees. While the number of promotions is a relatively crude measure of career success, these numbers (especially as one set represents a control group of people in the same grades and department) do give a clear indication that attendees have been more successful in their careers.

While there were no specific selection criteria for the LtB programme, as it was anticipated that all managers would attend, there may have been an element of "self selection", whereby keener, more extrovert staff put themselves forward before others. This may have had an effect upon the results presented but it is unlikely to account for the full difference in the promotion figures.

Delegates were also asked if attendance on the ILDP had made them more confident to apply for promotion, with 63% responding that it had. This outcome coupled with the actual percentages of promotions would suggest that the ILDP has contributed to a positive impact upon attendees' careers.

> *"I got a lot out of the programme and I am not sure that I would have been successful in getting promoted without what I learnt on the programme."*

When asked what effect the LtB programme had upon the entire JCP leadership pool, all interviewees felt it was positive and that, in particular, managers spent more time leading and less time being involved with the detail of others' work.

"I would say very much so. Yes (pause) I would say Lead the Business definitely had an impact for DWP in my opinion. Every single one of the more senior managers in my department came and talked to me beforehand and said what an impact it had on them."

"It's created a gap where the hope is that we, the ones that have been, should be able to pull the others with us."

Members of DWP's LtB steering group were also asked if they believed if the programme had a beneficial effect upon the overall management population with all three of those interviewed stating that it had.

Other Factors Influencing ILDP Efficacy

The open-ended qualitative data indicated that the number of one to one coaching sessions a delegate had received affected their perception of the programme and this is shown in Table I below.

Survey question	Correlation Coefficient	Strength of Relationship	p-value
Encouraged you to continue your leadership journey	0.46	medium	$< 1 \times 10^{-14}$
Changed your view on improving the communication process with your team/line mgr/colleagues	0.44	medium	$< 1 \times 10^{-12}$
The impact of one to one coaching	0.41	medium	$< 1 \times 10^{-11}$
You are more likely to take up coaching if offered	0.28	weak	$< 1 \times 10^{-5}$
How much learning have you retained?	0.23	weak	< 0.0005
Is your view of LtB now less positive / same / more positive?	0.22	weak	< 0.0005
Enabled you to lead change	0.16	weak	< 0.02

Table 1 – Correlation of Number of One to One Coaching Sessions with Survey Results

Note: All correlations shown are positive and link to an increasing number of one to one coaching sessions e.g. the greater the number of coaching sessions, the greater the retention of learning.

The statistical significance (p-value) for all seven questions is such that it is unlikely that these results occurred by chance – Bryman (2008, p334) identifies that a p-value with a maximum of 0.05 is the convention among most social researchers and all of the results in Table I are well within this guideline.

While identifying a relationship via statistical correlation is important, it does not necessarily prove causality e.g. that varying the number of one to one coaching sessions directly causes the

retention of learning to increase. However, the fact that the linkage was initially identified through the qualitative data (i.e. respondents saying this was so) would suggest a causal link. These hypotheses were then investigated further in the follow up interviews to discover if the interviewees considered them to be so.

The programme was originally designed so that one of the main purposes of the one to one coaching was to maximise learning transfer from the residential back to the workplace and then embed it. The data in Table I concurs with the findings in the Literature Review i.e. that the coaching element of the ILDP is key to both transferring and retaining the learning from the previous programme components. Indeed, it shows that the more one to one coaching sessions an individual has, the more effective the learning transfer and retention process becomes.

The coaching (360° and one to one) was delivered through a mixture of face to face sessions and phone-based sessions (to reduce costs). Often, the first was face to face, while subsequent sessions could be by phone. In order to compare the efficacy of these two different methods of delivering the one to one coaching, interviewees were asked for their views on the efficacy of each method. Some expressed no real preference, however others believed it was vital to have that early face to face contact. A typical comment from an interviewee:

> *"It's all about being approachable. The face to face element was vital. Once you'd had that it meant that the telephone was beneficial as well. If purely by phone it wouldn't work as well."*

All of the interviewees stated that the phone-based coaching was effective, even though some believed that the face to face sessions were slightly better and none of them expressed a preference for phone-based coaching.

Other demographic information was also examined to see if there was any linkage with the survey outcomes. Gender produced no correlation of any significance, suggesting that both sexes had similar views of the programme and benefited similarly.

Age of attendee showed only one statistically significant relationship and this was with the question, "*Given your experience of one to one coaching how likely would you be to take up more coaching if it was available to you now?*" This showed a negative weak correlation of 0.18 ($p < 0.005$) whereby, as age increased, the individual was less likely to take up coaching if offered. Interestingly, there was no relationship observed between age of the individual and their perception of how much they learnt or how much their leadership ability improved.

Summary and Conclusions

The study has been largely successful in achieving its purpose. The literature review provided a chronological look at the evolution of the design of leadership development programmes over the last ten to fifteen years. It showed how, from the early varied designs, the research has largely come to a consensus over the last few years about the optimal design for an LDP, as exemplified by two studies using programmes based at INSEAD (Ward, 2008; Kets de Vries *et al*, 2009) and other research from the UK and US (Meister, 2007; Hotho and Dowling, 2010).

This design has evolved not only to maximise the learning during the programme and ensure that this is then applied effectively in the workplace, but also to ensure that the learning continues to be applied in the longer term in the form of improved leadership behaviour. Furthermore, best practice design now ensures that the different components of a programme complement each other for maximum overall effect, thus creating the Integrated Leadership Development Programme (ILDP).

The analysis of the data from the case study based upon 530 managers who attended an ILDP from 2008 to 2010, was remarkably consistent with the findings of the literature review, both in substantiating the optimum structure (Table II), but also in validating the high degree of learning transfer and retention that ILDPs are designed to achieve.

By taking the significant elements of an ILDP, as concluded from the literature review, and augmenting them with the other findings of the case study research we can determine the best practice design for an ILDP as shown in Table 2 below.

Stage 1
A multi rater/multi source feedback report (360° survey). This should be facilitated by an experienced coach on a one to one basis. The outcome of this stage will allow the individual to set their own areas for focus in Stage 2.

Stage 2
An experiential learning stage. This component should allow participants to experience the challenge of leading. They should have opportunities to personally reflect on their successes and failures as well as receive the feedback of their peers about their leadership qualities. This stage should be facilitated by a group coach.

Stage 3
One to one coaching. Participants should have at least three executive coaching sessions over a period of up to six months following Stage 2. Focus should be maintained on applying the learning from previous stages to the workplace and clear goals established with the coach's assistance.

Stage 4
Application of learning on the job. This stage runs in parallel with and beyond Stage 3. Key to success in this stage is a high level of support and feedback from the line manager and opportunities to work on projects and in functional areas that will allow the participant to practice and apply their new skills.

Stage 5
An action learning project. This should be a real-life project involving several peers who are also attending the same programme. Specific time should be allotted to this stage to ensure that it fits in alongside existing responsibilities so that it receives adequate focus. The project should produce practical and usable outputs that are presented to senior management and feedback given by them. Peer feedback should also be encouraged throughout the project.

Stage 6
After at least one year the multi rater/multi source feedback report (360° survey) should be repeated, ideally using the same raters as before, to allow the participant to assess the progress that has been made. This discussion should be facilitated by a coach.

Table 2 – Best Practice Design for a Leadership Development Programme

Where time and resource is limited Stage 5 is the stage that can probably be omitted with the least impact on the programme benefits. Where budget is the biggest challenge then Stage 3 can use telephone coaching to reduce the cost; however participants believed the first session should still be face to face. The case study also demonstrated that a greater number of coaching sessions directly increases the retention of learning thus telephone based coaching is a preferable method of cost reduction than reducing the number of sessions.

The case study also identified:

- Participants were as positive about the programme two to four years later as they were immediately after attending
- Participants thought that, while some elements were more memorable than others, it was the complementary combination of all the programme components that made it particularly effective and that removing core elements would not be wise
- Attendees stated that they were better and more confident leaders today and this was due in part to the ILDP
- They still retained and practised a significant amount of the learning from the programme in their roles today and the executive coaching element was a key contributor to this transfer and retention. Research (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Saks, 2010) suggests that for many other training programmes this level of learning transfer would have declined significantly
- Programme attendees were nearly three times (23% vs. 8%) more likely to have been promoted subsequently than non-attendees. Even taking into account the possibility of some self-selection onto the ILDP, this still indicates improved career prospects as a result of participating in the programme
- 86% of attendees believed the ILDP was more effective than other personal development programmes they had attended
- A clear correlation was identified that suggests increasing the number of coaching sessions is likely to increase the amount of retained learning, the individual's desire to further develop their leadership ability and to change their views on how to communicate with co-workers
- DWP senior management and staff all felt that the programme had contributed to an overall improvement in the leadership capability of the organisation

These findings, combined with other research, suggest that the ILDP is a highly potent method of leadership development. It is particularly strong at ensuring that the learning is transferred from the training programme into the workplace and then continues to be used some years later. The significant level of coaching at every stage of the programme is believed to be a prime contributor to the high degree of use and retention of the learning. This design of an ILDP has largely come about by blending together the two existing disciplines of experiential leadership training and executive/group coaching to create an outcome with far greater impact than that of the individual elements alone.

Recommendations for Implementing Leadership Development Programmes.

A number of recommendations follow from the findings of the research. In particular, organisations investing in leadership development could utilise the Integrated Leadership Development Programme model as this currently provides the most effective learning experience with a high degree of learning transfer and retention.

When designing an ILDP it should take into account the best practice model as described in Table II and involve a significant element of coaching at each stage. Furthermore, saving cost by omitting the 360° feedback or reducing the amount of one to one coaching is a false economy and can degrade the longer term benefits of the programme. By following this approach such programmes can raise the leadership capability across an organisation.

Further Research

Two areas of further research are suggested that will add to the body of knowledge on this subject. Firstly, additional longitudinal studies of other leadership development programmes are needed. While it is assumed that the results of this case study are extendable across the entire leadership population, additional research from other organisations and countries should validate that assumption

Secondly, it is recommended that this case study should be repeated again in two to four years time, i.e. four to eight years after delegates' participation, to see if there is any change in the results. This would almost certainly make it the longest running study of its kind

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