Leadership Development: Up Close and Personal

Key Concept

Leadership courses that focus on the personal development of participants can play a significant role in transforming potentially regressive experiences into material for learning, experimentation, and growth. It is this "personalization process" that enables ongoing leader development.

Idea Summary

Building on existing research that draws links between identity development and leaders’ development, the authors followed a group of 55 high-potential managers over one year in an international MBA program. In particular, they studied their experiences on the Personal Development Elective (PDE) - a highly-rated course in which students work with a psychotherapist. They found that by examining their experiences and life stories as part and parcel of management learning, participants underwent a process of personalization, whereby their leaning became personalized through self-awareness. Ultimately, this process enhances the ongoing development and practice of leadership.

The authors acknowledge that their study extends a growing stream of academic work on the role of individual life stories in the development of managers; but despite there already being existing research that deems personal aspects of leader development essential, limited empirical attention has been given to this notion.

As a result of their study, the authors introduce a theoretical model that outlines those features of management education programs that in turn create the process of personalized learning, how it unfolds, and what it develops.

The study received the 2011 GMAC award for the most significant contribution to graduate management education, presented by the Management Education and Development division of the Academy of Management.
Business Application

A number of ways in which the personalization of management learning can be successful are highlighted throughout the research, including the following:

- Reflective engagement is fostered. This is the examination, acknowledgment and management of experiences and emotions, allowing participants to deal with them more constructively. In turn, this enables them to cultivate personal abilities that sustain ongoing leader development.

- In the case of executive education courses, personalization of management learning can transform potentially regressive features common to many "boot-camp"-like programs into the source of, and ground for, personal learning and development.

- This process complements the acquisition of conceptual knowledge and analytic skills from the traditional coursework, strengthens students' abilities in the domain of self-awareness and self-management, and allows them to clarify, revise and integrate their life narratives.

Overall, it is the very features of management education programs that have traditionally been lamented as not being conducive to reflection—such as, intensity, novelty and encapsulation—that the authors say provide a unique setting in which to undertake personal examination and development:

Educators should broaden the meaning of learning beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and understand that acknowledging regressive experiences is not only a valuable learning opportunity, but both part and parcel of attending a program.

To conclude, they put forward that their findings provide the rationale for intense and encapsulating forms of management education, providing provocative implications for the redesign of curricula currently underway at many business schools.

Further Reading


Further Relevant Resources

Gianpiero Petriglieri's profile at INSEAD
Jack Denfeld Wood's profile at IMD
Jennifer Louise Petriglieri's profile at INSEAD (previously at Harvard Business School)
INSEAD's Executive Education profile at IEDP

http://www.ideasforleaders.com/ideas/leadership-development-up-close-and-personal