

Executive Education Best Practices

A continuous supply of high-performance executive talent is probably the only sustainable competitive advantage in today's global marketplace. Since the leadership team can be the firm's most valuable asset or its worst liability, leadership development should be a core business management process sponsored by the CEO, overseen by the Board of Directors, and facilitated by the HR department. However, in most organisations, the leadership development programmes remain a function of HR with a portfolio of isolated 360 feedback surveys, competency profiling tools, and off-the-shelf training courses. With fragmented and ad hoc performance development efforts, lower ROI and misalignment can be expected.

There is a need for an integrated system, which includes best practices, tools and processes, to ensure succession planning and performance development of the management talent pipeline at all managerial levels, not only at the CEO level. Traditionally, the boards of directors focused on CEO succession and left leadership development to the HR department. Such a strategic management function must be sponsored, aligned and managed by the CEO and the senior executive team. Companies that fall short on managing leadership succession and development end up facing performance challenges due to market changes and talent attrition. Those firms will be forced to hire untested external talent or promote internal staff with an inadequate skill set.

Starbucks is one of the companies that understands the value of this performance development model better than its competitors. Their strategic leadership

development programme is overseen by the board, sponsored by the CEO, and integrated with HR hiring, training, and promotion processes. This strategic integration allows them to attract, develop and retain the best talent in their industry, which is a key source of their competitive advantage.

Another key success factor is the quality and relevance of the design, content, and delivery methods of the management training programme. For effective and efficient performance development initiatives, the training programs should be strategically aligned, customised, experiential, accelerated, modular and flexible, with a mix of face-to-face and online delivery methods.


The Harvard-pioneered case study method added a great value to the executive education model by allowing managers to learn from the experience of other companies. However, the case method remains generic and limited to theoretical analysis. The current executive education models do not bridge the critical knowledge-implementation gap. There is a need for a more effective and efficient training model that not only develops the general managerial knowledge, but also directly works on solving company-specific business problems and delivers actionable solutions.

The US based International Institute of Management (IIM) built a proprietary Action Learning Model (ALM) based on industry best practices and the breakthrough action-learning concept pioneered by the British Professor Reg Revans. The IIM customised Executive Education Programme integrates succession planning and performance management at all managerial levels. The program uses a unique mix of consulting,

training, coaching, and project-based performance evaluation methodologies to help executives learn and develop while addressing company-specific business opportunities and challenges. More importantly, IIM's ALM allows the leadership team to leverage the collective intelligence of the organisation by allowing their managers to work together and learn from each other in collaborative action-learning sessions.

The end result is a new breed of corporate training and development programmes, where the courses are specifically tailored for each client. The delivery of each programme is done in partnership with the client's team, resulting in internal capacity building and higher ROI. As one of the clients puts it; "IIM's Executive Education is like getting Big 5 consulting services at a fraction of the cost. Better yet, rather than giving the clients fish, they teach them how to fish."

The benefits of the new and innovative IIM Executive Education Model are clear:

- 1) Immediate business performance results,
- 2) Higher ROI from training budgets,
- 3) Increased employee commitment, productivity and collaboration,
- 4) Overcoming the challenges and high costs of management transitions,
- 5) Attracting better talent,
- 6) Improved succession planning, and
- 7) Increased stakeholder confidence. 

Med Yones (president1@iim-edu.org) is the president of International Institute of Management – A best practices research and executive education institute offering accelerated, customised, experiential, and online education worldwide.