

The Four Pillars of Successful Management Development

Pillar 3: Structure

Management Development or How to Make a Souffle

You are choosing a management development programme for yourself or others in your organisation. Of all the factors you take into consideration – the cost, the content, whether the course is residential or not, whether you'll be able to swim and sauna before the gourmet evening meal at the venue – probably the last thing to cross your mind will be the structure of the programme.

Of course, you might discount a week-long programme on the basis that you can't afford the time out of the office (or alternatively you might choose to shortlist it because you'll do anything to get away for a few days). But beyond the length of the time commitment, what else is there to consider?

Management and leadership are activities which are *done*, not *known*. It is one thing to *know* the recipe for a souffle, for example (any good cookbook or search engine can furnish you with the relevant knowledge), but it is something else to be able to walk into a kitchen and make a souffle. Similarly, it is one thing to sit in a seminar room and receive input on how to lead and manage a team, and it is another to go back into the workplace and actually lead and manage your team.

You would not teach someone how to make a souffle without asking them at some point to go and make a souffle. There is little to be gained from management development programmes which do not demand that managers to go back into the workplace and apply what they have learned to create results. This is like training chefs but never asking them to cook, like coaching golfers but making sure they never go out on the golf course, like banning aspiring swimmers from getting wet.

The only structure which will produce a real return on investment in development is a structure in which delegates attend the first part of a programme, then go and apply what they have learned in the workplace to create results, then attend another section of the programme, then go and apply what they have learned in the workplace, and so on. This is the only way we learn how to do anything – from our own experience. If opportunities to accumulate experience – and a strong demand to create results – are not built into the structure of a management development programme, you can be certain that no real experience has been gained, and no results created.

After over 25 years in management development, Mitchell Phoenix' Managing Director Kevin Yates is convinced that the only viable structure is a day a month. "A day a month is

often as long as senior people can be away from the office,” he says, “and it keeps the focus firmly on the delegates and their responsibility to use the material to create results. The quality of the results which come back gets stronger and stronger as the programme goes on and participants gain in skill and experience, so that the results on day 6 are often much more sophisticated than those reported on day 2. The whole process is cumulative, and designed to spotlight the participants and how they are changing and adapting what they are doing in the workplace.

“On the other hand, programmes which are geared towards input for the delegates, rather than output from the delegates (ie results), are often more cost effective and conveniently accessed via a book.”



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