



MITCHELL PHOENIX

The Four Pillars of Successful Management Development

Pillar 4: Expert Facilitation

Expert Facilitation is not Facilitation by Experts

When choosing a leadership development programme, one may encounter courses which promise “facilitation by experts.” The experts will have a background in a particular industry, and will draw on this background as they develop managers from the same industry on their programme.

In this way, ex civil-servants will train other civil servants, ex manufacturing directors will instil leadership and management disciplines in those working in manufacturing, ex-lawyers will develop other lawyers, and ex IT professionals will inculcate “soft skills” in current IT professionals.

When the development focuses around technical information, it is easy to understand why those with a background in a similar industry might be preferable. Non-lawyers will have no grasp of technical aspects of law, non-IT professionals will know little about the technical issues facing those working at the front line of IT.

Where leadership and management attitudes and skills are to be developed, it is less clear why those with a particular industry background will be a useful choice. An impressive track record working in a certain industry only suggests that a person is expert at working in that particular field, rather than in developing others to do so. Further, the more impressive the track record, the stronger the hold it will exert over the person’s thinking. Hard-won experience is even harder to relinquish. Yet anyone who wishes to develop wider understanding must do just that: let go of the particular, loosen their grip on their individual insights and begin to see further than their own autobiography.

Developing and inspiring others is not the same as doing oneself, as footballers who turn to management often discover. Who had a better track record than Sir Bobby Charlton? In terms of industry experience, of “been there, done it, got the medals to prove it,” at one stage he was peerless in the English game. His management career underlined the gap between doing oneself and mobilising others. For some this gap is easily bridged - Charlton’s peer Franz Beckenbauer managed the German World Cup winning team of 1990. For others it proves impossible to cross. (Charlton’s choice of subsequent activities shows how fast he learned this, and how shrewd and adaptable he is.)

What qualifications should one look for from those involved in management development? Kevin Yates, Managing Director of Mitchell Phoenix, has become convinced that there are four key factors: expert facilitation - by those who are skilled at mobilising others; robust course content; a unique day a month structure which places the emphasis on delegate output rather than trainer input; and an unwavering focus on the creation of concrete business results. When choosing a development programme, it is a strong track record in these areas which gives the clearest indicator of future performance.