

WHAT KIND OF HIGH POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP (DEVELOPMENT) IS IT TIME FOR NOW?



High potentials: change the engine while flying the plane...



Leaders today are operating in an exciting if tough time to be a leader, rich in risk and opportunity. We live in times of massive potential and innovation, which also brings with it complexity, digitization, globalization, regulatory shifts, disintermediation and transparency and this demands leaders become adept and agile across a broad range of social, technical and emotional leadership competencies. This context of ongoing transformation as the new normal in turn means business look to find leaders who can change the engine (innovate) while flying the plane (execute). In other words, we need leaders who manage to balance focus on today with tomorrow, who are curious, collaborative as eco-systems expand, who are agile and purpose-led.

Leadership development is perhaps the critical way to build the culture and talent base to deliver a winning strategy. However, innate talent is a myth. None of us are born agile, innovative and dazzling leaders juggling flying and changing. Leadership skills are all disciplines which can be developed through stretching experiences and reflection over time.

But most high potential development programs don't deliver the anticipated ROI since they overlook the need for intensive leadership experiences based on real business conditions combined with inspiration, feedback, reflection and practice. Leadership skills to be honed, must be lived. As such, you cannot fully outsource leadership development. You can however bring in thought partners and deep expertise that can help you curate the right design and experiences, offer networks, expertise passion and a willingness to integrate the very best ideas in service of a program that is fun, stretching, inspiring and really makes the difference.

What does future facing high potential development involve?

Learn first how to Learn: By the end of a doctor's degree over half of the technical knowledge she/he learned will be out of date and so it feels for leading in business today. So as the pace of digital innovation takes hold, what we can do is equip leaders to be curious, self empowered to learn and to be motivated to curate the skills they need for the future. By learning **how to learn**, develop habits and stay agile then we overcome the half life of technical acumen and put locus of development control into the hands of the high potential.

Design the full experience: We do not learn in a way that gives us go-to habits if we teach theoretical content and then practice it. The learning may inspire for a few weeks but it doesn't stick. Learning sticks when we offer experiences, deep reflection and then pepper in the teachable components that are immediately applied and practiced. This flip reversal of teach then do, towards experience/do then teach has huge implications for design. The aim becomes to curate experiences over time that are intentionally designed to stimulate and stretch around objectives but where the participant themselves is jointly responsible to the learning. Then add other ingredients in the design - ie. virtual and live, individual and collective, spacing of key ideas distributed over time. Finally make development seriously fun and stretching.

Applied Neuro(Science): To get organizations and human beings back in sync we apply the latest neuroscience into business in as fun and stretching a way as possible, making the science accessible and encouraging the application of the insights. The upside is significant. Organizations are set up in a way that assumes people are rational, unemotional and unbiased decision makers when we know the opposite to be the case. When we truly appreciate the true drivers of human behaviors then we know which levers to pull to drive performance.



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Digital & Financial Skeleton: Whatever else the future brings it will be digital. And whatever else is changing about leadership at the top a fluency in commercial concepts is going to stay an essential skill. Fluency is assumed by the time a talent reaches high potential levels and this is an inhibiting assumption. It can be difficult to admit a lack of confidence with numbers to the organization without reputational risk. While we focus on leadership behaviours, we don't shy away from suggesting programs include including Financial (creating Value, Balance Sheet etc.) and Digital, Applied Artificial Intelligence modules with technical partners as part of the overall design.

Tackle elephants: Your organizational culture will have elephants in the room that will need addressing to make the ROI on leadership development realized,. The risk is that when we don't address major cultural or organizational issues, through leadership development programs we end up cleaning the fish (leaders) and put them back into a dirty tank (culture and policies). There are some common elephants. Many companies claim to be customer obsessed but few truly do make decisions in service of the consumer over and above the scrutiny of the senior leadership team and/or Board, fewer still have opportunities at senior levels to round out leadership experience through lateral moves. Many dominant logics about the culture, supply chain, business model, customer base etc. build up and we want to encourage high potentials to break any group norm belief systems.

Create horizontal loyalty: Most organizations struggle with silo thinking and behaviors that impede collaboration and innovation. New models attempt to deal with this but until culture and structure catch up then it will be the minds and relationships of the organization that help drive horizontal connectivity. Leadership programs help build horizontal peer groups and loyalty that can be leveraged to smash down the barriers of the organization and incentives.



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Personalize Development: Development should be intimate and this is where individual and team based coaching can make all the difference. Individual coaching, when used well has the power to personalize leadership development and nudge executives into accelerating their own stretch. Coaching also helps demystifies a path to the top for those people who are inert with a foggy path ahead. Peer based coaching creates intimacy between a group over time where they have a squad that they bond to throughout and where they share the culture but not their individual problems. This is peer coaching at its best.

Future Facing: Leaders today are leaders because they were good at yesterday and may be great today. In our development ROI we aim to be investing in the leadership skills for the day after tomorrow. In other words we need to equip leaders with the skills and the runway in time to consolidate and build on these to be relevant for the future.

Agency: We have long been advocates for custom programs that reflect the needs of the business. We now advocate handing over a small and discrete part of the design process to the participants themselves. Where discrete elements of the design are owned by participants we achieve many positive outcomes - 1) Agency in development which is owned and authored by the participants 2) Appreciation of what it takes to pull off a great development experience and 3) Topics and experiences innovation beyond the experience and mindset of our own teams.

