Emerald Insight

Journal of Management Development

Collusion with denial: leadership development and its evaluation
Elizabeth King Paul Nesbit

Article information:

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

Collusion with denial: leadership development and its evaluation

Elizabeth King and Paul Nesbit
*Macquarie Graduate School of Management, Macquarie University,
Sydney, Australia*

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate ways to gain deeper understanding of the evaluation challenge by reporting on insights about the impact of a leadership development program. It focusses on participants' reflective post-course analysis of their learning, comparing this to a traditional evaluative analysis. Recently there has been a greater focus on programs to develop leaders who have the requisite cognitive and behavioral complexity to lead in challenging environments. However models for the evaluation of such programs often rely on methodologies that assume learning of specific skills rather than assessment of how well participants are able to cognitively and behaviorally adapt to uncertain and complex environments.

Design/methodology/approach – The leadership development program was evaluated in two stages and the findings compared. Stage 1 elicited responses to the program using a traditional evaluation approach. Stage 2 involved 30 semi-structured interviews with the participants exploring the connections made between their development experience, work environment and approach to challenge.

Findings – Evaluation approaches which focus on assessing reflection about personal learning provide greater detail on learning experience than traditional approaches to evaluation and can increase our understanding of the broader impact of leadership development programs. Current evaluation practices are mostly traditional despite dissatisfaction with outcomes. There are functional and financial benefits flowing from this practice suggesting collusion with denial between the suppliers and purchasers of leadership development and posing a question of causation.

Originality/value – This study supports the use of qualitative evaluation techniques and in particular a focus on post-learning reflection to increase understanding of the impact of leadership development programs. The increased understanding provided by this type of evaluation can play a significant role in both the design of leader development programs and the creation of strategic alignment between business strategy, the purpose of leadership development interventions, learning objectives, program design and program evaluation.

Keywords Evaluation, Reflection, Leadership development program

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing realization that organizational and national prosperity is linked to continuous development of leaders within organizations (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; Karpin, 1995). This need for leadership development is even more essential given the increasingly dynamic environment facing organizations as growing competitive forces, arising from globalized market conditions and rapid technological innovation drive changing and challenging organizational environments. Consequently, in recent years there has been a greater emphasis on leadership development programs to develop people with the requisite capability in cognitive and behavioral complexity for challenging environments (Denison *et al*, 1995).

To deliver this result, leadership development programs typically seek to facilitate sustained self-awareness, continuous learning and personal reflection (Day, 2001; Kolb and Kolb, 2009; Nesbit, 2012; Raelin, 2002) along with the development of specific

leadership skills. This combination of personal and job-related skill development is seen to enable the insight, flexibility and behavioral changes that allow the delivery of sustained, responsive and effective leadership (Boyatzis, 2006). Such effective leadership is seen to positively impact individuals, organizations and the community at large (Black and Earnest, 2009).

Responding to the recognized importance of leadership development, companies invest considerable resources in developing and delivering such programs. Scholars believe this investment will continue to increase in coming decades (Collins, 2001). Given the substantial costs of such programs and their perceived significance to organizational success, measuring participant learning and its organizational outcomes is critical.

Despite the strategic importance of leadership development, few organizations adequately evaluate the effectiveness of programs or their impact on performance (Collins and Holton, 2004). Furthermore there is limited attention to how best to evaluate leadership development programs (Cacioppe, 1998). Current approaches to evaluation include theory based approaches, mixed methods and case studies. Each approach offers different outcomes. A theory based approach allows alignment between objectives and activities; a mixed method approach enables qualitative and quantitative data to be combined to complement each other; and a case study approach enables the researcher to uncover the meaning of the learning for the participant while capturing the complexities inherent in leadership development (Russon and Reinelt, 2004). Thus while the practice of evaluation is generally unsatisfactory, theoretical guidance exists to improve both the methodology and outcomes of evaluation.

When considering what is actually being evaluated and measured it has been emphasized (Russon and Reinelt, 2004) that the method of evaluation in a leadership development program should measure what the audience wants to know.

As well as creating alignment between evaluation approach and desired information the theory of evaluation suggests it is useful to align the form of enquiry with desired program outcomes. There are two basic forms of enquiry that can be used to understand program outcomes – evidential and evocative (Black and Earnest, 2009). A brief outline of each type of inquiry might be useful. The use of both types of enquiry is seen as helpful because it enables triangulation of data and the opportunity to highlight conflicting results from both methods (Kan and Parry, 2004). Qualitative methods using evocative enquiry are seen to enable a dynamic evaluation that uncovers both the intangible benefits and the effects of the program over time (Patton, 1980).

The intangible outcomes sought by leadership development programs mean that evaluation techniques should measure more than simply a participant's perception of the program (Martineau, 2004). However, currently, evaluation practices for leadership development programs do not generally assess intangible outcomes. Common practices typically rely on evaluation models designed to respond to the training objectives and to capture learning transfer back to work (Belling et al., 2004). The most popular of these traditional approaches is based on the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 2008), where potential outcomes are defined at four different levels: participants' emotion post-program; learning; behavioral change; and the projected financial impact of those behavioral changes on the organization. See Figure 1 (Alliger et al., 1997).

In practice the Kirkpatrick model and others like it, are primarily used to measure transfer of training to individual employees rather than the broader impacts of leadership development programs. The sustained use of this model is due to its

136

perceived strengths including the provision of a vocabulary regarding training outcomes; the distinction between learning, behavioral and financial outcomes which directs evaluation away from the participants' subjective responses to objective measurable outcomes; and the implication that financial outcomes are the ultimate measurement of success in training (Bates, 2004). However, participants' emotional response to, and satisfaction with, the program, measured immediately after completion is often all that is measured (Bates, 2004; Holton, 1996). Thus, while this evaluation model has greater capacity to clarify both the transfer of training to individual employees and the broader impacts of a program, in practice this rarely occurs (Alliger and Janak, 1989).

Some researchers have argued that while the simplicity of the Kirkpatrick style model supports discussions of leveraging human capital, it can be problematic in evaluating leadership development programs. This is particularly so for programs delivered in complex environments because the impact on leadership skills requires deeper, more personal insights regarding skill development and learning outcomes (Gosling and Mintzberg, 2006) such as changed mindset (Kennedy *et al.*, 2013). Thus while leadership theory recognizes the behavioral and cognitive complexity required to lead (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007), the theory and practice of development evaluation does not generally match that interpretation (Edwards and Turnbull, 2013).

Given that in dynamic environments learning to lead is an ongoing reflective practice which underpins the learning process (De DÉA Roglio and Light, 2009), the Kirkpatrick model may in fact draw attention away from this reflective need (Gosling and Mintzberg, 2006). Emphasizing positive emotional reactions to leadership development programs reinforces design of programs to produce positive experiences. In reality, learning experiences are often uncomfortable and confronting and not necessarily correlated with positive feelings immediately following a course. Another problem with the Kirkpatrick model is that post-program emotional experience does not always correlate with learning (Gilpin-Jackson and Bushe, 2007). Therefore the emphasis on return on investment (Hayward, 2011) linked to positive affect post program, downplays the need for challenging experiences typically associated with learning and growth (Nesbit, 2012).

Researchers wanting to reduce the gap between evaluation theory and practice have sought ways to capture complex program outcomes as well as to allow evaluators to understand what is actually learnt. One approach to address this gap is to assess whether a leadership development program successfully results in leaders who think broadly and deeply about their behavior, especially in complex and dynamic work environments (Boyatzis, 2008). The perspective that leadership development involves

Figure 1.
Kirkpatrick taxonomy

constant evolution (Reynolds, 1999) and that leadership learning is ongoing in response to formal, informal and incidental reflection (Marsick and Watkins, 2001) suggests that a delayed, reflective evaluation method may be useful in capturing a more complete picture of the learning process. This implies that more qualitative analyses of participants' experiences and changing perspectives over time are needed.

In general, qualitative research is seen as the methodology of choice for contextually rich topics (Conger, 1998). Leadership is one such topic due to the various situational factors that impact the role creating the need for continuous adjustment in style (Fiedler, 1996); learning – which is impacted by context (Ramsden, 1997); and a variety of individual factors (Dragoni et al., 2009). Thus evaluating a leadership development program is about investigating a dynamic complex behavioral process (Patton, 1980).

Guidance on how to conduct this type of investigation has been provided by an evaluation model based on the theory of change (Watkins and Lyso, 2011). The approach identifies critical incidents of new behavior to explore changes made in response to a development program at both the individual and the organizational level and is seen as a way to capture outcomes that are unpredictable, difficult to measure and potentially highly impactful. Other aspects of evaluation theory recognize the important role of context in leadership development (Peters et al., 2007) and the broader benefits of leadership development interventions including personal, inner benefits such as the motivation, confidence, and clarity that can emerge from effective leadership development interventions (Leedham, 2005).

The purpose of the present study was to report an effort to evaluate a leadership development program using a delayed qualitative analysis of learning. The approach taken utilizes qualitative methodologies and exploration of both critical incidents of learning and the impact of context on learning, then compares insights with those produced by a more typical immediate post-course quantitative evaluation.

After conducting a traditional evaluation, we conducted semi-structured interviews with managers who had been involved in a formal leadership development program to explore the connections made between that development experience and their approach to work. Specifically we were interested in whether the leadership development program changed the way participants approached challenging situations at work; the benefits, if any, they felt they received from the program; and the impact of their immediate work environments on their learning outcomes and process.

It is proposed that incorporating a qualitative evaluation method will increase understanding of the relationship between leadership learning processes and leadership development programs in dynamic environments. As evaluation methods underlie investment decisions, a more complete understanding of outcomes achieved may improve the quality of such decisions and ultimately of leadership behavior which is crucial to organizations striving to successfully navigate dynamic and therefore complex environments.

Method

This study was carried out in a large Australian government organization with responsibility for monitoring and enforcing company and financial services legislation. Due to the sensitive nature of its operation, the organization is anonymously referred to as LEGCO. The structure of LEGCO is arranged as a matrix, utilizing cross-functional teams for project-based work. Team members generally report to one manager for administration but to more than one for daily work tasks in multiple project teams. As a result of the leadership structure and variable role designs, reporting

arrangements are fluid and complex creating constant internal and external change alongside the inherent change in project-based work. Given the nature of the organization's role in monitoring and enforcing company and financial services law as well as its complex reporting structures, the organization is said to operate in a turbulent and dynamic environment.

The leadership development program was initiated within an organizational change project designed to develop leaders with the capability to drive cultural change. The program involved three skills-development workshops (lasting from two to three days each) aimed at increasing competency in self-leadership, people leadership, and team leadership. These workshops were held every few months over a two-year period. The skills workshops were conducted in typical class-based format with university-tenured lecturers presenting on core leadership topics. The programs were mostly traditional and formal in content and delivery. However they also integrated education in self-reflection and behavioral change strategies to encourage deeper levels of personal change.

Surprisingly, the program design only implied a broad leadership competency model and its aim could be expressed as simply a desire for "better leadership." Like many organizations, LEGCO wanted better leaders to take the organization forward into difficult times but lacked clarity about specific competencies needed. This research study arose from dissatisfaction with a previously undertaken, and limited, leadership development program evaluation which focussed mainly on immediate post-course evaluation assessment.

At the time of the study, 22 executive level and 220 senior manager level staff had undertaken at least one of the three workshops. The participants typically held legal or financial qualifications. Of the 30 participants interviewed, four were executive level managers, while 26 were senior managers reporting to executive leaders. There was an even distribution of males and females for the executive level interviewees but a ratio of approximately 5:1 of males to females at the manager level. Participants were nominated by the organization's Learning and Development Team as a representative sample of the entire group.

There was considerable variance in participant experiences in the background they brought to the program and the learning interactions in which they engaged. These included: differences in time spent in current roles and within the organization; different combinations of development units completed; and different levels of previous exposure to the program's concepts. Consequently, evaluating the program's impact epitomized the complexity of measuring outcomes of leadership development programs in general and, in particular, those conducted in dynamic environments. The evaluation method was designed to match the organization's information need, which was to assess the impact of the program, although no pre-program competency measurements had been taken.

The leadership development program was evaluated in two stages using two methodologies. The first stage was a quantitative evaluation, completed immediately post-program, using a questionnaire developed from the principles of the Kirkpatrick model (Kirkpatrick, 1977) to reflect a Level 2 evaluation focussed on learning outcomes. This approach was chosen as it is the most popular of this common method of evaluation which focusses on transfer of training to individuals. The second stage was a qualitative assessment involving semi-structured interviews lasting 45 to 60 minutes. These were conducted a minimum of three months post-program. Issues investigated during the interviews included: the context of the individuals' experiences; critical

incidents that led to learning post program; the connections participants made between the program content and their working style; working style changes made in response to the program; participants' perceptions of benefits of the program, and the impact their immediate work environment had on their learning.

In addition to the semi-structured discussions during the interviews, participants were asked to offer their perspective on the value of the program for themselves and the organization. Participants either chose a numerical rating between 0 and 10 for the programs (where 0 was least valuable and 10 most valuable) or offered words to describe their satisfaction. This information on satisfaction is equivalent to information gathered using an evaluation model similar to the Kirkpatrick model, at Level 1.

At the organization's request, interviews were not audiotaped. Instead, hand written notes were made during the interview. Effort was made to note verbatim quotes to ensure the analysis represented the "voice" of participants. For the same reason, interview notes were reviewed immediately after the interview and expanded to form as rich a record of the interview as possible given the restrictions. These notes were entered into NVIVO to aid the articulation of emerging themes. The interview process was refined throughout the study to respond to emerging data and improve clarity. This process created order from spontaneous, qualitative responses without over-simplifying results and helped maintain rigor in information collated from a complex learning experience undertaken in a dynamic environment. The interviews were conducted by one highly experienced person to minimize variation in interviewer interpretation.

Discussion
Overall evaluation of the leadership development program
It became apparent from the interviews that participants in the leadership development program generally considered it successful in two key ways. Two-thirds of interviewees believed it helped them create positive behavioral and/or cognitive changes, even though half stated their work environment failed to support their efforts to change. Second, over a third of participants perceived the program to be successful by creating increased reflective skills whereas only one-tenth had indicated engagement in personal reflective practices prior to the leadership development program, suggesting that these skills were embraced in response to the program itself.

Participants were asked at interview to rate their overall satisfaction with the program using a ten-point scale. While results ranged from 5 to 10, most participants rated the programs in the 7-8 range, describing the program as "valuable" or "very valuable." These evaluations corresponded with the immediate, post course, evaluative measurement survey demonstrating that a delayed, dynamic, reflective process did not alter people's level of satisfaction with, or their perception of, the value of the program. One participant, who rated the program 7-8, articulated the benefits of the program for LEGCO as follows:

> It was valuable to get a theoretical perspective. Benefits for individual and organization included staff retention, increased productivity of team and organization, increased quality of perception of external stakeholders, increased awareness of techniques which led to greater understanding of situations and increased confidence.

Feedback on things that "stuck" from the formal leadership development program included variations on the following themes: "thinking about their team working as a single entity rather than a group of individuals"; "discovering ways to treat people

more as individuals"; "discovering more about themselves simply from the opportunity provided for reflection"; "recognizing that colleagues think about and approach things differently"; and "insight into the importance of their role as leader." One leader described this discovery as "It made me realize I do make a difference. I set the tone for the day."

To determine if any of the ideas that "stuck" translated into behavioral change, participants were asked to describe any behavioral changes they had made in response to the leadership development program. In total, 23 (77 percent) of the participants stated they had done so. In general, most comments were about different ways in which they had changed how they managed others. Changes included greater people focus, more professional approaches to management, more self-awareness and more planning of interactions as indicated by the following quotes. "I work harder on delivering bad news." "I'm more assertive now." "I am no longer trying to create a happy family." "I delegate more." "I have made cheat sheets to help get consistent messages to the public," and "I have increased self-reflection including writing."

Almost all participants who reported behavioral changes also reported cognitive changes. Reported cognitive impact ranged from subtle to dramatic, for example: "I'm more conscious of the leadership dynamic - more aware that I need to move from doing it myself to motivating others."; "It's important not to leave a train wreck in your path to get things done. It's important to keep everyone happy - the importance of staff retention."; "I have an increased professionalism in my people management."; "There is an increased awareness and appreciation of diversity"; and "My big learning was to shut up and listen." These reflections indicate that cognitive and behavioral change tends to co-exist and that significant change usually has components of both.

A number of participants noted changes in mindset about their roles reflecting a movement in leadership style from technical and task-focus to people-focus, and from self-focus to other-focus. This showed up as recognizing the need to adjust their personal style in response to team members rather than expecting team members to make the adjustments. Participants also noted changed perceptions about their own role and career: "The course changed my mind set. Rather than feeling dejected because I can't get a senior management role I decided to improve myself while I am here."

Such responses can be compared to the answers about intended behavioral change which emerged from the immediate static evaluation of the program. Statements at that point tended to be action orientated rather than reflecting deep learning or perception changes, including "setting goals for using the theory I learned in specific situations" and "maintaining a list of things to implement."

To identify differences between the analyses of feedback, we compared answers provided by both methodologies to the same topic. Examples of comparative statements are listed in Table I and our interpretation follows:

- When describing their key learning from the program a typical answer using the static methodology was "team profiles," compared to "I realized senior management is about being a knowledge hub." The first suggests a sense of content that "stuck" whereas the second suggests the meaning taken from the content and the attitude change that may have occurred in response.

- When asked to comment on the quality of facilitation a common answer from the static process was "well facilitated," in contract to a dynamic process comment being "The excellent facilitation made me feel the company appreciated me." Thus the qualitative response provided insight into the manager's perceptions of

Topic	Static immediate evaluative	Dynamic delayed reflective
Key learning on management	Team profiles	Senior management is about being a knowledge hub
Facilitation	Well facilitated	The excellent facilitation made me feel the company appreciated me
Overall evaluation of the program	Excellent	Benefits for individuals and the organization include staff retention, increased productivity, increased awareness of leadership techniques leading to greater understanding and confidence
Intended changes to management style	Become a better communicator	Pause and use empathy
Suggested program improvements	Finish earlier	Create more opportunity to implement tools at work

Table I.
Feedback examples

the value of investing in training. This broader view highlights the potential positive impact on staff morale and engagement that occurs simply due to people's appreciation of investment in their growth and offers an opportunity to expand our view of ROI on training investment.

- When asked to provide an overall evaluation of the program a common answer using the static approach was "excellent" whilst a comparison answer was "benefits for the individuals and the organization included staff retention, increased productivity and increased awareness of leadership techniques leading to greater understanding and confidence."

- When asked about intended changes to management style resulting from the program, a typical answer from the static evaluation was "to become a better communicator" whilst a comparison answer was "to pause and use empathy." In these two examples the qualitative answer adds detail to the general idea of benefits, providing an example of the way qualitative analysis complements and extends the information gleaned from quantitative data, as it does in other areas of leadership research.

- When asked to suggest program improvements, answers provided by the static methodology included comments such as "finish earlier" compared to "create more opportunity to implement tools at work." This contrast showed the latter approach encouraged thinking that was more closely linked to the learning achieved and its application, rather than just the experience.

Interpreting these answers was the key to our understanding the nature of differences in the evaluation approaches. Variation in the types of comments showed that the delayed, dynamic, reflective evaluation uncovered greater detail and has the potential to uncover both the emotional impact of the experience and the meaning participants attribute to the learning.

A number of participants candidly stated they were unable to recall specific workshop details, although most recognized having received a significant development opportunity. Intensity of work was one reason people found limited opportunity to reflect on and apply the program content. Another reason suggested for limited impact

was that participants had limited energy to apply effort and intent to the learning task. Both these suggestions underline the importance of the environment on learning.

Impact of environment on learning
LEGCO presented participants with a complex work environment within which to explore their leadership learning. One particular problem relates to how externally imposed, intense deadline pressures force constant change in priorities and demands. This need for flexible responses requires the need to move from issue to issue often prior to completion of that issue. The reality of these often rapidly shifting priorities is emotionally difficult, causing motivation challenges by compromising a sense of achievement and devaluing work. One participant described it like this "there are different expectations and little consistency in approach with the senior leaders; therefore it is challenging to come to grips with what they require or feel like about how you are performing." Work satisfaction suffers and stress increases as people strive to attach to the latest agenda. To sustain work engagement in such environments leaders must deal with ambiguity, cross-functional team structures, changing human resource standards, and significant differences in staff experience and expertise while developing recommendations on legally, ethically and emotionally complex issues.

Leadership development programs are intended to support leaders to perform in these complex environments; however the level of support that is delivered may not always be that which is intended. Leadership development programs require leaders to think broadly and deeply about their behavior (Boyatzis, 2008) and how to change it. Therefore such a program itself can be challenging because behavioral change is demanding (Prochaska *et al.*, 1995). In addition, participation in leadership development programs often leads to longer working hours to compensate for time lost, a common but ineffective strategy (Loehr and Schwartz, 2001; Schwartz and McCarthy, 2007). Consequently leadership development programs, delivered in dynamic complex environments, may add to cognitive and task overload reducing ability to learn and adapt, rather than increasing the skill to lead flexibly and perform well.

It was clear that participants found their work environment stressful and negative, with many describing it as "chaotic." Many felt pressured by deadlines and changing priorities, whilst others were frustrated by how long it took to get decisions on their recommendations.

There was also widespread dissatisfaction with a recently implemented, flat structure and fluid reporting arrangements due to the disruption to informal networks and creation of role conflicts. Many participants found working in the changed structure difficult and stressful. The challenge of dealing with top-down decision-making with constant change and the resultant stress was commonly discussed and seen to cause "mass dismay."

An overwhelming sense of despair and negativity about the organization itself was evident with comments including: "a toxic environment of conflict and distrust"; "a poisonous culture"; "being treated like fodder"; and "This organization is like a fish – fish rot from the head."

The sense of negativity was tangible and underlined the recognized need to achieve the very cultural change that underpinned the strategic review which led to the development of the program. Stressful environments can negatively impact learning (De Rue and Wellman, 2009) and personal change (Benson and Allen, 1980). The experience of stress is problematic in the context of learning and leadership as it reduces one's ability

to think and behave flexibly – abilities that leaders need to adapt to the challenges inherent in dynamic environments. Stress also creates cognitive overload (Suls and Rothman, 2004), emotional negativity (Fredrickson and Losada, 2005), and an automatic maladaptive physical stress response which negatively impacts the muscle, nervous and immune systems and results in poor health and performance (Benson and Allen, 1980). Thus, challenge overload, typical of dynamic environments, may reduce the effectiveness of programs by limiting leaders' capacity to learn.

Nevertheless, this study found that significant learning and behavioral change did occur despite the dynamic high stress environment. This leads to the question as to how learning occurs despite such barriers, and how much more may have been learned if the environment were less dynamic.

One answer may lie in the encouragement of reflection within the leadership program. The leadership development program reported here provided education in reflection. This enabled participants to consider the role reflection played in their learning and their general approach to work challenges, and to discuss this during the delayed dynamic evaluation process.

The important relationship between reflection and learning is strongly supported by scholars (Kolb and Kolb, 2009; Reynolds, 1999) and this study highlighted the causal relationship, as described by participants, between reflection and behavioral and cognitive change. Through reflection, participants could clearly articulate connections between the content and their own cognition and behavior. Many were able to articulate a process whereby personal reflection emerged in response to the program which, in turn, led to insights which initiated a change in cognition or behavior.

In summary, the participants described various effects that their work environment had on their learning. Figure 2 summarizes key aspects of this feedback. It suggests how environment impacts on learning through a positive or negative interplay with participants' capacity to reflect on the development opportunity, to practice new skills, to be motivated to use the skills or simply to provide opportunities to do so.

Some participants noted a desire for more time to reflect on their actions and commented on there being either too much or too little reflection in their organization, issues also identified by scholars. One study discusses the reflection challenges at an organizational level suggesting that organizations tend to be "focused on action, but not so adept at stepping back to reflect on their situation; or the opposite, where they are so involved in the reflective process […] they cannot get things done fast enough" (Gosling and Mintzberg, 2003, p. 56). Participants wanting more time to reflect felt that they were so pressured by deadlines and changing priorities they were unable to do so.

Prior to the leadership development program, three participants had personal disciplines of reflective practices such as meditation and prayer, and all three identified these practices in their approach to work. Other participants described activities that enabled reflection such as "soccer" or "exercise and constant self-reflection" within their approach to dealing with work challenges. In response to questions about reflective practice, one participant used self-talk (Nesbit, 2012) as a mental discipline to deal with the complexity of work: "think like a robot"; "segment of day by segment of day"; "don't think ahead"; "don't think about problems in the future."

After the leadership development program, one third of the participants noted they had developed personal work-related reflective practices that enabled structured reflection on their behavior and approach to work. They all noted this practice as both
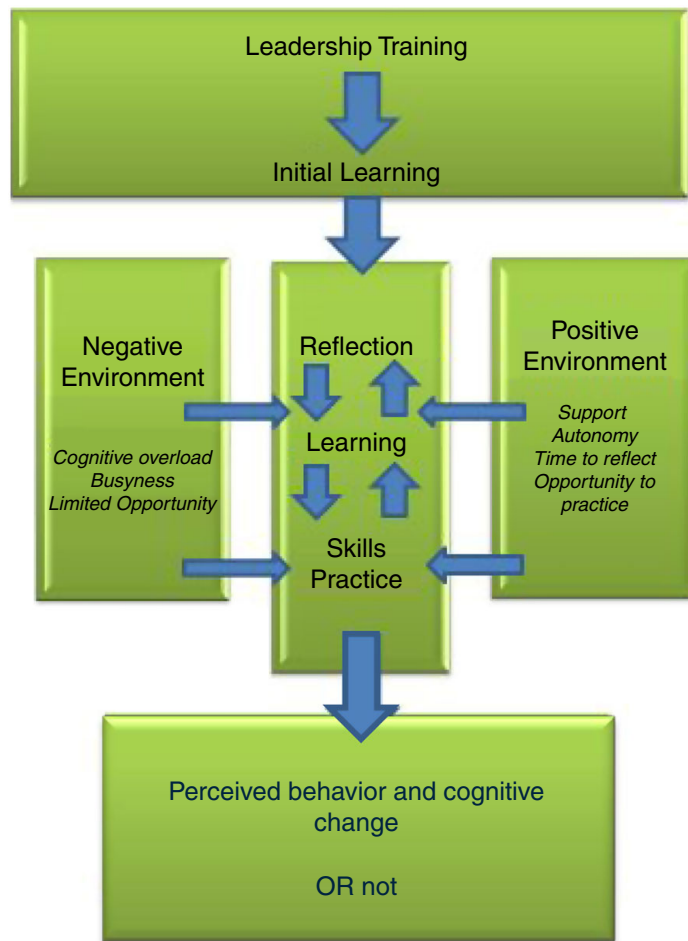
Figure 2.
Key aspects of
feedback

supporting what they learned from the program and providing an ongoing mechanism for self-development.

The qualitative investigation into the role played by reflection in learning supports the idea that challenging leadership situations, along with other types of critical and learning events, trigger reflection which in turn leads to self-development (Karp, 2013; May *et al.*, 2003). It also concurs with scholars noting the significant role that local context can play in the outcome of leadership development programs (Peters *et al.*, 2007). This investigation highlighted the impact of supervisor support, opportunities to apply learning, overall workload, culture and organizational structure on leader development. These aspects of environmental context all impact the potential for a leadership development program to lead to deep personal change such as changes in mindset, applied learning and eventual behavior change and, ultimately, enhanced leader and organizational success.

Conclusion

This study explored the reflective insights of managers about their work environment and changes in behaviors and cognitions associated with their attendance at a leadership development program. The study drew out the nature of the subtle changes in behavioral and cognitive responses among participants, despite working in an environment that was seen as stressful and even toxic at times. The importance of

reflection as stimulated by the leadership development program was seen to be a major benefit that facilitated learning and allowed leadership change to be contemplated and enacted.

The impact of context on learning was highlighted in this study. If the learning opportunity provided by a leadership development program is to be translated into changes in leader behavior then a positive organizational context is helpful. To improve outcomes of development programs, organizations can provide supervisor support for the new skill, opportunities to apply learning, and an environment that reduces stress and encourages reflection.

The evaluation methodology allowed a comparison of qualitative and quantitative analysis and showed that the data was mostly complementary. However the qualitative analysis provided richer detail of the learning experience and the potential value of the learning for the participant and the organization. For organizations wanting to understand the broader impact of a development program, a qualitative evaluation process will enable them to determine the deeper changes, such as mindset, that have occurred. This information can complement the traditional evaluation process designed to determine transfer of learning, or can stand alone as a useful approach to understanding what has occurred.

Given that evaluation plays a crucial role in determining ongoing adjustment and support of leadership development programs, this study suggests that more complete understanding of the effectiveness of a leadership development program conducted in a dynamic environment is provided using a qualitative, delayed, reflective, dynamic process.

Current evaluation practices do not generally allow alignment of evaluation methodology with the desired outcomes for leadership development programs, particularly those delivered in complex environments. Most evaluation approaches to leadership development programs provide information on tangible outcomes, using appropriate methodologies to do so. However leadership is a complex task and modern environments are increasingly dynamic and complicated. The strategic importance of leadership development leads to questioning of the apparent inconsistency between evaluation practices and chosen methodologies and the goals of leadership development programs. Thus a focus on the strategic alignment between the purpose of a leadership development program and its evaluation objectives and methodology would likely provide organizations and their leaders with more effective information on which to base their development decisions. An acceptance that evaluating leadership learning in modern environments is a complex and, at times, messy process may provide support for the leadership development professionals striving to understand the impact of their activities.

The theory/practice gap that exists between leadership development and its evaluation is clear and potentially detrimental to organization success. However it is rarely recognized or addressed within organizations. Investigating why this collusion with denial exists could shed light on the situation and suggest possible solutions.

References

Alliger, G.M. and Janak, E.A. (1989), "Kirkpatrick's levels of training criteria: thirty years later", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 42 No. 2, pp. 331-342.

Alliger, G.M., Tannenbaum, S.I., Bennett Jr, W., Traver, H. and Shotland, A. (1997), "A meta-analysis of the relations among training criteria", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 50 No. 2, pp. 341-358.

Bates, R. (2004), "A critical analysis of evaluation practice: the Kirkpatrick model and the principle of beneficence", *Evaluation and Program Planning*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 341-347.

Belling, R., James, K. and Ladkin, D. (2004), "Back to the workplace: how organisations can improve their support for management learning and development", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 23, pp. 234-255.

Benson, H. and Allen, R.L. (1980), "How much stress is too much?", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 58 No. 5, pp. 86-92.

Black, A.M. and Earnest, G.W. (2009), "Measuring the outcomes of leadership development programs", *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 184-196.

Boyatzis, R.E. (2006), "An overview of intentional change from a complexity perspective", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 25 No. 7, pp. 607-623.

Boyatzis, R.E. (2008), "Leadership development from a complexity perspective", *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, Vol. 60 No. 4, pp. 298-313.

Cacioppe, R. (1998), "An integrated model and approach for the design of effective leadership development programs", *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 44-53.

Collins, D.B. (2001), "Organizational performance: the future focus of leadership development programs", *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 4, pp. 43-54.

Collins, D.B. and Holton, E.F. (2004), "The effectiveness of managerial leadership development programs: a meta-analysis of studies from 1982 to 2001", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 217-248.

Conger, J.A. (1998), "Qualitative research as the cornerstone methodology for understanding leadership", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 107-121.

Day, D.V. (2001), "Leadership development: a review in context", *Leadership Quaterly*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 581-613.

De DÉA Roglio, K. and Light, G. (2009), "Executive MBA programs: the development of the reflective executive", *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 156-173.

De Rue, D.S. and Wellman, N. (2009), "Developing leaders via experience: the role of developmental challenge, learning orientation, and feedback availability", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 94 No. 4, p. 859.

Denison, D.R., Hooijberg, R. and Quinn, R.E. (1995), "Paradox and performance: toward a theory of behavioral complexity in managerial leadership", *Organization Science*, Vol. 6 No. 5, pp. 524-540.

Dragoni, L., Tesluk, P.E., Russell, J.E.A. and Oh, I.-S. (2009), "Understanding managerial development: integrating developmental assignments, learning orientation,and access to developmental opportunites in predicting managerial competencies", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 52 No. 4, pp. 731-743.

Edwards, G. and Turnbull, S. (2013), "Special issue on new paradigms in evaluating leadership development", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 3-9.

Fiedler, F.E. (1996), "Reflections by an accidental theorist", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 453-461.

Fredrickson, B.L. and Losada, M.F. (2005), "Positive affect and the complex dynamics of human flourishing", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 60 No. 7, pp. 678-686.

Gilpin-Jackson, Y. and Bushe, G.R. (2007), "Leadership development training transfer: a case study of post-training determinants", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 26 No. 10, pp. 980-1004.

Gosling, J. and Mintzberg, H. (2003), "The five minds of a manager. (cover story)", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 81 No. 11, pp. 54-63.

Gosling, J. and Mintzberg, H. (2006), "Management education as if both matter", *Management Learning*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 419-428.

Hayward, S. (2011), "Connecting leadership development to bottom line benefits", *Strategic HR Review*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 28-34.

Hogan, R. and Warrenfeltz, R. (2003), "Educating the modern manager", *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 74-84.

Holton, E.F. III (1996), "The flawed four-level evaluation model", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 5-21.

Kan, M.M. and Parry, K.W. (2004), "Identifying paradox: a grounded theory of leadership in overcoming resistance to change", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 467-491.

Karp, T. (2013), "Developing oneself as a leader", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 127-140.

Karpin, D. (1995), Enterprising nation: reviewing Australia's managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century, report of the industry task FORCE on leadership and management skills, Canberra.

Kennedy, F., Carroll, B. and Francoeur, J. (2013), "Mindset not skill set evaluating in new paradigms of leadership development", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 10-26.

Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1977), "Evaluating training programs: evidence vs proof", *Training and Development Journal*, Vol. 77.

Kirkpatrick, J.D. and Kirkpatrick, W.K. (2008), *Training on Trial*, American Management Association.

Kolb, A.Y. and Kolb, D.A. (2009), "The learning way: meta-cognitive aspects of experiential learning", *Simulation & Gaming*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 297-327.

Leedham, M. (2005), "The coaching scorecard: a holistic approach to evaluating the benefits of business coaching", *The Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 30-44.

Loehr, J. and Schwartz, T. (2001), "The making of a corporate athlete", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 79 No. 1, pp. 120-128.

Marsick, V.J. and Watkins, K.E. (2001), "Informal and incidental learning", *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, Vol. 2001 No. 89, pp. 25-34.

Martineau, J. (2004), "Laying the groundwork: first steps in evaluating leadership development", *Leadership in Action*, Vol. 23 No. 6, pp. 3-8.

May, D.R., Chan, A.Y.L., Hodges, T.D. and Avolio, B.J. (2003), "Developing the moral component of authentic leadership", *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 247-260.

Nesbit, P.L. (2012), "The role of self-reflection, emotional management of feedback, and self-regulation processes in self-directed leadership development", *Human Resource Development Review*, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 203-226.

Patton, M.Q. (1980), *Qualitative Evaluation Methods*, Sage publications, Beverly Hills, CA.

Peters, L., Baum, J., Hannum, K., Martineau, J. and Reinelt, C. (2007), "The importance of local context in leadership development and evaluation", *The Handbook of Leadership Development Evaluation*, pp. 261-283.

Prochaska, J.O., Norcross, J.C. and DiClemente, C.C. (1995), *Changing for Good*, Avon Books, New York, NY.

Raelin, J.A. (2002), "'I don't have time to think!' versus the art of reflective practice", *Reflections*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 66-79.

Ramsden, P. (1997), "The context of learning in academic departments", *The Experience of Learning*, Vol. 2, pp. 198-216.

Reynolds, M. (1999), "Critical reflection and management education: rehabilitating less hierarchical approaches", *Journal of Management Education*, Vol. 23 No. 5, pp. 537-553.

Russon, C. and Reinelt, C. (2004), "The results of an evaluation scan of 55 leadership development programs", *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 104-107.

Schwartz, T. and McCarthy, C. (2007), "Manage your energy, not your time", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 85 No. 10, p. 63.

Suls, J. and Rothman, A. (2004), "Evolution of the biopsychosocial model: prospects and challenges for health psychology", *Health Psychology*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 119-125.

Uhl-Bien, M., Marion, R. and McKelvey, B. (2007), "Complexity leadership theory: shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 18 No. 4, pp. 298-318.

Watkins, K.E., Lysø, I.H. and Demarrais, K. (2011), " Evaluating executive leadership programs: a theory of change approach", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 13, pp. 208-239.

Appendix 1. Sample structure of the first approach to evaluation, conducted immediately post program

The program
What were your goals in attending this program?
What were the best aspects of this program?
What did you like least about the program?
What changes (if any) would you suggest to improve this program?
How will you apply what you have learnt in your organization?

The content
On a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), please provide the appropriate response beside each question below.

	Poor		Acceptable	Excellent	
	1	2	3	4	5
How well did the program help you accomplish your learning objectives?					
How well did the content correspond to the business challenges you face on the job/in your organisation?					
How well did the content contribute to your capability as a manager?					
How well did the content match your needs and expectations?					

General Comments:

The presenter
On a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), please provide the appropriate response beside each
question below.

	Poor		Acceptable		Excellent
	1	2	3	4	5
This presenter exhibited good knowledge of the subject.					
This presenter stimulated interest in the subject.					
This presenter explained concepts clearly.					
This presenter was well prepared for each session.					
This presenter demonstrated enthusiasm for teaching.					
Content was made relevant to my situation.					
How well did the presenter apply the content to the challenges you encounter on the job?					
Overall effectiveness of presentation style.					

Comments:

Appendix 2. Structure of the qualitative interviews

Welcome

Thanks

Introduction

Why and what

Timing

Notes

Benefits

Background and Role

How long have you worked here?

Tell me about your role.

What does it involve?

Who do you interact with – typical week?

Do you work in groups/alone/ratio?

Close knit?

Personal Organization Chart

Understanding the Individual

What do you enjoy /find meaningful about your role?

Why?

What do you find less enjoyable/less meaningful?

Why?

What achievement are you most proud of in your role so far?

Why?

General Work Challenges

What do you find challenging in your role?

Have there been any **particular** challenges that have stretched you / lead you to learn or grow or change the way you work in some way?

Reflective Practices

Referring to specific challenges….

When you have found yourself facing challenging or problems at work how have you worked through them?

Connections between Work Behaviour and the Courses

Background

What courses have you been on?

What aspects have you found relevant?

What have you applied?

Any behavioral changes?

Specific examples.

How long have you made changes?

Are the changes consistent / increasing/decreasing?

Has the course changed the way you think about your role?

Critical Incidents and Connections

What are some key incidents you have had to focus on at work since the course?

How have you dealt with these incidents?

Overall Assessment

Overall did you find the program useful?

How would you rate it – 0-10?

What in particular has been useful?

What have been the benefits of the course for you /organization?

Would you recommend the program/why?

The Environmental Impact

Referring back to situations, challenges and behaviour change…

Is there anything in the organization's environment that has been helpful for you in making changes?

Is there been anything that has made it difficult for you to make changes/obstacles to change?

Is there anything else you would like to comment on?

About the authors
Elizabeth King is an Executive Coach and Facilitator specialising in evidence-based approaches to enhancing performance. The focus of her work has been the integration of evidence-based self-care and evidence-based coaching techniques to enhance executive performance and improve health outcomes for both executives and people with chronic illness. Her current career interest has extended to include the focus of her PhD research – how to predict and improve leadership performance in dynamic environments. She has a BSc, MBA, Masters in HRM and Coaching and post graduate training in Behavioural Medicine from Harvard. Elizabeth King is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: Elizabeth@metaperformance.com.au

Dr Paul Nesbit is a Senior Lecturer in Management at the Graduate School of Management, Macquarie University where he teaches and researches in the field of leadership development. He has a BA (Honours) in Psychology, an MA in Sociology, an MBA, and PhD in Organisational Behaviour from the University of New South Wales.