

LEADER DEVELOPMENT: EVALUATING A LEADER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Bárbara Filipa Viana de Sousa¹ & Catarina do Vale Brandão^{1,2}

¹Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Porto

²Centre for Psychology at University of Porto

Abstract: Leader development is a recent area of research, stemming from organizational practices that focus on leader development programs to gain competitive advantage. Therefore, program evaluation gains importance, as it allows determining the value and efficiency of a program. The overall objective of this research is to evaluate the leader development program implemented by an engineering non-profit organization. To this end, a qualitative and evaluative approach was adopted through a case study methodology. Data were gathered from program stakeholders through interviews and written documents. The results show that the program has underlying functionalist and interpretive discourse principles, focusing on the results of the organization and on people's well-being. The leadership approach combines principles of TABELS and Transformational Leadership theory, aiming a leader who is authentic, caregiver, constructor, contaminator, entrepreneur, ground breaker and meaning designer. The leader's development was essentially based on a self-reflective process, using the method of critical incidents, projective techniques and role-playing games. Regarding the development process, two stages focusing intrapersonal and interpersonal development were identified: (i) ExtraMind activity and (ii) a Retreat of leaders. Throughout this activities, two layers of leader development were aimed: identity and self-regulation development and adult development. The major contribution of the study was the evaluation of an executed leader development program, which allowed us to do some recommendations to the organization concerning its improvement. In addition, it contributes to leader development program's evaluation. By presenting a more complete analysis system it allows a deeper and more exhaustive analysis of a program.

Keywords: Leadership, Leadership development, Program evaluation, Case Study

Introduction

Leadership can be defined as a process of social influence where individuals determine the goals of a group, stimulate the behavior towards the goals set, and influence their continuity and culture (Yukl, 1989). It is considered one of the most intense and important social phenomena of today (Wellman, 2017).

Leader and Leadership Development

Leadership development refers to the process of developing multiple individuals (leaders and followers) to strengthen leadership interpersonal relationships in the organization (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). The focus is on the individual level, leader-follower dyad, peer relations, climate and organizational culture (Day & Harrison, 2007). On the other hand, leader development, what we focus here, refers to the process of developing an individual to become a leader or to improve a leader's performance, working primarily at the individual level (Day & Harrison, 2007). There is an investment in the development of the individual's potentialities and in the expansion of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA's) and leader's self-views (e.g., self-efficacy, self-awareness and leader identity). Regarding the leader's development process, variables that capture self-views are more proximal and malleable for the leader's emergence, long-term development and effectiveness (Liu, Riggio, Day, Zheng, Dai, & Bian, 2019).

Program Evaluation

Facing constant change and intense technology, organizations are increasingly investing in leader development programs. However, most of these programs lack empirical foundation and evidence of the effectiveness of their results. In this context, program evaluation is of high importance as it allows to determine the value, relevance and efficiency of a program according

to formulated criteria (Fawcett & Pockett, 2015). Thus, it enables the continuous improvement of the evaluated programs once it supposes the identification of development opportunities and improvement recommendations (Phalen & Cooper, 2007; McKee, Odom, Moore, & Murphrey, 2016).

Methodologically, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used for data collection and analysis (Fawcett & Pockett, 2015). In terms of informants, stakeholders represent a very important group to be included in the evaluation and among the stakeholders, Patton (2012) in his Utilization-Focused model draws attention to intended users. Intended users are the subjects who ensure that assessment results and recommendations suggested by evaluators are implemented - it is the intended uses of the intended users that determine the focus of the evaluation (Patton, 2012).

A model for Leader Development Program's Evaluation

After addressing program evaluation in general, we now focus on the evaluation applied to leader development programs, as this is the object of this paper. Based on our literature review we considered Esper's (2015) Model, which results from an integrative review and test of leader development existing literature. The model presents seven criteria to evaluate a program, which allow the analyses of the program both in terms of its theoretical foundations (criteria 1 to 4) and the underlying learning process (criteria 5 to 7). The seven criteria are: (1) Guiding discourse of the program, (2) Theoretical foundations of leader and leaderships concepts, (3) Leader concept, (4) Leadership concept, (5) Learning conceptualization, (6) Learning process and (7) Depth level of the development process. Note that leader development programs do not explicitly define their guiding discourse (criteria 1). This means that the program's guiding speech is identified after analyzing the remaining six model criteria.

Study objective and research question

The main objective of this study was the evaluation of the leader development program implemented by the organization CEiiA, using the Esper's model (2015). In this sense, a research question was defined: What are the theoretical fundamentals and learning process behind CEiiA's leader development program?

Method

A case study was conducted, adopting a qualitative approach and an evaluative methodology, focused on the analysis and evaluation of the program developed and implemented by the organization CEiiA.

The organization: CEiiA

Our case was selected from CEiiA, a 300-employee product development and engineering center that operates in several engineering areas. CEiiA's environment is characterized by a wide range of areas of interest, high technology, multiple teams with different tasks and a large mobility of people between teams. Thus, it is a very complex, challenging and competitive context, where people are constantly motivated to reach new goals and present pioneering ideas (CEiiA, personal communication, 2019).

Case Selection

Given that, the organization has a culture of development and appreciation of its employees (CEiiA, personal communication, 2019), we had to identify the activities implemented to develop people and understand if they focused on leadership development or leader development, according to the literature. Thus, four activities were identified: three related to leader development and one to leadership development (Table 1). The activities

ExtraMind and the Leaders Retreat form the program selected for the evaluation. The Thematic Workshops were not included in the evaluation, as at the time of the study they had not been implemented.

In terms of the organization and coordination of the program, four actors/coordinators were identified.

Table 1. Categorization of CEiiA development activities at the time of data collection

Program type	Leader Development	Leadership Development
Activities	ExtraMind	ExtraMile
	Leaders Retreat Thematic Workshops	

Informants and information techniques

Regarding information gathering techniques, we used semi-structured interviews, one face-to-face and one electronic. Interviews were chosen as our primary technique because of the depth of information it provides, as it is necessary to understand in detail all aspects of the program and the activities carried out (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Besides, to complement our data collection, we gathered documents regarding the program from both the organization and the coordinators of the program. These coordinators were our informants: one internal to the organization and two external (one from each activity). These are some of the evaluation stakeholders (Phalen & Copper, 2007), as well as the intended users, as they confirm the results and implement the recommendations resulting from the evaluation (Patton, 2012). These sources and tools for collecting information enabled us to respond to each of the Esper model analysis criteria.

Gathering data procedures

Once the organization's authorization to carry out the study was formalized, the program and activity coordinators were identified in order to obtain information that would allow the full analysis of the conceptual and structural basis of the program.

Thus, three coordinators were identified and invited to participate in the study – two agreed to conduct an interview, and the third agreed to provide documents regarding the activities developed. The interview with P1 took place at CEiiA and lasted 58 minutes. The interview with P2 was in electronic format, due to his dislocation. Electronic interviews circumvent the problem of geographical distance and also ensure the collection of authentic and detailed data on the study objectives (Morgan & Symon, 2003). This interview was conducted in real time, online, through Skype, lasting 20 minutes. Both were audio recorded, transcribed, validated and analyzed.

Data analysis techniques

The data analysis process involved the importation of this material and written documents into NVivo 12 Plus (QSR), the software used for data management and analysis. Data were analyzed using the categorical content analysis technique.

Content analysis corresponds to a set of systematic procedures that allow the interpretation of inferences through an objective and systematic description of their content (Gil, 1999). Categorical content analysis, in specific, consists of counting and clustering content within search categories (De Castro, Abs, & Sarriera, 2011). It should be noted, however, that content counting was not considered in the analysis of our data.

The categorization system was created following, first, a deductive logic (De Castro et al., 2011; 1st and 2nd level of analysis were defined based on Esper's proposal) and, in a second phase, an inductive logic (Bowen, 2008; complementarily, subcategories emerged, which

completed the categorization system). This articulation built the solidity of our category system (Gondim & Bendassolli, 2014) and allowed rigorous category operational definition.

Results and discussion

Next, the results obtained are presented and discussed, organized by the seven analysis criteria considered. As the evaluation of the program results from the combination of different data sources, it is also presented in each criteria specific data for each of the activities that form the program (i.e., ExtraMind and Leaders Retreat), in order to understand the specificities of the units of analysis considered.

Note also that criteria 1 is the last one to be presented as it results from the analysis of the remaining six criteria (see section 2.1).

Theoretical foundations of leader and leaderships concepts: criteria 2

The foundations of leader and leadership concepts result from identifying the leadership approach and program principles. Specifically, the assumptions underlying the program and which reflect its leadership approach are: (1) the leader must provide support to his followers; (2) the leader's supportive behavior encourages the followers to enter in exploration mode and to be more efficient; (3) the leader must have support to provide effective support to the followers; (4) the leader must present challenges that set high expectations and stimulate the creativity and innovation of the followers; and, finally, (5) each leader has a dominant archetype that results from the combination of 14 personality traits.

The first three premises reflect the TABELS model – *Theory of Attachment Based Exploratory Interest Sharing* (Heard & Lake, 1997) – namely the concepts of exploration mode and survival mode, mediated by the perception of support by a caregiver (Heard et al., 2009), who in this case will be the leader (Brandão, Miguez, & McCluskey, 2016). This model assumes that if the leader is an effective caregiver and perceives his internal environment and/or external environment as safe, he can better regulate the activation of self-defense system (associated with survival mode) and restore its exploration and creative potential (McCluskey, 2010). Alongside the focus on the leader as a caregiver, the program's third premise underlines the importance of also providing the leader with conditions that allow him to feel safe and supported so that he can be an effective caregiver. The program's fourth premise reflects the Transformational Leadership Theory, according to which leaders drive the performance of followers by setting high expectations and promoting openness to challenges (Bass et al., 2003). Thus, when followers perceive support and challenge from the leader, they go into exploration mode; when these perceptions are nonexistent, they enter survival mode. The fifth premise concerns the concept of archetype. P1 and P2 defined six leader archetypes from the different possible combinations of 14 leadership personality traits. These archetypes allow foreseeing the ways of acting, the strengths and the development areas of each leader. The six leader archetypes considered in the program are: caregiver, entrepreneur, builder, contaminator, ground breaker and meaning designer.

In addition to these assumptions, three principles of the program were identified: (1) the program focuses on individual change and reflection; (2) leadership development is an internal talent management strategy; and (3) the program covers potential leaders. Underlying ExtraMind are the assumptions of TABELS and the Transformational Leadership Theory, while the Leaders Retreat is grounded in the concept of archetype.

Leader concept: criteria 3

The concept of leader underlying the program integrates (1) the characteristics of the leader, (2) the role of the leader, and (3) the type of leader to develop.

Regarding the characteristics that the CEiiA leader must possess, six are differentiated: builder, contaminant, caregiver, groundbreaker, meaning designer and entrepreneur.

About the role of the leader, this is to impart knowledge, provide experiences, challenge and support the leaders in order to develop their skills and competencies. Moreover, leadership implies mobilizing the followers towards the objectives and helping to overcome the problems that may appear, whether technical, for which solutions are already known, or adaptive, whose solutions need to be innovative (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Finally, the kind of leader the program seeks to develop is an authentic leader - self-conscious, who knows his or her strengths and areas of development and what motivates and challenges him (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Observing the particularities of the activities of the program, we can see that ExtraMind focuses on just one of the characteristics of the leader (the caregiver), while the Leaders Retreat covered the development of all characteristics.

Leadership concept: criteria 4

Leadership is seen as a systemic competence (personal, social and instrumental). Thus, the program has a leadership conceptualization focused on the leader and his competences, following trait approach to leadership (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Regarding the focus on the leader's caregiving capacity, we can identify the importance given to genuinely trusting and collaborative relationship between leaders and followers, which promotes commitment and well-being (Neves, Garrido, & Simões, 2015).

ExtraMind's specific leadership design focuses on the leader's ability to create a secure environment and is therefore more focused on the leadership relationship; the Leaders Retreat incorporates both conceptualizations.

Learning conceptualization: criteria 5

The learning conceptualization include the following elements: (1) learning principles, (2) learning practices, and (3) leader development methods.

Concerning the *learning principles*, there are three: (i) skills development, (ii) exploration, sharing and reflection of experiences and (iii) free and informed participation. The first principle refers to the development of personal, social and instrumental competences, as leadership is considered a systemic competence (as already identified in the previous criteria). The second principle refers to the basic idea that guided the selection of the activities done, where the development of the leader occurs through the sharing and reflection of personal and meaningful experiences, which makes the development of the leader an essentially self-reflective process. The last principle tries to ensure that all participants freely agreed to participate in the program activities (given that some participants were previously selected by their superiors).

About the *learning practices*, we identify three: (i) the leader's life stories, (ii) art-based methods, and (iii) learning by experience. The leader's life stories translate a process of sharing and expression of personal events and the way they were perceived and interpreted by oneself, constituting a process of meaning construction (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005). In this sense, by analyzing his history and comparing it with the stories of other leaders, the leader finds elements for his personal development and growth (Sparrowe, 2005). Art-based methods are a form of learning where art can be used to represent the life of leaders and their organizations (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). Thus, through painting, leaders projected their thoughts and represented their place in the organization. The last learning practice consisted in the experience of meaningful experiences and the individual reflection on the meaning of those experiences for the leader - a reflexive internalization process that leads to the acquisition of new competences and ways of acting (Kok-Yee, Dyne, & Ang, 2009).

The *leader development methods* identified were: (i) the critical incident method, (ii) projective techniques, and (iii) role-playing games. The first method involved the sharing of cases experienced by the participants (i.e., critical incidents) and from the shared cases the main issues to be addressed were identified, in order to find potential solutions to practical problems and to develop ways of acting (Flanagan, 1973). The second method of development consisted on the interpretation of stimuli, where participants had to give meaning to the various situations to which they were exposed. The role-playing technique consists of the participants' performance and personification of roles assigned to them by the therapist. Therefore, it represents an experiential activity, used to mobilize various psychological concepts, promote creativity and the exploration of skills, contributing to the development of empathy and supportiveness (Cano, Lopez, & Pousada, 2019).

Observing the activities of the program, we can see that both involve a self-reflexive development process focused on skills development. However, ExtraMind uses the method of critical incidents and the Leaders Retreat uses projective techniques, while role-playing games are a common technique; finally, while ExtraMind focuses on the leader's life stories, the Leader's Retreat makes use of all three learning practices.

Learning process: criteria 6

Analyzing the learning process of the program involves considering the purpose of the program and its development process.

Program Objectives

The principal objective of the program is to develop the organization's leaders, focusing on personal, social and instrumental competencies, identifying their strengths and talents and supporting them to take on challenges that align their characteristics and expectations (personally and professionally) with those of the organization (Academia CEiiA, 2018). This general objective is split down into three specific objectives: (1) development of self-knowledge, (2) development of social and instrumental skills and (3) development of efficient teams. ExtraMind focuses on the leader's personal skills and caregiving tools, while Leader's Retreat focuses on personal, social and instrumental skills, deepening the work done through ExtraMind.

Development Process

The program development process integrated two stages: the first stage comprises the ExtraMind activity, focusing on individual development, and specifically on personal skills and the leader caregiving tools. The second stage came with the Leaders Retreat activity and was more extensive, focusing on the development of personal, social and instrumental skills.

During ExtraMind, nine thematic sessions were held, where TABEIS' seven internal systems were explored through role-playing games. The goal was for the leader to learn to identify and regulate in each other the systems of the model. Through this reflection on modes of action and regulation of internal systems, the subject identifies their strengths, weaknesses and motivations (Mintzberg, 2005).

The Leaders Retreat was an activity where leaders went to a resting place where they spent three days with each other. In terms of the structure of this activity, three phases were identified. The first phase of contents design resulted in the definition of six leader profiles, called archetypes (identified in criteria 2) that represent the six characteristics that the organization seeks in a leader. Therefore, during the 3 days, several activities were held in order to identify and make known to the leader his dominant archetype and, consequently, work on the development of all archetypes.

In general, the activities carried out during ExtraMind and the Leaders Retreat sought to encourage participants to reflect individually and in groups and to discuss their experiences and

ways of acting, focusing on the intrapersonal development and interpersonal development of the leader (Day & Dragoni, 2015).

Depth level of the development process: criteria 7

The depth level of the development process refers to the leader development layer that is achieved with the program. The development layers the program seek to expand were: (1) the development of the leader's identity and self-regulation and (2) the adult development. The identity and self-regulation of the leader is an intermediate layer of development that encourages the process of self-reflection (Esper, 2015). Beyond this, the program has reached the deepest layer of leader development, concerning andragogy (Esper, 2015). This refers to the vertical development of the person and the construction of new ways of understanding oneself and the world (Cook-Greuter, 2004). Reaching the adult level of development, allows leaders to maintain a developmental trajectory even after the activities are completed.

Concerning the activities, ExtraMind works at the level of the leader identity formation layer, while the Leader Retreat works at adult development.

Guiding discourse of the program: criteria 1

Finally, regarding the program's guiding discourse, we can identify the influence of two discourses: (i) a functionalist discourse that focuses on achieving higher levels of confidence, commitment and more efficient performance (Gardner et al., 2005); (ii) an interpretative discourse, because while seeking to ensure the performance of the organization, there is a focus on developing meaningful relationships between leader and followers and ensuring the well-being of people (Maybe, 2013).

Observing the activities, we can see that ExtraMind is guided by an interpretive discourse, while Leaders Retreat is guided by a functionalist discourse.

Conclusion

This study deepens understanding about leader development by evaluating a specific leader development program, implemented in the context of an organization. Given this, we believe that our contributions were multiple. *For the organization:* the systematization of the program – the needs, the areas of development, the strengths and potential informed next steps. *For future application of the model:* the suggestion of an evidence-based detailed evaluation system. *For leader development:* the reinforcement of the importance of developing the various dimensions of the leader, especially the leader's self-perceptions as one of the main focuses of the leader's intrapersonal development (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Liu et al., 2019).

On the other hand, this paper has some limitations that should be considered regarding the little involvement of the coordinators in the design and validation of the program evaluation plan and the impossibility of interviewing the coordinator who implemented the ExtraMind sessions, which we by-passed by accessing documents on the activity. We strengthen the importance of including participants in the evaluation process. Given this, we believe it would be a benefit for the Esper model to introduce a criteria for analyzing the results and impact of the program on participants, making it more oriented to applied research and deepening the understanding about the impact the program had on each leader.

Finally, we suggest that future studies should invest in identifying factors that can facilitate leader development so that programs can make use of increasingly effective development strategies.

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