

Educating Ourselves

On the role of professional development in business Schools

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The Executive Academy





The late Sumantra Goshal once pronounced the wise words: “You cannot manage third generation strategies with second generation organisations and first generation managers”.

First-generation organisations (1stG) that operate in a stable and predictable environment can manage people primarily based on the principles of scientific management and command and control to create a well-oiled machine capable of operational excellence. The disadvantage of 1stG organisations, however, lies in their very stability and predictability: they are slow to adapt and they do not take advantage of the initiative and intelligence of employees.

Second-generation organisations (2ndG) have to respond to increasing pressures to deliver, shifting attention to sales and growth. They are a step up from 1stG in that they do draw on the creativity and resourcefulness of employees, driving them mainly through management-by-objectives (MBO), which leaves a lot of room for autonomy. However, MBO is also fraught with problems, such as the single focus on individual objectives, the negligence of criteria for excellence that are hard to measure, and self-serving, unethical behaviour under the motto “the goal justifies the means”.

Third-generation organisations (3rd) build further on the strengths of previous generations but develop into learning, data-driven enterprises that adapt quickly to emerging, unanticipated changes in the environment, and put everything into place to promote efficiency and wellbeing. The highly adaptive 3rdG organisations develop flexibility and resilience bottom-up starting with the individual.

Challenges for leaders of business schools and universities

The need the move from 1st to 3rdG management is equally relevant for business schools and universities and probably even more challenging there than for businesses. Many universities still function as first-generation bureaucracies, churning out students.

Business schools, under pressure from, increasing global competition and highly demanding “customers”, have adapted and developed 2ndG policies and processes to keep up with the transformations their main customers, managers, were going through. Business school faculty, often active as consultants, and very much in tune with the new trends in their areas, are expected to think ahead, and have to adapt 3rdG mindsets in order to prepare their clients and students for the future.

EFMD realises that educational programmes for deans, professors and even for researchers exist but few programmes offered solutions for the middle management of universities and management schools such as associate deans and programme directors, the leaders of tomorrow.

The Executive Academy was conceived with a clear purpose in mind: to help these professionals take charge of the necessary transformation of the educational sector, take up leadership to make organisation-wide changes, and prepare for taking over the helm.

We designed a structured programme focusing on wellbeing, self-leadership, leadership, disruptive technologies and innovation, with a clear focus on practice, to make sure the programme would results in tangible change in educational institutions.



360

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Delivering the Executive Academy

In order to encourage pro-activity and extend the educational experience beyond the one-week programme, we decided that participants would have to start one month before the programme with a set of pre-programme materials (360 evaluation, readings, articles, exercises). This is common practice in business schools' programmes, but not in professional development for industry professionals. We needed to embrace a system in which a participant will give as much as he or she will take away.

Due to the limited face-to-face time (4.5 days), we had to set an intense rhythm in our design. If we wanted people to forge long-lasting relationships with their peers, the programme had to be designed as a week with in-class and out-of-class activities that would accelerate the learning and networking parts of the programme. The residential component was also considered; participants staying at the same hotel will help to generate relevant conversations.

Self-leadership

In order to realise the overall objectives of the Executive Academy, we started the programme with a focus on self-leadership, developing sessions on leadership paradigms, purpose and self-leadership, self-knowledge and leadership styles, and self-leadership skills, primarily focusing on managing stress.

Participants in the Executive Academy are invited to reflect on their own sense of purpose in their personal and professional life to appreciate the importance and challenge of aligning personal aspirations, needs and talents with organisational expectations and strategic intent. Sensing one's own purpose is a fundamental step to understand the power of motivating individuals while realising organisational objectives.

With the daily demands of operations and targets, it is easy to lose out of sight one's personal deeper drives and ambitions. Developing awareness of one's own purpose triggers respect for the need and sense of purpose in others. However, this is only the beginning. Given the depth and very personal nature of purpose, managers tend to overestimate the effort and level of trust needed to elicit purpose in others.

Self-knowledge and leadership styles

High-performance teams are composed of a set of complementary styles and talents. This requires that individual contributors have a high sense of self-knowledge of their unique preference for selecting and processing data and interacting with others. Therefore we guide participants in discovering their own cognitive and social styles, which in turn determine individual (self)-leadership styles. Contemporary managers are not only capable of situational leadership, but develop the necessary behavioural complexity and repertoire to deal with many leadership paradoxes.

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Self-leadership skills: stress management

The highly volatile socio-economic environment comes along with unprecedented levels of stress and pressure to deliver despite uncertainty. The 3rdG manager needs to be highly resilient and well balanced to rapidly bounce back from impacts and then inspire teams and organisations to maintain high levels of motivation. This starts with a strong sense of self-awareness of one's physical and mental vulnerabilities while coping with stress.

We introduce participants to the Brain Balance, a neurosciences-based model of four paradoxical activities that can be deployed to increase one's resources to deal with demands. Central to both stress- and time-management, and the harmony between work, family and personal life, is the capacity to focus, prioritise and be fully present, in order to take well-considered decisions and develop quality relationships at work and at home.

From self-leadership to leadership

The strong basis of self-leadership helps managers to lead and influence others with composure and grit. The challenge of participants in the Executive Academy, is that they have to deal on a daily basis with a wide range of stakeholders, administrators, students, organisations, professors and staff over whom they generally do not have any direct hierarchical power. This is why throughout the course we focus on motivating others through a shared sense of purpose, with language and arguments tailored to individual cognitive and affective styles, and by developing relationships based on respect for others' motives and aspirations.



76

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Starting to lead

To ensure the transference from the classroom to practice, it is critical to set out a project in which participants can implement what they are learning in class. Therefore we included a capstone project in which participants implement a strategic, institutional challenge. Second, we offered one-to-one coaching session to the participant, two weeks after the "learning discovery" in order to develop and evaluate the leadership journey action plan.

Evaluating the Executive Academy

Executive Academy was born with a clear purpose in mind: to improve participants' lives.

This may sound a bit presumptuous, but after four editions and 76 participants trained in Prague, Miami, Singapore and then Prague again, we can confirm that our participants' lives have been improved after the experience.

However, the Executive Academy will maintain its "work-in-progress" approach. As new needs arise (such as artificial intelligence, blockchains), the programme will have to quickly incorporate them.

Also, struggles now barely evident will have to be addressed. That's why we have generated the Executive Academy Alumni, which will serve as our specific "innovation lab", not only to keep the conversation alive and offer new opportunities to former Executive Academy participants but also to make sure that future participants in Executive Academy will have access to an educational journey that tackles both participants' needs and struggles, whatever they might be.

The journey has only just begun.

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