

**CHANGING LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR:  
THE IMPACT OF CO-WORKERS AND  
THE IMPACT OF COACHES**

***A REVIEW OF RESULTS IN FIVE MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS***

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**Introduction**

**Five very different organizations set out with similar goals - to determine the desired behaviors for leaders in their organization and then to help leaders increase their effectiveness by better aligning actual leadership behavior with these desired behaviors. Each of the organizations developed a custom leadership profile that was specifically designed to meet their requirements. Each developed a 360° feedback process that included behaviors that were consistent with the leadership profile. Leaders in all five organizations received feedback that was reviewed with a consultant (either internal or external). Leaders were encouraged to identify 1-3 key areas for improvement, discuss these areas with their co-workers, follow-up with co-workers on an ongoing basis and then use a custom-designed mini-survey to measure if they had become more effective over time (as evaluated by their co-workers). Each of the five organizations used a somewhat different approach to achieving the same goals. All were extremely successful! The purpose of this article is to review their approaches and their levels of success in order to better understand the most important factors in helping leaders achieve a positive, long-term change in effectiveness (as evaluated by their co-workers).**

**The Five Organizations and Their Approaches**

**The five organizations included in this article are all very different. Each is in a different industry and face different competitive pressures. Each is one of the leading organizations in their industry. Three of the five companies used a targeted approach to this leadership process. In these cases 75-250 high-potential managers were involved in the study.**

Since each manager received feedback from an average of 6 co-workers, 450-1,500 co-workers (in each company) were respondents in the research. In the remaining two companies, a minimum of 1,500 managers were trained and received feedback, while over 9,000 co-worker respondents were in the data base.

Each of the organizations had varying degrees of international representation. One was almost exclusively American; one was 50% US and 50% international. The other three had varying representation between these two. The results for leaders inside and outside the US were very similar.

As discussed earlier, leaders received 360° feedback in each of the five organizations. Every leader was asked to follow-up with his/her co-workers. In each case, leaders chose 1-3 areas for improvement. They then received mini-survey feedback (from 3-15 months later) to measure perceived improvement on both their selected “areas for improvement” and on their overall change in effectiveness as a leader.

The five organizations – and their approaches to changing leadership behavior, are listed below.

- A) *An aerospace / defense contractor* – Approximately 1,500 executives and managers (starting with the CEO and his team) received training for 2 1/2 days. Each person reviewed his/her 360° feedback with an outside consultant (all *in person*). Each received at least three “reminder notes” to help ensure that they would follow-up with their co-workers.
  
- B) *A pharmaceutical / health care organization* – Approximately 2,000 executives and managers (starting with the CEO and his team) received training for 1 1/2 days. Each person reviewed his/her 360° feedback with an outside consultant (almost all *by phone*). Each received at least three “reminder notes” to help ensure that they would follow-up with their co-workers.
  
- C) *A telecommunications company* – Approximately 175 executives and high-potential leaders (including the CEO and his team) received training for one day. Each leader was given a personal *external* coach (a coach from outside the company). Each coach

was instructed to have one-on-one sessions with their client on an ongoing basis.

D) *A financial services organization* – Approximately 150 high-potential leaders received training for one day. Each leader received a personal *internal* coach (a coach from inside the company). Each coach had one-on-one sessions with their client on an ongoing basis (either in-person or by phone).

E) *A high-tech manufacturing company* – Approximately 75 high-potential leaders received coaching for one year from an *external* coach. This was *not connected to any training program*. Each coach had one-on-one sessions with their client on an ongoing basis (either in-person or by phone).

### **FIVE KEY LEARNINGS**

***In all cases the most important variable in predicting increased leadership effectiveness was the leader's interaction with co-workers.***

All five organizations measured the frequency of the leader's interaction with co-workers and compared this measure to the perceived increase in leadership effectiveness. Company "C" used a "percentage improvement" scale to measure increased effectiveness. The other four companies used a "-3" to "+3" scale. The results were very similar in all cases. Leaders who discussed their selected "areas for improvement" with their co-workers and followed-up with these co-workers on a regular basis showed dramatic improvement. Leaders who did not have ongoing dialogues with their co-workers showed much less improvement. This was true whether the leader had an external coach, internal coach or no coach.

Leaders who were seen as having "frequent" or "periodic" interaction (concerning input on "areas for improvement") were always seen increasing in effectiveness far more than leaders who had "little" or "no interaction" with co-workers.

The following tables indicate the impact of co-worker follow-up on leadership effectiveness by comparing Company "A" and Company

**“D”**. While these companies are in very different industries, used different approaches to change participant behaviors and had different participants, their results are almost identical! Leadership involves a *relationship*. The most important factors in improving this relationship are clearly neither the coach nor the training methodology. They are the leader and the co-worker.

***Feedback or coaching by telephone works about as well as feedback or coaching in person.***

A common belief is that feedback or coaching is a very “personal” activity and that it is much more effective if done in person (as opposed to by phone). Research conducted by these five organizations does not support this belief. The organization that conducted almost all feedback by telephone produced almost identical “increased effectiveness” scores as the organization that conducted all feedback in person. The organization that used all external coaches made sure that each coach had at least two “one-on-one” meetings with his/her client. Some coaches met with clients regularly in person, while some had almost all interaction by telephone. There was no clear indication that either method of coaching was superior to the other.

One client did a “customer satisfaction” study comparing client satisfaction with 360° feedback by telephone vs. feedback in person. Clients were equally satisfied with either process. While this type of “happiness measure” is not as valid as long-term measures, it shows that even the short-term experience of feedback by telephone is as positive as the experience of feedback in person.

***Either internal or external coaches can make a positive difference.***

In company “E” only external coaches were used. In company “D” only internal coaches were used. Both approaches produced very positive, long-term results in increasing leadership effectiveness. The three major variables in determining whether to use an internal or external coach seemed to be *time, credibility* and *confidentiality*.

In company “D” internal coaches were given the time to do the job. This was treated as an important part of their responsibility, not an

**“add on” to do “if they got around to it”. They were trained in the coaching process and viewed as highly credible by their internal clients. (In fact, their internal clients said they preferred them to external coaches.) Each internal coach worked with a leader in a different part of the business. They assured their clients that this process was for high-potential development, not evaluation.**

**In many organizations, internal coaches just do not have the time to interact with a meaningful sample of leaders on an ongoing basis. In some cases they may not seem as credible to executives. In other cases they may appear to be in a “conflict of interest” position in terms of their role as a coach and their role as an evaluator. If these perceptions exist, then external coaches may be preferable.**

**Internal coaches were seen as having the advantage of “knowing the business” and “understanding the key players”. External coaches were seen as having the advantage of an “outside perspective” and “objectivity”. Neither choice seemed to be “better” or “worse” in an absolute sense. The appropriate answer appears to depend upon the needs of the client and the organization.**

**Training, when coupled with ongoing follow-up can make a huge positive difference.**

**Companies “A” and “B” provided training on how to involve co-workers in follow-up and continuous improvement. Leaders also received ongoing “reminder notes”, suggesting that they should follow-up. With today’s new technology, very sophisticated follow-up systems are available to help ensure that follow-up occurs. As a general rule, the more that the company follows-up with the leader, the more the leader follows-up with the co-workers (and the more effective the leader becomes).**

**One reason that coaching is so effective is that it helps inspire leaders to follow-up with their people. Company “C” found a strong positive correlation between the number of times that the coach followed-up.**

**Follow-up with leaders does not have to be a costly tool. Internal coaches can make follow-up telephone calls. Computerized systems can send “reminder notes”. Almost any follow-up is better than none. One**

of the great weaknesses in most training and development is the insufficient attention to follow-up. Many companies spend millions of dollars for the “program of the year” and almost nothing on the follow-up that can help ensure that the program actually gets executed!

*Frequency of interaction with co-workers and coaches seems to be more important than duration of interaction.*

In all five companies the frequency of interaction seemed to be a major variable. All companies noted that frequency of interaction with co-workers was a key driver of success. As was mentioned earlier, Company “C” also mentioned that frequency of interaction with coaches made a positive difference.

Historically, a great deal of leadership development has focused on the importance of an *event*. This event could be a training program, a motivational speech or and executive off-site meeting. The experience of these five companies indicates that real leadership development is a *process*.

A good analogy might be working out. The historical approach to leadership development would be to have leaders sit in a room and watch demonstrations on how to exercise. The company would then wonder why everyone was not in shape a year later! Arnold Schwarzenegger wisely said, “Nobody ever got muscles by watching *me* work out.” The key to getting in shape is not understanding the theory of working out. It is engaging in the process of working out!

The “personal trainer” example seems very applicable to the role of executive coach. The role of the personal trainer is to “remind” the person being trained to do what he/she knows should be done. Most personal trainers spend far less time on theory than they do on execution. The same seems to be true for leadership development. Many leaders know what to do. They have all read the same books and listened to the same “gurus” giving the same speeches. Their challenge is not understanding the practice of leadership; it is practicing their understanding of leadership.

One lesson is clear from the four companies in our study that included training programs. *If leaders go to a leadership development program,*

*and do not follow-up with their people, they might as well stay home.* While there is some evidence that coaching without follow-up can produce some positive change in leadership behavior (from Company “E”), there is no evidence that training without follow-up can produce positive change in leadership behavior that is any greater than “random chance”.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

**This study was not conducted involving a few graduate students at a university. This was a review of the leadership development efforts of five major corporations. It involved thousands of leaders and over 20,000 co-worker respondents. The findings are clear and encouraging. Companies can do a great job of helping leaders achieve a positive, long-term, measurable change in behavior without spending unneeded amounts of time or money!**

**Leaders can clearly benefit from coaching, but it does not have to be done by external coaches. Company “D” has shown how internal coaches can produce the same positive results as external coaches. In fact, in Company “D” internal trainers conduct the “train the coaches” sessions for internal coaches. Company “D” is now in the process of documenting how line internal coaches can produce the same positive results as HR internal coaches.**

**Coaching can be a great complement to training. Companies “C” and “D” both showed how either internal or external coaches can help make training “come to life” through frequent coaching interactions.**

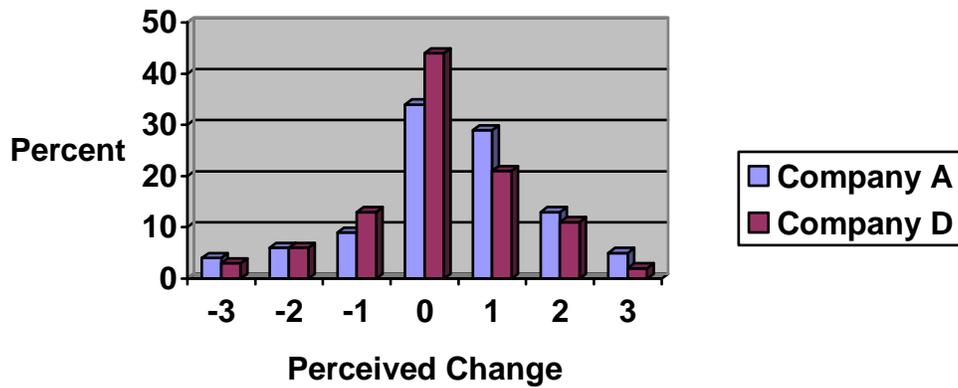
**Coaching can work as a “stand alone” process, even when it is not combined with training. Company “E” produced fantastic results by having leaders receive coaching that was completely disconnected from any training.**

**Leaders who do not have coaches can “learn to be coached” from their co-workers. The key to changing behavior is “learning to learn” from those around us and modifying our behavior based upon their suggestions. Companies “A” and “B” used a very streamlined and efficient process of focused training and “reminder notes” to help leaders achieve a positive, long-term change in effectiveness without**

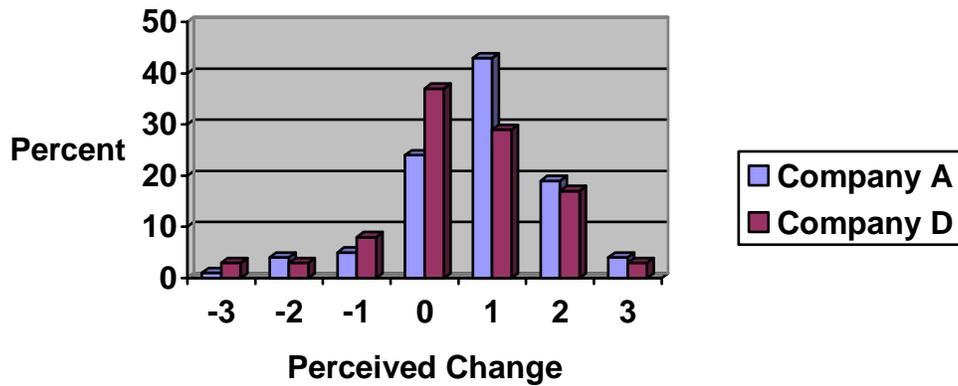
**having either internal or external coaches. Feedback discussions by telephone were shown to work as well as feedback discussions in person (and at a much lower cost)! By using new computerized follow-up systems and telephone coaching, companies can provide outstanding support to larger numbers of leaders in a cost effective manner.**

**The key learning from these five companies is that leadership is about the relationship of the leader with his/her co-workers, not about the relationship of the leader with a coach or trainer. If the organization can teach the leader to reach out to the co-workers, to listen and learn and to focus on continuous development, both the leader and the organization will benefit. This process does not have to take a lot of time or money. It does, however, require a lot of commitment and follow-up.**

**Table 1**  
**Change In Leadership Effectiveness**  
*My co-worker did no follow-up*

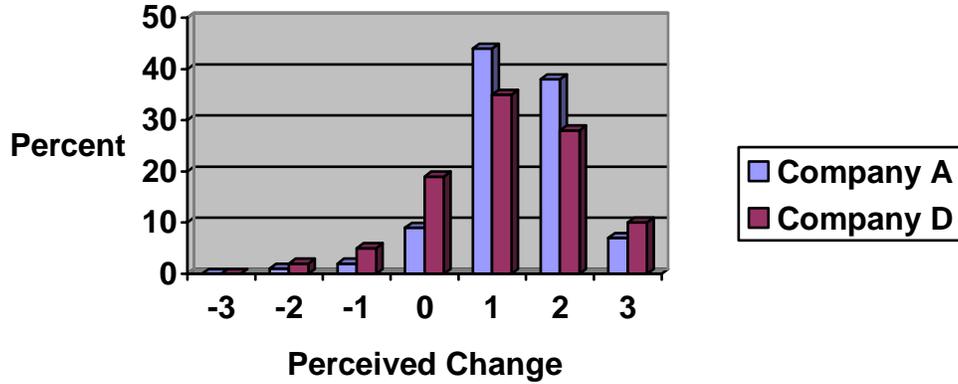


**Table 2**  
**Change In Leadership Effectiveness**  
*My co-worker did a little follow-up*



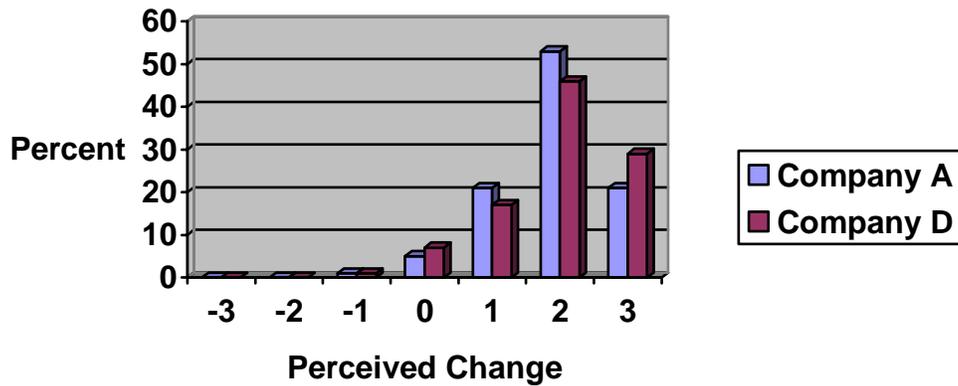
**Table 3**

**Change In Leadership Effectiveness**  
*My co-worker did some follow-up*



**Table 4**

**Change In Leadership Effectiveness**  
*My co-worker did frequent follow-up*



**Table 5**  
**Change In Leadership Effectiveness**  
*My co-worker did consistent or periodic follow-up*

