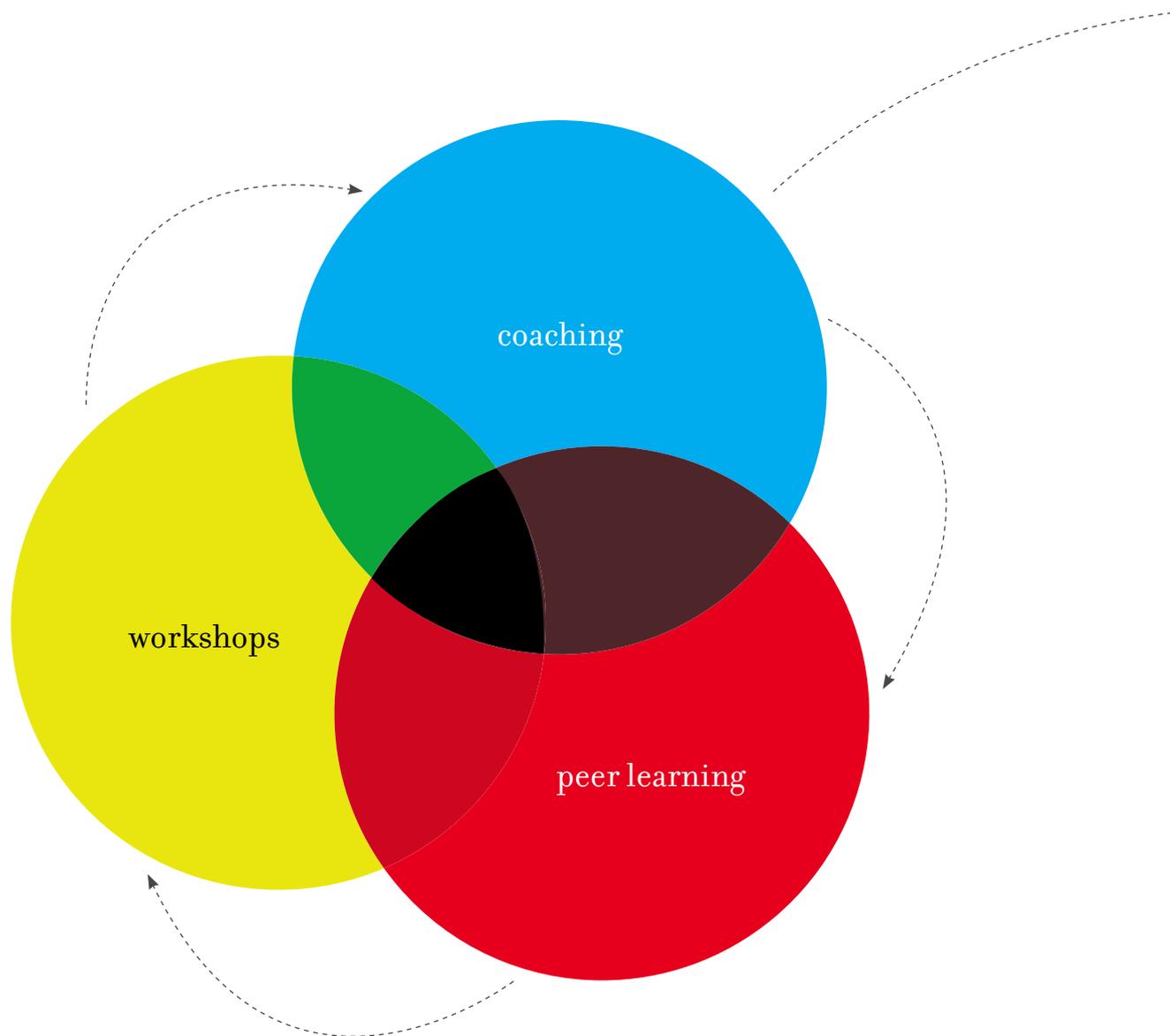
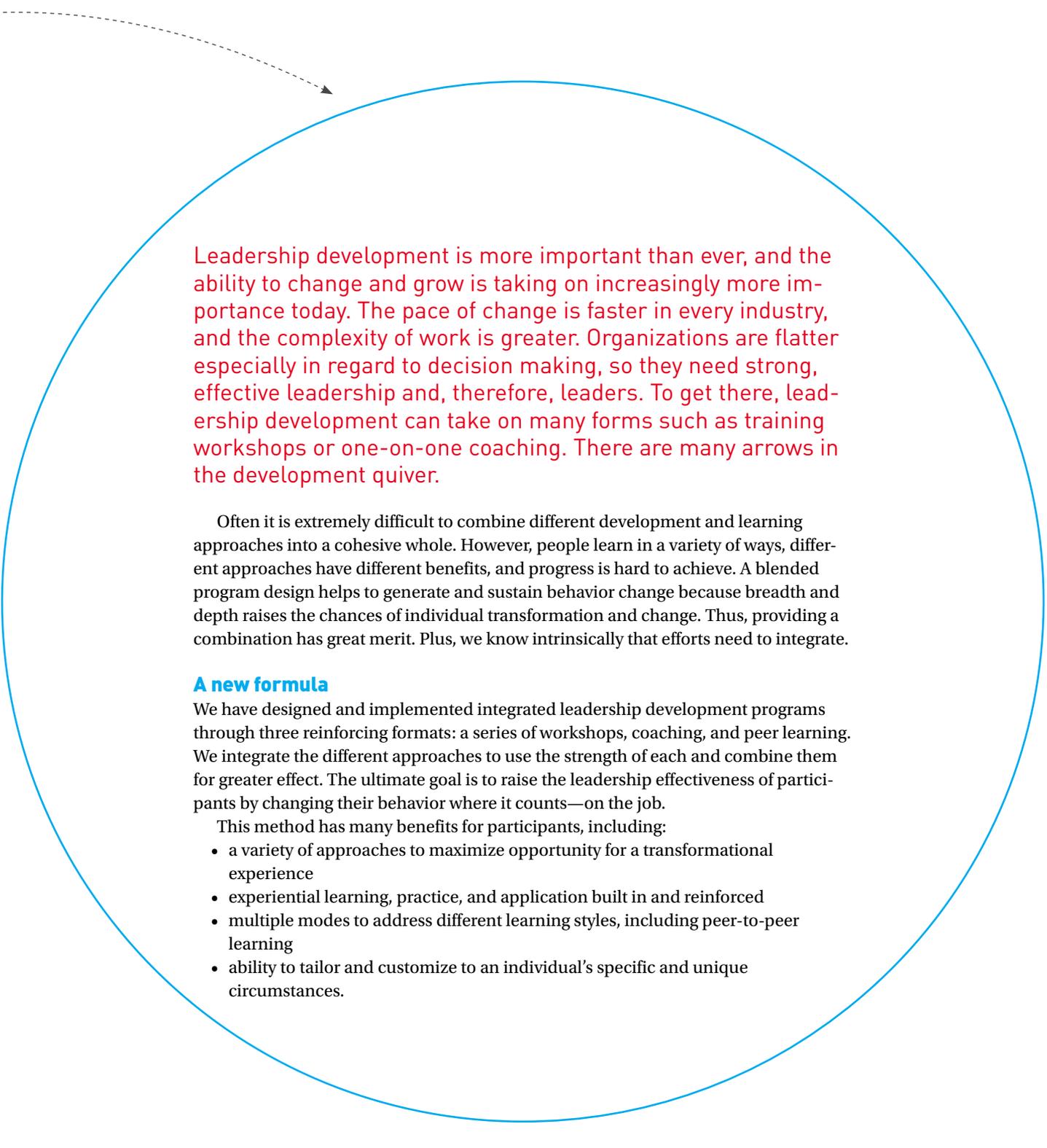


A blended learning program that integrates coaching, workshops, and peer learning combines the best features, and benefits, of each format.



A Three-Pronged Approach to Leadership Development

By Robert P. Hewes and Alan M. Patterson



Leadership development is more important than ever, and the ability to change and grow is taking on increasingly more importance today. The pace of change is faster in every industry, and the complexity of work is greater. Organizations are flatter especially in regard to decision making, so they need strong, effective leadership and, therefore, leaders. To get there, leadership development can take on many forms such as training workshops or one-on-one coaching. There are many arrows in the development quiver.

Often it is extremely difficult to combine different development and learning approaches into a cohesive whole. However, people learn in a variety of ways, different approaches have different benefits, and progress is hard to achieve. A blended program design helps to generate and sustain behavior change because breadth and depth raises the chances of individual transformation and change. Thus, providing a combination has great merit. Plus, we know intrinsically that efforts need to integrate.

A new formula

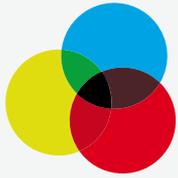
We have designed and implemented integrated leadership development programs through three reinforcing formats: a series of workshops, coaching, and peer learning. We integrate the different approaches to use the strength of each and combine them for greater effect. The ultimate goal is to raise the leadership effectiveness of participants by changing their behavior where it counts—on the job.

This method has many benefits for participants, including:

- a variety of approaches to maximize opportunity for a transformational experience
- experiential learning, practice, and application built in and reinforced
- multiple modes to address different learning styles, including peer-to-peer learning
- ability to tailor and customize to an individual's specific and unique circumstances.



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Integration in Practice

An example of the power of integrating the three formats—workshops, coaching, and peer learning—is how we introduced an active listening concept. It begins with coaches going over a framework, theory, and some examples. Then the group has a discussion. This gets the participants asking questions. However, here is the twist: It isn't the coaches who always provide the answers; the coaches facilitate the discussion so that peers are answering. This facilitation is key to establishing a back-and-forth flow.

Next, participants work in peer groups on an exercise. A debrief follows, which captures key learnings. We then start to bring in coaching techniques by having them identify a specific time and place to apply the learning. In a follow-up workshop, they cover the application of the learned concept or technique. It is all tied back together by having an "application" segment at the beginning of the workshop. In this, participants present and discuss how they applied the ideas, and talk about successes and challenges.

In this case, a spot-weld moment occurred that will live throughout a program. The participants were talking about the application of active listening in a learning group. When a participant came back and said that "active listening is not *not* talking," the entire group nodded in unified agreement. That moment was priceless for development. It captured the room and beautifully captured a critical point about active listening.

We will venture to say the exact words could be said on a slide or in a side conversation, but in no way would it have had the same impact. This example shows how all three elements are being used to reinforce a concept in a way that is less likely by using just one approach. This is the power of integration.

Workshops provide scale and the ability to create a group dynamic. In these workshops, expert facilitator coaches lead participants through a leadership curriculum in a highly interactive and applied format.

Coaching enables the program to tailor and customize topics toward the individual, to get right at what a participant needs. Coaches help participants to apply the leadership curriculum to the individual's situation.

And with peer learning, teams of participants meet during workshops and develop collaborative relationships. They are able to discuss common issues and share best practices and experiences. For many people, hearing common problems from peers connects in a powerful way. Also, having to present to peers and a group leads individuals to take action.

How to make it work

The key to this type of blended program is to create an integrated design and delivery model that ties the different approaches together. We started the integration from the ground up. We didn't just bolt different programs and approaches together, but instead adjusted each so that each works off the other. Design with integration in mind.

The important questions to keep asking are: "How do we integrate these?" and "What should we do with each format to reinforce the other for the best learning?" By constantly asking these questions, it focuses the choices you make. Then, in the delivery, you have to always tie each together.

To paint a picture, here are the details of an integrated program for which we will describe each of the three parts and how we integrated them. Our illustrative program is a composite of several current or recently delivered programs. It lasts seven months, with five full-day workshops occurring every 1.5 months. There are 12 participants, each of whom has a coach and receives 360-degree feedback.

With their coach, participants create a customized development plan constructed around a critical growth area with two to three goals. Participants also have regular coaching sessions for the

duration of the program. The person's manager is involved by providing initial development goals, giving 360-degree feedback, reviewing a plan, and giving feedback during plan implementation.

The peer groups are set up as learning groups comprised of four to six participants within the workshops. These groups work together during most breakout sessions, discuss preworkshop application, and become a resource outside of the workshops. To maximize a networking effect, we switch learning group membership halfway through the program.

Workshops

The purpose of the workshops is to serve as a laboratory to introduce and experiment with concepts, tools, and techniques. Time is spent in skill practice, group discussions, and planning for on-the-job application. It gives participants the opportunity to try new techniques, discuss different views, and tap the experience of the group.

This group dynamic builds over time and can't be duplicated in one-on-one situations. By having a series of workshops, this structure allows the group to form working and learning relationships. With relationships established, they start to look to one another for advice and can work through important issues.

To reach an integrated design, the workshops comprise three elements. The first is completely participant centered. They discuss how they applied key concepts between workshops—which introduces the practice and process of sharing lessons learned and application between sessions.

At the end of each workshop, participants are asked to identify what they have learned and what they will apply in the workplace. They make a commitment to the peer group that they will apply what they've learned, which builds an expectation and obligation among group members. Then, near the beginning of each subsequent workshop, there is built-in time for participants to report out on their "assignment," how they applied the newly learned concepts. It is critical that this occur in every workshop.

Another design element that ties directly with the coaching is that participants share their professional development objectives with one another. Given that the workshops are spanning the length of the coaching, we have the ability to design in key pieces that tie to the coaching. In the kickoff, we set up this expectation, and that helps to raise the bar for people. They know they will need to share goals, so that makes everyone put together better and more complete goals. This is another factor of the group dynamic.

The final integration design feature is to have coaches actively facilitate the sessions, which provides a consistency of efforts across the program. This is a critical factor since learning organically happens in the workshops that are spot-weld moments. Coaches are able to identify what they can address in the coaching and, conversely, they can identify what should be brought up in the workshop based on their coaching. We even start the next workshop with questions for the peer groups.

Coaching

The second integrated component is coaching. At a high level, coaching provides the opportunity to tailor concepts to the unique needs and situation of the individual participant, but within the context of the workshop and group. Coaches and participants both refer back to the group sessions.

There are three key elements to an integrated design for the coaching. The first is to set up each phase of coaching in the workshop (self-assessment, 360-degree feedback, action planning, and so on). Participants discuss the phase and ask questions, which builds common understanding and raises questions and answers that go beyond what one individual would do. Again, this is another group dynamic.

Second is to ensure that coaches discuss key concepts and techniques presented in the workshops in individual coaching sessions. During coaching, they are able to reinforce these concepts and figure out with the participant how to use them in practice based on

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the participant's specific situations. In essence, this part of the coaching is one big follow-up on any assignments from the workshops.

Finally, the third element is to use the coaching as a powerful way to keep people on track. Research on coaching shows that one of the biggest benefits beyond the insight and advice a coach provides is keeping a client on track and staying focused. By designing this into the agenda of coaching meetings, it is sure to happen and the participants are ready for the next workshop.

Peer learning

The third program component to integrate is peer learning. At its heart, peer learning centers on the idea that peers hear from others in different organizations and learn from the varied experiences. Seeing that many leadership issues are common regardless of the organization helps participants to tackle issues. The trick is to actively integrate that basic idea into the workshops.

There are several ways to integrate peer learning, primarily in the workshops. One way is to create breakouts centered around the peers or learning groups. When a concept is introduced and discussed, we then discuss practice exercises for the learning groups to tackle. The peer group also has the joint responsibility for report backs.

Another element is to have the learning groups work on deliverables needed for the coaching. This can be reviewing and discussing 360-degree rater lists and reviewing action plans. It also takes advantage of peer pressure—you know you have to present and show progress, which creates accountability. Nobody wants to show up at the workshop with nothing done. And nobody wants to say to a coach, "I haven't done anything." Combining these two elements helps a large percentage of any participant population to keep moving. It is a motivator.

Transformational experience

Participant results speak for themselves with comments such as "The workshop and coaching combination is fantastic. ... It is great to hear from people in different organizations and to learn from the combined experiences," or "Very practical tools, could apply them right away and the personalized coaching really helped me apply it to my unique situation."

The key to any leadership development program is providing it in a way that produces development, learning, and ultimately more effective leadership—which is needed in every organization. By using an approach that is integrated from the start, three classic formats of workshops, coaching, and peer learning can be combined into a powerful learning program to produce leadership development. This format and integrated design helps to create the conditions for a transformational developmental experience.

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