

Academic study proves the long-term effectiveness of leadership training

Long-term Investment: Management Training

Companies have to act with faster and with increasing flexibility and cost optimisation if they are to remain competitive in a digital age and in times of globalised markets and accelerated business models. Permanently changing market conditions require continual adaptability and managers whose high level of expertise support corporate change processes and who at the same time demonstrate empathy, credibility and respect in fostering a “can do” mentality with their employees. Managers learn the necessary tools in leadership training. There has always been a high degree of uncertainty with regard to the sustainability of investing in qualification. A new study business study by Fresenius University in Munich has shown that such training not only has a direct impact but also maintains a long-term effect over many years.

Constant restructuring within a company, increasing pressure to be geographically mobile and the fear of losing one’s job affect everyday life for many employees whilst they are, at the same time, expected to demonstrate maximum possible flexibility and readiness to accept change. This requires competent managers whose high level of expertise are able to provide support for corporate transformation processes and who are at the same able to bring their employees on board and motivate them to deliver maximum performance. Ultimately, in the words of leadership expert John C. Maxwell, “leadership is about people development.”

Managers as coaches for their employees

For a long time, managers have not simply been decision-makers but also support-providers, coaches and change agents for their employees. Market-oriented companies pursue a concept of transformational leadership with managers who inspire their employees to give of their best, who act as role models, involve employees and give them a feeling of being appreciated. In short, managers are expected to demonstrate increasingly high levels of leadership competence whilst at the same time having less and less time to interact directly with their employees and manage day-to-day business – itself shaped by shorter innovation cycles, increased international competitive pressure and tighter legal restraints. When managers who are already un-

der pressure are not given additional resources and/or are not familiar with suitable methods for effectively developing a sustainable style of leadership, appraisal reviews with employees become increasingly rare or are conducted in a manner that does not deliver the desired result. This is frustrating for both employees and managers and damages a company's development.

Successful leadership can be learned

In order to prevent this, companies are placing greater focus on leadership training that qualifies management and future management in personnel management/leadership, (self-) potential analyses, team approach etc. In this respect, an understanding of leadership focuses increasingly on four crucial core competences, as emerged in a recent McKinsey study¹ with 181,000 managers: 1. Be supportive, 2. Operate with strong result orientation, 3. Seek different perspectives, 4. Solve problems effectively. Interestingly, it is not so much a bundle of standardised methods that is behind these aspects as the correct approach that enables managers to lead their employees with authority and yet personally. Leadership training that has a long-term impact targets exactly these core competences.

Long-term success of training has been academically proven

Successful leadership, even under time and cost pressures and especially in the midst of continual change processes, can be learned, as proven by a recent Bachelor thesis published by the Business and Media School at Fresenius University in Munich, "Training for Managers in Change Processes". Using "BBT Leadership Compact" training, offered by ChangePartner AG in Hamburg, as an example, business psychology graduate Clemens Neiß proves the long-term effectiveness of this training. Neiß's systematic evaluation demonstrates that, over a period of 15 years, didactics, methods, learning content and personal development measures deliver exactly what the training provider, ChangePartner AG, promises. Neiß sent his development survey to 187 of a total of approx. 300 people who had participated in the training over the previous 15 years. The return quota was 32 per cent which can be interpreted as an initial sign of the long-term impact of the training on people, given that many of the participants attended the training more than a decade previously.

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http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/leading_in_the_21st_century/Decoding_leadership_What_really_matters?cid=other-eml-alt-mkq-mck-oth-1501

Approach and personality are crucial

“BBT Leadership Compact”, led by two trainers, focuses on providing a transformational understanding of leadership and comprises three modules. In the first module, key elements of leadership methods and personal development are taught and consequently the ability to change and social and leadership competence of participants reinforced. The second module addresses conduct in conflict situations and conflict management, whilst the final module concentrates on change management. The training provides participants with qualification on a methodical level for further strengthening their leadership competence in their day-to-day routine or project work with suitable method know-how as well as on a personal level on which personal impact and conduct, ability to change, internal approach, an understanding of one’s own role and a capacity to reflect on one’s own role and that of others are trained.

The aforementioned study demonstrates that this combination pays off and that participants obviously benefit from what they have learned years later. Based on an evaluation of the 58 questionnaires that were completed and returned, Neiß was able to confirm the four following hypotheses: (H1) The content taught in training is of practical use, on an everyday basis and in change processes; (H2) Management training results in a higher degree of secureness in one’s personal style of leadership and has a positive effect on successful leadership in change processes; (H3) Personal style of leadership has great impact on success in change processes; (H4) Managers benefit from management training for personal development. For instance, on a scale of 1 to 5, 35 of the 58 former participants who responded to the survey rated the training clearly as “5” (in other words, as very helpful) even after many years, 18 of them rated it as helpful, four selected a “3” rating and just one participant gave the training a “2” rating. In response to the question regarding secureness in their managerial role after the training, 19 participants stated that they felt much more secure and 24 gave a “4” rating.

Learning to attain understanding and agreement

In addition, the study provided qualitative information as to which leadership and communication models provided the greatest additional value and could be applied in practical situations. It was in fact the simple models that proved to be the most effective: in the survey, 18 per cent of participants selected the so-called “iceberg model” that describes the relationship between factual

and emotional levels, for example in motivating employees. As with an iceberg, 90 per cent of the roots for motivation lie under the water surface; logic, figures and facts are only 10 per cent of the motivational factor for employees; it is inordinately more important that managers succeed in bringing their employees “on board” – in other words, achieving not only “understanding” but also “agreement”. The very same thing is the object of a transformational leadership concept that can only be implemented with a style of leadership that includes a positive and people-oriented approach and personality on a manager’s part.

Conclusion: Whilst the “measurability” of the sustainability of training programmes is the subject of much discussion in HR departments, Neiß demonstrates clearly in his study based on organisational psychology that, and the extent to which, participants continue to benefit from a specific training approach such as BBT Leadership Compact, even many years later. It helps them to develop their own leadership personality and to apply their motivating charisma in managing their employees through transformation processes and to define binding target agreements with them in spite of increasing time and cost pressures. As such, managers are well prepared for the growing challenges presented by their position and incidentally affect positive change in their company’s culture.

Author: Eva Günzler

Further information: www.change-partner.de