

Decoding Leadership Development

Leadership development is a priority for the organizations as they require a new class of leaders with strategic and forward-thinking minds in this digital age. In conversation with People Matters, **Jennifer Martineau**, SVP, Research, Evaluation, and Societal Advancement - Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) shares her perspectives on leadership development and diversity

Ester Martinez & Vani Vyas

Jennifer Martineau has more than 25 years of experience in the field of leadership development and her areas of expertise include evaluation of leadership development, organizational leadership transformation, leadership strategy, women's leadership etc. She has also been responsible for the leadership and execution of CCL's world-renowned research, analytics, evaluation, and societal advancement practices.

The conversation was also joined by Sophia Zhao, Senior Researcher – APAC, CCL, who also shares her perspectives on the theme.

Q You have been in the space of leadership development for long and you have seen the space evolving. What do you think has changed in the recent years?

A In CCL's early days, the first development programs were three weeks long and so you can imagine they were very intensive and somehow we were able to get people to leave their offices for three weeks when there was no Internet or mobile phones; But today even 3 days is challenging and people feel it is too long for them to leave work because they could get too far behind and problems may occur. So the shift in the industry is from intensive, longer phases to consumable nuggets of information in two or three days. Another shift is from face-to-face to digitalized leadership development. The technology available for the industry is rapidly improving and allows us to achieve significant impact through online methods that was not possible even a few years ago.



Another important element is that development needs to be experiential; you cannot learn through just reading or listening to ideas and theories. You need to behaviorally put yourself into development and practice new approaches. The shift from doing so in face-to-face development to online development has certainly been a big change for CCL and for the industry. At the same time, though, it opens the door to reach audiences that we haven't been able to reach out to in the past. Digital leadership development can be made available to people at all levels of an organization not just people in the mid to upper levels. Shifting leadership development from purely face-to-face into digital is one way that CCL has democratized leadership development.

Q According to McKinsey, over 90 percent of CEOs are planning to increase investment in leadership development because they see it as the single most important human-capital issue their organizations face. How much do you agree with the statement that “good leadership is a critical part of organizational health, which is an important driver of shareholder returns”?

A Jennifer: We have a white paper called ‘Driving Performance – How leadership development powers sustained success’. As per the research, HR analytic expert, McBassi & Company launched a series of investment portfolios to track correlations between company’s stock prices and their levels of investment into leadership development. The research showcased that companies with high scores for their investment in human capital delivered stock market returns five times higher than those companies with less emphasis on human capital.

Leadership training programs conducted by CCL have helped numerous leaders to reduce costs and drive new lines of revenues. One leader from such a program ran an initiative that led to one-year savings of about \$2million. Another led a project team that reduced its costs by 80 percent. So in assisting clients in understanding the potential “bottom line” impact possible through leadership development, we stress four major outcomes — improve bottom line financial performance, attain and retain talent, create organizational alignment and increase organizational agility.

Q Leadership development is a continuous process. So how do you practice this?

A Jennifer: Indeed, leadership development is a continuous process and part of one’s job. It’s just like you are walking from one place to another and breathing at the same time. Either one can refuse to learn and develop, or one can accept that everything one does in life is part of one’s development. For example, leaders need to learn to craft time in their team meetings for development. They must learn to reflect on what worked recently for them and what did not. It will enable them to think how they can work more effectively as a team.

Sophia: Our research has also indicated that leaders who are successfully able to implement this kind of a development allowed leadership development to be a priority. It requires conscious effort and mindset shift.

Q So, What is your perspective about India or Asia? How it is different in terms of leadership development?

A Sophia: We conducted an Asian leadership study and a big difference we saw was that bigger organizations in the US and UK grew slowly through stages whereas organizations in India and China grew with a big boom. They grew super-fast. That’s why organizations find it harder to find leaders who have professional experiences equivalent to 25 years of experience. Such organization leaders don’t have as much time as those in developed countries to develop or learn from their own experience. So, that’s why they need to accelerate their leadership development.

Q When we talk about women in leadership, we tend to look at lot of data and numbers. While doing so, do you think we lose the intent behind?

A Sophia: There is a risk and that is part of a challenge that we face when we conduct leadership development. But at CCL we do not just look at ticking the box to indicate that we have developed women leaders. We are looking for a real change that has taken place and we work on the plans to measure that. Sometimes numbers are a part of those measures, but they are not the sole measures.

Development needs to be experiential; one needs to behaviorally put oneself into development

Q It is a fact that the Boards of organizations lack diversity and the effort to change the situation is also miniscule. Why do you think there is this challenge?

A Jennifer: Usually to create a momentum for that kind of a change, one needs to identify the problem. When organizations are stable they are less likely to see where the problem exists than if they were in a time of turmoil. But leaders need to identify the problem and work towards resolving it when they have the opportunity to focus on it – often during times of stability. We also need to recognize that human nature is to group with “people like me”. We are more comfortable with people who have had similar life experiences as we have. If the board of directors for an organization is primarily men, then they will likely select other men - people they are familiar with or with whom they are comfortable. This is not always intentional – unconscious bias enters the thought process and affects decision making. So it is critical that we acknowledge unconscious bias and are intentional about bringing on more diversity of thinking and diversity of perspectives so that we can work towards solutions to the problem of gender bias. **em**