

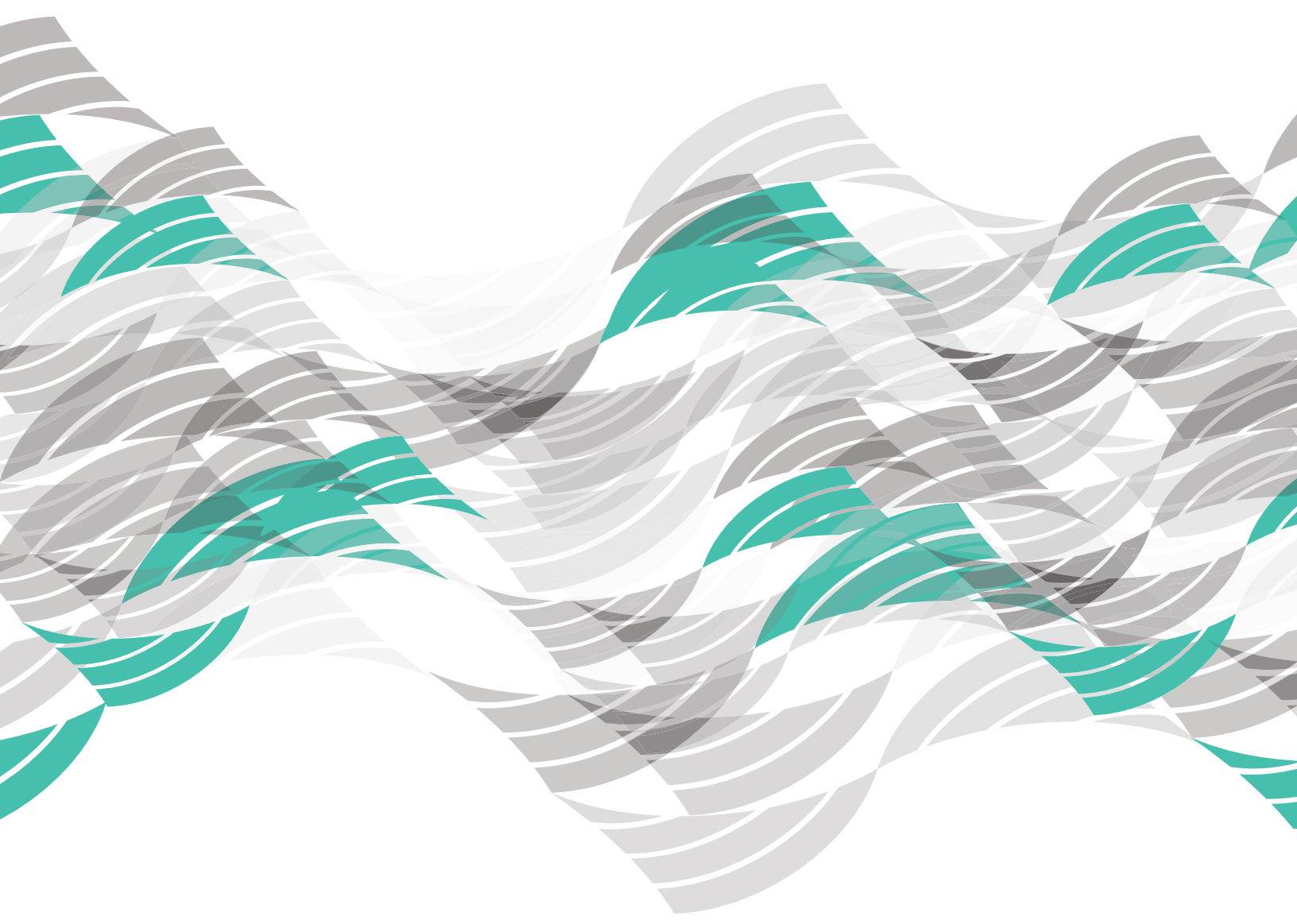
WHITE PAPER

# The Effectiveness of the Leadership Development Programme in Europe

## An Evaluation Report



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## Contents

Executive Summary	1
Evaluation Strategy	4
Results	5
Participants Report High Levels of Satisfaction with All Aspects of LDP	5
Improvements in Self-Awareness Are Rated the Most Impactful	6
Participants Saw Key Learning Objectives as Highly Relevant	7
Participants Accomplished Key Learning Objectives	8
LDP Had a Positive Impact on Participant Behaviour	9
There Are Factors that Can Maximize LDP Benefits in the Workplace	11
Optimizing the Value of LDP and Other Developmental Experiences	14
CCL Evaluation Services	16
References	16
About the Authors	17

# Executive Summary

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Leadership development has moved to the forefront for today's most successful organisations. Studies show an investment in development can improve bottom-line financial performance, create organisational alignment, increase agility, and help an organisation attract and retain top talent. As a result, leadership development is seen as an important imperative and as a strategic differentiator that can help an organisation break away from the pack.

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) offers a wide range of development opportunities to meet the leadership challenges of today's organisations. One of the most popular is the Leadership Development Programme (LDP)®—a flagship, open-enrolment initiative for mid- to senior-level managers. These “middle zone” leaders typically must operate up and down the organisational hierarchy, as well as across functions and silos.

LDP addresses the unique needs of these managers by helping them build the skills and confidence they need to address the tensions inherent in their middle-zone role. They learn

to bridge the gap between senior management and front-line workers to create alignment, build commitment, manage change, and translate organisational strategy into effective action.

LDP has evolved significantly over the years in response to changes in the workplace and as new research findings and new best practices emerge. That continued evolution has kept the programme as relevant today as it was at the time of its creation four decades ago. In fact, programme alumni, managers, and executives consistently rank it as one of the best leadership development programmes in the world.

In June 2010 CCL refocused the content of the programme around six competencies that our research shows are most critical for leadership success. Four of those competencies are vital to all leaders (*self-awareness, learning agility, influence, and communication*), while two are especially important to those working in the middle zone (*thinking and acting systemically and building resiliency*).



To determine the effectiveness of the changes in LDP content, CCL embarked on an extensive, multidimensional evaluation of programme outcomes for participants in Europe. The results indicate that LDP is clearly moving the needle in each of the six competency areas it targets. Participants clearly valued the LDP experience and found the content relevant to their life and work. All felt they had successfully achieved the learning goals set in LDP, as well as their personal development goals for the programme. They attributed the strides they had made to relevant and engaging LDP content, experienced course facilitators, interaction with their peers, and the personalized coaching they received.

The perceptions of improvement reported by participants are confirmed by survey input from others in their respective organisations even months after the programme concluded. They reported improvement by LDP participants across all evaluated behaviours—especially in regard to self-awareness. Participants were also seen as having a greater impact on their organisations than before and were achieving improved business results.

This paper provides further detail on the evaluation outcomes and the process used to measure them. We also include recommendations on how future participants can derive the most value from LDP, particularly in terms of organisational support and feedback.

## About the Leadership Development Programme

CCL's Leadership Development Programme is delivered more than 100 times a year around the globe. Participants learn how to lead from the middle of an organisation, lead through collaboration, lead within a system, integrate multiple perspectives, and transfer what they learn back into their organisation. The diverse programme incorporates:

**Assessment.** A comprehensive picture of leadership skills, behaviours, and preferences of the participants include a close look at the key competencies needed to succeed as a leader of managers.

**Peer learning groups.** In-the-moment feedback from peers provides insight, suggestions, and support.

**Practice and application.** A business simulation and out-of-classroom experience provide tangible, practical lessons.

**Personal coaching.** A half-day session and two 45-minute follow-up calls with a CCL coach reinforce learning.

**eLearning.** Online courses, publications, and tools help participants continue to learn when back at work.



# Evaluation Strategy

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As a reflection of CCL's commitment to continuous improvement, this evaluation explored the effectiveness of LDP at two levels:

**Did the programme achieve its objectives for participants?**

**What was the impact of each of the various programme modules on programme outcomes?**

Answering these questions helps CCL content designers determine what further improvements might be made to broaden the impact of LDP. A team from Maastricht University, the Netherlands, designed the evaluation relying on four sources of information:

**End-of-programme surveys** on training content (199 participants).

**Client satisfaction surveys** (81 participants).

**Multisource feedback** from CCL's 360-degree REFLECTIONS® survey (20 self-assessments and 164 other raters), used to assess changes in behaviour and organisational impact three months after the conclusion of LDP, as reported by participants, their bosses, peers, and direct reports.

**Semistructured phone interviews** (six participants) to enrich the findings from quantitative data. We asked LDP graduates how they were implementing the knowledge and competencies they acquired in the programme and the factors that facilitated or inhibited the transfer of their training to the workplace.

The data in our evaluation involves individuals who participated in LDP in Brussels from June 2010 to February 2012. Since LDP is an open-enrolment programme, candidates self-select their participation. Sessions were conducted in English but drew participants from a variety of nationalities.



## Results

Our evaluation shows that LDP is hitting the mark and accomplishes its stated goals, as summarized in the following results.

### **Participants report high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of LDP.**

When asked more than eight weeks after they completed LDP what they thought about the training, participants reported high levels of satisfaction (a cumulative rating of 8.8 on a 10-point scale). This indicates sustained satisfaction over time. Moreover, this satisfaction pertains to all aspects of the training, including pre-training assessments, the training itself, and personalized coaching sessions.

#### **Sustained Participant Satisfaction with LDP**



## Improvements in self-awareness are rated the most impactful.

In order to understand which LDP modules participants found most effective, we examined feedback participants provided as part of their end-of-programme survey. Coaching, peer feedback, and the 360-degree feedback tool were cited in two-thirds of all narrative responses. Each of these elements contributes to increased self-awareness, which CCL has identified as the cornerstone of leadership development. While many other training elements were also mentioned as beneficial, they were brought up less often.

Similar results surfaced during phone interviews. When participants were asked which aspects of LDP they found most beneficial, the topics cited most frequently were the modules and activities designed specifically to increase self-awareness. Among them were coaching, simulations, and all forms of feedback, including 360-degree feedback, peer feedback, and CCL's situation-behaviour-impact (SBI) model. Interview participants also mentioned resiliency exercises, the FIRO Business™ profile, and the Work Place Big Five™ assessment—all tools that are part of LDP training experience.

### Examples of Interview Responses

#### Regarding the SBI feedback technique taught in LDP:

“SBI provided perfect feedback which I never got before, and it helped me to open my eyes in certain areas. (. . . ) I never got such feedback from people. (. . . ) It helps a lot.”

#### Regarding coaching:

“It really made a difference in my relationship with people.”

“Frustration leads to being completely fed up and saying things when you really should not. So that’s something I have really changed, and that is coming not so much from the training itself, but from the discussion with the coach.”

“You think you know yourself and then you hear and get examples from others; you realize it is something that you need to work on.”



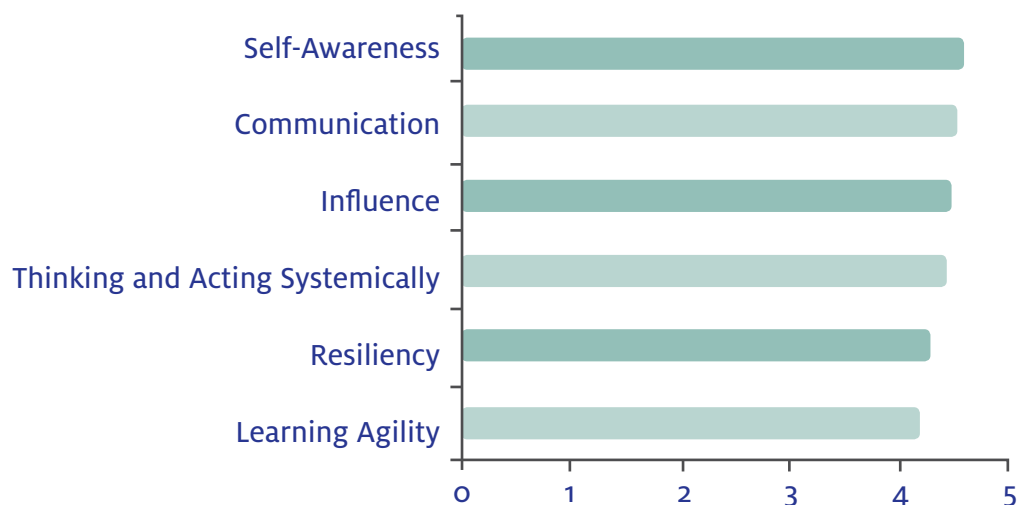
### Participants saw key learning objectives as highly relevant.

Perceived relevance of a learning goal or objective is an indicator for good training design. It is an important precursor to learning transfer and to overall engagement in training (Ardts et al., 2010; Scaduto et al., 2008).

As a result, we evaluated the perception of relevance in the survey we conducted on the last day of LDP. All

respondents indicated that they found the six leadership competencies targeted in the programme to be highly applicable to the workplace, with all average scores exceeding 4.0 and higher on a 5-point scale. The self-awareness and communication competencies were seen as most relevant of all.

### Relevance of Learning Objectives for LDP Participants



## Participants accomplished key learning objectives.

The overwhelming majority of participants said they achieved the learning objectives established for each of the six leadership competencies addressed in LDP to a great extent or to a very great extent. This means the programme is equipping participants with key behaviours and insights that can drive meaningful results back on the job and can help them better handle the tensions and ever-shifting dynamics of leading in the middle zone. They are better prepared to:

**Bridge the gap between senior management and the front line** to grow alignment, build commitment, and turn strategy into action.

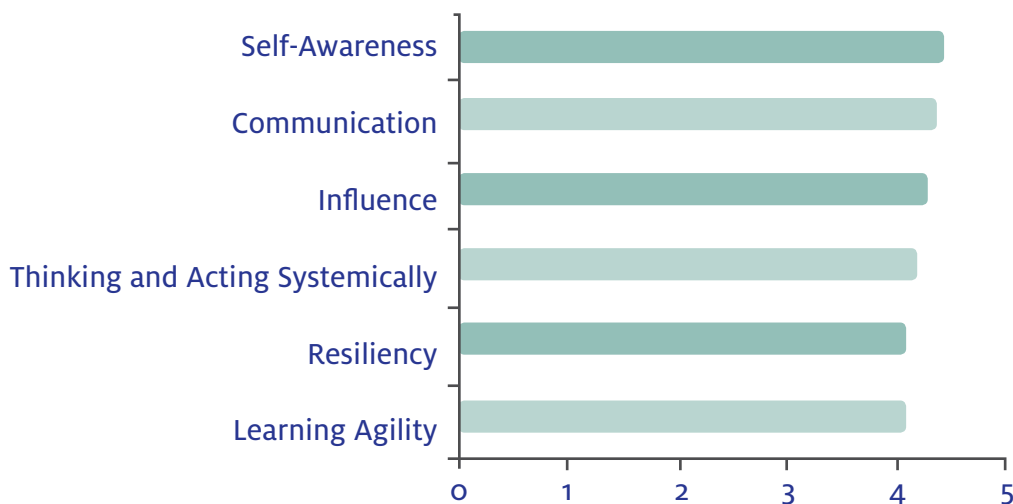
**Collaborate across the organisation** to gain critical perspectives, solve complicated problems, create buy-in, and manage politics.

**Effectively manage complexity** to take wise and productive action amidst rapidly changing conditions.

**Leverage the experience gained from multiple life roles** to increase their leadership effectiveness at work.

**Build resiliency** to effectively manage stress, uncertainty, and setbacks.

### Achievement of Learning Objectives by LDP Participants



## LDP had a positive impact on participant behaviour.

While participants may be satisfied with LDP content and may have accomplished key learning objectives, it is also important to understand whether there were actual changes in demonstrated behaviour following participation in the programme. We gathered evaluation data to address this topic more than three months following completion of LDP—when sufficient time had elapsed for new behaviours to become established and for there to be a demonstration of real, sustained change.

Input was gathered both from participants and from other relevant individuals in the organisation, including participants' peers, direct reports, superiors, and bosses. Raters were asked to provide a pre- and post-LDP evaluation on each key leadership competency so we could evaluate the differences before and after participation in the programme.

**LDP resulted in statistically significant, positive changes in each of the 14 behaviours and competencies measured—especially negotiation and self-awareness.** That means managers who were already solid performers before the training were now performing at even higher levels across a variety of parameters.

CCL research shows that organisations often gain the greatest organisational impact when successful managers further improve their competencies, even if those changes are small (Hoole et al., 2007).

### Changes in Behaviour Following LDP Observed by Participants and Relevant Organisational Others\*



\* Average absolute change (on a 9-point scale) between "before" and "now" as witnessed by participants' direct reports, peers, and bosses at work.

The interviews with LDP participants provide similar results, with most indicating the greatest progress in three core competencies: influence, communication, and self-awareness.

### Examples of Interview Responses

“Now I am able to listen to the issues and the viewpoints of people and ask them to put their action plan on the table with due dates identified by the team.”

“Taking more time for dialogue and taking care of people’s feeling and less time for action. More balanced way of management.”

“I might have lost some people’s opinions in the past and not explored the full potential of some ideas.”

“Improved my capacity to put myself in someone else’s shoes; have more empathy.”

“I have succeeded in having the company align on a different set of objectives for this channel; I have succeeded to convince the company that this is a significant incremental business opportunity to the company.”

Participants also referred to improvements in resiliency, learning agility, and the ability to think and act systemically, though these competencies were mentioned less often.

Some participants said they are now providing feedback using the specific method taught in LDP and are better at clarifying priorities. They spoke of an awareness of who they are (in terms of strengths and areas for improvement), of how best to communicate and interact with others, and of how to influence others and work effectively with them.

Both LDP participants and others in the organisation were asked to evaluate whether the programme resulted in behavioural changes that can deliver organisational impact, such as openness to diverse perspectives, cross-boundary collaboration, and organisational effectiveness. Results showed positive changes in each of these areas, especially in relationships with colleagues.

### Examples of Interview Responses

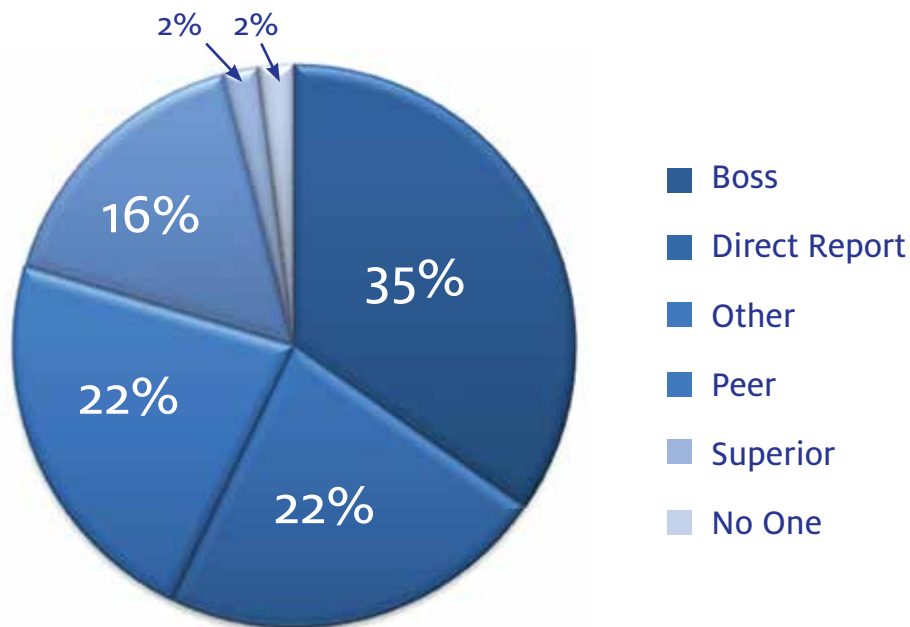
“I am finding easier alignment with different countries and colleagues in different functions.”

## There are factors that can maximize LDP benefits in the workplace.

Our evaluators were especially interested to learn whether there are factors that impact whether the knowledge and skills acquired during LDP are applied back in the workplace. We began by focusing on the forward-looking development goals each participant is asked to establish during the programme and to share with a CCL coach for reinforcement. Several months after completion of the programme, **80% of LDP alumni considered themselves successful in attaining their development objectives, while the remaining 20% considered themselves very successful.** Not a single participant reported failure in achieving the goals established.

Experience shows that goals shared with others are more likely to be achieved. As a result, CCL coaches routinely encourage LDP participants to share their objectives with others they trust in order to promote accountability. The accompanying chart shows that more than half of LDP participants in our study chose to share their development goals with a boss or direct report, which may be an important driver in the successful completion of developmental objectives.

**Organisational Others with Whom LDP Participants Shared Development Goals**



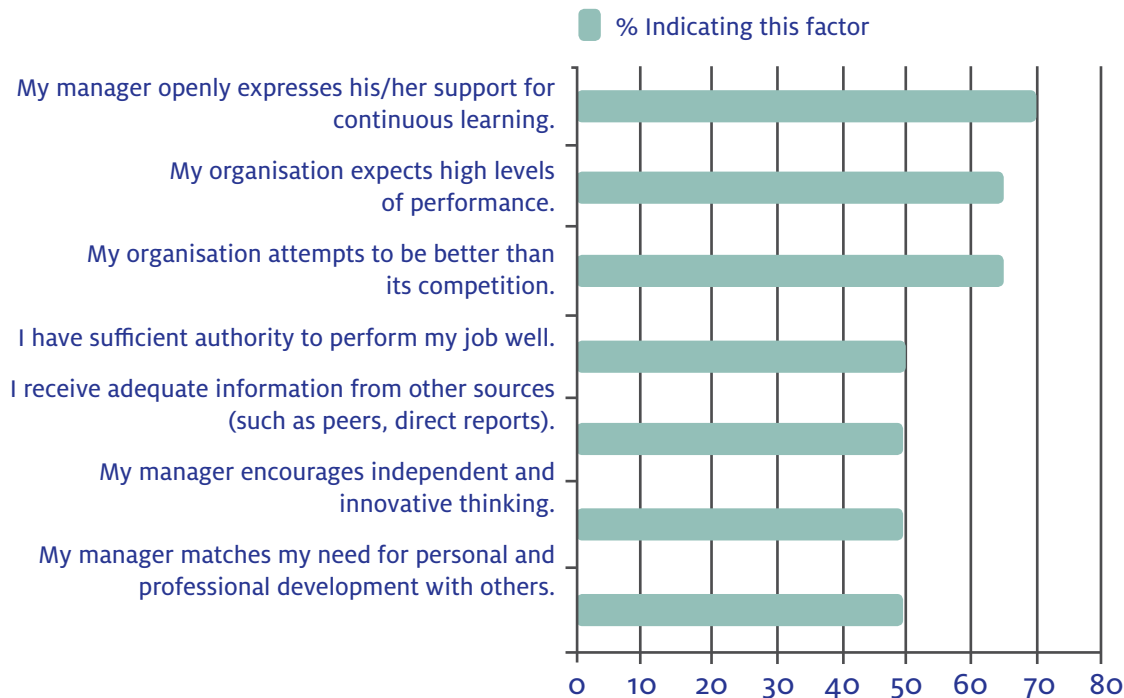
In addition to sharing developmental goals with others, our evaluators discovered there are many other factors that can encourage individuals to apply newly acquired knowledge and skills to the workplace. In particular, a supportive workplace climate and opportunities to use new competencies are seen to play an important role. More than 60% of our respondents cited these three important factors for training transfer:

**Management Support for Learning**

**High Performance Expectations**

**An Organisation That Strives to Be Better than the Competition**

### The Factors LDP Participants Say Helped Them Achieve Their Development Goals



Results from our post-course survey were reinforced by the interviews we conducted. Participants often referred to the role others played in helping them transfer their improved competencies and behaviours to the workplace. They mentioned

the importance of feedback and support, interaction with their CCL coach, sharing plans with colleagues, and the support received from colleagues who had also attended LDP.

## Examples of Interview Responses

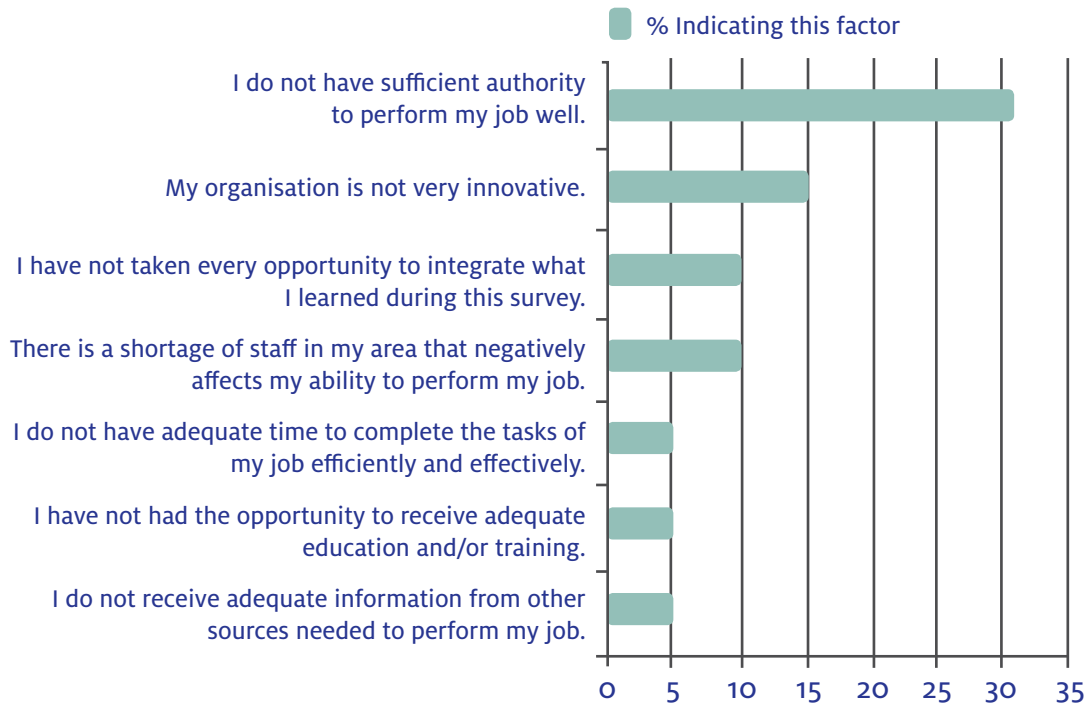
“My boss, for sure, he is very helpful. We are having reviews regularly. As part of my objectives my boss is giving me more exposure to top management.”

“Talking to my colleagues . . . about my experience in CCL really helps changing some things . . . It’s a bit easier to agree to do things differently.”

These interview comments mirror some of the quantitative data seen earlier. Participants indicate the value of management support for employee learning and independent thinking, of having sufficient authority to act, and of personally taking every opportunity to learn in an environment that has high performance expectations.

The absence of supporting factors is typically detrimental to achieving developmental goals. But in general, our respondents indicated there were few obstacles inhibiting their development. Most of the items listed were identified by less than 5% of participants. The highest ratings were obtained for insufficient authority to perform the job role and lack of innovation in the organisation.

## Obstacles Identified as Detrimental to Achieving Development Goals



When interviewed about obstacles, participants most commonly replied that a lack of time prevented their full implementation of LDP knowledge and skills. One participant, for example, said he found himself in a “booming market: there is no

time to breathe.” Other factors raised included a lack of support, a lack of personal discipline, and organisational complexity. There were several participants who stated there were no obstacles that kept them from accomplishing their goals.

# Optimizing the Value of LDP and Other Developmental Experiences

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Multiple studies show that an investment in effective leadership development can deliver substantive value to an organisation—helping to improve bottom-line financial performance, attract and retain talent, create strategic alignment, and promote a more agile response to change.

Our multifaceted evaluation of LDP shows it too delivers a strong return by successfully developing critical leadership competencies that impact performance back on the job. This improvement is borne out in survey data and in the comments and examples provided by alumni during interviews.

“For me at the end, it was the best programme I ever had. It was really good. It was structured. It was clear that it was done by people with a lot of experience with it. They knew what they were doing.”

How can we account for the impactful results and the positive reception the programme receives? As might be expected, there is no single answer. Many participants credit the experiential nature of the curriculum—intense learning experiences followed by structured reflection. Other CCL research also supports that conclusion. We’ve consistently found that experience is the most powerful way to learn the lessons of leadership (Wilson et al., 2011).

Clearly LDP’s focus on relevant content is also critical to the outcomes achieved, with all six modules specifically designed to help those “managing in the middle.” The multiple assessments used, facilitated feedback, and discussion are helpful, as are the various tools and activities that actively engage participants throughout the five days.

Interaction with peers throughout the programme can also be particularly valuable, especially given the personal development content discussed. Some participants rated feedback from peers as the most significantly beneficial aspect of LDP. This feedback can only work effectively once a safe learning environment has been created by the participants themselves and by experienced LDP facilitators.

Participants rated the personalized coaching woven into the programme very highly. They also acknowledge that this coaching is effective because it centres on the intense, concrete learning experiences incorporated into LDP training. Coaching is what “brings it all together” for participants. Better still, the coach continues to be a presence after the return to the workplace—providing support for the implementation of the personal development plan.

Based on survey data and interviews with participants and facilitators, we’ve identified several recommendations that can help those participating in future LDP sessions—or in other leadership development initiatives—derive more value from the experience.

### **Recommendations for Optimizing the Value of LDP and Other Developmental Experiences:**

- Identify clear development goals and share them with trusted others who will hold you accountable to your plans.
- Raise management awareness of your need for support and feedback.
- Share your experiences and plans with colleagues who have participated in the same development programme and can reinforce new behaviours and learning.
- Actively look for feedback on your progress.
- Make it clear to others that you are open to developmental opportunities.
- Manage your time carefully on your return to work to allow time for reflection and planning.
- Be realistic. Establishing new behaviours takes time.

# CCL Evaluation Services

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CCL's Evaluation Centre helps organisations get the most out of their investment in leadership development. Our team can help you:

- **Measure the effectiveness of your talent development initiatives.**
- **Provide stakeholders with meaningful, actionable data that will help them to make the right decisions about future investments in human capital.**
- **Maximize impact through high-quality programme initiatives that meet your specific organisational needs.**
- **Monitor leadership development initiatives to ensure continuous progress in achieving organisational outcomes.**

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## About the Authors

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**Regina Eckert, PhD**, is a scientist-practitioner who represents the Center for Creative Leadership's (CCL®) research team and is broadening CCL's evaluation capacity in the EMEA region. She is currently leading a CCL study on "Careers in 21st Century Europe" to explore how culture and gender influence the development of leadership careers. Regina is a key researcher on current projects focused on leadership and sustainability, social identity, and diversity, and she frequently speaks on those topics to both scholars and practitioners. She also managed the development of Global6, a 360-degree feedback tool for global leadership. Gina holds a degree in psychology from the University of Munich, Germany, and a PhD in management from Aston Business School in the United Kingdom. She also has a post-graduate certificate from Aston for teaching and learning in higher education, approved by the U.K. Higher Education Academy. Before joining CCL, Regina consulted on quality management in German healthcare, organisational change, and leadership development in the automotive industry.

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**William Mulhern** coordinates a global organisational change effort. He began his career in Belgium in the high-tech communications industry and has 17 years of international management and organisational experience in a variety of functions (operations, project, and programme management). He completed his BSc in psychology at University College, Dublin, Ireland, and the Netherlands, and recently completed an MSc in work and organisational psychology at Maastricht University, the Netherlands. His work to evaluate the impact of CCL's LDP programme formed part of his master's thesis.



## Center for Creative Leadership®

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of leadership development. By leveraging the power of leadership to drive results that matter most to clients, CCL transforms individual leaders, teams, organizations and society. Our array of cutting-edge solutions is steeped in extensive research and experience gained from working with hundreds of thousands of leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world's Top 5 providers of executive education by the *Financial Times* and in the Top 10 by *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, CCL has offices in Greensboro, NC; Colorado Springs, CO; San Diego, CA; Brussels, Belgium; Moscow, Russia; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Singapore; Gurgaon, India; and Shanghai, China.

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