

Leading somewhere

FRIK LANDMAN says both corporate educators and corporate leaders who present themselves for education have a choice. The choice of accepting responsibility.



Lead us Evolution, lead us,
Up the future's endless stair;
Chop us, change us, prod us, weed us,
For stagnation is despair:
Grouping, guessing, yet progressing,
Lead us nobody knows where.

– CS Lewis from *Evolutionary Hymn*

ORGANISATIONS ARE POWERFUL and they shape our global landscape in significant ways. Executive leaders, in managing these organisations, decide how to manoeuvre them across this landscape.

As educators, our first response to the development of these leaders should not be to seek a precise and operational definition of executive development or leadership development. Our first concern should be for civil society – those affected by the decisions of these architects of economic and societal landscapes.

Dr Phillip Harper offers us the world at a glance: If we should reduce the world into a village of a 100 people, the following will be a profile of the village: 57 would be of Asian origin, 21 European, 14 North and South American and 8 African; 70 would be blacks and 30 whites; 6 people in the village would possess 59% of the village's wealth; 80 people in the village would live in substandard housing; 70 of the village people would suffer from malnutrition; 1 would have a college degree; and 1 would have a computer. These realities however are stretched like writing on a balloon and are difficult for us to experience on a daily basis.

Does management education matter in such a context? Certainly. Organisational leadership and management have an important societal responsibility. Ulrich writes somewhere: "...management education today should enable, and indeed require, future managers to lead us out of the mess that past and present notions of good management have created!" and I might add: that ostensibly good management education has created.



It remains incontrovertible: Improving the leadership mind means improving the human condition and therefore the quality of societal life.

Too often, however, managers exit highly acclaimed learning systems (read: programmes) lacking a critical mind. Globally responsible leaders ought to have more to offer than the recycled opinions of others (such as facilitators, etc.). Immanuel Kant noted, "He who has once tasted critique will forever loathe all the dogmatic twaddle with which he was hitherto contented". This is one of the important outputs of an executive learning intervention: to have developed critical thinking, to lead with discernment, to exhibit sound judgement. Knowledge is not about regurgitation. West Churchman aptly reminds us that knowledge resides in the user.

To refer to the increasing complexity that leaders have to deal with is to state the obvious. The executive education business (corporate universities, business schools, corporate training divisions, consultants, trainers) has reacted to this complexity with a proliferation of management approaches, programmes and fads. Managers are overwhelmed with learning interventions that attempt to simplify these complexities.

But the "sheep dip mentality" where someone is sent to a conference or a workshop to find the latest panacea and then returns to 'dip' everyone in the company into this 'solution' is making place for the realisation that every learning design has a very particular context of application.

Knowledge is not about regurgitation

Responsible executive education is about knowledge individually internalised and upon which the leader can act responsibly. □

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