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Improving Workforce Professionalism: A Retrospective View of Developing Leadership Mass Through Your Staff

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- OSD's Obligations and Expenditure Rate Goals (*AT&L*, Aug. 2013)
- Learning Organizations (*ARJ*, Apr. 2013)
- Human Capital Accelerators (*AT&L*, Mar. 2011)
- It's Time to Take the Chill Out of Cost Containment (*ARJ*, Apr. 2010)

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Abstract

How can the acquisition workforce train and create experience for the next generation? This research addressed how Defense Acquisition University (DAU) develops its emerging leaders among its support faculty and staff, a vital part of that equation.

Through a retrospective view of Emerging Leadership Program (ELP), the author investigated the value and impact of the program's details and its resulting effect for its graduates. To learn more, the graduates participated in a survey along with their supervisors that quantified their ELP experiences and observations, as well as confirmed any concomitant value. This research assessed the outcomes of DAU's ELP over the course of six years by focusing on various ELP activities coupled with an emphasis on behavior to reinforce the importance of improving workforce professionalism. Originally, the ELP was intended to create a development pathway. Has it?

Issue

Like any human capital development program, is the investment worth it? After completing the ELP at the Defense Acquisition University (DAU), were graduates able to influence leadership (a key performance indicator) with their new skill sets? Moreover, how many of the 58 graduates became more competitive for various leadership positions and how many actually advanced?

Introduction

Corporate universities have a long history with training programs designed to prepare their organization's future leaders—DeLoitte, the Missile Defense Agency (MDA), Disney, Motorola, InoSys, Caterpillar, MasterCard, McDonald's, to name a few. These organizations have instituted leadership programs to develop their personnel through building positive team cultures, grooming the next generation, leading through trust, and so forth. Many incorporated soft skill workshops, case studies, rotational assignments, and mentoring, etc. with many who are highly selective of their candidates. Infosys selects just 125 candidates from a list of 7,000 applicants (OriginLearning, 2014). Similarly, military organizations recognize their future leaders require formal development. Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral John M. Richardson uses the term *high-velocity learning* and recognizes the need to take advantage of the various talents and perspectives provided by the newest members of an organization (Stewart, 2016). DAU developed an Emerging



Leadership Program (ELP) that is “Developing Leadership Mass” from the bottom-up as well.

Background

How did ELP actually come about? It took root through an internal climate survey that DAU conducts every two years to learn more about what it does well and other areas that may require more attention through the use of climate survey improvement (CSI) teams. DAU established CSI teams to address any required action. In 2009, they noted a negative trend with the staff’s job satisfaction in comparison to faculty. After a closer look, DAU staff found that staff were seeking “more recognition” and the ability to “influence decisions” in their respective workplaces. In response, the CSI team recommended that DAU develop a “Future (Emerging) Leader Program” (Seligman, 2009) and piloted an “Emerging Leadership Program” in 2011. Initial results looked promising. The graduates felt the program helped them bridge the opportunity gap that was previously missing. Today, DAU’s current ELP incarnation continues to emphasize opportunities as a cornerstone through “experience and knowledge that fosters professional and personal growth ... and prepares select DAU employees for positions of increasing responsibility” (Fowler, 2015).

Emerging Leadership Program Specifics

Participation in ELP is competitive. If selected, ELP participants are exposed to a wide range of leadership competencies during a year-long program. They meet once a month virtually, and twice, face-to-face. The two face-to-face meetings are reserved for the first and last meetings. Altogether, the forums help pace the participants through various ELP program activities designed to strengthen seven core competencies:

1. Customer Service
2. Communications Skills
3. Interpersonal Skills
4. Flexibility/Adaptability
5. Problem Solving
6. Developing Others & Continuous Learning
7. Integrity & Honesty

The list below characterizes the 14 ELP components:

- Discussion Groups
- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Assessment® (MBTI)
- Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI)
- Individual Development Plan (IDP)
- Journaling
- DDI 360 Leadership Mirror® (360)
- Team Activity
- Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQI)
- E-Learning Curriculum (e-Learning)
- Reading Report
- Soft Skill Workshops
- Mentor



- Shadow
- Final Project

ELP is designed to build greater confidence in leadership behavior through a structured process that leverages blended learning. The 14 components are used within an integrated framework of participating peers, supervisors, and mentors (formal and informal) to favorably influence graduate performance back on-the-job. For example, peers participate in 360 assessments, supervisors establish expectations, and mentors help support ELP participants in meeting their established growth goals.

Methodology

The researcher used a peer reviewed survey to collect data on eleven quantitative and qualitative questions with matrix-style format and cell groupings to expedite the time to complete (Figure 1).

The screenshot shows a web-based questionnaire for the Emerging Leadership Program (ELP) at Defense Acquisition University. The form is divided into several sections:

- Header:** DAU logo and title.
- Introduction:** DAU is looking to better understand the impact of the Emerging Leadership Program. The outcome of this study is expected to help DAU create a more focused workplace program.
- Demographics:** Select your completed level of education (dropdown menu).
- Leadership Qualities:** Select your "Top 5 Qualities" you expect of a DAU Leader. A list of 15 qualities is provided with checkboxes, including "DAU Enterprise Perspective and Alignment", "Credible", "Promotes Collaboration", "Develops Self & Others", "Behavior Aligned with DAU Values", "Displays Respect & Support", "Exercises Authority and Decision Making", "Innovator", "Change Agent", "Competent", "Critical Thinker", "Effective Communicator", "Leads by Example", and "Builds & Nurtures Trust Relationships".
- Agreement Section:** As an ELP graduate, rate your agreement with the following. A Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) is provided for the statement: "My DAU advancement opportunities have improved. I am more optimistic about my future with DAU. I can better influence decisions affecting my work."
- Effectiveness Section:** Rate the effectiveness of the following in preparing you as an emerging leader. A matrix-style format is used with Likert scales (NA to 7) for 14 activities: Mentor Assignment, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Strength Deployment Inventory, SubSkills, Emotional Quotient Inventory, ELP Discussion Groups, DAU 360 Leadership Mirror, Team Activity & Presentation, SkillPort E Learning Curriculum, Individual Development Plan, Journal Assignment, Reading Assignments, Shadow Assignment, and Final Project.
- Frequency Section:** How frequently have you applied the following on the job? A matrix-style format is used with Likert scales (NA to Always) for the same 14 activities.
- Open-ended Comments:** Several text boxes are provided for comments on specific activities and overall program feedback.

Figure 1. ELP Questionnaire

The total cohort of ELP graduates were invited to give feedback on their perceived effectiveness of the 14 ELP activities in their leadership preparation and how frequently the ELP graduates were using their newly found skills. ELP graduates were also asked to comment on how they would apply what they learned. Their supervisors were invited to participate to provide a cross-sectional perspective for this study. Because the need for a staff leadership program was triggered by a previous climate assessment, the survey also included three DAU climate survey questions for comparison to benchmarked data. The response variables were labeled using a semantic differential and then numbered with Likert-like scoring to provide a profile of the connotation.



The results were exported to Excel (Figure 2). The researcher used custom visual basic formulas to build summary arrays to display respondent groupings.

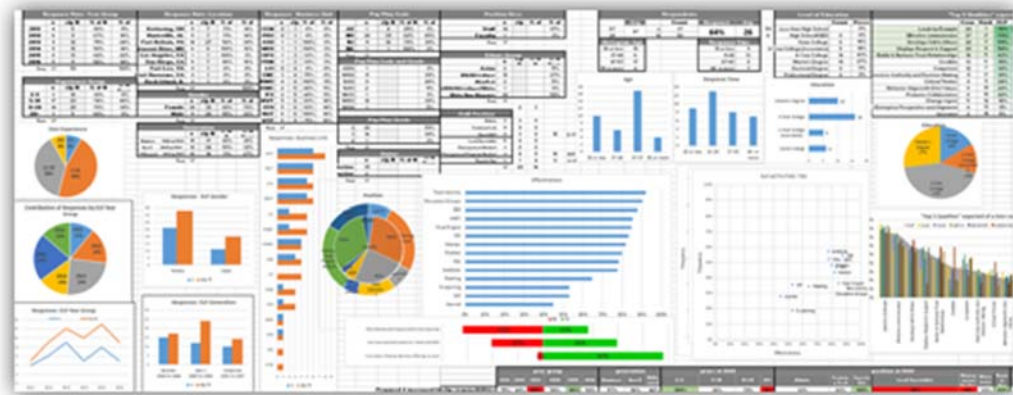


Figure 2. Summary Spreadsheet

Findings

This research confirmed the ELP's effectiveness and identified impacts through a variety of metrics based on the graduates' perceived effectiveness of the constituent ELP activities along with their supervisor's assessment of any changes in key behaviors "observed." The findings indicated a positive learning experience overall. Respondents recommended several changes to improve the effectiveness of the activities that would lead to more favorable learning outcomes including a preference for expanded leadership opportunities where they could apply their newly founded skills.

What was the single most influential factor for ELP graduates that helped them gain momentum as a future influencer/leader? It depends on the axis. For "effectiveness" it was team activities; for "frequency of use" it was soft skills closely followed by the DDI 360 Leadership Mirror®. Figure 3 highlights all 14 factors. According to the qualitative comments, the participants found this and other self-assessments including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Assessment (MBTI) allowed for self-awareness and self-managed change. Team activities and the unique soft skill training seemed to serve as an experiential platform to practice what they learned and helped them build stronger intellectual muscle.

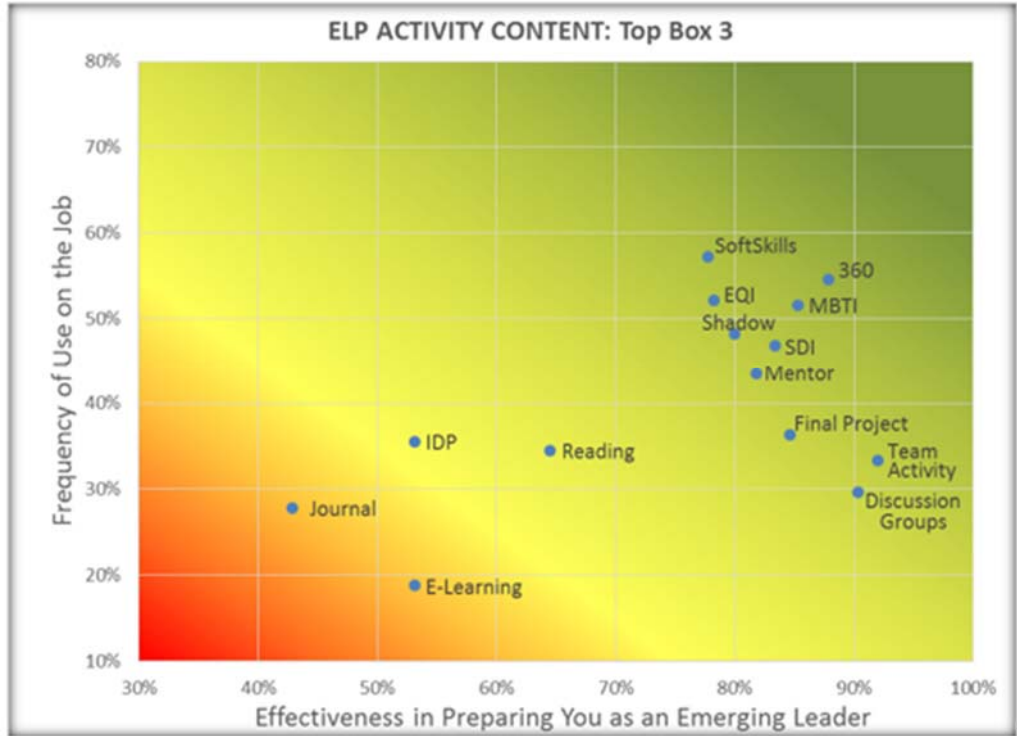


Figure 3. ELP Activity Content

Demographics

The participants in DAU's ELP were well represented in this research study, and responded at a rate of 64%. Figure 4 displays ELP year groups and their contributions to the total. With the exception of the initial ELP pilot, class sizes ranged from 9 to 13 students since the program's inception.

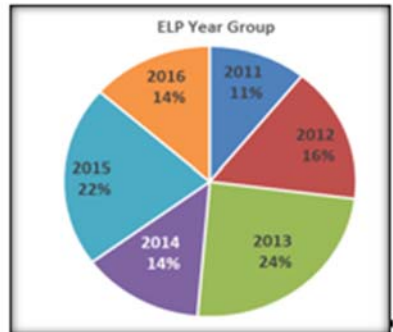


Figure 4. Contribution by ELP Year Group

Figure 5 shows how the two groups varied when comparing the respondents (n) to the total number invited (N) by year group, the gap (non-responders). Response rates also varied by generation:

- Boomers: 88%
- Gen-X: 50%
- Millennials: 71%



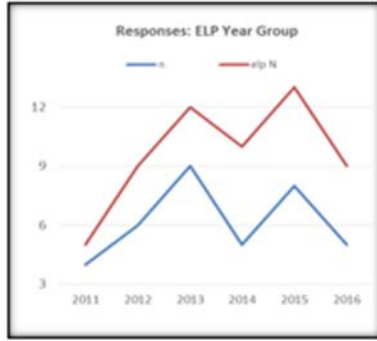


Figure 5. Year Group Response Gap

The Gen-X group was the largest non-responding group in this assessment (Figure 6). The lower response rate among Gen-X could be explained by their mistrust of technology (Erickson, 2008).

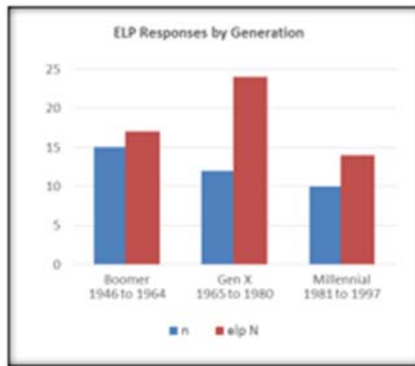


Figure 6. Response by ELP Generation

Respondents were categorized as Line Staff (admin, training techs, and specialists), Mid-Level Staff (lead specialists, management analysts, and management program analysts), or Senior Staff (designated deputy personnel or senior supervisors). The respondents also had diverse educational backgrounds. Almost a third held a master’s degree while about half held bachelor’s degrees. The rest either held a two-year degree or were actively seeking college credit.

Assessing the 14 ELP Activities

The 14 ELP learning activities were assessed using a top box three (TB3) methodology (i.e., totaling the responses of 5, 6, and 7 on a Likert Like scale from 1–7 and then dividing by the total respondents). Figure 7 shows the learning effectiveness of each activity. Admittedly, the effectiveness of each activity could be influenced by their frequency of use (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, etc.). The scatterplot shows the respondents’ aggregated average of the ELP attributes rated for both effectiveness and frequency.



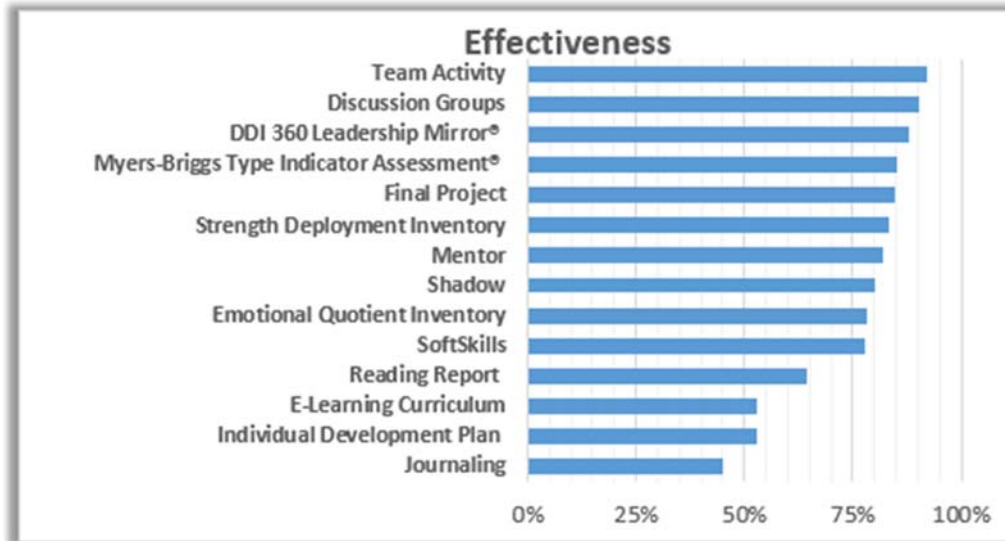


Figure 7. ELP Graduates Rate ELP Activity Effectiveness

Combining both components could suggest a tight coupling (or not) between the two. For example, the value of any particular activity with a high frequency and high effectiveness might start to wane (or not) if exercised less frequently as seen in Figure 3. To simplify the outline for the following section, the researcher kept “effectiveness” as the more influential attribute. Follow-on research could validate any changes in effectiveness for those components used more frequently (or less) over time.

Representative Comments

The following quotes represent a sampling of the respondent’s comments associated with the 14 ELP activities. The comments are listed in order of the TB 3 rating (high to low) for effectiveness. Specifically, ELP graduates were asked: “What will you do differently now?”

Team Activity (TB: 92%) “I will ...

- ... dive into projects that affect DAU as a whole.”*
- ... plan my own goals and keep others accountable to the project goals.”*
- ... stay connected with my ELP project team as a professional network.”*
- ... work better with teams to get full participation whether I'm a lead or a team member.”*

Discussion Groups (TB: 90%) “I will ...

- ... participate more and share my ideas even when they are different.”*
- ... provide candid feedback to other members.”*
- ... get to know my counterparts from across the university.”*
- ... appreciate the power of collaboration and ‘bring it’ when it applies.”*

360 (TB: 88%) “I will ...

- ... work on continuous improvement and be more self-aware in areas where I need to improve.”*



- ... improve on my effectiveness with communication skills and delegate.”
- ... engage and work on perceptions on how I am seen by my leadership.”
- ... continue to reflect—the 360 assessment was a profound learning moment about myself as a leader.”

MBTI (TB: 85%) “I will ...

- ... make more effective interactions with differing and similar personality types.”
- ... consider adjustments needed with other personality types on how they work and interpret information.”
- ... continue to apply MBTI and learn to better support my self-leadership.”
- ... be more aware of other co-workers preferences so as to reduce conflict and increase group cohesion.”

Final Project (TB: 85%) “I will ...

- ... continue to reflect and look back at projects.”
- ... remember this—it was rewarding to see it come together as value added.”
- ... look for IPT participation opportunities...good vibes on my presentation.”
- ... do this again. ... I enjoyed the process of pulling together a final project.”

SDI (TB: 83%) “I will ...

- ... adjust my behavior and approach to conflict situations to be more effective.”
- ... strategically approach conflict with leaders armed with knowledge of how my SDI compares to my leadership.”
- ... be more aware of my stress reactions and make effort to better deal with daily work stressors... especially when working on teams.”
- ... apply immediately! An informative tool and profound moment to learning about myself as a leader.”

Mentor (TB: 82%) “I will ...

- ... continue weekly mentor vector checks. ... I have too much to work on but perspective is invaluable ... learning to engage.”
- ... find time to take on this challenge.”
- ... reference back to my mentor when/if a situation warrants.”
- ... utilize several suggested methods and reflect back on my mentor’s insights.”

Shadow (TB: 80%) “I will ...

- ... request more stretch opportunities...research and/or support deep dives.”
- ... ask for a specific project to lead now that I have had a shadow so I can exercise my new skills...I can contribute and lead from below.”
- ... approach others with more confidence ... a transformational experience.”



... model my own approach from what I saw demonstrated ... so much learning in the shadow!"

... look for more shadow opportunities ... even if informal this is an outstanding networking opportunity and learning opportunity."

... emulate some traits I observed as well as avoid some."

EQI (78%) "I will ...

... be more patient with others."

... handle daily situations differently."

... show more empathy ... a profound learning moment about myself as a leader."

... treat all colleagues as humans, regardless of position or status."

Reading (65%) "I will ...

... work on developing an ongoing professional reading habit."

... look for another good leadership book."

... use try to use and remember the skills I read...great recommended reading!"

... read additional books to continue to learn new leadership approaches and techniques."

e-learning (53%) "I will ...

... look for continued e-curriculum—it was free and it was helpful."

... use the new skills to deal with others in the circumstances I read about."

... do more e-learning beyond the 'requirements' to improve my self-knowledge and skill-knowledge."

... keep soft skills on my reading list."

IDP (53%) "I will ...

... better assist subordinates with setting up their IDPs now that I have done one."

... continue IDP from a holistic perspective."

... spend more time discussing options outside of DAU's programs that supplement the ELP learning."

... plan my opportunities—'need' vs 'want' because I can't do everything."

... continue to plan as I take my development seriously but in many ways I think we check the box on this."

Journal (45%) "I will ...

... look for guidance on how to journal or what to record."

... update my journal."



Representative Comments in Review

The ELP graduates' "I will ..." statements reinforced how the ELP activities may have compelled them to apply what they learned. The comments also emphasized how this program can open new behavioral pathways that could have a lasting impact. Many of the graduates spoke of seeking additional opportunities to participate in projects, IPTs, informal mentoring, and focus groups to practice and enhance their new skills. Recognizing the need to continuously learn new skills, ELP graduates seemed to recognize the importance of widening their learning apertures in the years ahead.

An Assessment of Impact

What matters is generally measured. With ELP, what is a suitable measure of effectiveness for the program as a whole? Benchmarking against DAU's internal climate survey (collected on a Likert Like scale of 5) appeared to be a sound approach. Hence, the researcher used DAU Climate Survey questions to measure impact of ELP after graduation from the year-long program. ELP graduates offered candid comments—some very provoking—as described below.

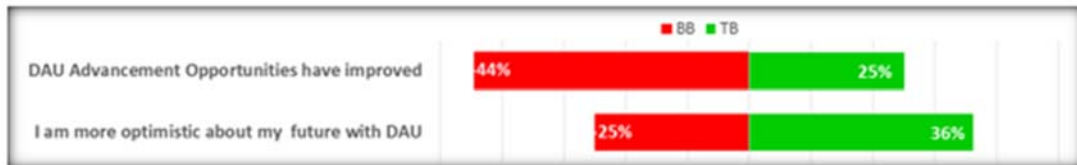


Figure 8. ELP Graduate Responses to Climate Survey Questions

DAU Advancement Opportunities and ELP Optimism (Figure 8)

Bottom Box: Have DAU Advancement Opportunities improved? With 44% in the bottom box, the majority felt opportunities had not improved; 25% of the respondents indicated less optimism with their futures at DAU. ELP, as the name suggests, is a program to develop emerging leaders. But what do ELP graduates actually emerge to? Several respondents pointed out that staff advancement is limited, "dismal at best," and "rare." Initial discussions at the program outset made it clear that there are few advancement opportunities at DAU for staff. A few respondents indicated they were encouraged to "move on" if they were seeking a leadership position—and they did. Over 10% of the graduates have left DAU for advancement positions.

Top Box: Why did some ELP graduates confirm improvements in their advancement opportunities when the data did not appear to support this ranking? While many respondents expressed disappointment that leadership and supervisory positions appeared to be fading, others stated a more optimistic view. They said they were "waiting it out" or "hanging in there" for leaders to retire or "move on." While the optimists (where one respondent said "attitude is everything") may not see a clear path for advancement (i.e., "it isn't evident"), they stressed the power of influence as a surrogate leadership strength. Several respondents noted that cross departmental and collaborative projects were especially useful. It gave them more opportunities to influence outcomes.



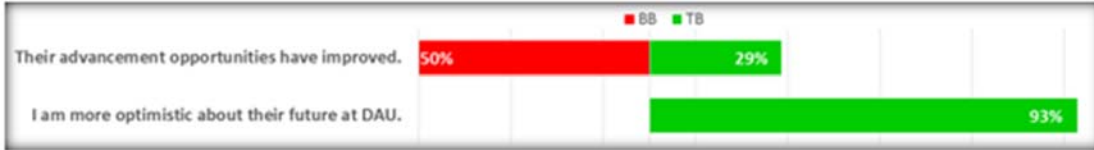


Figure 9. DAU Climate Survey Questions Answered by ELP Graduate's Supervisors

Supervisor's Speak

Supervisors of ELP graduates were asked the same questions from the climate survey (Figure 9). While both ELP graduates and their supervisors responded similarly to DAU advancement opportunities for emerging leaders, they had distinctly different levels of optimism about an ELP graduate's future. Supervisors viewed ELP graduates' future impact at DAU with 93% in TB3—significantly higher than ELP graduate responses (i.e., 57%). When asked to comment “in what way,” supervisors indicated their ELP graduates seemed to possess broader perspectives of DAU. One supervisor noticed his/her ELP graduates came back to the job with a better understanding how to articulate their end-of-year contributions and how those contributions supported DAU Strategic Goals. Supervisor comments below (with ELP graduate names protected) reinforced other visible gains:

- “xxxx more actively seeks opportunities”*
- “The experience has opened xxx's view outside beyond her immediate environment”*
- “xxx has a greater sense of inclusion and is taking ownership.”*
- “The program is a plus for their evaluations.”*
- “I have seen a notable change in most who have graduated.”*
- “I see a LOT more confidence in xxxxxx these days.”*
- “I see growth in leadership skills and think ELP also provided a great internal networking opportunity that will facilitate future contributions.”*
- “xxx having open communication with others in the program is of value to obtain goals.”*

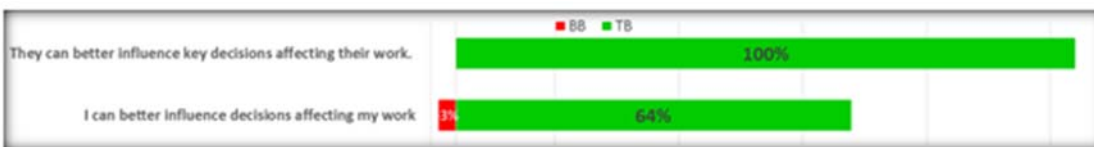


Figure 10. DAU Climate Survey Questions Answered by Both ELP Graduates and Their Supervisors

Influencing Decisions at Work (Figure 10)

Bottom Box: Very few respondents commented in the bottom box. One respondent noted “after getting to know the other ELP participants, it is clear that influence largely depends on the daily duties of the staff member.” Another said, “I’m just a worker bee ...” Perhaps, seeing influence as an inherent feature of a particular leadership position is holding some ELP graduates back who could otherwise be influential. One ELP graduate conveyed a more pessimistic view and said “almost everyone here has been through the program” and none were “selected for ELP” because they were potential leaders.”



Top Box: The ELP graduates scoring in the TB box (64%) appeared to be more comfortable with everything from communication to making decisions. They noted their communication skills had improved and they even understood themselves better. They also felt they developed a stronger voice along with an increased ability (and responsibility) to use it for the team or project to succeed. One respondent said “accept it—there is potential to lead from below.” Others said “my boss has confidence in me to perform my duties above my duty description” and “I could influence decisions about my work ... what I learned is helping me to be a better asset to DAU.” Even others said they learned new skills to help them act more assertively and make a bigger difference.

Supervisor’s Speak

Can ELP graduates better influence key decisions? With 100% in TB3, supervisors indicated their ELP graduates could better influence key decisions. Supervisor comments listed below confirmed several significant improvements:

“xxx has improved confidence and better communication skills, this combined with a better understanding of DAU culture all leads to better decision making.”

“I think most of the graduates are still a work in progress; but I think the more we can keep them involved the more they will excel and influence not just their work but work of the University.”

“xxxx has better insight into the organization and more useful contributions.”

“xxx better understands and is applying the power of influence having ascended to a more senior leadership position.”

“The program does a great job at promoting a team environment and forge lasting professional relationships. My staff reaches out to a network of thinking partners and comes to me with more actionable and relevant solutions.”

“My ELP graduate has more confidence in themselves which encourages the sharing of ideas and ultimately influence.”

Influence as a Leading Indicator for Results

ELP graduates said “with the right skill and attitude, you can influence and win confidence to make an impact.” Research suggests that a leader without influence is not a very effective leader. Others say, “An Influencer is a Leader. ... They challenge processes.” In that context, ELP graduates who learn to influence despite certain hurdles can indeed lead up and across, and ultimately achieve some the same outcomes as leading down. The formula depicting influence in Figure 11 was adapted from a leadership blog (Rockwell, 2016) and captures the fundamentals of influence.



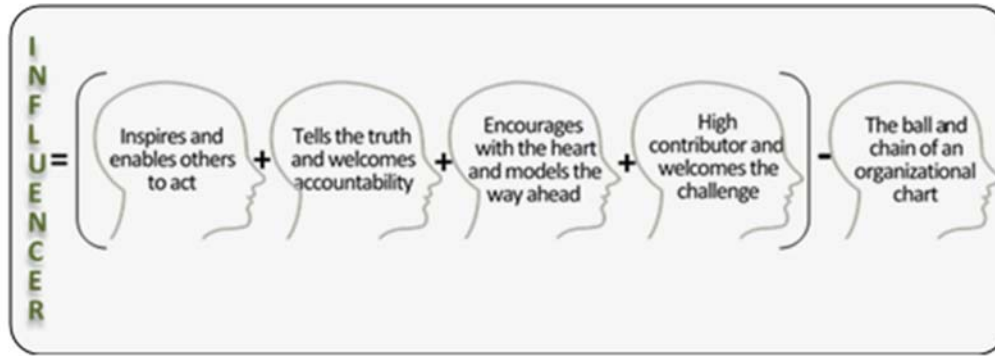


Figure 11. Influencer Model

After looking closely at all the data, did ELP create any results for the DAU, organizationally? What leading indicators or predictors suggest that behavioral changes are on track to produce desired results (Kirkpatrick & Kayser Kirkpatrick, 2016)? ELP supervisors were asked what their ELP graduates had done on the job that they could attribute to ELP. Any observed behavioral changes could serve as a bellwether of things to come.

“She has improved confidence in taking on challenges.”

“Communication and negotiation skills have greatly increased.

“My ELP graduates are taking on more leadership responsibilities.”

“xxxx filled a leadership void created when a PM left and he did such a great job that the position was not back filled.”

“My ELP graduates have learned to influence my behavior to the betterment of our business unit.”

“My ELP graduate has LED several key projects in the West Region; thinks more strategically; spends more time developing herself; asks more questions of leadership.”

“Two of my staff who have graduated from ELP have been promoted and one has taken a very active role in mentoring our pathways students.”

“I noticed that xxxxx now not only actively seeks leadership opportunities but also does a great job leading teams.”

“The program broadened their perspective and their ability to see the big picture and connect the dots ... a change in mindset and attitude which will go a long way.”

“My ELP graduates are taking on more lead roles for projects and have become invested in their own success.”

Leadership Qualities: What Matters and the Gaps

Supervisory data confirmed ELP Graduate contributions and their ability to influence outcomes. However, because influence can be complex to measure, ELP graduates and their supervisors were asked, “What made leaders effective?” Specifically, ELP graduates were asked to identify the leadership qualities they expect of a leader while supervisors were asked to identify the five leadership qualities they expect of ELP graduates. Figure 12

compares “what mattered most” for both groups along with their fluctuations. The companion comments provided several “perception gaps.”

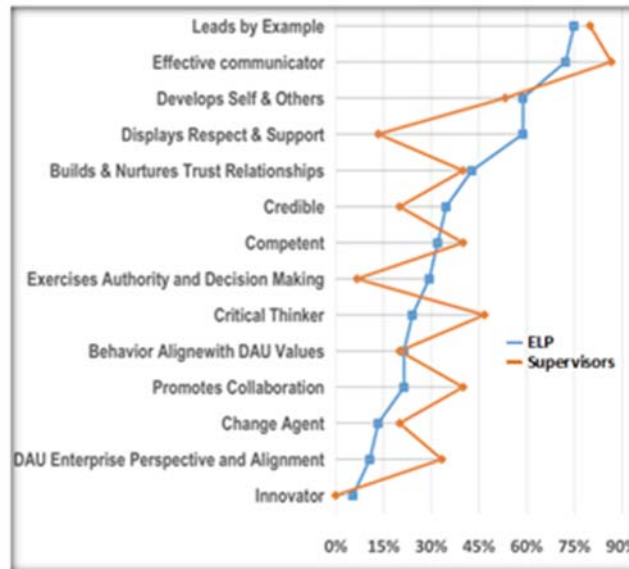


Figure 12. ELP Graduates and Supervisors Asked: What Makes Leaders Effective?

What Matters Most

While no single quality can be attributed to successful leadership, the awareness of all these characteristics can give a strong grounding for ELP graduates to influence outcomes. The characteristic that promote more influence could be the one that supervisors selected the most—communication. ELP graduates also placed high value in communication.

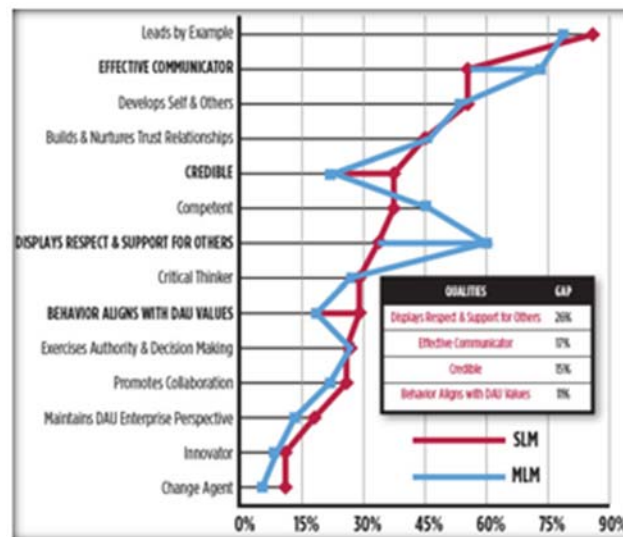


Figure 13. SLMS and MLMS Asked: What Matters Most in a Leader?



Perception Gaps

The largest gap between the groups (i.e., almost 50%) centered on Displaying Respect & Support. Only 13% of the supervisors selected this quality as the top five for the graduates while almost 60% of the ELP graduates felt it served as a much higher quality expected of a leader. Based on this aggregate level the gap, ELP graduates would be well served if they better understood their supervisor's expectations, especially in both critical thinking and collaboration.

The High Flying Leadership Qualities

Interestingly enough, the ELP graduate responses were consistent with the results of a separate study on DAU's MLM (mid-level leadership) responses (Tremaine, 2016). Tremaine noted that demographic factors easily influenced the leadership qualities. Both studies found the largest gap to be "Displaying Respect" where subordinate groups placed significantly more emphasis on it.

So what does this all mean? Are "influence," "displaying respect," and "outcomes" linked in some way? What is the cost of not displaying respect and what are the gains? A Harvard Business Review (HBR) study found that "no other leader behavior had a bigger effect on employees across the outcomes measured" (Porath, 2014)." In their study of nearly 20,000 employees, HBR noted about half didn't feel respect was displayed by their leaders. Moreover, negativity was "contagious." The other half who said they were treated with respect reported high job satisfaction, high job significance, high organizational trust, more engagement, and more likely to stay with their organization. Doug Conant (former Campbell's Soup CEO) turned Campbell's Soup around and set performance records (5 fold on the S&P ratings) largely by showing employee's respect. Stephen Covey (n.d.) reinforces respect by placing it second on his Leadership List.

What ELP Graduates Said About Learning in Their Ongoing Job Shadows

The ELP graduates shadowed DAU Regional Deans, Associate Deans, Operational Directors, Information Managers, Industry Chair, and various Directors, Department Chairs, and so forth. In some cases, they even shadowed leaders outside DAU including NAVAIR, the Air Force Institute of Technology, and other senior Learning Officers. Their experiences were captured in the following representative sampling.

My job shadow gave me a better appreciation for relationships and the need to stay in touch with customers to better meet their needs and keep collaborative attitude and communication lines open. I have better insight on customer relationships ... this is a new perspective for me on what DAU does with our ALM that would not have happened without my ELP experience.

I was able to observe and participate in discussions at our most senior levels. I have more insight and had a unique hands on experience.

I learned to not get overly attached to my own ideas when they are challenged. ... I've been practicing and have improved at keeping my mind open to other's input.

Although this leader was from another organization, I saw how differently he applied himself with assertiveness and in communication. I will be increasing my focus on professional development to improve my ability to apply soft-skills.

I wanted to experience how to handle tough situations, especially initial outreach engagements. I shadowed several seasoned experts and watched



how they each engages with customers. My self-confidence quadrupled. I said to myself, "I can do that" and decided to be the staff example and move into uncharted territory (e.g., projects not typically assigned to staff) to show we are a key resources ... we can lead and influence outcomes.

I saw what the next level might be like when it came to the daily grind. I am now more prepared and maybe less idealistic on thinking management is an easy job. I was able to witness just how much of the job is simply about solid communication with employees and customers via email, meetings, phone calls, and support of internal business processes. I am more purposeful now in my own communications.

Reflected on the positive and less effective qualities of each supervisor. For me personally, I am more reflective before making decisions and I am thinking more critically about all my work interactions so they stay positive and productive.

I have increased my focus on improving my decision making skills.

I see the value in mentoring others and having a mentor. I plan to assist others more and be more willing to ask for help.

I saw how she narrows her focus on doing less and targets the high impact projects but delegates tasks. I plan to find more guidance to help build this skill by incorporating a coach or a mentor to help me stay focused on high impact. ... this is hard because I am staff I am expected to take care of work at the task level.

She is a well-respected leader and a great example of a humble leader. My own leadership style has been greatly influenced by spending time with her.

I like her individual personality. ... I learned and plan to be more compassionate.

I liked the way she treated her employees ... really listened to them

I learned a great deal in observing the leadership styles of the previous Dean and the new Dean.

Conclusion

After collecting and analyzing the data, DAU is in a better position to substantiate the required adjustments to the ELO program and keep it relevant, challenging, and serve as platform to further develop staff. The components that the respondents found very useful don't need much tweaking; the ones that showed less value including course readings, IDP, Journal, and e-learning could all use a boost. Nonetheless, 81% of the ELP graduates felt ELP prepared them for increased leadership responsibilities and gave them more useful tools to influence decisions. More importantly, they became more conscious of the leadership dynamic. As one respondent said, "Leaders make mistakes too, but it's how they communicate and take accountability that makes them stronger leaders and real influencers." Another respondent echoed a similar view and said, if you aspire to be a leader, take a hard look at how you influence and begin to develop those skills. Shadow assignments, self-assessments, and soft skills were all rated as skillsets used more frequently, but what needs to happen to make them all more effective? Some of the respondents felt cohorts needed to continue after graduation to continue to focus on their development. Supervisors saw marked gains in their ELP graduates' confidence and ability



to influence. The year-long time investment seemed well-worth it given the observed results. The actual behavioral changes they noted in the workplace speaks strongly to the ELP's efficacy. As an enterprise, DAU heavily depends on its professional staff to meet its mission. Without them, DAU would be hard-pressed to provide a global learning environment to develop qualified acquisition, requirements, and contingency professionals who deliver and sustain effective and affordable warfighting capabilities. As a janitor so aptly replied when President John F. Kennedy asked the janitor what he did at NASA, the janitor replied, "I'm helping put a man on the moon!" (Nemo, 2014). DAU's investment in the development of their staff through ELP can do the something similar for the DAW. For ELP, training was just one component. On-the-job behaviors were more telling and they got a noticeable boost through an integrated framework of participating peers, supervisors, and mentors (formal and informal). In practice, this framework also served to monitor, reinforce, encourage, and reward ELP participants. It also helped develop a shared commitment to sustain greater confidence for the ELP graduates where they learned by doing—via "blended performance learning" (Kirkpatrick, 2016). The integrated framework helped ELP graduates stay ahead of the learning curve. In a recent poll, 41% of the ELP graduates said they were promoted and 10% left DAU for leadership positions. Although they were not promoted, an additional 13% said they have been assigned increased leadership responsibilities. It's safe to say that other organizations who are intent on developing and improving the professionalism of their workforce, including staff, can achieve measurable gains by instituting something similar to DAU's ELP. As a DAU ELP graduate, it did for me.

Recommendations

- Determine the critical behaviors that will be required for your organization's emerging leaders and build a program around it. Invest early in a formal and competitive leadership development program that has clear objectives, expectations, and is communicated enterprise-wide.
- During the leadership development program:
 - Institute periodic self-assessments benchmarked against peer groups to confirm growth areas and uncover blind spots that may require more developmental attention.
 - Leverage the value and safety of cohort teams for their collaborative contributions to innovative learning.
 - Assign team leaders to group projects so they can exercise a wide range of leadership skills through experiential learning.
 - Recognize the significance of developing "influencers" even though individuals in the development program may not be occupying formal leadership positions.
 - Seek feedback from both the participants and their supervisors throughout the participants' development journey, and share the results in a timely manner.
 - Adjust program content as required to keep it relevant and robust.

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