

Leadership Development in China: How the Companies Develop Their Leaders and What Critical Factors Contribute to Enhancing the Effectiveness of Leadership Development Practices

June Xuejun Qiao
Peking University

William J. Rothwell and Albert A. Vicere
The Pennsylvania State University

This study investigated how companies in China develop their leaders and what critical factors contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of leadership development practices. This study adopted a multiple-case study design. Four companies - ABB, BenQ, Lenovo and Motorola were studied. The findings suggest that the four companies in China develop their leaders in more or less the same way as their counterparts in the United States, but in a less structured and formalized fashion.

Keywords: Leadership Development, Effectiveness, China

Leadership is considered more important in industry than ever before. According to findings from the Human Resources Institute's 2003–2004 Major Issues Survey, leadership was viewed as the single most important issue in terms of its impact on workforce management among North American companies, and ranked the third among European companies (Human Resources Institute, 2004a). The American Management Association pointed out that the reasons for leadership's growth in importance include the fast pace of change, increased global competition, and a growing focus on customers (American Management Association [AMA], 2005). In order to sharpen their competitive edge, organizations have become more and more results-oriented. Leaders today are not only expected to deliver business results, but also to develop other leaders at the same time, making leadership more stressful and difficult. Not surprisingly, companies' leadership development programs have been pressed to make a difference in enhanced leadership capacity and organizational performance. Marcus (2004) found that 65% of surveyed firms placed leadership development as one of the top five focal points for corporate strategy.

The AMA (2005) suggests that as the economy continues to globalize, and as the workforce moves across national boundaries, cultural diversity has become a substantial challenge that warrants more research on leadership in a global and cross-cultural environment. Compared to managerial learning studies in the United States and Europe, research on managerial learning in China is still in its infancy (Tsang, 2001). However, China is growing so rapidly that companies in China are badly in need of many well-grounded business leaders. But leaders don't spring into the world fully formed. They need to be developed and trained. Under such circumstances, companies in China are interested in understanding how other companies in China develop their leaders and how they may develop their leadership capacity more effectively. The purpose of this study was to investigate how companies in China develop their leaders, and explore the critical factors that contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of leadership development practices in China. The specific research questions include (a) what are the general talent strategies in the companies, (b) what roles should HR play in the companies, (c) what common ways are being used by the companies to develop their current and future leaders, and which ways are perceived as more effective, (e) how are the leadership development programs designed, (f) what are the major problems and challenges the companies face in leadership development, (g) how do the companies usually evaluate the effectiveness of leadership development programs, and (h) what key factors contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of leadership development practices in China?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study is called "Leadership Development with Impact" model (Vicere, 2001; see also Alldredge et al., 2004), see Figure 1. As per this model, five major factors have strong impact on the effectiveness of leadership development practices, namely the strategic imperatives, program design, link to workplace, performance drivers and human resources alignment. It suggests that the more the five factors are interlinked with each other, the more effective will be the leadership development practices.

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To be more specific, this framework shows that in order to achieve better results, leadership programs should be linked to the workplace, and both components should be aligned with the strategic imperatives of the organization. Yet Vicere (2001) argued that this is still not enough, because it is only part of the double loop learning process. He further explained that even if the programs are designed perfectly and linked to strategic imperatives and organizational needs, overall improvement in organizational performance can still not be guaranteed in cases in which the performance of individual participants are not measured against what they have learned and when they are not rewarded properly for improved performance.

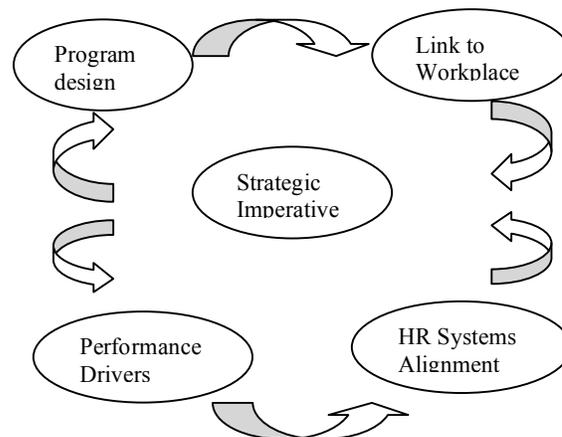


Figure 1. Leadership Development with Impact

Methodology

This study followed a multiple-case study design. Since the intention of this study was to investigate how companies in China develop their leaders, and to explore the key factors that contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of leadership development practices, the Chinese companies that represent different types of business and that demonstrate strengths in leadership development were the target population for this research. Furthermore, in order to control extraneous variation, Eisenhardt (1989) suggested that companies with some common characteristics should be selected. Following this logic, ABB, BenQ, Lenovo and Motorola were chosen as the target companies for this study. The four companies were selected because they share many things in common: (a) they are all technology-driven companies; (b) they face the same macro environment in China, which means the same challenges; and (c) all have invested heavily in leadership development. BenQ, Lenovo and Motorola are all IT companies, covering manufacturing, R&D, sales & marketing. ABB and Motorola are both multinational firms, yet Motorola represents centralized organizations with typical American cultures, while ABB is a manufacturing company with heavily decentralized European influences. BenQ and Lenovo are both Chinese companies, but BenQ is a Taiwan-based firm and Lenovo originated in Mainland, China. Four companies were studied in China from January to December 2005. The data collected included interviews, which served as primary data, and documents, as secondary data. The interview data were collected from the CEO (whenever possible), HR professionals, training professionals, line managers and high potentials using structured interview guides. A total of 40 people participated in the interviews. According to Yin (1994), as the research questions formed the structure of the inquiry, they served as reminders of the information that needed to be collected. Yin further emphasized that a conceptual framework should be used to guide the researcher in where to look for relevant evidence (Yin, 1994). Following this logic, an interview guide was developed for each target group based upon the research questions and the conceptual framework, linking the research questions, the conceptual framework and the interview questions tightly together.

In order to ensure the quality of this study, the researchers built a three-way triangulation into the research design. First, the primary interview data were triangulated with the secondary documentary data. Second, the interview data were collected from CEOs, HR professionals, line managers and high potentials within each company, and therefore triangulation within cases across informants was made by comparison-and-contrast of

personnel opinions at different job levels in a company. Third, the cross-case study design allowed the researchers to triangulate the data from four different cases, and identify similar and unique themes across the four cases.

After data collection was completed, the interview data were transcribed, cleaned and coded before the common themes were identified to answer the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding was done by three coders independently. The inter-rater agreement was calculated, and the agreement index among the three coders ranged from 73% to 81% for various coded segments. In analyzing the data, the researchers first developed a case study report for each individual case. In order to add validity to the study, the draft case study report was sent to 1–2 key informants in each company for their review. The comments from the key informants were incorporated into the revised case study reports. Following the within-case analysis, a cross-case analysis was performed, and the common themes across the four cases for each research question were presented. At last, the findings of this study were compared to the previous literature before the final conclusions were drawn.

With regard to study limitations, first, as determined through the case study approach and limited resources, only one case was selected for each type of business in China. Therefore, the study's generalizability may be limited because the current design does not allow findings to be replicated within categories (Eisenhardt, 1989). Second, it was better to involve multiple investigators in the study because different members often have complementary insights that add to the richness of data. More importantly, the convergence of observations from multiple investigators enhances confidence in the findings (Eisenhardt, 1989). Third, since the study was designed to collect data around the pre-defined conceptual model developed prior to the study, this design may bias and limit findings (Eisenhardt, 1989). Fourth, since the data were collected using the case study approach and the primary evidence mainly came from interviews, the researchers assumed that the interviewees had been involved extensively in the leadership development programs in the selected organizations, and they would give honest responses to interview questions that reflect their true perceptions of the reality. Last, as the data of this study came from four companies of certain kinds in China, the findings could hardly be generalized to other Chinese companies in broader context.

Results

Leadership Development Practices

General talent strategies. The data for this study suggested that the four companies each have a clear talent development strategy. The two international companies tended to emphasize talent localization, while the two local companies preferred to recruit talent from recent graduates of top universities in China. All four companies preferred to develop their own talents. With the exception of Lenovo, the other three companies clearly stated that they preferred to promote from within. These findings support the results of Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) who found that the best practice organizations grew or developed leaders as opposed to buying them, and that senior executives tended to be groomed from the beginning to take on increasing responsibilities. Hewitt Associates (2005) presented similar findings which indicated that all of the Top 20 Companies have a strategy for selecting leaders from within.

The roles of HR. The CEOs and the HR professionals participated in this study indicated that HR is expected to play a leading role in talent development by not only recruiting, selecting, developing and retaining top talent for the company, but also developing a high-performance workplace in the company. However, the line managers held a markedly different view in this regard. The line managers at Lenovo and Motorola indicated that HR's role in talent development is fairly limited. They pointed out that the business managers should be held responsible for the development of their people, not HR. This argument agrees with one of the major findings in Hewitt Associates (2005), where it was reported that 80% of the Top 20 Companies hold senior management accountable for the success of programs such as succession planning, performance management, and high-potential development.

Leadership competency model. In this study three out of the four companies had official leadership competency models. Although ABB had no official leadership competency model, its CEO clearly articulated and defined the leadership qualities that he sought. However, Lenovo was the only company to update the leadership competency model regularly based upon extensive internal research. The findings are in line with Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001), which indicated that a majority of the best practice organizations have identified leadership competencies, or at least tried to define the characteristics and qualities of successful leaders, and make sure that their competencies are kept up-to-date through both internal and external research. Hewitt Associates (2005) also found that 100% of the Top 20 Companies have identified leadership competencies. AMA (2005) indicated that developing leaders was the third most highly ranked leadership competency. In comparison, although, in one way or another, the four companies held their business managers accountable for developing people, none regarded developing leaders as one of their core leadership competencies.

Identifying leaders. In this study, the four companies each had their unique way of identifying future leaders. Motorola was the only company to identify high potentials through a formal succession planning process, although

the succession planning process was not perceived as functioning well due to lack of follow-up and constant changes in the market. BenQ and Lenovo were clearly performance-based, since all of their leaders demonstrated a clear track record of superior performance. ABB preferred to use project-based assignments.

Developing leaders. Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) suggested that best practice organizations view leadership development as a costly undertaking but also as a worthwhile investment. They reported that viewing their leadership development process as a long-term investment was key to best practice organizations. In this study, the CEOs at both ABB and BenQ shared the same opinion. The CEO at BenQ said that, “we are committed to develop our talents, as we see HR as a long term investment, not as an expense.” And the CEO at ABB pointed out that he personally values the medium- and long-term impact of talent development on business results.

The findings of this study indicated that all four companies emphasized developing people on the job. They heavily used job-related approaches, such as on-the-job coaching, job rotations, etc. On-the-job coaching has been identified as the most effective approach in developing leaders across the participant groups in three of four companies. This finding is in line with that of the AMA (2005), which reported that most leaders attribute their mastery of leadership to on-the-job experience. In this study, all four companies required their business managers to shoulder the responsibility for people development. However, none reported formally connecting the executives’ annual incentive package to the success of talent development. In comparison, Hewitt Associates (2005) reported that the Top 20 Companies formally hold their leaders accountable for the success of leadership development programs, and more importantly, these companies linked a significant percentage of the incentive package for business leaders with talent development.

In this study, all four companies preferred to use internally designed leadership development programs. In terms of method of delivery, face-to-face is more preferable to on-line delivery. Hewitt Associates (2005) suggested that 90% of the Top 20 Companies reported that internal leadership training is almost always or always used. Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) indicated that the majority of the best practice organizations favored the face-to-face method of delivery. In selecting program participants, Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) indicated that the best practice companies look to the goals of their leadership development process to determine who will be selected as a participant. This study found that since most of the leadership development programs are competence-based, job level is one of the most important selection criteria in identifying program participants.

Except for ABB, the other three companies did not conduct formal needs assessment for their leadership development programs. Instead, the HR professionals took the lead in designing the programs based upon leadership competency model and current business issues, and some of the line managers complained they were left out of the loop in program design. In comparison, Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) indicated that all best practice organizations reported conducting formal business-unit needs assessments. Their first step in designing the leadership development programs was to solicit the direct input of their key customers, and gathering input from key customers is an ongoing process for best practice organizations.

The effectiveness of leadership development practices. The AMA (2005) regarded measuring the effectiveness of leadership development as a third element with the greatest influence on the ability of companies to develop and retain leaders. Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) reported that, in general, the best practice companies were more aggressive about measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of their programs. Hewitt Associates (2005) supported this idea, indicating that better performing companies tended to use metrics to assess the effectiveness of leadership programs. In this study, all four companies used participant satisfaction as the major way to evaluate the effectiveness of their leadership development programs. Other than this, the informants reported that there was no well-structured way to track the effectiveness of training programs. However, Goldsmith and Morgan (2004) argued that the companies should not just evaluate the employees’ satisfaction with leadership development, but also take care to measure the effectiveness of their leadership development initiatives. Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) suggested the use of both participant satisfaction and impact research will help provide a more balanced set of results.

The AMA (2005) stated that a highly integrated talent management system should include such metrics as (a) number of managers promoted, (b) success of managerial moves three years later, (c) time to fill open positions, (d) number of external hires for management positions, (e) number of developmental moves, and (f) performance distribution. In addition, other metrics that may be tracked included frequencies of leadership meetings that talk about talent, employee morale and satisfaction, attrition and headcount analysis, recruiting cost and diversity representation in the talent pool. In this study, the talent readiness, critical turnover rate and internal fill-in rate were the three most frequently mentioned metrics suggested by the informants as appropriate for measuring the effectiveness of leadership development.

Critical Factors Contributing to the Effectiveness of Leadership Development Practices

Strategic imperatives. Alldredge et al. (2004) emphasized that in cases where a program was created without real links to the firm's strategic imperatives, even if the faculty was outstanding and action learning built in, the resulting program might generate no more than great "smile sheet" evaluations. Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) expressed the same idea, saying that, "if the leadership development process is to be an effective part of the change process, it must be aligned with all of the strategic objectives of the organization" (p. 8). Hewitt (2005) supported this view, suggesting that the Top 20 Companies' approaches to building leaders were firmly rooted in business strategy. This study indicated that the HR professionals were aware of the importance of linking the strategic imperatives with the leadership development process. In one way or the other, they all made an effort to ensure this linkage in designing their leadership development programs in various ways.

Link to Workplace. Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) emphasized that action, not knowledge, is the goal of best practice leadership development processes, and real time business issues are heavily used in learning and development in the best practice organizations. In this study, the informants, from the HRD professionals to the line managers and high potentials, all regarded the relevance to the workplace as an important factor in influencing the effectiveness of leadership development. However, ABB was the only company to use real-life business cases in its leadership development programs. The informants in the other three companies described their leadership development programs as too general, impractical and lacking relevance to daily operations.

Performance Drivers. This study found that, one way or the other, all four companies required their business managers to shoulder the responsibility for people development. However, except for ABB, none of the other three companies clearly specified people development as one of the key items on their performance review forms. Among the four companies, BenQ did exceptionally well in linking its performance management system with talent development as well as the compensation and benefits package. Its CEO strongly emphasized that, "in my opinion, talent development should be regarded as one of the important performance indicators for leaders". One of the line managers at Lenovo also suggested that talent development should be considered as one of the important factors in the promotion and performance evaluation of managers.

HR Alignment. Hewitt Associates (2005) suggested that one of the differentiating factors for Top 20 companies is that their high potential leaders received clearly differentiated compensation - more than two-thirds of these companies target long-term incentive pay for high potentials between the 90th and 100th percentiles. In this study, the HR manager at BenQ reported that the four functions of HR were closely aligned in support of change in the company's strategic imperatives. In comparison, at Lenovo and Motorola, the leadership development programs did not necessarily link with promotion and career advancement. Both HR professionals and line managers at the two companies complained that their HR functions were too separate from each other. As one line manager at Lenovo put it, "the different functions within HR are not well coordinated among themselves, and as a result, the policies from different functions often conflict each other".

Corporate Culture. Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) pointed out that the best practice organizations realized that the leadership development process must fit the culture of the organization. One of the most important characteristics of all six best practice companies was the extreme care taken to ensure that their leadership development processes were tailored to their own specific culture. This study also revealed that corporate culture was believed to have a strong impact on the effect of leadership development practices. One HR professional at BenQ commented that, "all of our leaders grow up from this soil and show clear imprint of the BenQ way, which heavily influence on the way they lead their teams and develop their subordinates". In addition, one of the repeated themes in this study was that companies that were more tolerant and allowed their people to learn from mistakes had a better chance to unleash their people's full potential.

Top Management Support. Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) showed that top level support was a consistent key to developing leaders and sustaining the process in best practice organizations. Alldredge et al. (2004) pointed out that a CEO with a clear vision, who demanded the accelerated development of leaders and was willing to champion efforts to this end, could have a huge impact on a large organization in a short time. Hewitt Associates (2005) suggested that one of the key enablers of leadership quality and depth is the active involvement of the CEO and Board of Directors. In addition, the AMA (2005) also identified top executive support and involvement as one of the elements having the greatest influence on the ability of companies to develop and retain their leaders. This study found that, with the exception of Lenovo, the informants at the other three companies indicated that their top management teams had demonstrated strong support for leadership development. The CEO at BenQ personally spends more than 50% of his time in talent-related issues.

Communications, Execution & Follow-ups. One of the key findings in this research was that communication is a critical factor in enhancing the effectiveness of leadership development practices. Communication includes that between line managers and high potentials either before or after leadership development programs, between HR professionals and their major internal clients, and among HR professionals themselves, etc. This study revealed that

although HR professionals at the four companies all attempted to address this issue in their own ways, each had specific problems in communications.

In addition, execution and follow-up also surfaced as two of the most critical issues in leadership development practices. At Motorola, the informants commented that although it was clearly specified in the Training Handbook for the CAMP-E program what should be done before, during and after the program, many people did not follow the requirements. Hewitt Associates (2005) emphasizes that, "although the companies may have the right programs in place, it is the integration and execution of these programs that make the most difference" (p. 1). Goldsmith and Morgan (2004) also indicated that the follow-up factor correlates with improved leadership effectiveness. They pointed out that, "too many companies spend millions of dollars for 'the program of the year', but almost nothing on follow-up and reinforcement" (p. 36). Nevertheless, except for the C-Master Program at ABB, there was no official follow-up system in place at any company to guide people in how to apply what they'd learned into workplace.

Others. Other factors that may have significant impact on the effectiveness of leadership development practices include a strong learning culture, inner drive of people, the role of line managers, timing issues, and organization structure stability and management team continuity. The informants from the four companies repeatedly pointed out that a strong learning culture contributes to encouraging people to learn and improve, and therefore has an impact on the effectiveness of leadership development practices. The employees' inner drive or motivation was identified as another critical factor. One high potential at ABB pointed out that only when people have a strong inner motivation to improve, will the training be more effective. The HR manager at BenQ argued that, "in my opinion, the effect of training depends largely on inner motivation of each individual. Only when he or she has strong learning capability and is highly motivated to learn, can training contribute to enhancing his or her working capabilities. So the key here is motivation".

The role of line managers was identified as playing a critical role in leadership development across the four companies. Based on the data from this study, the managers could contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of leadership development in a number of ways. First, the line managers could serve as role models for their subordinates. One line manager at ABB pointed out that, "Having a good role model is probably the most important thing. If you work for a good manager, you can learn from him, pick up quickly and take on the good attributes or styles". Second, since the on-the-job coaching was regarded as the most effective approaches to developing leaders, the line managers could contribute to developing people on a daily basis by serving as coaches for employees. The study suggested that the boss's willingness to coach and the stability of the direct boss are the two critical factors influencing the effectiveness of on-the-job coaching. Third, the direct boss also played an important role in the follow-up phase after the leadership development programs. One high potential argued that the training could be more effective if the direct boss could encourage people to apply their lessons to the workplace, and if the improved performance received timely recognition.

Timing issues also were found to have an impact on the effectiveness of leadership development practices. The right programs offered at the right time will have more impact. One high potential at Lenovo said that, "I think the timing issue is very important in training. In case the timing is wrong, training won't do any good". In addition, frequent changes in organization structure and management team emerged as critical factors in influencing the effectiveness of leadership development programs. The informants pointed out that frequent change in organization structure may have positive or negative impacts on leadership development practices. As the line manager at Lenovo indicated, on the one hand, frequent restructuring may generate plenty of chances for people to try different things; on the other hand, it may result in too many people who can do a number of different things, but be expert in none. In addition, one of the line managers at Motorola pointed out that in cases where the organization structure and the management team changed too frequently, people became frustrated and depressed, making it difficult to develop people from inside.

Conclusions

Based upon study findings, the researchers concluded that, the four companies in China developed their leaders in more or less the same way as their counterparts in the United States, but in a less structured and formalized fashion. The needs assessment phase and measuring the effectiveness of leadership development were the two components apparently left far behind. The researchers contended that this was due in part to the fact that few human resources development professionals in China have formal education background in the HRD field. This study found that most of the human resource development professionals in the four companies developed technical expertise on the job, and many of them had little frontline business experience. The HRD professionals at the four companies all commented that they were short of well-trained HRD professionals, and viewed this as one of the major challenges in leadership development in China. In sharp contrast, Fulmer and Goldsmith (2001) indicated that they were

impressed by the professionalism of the leadership development people at each of the best practice partners. They had excellent backgrounds in various aspects of human resources development and extensive line business operation experience. Fulmer and Goldsmith argued that creating a business and education mix seemed to enable best practice organizations to build programs based on sound theories, and focused on results vital to the organizations.

Although the four companies in this study differed in many ways in their leadership development process, each demonstrated its unique strengths in leadership development practices. More importantly, together they provided a “patchwork” for excellence in leadership development practices, allowing other companies in China to benchmark their practices. Lenovo distinguished itself in linking its leadership competence model tightly with the performance evaluation of the business managers. It updated its leadership competence model once every year based on extensive internal research data. Motorola stood out in formalizing the connection between the succession plan and its leadership development process. In addition, its well-developed Training Handbook clearly specifies expectations for all relevant parties before, during and after the programs. Moreover, its leadership development team was the most professional among the four companies in this study—they were more senior in age and better-equipped with HR/HRD expertise. ABB demonstrated its strengths in conducting training needs assessment and emphasizing communication with all relevant parties in each step of its leadership development process. Compared with its counterparts in the other three companies, the HR team at ABB received the highest compliments from the line managers and high potentials for identifying and developing leaders for the company. Although the leadership development team at BenQ was the youngest among the four companies, they did exceptionally well in linking the performance drivers and the HR alignment pieces to leadership development practices in support of the company’s strategic imperatives. Their talent development initiatives were firmly rooted in strategic imperatives, and the compensation and reward systems were closely tied to talent development and performances.

Based upon study data, the researchers concluded that the Leadership Development with Impact model works well for the four companies in this study in the Chinese context. In addition to the five major factors identified in this model, additional factors were revealed in this study as key factors contributing to enhancing the effectiveness of leadership development practices, including (a) top management support, (b) supportive corporate culture, (c) communication, execution and follow up issues; (d) a strong learning culture (e) employee’s inner drive or motivation; (f) the role of line managers; (g) timing issues (e) organization structure stability and management team continuity.

Discussion

As one of the first attempts to investigate how the companies in China develop their leaders, this study contributes to the new knowledge in HRD in many ways, and has a number of implications for both researchers and practitioners. In the following section, the researchers will discuss the implications and present recommendations for the two groups respectively.

For Researchers

First, this study presents the current leadership development practices in China, which has been more or less ignored in the literature to date. Second, this study ties actual data to a conceptual framework – “the Leadership with Impact Model” (Vicere, 2001), providing concrete empirical evidence for this model. As such, it reveals several critical factors that contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of leadership development practices in China. Based upon the findings of this study, a number of theoretical propositions could be well developed to test the effectiveness of leadership development practices in a quantitative manner.

With regards to future research, the researchers would recommend that survey instruments be developed based upon the findings of this research, and that quantitative data be collected to explore the impact of leadership development practices on individual, group and organizational performance. Due to the limitations in the case study approach, the researchers would encourage the collection of more similar case studies in China to warrant the generalizability of study findings. In addition, leadership development practices in other types of business, such as fast-growing private companies, state-owned enterprises, the Chinese government, and non-profit organizations should also be explored in the future.

For Practitioners

The practitioners who probably would find this study of great value may include the CEOs, the HR/HRD professionals, and the educators. For the CEOs, several key findings from this research deserve special attention. Some may argue that in the current highly competitive labor market in China, it would be too costly and risky to develop leaders on their own, since other companies may easily lure talents away to higher positions and better pay. However, this study found that the four companies all managed to retain their critical talents. This evidence suggests that, managed properly, growing leaders from inside may work well even in the highly competitive labor market in

China. Second, one of the key findings of this research was the critical role played by the line managers in enhancing the effectiveness of leadership development practices. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the line managers at each level be held accountable for the success of the leadership development process. They should be well trained, motivated, evaluated and rewarded for doing their part in developing leaders for the companies. In fact, developing a leader is in itself a major form of leadership, and developing leaders has been identified as one of the core leadership competencies by the AMA (2005).

Since this study presented the leadership development practices of four exemplar companies in China in great detail, and also reported on best practice leadership development worldwide, the findings from this study will be of great value to HR and HRD professionals, especially those who work in the leadership development function. First, although the leadership development practices revealed in this study may not fit perfectly in other organizations, they may suggest other alternatives or stimulate new ideas for designing a leadership development process that fits the unique corporate culture of other organizations. As the four companies in the study each demonstrated their unique strengths in leadership development practices, together they serve as benchmarks for excellence in leadership development in China. Second, the factors that have been identified in this study as critical to contributing to the enhancement of leadership development practices, may show HR/HRD professionals how to improve the effectiveness of their leadership development practices. The researchers would recommend that HR/HRD professionals develop a check list for designing and developing their leadership development practices, making sure that critical factors are considered and carefully addressed in proper ways. In doing so, the effectiveness of leadership development practices will be enhanced significantly. Last, as this study found that one of the major challenges in leadership development in China is the lack of well-trained professionals in learning and performance, the researchers would highly recommend that educators collaborate with top-ranked graduate programs in training and development in the U.S. and Europe to introduce graduate degree programs in training and development in China.

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