An Evaluation System of Training Programs for Career Development: Content, Applicability and Perceived Importance

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Abstract

In this paper, we present a case study of a leadership training program conducted at a Midwestern corporate university. After meeting with organizational leaders, conducting interviews with participants and taking extensive field notes for the first two cohort groups, the three major aspects that emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data (content, applicability, and perceived importance of attending the session) were used to developed a 12-item evaluation instrument and administered to the subsequent five cohorts over the next 2 ½ years. Our purpose was to develop a system to improve the training program based on the organization's objectives and participants needs. After validity and reliability analyses, a main finding in this study using both regression and structural equation modeling shows that content was about four times stronger than applicability. Although applicability was not significant, the results are as the evaluation was tailored to the organizations specific needs. We propose that such a method be used by organizations intending to evaluate their training programs on a case-by-case basis. As this system aligns with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning and includes participant feedback, such a method would be

sufficient for the organization to engage in double-loop learning to improve further renditions of their training programs. This system and finding would have implications for academics and practitioners who are involved in designing training programs for organizations when the focus of the training is managerial development.

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Introduction

With change changing at a faster rate, organizations have focused on creating training programs for its members in order to compete and succeed in today's volatile environment. Pfeffer (2000: 507) argues that "[t]raining can be a source of competitive advantage in numerous industries for firms with the wisdom to use it" Prahalad (2000: 492) supports this as he considers training as part of career development for managers where commitment to training programs should include both the "analytic and experiential side of management." Defined as "the systematic acquisition of skills, rules, concepts, or attitudes that result in improved performance" (Goldstein, 1993: 3), training has become part of organizational learning and change, and career development. With this in mind, we submit that evaluation of training programs is not only necessary but also critical. A good evaluation is a measurement system that incorporates the unique design determined by the organization's objectives or strategic vision and the needs of participants. Therefore, having the knowledge to develop measurement from initial qualitative data from organizational leaders and initial participants is a vital part of evaluating the adequacy of training programs from an organizational and participant perspective.

Most evaluation methods of training programs have focused on the cost and benefits of having such a program (Lewis & Thornhill, 1994), or simple evaluations such as level of happiness indices (Paauwe & Williams, 2001). The four-level model developed by Kirkpatrick (1994) suggests measurement of reactions to training, learning attainment, transfer and subsequent behavior, and business results. According to this model, information from each prior level serves as a base for the next level's evaluation. Since evaluation of training focuses on organizational and personal development, the system we suggest does not approach evaluation as one involving levels but rather as one involving a double-loop learning through a case-by case process where qualitative information collected from organizational leaders and initial participants is analyzed in order to

develop a unique measurement system that would meet the objectives of the training program and future renditions of them. In short, evaluation of training programs should be conscientiously (and meticulously) custom-made towards improving training.

Furthermore, since most managerial development programs focuses on learning, and that Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) has been an illustrative model of managerial learning (Vince, 1998), evaluation systems should focus on the grasping and transforming of new knowledge. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the extent to which participants in a training program consider content (acquiring of knowledge) and applicability (using of knowledge) as critical aspects of the training. As our purpose was to develop a system to improve the training program based on the organization's objectives and participants needs, we collected qualitative data from interviews and field notes to develop major themes. In this study, three themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis: content, applicability, and perceived importance of attending the session. Based on this information, we pose two main questions: Is content or applicability more important to participants in this program? Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of attending a training program and the content and/or the applicability of the program?

The theoretical Background of Evaluation

Evaluation has been an important subject in management studies and research as it is related to the issues of efficiency, effectiveness and impact (Rossi and Freeman 1989, p.19). Tyler (1942) proposed one of the first models of evaluation that specified the comparison of performance with objectives. The notion of ongoing evaluation included a feedback process while programs were conducted. This idea has been the basis for many quality improvement programs.

Since the introduction of Tyler´s model, many other models have emerged, each model reflecting the evaluation requirements of its time. McCoy and Hargie (2001) gives the following listing: goal-free evaluation (Scriven, 1967); Campbell's (1969) scientific approach; illuminative evaluation (Parlett and Hamilton, 1977); utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 1986); the responsive mode advocated by Cronbach and his colleagues (1980) which was designed to be responsive to the characteristics of the program environment and the issues identified by stakeholders and their informational needs; fourth generation evaluation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989); and realistic evaluation (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

In essence, no one model of evaluation is complete and suitable for all situations. Each type has strengths and weaknesses (McCoy and Hargie 2001). To evaluate effectively, there is a need for a better understanding of the nature of evaluation, its purpose and important relevant aspects.

Our system for evaluating training as discussed earlier takes into account the nature, purpose and relevant aspects for a managerial training program. The system is shown in Figure 1. In most evaluation of training programs, the design would include identifying both the content and application aspects of the training. However, testing the effect of each of these aspects on the participants' perceived importance of attending the training sessions is critical in developing and refining the significant aspect of the training program. Therefore the feedback system is not just to change certain content in particular sessions but to engage in double-loop learning where even the design may need to be revisited and adjusted to make the training effective. We represent the double-loop feedback in dotted lines in Figure 2. We use this system in both the development of hypotheses and the analyses of the results.

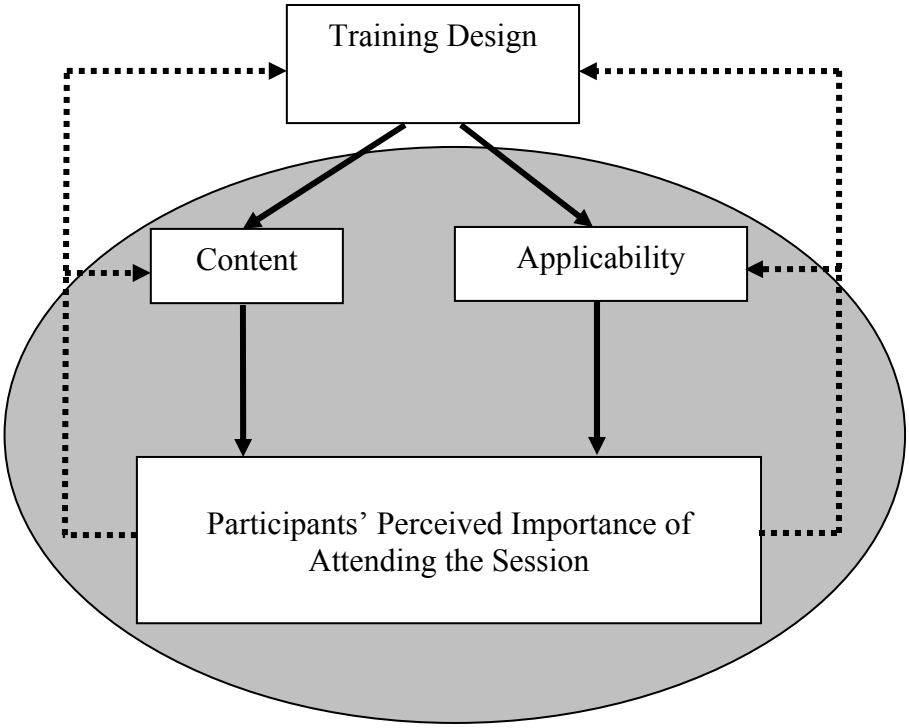

Figure 1. The System for Evaluating Training Programs Using its Three Major Aspects

Managerial Training in Organizations

When organizations go through a change, training has been an avenue to support the change process in the organization. Kassicieh and Yourstone (1998) cite Crosby (1979, 1984) that training and education are viewed as key ongoing processes in support of organizational growth and advancement, and that training provides a forum for communication of new organizational strategy, new values, new tools, and new ways of performing work. If one were to consider training as educating employees and part of the ongoing process in organizational change, growth, or advancement, the training program will have to be designed for the organization's and employees' specific needs.

Although employee training has become more prevalent today than 15 years ago, many companies conduct training simply for appearance sake (Hughey & Mussnug, 1997), instead of focusing on adult learning and development (Wills. 1994; Hollenback & Ingols, 1990; Humphrey, 1990), Kolb's (1984) experiential learning (Whetten & Clark, 1996) and cognitive abilities (Carter, 2002). In fact, despite the fact that large corporations spend over $50 billion on training expenses, effective employee learning is minimized (Katz, 1998).

One of the most overlooked aspects in training is the evaluation phase (McClelland, 1994). McClelland mentions that budgetary and other constraints have caused many trainers and instructional designers to employ standardized, commercially available evaluation instruments, and that there are many disadvantages in using standardized instruments. Among the disadvantages mentioned by McClelland is that the standardized instruments are neither comprehensive nor focused on critical content areas that would be either necessary or desirable. From an application perspective Axtell, Maitlis and Yearta (1997) suggest that effectiveness of training should be based on the extent to which trainees effectively apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes they obtained in the training. Alliger and Horowitz (1989) highlight the concern that evaluating training programs have not considered actual measures to capture knowledge gained and retained in training programs.

Experiential Learning Theory. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Theory (or ELT) is a model of learning and integrative development based on existing theories, particularly John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Carl Jung, in the area of learning (involving experience) and development (or individuation). The learning cycle is based on the following four distinct modes of learning:

1. Concrete Experience (CE) – being able to involve oneself fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences.

2. Reflective Observation (RO) – being able to reflect on and observe one's experiences from many perspectives.

3. Abstract Conceptualization (AC) – being able to create concepts that integrate one's observations into logically sound theories.

4. Active Experimentation (AE) – being able to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems.

Figure 2 shows the learning cycle. Kolb defines each of these modes as abilities that learners need in order to be effective. These four modes are presented as dialectical modes. CE and AC are dialectically related modes in the "**grasping experience**" dimension, and RO and AE are dialectically related modes in the "**transforming experience**" dimension.

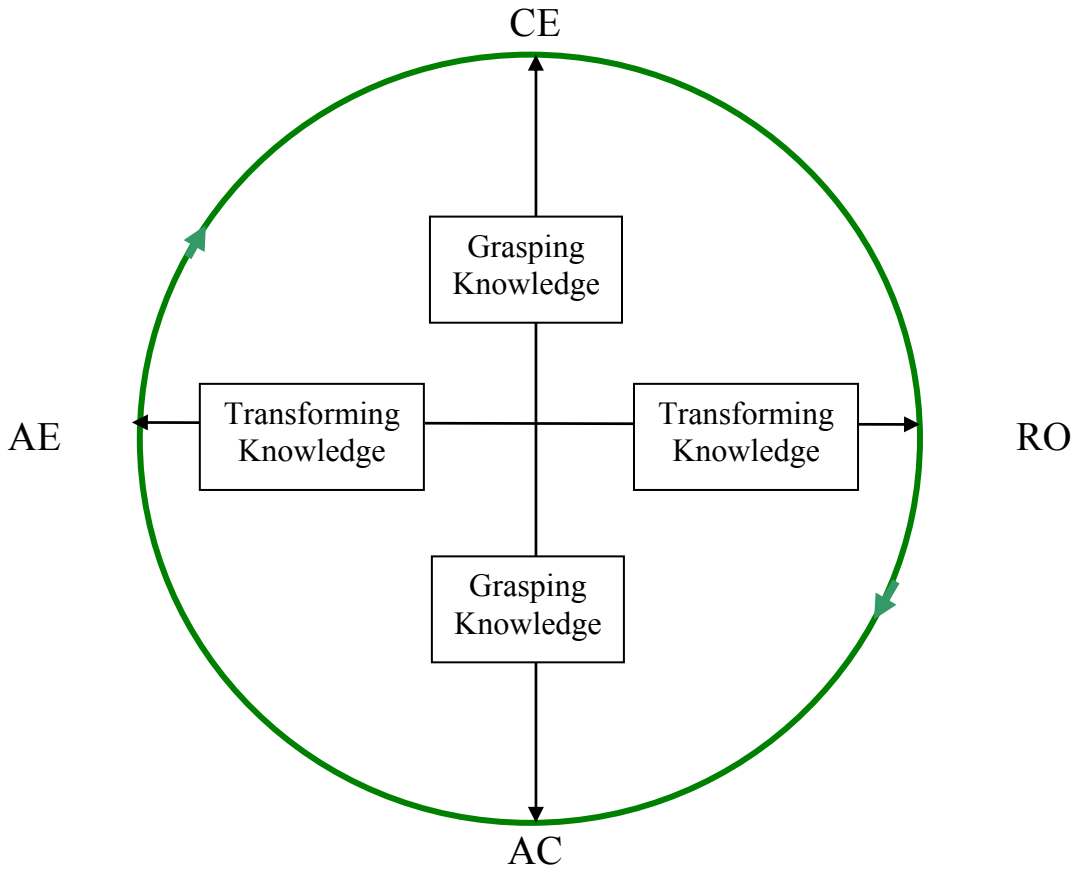

Figure 2. Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb asserts that knowledge is gained from the combination of both grasping and transforming from experience. Two of the three themes that emerged from the qualitative data align with these modes (or dimensions) of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and therefore was used to classify two primary aspects of managerial learning: The ***content*** of the training (equating to the educational aspect, or obtaining of knowledge in the training program) and the ***applicability*** of the training (equating to the training aspect, or the utilizing of knowledge in the training program). Chan (1994) also suggests that managerial training should integrate the knowledge and application aspects of training.

Research Hypotheses

In this study, managerial training is presented as a learning process involving the "grasping of knowledge" and the "transforming of knowledge" dimensions of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. The research question central to this study is to determine if participants in a managerial training program would consider importance of attending a training session related to both content and applicability as critical aspects of the training. As part of training is education, participants would assess the importance of a training program by the knowledge they have acquired. Hence,

> ***H1: Perceived importance of attending a training session is positively related to content.***

As discussed earlier, most managerial training programs have also focused on skill development by incorporating the practical use of the knowledge they have acquired. This is usually incorporated either within the sessions in the training program or through follow-ups after the training sessions. In this particular training program, participants are given time to practice what they have learned within the sessions themselves and to also require that participants engage or initiate

change initiatives in their workplace between sessions (as there is a two-week window between sessions). The second hypothesis is:

> ***H2: Perceived importance of attending a training session is positively related to applicability.***

Finally, based on Experiential Learning Theory and focusing on the participant as a customer, participants will react favorably to training sessions (perception that the training session was important for them to attend) if they feel that they have both acquired new knowledge and apply the new knowledge they have acquired. The third hypothesis is:

> ***H3: Perceived importance of attending a training session is equally affected by content and applicability.***

Method

We used a case study approach (Yin, 1994) as it aligns with the unique requirements for training programs in organizations that involve the nature of feedback, the purpose and relevant constructs that would emerge. We believe that these aspects could also be used as a system for evaluating training programs as part of the career development process. In accordance to the proposed system (Figure 1) spelt out to treat the evaluation of a training program as one that involves double-loop learning, in this design we used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. From the onset of the training, we took extensive field notes that included content delivered, questions asked, and difficulties raised by participants. Two months after the first two cohorts (60 participants) went through the program, we selected 12 participants (20%) at random and interviewed them about high-points in the program, what could be improved, how useful the content of the program was and if they could apply what they have learned. The interview data and the field notes were analyzed for themes and feedback to the organizational leaders in two meetings with them. The

final major themes that were critical for both the organization and the participants were used to develop a questionnaire to evaluate subsequent programs. However, the questionnaire developed was first administered to the third cohort (after every session) and analyzed for reliability and validity. The final questionnaire was administered to subsequent cohorts after every session of the training program. We obtained a total of 476 responses that were used in the analysis. The data collected was analyzed using regression and structural equation modeling.

Research context. The foundation of Appreciative Leadership is Appreciative Inquiry, which is an inquiry process that focuses on successes from the past and builds on that toward the future rather than focusing on problems (problem solving) in the present (for a good synopsis refer to Yaballe & O'Connor, 2000). After going through the Appreciative Inquiry process, a Midwestern university organized an Appreciative Inquiry Summit for the entire university (including staff, students, and faculty), which was part of the organizational change process. Themes were clustered and presented to the top-level management of the entire university. Out of the themes that emerged in the summit, the need to have training for managers and supervisors on how to be effective Appreciative Leaders was highlighted as one of the important themes.

The Human Resources Department of the university pursued the training theme and approached David Cooperrider (the founder and developer of the Appreciative Inquiry philosophy and methodology) to conduct an Appreciative Leadership (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1999) training program for the managers and supervisors of the university. As no such program exists, Cooperrider agreed to conduct the first module of a five-module training program. The Human Resources Department partnered with the Corporate University of the university to assist in conducting this program. The Corporate University brought in three other consultants to conduct the other four

modules. The author was asked to evaluate the program due to his expertise and familiarity with Appreciative Inquiry. Participants for this program were confined to supervisors/managers with two or more direct reports.

This paper focuses on the evaluation of this Appreciative Leadership Training Program that was developed to train supervisors and managers to understand the principles of Appreciative Leadership (content) and to help them practice Appreciative Leadership at work (applicability). As no Appreciative Leadership Training Program exists, the author treated this evaluation as an evaluation research with the opportunity use "double-loop learning" to develop an Appreciative Leadership Program (ALP) that would align itself with the intended outcomes matching the organizational change effort. The author treated this evaluation research as a process as outlined by McClelland (1994): one adopting a systematic approach where the analysis of the training can serve as indicators of what changes or improvements will be required in curricular design process to make the training more effective, while also providing for a more positive return on the organization's training investment.

Subjects. A total of 175 managers/supervisors participated in the training with an average of 25 managers in each cohort groups called "flights". The participants represent 14 departments in the university. Of the participants, there were a total of 123 females and 52 males. The managers that participated had a minimum of 2 direct reports. There were a total of 7 flights (over the course of 3 ½ years), which were grouped into two groups for the purpose of evaluating the program as follows:

1. Group 1 – Flights 1 and 2 (1st year)
2. Group 2 – Flights 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 (the next 2 ½ years)

Participation in filling out the evaluation questionnaire was voluntary and kept anonymous. We received an average of 17.56 responses per Flight per session (a 70.3% average) for the five sessions. We received an average of 18.5 responses per Flight per session for session 6 (a 74% average). The details of the number of participant responses that were used for each Flight and each session for both groups are shown in Table I.

Table I
Number of Participants for each Flight and their Response Rates by Group and Session

Group	Flights	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Total by Flights
1	**1**	Qualitative Data collected from 20% of the sample in these two Flights						
	2							
2	**3**	14	15	16	15	17		77
	4	16	18	22	17	17		90
	5	18	17	18	18	21		92
	6	21	19	19	12	16	15	102
	7	19	19	18	19	18	22	115
Total by sessions		88	88	93	81	89	37	476

Procedure and Material. Upon confirming the attendance, the Associate VP of HR called for a meeting where the three outside consultants met with David Cooperrider and the author to ensure that the contents of each session would be presented using the philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry. The five sessions and their brief overviews are shown in Table II. The participants underwent a five-session leadership-training program in which there was a two-week window between each session. Flights 6 and 7 underwent an additional session (session 6 – see Table I for brief description).

For Flights 1 and 2, (Group 1) the author took field notes for each session of the training program (a total of 51 pages). Participants in Group 1 were interviewed individually at least two months after they attended the program. Each of these interviews was analyzed using for common themes and the three major themes that emerged were: content, applicability, and importance of attending the sessions.

Table II
Brief Coverage of Each Session in the Training Program

Session	Topic	Brief Coverage of the session
1	Appreciative Leadership	Introduce the concept of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and its principles; understanding the 4-D cycle of AI; understanding the power of the framing of the question; and conducting Appreciative Interviews.
2	Start Right	The process of hiring new employees; how to treat new hires; the value of being prepared; conducting open ended interviews; and making hiring a successful venture.
3	Foster Success	Understanding university policies; rewarding employees; conducting performance reviews; the importance of relationship building; providing regular feedback; and role plays for performance evaluations.
4	Build Bridges	Combining AI and discipline and counseling; communicating effectively; conducting progressive counseling; and understanding university policies.
5	Celebrate Community	Understanding teams; doing an exercise on information transfer; developing an effective system of communication; and support from team members.
6. (Groups 6 and 7 only)	Appreciative Leadership Workshop	Revisiting Appreciative Leadership; discussing change initiatives in the workplace; working on a case study; and answering any other questions participants might have.

After two meetings with the organizational leaders, the themes that emerged from these raw data were consolidated and used to develop an Appreciative Leadership Training Questionnaire (ALTQ) which was to be administered to participants in Flight 3 of Group 2 at the end of each session in the training program to measure the each participant's understanding of appreciative leadership (4 questions on content); the importance of the session (3 questions on importance); and the extent to which they felt that the knowledge was applicable at work (5 questions on applicability). Based on the responses, the ALTQ had strong reliability and validity and no changes were made to the items. The 12 items used in the ALTQ was then administered to the other flights in Group 2 (Flights 4-7). Each item was assessed on a 5-point scale ranging from "Not Much" – "Very Much." Items capturing the antithesis of Appreciative Inquiry (Problem Solving was included to determine if participants were able to understand the differences between the two philosophical approaches. The ALTQ was tested for reliability based on the responses from Flight 3. The items for the constructs and their items are shown in Table III.

Table III
Items in the Appreciative Leadership Questionnaire

1. I understand what it means to be an appreciative leader. (CONTENT)
2. I have the skills to be an appreciative leader at work. (APPLICABILITY)
3. I know how I need to change to become a more appreciative leader. (CONTENT)
4. I feel confident that I can become a more appreciative leader. (APPLICABILITY)
5. I use appreciative leadership at work. (APPLICABILITY)
6. I think it was important for me to attend this session. (SESSION)
7. To what extent did this session focus on appreciative leadership? (SESSION)
8. I use the problem solving approach at work. (APPLICABILITY)
9. This session increased my understanding of appreciative leadership. (CONTENT)
10. I want to be an appreciative leader. (APPLICABILITY)
11. To what extent did this session emphasize problem solving? (SESSION)
12. This session helped me to know how to change my work environment to be more
13. appreciative. (CONTENT)

Findings

Using the responses from Flight 3, the ALTQ had an acceptable reliability alpha of .76. The data was checked for influentials and outliers and four cases had to be removed as they were affecting the normality of the data. Linear Regression using the composite for "importance of session" as the dependent variable was carried out to test for multicollinearity. The VIF (1.28) and Tolerance test (.780) are acceptable and posed no multicollinearity problems.

After cleaning the data and removing influentials and outliers, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was run to determine which items needed to be removed so as to obtain convergent and discriminant validity. Upon running Exploratory factor analysis (Principal Components with Promax Extraction Method), only the items C3 and C12 had strong loadings, items A2, A4 and A5 were convergent, and items S6 and S7 were convergent. Table IV shows the convergent validity of the constructs (above .3 loadings and less than .3 cross loadings) and the discriminant validity (correlations less than .5).

Table IV
Rotated EFA[a] Results and its Correlation Matrix

Component	Loadings		
	1	2	3
Content3			.913
App2	.836		
App4	.832	.259	-.212
App5	.801	-.205	.226
Session6		.908	
Session7		.739	
Content12		.319	.670
1	1		
2	.387	1	
3	.494	.311	1

[a]We used Principle Components with Promax Rotation ($\lambda > .20$ suppressed).

The reliability improved to .80 after removing the problematic items. The items in the each construct that remain based on the EFA analysis suggest that content in this training program is more about understanding how one can become a more Appreciative Leader (C3), or how to change the environment to be more appreciative (C12). As far as applicability is concerned, having the skills to be an Appreciative Leader at work (A2), feeling confident that one can become a more Appreciative Leader (A4) and using Appreciative Leadership at work (A5) were the significant and valid items. Finally, in terms of importance of the actual session itself, thinking it was important to attend the session (S6) and that the session focused on Appreciative Leadership (S7) were valid items. These items were then used to create composites for each construct and z-scores created to run the Linear Regression using Importance of the Session as the dependent variable and Content and Applicability as the independent variables.

The Linear Regression runs for Flights 3-7 using SESSION (the composite score for the importance of the session) as the Dependent Variable and CONTENT (the composite score for content of the training and APPL (the composite score for applicability of the training program) as Independent Variables is shown in Table V. Interestingly, all flights (except flight 5) show that content (C) is more significant than Applicability (A), which supports H1 but not H2 and H3.

Based on the value of the coefficients, Content is about at least four times stronger than Applicability (except for Flight 3, where content and Applicability are about equal and just as significant which supports H3).

To explore this further, the same analysis was used on each session to see if the same pattern shows up (see Table V). Once again, only content is significant (Session 6 was barely significant, but this could be due to the smaller sample size with only 2 flights), but applicability

is not, thus again supporting only H1 and not H2 and H3. The results also show that Content is far stronger than Applicability (at least four times) even when analyzing the sessions instead of Flights. We ran the same analysis on the entire 5 flights and the same pattern showed up (see Table V). Based on these findings, it is clear that Content is far more important to participants in Managerial/leadership learning and development.

Table V
Unstandardized Coefficients and Significance for Flights and Sessions

FLIGHTS	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	SESSIONS	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Flight 3					**Session 1**				
Zscore(C)	0.58	0.12	4.80	0.00	Zscore(C)	0.43	0.10	4.41	0.00
Zscore(A)	-0.14	0.12	-1.17	0.24	Zscore(A)	0.03	0.11	0.23	0.82
Flight 4					**Session 2**				
Zscore(C)	0.53	0.12	4.50	0.00	Zscore(C)	0.32	0.13	2.47	0.02
Zscore(A)	-0.12	0.12	-1.00	0.32	Zscore(A)	0.11	0.13	0.87	0.39
Flight 5					**Session 3**				
Zscore(C)	0.30	0.12	2.60	0.01	Zscore(C)	0.48	0.09	5.16	0.00
Zscore(A)	0.38	0.14	2.62	0.01	Zscore(A)	0.08	0.10	0.80	0.43
Flight 6					**Session 4**				
Zscore(C)	0.45	0.10	4.52	0.00	Zscore(C)	0.62	0.14	4.34	0.00
Zscore(A)	0.11	0.11	0.99	0.32	Zscore(A)	-0.01	0.15	-0.05	0.96
Flight 7					**Session 5**				
Zscore(C)	0.45	0.10	4.58	0.00	Zscore(C)	0.65	0.11	5.86	0.00
Zscore(A)	0.04	0.11	0.35	0.72	Zscore(A)	0.02	0.12	0.18	0.86
Flights 3-7					**Session 6**				
Zscore(C)	0.45	0.05	9.29	0.00	Zscore(C)	0.33	0.17	1.98	0.06
Zscore(A)	0.05	0.05	0.89	0.37	Zscore(A)	0.08	0.17	0.46	0.65

Structural Equation Model. The initial structural model of Content and Applicability on Importance of Session was conducted on the entire data set combining H1 and H2 into the structural model. The measurement sections of the model had been tested and Figure 3 represents the final model, which will be used in the CFA. As mentioned, based on the EFA results, Content had two valid items (C3 and C12); Applicability had 3 (A2, A4, and A5); and Importance of Session had 2 (S6 and S7). I added the errors and disturbances required in the model and ran it to adjust for any problems to improve the model. The final model is shown in Figure 4. Interestingly, for content, only the items capture knowing how to change oneself (C3) and knowing how to change the environment (C12) were significant. This implies that training programs that help managers or supervisors know how to change or developed are critical in this leadership training program. As for as applicability is concerned, having the skills (A2), feeling confident (A4), and using the newly acquired knowledge (A5) were valid and significant.

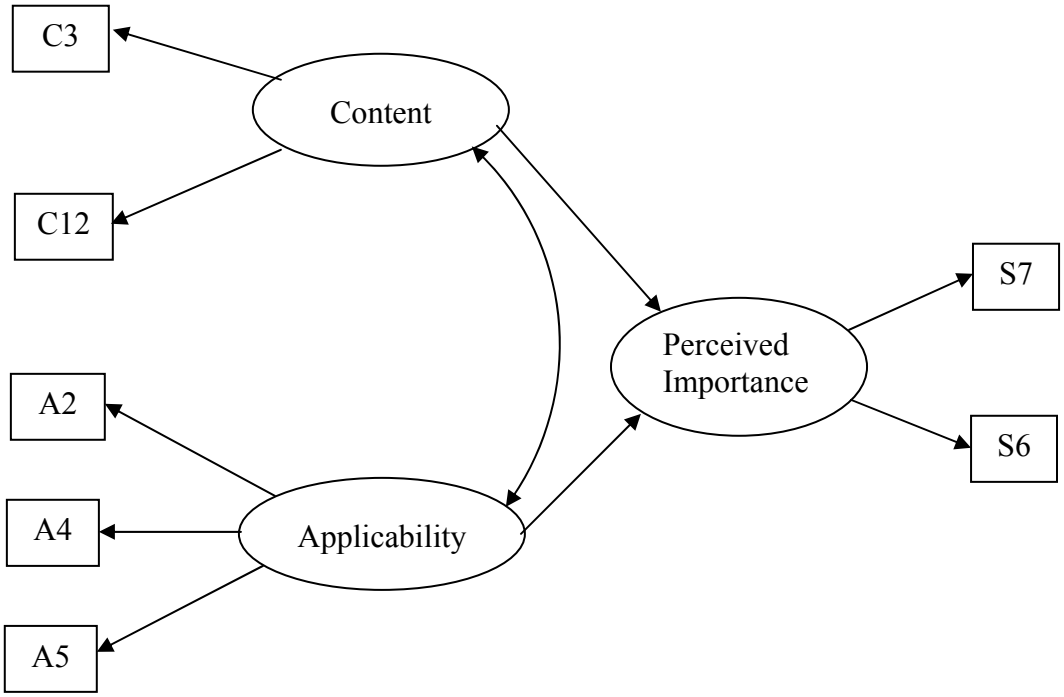

Figure 3. Structural Model Using Participants' Perceived Importance of Attending the Sessions as the Dependent Variable

The model converged as minimum was achieved. The absolute fit results of the model showed a χ^2 of 101.365, df 13, and p<.000. This significance of the χ^2 is due to the sensitivity of the large sample size (recommended less than 200 in Pedhazur and Schmelkin, 1991), and therefore other results were analyzed. All regression weights were significant, and the correlation between Content and Applicability (first order factors) is .842 and significant at p < .000. This is acceptable as we are expecting both first order factors to be correlated. The fit indices for this model are as follows: RMSEA = .118 (C.I. .140 -.097 – within the .12 range) which suggests that this is a good model, and the closeness of fit was less than .05. The incremental fit index (CFI) is .993 and the Normed Fit index (NFI) is .992, both higher than .95, which does suggest a very good model. The Standardized RMR for this model is .0889, which borders on a good model.

This model was tested on the two sets of cohorts (the groups (Flights 3-5) that went through sessions 1-5) and the groups (Flights 6 and 7) that had an added session (6^{th} session). We also tested the regression models for the different Flight Groups. The results are shown in Table VI.

Table VI
Summary of Model Fit Indexes and Regression Weights

SUMMARY OF FIT INDEXES FOR THE TWO GROUPS TESTED								
MODEL	**χ^2**	**df**	**sig**	**RMSEA**	**C.I. of RMSEA**	**CFI**	**NFI**	**SRMR**
Initial Model	101.365	13	0.000	0.118	.140 -.097	0.993	0.992	0.0889
Flights 3-5	50.961	12	0.000	0.112	.145-.081	0.994	0.992	0.0703
Flights 6&7	15.114	12	0.235	0.035	.082-.000	0.999	0.997	0.0390

SUMMARY OF REGRESSION WEIGHTS FOR THE FLIGHT GROUPS TESTED			
	Coefficient	**S.E.**	**Sig.**
Flights 3-7 (all groups)			
Applicability → Importance	-0.598	0.200	0.003
Content → Importance	1.155	0.228	0.000
Flights 3-5 (Group 2a)			
Applicability → Importance	-0.701	0.277	0.011
Content → Importance	1.377	0.325	0.000
Flights 6&7 (Group 2b)			
Applicability → Importance	-0.419	0.258	0.105
Content → Importance	0.991	0.285	0.001

As can be seen in Table VI, Content and Applicability are both significant when participants consider the importance of the training sessions. Only in Flights 6 and 7, Applicability is not significant. This could be due to the smaller sample size as there are only two groups in this sample. However, looking at the coefficients themselves, it is very clear that Content is about twice as strong as Applicability in all groups. Although the differences between the values of the coefficients differed from that of the unstandardized values (Table V), the findings are similar. This would imply that participants in the training program consider Content as much more important to Applicability.

Discussion and Implications

In the current "global environment," training leaders is important (Black & Gregersen, 2000) and that over one-third of the educational budget in Fortune 500 companies is spent on employees in the middle and upper levels (Klein, Astrachan, & Kossek, 1996). Although training programs abound in organizations, limited research has focused on the participants' reaction to the value of a training program (importance of the session) based on both content and applicability in these training programs. This study does so with a leadership training program conducted over 3 ½ years involving 175 managers with a total of 476 responses from each session of the training program. From the findings, participants are more concerned about content than applicability (which may appear counterintuitive, if one assumes that managers and leaders are more concerned about applying what they learn) in this leadership training program. However, as this training program is the first such program to be conducted, participants may consider understanding Appreciative Leadership as a critical component in the training program (also a finding in the interviews done). It is very possible that training programs that focus more on skill development may show the reverse finding (that applicability is more critical than content), but as far as programs that focuses on career development is concerned, it may show a similar pattern as that found in this study. Perhaps other leadership training programs could be evaluated using these three aspects: content, applicability, and perceived importance in attending each session to determine if such a system could be used in other training programs (using analysis from the qualitative data to develop items related to each of these aspects but specific to the needs of the organization and its participants).

As far as content of this training program is concerned, items measuring knowing how to change one's self and one's environment had the strongest loadings. This would imply that managers and supervisors who go through this leadership training program consider it very important to not only learn about new concepts or ideas, but

also learn how it is that one could change internally and improve one's circle of influence. Such learning may also be important for managers and supervisors who undergo other types of leadership training programs that focus on managerial learning and career development. Further research comparing this finding with other similar training programs could be carried out.

Another finding in this study is that both content and applicability do not have similar effect on the participants' reactions to the training program. Although both affect the participants' perception of importance of the training sessions, content had a much stronger effect (up to four times stronger). A possible explanation for this is that managers and leaders are socialized into delegating tasks and might assume that it is more important that they expand their knowledge base instead of actually carrying out tasks (or applying their newly acquired knowledge) as they are accustomed to delegating tasks and may perceive themselves as the "brains". Perhaps this socialized learning may suggest that managers are more oriented to "Grasping Knowledge" (i.e. Concrete Experience←→Abstract Conceptualization) than "Transforming Knowledge (Active Experimentation ←→Reflective Observation). Further research could be carried to determine if this pattern of preferred axis of learning (instead of mode of learning) is evident and important for the career development of middle managers and/or top managers. This finding implies that managers and supervisors going through leadership training programs place more emphasis on acquiring new knowledge than actually using it.

Conclusion

In this study we have proposed a system of evaluating training that takes into account its nature (i.e. double-loop learning), its purpose related to the organizational change effort and tailored to train managers to understand and practice Appreciative Leadership. In

accordance to the system we used, we conducted interviews with participants that attended the first two programs and developed the questionnaire to evaluate the training program. It was through the meticulous and conscientiousness of the analysis that three themes emerged: content, applicability and perceived importance of attending the sessions. We are confident that other training programs would surface the same, if not similar, aspects. It is the items in the questionnaire (based on the qualitative data) that will be unique to evaluate each training program. This would have implications for academics and practitioners who are involved in designing training programs for organizations (especially that of leadership training) when the focus of the training is managerial learning and career development. Finally, this study might have significant impact on Human Resources Professionals as it may open a door to understanding what it is that organizations that are going through change or development and participants (managers, supervisors or employees) who undergo training are looking for so as to have a customized evaluation system along these three aspects.

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