

# The impact of a leadership program

for managers in an international retail organization

Suzanne Verdonschot, Kirste den Hollander

This leadership program supports managers in a large international retail organization in their development. In 2011, Kessels & Smit, *The Learning Company* was invited to redesign the program. During the past years the program received a lot of positive feedback from participants, stakeholders and supporters. However, we didn't have a complete image of the realized impact. The present study assesses the impact of the program in the daily work of the participants.

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## What is the leadership program about?

The aim of the program is twofold: firstly, participants are challenged and enabled to reflect on their own thinking and acting as well as take responsibility for their own learning. Secondly, participants are supported to experiment with new ways thinking and acting that will help them to be more effective. The program is a year-long leadership journey, in which participants are offered small assignments, experiences at work and meetings with others as well as six work sessions with the whole group.

## What is impact?

Impact occurs when the skills learned in the leadership program are applied in the work behaviour of participants to improve performance in some of the function or role. When this leads to a result which contributes to an organization's objective, there is impact (Brinkerhoff, 2006). The method used for the research is the Success Case Method (SCM), originating from Brinkerhoff (2006).



*“The leadership program helped  
me in determining my direction in  
relation to my goals”*

### How did we determine the impact of the leadership program?

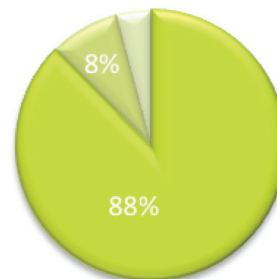
The study focuses on 28 participants that took part in the program in 2013 and 2014. These participants received the questionnaire. Almost all of them (24) filled out the survey. With eight participants an in-depth interview was done. Additionally, three managers and two buddies were interviewed to share their views and insights with respect to the development of the participants.

### What is the realised impact?

The majority of the participants (88%) achieved a lot of impact with the leadership program. These participants indicated that they learned something new, applied this in their day-to-day work which has led to some worthwhile results for the business. The impact was mainly realized as participants were challenged to reflect on their own thinking and acting and to experiment with new ways of thinking and acting. This led to sustainable new ways of working. Furthermore, participants are actively investigating the interest and desired results of oneself and other involved parties whilst making use of different perspectives to attain a solution.

*"The leadership program helped me in determining my direction in relation to my goals. Not only in marking a spot on the horizon but also specifically on what I need to do to get there and on what currently stands in my way."*

Furthermore, 8% of participants achieved some impact. This group did learn new skills and knowledge which they applied in their work environment but did not yet see clear results which were beneficial for the organization. Last, 4% of the participants achieved little to no impact with the leadership program.



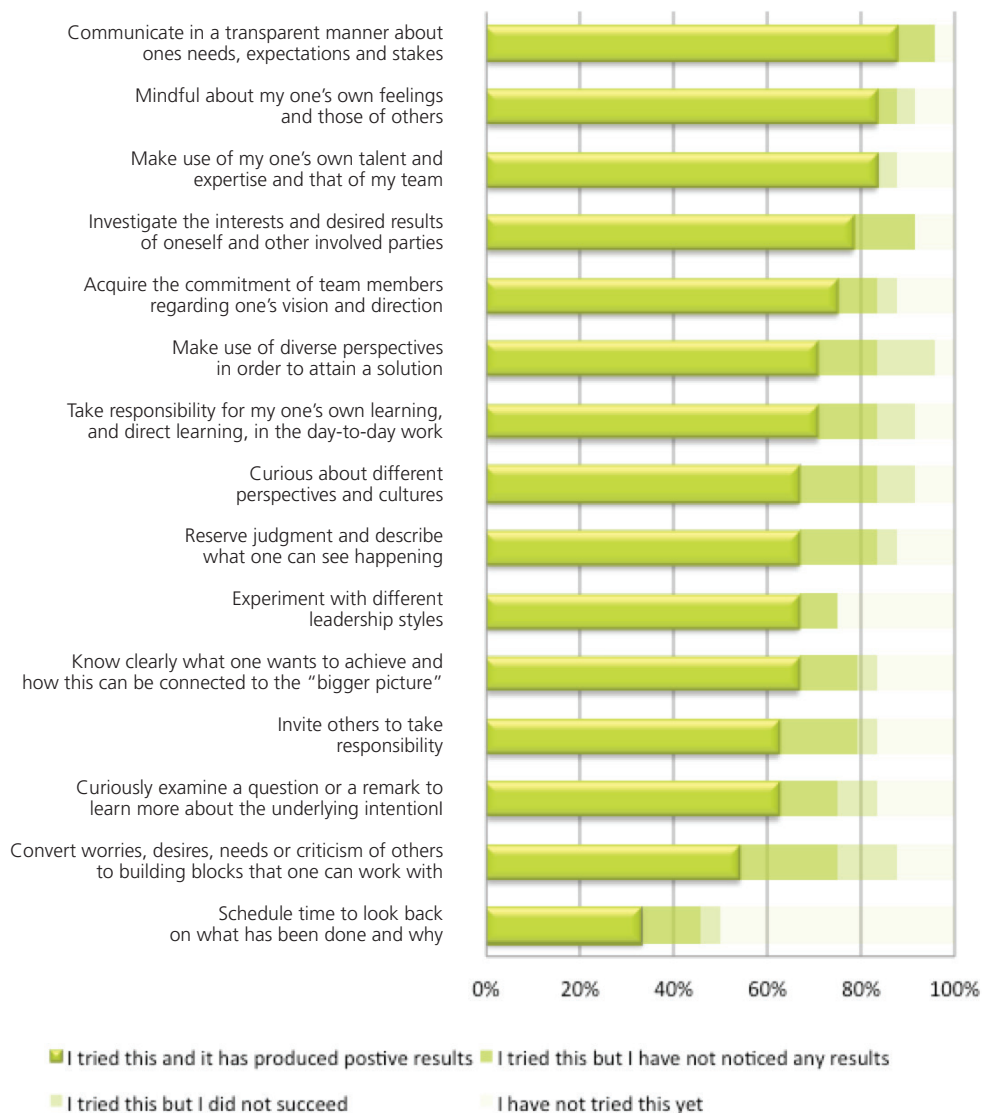
- Participants who achieved a lot of impact
- Participants who achieved some impact
- Participants who achieved little to no impact

### What work behaviour did change?

The majority of the participants (over 80%) indicated that they used the program to communicate in a transparent manner, to be aware of feelings of themselves and others as well as making use of talent and expertise in a way that creates worthwhile results for the company. The adaptation of these work behaviours allowed the participants to make impact on the four key pillars of the program, i.e. getting commitment across organizational lines, breaking patterns one is part of, connecting perspectives as a facilitator and determining one's own direction.

*"Since the leadership program I really make an effort to see where the others are coming from. I make use of the ideas of people from different backgrounds to come up with a solution or an idea. It is not only more energizing to work this way but we also come up with more sustainable ideas."*

However, in the case of scheduling time for looking back on what has been done and why only 33.3% of the participants were able to apply this in their work and yield positive results. In addition, more than 50% of participants indicate that they have not tried to schedule time to look back on what has been done and why. Participants address the culture of organisation which has a strong focus on 'tomorrow' which leaves little room to learn from 'yesterday'.



### View of managers and 'peer supporters' on the impact of participants

The conclusions drawn by the participants concerning their development corresponds with the conclusions drawn by the managers and the peer supporters. The managers and peer supporters saw that participants developed themselves in engaging and connecting others as well as determining their own direction. Furthermore, managers and peer supporters saw that participants improved themselves in breaking

hindering patterns. All of these improvements were seen as new sustainable patterns, indicating that participants successfully incorporated them into their behaviour. Managers mention that the participants are more effective in their job, were able to work more efficiently and were more visible in the organisation. Moreover, they describe the program as one in which the participants have a wealth of opportunities to experiment with new management styles and working styles. In this way, progress becomes quickly visible.