

The Leading Edge Programme - A Holistic Approach to Leadership Development.

WorkAssist has recently launched an innovative and holistic leadership development programme called “The Leading Edge Programme”.

The Leading Edge Programme is designed and directed by Patrick J. Psaila, a psychologist and training consultant. Patrick has been working with various organizations since 1998 after obtaining his training in Vancouver, Canada. From feedback that he received through the numerous training programmes he delivered, he identified a common reality. Very often leaders and managers are well equipped technically but struggle to really motivate, empower and manage their people. It is from this feedback that the idea for the Leading Edge Programme was conceived.

The Leading Edge Programme is based on sound principles of adult learning that highlight the importance of experiential, multi-sensory, accelerated learning techniques that connect the thinking brain to the emotional brain to increase motivation and the ability to learn. One other novel aspect of the Leading Edge Programme is its focus on developing and stimulating the right brain which is responsible for creativity and innovation. There is ample neuroscientific evidence today that shows how exercises that create hemispheric integration bring out high levels of potential in people’s levels of functioning. This releases more and more creativity and openness in participants as they enjoy learning.

The programme is also designed using activities that tap into the various human intelligences based on research by Dr. Howard Gardner in 1983. These consist of visual, linguistic, interpersonal, musical, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, logical and naturalist intelligences. The programme incorporates exercises that tap into the various intelligences making it more likely to induce permanent learning.

While the core of the programme is based on the principles of emotional intelligence as applied to leadership practices, Patrick draws on a number of tools and techniques to reach the programme objectives. Among the approaches he uses are Neuro Linguistic Programming, Ericksonian Hypnotherapy, Cognitive, Gestalt, Humanistic, and Existential Psychology.

The design of this programme is based on the guidelines for best practice in designing Emotional Intelligence Programmes issued by the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence and a training framework recommended by Geetu Orme and Kate Kannon, two respected practitioners in the field of emotional intelligence development. For a real developmental and transformational experience, the authors recommend a minimum of five full days of training separated by one or two weeks. This may determine the long term effectiveness of the programme. Based on this premise, the Leading Edge

Programme runs for six full days over a six week period allowing plenty of time for integration and assimilation of the learning experience. The authors also found that the quality of training is enhanced when the trainer meets with the participants prior to the programme to clarify expectations and address questions and concerns as well as begin building rapport. To meet this standard, Patrick meets with the programme participants for a two-hour pre-session meeting.

Research in affective neuroscience also indicates that people undergoing transformational learning need to feel relaxed and psychologically safe. An optimal learning climate creates in the learner an ideal physiology for learning characterized by a significant reduction in stress hormones. For this reason every session in the programme incorporates relaxation exercises and body work that helps participants feel more relaxed and alert. Some of the exercises also include brief learning installations, a technique using semi-hypnotic induction to help participants internalize key learning points while in a state of deep relaxation.

The programme is organized into two main parts. The first part focuses on the intrapersonal dimension of leadership and takes participants through a process of self-awareness, recognising personal potential and areas for development, self-management and self-motivation, and learning how to influence emotional states through cognitive reframing. The second part of the programme deals with the interpersonal aspects of leading and managing people and includes topics such as skills in motivating and empowering people, leading and maintaining effective teams, influencing and inspiring others and promoting and creating organizational culture change. The whole programme focuses on the psychological aspects of leading and managing people and takes a holistic approach addressing the physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual and cognitive dimensions of people. The sixth day is dedicated to the consolidation and transfer of learning. Participants are coached in creating effective well formed goals and strategies that emerge from the programme. They also formulate their own personal and professional development plan.

A key problem with many training programmes is that they are left in isolation from the real world and participants are not followed up and supported. A follow-up feedback session is held with the participants ten weeks after the last session to assess progress and the implementation of the personal development plan. Throughout this period participants are offered coaching, mentoring and counselling to support them in achieving their outcomes.

Groups are kept small, ideally not exceeding fifteen participants. This will ensure that people have enough "air space" to interact freely and get plenty of direct attention from the programme facilitator.

The programme is highly learner centred and although it follows a logical and sequential progression, it is designed to steer itself according to the needs and issues of each specific group. This customization takes place both at the design

and the implementation phases of each programme. Various classical training tools are used, such as discussions in large and sub-groups, simulation exercises, case studies, role plays, dvd's, and self-assessment questionnaires as well as more cutting edge exercises that promote right brain development, learning installation using semi-hypnotic inductions, visualization techniques, body work, and other innovative multi-sensory exercises.

Patrick is already directing The Leading Edge Programme with the management team of a leading information technology organization and will be launching another company-wide programme with an international organization towards the end of October. He strongly believes that this programme addresses a core need in today's organizations. A need for effective leaders who are able to manage themselves and others, empower and develop their people, while making them feel valued, cared for and respected. It is this approach that ultimately achieves organisation's strategic and business objectives. Rooted in up-to-date scientific research while at the same time highly practical, applicable and enjoyable, the Leading Edge Programme enables leaders to strengthen their potential and further empower them to achieve excellence through people.

Patrick J. Psaila is a freelance psychologist working within various organizations for the past eight years after his training at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. He is also a Licensed Practitioner of NLP from the Irish Institute of NLP in Dublin and a member of the Society of NLP. Patrick works with various large and medium sized organisations involved in manufacturing, education, health, tourism, banking, and other services as a trainer, HR consultant, and psychologist. His current area of specialization and interest is developing personal and professional development programmes for managers and leaders in organizations, focusing on importance of Emotional Intelligence in leadership. Besides his freelance work he is also a sessional lecturer and trainer with the University of Malta, the Malta Institute of Management and the Foundation for Human Resources Development. He is also a member of the Malta Psychology Profession Board responsible for the licensing of psychologists working in Malta. He can be contacted through his website at www.workassistmalta.com or on mobile phone number 7988 7982.