

# *Leadership Development Program Design: **Opportunities and Risks in Using Action Learning***

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# *The Brass Ring*

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- **The Project Sponsor:** “I want this now...and I want it everywhere...”
  - **The Problem Owner:** “It was an opportunity to create a space for people to grow as leaders.”
  - **The Action Learning Team**
    - “We took real ownership of the issue...more than our Project Sponsor.”
    - “We created a wave of influence.”
    - “The experience **inspired me to stay** at the Agency.”
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# *The Brass Knuckle*

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- “The Action Learning project was a failure.”

# The First *Prime Experience*

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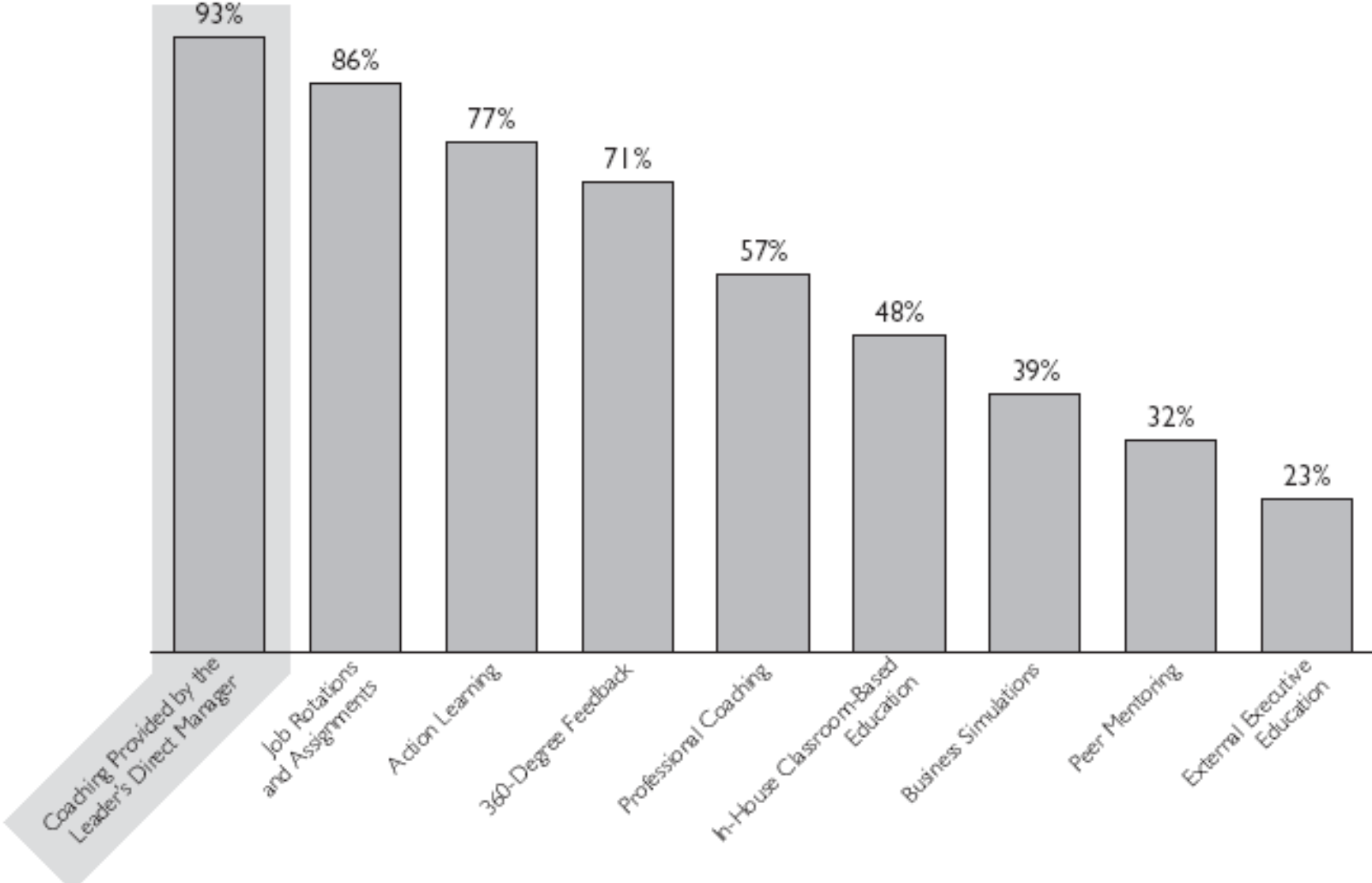
- AL Coach--Great Leader Parallel
  - “A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: ***we did it ourselves.***” (Lao-Tzu)
  - The action learning coach models the way in helping the group learn to **manage the dilemmas** of leadership—dilemmas that are inherent in the AL process.
  - The action learning coach is the *model for 21<sup>st</sup> Century leaders*. Creating the conditions for success...ensuring that their people have clarity on the goal...empowering them to act ...and constantly fostering their learning.

# The Second *Prime Experience*

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- Action Learning Team--Great Organization Parallel
- “A great organization is a place where I can do work that I am passionate about, develop my skills, work with people I care about, and make a difference.”

# Building Leadership Bench Strength (CEB Study)



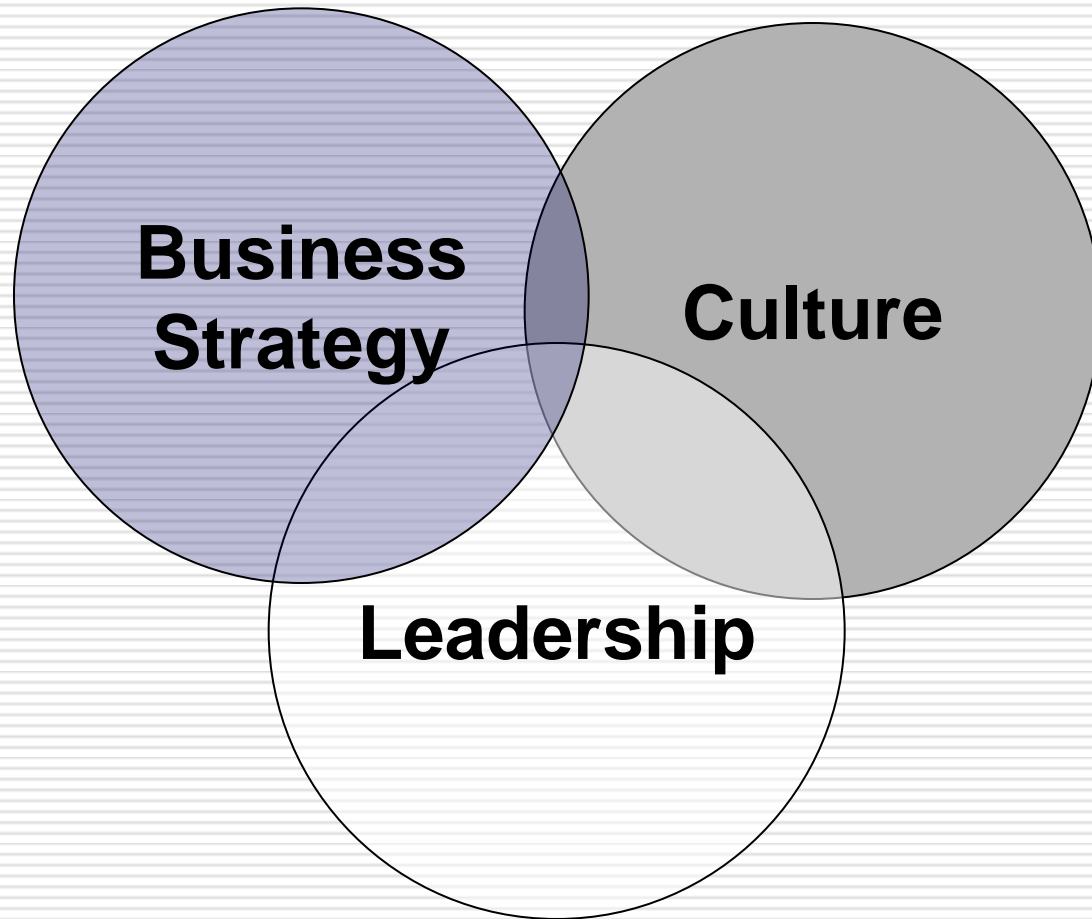
# The Opportunities

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1. Design Driven by **Clear Outcomes**
2. Focus on **Transformational Shifts** in Identify, Beliefs and Attitudes
3. **Fully Integrated** into the Larger Leadership Development Program
4. **Virally Dispersed** Throughout the Organization
5. Leveraging **Post-Program Learning**

# Opportunity #1: Link Program Design to Key Drivers

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# Leadership Development Program Drivers: Examples

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- Strategy Drivers
    - Productivity
    - Innovation
    - Retention
  - Culture Drivers
    - Peer Collaboration
    - Business Unit Integration (e.g. post merger)
  - Leadership Drivers
    - Adaptability/Agility
    - Leadership Continuity
    - Relationship Building
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# Drivers: Best Practice

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- **Who:** Arlington County: *Leaders' Challenge* Program
- **What:**
  - Focus on Cross-County Collaboration
  - Focus on Transformational Leadership
- **How:**
  - Selection of Participants
  - Selection of Problems
  - Development of Solutions that Have Cross-County Application

# Opportunity #2

## Transformational Shifts in Identify, Beliefs, & Attitudes

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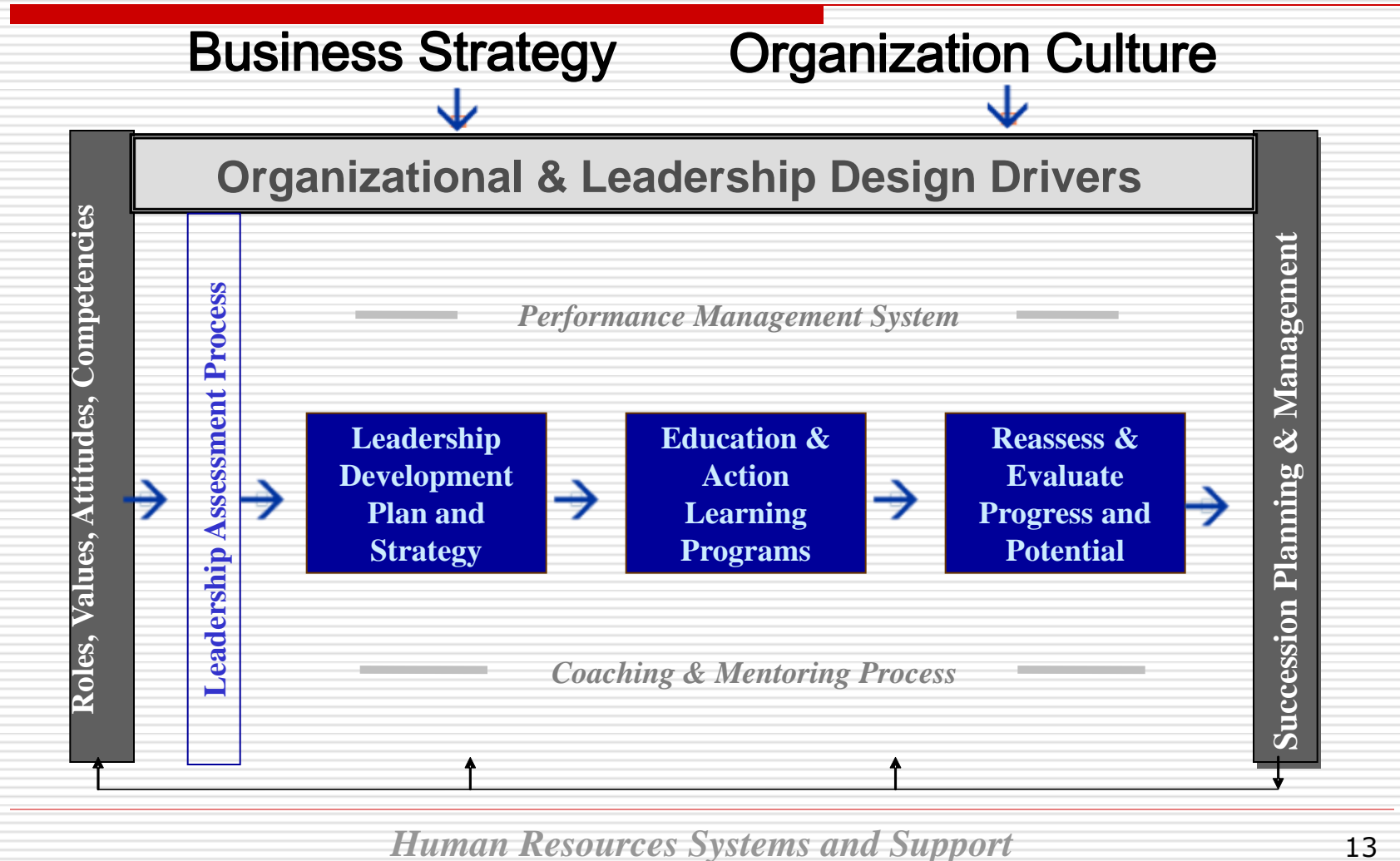
- ❑ Level I: **Transactional** Leadership (Behaviors)
- ❑ Level II: **Transitional** Leadership (Competencies)
- ❑ Level III: **Transformational** Leadership (Worldview, Identity, Beliefs, Assumptions, Attitudes)

# Transformational *Leadershifts*: Best Practice

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- **Who:** American University
- **What:** *Key Executive Leadership Program*  
(Masters Program in Public Policy)
- **How:**
  - Focus on “unlearning”
  - Focus on teaching other leaders in Action Learning project
  - Journaling (Reflections)
  - Final exam on shifts in world view, attitudes, and beliefs

# Opportunity #3: Integration



# Integration: Best Practice

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- **Who:** Microsoft
- **What:** ExPo Program
- **How:**
  - Corporate Social Responsibility Linkage
  - Leaders Building Leaders Philosophy
  - Innovation Method (Krippendorf)
  - *Learning Circle* Linkage

# Opportunity #4: Viral Dispersion

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- A major opportunity is to build action learning into the culture...it is a seamless and ongoing part of what the organization does.

# Viral Dispersion: Best Practice

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- Who: Intelligence Community
- What: Viral Strategy
- How:
  - Grass Roots
    - Communities of Interest
    - Influencers in AL sessions
    - Internal Coach Certification
  - Top-Level Corporate Focus and Support
  - Underlying Philosophy: “Give it way...let it go.”

# Missed Opportunity #5: Post Project Learning Motivates

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- Learning must be mined over the long-term...learning from action learning may not occur until after the program is over
- Stories:
  - Women in the Military (GWU)
  - Learning from Peers (DISA)

# The Risks

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- Problem Selection
- Problem Owner Selection
- Overload

# Risk #1: Problem Selection

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- Multiple Challenges in Problem Selection
  - Match to Key Driver
  - Scope Match to Program Length
  - Match to Long-Run Champion
  - In-tact Teams

# Problem Selection: Best Practice

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- Who: Goodrich
- What: *EDGE* Program
- How: Create **Choice** in Problem Selection
  - CEO involvement in driving development of potential problems as well down select
  - Rigorous down-select process run by VP of HR

# Risk #2: Problem Owner Selection

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- Characteristics of the Engaged Problem Owner
  - Time and energy to engage
  - Willingness to “let go” of the problem
  - Model leader
  - Learner mindset
  - Willingness to carry forward the solution

# Risk #2: Challenging Problem Owners

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- A problem owner who
  - is the problem in the problem
  - is the problem in the group
  - does not want to be the problem owner
  - tries to be too helpful

# Risk #2: Problem Owner Selection

## Best Practice

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- Who: American University
- What: *Key Executive Leadership Program* (Masters Program in Public Policy)
- How:
  - Student finds the problem owner
  - Student forms the AL team

# Engaged Problem Owner

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- “My challenge to them was to you want to be effective or right?”

# Risk #3: Overload

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- “Managers would schedule meetings when they were supposed to be there...they `pressurized them.””
- Sometimes managers are threatened by their people growing and its not happening to them

# Overload Best Practice

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- Who: DISA
- What: ELDP
- How:
  - **Phase I:** Action Learning (Individual Leadership Challenge)
  - **Phase II:** Group Project with Tailored Training

# An Ideal Story

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- Who: Consulting Firm
- Focus: People Development
- Attributes:
  - Corporate Driver: **Retention**
  - Transactional and Transformational Shifts: Shifts in Attitude and Skills Around **Focus on People Development**
  - Consultative Design
  - Integrated Approach (AL, Content, Coaching)
  - Action Learning (Project and Individual Challenges)

# Conclusions

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- ❑ Understanding the **business context** (drivers, culture, leadership)
- ❑ Making the **drivers** and link the drivers to the program design
- ❑ Understanding the **learners perspectives** and needs
- ❑ Understand the **problem owner's perspective** and help them see what to expect.
- ❑ **Create an integrated designing linking** action learning with other components in the program.
- ❑ **Management of dilemmas**, competing values and risks that action learning creates (e.g. intact teams)
- ❑ Take **advantage of opportunities** to work at higher cognitive levels (values, assumptions, beliefs)

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