

# Why Training Fails

White Paper

coachlive®





# Training Fails

And it costs us a lot more  
than we outlay!

**The failure of training to transfer into practice proves more than just a cost to an organisation's hip pocket.**

Training may well try to instill practices and methodologies in leadership but provides little in the way of application. It's rarely engaging, rarely applied in currently faced scenarios, and most often leaves the emergent leader with little resource from which to draw.

The costs of training then far exceed that of its initial outlay. Emergent leaders can easily become disengaged as the opportunity granted them fails to meet their aspirations. And worse, they fail to meet expectations or responsibilities toward team leadership.

Here we examine the cost and effect of this failure and look toward effective solutions.

coachlive®



**Robert Balmer**  
Director Coachlive

As a former Director of Compaq Computer Australia, Rob has gone on to become one of Australia's most sought after Executive Coaches, with more than 17 years experience and hundreds of coaching assignments successfully completed.

He is completing a Master of Professional Studies (Coaching Practice) and it is from the research associated with this degree that much of the evidence presented in this White Paper is drawn.



Let's ask why?

Page:

Training fails: Introduction

2

Executive Summary

5

Training is failing both managers and the organisation

6

Why Frontline Management Training Fails

8

Other studies draw similar conclusions

9

Why don't we change the manager training formula?

10

Is there a solution?

11

Integrated learning and coaching for effective transfer

12

What are the barriers to coaching-based solutions?

13

References

14

An alternative and more effective solution!

15





### **Why is a leadership coaching company releasing a paper on frontline management training?**

Through 14 years of executive coaching we've assisted organisations to unlock their full potential. We've worked with executives who have struggled to get their strategies, priorities, ideas and innovations effectively executed at the frontline of their organisations, we think it is time to call the problem for what it is!

**Robert Balmer**  
Director Coachlive

The learning transfer  
problem and why  
frontline management  
training is failing  
organisations like yours!



**Powered by** Executive Central, leaders in the delivery of pragmatic and practical executive coaching.



A dramatically different business environment requires a dramatically different set of behaviours & skills.

Hay Group 2016

## Executive Summary

It is clear that organisations need leadership and management development at every level to ensure effective responses to contemporary contexts.

Landmark studies of leadership in Australian organisations, such as Melbourne University's Study of Australian Leadership (Gahan et al, 2016) document the disruption and uncertainty facing Australian organisations across public and private sectors. They also document the need for innovative approaches to leadership development across organisations.

Most of the attention and funding is directed to executive leadership, however it's at frontline and middle management levels that strategy execution and drive-to-performance occur.

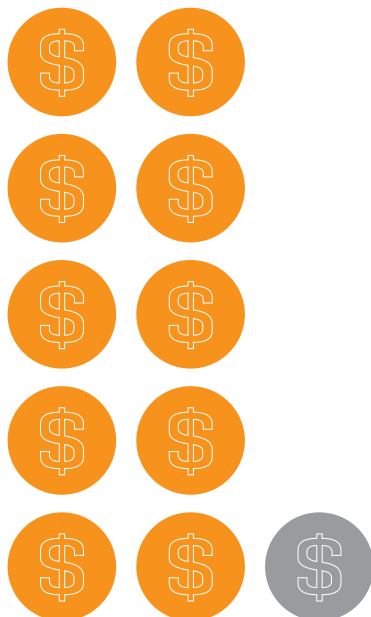
Frontline and middle management development are often overlooked, and existing frontline manager training often does not translate into practice. Australian organisations are failing to develop leadership capabilities in frontline and middle managers: capabilities that are needed for complex business environments (Hay Group 2016).

What's needed are effective methodologies for learning transfer, so that training quickly translates into better performance management and leadership across the organisation. There are some breakthrough solutions, providing more integrated approaches to embedding training in practice.

## Training is failing both managers and the organisation

“ For every \$10 spent on leadership development for senior leaders, only \$1 is spent on frontline leaders

Gahan et al. 2016



From the perspective of many of our clients, training for frontline and middle managers does not result in either improved performance (management) or strategy execution. There are numerous contemporary Australian and international studies that provide researched support for this view.

Too many Australian organisations under invest in leadership development, especially at the frontline, with many workplaces not investing in leadership development at all. For every \$10 spent on leadership development for senior leaders, only \$1 is spent on frontline leaders (Gahan et al., 2016).

Previous calls for improvement in leadership development in Australia, for example the Karpin Report (Karpin, 1995) and Karpin Report Revisited (Samson, 2011) have gone largely unheeded. Contemporary studies consistently indicate that against the critical elements of strategy, innovation, staff engagement, and behaviours, Australian workplaces and leaders perform poorly relative to their international peers (Dixon & Koslowski, 2017). Samson (2011) found that people who are promoted to management roles from primarily technical roles may be under prepared and need a higher level of management education.

“

...many Australian managers fail to master fundamentals such as performance management, monitoring, target-setting and incentivizing

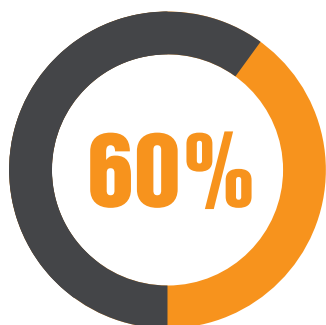
Gahan et al. 2016

70% of staff in any large organisation report to a frontline manager. The manager is therefore the biggest influence on the employee's experience of organisational culture, their level of engagement, and their ability to understand and execute the organisation's strategies and priorities. Worryingly, Gahan et al. (2016) report that many Australian managers fail to master fundamentals such as performance management, monitoring, target-setting and incentivizing. Problems with the manager are amongst the most cited reasons for leaving an organization.

Poor management practices at frontline and middle levels have a flow on effect to all employees. 60% of Australia's economy is composed of services where employee engagement is critical. Global norms indicate that Australian workers are less engaged than their peers elsewhere in the world by more than five percentage points and are heading in the wrong direction. (Dixon and Koslowski, 2017)



70% of staff in any large organisation report to a frontline manager.



60% of Australia's economy is composed of services where engagement is critical!

“ The problem with many training initiatives is that managers are not equipped to provide ongoing coaching, reinforcement and assessment...

Fox. 2016

## Why Frontline Management Training Fails

**Both anecdotally and in academic research, it is widely agreed that a training based approach to management development fails to transfer into applied practices in the workplace. Reasons cited in Gahan et al. (2016) Study of Australian Leadership:**

- Too little connection to strategy and to leadership skills that will support strategy
- Too much emphasis on the top executive level development budgets are focused on senior management at the expense of middle and frontline manager.
- Management and leading others is learned gradually – changed behaviours are not embedded through one-off training events.
- Too few modalities for a rich learning experience. Predominant training modes are facilitator-led workshops, whereas learning transfer is best achieved through a blended learning format of virtual, face-to-face, and self-paced elements.
- Too little content is linked to the areas of leadership that are known to be critical, with only half of all leadership programs being specifically linked to leadership competency frameworks that have been developed to meet the specific needs of the organisation.
- One “bright spot” is the emergence of “multi-step, structured development”, with the classroom component as one step of a process that includes pre-program 360 degree assessments and post-program coaching opportunities.





“

..the lack of environmental support, along with authentic encouragement to sustain practice even when failure occurs, is critical for learning transfer.

Kivland and King. 2015

## Other studies draw similar conclusions:

- **Lack of senior management support and participation**  
(Kivland and King, 2015; Fox, 2016).
- **Lack of follow-up, coaching, and reinforcement after training events**  
(Fox, 2016; Phillips and Phillips, 2002).
- **Training objectives not aligned to business needs**  
(Furnham, 1996; Phillips and Phillips, 2002).
- **Failure to pre-screen training participants**  
(Blume et al., 2010).
- **Lack of attention to the trainee's current work environment**  
(Kivland and King, 2015).
- **Cost of the training**  
(Phillips and Phillips, 2002).

“ Learning professionals globally need to adapt, take risks and try new ways to develop leaders.

**Phillippa Prentice**

Leadership Capability &  
Learning Manager ANZ  
Reckitt Benckiser

Why don't we change  
the manager training  
formula?

It has been our experience that many organisations continue to take a training based approach to frontline management development for three primary reasons:

1

Typical 'One and done' training events are seen as the most effective way to get frontline managers upskilled, with minimal workplace disruption.

2

Budgets are typically tight for development. In-house training is often utilised in the belief it offers an acceptable solution, and is perceived to save on costs.

3

Complex leadership capabilities are not within the scope of traditional views of frontline leadership, and this is reflected in approaches to training.



Organisations are changing rapidly and these changes should be reflected in our approach to leadership development.

**Brigitte Fairbank**

NSW Treasury  
Executive Director – Human Resources

## Is there a solution?

It's surprising that organisational development professionals continue to champion narrow training-based approaches to frontline management development, given the concerns expressed in the literature. However we must have some sympathy for the predicament these professionals find themselves in when their organisations want management and leadership development solutions within a tight budget.

If the solution were a simple one, all of the academic research papers would be describing it. However, while they are very good at describing what is wrong with training-based approaches and what characteristics an ideal development approach should have, none of them actually provide an answer as to how this can practically and pragmatically be done. So organisational development professionals have not really been provided with the ammunition they need!

# Creative Solutions

## Integrated learning and coaching for effective transfer

**Many research studies, including a number of those already cited in the paper, find that a more multi-faceted, coaching-based approach to management development is far more likely to deliver sustained and applied results in the workplace. Such an approach provides follow up, reinforcement and stimulus in real time, to ensure that learning is embedded in practice.**

Gahan et al. (2016) noted that mentoring and executive coaching had the most positive impact of all leadership development activities studied (such as formal leadership qualifications, leadership seminars, leadership assessment and special developmental assignments). In this study, positive workplace outcomes were measured via radical innovation, incremental innovation, OTAS-9, and compared performance.

Dixon and Koslowski (2017) described a “bright spot” emerging in leadership development programs. This was the emergence of “multi-step, structured development” which sees a classroom component as one step of process that includes pre-program 360 degree assessments and post-program coaching opportunities.

Baron and Morin (2010) documented a correlation of coaching sessions with post-training self-efficacy. Their results also showed that utility judgment (training seen as useful) and affective commitment (to training and to organisation) had a positive and significant relationship with post-training self-efficacy. This study underlines the importance of post-training coaching behaviours in general.





Effective leadership development is not a course; it is a process over time that organisations must commit to, particularly within middle management levels.

### Wade Fuller

Queensland Police  
Acting Inspector | Leadership Coach  
People and Culture  
People Capability Command

## What are the barriers to coaching-based solutions?

Until now, the main problem with coaching-based approaches to frontline management development has been that the cost per participant, using traditional coaching models is prohibitive for implementation across the ranks of middle and frontline managers.

The other barrier, in our opinion has been a lack of awareness of the problem: lack of understanding of the changing skill sets required for different management levels; lack of understanding of the limitations of one-off training events; and deficiencies in learning transfer.

Hopefully this paper contributes in some way to opening up discussions about middle and frontline manager development. We consider it important for HR and L&D professionals join a conversation about management training efficacy and creative approaches to equipping all management levels for the demands of a complex business environment.

## References:



---

Baron, L. & Morin, L. (2010) The impact of executive coaching on self-efficacy related to management soft-skills. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 31, 18-38.

---

Blume, B. D., Ford, J. K., Baldwin, T. T. & Huang, J. L. (2010) Transfer of Training: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Journal of Management*, 36, 1065-1105.

---

Dixon, R. & Koslowski, N. (2017) Why The Traditional Approach To Leadership Development Is Failing Australia. [www.maximus.com.au](http://www.maximus.com.au)

---

Fox, A. (2016) Why Training Fails and What to Change: A Case for Microlearning and Ongoing Management. *Employment Relations Today*, 43, 41-45.

---

Furnham, A. (1996) Why training fails. *Across the Board*, 33, 14.

---

Gahan, P., Adamovic, M., Bevitt, A., Harley, B., Healy, J., Olsen, J.E., Theilacker, M. (2016) *Leadership at Work: Do Australian leaders have what it takes?* Melbourne: Centre for Workplace Leadership, University of Melbourne. Retrieved from: [www.workplaceleadership.com.au/sal](http://www.workplaceleadership.com.au/sal)

---

Hay Group Report (2016) Getting the most out of the middle. [www.haygroup.com](http://www.haygroup.com)

---

[http://info.haygroupupdate.com/rs/494-VUC-482/images/HayGroup\\_Getting\\_most\\_out\\_of\\_middle.pdf](http://info.haygroupupdate.com/rs/494-VUC-482/images/HayGroup_Getting_most_out_of_middle.pdf)  
Retrieved 8Sept2017

---

Karpin, D. 1995. *Enterprising nation: renewing Australia's managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century* [Karpin report]. Canberra: Australian Government.

---

Kivland, C. & King, N. 2015. Six Reasons Why Leadership Training Fails. 32.

---

Phillips, J. J. & Phillips, P. P. 2002. 11 reasons why training & development fails..and what you can do about it. Minneapolis.

---



# Let's start talking

An alternative and more  
effective solution!

**Coachlive have developed a model that solves both the problems of cost and effective learning transfer.**

Coachlive delivers the benefits of Executive Coaching to your frontline and middle level managers at a cost on par with most conventional training programs.

The Coachlive model uses a "multi-step, structured development" (Baron and Morin, 2010) process to ensure that frontline and middle managers receive the support and stimulus needed in development of leadership capabilities. Coachlive is both, cost effective and minimises workplace disruption.



**EXECUTIVE  
CENTRAL**

**Powered by** Executive Central, leaders in the delivery of pragmatic and practical executive coaching.

**Contact us Today!**

**1300 737 495**

[info@coachlive.com.au](mailto:info@coachlive.com.au)

**coachlive<sup>®</sup>**

**[coachlive.com.au](http://coachlive.com.au)**