THE SUNDHEIM GROUP

Developing Leaders through Delivering Results:

Going the final mile in leadership development to close the Results Gap

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Introduction

Surveys of senior executives across the globe consistently point to strengthening leadership talent as a top priority for the success of their organizations. (AMA, 2009). They understand that a lack of leaders who are prepared to deal with an increasingly complex business world is a serious impediment to growth and even survival. Long gone are the days of leadership churning out predictable returns by effectively managing predictable processes. Over the last twenty years, the game has increasingly become about driving results by successfully planning and managing change. In this new reality, leadership development methods have changed as well. Successful efforts no longer focus solely on knowledge and awareness building. They incorporate experiential opportunities to learn in action to better prepare leaders to deal with the complex issues they're facing.

The majority of leadership development occurring in organizations today combines two broad categories of learning experiences – knowledge-based and action-based. Knowledge-based learning is designed to build awareness and conceptual understanding of leadership issues and can include leadership courses, expert lectures, conferences, case-studies, and team development exercises. Action-based learning is designed to deepen complex understanding of how to turn knowledge into action in the context of real problems and can include action learning, executive coaching, and team coaching to name a few methodologies. This second category is firmly grounded in the belief that the best way to learn how to do something is through experience - an idea with an extensive foundation in research (Kolb, 1984).

There is a third category of very powerful developmental experiences that go largely untapped in any systematic way. This is can be referred to as results-based learning. Similar to action-based learning, it's grounded in experiential learning theory. However it differs from action-based learning in one very critical way – focus. Action-based learning is built around learning & development issues. Learning is the primary focus. Real life projects are included to provide a relevant context within which to learn & develop. While action is a crucial component of the learning, measureable results rarely are. Conversely, results-based learning is built around measureable results – for instance sales growth or product quality. Results are the primary focus, not learning. Learning and development become, instead, the natural outgrowth of having to achieve something difficult.

A great way to illustrate this distinction is by looking at a real example. Consider the learning that occurred on Apollo 13's mission operations team when they had to figure out how get the astronauts home after the command module lost oxygen. In three days, flight controllers had to develop and document new procedures that would normally take three months (NASA). A measurable result – getting the astronauts home – was the primary focus. Learning was a secondary focus, to be considered and codified after the fact. Imagine if you tried to recreate this learning experience absent the reality of having to actually deliver this outcome - in a planning exercise for example. It would go a long way to helping learners understand the variables involved, but it could never take you the final mile. It simply could not reproduce the complexity of variables one encounters "in the line of fire." Most importantly it couldn't produce the real-world implications of failure.

Significant learning is born when failure is an extremely unattractive option. To a large degree, intentional leadership development has failed to take advantage of this fact.

The End Goal of Leadership Development

Ask anyone, "How do you know if a leader is effective?" and you're likely to get variations on one answer – they produce results. You never hear – they understand leadership – or they're good at strategic planning – or even, they know how to take action. Those tell you about what leaders *do*, but not whether they're effective. Only results can tell you that.

You'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who would disagree with the notion that the end goal of leadership development is to grow leaders who can deliver results. This then raises an interesting question - why are there so few structured approaches to building leaders in the course of delivering real results? Most are one or two steps removed. There's no easy answer to this question, but one contributing factor is the fact that results-based learning tends to be a hybrid of strategy execution consulting and leadership development. As a result there's not an obvious driver in organizations for these sorts of interventions; a topic that will be considered later.

This paper will argue that there's a "Results Gap" in current leadership development strategies. Put simply, the majority of leadership development occurring today, while good, fails to go the final mile in creating a structured and supportive environment in which leaders produce, not just strategic action, but measurable business results. In the course of exploring this topic it will answer a few critical questions

- What is the Results Gap?
- What do results based interventions look like?

- Why are they an important part of the leadership development mix?
- How can they be successfully introduced into organizations?
- What are their limitations and challenges?

The Results-Gap & Results-Based Interventions

The Results Gap is the gap between taking intelligent action and producing results. There's obviously a clear connection between the two, but the former does not necessarily lead to the latter. Results-based interventions (RBI's) are thus interventions that are targeted at the latter. In many ways RBI's use similar tools to other leadership programs including coaching, team-based problem solving, strategizing, and facilitative leadership practices such as reflection and inquiry. However, they differ in four critical ways:

1. The primary end goal of intervention is measurable results – not learning
2. The results *directly* impact the critical objectives of the organization
3. Leaders in the process are accountable for achieving the results, not just planning for them
4. Failure to achieve the results has immediate and measurable consequences for the organization

It's easy to see how the Apollo 13 example above meets these 4 criteria. Getting the men home was the goal, not learning how to do it. The results directly impacted the critical objectives of manned space flight (getting them home). The men leading the process were responsible for delivering the results and failure to do so had immediate consequences. It's also easy to see how a simulation does not meet these criteria. The primary goal is learning. The results will not *directly* impact the organization. And the

leaders are not accountable for achieving these results in the actual organization so the consequences of failure, while uncomfortable, are not as significant.

An important advantage of RBI's is that they help close the measurement gap as well. Like all business investments, executives want to know the return they're getting on their training and development dollars. Kirkpatrick (1998) was an early pioneer in the field of training measurement and his 4 levels of evaluation have long been used by practitioners to create the case for results of training efforts. Philips (1997) took the model one step further and added a fifth level to measure return on investment. These methods have been widely accepted, used, and very helpful. However, the connections they make to critical and measureable results are dubious at best. The challenge has nothing to do with their methods, but rather with the interventions they're trying to measure. Because most leadership development interventions are skills-forward (meaning, if skills are built eventually results will come) there's a chasm that has to be crossed to connect the two. Kirkpatrick and Philips are merely trying to build a bridge to cross it.

RBI's don't have the same challenge because they start on the other side of the chasm in the first place. Desired results are crystal clear before any action happens. As opposed to skills-forward, it's results-backward. In essence, it renders the bridge-building process of skills-to-results irrelevant. Any bridges that have to be built are built backward from desired results to necessary skills making for a more efficient contextualized learning experience.

All of this is not to say that knowledge-based and action-based learning are irrelevant. In fact, it's quite the contrary. They provide a critical level of knowledge, awareness, and skill, upon which results-based learning can be successfully built. A clear

example of this is the required classroom and flight simulation time pilots need, in addition to actual flight time, in order to become excellent pilots. Each type of learning closes a critical learning gap. The same is true for leaders. Figure 1 illustrates the three gaps that leaders must cross in order to become truly effective: knowledge, action & results. Traditionally they've had to figure out how to cross the third gap on their own; by trial and

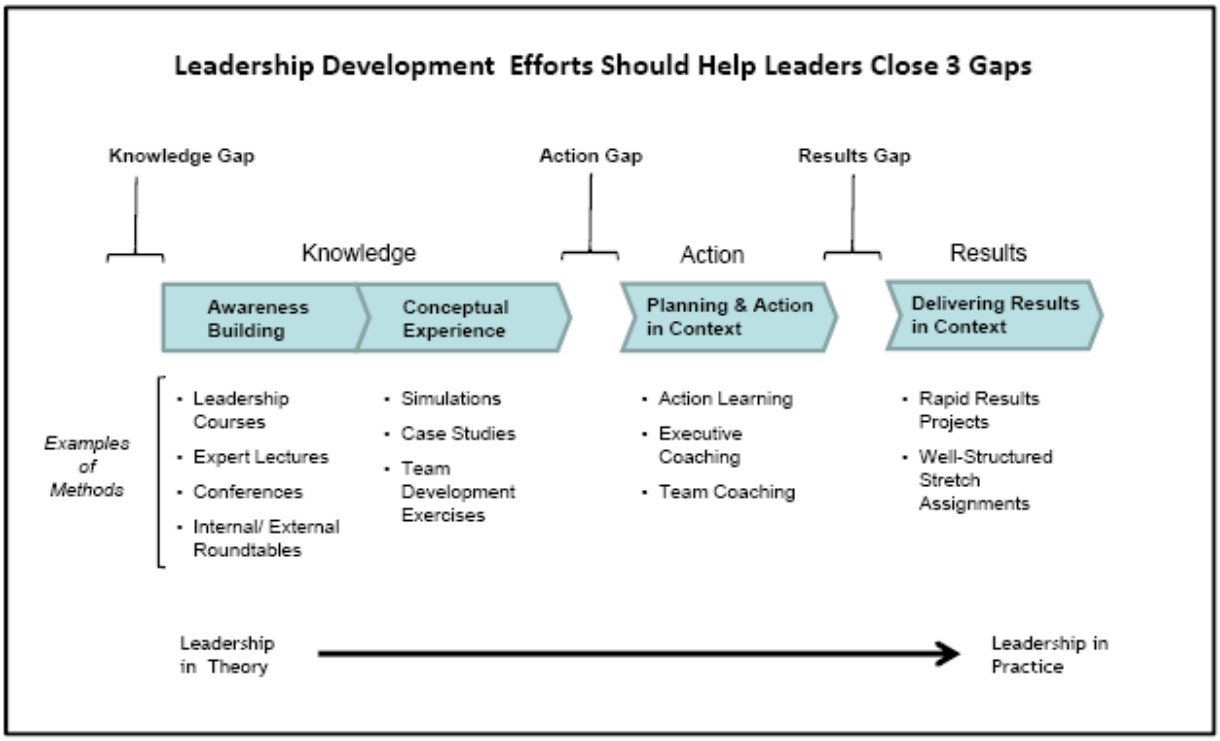

Figure 1

error with limited guidance. While leaders still must cross the gap on their own in results-based learning interventions, the structure of the methods provide an environment to focus and accelerate the process.

The following section considers three learning methods: action learning, stretch assignments, & rapid results projects to more clearly illustrate what successful results-based learning interventions can look like. It will show how the first two have some of the important ingredients of successful results-based learning, but lack the design and focus

respectively to deliver it. Action learning, while effective and useful, is more of a critical thinking/strategic planning tool and is not intentionally set up to take leaders the "final mile" in helping them learn how to deliver results. Stretch assignments, while a good environment for results-based learning, are rarely structured effectively to take advantage of that fact; and furthermore are tough to scale and manage as a formal learning intervention.

The third method, rapid results projects, pioneered by Robert Schaffer and used in his consulting practice over the last thirty years is primarily a consulting intervention with strong learning outputs as a secondary objective (Schaffer & Ashkenas, 2005). Its structured process, tight scoping, and results focus combines elements from action learning and stretch assignments to create a scalable and effective approach to results-based learning.

Action Learning – not truly focused on achieving results

Action learning is undoubtedly a powerful learning and development process. Initially introduced by Reg Revans in the 1940's, it has grown to become the predominant method of developing leaders in the course of real work. While there are many variations on its design, at its core it's always concerned with real people resolving and taking action to resolve real problems (Marquardt, 2004). In so doing it closes the action gap in leadership development by providing a structured and safe environment within which to learn and experiment.

Action learning is particularly well suited for developing leaders to understand and solve complex strategic problems they would otherwise not be exposed to in the course of their daily jobs. A frequent focus, for instance, is helping functional leaders develop a

broader enterprise perspective in their approach to strategizing. Popular topical issues include driving change, innovation, & new product development. For these purposes, action learning is useful. However, it can miss the mark for business critical *results* achievement.

The action learning approach consists of six primary components – problem, group, questions, action, learning, & coach. It has a solid pedagogical foundation that is rooted in experiential learning theory (a topic that will be considered later). As in any intervention, the framing of the problem is a vitally important step as it gives direction to everything that follows. There are a few clear rules in setting up an action learning problems to increase its chances of success (Marquardt, 2004):

- Importance – The problem should be critical to the individual or organization posing the problem
- Urgency – There should be a clear time frame in which the problem needs to be clearly defined and actions taken
- No Existing Solution – It should be a true problem for which no answer exists and no single answer is seen as "right"
- Feasibility – It must be within the purview of one or more people in the group to understand the problem or its context
- Familiarity – Someone in the group should have familiarity with the problem (though not all as this can help introduce new questions)
- Significance – It is helpful if the problem is important to a one or more people in the group

- Learning Opportunity – It should be seen as a distinct learning opportunity by members of the group

- Group Authority – The group needs to have the authority to solve the problem and take action

What is conspicuously missing from this list is any discussion pertaining to the end state that will be achieved once the problem is solved – i.e. how will we know it's been successful? It's a significant issue because doing this means collaboratively defining these end states with those responsible for the critical objectives of the sponsoring organization before any significant work is done – not always an easy task. If this doesn't happen upfront, there's a good chance that a team will be chartered to work on the wrong problem. Action learning literature points to this as a common issue in the early stages of an action learning program (Marquardt, 2004; Raelin 1999), but few discuss the necessity of a rigorous definition around end state results as a solution to it (it may be implied, but it's not spelled out).

To illustrate the challenges of working on a problem with an unclear end goal, I offer the following action learning program from a past client. An Information Technology (IT) action learning group was chartered with devising strategies to increase the use of a system to catalog new technology initiatives. The problem - The IT division was having trouble tracking global activity. Many discussions ensued about change management strategies to improve adoption and eventually a plan was put in place. A lot of good learning followed as many members of the team had never worked on a change management project before and they enjoyed the new skills they were learning. After nine months, they doubled usage and were pleased with progress. Unfortunately the CIO

was not. Why? Because he still couldn't understand how his budget was being used globally and he had to guesstimate dollars again for the following year – something he did not want to have to do. To which one of the team members replied in private, "What did he want us to do, pull a rabbit out of a hat? The system is built for much more than budgetary data. It's complex. People aren't going to change behavior on a dime." This team member missed the point. They solved the wrong problem because they never clarified the exact end result that the CIO needed – one that happened to be critical to business operations. It was actually narrower than the problem they tried to solve. The CIO is implicated as well as he never helped them clarify what he really needed. Though they learned a lot in the process, they didn't solve the critical problem. As obvious as this sounds in retrospect, it's rarely so in practice. Groups throughout organizations everywhere engage in solving the wrong problems because end state results are not clarified. Many headaches could have been averted if the conversation around desired end states happens in a robust fashion, earlier.

As broad as it is, the action learning literature does not directly address this issue. One can surmise this is because action learning's primary focus is on the learning process, not problem or project formulation. In his article, *The Design of the Action Project in Work-Based Learning,* Raelin (1999) recognizes this issue and sets out to, "remedy the inattention heretofore paid to the action project in the work-based learning literature" (p. 12) Yet, he too fails to make the connection to end results, merely providing more specifics about types of projects.

Stretch Assignments – tough to structure, scale, and manage

Another type of leadership development intervention that is powerful, yet can often fail to bridge the results gap is stretch assignments. They have long been considered an important tool in developing leaders to deliver critical results. Companies such as GE, Eli Lilly, and Nokia among others have relied on them as an integral part of their leadership development mix (Colvin, 2008). As the word stretch implies, these assignments are intended to take leaders outside of their comfort zone in order to help them learn and grow in a new environment filled with new, and usually challenging, variables. They can be done at any level of an organization from general manager of a business unit down to associates in line functions. When structured well they are truly results-based leadership development initiatives. They drive a leader to get creative in order to survive and deliver results in a supportive environment.

Unfortunately, many stretch assignments are not structured well. Too often they are akin to throwing someone in a pool in order to teach them how to swim – i.e. if they don't drown we'll know they've got the requisite skills. Several authors have explored the topic of how to set up a new, potentially difficult, assignment for success (Watkins, 2003; Peters & Smith, 1998) and this author had firsthand experience with it as well. Table 1 reflects several important design criteria to increase the likelihood of success.

Design Criteria	Description
Support from the top	To be successful the leader needs support from at least a direct manager and hopefully another level above. Additionally alignment and collaboration with HR can go a long way to ensuring assignment is truly developmental in nature.
Clear objectives defined collaboratively	The sponsoring manager should be driving force in ensuring that the objectives of the assignment are clear to all involved. That said, the leader taking the assignment must be the driving force in actually clarifying them.
Results based (not duration based)	A major challenge in many stretch assignments is that they are duration based instead of results based. As a consequence success often means nothing more than "keeping the ship afloat" while on the job because it will be over in 18-24 months. Building on the point above it's important to make sure the objectives are grounded in measurable results.
Clear timelines	To be the most useful, the assignment should have a clear timeline for delivery of results that all can discuss and align on
Risks and mitigation strategies clarified upfront	Something new leaders are often not good at doing is identifying risks and mitigation strategies upfront for the objectives on the horizon. Building this skill and the subsequent ability to deal with breakdowns when they occur is one of the most important aspects of a stretch assignment
Clear development plan	To ensure the assignment is truly a developmental initiative, it's important to have a clear development plan upfront that is shared with relevant parties to provide proper support
Coordination with local leadership	Local leadership is often not on the same page as the sponsoring manager as to assignment or developmental objectives. Where appropriate it can be helpful to include them on focus and goals
Coaching and mentoring	The stretch assignment will obviously be difficult for a variety of reasons. Structured support along the way is imperative to helping the leader make progress on both assignment and developmental objectives.

Table 1

However, even if they're designed well, they still have some drawbacks. For the most part they're full time jobs that someone has to rotate in and out of. Furthermore, you're only building one leader at a time so scale and complexity are issues for a large high potential population. The process can be difficult to manage. Add that to the fact

that many of them are *not* designed well and you can often end up with something less than a true strategic leadership development process.

Rapid Results Projects – designed to bridge the results gap

In the early 1970's, after working with several clients on very focused results they needed to produce, Robert Schaffer and his partners at Robert H. Schaffer & Associates (RHSA) had the insight that a different sort of learning was unleashed during "can't-fail" projects. He describes it as a sort of "magic and high degree of creativity" that happens when the specific target is clear and failure has real and measurable consequences. He and his colleagues have subsequently spent the last thirty plus years developing and using a consulting process termed Rapid Results to harness this insight to help companies produce results and build capability (Schaffer & Ashkenas, 2005; Schaffer, 2002).

The process shares elements of both action learning and stretch assignments. First and foremost, all three recognize that given the complexity of business the most powerful learning happens on the court dealing with real issues. They all also acknowledge that leaders need a degree of support during the process as they'll be experimenting with new strategies and behaviors. While there are other similarities, these two are the most significant.

Rapid Results projects differ from action learning and stretch assignments on one primary dimension – an unrelenting focus on end-state measurable results (as was described by the 4 criteria of a RBI's above). This difference gives rise to several critical design considerations pertaining to timeframe and accountability. They tend to be short

in nature (3-4 months) so as to keep leaders and teams engaged and motivated. As well, there is usually one person accountable for the result (the Team Leader) so as remove any confusion about whose butt is on the line to deliver.

The nature of the results focus also means that the projects end up being considered more strategy execution than leadership development. This distinction has many logistical implications for these projects including: how they are framed, how they are supported, who gets involved & where budget comes from. This topic will be considered in the section on introducing RBI's into organizations.

Why do these short term results-based projects work? RHSA's research with thousands of managers who've been through the process have indicated that it tends to work because it releases what they call "zest factors" in those involved. These zest factors help to produce miracles in "must-do situations" and include:

- A sense of urgency – results needed quickly
- Success near and clear
- Personal accountability
- People collaborate – a new spirit
- Pride of accomplishment
- Fear of failure
- Exciting, novel, like a game
- Freedom to experiment and ignore red tape

(Schaffer & Ashkenas, 2005)

As a result of this work and research, Rapid Results projects are designed with seven defining characteristics (table 2):

	Characteristic	Description
1	Focuses on an important goal	The project focus must be something that is deemed important to those running the organization or unit involved
2	Produces a measureable stretch result	The result produced should be measurable in terms of impact to the critical objectives of the organization. For instance, "produce a high quality sales training program" is not a result that directly impacts the critical objectives of the organization. "Increase sales in product 'x' by 20% in the eastern region" is that kind of result.
3	Works in the short term	The result should be attainable in 3-4 months
4	Pinpoints clear accountability	The person on the line to deliver is clear – this is usually the team leader.
5	Drives experimentation	The nature of these projects is that they are results that have been difficult to achieve for a variety of reasons. Consequently, in order to be successful they must be set up to encourage and support experimentation through a thoughtful facilitative process.
6	Is planned and disciplined	The programs need to have structure. This is what can separate them from many stretch assignments. A specific group is brought together to deliver a specific result in a specific timeframe.
7	Makes learning a deliberate outcome	This is a key differentiator from other consulting interventions where learning is incidental and may or may not happen. In these projects learning is intentionally considered, codified and shared.

(Adapted from Schaffer & Askenas, 2005) Table 2

To illustrate how a Rapid Results project differs from an action learning project, let's consider how the IT project discussed above might change given what we know about Rapid Results projects. The primary difference pertains to number 2 above. In a Rapid Results project, the specific intended result of budget transparency would have been clearly vetted before any action was taken to address the problem. The goal, while still a stretch, would have been smaller than the one they tried to solve. Because of this,

the timeframe within which it would have been shorter and easier to predict. Those working on the issue would have had a clear target for success in the foreseeable future. Because the target and timeline would have been clear, and the result was something that would have directly impacted a critical objective – freeing up dollars for innovation - the project would have created "zest" in the team. In turn, this would have created different learning (outlined in the incidental learning section further in the paper).

This concept of zest is very compelling - and intuitive on some level. We've all had experiences where we we've done things we didn't know we were able to do – simply because failure was so unattractive to us. Accomplishments like the Apollo 13 team figuring out how to develop and document new procedures in 3 days instead of 3 months are remarkable. Yet at the same time, they're not totally surprising. Somehow human beings are able dig down and find clarity, focus, and creativity when we need it most. The next section will explore the concept of results-based learning in relation to learning theory to begin to understand why it works.

Why RBI's are Important to Leadership Development

RBI's produce different learning than both knowledge and action based interventions. With regards to the former it's more obvious; knowledge-based interventions take place outside of the context of real situations. But with regards to the latter there are differences as well. This section will explore four areas that distinguish results-based learning interventions from others.

They Clearly Situate Learning Inside of the Pursuit of End-State Results

Results-based learning is experiential in nature. In and of itself this doesn't tell us very much. The body of literature surrounding the connection between experience and learning is one of the largest in the adult education field. This is because it could be argued that all learning is experiential in nature. This creates problems of definition (Fenwick, 2000) and raises the question, "How is the experience in results-based learning different from the experience in other types of learning?"

A helpful place to begin to answer that question is by considering two definitions of experience put forth in the literature. One considers experience as a noun; which is to say it is a definable event that can be reflected upon and harvested for learning. Another considers it as verb and does not separate the experience from the learning (Yorks & Kasl, 2002). This is a phenomenological perspective which can be more accurately summed up as learning from *experiencing* rather than learning from experience. It argues that learning and experience cannot be separated as they are in a continual dance to define each other (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997.) The implications of this distinction go to the very core of epistemology, or how we know things, and have been the subject

of discussion for years in many fields including philosophy, psychology, and education among others (Dodd, 1994). While an in depth exploration of this distinction is beyond the scope of this paper, I will highlight a few key arguments to elucidate the nature of experience in results-based learning.

Dewey's Principles of Continuity and Interaction

Dewey was a pioneer in exploring how learning happens from experience. He argued that in order for learning to occur, an experience must exhibit the principles of (1) continuity and (2) interaction: "The principle of the continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies some way the quality of those which come after" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, p. 162). The logical conclusion of this statement is that the content and quality of learning is dependent upon where in time it occurs. An example might be that of an electronics engineering team chartered with developing a telephony product in the 1950's for Bell Labs. The product they develop would have been built on the shoulders of the products that came before it. In turn, their product would serve as the shoulders upon which the next generation would build their products. The same team working 40 years later would have learned different things – and built different products as a result of the idea of continuity of experience.

Dewey's second principle of learning from experience is interaction. This principle suggests that, "an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, p. 162). To continue with the engineering example above, the

principle of interaction would suggest that their learning is not only a result of where they are in time, but also their specific environment at that moment. For instance, they might have been having conversations with colleagues in another line of work whose comments sparked a new transistor idea. Had they not had that environmental interaction, they might not have had the same insight. The same team in a different set of circumstances would likely have learned different things and come to different conclusions.

Continuity and interaction help us understand how experiential learning is both temporally and situationally positioned. These concepts are important in helping distinguish results-based from knowledge-based learning, but not from action-based learning which is also temporally and situationally positioned "in context". We turn to constructivism to help us do this.

Constructivism and Making Meaning from Different Kinds of Results

Constructivism is a foundational concept that underlies many adult learning theories. It posits that people construct the reality in which they live primarily through a rational reflective process. As a result, knowledge is not an objective reality, but rather a shared set of meanings that an individual or group develops and holds (Candy, 1991). The process is ongoing as human beings continually seek and define meaning through experience.

The concept of meaning-making can help distinguish results-based from action-based learning. Each type of learning creates a different ground or situation. The implication of this difference is that it sets the stage for different meanings, problem structuring – and thus learning.

Action-based interventions are primarily concerned with *interim results* while RBI's are primarily concerned with *end-state results*. An example of an interim result might be to define a new sales management structure – a possible topic in an action-based learning program. An example of an end-state result might be to increase sales – a possible topic in a results-based learning program. One might argue that they're both focused on the same end result, to increase sales - which is true - but the intervening interim result in the first example changes the nature of the intervention because it's more prescriptive in nature. This, in turn, changes the nature of how the problem is viewed, structured, explored, discussed & addressed. It is, for example, possible to outline and implement a new sales management structure that does not increase sales. While related, defining a new sales management structure and increasing sales are different problems, around which a different set of meanings arise, especially having to do with the definition of success.

Theodore Levitt, professor emeritus at the Harvard Business School, illustrates the difference between interim and end-state results in his famous quote, "People don't want quarter inch drill bits they want quarter inch holes." Designing quarter inch drill bits and delivering quarter inch holes are so closely connected that people often see them as the same problem, when in fact they are not. The former is a focused on an interim result while the latter on an end-state result. One cannot say for sure that the drill bit actually delivered the hole unless one is accountable for the hole and not the bit.

They Engage Multiple Ways of Knowing

In addition to the situated nature of experiential learning Dewey posited, he was the first theorist to connect the process of learning to scientific inquiry in conceptualizing learning as, “a dialectic process of integrating experience and concepts, observations, and action” (Kolb, 1984, p.22). Piaget, Lewin, and Kolb also provide similar cyclic descriptions of learning from experience (Kolb, 1984). These theories have come to be known as pragmatic theories of experiential learning because the knowledge they produce is practical and communicable. They have been popular in the western world because they dovetail nicely with widely help epistemological assumptions about how we know and thus learn. However, critics have contended that this sort of knowing, while important, does not tell the whole story because it privileges rational knowledge that can be conceptualized and does not account for other types of phenomenological knowledge born from experience (Heron, 1992; Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

Jonah Lehrer in his book, *How We Decide* (2009), tells a story that captures the phenomenological view well. Michael Riley was a British soldier monitoring radar screens in the 1991 Iraq war. At 5:01 am one morning he noticed a radar blip on the screen that made him suspicious, but he couldn’t explain why. It was either a plane coming back to land back on an American ship or a missile targeted to hit it. He tried the radio, but got no response. However that didn’t tell him much as the planes often turned their radar off to avoid Iraqi antiaircraft missiles. After much consternation he fired a missile and shot it down - still unsure if he was saving a ship or killing two friendly pilots. It wasn’t until four hours later that he officially learned it was the former. An initial review of the tapes

determined that there was no way he could have known it was a missile. It was concluded a risky gamble – that luckily paid off.

Two years later, Gary Klein, a cognitive psychologist who consults for the Marine Corps took a closer look at the incident. Upon a thorough inspection of the tapes he discovered a distinction in blip patterns that had gone unnoticed. Planes showed up on a first radar sweep while, due to altitude, missiles showed up on the third sweep. Riley was evaluating the altitude of the blip even though he didn't consciously know he was doing it this. It was a subconscious instinct he had developed through experience. That phenomenological knowledge saved lives.

In this section we'll consider two types of knowing that can help explain why results-based learning is important – Heidegger's ontological knowing and Heron phenomenological ways of knowing.

Heidegger's Ontological Knowing

Many of our current conceptions about how we know things are rooted in epistemological theories dating back to the Classical period in Greek history and the European Renaissance (Dodd, 1994). The Renaissance ushered in the birth of modern science with theorists such as Bacon, Hobbs, Newton, Galileo, and Descartes. They contended that knowledge was born from reason and empirical demonstration rather than from divine forces that were unverifiable. This profound change fundamentally shifted how we understood the nature of knowledge and truth. They argued that the only true knowledge was knowledge that could be objectified and verified by the senses. Descartes had the greatest impact of these thinkers and his rationalistic perspective has

come to be known as Cartesianism. "Our primary legacy from…Cartesianism is a dualistic approach to scientific inquiry which assumes a fundamental pre-given reality which can be separated into parts and capable of being studied independently by observers who are isolated from the observed" (Dodd, 1994, p.12).

This epistemological perspective is so ingrained in our collective consciousness today that, even though it has significant implications on how and what we learn, it goes largely unquestioned and unchecked. To make the concept more tangible, consider an example germane to this paper – books on leadership. Open any of the current best sellers on the topic and you'll likely see a list of recommendations on how to lead. In essence, it is set of pre-given realities that have been experienced by someone who, through testing and thinking, identifies them, makes them object, and codifies them into knowledge to be shared with others. This Cartesian conception of knowledge creation serves as the foundation of rationalistic learning theories put forth by Dewey, Lewin, Piaget, & Kolb among others (Kolb, 1984). While helpful, this conception of knowledge is based on "know-*what*" or objective knowledge. It is missing the "know-*how*" or subjective situational knowledge. The two together form ontological knowledge – or knowledge that comes from being in the world - which posits that they cannot be separated. Descartes, it argues, created an unnatural dichotomy that does not accurately represent how the world really is.

Martin Heidegger put forth his theory of ontology in his landmark work *Being and Time* (1965). Distinct from Descartes' conception of knowledge, Heidegger asserts our primary way of knowing is not by going around as detached observers, collecting information on the bits and pieces found in objective space and processing it in our heads,

rather it comes from being involved with things (Dodd, 1994). He developed a new vocabulary to talk about this concept because current language is embedded with Cartesian duality. For instance, in our Cartesian world, human being means a person distinct in the world. Heidegger's term *Dasein* is meant to reference the same entity but instead adds context to create a word that means being-in-the-world. Dasein makes sense of the world and gains knowledge through *comportment,* a term he coined to mean dealing with the world (his definition is more complex than this, but this will suffice for the purposes of this paper). This experience of "being-in the-world" "dealing-with" the world also has a new vocabulary. Following are five elements of comportment through which knowledge is created.

1. **"Where in's"** – This is the context or environment in which activity is taking place
2. **"With which's"** – This is "equipment" that is being manipulated in the the activity
3. **"In order to's"** – This is what Dasien in comportment will produce
4. **"Toward which's"** – These are the interim results that will be achieved
5. **"For the sake of which's"** – These are the end-state results that will be achieved.

Heidegger is making the point that it only by experiencing these components as a whole that we gain knowledge. In the process of a results-based learning it might look something like the following. (1) In corporation "X"; (2) I'm going to use my business experience and current data I've collected; (3) in order to generate insights on the current possibilities for "X" in the Chinese market; (4) so that (towards which) I can produce a

market strategy for that market (5) For the sake of delivering "y" revenues by "z" time. Ontological knowledge is created by "dealing with" that whole process.

This idea points to a critical difference between action-based and results-based learning. Many action based learning programs do not consciously engage with all five of these areas – they engage with 1-4. In this way, according to an ontological perspective, participants in an action learning program cannot gain the knowledge pertaining to what it will actually take to *implement* the strategy. This isn't to say that the knowledge created is not extremely useful, it just doesn't go the final "ontological mile."

Heron's Phenomenological Ways of Knowing

Phenomenology is related to, but distinct from ontology. It is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view and presupposes ontological being-ness (Stanford, 2008). The phenomenological approach to experiential learning looks at experience as a verb. We can learn, according to this view, not only from what happened, but also from our experience of what happened. This becomes important in situations where we might not be able to form a clear picture of a concrete experience. The best we may be able to do is describe the feelings, but not what actually happened.

One theorist who takes a phenomenological approach to experiential learning is Heron (Yorks & Kasl, 2002). He has developed a four level model of how people gain knowledge (figure 2). He argues that knowing starts with a feeling before we can actually put it into words/image. This is the first level of his model called experiential knowing. The second level is presentational knowing; the knowledge we develop as we try to bring

our experience to life (through words, images, movement etc). The third level is propositional knowing; the knowledge we develop as we turn our experience into concepts. Lastly, practical knowing is the knowledge we develop regarding how to actually use the concepts we've conceived.

A difference between Heron's theories and more "practical" approaches to experiential learning, such as Kolb's referenced earlier, is that the practical theories consider knowledge to come from levels three and four of Heron's model. Kolb does not directly take into consideration levels one and two - attending to experiences before they're concrete or rational in nature. The experience of the experience is not directly referenced as valid data in Kolb's model.

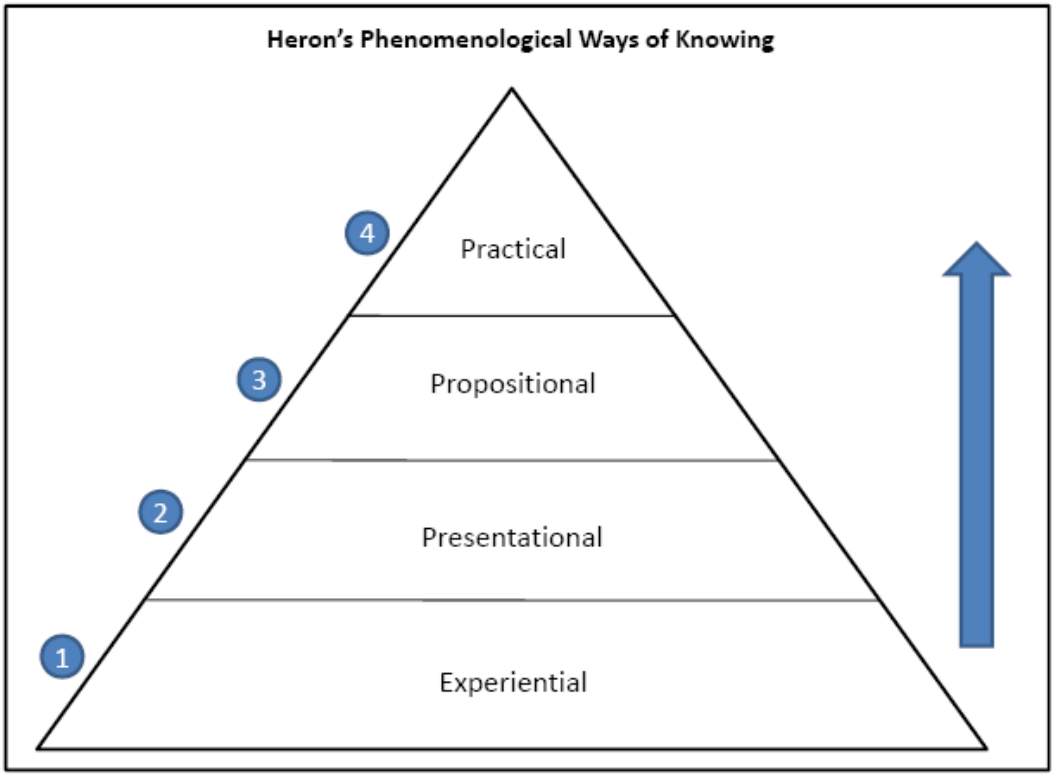

Figure 2

Recently I had an experience which demonstrated the value of Heron's model. I was a part of a seven person workgroup all focused on a common task. One of the members had less experience than the rest of the team. She regularly invalidated her perspective because she didn't feel she had as much knowledge as everyone else. If we were to consider her knowledge solely from the "practical" or "propositional" levels, she would have been right. However, with the help of Heron's model, we were able to point out that she had valuable experience to share from the levels of "how did she experience what was going on? & what have her experiences to date told her about the best approach?" This realization allowed her to feel more comfortable sharing things that weren't quite fully baked yet – which in turn helped her up the ladder towards practical knowing more quickly.

Heron's model is helpful in the understanding the power of RBI's because it accounts for where we "find" knowledge when we're up against a difficult situation. Consider the example of Apollo 13. The innovations needed to get the astronauts home safely did not exist at the level of propositional or practical knowledge when the disaster occurred. In order to succeed the mission control engineers had to "trust their gut" as to what would work and test it quickly to get it up the ladder to practical knowledge. Clearly-targeted tight-timeframe projects create a space that calls forth experiential knowing in ways that other projects cannot. It engages a way of knowing that might be easily discounted in a more drawn out planning-style intervention which privileges propositional and practical knowing.

They Overcome Issues of Learning Transfer

Learning transfer has long been an important consideration in workplace learning due to the implications on performance (Huczynski, 1978; Baldwin and Ford, 1989; Broad and Newstrom, 1992). Research has shown that, "as little as 10% of what is taught in training programs actually transfers to the job" (Cordeiro, 1997). There's no easy answer as to why this number is so low. Variables that impact it include relevancy, degree of program support, practice, & feedback to name a few.

The topic has also suffered from issues of definition which have made it difficult to define appropriate strategies to improve it. Laker (1990) has developed a useful framework which teases apart some important distinctions in learning transfer, creating a robust yardstick with which to measure it. He suggests that it changes along two dimensions – temporality and situational generalizability. For example, with regards to temporality, when has transfer occurred? Is it when the learner has used it successfully 1 time, 10 times, 100 times? With regards to situational generalizability, to which situations should the learning should be transferrable? Is it only a few tightly related to the learning program or multiple different scenarios? The answers aren't straightforward, but the framework (table 3) creates a context for a richer dialogue about learning transfer.

It outlines four dimensions. Transfer initiation refers to the initial application of new skills. Transfer maintenance refers to the application of skills over time. Near transfer refers to the application of skills to situations that are similar to training. Far transfer refers to the application of skills to situations that are different from training.

When we consider the third column in table 3, variables that affect the dimensions of learning transfer, we can see that, to a large extent, they're already built in to RBI's.

The learning starts on a real project which means that arriving at *transfer initiation* and *near transfer* is not a 2 step process of learning then implementing, it's a one step process with both of those occurring in the learning environment. *Far transfer* is also strongly supported by RBI's because the learning is principle centered as opposed to skill centered and thus inherently more transferable to a wider variety of situations in organizations.

Dimensions of Learning Transfer

Dimension	Description	Variables That Will Impact Transfer in Dimension *(positive relationships except where noted otherwise)*
Temporality		
Transfer Initiation	Initial application of new skills	1. Degree of Learner's initial understanding 2. Perception of rewards for applying learning 3. Degree of visible managerial and organizational support 4. Perception of self ability to apply new skills and behaviors 5. Opportunities to apply the learning quickly 6. Degree of enthusiasm and motivation generated in the learning during the learning 7. Degree of modeling in those around the learner back on the job
Transfer Maintenance	Application of skills over time	1. Learner's ability to modify original learning over time 2. Degree to which new skills are rewarded extrinsically 3. Degree to which new skills are rewarded intrinsically (e.g. by demonstrated mastery and achievement) 4. Degree of previous or intervening contradictory learning introduced (inverse relationship) 5. Degree to which new skills and behaviors lead to higher levels of performance 6. Degree to which others on the job support and encourage the maintenance of new skills and behavior
Generalizability		
Near Transfer	Application of skills to situations that are similar to training	1. Degree to which the learning environment mirrors the workplace 2. Specificity as to how the training will be applied to the job 3. Degree to which practice is encouraged for new skills and behaviors 4. Degree to which the procedural nature of the task is emphasized
Far Transfer	Application of skills to situations that are different from training	1. Degree to which the learners understand the underlying principles, concepts, and assumptions of the skills and behaviors learned. 2. Degree to which the learners practice in different contexts 3. Degree to which learners are able to discuss and apply learning to situations of their own choosing 4. Degree to which they get encouragement and support around applying skills and behaviors to new situations

Table 3

Finally, with regards to *transfer maintenance*, a significant driver of this sort of transfer is feedback that the learning is having an impact. This is the dimension of learning transfer that most separates results-based learning from other types. Because

plans are taken to end-state goals, learners can see the impact of their learning and efforts from start to finish. Related to ontological knowing discussed above, "dealing with" the entire process transfers learning the final step from know-*what* to know-*how*.

They Foster Incidental Learning in Ways that Other Interventions Cannot

Informal learning is learning that is primarily experiential and not institutionalized (Marsick & Watkins, 2006). It has been estimated that upwards of possibly 70% of all workplace learning happens in this manner. Because of this, significant attention has been paid to the subject over the last several decades.

Incidental learning is a subset of informal learning and has been defined by Marsick & Watkins as the unintentional byproduct of another activity (2006). Through this definition we can come to understand results-based learning as a form of structured incidental learning in that the primary focus is another activity (producing a result) and the learning comes in the pursuit of it. This definition, however, contains a seeming paradox. Can a structured experience produce unintentional learning? – i.e if the experience is planned and has development as an objective (even if secondary), wouldn't that mean the learning outcomes are also planned? The answer is yes on a categorical level, but no on a specific level; we may know that insights will be produced in a particular area, but not what those specific insights will be. This is true of all types of structured experiences that have incidental learning as an objective, not just results-based learning. For example, this idea holds true for action learning and simulations as well.

Where results-based learning differs from other types of structured experiences is in the categorical learning outcomes it is designed to provide which, consequently, lead

to different specific insights. RBI's provide specific insights in the following area in ways that other types of structured experiences cannot:

1. **What will really work…and what won't** – Until a learner is faced with having to produce an actual result (as opposed to planning to produce the result) he will not have the actual know-*how* to get it done no matter how much conceptual know-*what* has been produced.

2. **The true nature boundaries** – Organizational boundaries are erected in order to make organizational life more manageable (Ulrich, Kerr, & Ashkenas, 2002). However as time goes by, we can forget that they are merely social constructions and actually permeable/movable. Results-based learning creates an environment in which to experiment with challenging boundaries because the result is in the forefront, not a boundary-laden process.

3. **Self-concept regarding agency and capability to produce results** – As a learner moves through an RBI, she gains important insights around her skills and capabilities. She understands where she excels and where she has challenges in the course of actually delivering results.

No other type of structured, scalable leadership intervention can produce this sort of incidental learning. While RBI's may not always do this, their design is likely to bring about this sort of learning more often than others. The next section will consider how RBI's can be introduced in organizations.

Introducing RBI's Into Organizations

When Do They Make Sense?

The simple answer to this question is that they make sense when delivering results is the concept you need leaders to learn. As the discussion above has shown there is no substitute for direct experience. That said, it can be helpful to clarify the types of situations where RBI's make sense. Below in table 4 are three types of learning interventions discussed in this paper and the situations in which they can be most appropriate. It's worth noting that all three can be mixed and matched to create leadership development programs.

Type of Intervention	Areas where it's most applicable
Knowledge-Based	• New leaders who need grounding in basics • New research/topics • Best practice sharing
Action-Based	• Strategic thinking, planning exercises • Areas of exploration where results cannot yet be defined • Issues where problem definition itself is the content
Results-Based	• Issues where failure to deliver results has measurable consequences • Problems that have been tough to address for extended periods of time • When delivering results is the competency that needs to be developed

Table 4

What this table helps to convey is that the areas where RBI's are most applicable feel more like consulting interventions than leadership development interventions. You could imagine hiring an outside consulting firm to come in and help address these issues, as experts, rather than building up internal capacity to do so. This is what makes RBI's

more of a hybrid consulting/capacity building intervention than a straight leadership development exercise. This can lead to a lack of clarity as to who drives RBI's in organizations.

Who Drives The Process?

Because these types of interventions can straddle traditional conceptions of leader development and consulting, it's not immediately clear how they can be introduced into organizations. In this section we'll consider the topic from two different organizational perspectives: that of business leaders and the leadership development function. Their perspectives tend to differ along 3 dimensions – relationship to results, conception of value, and relationship to learning. I will consider how the groups vary along these dimensions and the implications for introducing RBI's into organizations.

Relationship to results is born from how these groups tend to think about the topic. Because of their charter in the organization, those in the leadership development function tend to think about interim results much more than end-state results. For example, they think about competencies and how to develop them more than the ultimate end state those competencies are targeted to achieve. This isn't to say those interim results (competences) weren't originally derived from a thoughtful consideration of end states; it's merely that once they've been derived, the interim results often take center stage. Because they spend less time intimately involved with the end state objectives of the organization, they must continually stay tuned-in to whether or not their efforts are actually helping produce the critical objectives of the organization. Similar to the discussion of Kirkpatrick and Philips above, it's a constant dance to maintain connection and relevance.

Business leaders have an easier time staying connected to end state results because that's their charter. While there are different perspectives between different types of business leaders - for example, line leaders tend to be focused on end state results in their business unit or division, while senior leaders may be focused on enterprise results – the focus is still on critical drivers of organizational survival.

These differences in relationship to results have implications for introducing RBI's into organizations. One could argue that it's tough to introduce them through the leadership development function because that's not where end state results live in organizations. This is why a common refrain heard from vendors offering performance improvement services to organizations is, "I try not to go through HR, but rather directly to the business to sell my services since they're more intimately connected to what needs to happen." They know they'll be able to get closer to the end state results through conversations with the business in most situations. However, this gap creates opportunities for creative and thoughtful leadership development professionals who can take a consultative mindset to creating results based interventions alongside the business.

Differing relationships to results creates differing conceptions of value amongst these groups as well. In my experience, the leadership development function's conception of value tends to be anchored in how much volume they will get for their dollars. For example, this might be measured in terms of hours, days, or number of programs they can produce. This perspective is driven by the fact that their mindset is often rooted in interim results. Because it's tough to link these results to end state results considerations are often relegated to measurement by volume.

Conversely, because business leaders' results are more closely tied to bottom line numbers, they more readily conceive of value in terms of how it will impact bottom-line results. If I told a business leader that it was going to cost $100K to help him deliver results and build leadership capacity in the process, his first reaction is less likely to be, "What would I get for that in terms of services?" and more likely, "What would I get for that in terms of impact to my problems?" If he's got a $50K problem, $100K would seem very steep. If he's got a $10MM problem, it would seem like a bargain.

This ingrained conception of value impacts what conversations each group finds themselves in. To a large degree, those in leadership development in many organizations are in the wrong conversation when they go down the path of volume for dollars. This can be another reason that conversations around RBI's do not go through the leadership development department. The best way to introduce these sorts of interventions is through business impact, a conversation business leaders are often better versed in. Framing thinking in terms of business impact is a development opportunity for many leadership development departments.

Finally, both groups have different relationships to learning as well. For those in leadership development it's it tends to be in the forefront when considering options, while it's often secondary to business leaders. The implications here are that if RBI's are conceived of and delivered without expert guidance from accomplished leadership development professionals, the chance that learning will be fully supported in the process is small. Without that guidance, RBI's run the risk of becoming mere fire drills that can do more harm than good.

The meta implication of these differences is that leadership development and business leaders need to work closely to ensure these programs have the greatest impact. This collaboration is needed more so with RBI's than any other type of experiential learning because the results have to be very relevant and real, with a supported learning process. As a hybrid consulting and leadership development process, they must be supported as both groups.

Limitations & Challenges of RBI's

Like all leadership interventions, RBI's have their limitations and challenges. Three worth noting relate to structuring and quality of learning.

As noted above, one limitation of RBI's is that they take more energy and thought on the part of organizations to structure given they're embedded in the business. While there is no shortage of critical business issues to build them into, the practical nature of doing this can be challenging. Leadership development practitioners and business leaders have tried-and-true ways of doing things and this process forces them to get out of their comfort zones.

A second related challenge is that if the program is not structured well learning will not be realized to the fullest extent. Because learning is a secondary outcome, it's easy to get swept under the rug. Those introducing these programs need to ensure they are diligent about creating the reflective processes to ensure learning can be deepened.

Third, RBI's can be stressful and as a result short circuit learning processes even if they are structured well. A group under heavy stress may be less inclined to get value from the reflective process than one that isn't. Having said that, while RBI's can always

run the risk of getting too stressful, one could argue that there is something important to be learned from that stress. This merely points to the fact that RBI's should be included as part of the leadership development mixes but not replace other methods in the process.

Conclusion

Strengthening leadership talent is a top priority in organizations across the globe. As challenges have gotten more complex, methods of leadership development have followed suit. While knowledge and action based interventions have been important elements to an effective development strategy for quite some time, this paper has made the case that a third type of intervention, results-based interventions (RBI's), are an important addition to these methods. Focused on helping leaders actually produce results "on the court," RBI's take leaders the final mile to provide support as they *deliver* against critical organizational objectives. While sharing characteristics with better known interventions such as action learning and stretch assignments, RBI's differ with regards to the kinds of results they focus on, and consequently, the design of the programs.

RHSA has been a pioneer in the field of RBI's over the last thirty years. They've developed a set of seven design criteria that outline how to run a Rapid Results project; an RBI with which they've had tremendous success. They've found a clear short term result, with clear accountability to be the driving factors for success.

Additionally, much learning theory exists to explain why RBI's are successful. Using learning literature we've seen how they situate the learning powerfully, engage multiple ways of knowing, overcome issues of learning transfer, and produce important incidental learning that other forms of learning cannot.

Finally, I've considered issues pertaining to when and how to introduce RBI's into organizations. They are most applicable when failure to deliver results has measurable consequences, problems have been tough to address for extended periods of time, and delivering results is the competency that needs to be developed. Because they are a hybrid consulting/leadership development intervention, to be most successful, they should be designed and delivered by both business leaders and leadership development professionals.

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