



Looking Forward to

Development

**Create valuable development programs for managers by using social learning in its most natural form—encouraging managers to learn from their own experiences and enabling connections with each other.**

**By Henry Mintzberg**

It's been a hectic morning, as usual. You're struggling to keep your head above water. And here comes an email from HR: Apparently, it's time you participated in another development program. Just what you need!

You think back on the last one: It was pleasant enough, especially the discussions with other managers in the halls. You even picked up some interesting ideas in the classroom. (What were they again?) Then you came back to a big pile of work, not to mention snickering colleagues. ("It must have been tough with all that great food.") Then a few days later, it was as though it never happened.



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### Wait a minute

Slow down. Stop. You're reading this article, and that's a start. You know as well as anyone that if you do as you've always done, you will always get what you always got.

So maybe it's time for a little re-framing. What if, by truly stepping away from the pressures, you could actually reduce them when you got back?

What if the learning in your next program were based, not on the experiences of other people (cases and theories), but on your own experience so that you wouldn't forget it?

And what if you went to that program, not as a lone wolf to be developed, but on behalf of your organization to make it a better place? Indeed, what if you were backed up in the program by a team of your own colleagues—eager to share your learning and partner with you in driving consequential changes?

Still not sure? Okay, what if the whole kit and caboodle were brought into your own workplace such that all this development happened in a way that enabled the group of you to take the initiative to reinvigorate your organization?

Does all this sound utopian? Well, read on, because we have been developing such practices successfully for 15 years in a family of programs for practicing managers. I'll let the managers speak for themselves through their own stories.

### This is the best management book I ever read!

Silke Lehnhardt came to our "International Masters in Practicing Management" (IMPM.org) as part of a team sent by Lufthansa. Picture her sitting with colleagues at one of our round tables in a flat classroom, so that they can go into a discussion at a moment's notice, without having to "break out." Together, they are spending about half the time of the program reflecting on

their own experiences and sharing their resulting insights with each other.

Each day starts with "morning reflections"—first, a few minutes to write thoughts in their "insight book," which is empty except for their name printed on it; then the sharing of these insights with each other around the table; and finally, a plenary, in a big circle, to discuss these ideas altogether, which sometimes runs for a full hour.

Lufthansa holds a yearly meeting to welcome the managers it will be sending to the IMPM. (The company has sent teams every year except one, since 1996.) At one of these meetings, Silke held up her insight book and declared: "This is the best management book I ever read!"

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**At one of these meetings, Silke held up her insight book and declared: "This is the best management book I ever read!" Shouldn't the best management book all managers ever read be the one written as a result of their own development?**

### It was great meeting myself!

It may make sense to base an MBA program for junior people on functions such as marketing, finance, or HR, so that they can learn more about business. But does it make sense to do so when the program is intended for practicing managers moving into general management? Why push

them back into the functional silos just when they are just coming out of them?

Accordingly, we organize our programs around the mindsets of managing: reflection—about managing self; analysis—about managing organizations; worldliness—about managing the context of organizations; collaboration—about managing relationships; and action—about managing change.

The first time we ran the program, at the end of the first module about reflecting on managing self, as everyone was going around saying, "It was great meeting you," Alan Whelan, a sales manager at BT, announced: "It was great meeting myself!"

Think of how much better managing can be when practiced by people who have truly met themselves. As Saul Alinsky wrote in his book *Rules for Radicals*, "Most people do not accumulate a body of experience... [They] go through life undergoing a series of happenings, which pass through their systems undigested. Happenings become experiences when they are digested, when they are reflected on..."

Alan, by the way, had a surprise when he got home from this and subsequent modules, as do many of the managers in this kind of development. The place did not fall apart in his absence. When you slow down, reflect, and take stock, and when you truly meet yourself, you can see past the pressures of managing and thus become able to function less frenetically and more effectively.

### You don't need to motivate your first-line employees.

We do field studies in our programs—kind of busmen's holidays. The managers visit each other's organizations, not to hear speeches or get the packaged tour, but to probe into some issue of concern to the company.

This worked so well in our original master's program that we incorporated



it into a second, shorter program, called the “Advanced Leadership Program” ([alp-imp.com](http://alp-imp.com)). The ALP sells tables, not chairs: companies send one or more teams of six managers, with a key company issue—for example, “How do we motivate our first-line employees?” (a passenger railroad) or “How do we understand and improve decentralization in our organization?” (a road-building company with regional businesses).

In three modules of five days each—spread over roughly six months—the managers work on these issues within and across their teams (the latter in a process we call “friendly consulting”). It combines the best of both ways to change an organization: an internal taskforce and external consultants. Each company team works on its issue with the advice of colleagues, who have no axe to grind.

The managers really get into this, in part because everyone has usually experienced every issue in one form or another. They bring their experience and expertise to bear on these issues and thus contribute to each other’s problem-solving as well as learning.

To get a sense of this, consider the result of the field study on the first issue mentioned previously. The friendly consultants bought tickets on that railroad, and rode its trains to meet those first-line employees. They also interviewed managers at various levels in the hierarchy. They returned to report: “You don’t need to motivate your first-line employees. They are plenty motivated. You should use them to further motivate your managers!”

This was obviously an insight for the railroad team, but no less so for the friendly consultants. When one was asked “Do you think the same thing is happening in your company?” she replied “Exactly!” Managers just don’t do field studies in their own companies.

One manager in the ALP commented: “I am amazed at the impact

that a group of individuals [in middle management] can have on an organization.” My colleagues and I were not amazed, not after working with many such teams. We have learned never to underestimate the potency of a group of middle managers committed to their organization as a living community.

### Why are you typing?

We call one of the managerial mindsets “worldly” rather than “global”

because we want the managers to come out more individually worldly rather than more cookie-cutter global. To be worldly means to be able to get inside the worlds of other people, profoundly, so that you come back with a deeper understanding of your own world.

A compelling experience in worldliness occurs in what we call the “managerial exchange.” Here the managers pair up and spend the better part of a week at each other’s workplace. The guest observes and explores what is

## Extending Management Development Into Social Development: Bringing Alive Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility gets a good deal of attention in business these days, but sometimes more lip service than action. We have seen it come to life in another of our programs, for managers in healthcare, called the “International Masters for Health Leadership” (IMHL; [www.mcgill.ca/imhl](http://www.mcgill.ca/imhl)), modeled after the IMPM.

For many of its people, healthcare is more than just work. It’s a calling. Accordingly, during the running of the IMHL, we have witnessed groups of the managers reaching out to concerns in their broader healthcare communities, sometimes bringing these back into the classroom for friendly consulting.

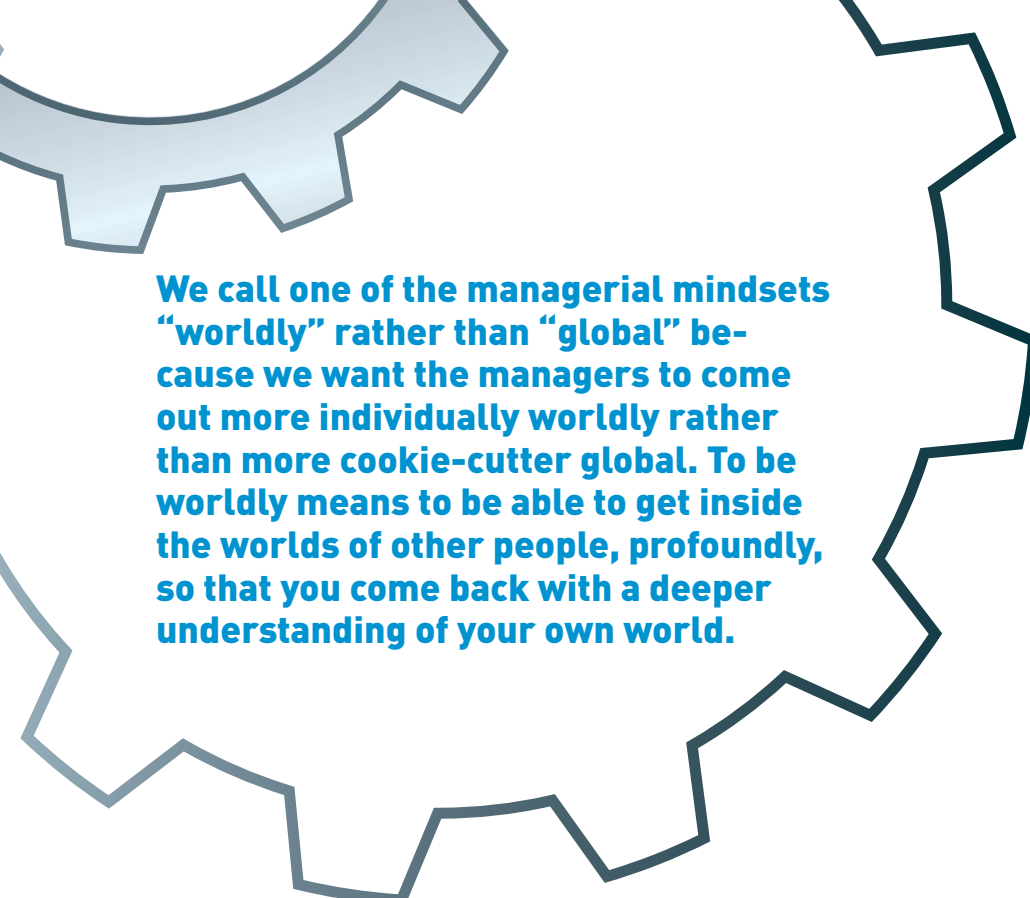
A major concern in Africa is capacity building of the healthcare management infrastructure. Two of the IMHL managers from Uganda, physicians in the World Health Organization and the government, held a conference in Kampala attended by 60 healthcare workers from seven African countries, to diffuse this natural learning philosophy on the African continent. Despite some expressed concerns about the people there being reserved, the conference was a great success indeed, it was difficult to stop discussion during the morning reflections.

When the province of Quebec established a major commission on healthcare, a Quebec group in the IMHL sought and was granted a two-hour slot to convey how they believed management should be practiced in healthcare. The three commissioners were fascinated and asked for more. So they were invited into the class for some friendly consulting.

A few weeks later, each joined one of the round tables to discuss issues such as “How do we promote greater collaboration across healthcare institutions?” The head of the commission called after their report was issued to say how influential this activity had been on their recommendations.

This can happen in the business world too. Healthy organizations of all kinds take their social responsibility seriously and gain significant benefits in return. Their engaged managers appreciate how much their own organization depends on constructive engagement with the communities around it for its sustained success, so they can look forward to social development as a natural part of their own development.





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going on and provides reactions and advice to her host. The managers love this experience because it is a chance to get deeper into the working world of another manager.

The first managerial exchange took place when Mayur Vova, an entrepreneur from Puna, India, visited Françoise LeGoff on the Africa desk of the Red Cross Federation in Geneva, Switzerland. At the opening reception of the next module a few days later, the two of them could hardly restrain their enthusiasm: They had to tell me the whole story at the door.

For example, early on, Mayur saw Françoise working on her PC and asked “Why are you typing? Can’t a secretary do that?” This was one way to learn the difference between staffing in India and in Switzerland—a first step toward worldly wisdom.

On the last day, Mayur proposed to Françoise that he would be happy to meet with any of her staff. They all lined up, secretaries included, to convey through him their impressions of her management style. Better than a 360! “He was like a mirror for me,” Françoise reported, although it was not always easy. The following Monday, two of Françoise’s assistants came in with specific proposals for change.

### **Time for *Impact* teams back at work**

Like many other people in development, we had been trying to manage “impact” in our programs for a long time, urging the participating managers to bring their learning back to work for teaching and for changing, diffusing their learning to others, and driving change in their organizations.

We have had successes. For example, some managers held debriefs for their staff to expose them to what they learned at each module, another installed a round table on the floor of the factory he manages in Mexico City so that he and his team could reflect on problems as they arose.

But impact in management development has to go a lot farther. So now, with the help of company representatives involved in the IMPM from Lufthansa and Rio Tinto, we have come up with a new idea: “*Impact* teams.” It may well represent a breakthrough in management and organization development.

Each manager in the program is asked to designate a team of colleagues who do the program with him virtually, both to anchor the learning and to pursue its consequences. This *Impact* team is briefed on the

learning after each module; it welcomes the guests on the managerial exchange and field studies; and together with the participating manager, it promotes changes in the organization as a result of this learning.

In effect, a group with whom the participating manager works every day does the program as a kind of *pact* with him. Instead of being isolated upon return, as is so often the case in development programs, the manager is welcomed by colleagues enthusiastic to share the learning experience. This also leverages the activity: For every person on the program, five or more can be developed back home.

### **“Making things go” instead of “seeing how things go”**

One day, we woke up to discover that our whole approach of social learning had been carried to its natural conclusion by a middle manager acting on his own.

Phil called. He’s my stepson and at the time, director of engineering in the Montreal operation of a high-technology company. Some of his engineers had become managers after their programming work had been outsourced to Eastern Europe, he said, and they were struggling. “What should I do?” Phil asked. “And, by the way, I have no budget!”

Get them around a table periodically, I suggested, in a quiet atmosphere where they can reflect on their concerns and share their experiences in dealing with those concerns.

Phil took this up with a vengeance. He met with his own managers every second week or so, for about 75 minutes at lunch. It had to be fun, he said, or they wouldn’t keep coming back. They did, for two years. Soon, Phil had another group of peer managers on site, and then a third, spread across the company on conference calls, while members of these groups also started groups of their own.



When I showed Phil our course materials in loose-leaf binders, he developed topics to drive each of the sessions, ranging from negotiating skills to figuring out the balance sheet. They did brief reflections at the start of every session, too, and even used field studies: In one session, they all went into the hall to interview people about the company's culture. The key for Phil was to take these discussions into organization development, with the groups pursuing the implication of their learning for changes in the company.

As a consequence of this success, we incorporated CoachingOurselves.com to enable managers elsewhere to take responsibility for their own development. Thousands of managers are now enrolled all over the world in companies such as Fujitsu and Cathay Pacific.

Groups of five to seven managers, formed inside their own organization, download various topics written by well-known authors. Sixty are now available, such as "Silos and Slabs in Organizations," "Developing Our Organization as a Community," and "High Performance Teams."

Each group discusses the topic and pursues its implication in an informal setting; for example, over lunch for about 90 minutes every couple of weeks. There is no faculty present, no one is facilitator, and there is no formal coach—just the small groups of managers learning from each other and coming up with ways to improve their practice and their organization. Think of CoachingOurselves as carrying the legacy of General Electric's "Work-Out" program to small teams all over the company.

Phil chatted recently with a manager who was coordinating a new CoachingOurselves group in a small company. In response to "How's it going?" she replied that she would "see how things go" in the next couple of sessions. This was not the response Phil was getting from the other

companies, so he replied: "Coaching Ourselves or any other development program is not about 'seeing how things go.' When you call a crisis meeting you do not 'see how things go.' You make them go. As managers in CoachingOurselves, you have little choice but to take responsibility for your own development and results."

Phil's words from practice reinforce the central message from our own experience in development—namely, that there is nothing quite so potent or so natural as engaged managers committed to developing themselves and their organization.

### The story of these stories

What can we draw from all this? These stories tell the story of how, with some basic reframing, development can become a compelling experience of learning with impact:

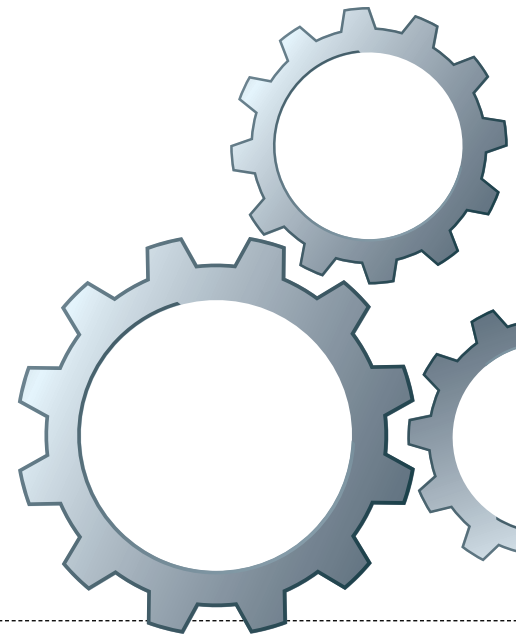
- Development works best as a form of natural social learning, in small groups that provide meaning to managers' experiences.
- Development has to enable managers to become seriously reflective in the context of taking action.
- Companies and other organizations function most effectively as communities of human beings; development programs should be designed to enhance this.
- Middle managers are key to this: Development can build their confidence and commitment alongside their capabilities, especially in being able to grow strategies from the middle out.

Put all this together, and development becomes something to which managers as well as their organizations can look forward.

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