



Building Executive Performance

SMU's Steve Wyatt explains how SMU supports Executive Development

As Chief Learning Officers partner more closely with business units, they are seeking to directly enhance on-the-job performance of the executives participating in development programmes.

Learning and development professionals spend hours discussing what is the right content to include in any executive programme. Undoubtedly, the question is important; there is limited time spent in a programme, many options for content, and the choices are critical to the competences the executives acquire. To illustrate: what does the marketing team need to know to be customer focused? How should new country managers write strategy plans? These, however, are content-based questions. Often what business unit leaders want to know is where the next \$500 million of incremental growth will come from, or if a 'high potential' can now be deployed to lead a critical part of the business. While such questions also include a content dimension, they also ask the question of achieved performance.

At Singapore Management University (SMU), in addition to our executive education courses, we also support clients to address these performance-oriented questions. We craft integrated learning journeys that achieve positive behaviour, what we term Executive Development.

Executives learn differently. We know that lectures and exams may work well with undergraduates, and that analysis and decision-making via case study work well with MBA students who are developing their understanding of business context.

But what about executives?

Executives already possess essential knowledge and intimately understand the business context including industries and markets. These executives are busy and have limited time to prepare. They are also learning via their company's internal talent management process and therefore are not seeking an external qualification that facilitates job-hopping. Executives, therefore, want to know how a learning programme delivers content that is directly relevant to their context and how the experience will enhance performance.

To that end, an SMU Executive Development learning journey employs four principles that reflect the needs of executive learners.

First, and perhaps most importantly, executive programmes need to address motivation at the outset. Rushing headfirst into content discussions without addressing the motivation may seem like good time

management, but is poor process management. Executives are stretched in numerous directions simultaneously and the development programme tugs in another. Good programmes need to foster motivation by emphasising the programme's relevance to their context, through customisation of content and design.

Closely related to motivation is the preference for experiential learning. We use the doctrine "Hear, See, Do – Debrief" to define an integrated experience. Herein lies an opportunity to improve performance-based return on the investment in executive training. To illustrate, an experiential learning module might be designed around a strategically important issue, giving contextual relevance and insightful outputs that the business can enact.

Third, we need to pace the rate of development, typically a journey of time-efficient 'bite-sized' modules (in-person or virtual), with opportunities between modules for application, reflection and repetition. Such programme design maximises the opportunity for executives to ask questions of one another and benefit from the on-call support of skilled facilitator-coaches. The design also encourages building on the insights from one module with the learning from the next, building up a more robust understanding of the complexities, trade-offs and tensions that exist.

Finally, executives learn best when their executive journey heightens self-awareness and personal reflection. Structured, periodic feedback from peers, and observations from the facilitator-coaches, provide insight and help executives track their effectiveness as leaders and team members. A multi-step development journey that emphasises experiential application provides context and insight on the participant that personal leadership coaches struggle to access otherwise.

Thus the design of a learning journey that addresses the performance improvement objectives of the participants is significantly different to a design that focuses solely on the content. It needs to directly address motivation, context, experiential-application, self-awareness and personal development.

SMU provides executive education courses and integrated executive development learning journeys. With over 330 faculty members focusing on the issues of business and management in Asia, we match depth and breadth of content with deep customisation of learning journey design, enhancing the performance of individuals and teams.

SMU EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

SMU Executive Development enables executives to be "Future Ready-Now", equipping them with the knowledge, skills and confidence that managers and leaders operating in Asia and globally require today and will be increasingly relevant tomorrow.

Be empowered to make a difference. Be Future Ready-Now.