

Transforming Leadership Performance - Breaking Comfort-Zone Barriers

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Abstract

The study assess if specific training conferred to remove blind spots in order for becoming aware of their respective comfort zones can improve leadership effectiveness. A questionnaire covering the five common parameters that gravitates leaders toward comfort zone operations were formulated namely a) routine and fixed ways to do things, b) avoidance of rapid change, c) territorial and silo operations, d) avoid exploring new challenges and e) avoiding high expectations. Two groups containing 33 top managers and 250 middle managers of a leading multi-national company in Malaysia were provided with the questionnaires. The leaders were evaluated on their current thinking, perception and practices in all these five areas. In both groups the training significantly showed improvement in terms of the reduction in the comfort zone seen in the five attributes. However the intervention showed a more significant effect in the middle management compared to the top management group for all of the five aspects. The intervention was found to be effective for three of the five aspects for the top management. The aspects are willing to move away from routine and fixed way of doing things, exploring new challenges and taking initiatives to meet higher expectations, however all five aspects were found to have effective improvements for the middle management groups. The study conclusively shows that leadership training has to be specifically focused to evaluate fixed outcomes such as the movement out of comfort zones.

Key words: *comfort zone, transformative leadership, silo and territorial, rapid change, Routine work.*

Introduction

Leadership has been considered as one of the key attributes to determine organisational commitment (Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982) and is considered an important ingredient for organisational and business success (Avolio, 2002).

Leadership quality and attributes varies in each person and generally is evaluated by a) the ability to achieve the desired results or b) the ability to influence others to follow towards a certain cause. Great leaders must be able to inspire others to follow

them (Nicole Fallon, 2016). Highly committed leaders, good in coordinating, collecting processed information, instil ownership (Cohen, Chang & Ledford, 1997; Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001), consult team members, garner inputs and facilitate decision making process (Burke 2006) will naturally empower followers. However in reverse an autocratic leader or poor involvement leader will deter team members from actively participating or communicating in the team activities (Bolman and Deal, 1991; Steward and Manz, 1995). It cannot be therefore emphasised the importance of the need to generate transformational leaders who can then be the social architects, creating a shared meaning and purpose of existence for both the organisation and employees. They establish greater clarity of current norms and values that propels performance (Northhouse, 2015).

Leadership performance was shown to increase with efforts taken to transform attitudes, beliefs and values rather than impose towards gaining compliance (Bass, 1985, 1990). Understanding the team member's expectations, beliefs, values and their potential towards both organisation and employees growth is vital towards instituting transformation efforts. It is critical that leaders who desire to transform the employees, must ensure that the employees are motivated to challenge current practises and work towards improving it. The leaders must be able to persuade and inspire employees to contribute their effort to achieve given goals rather than just convince them of the importance of organisation's goal (Ng, 2016).

Excellent leadership performance is an integrated approach to deliver the desired results. It is a combined contribution of leaders leading the subordinates towards delivering continuous improving value to customers and stakeholders, organisational sustainability, organisation learning, improvement of overall organisation and personal learning. Bass (2008) suggested that individual and collective performance of leaders happens when leaders care, respect and focus on employees' development. Employees are allowed to challenge current practises to uncover new solutions or ideas; motivate them by raising the bar of expectation, and finally influence them with their charisma and attitude.

1.1 Why leaders fail?

While having enough knowledge and experience upon resuming leadership positions, many leaders fail to deliver the expected results, sustain their own success and preserve the loyalty of followership which result in causing successful organisations to reach a failure state. Nicole Fallon (2014) in his article Leadership Failure identified five stumbling blocks for bosses which highlighted the main reasons for leadership failures, i.e. over or under confidence of leaders feeling of know all or unsure of themselves, approaching leadership with the wrong expectation, lack of right skill set training, ignoring the importance of relationship building and failing to listen to subordinates thinking that they know all. Leadership

failure is also due to shift in focus to maintain perfection, poor communication to hide leader's confusion and uncertainty, avoid taking risk out of fear of failure, ethic slip and poor self- management (Mark Sanbarn, 2015). On another hand Kottler (1995, 2002) listed 8 critical reasons of leadership failures in the areas of establishing a sense of urgency, creating a powerful guiding coalition, having the lack of vision, under communicating the vision, failing to remove obstacles to the new vision, planning poorly, focusing on short term wins, declaring victory in early stage and finally not anchoring changes with corporate culture.

Recent findings also emphasized that failure of leaders is attributed to the acceptance and adjustment which leads to poor leadership performance (Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Chee, 2014). Failure in the preparation for execution has been shown to lead to organisational success (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Mike Myatt (2015) highlight a profound insight referring to Marissa Mayor's case study in poor leadership that leader can be very skilful at challenging the thoughts and opinions of others but may be incapable to challenge their own thinking patterns and thereby overlook the possibility of learning and unlearning.

The above reasons for leadership performance failure are not an encompassing one but become the basis for most organisations' failures. The possible underlying obstacle subtle enough not to be detected but gross enough to cause major leadership performance failures is the trap called the Comfort Zone .

What is comfort zone?

The idea of the comfort zone traces back to 1908 where a classic experiment in psychology (Yerkes and Dodson, 1908), showed that a state of relative comfort is needed to create a steady level of performance. Luckner and Nadler (1997) developed the basic premise of comfort zone model, who claimed that, "Through involvement in experiences that are beyond one's comfort zone, individuals are forced to move into an area that feels uncomfortable and unfamiliar called the groan zone. By overcoming these anxious feelings and thoughts of self-doubt while simultaneously sampling success, individuals move from the groan zone to the growth zone. Brown describes it as "Where our uncertainty, scarcity and vulnerability are minimized — where we believe we'll have access to enough love, food, talent, time, admiration. Where we feel we have some control."

Cambridge Dictionary defines comfort zone as "a situation in which you feel comfortable and in which your ability and determination are not being tested. Psychologist and behaviorists describes comfort zone as a behavioral state within which a person operates in an anxiety-neutral condition, using a limited set of behaviors to deliver a steady level of performance, usually without a sense of risk. This implies that comfort zone remains as no change in the 'anxiety' of an

individual, the level of performance will remain constant. Vice versa, if there is a change in the level of 'anxiety' than performance level will result-either upwards or downwards.

Figure 1 illustrate the impact of increase in anxiety towards performance improvement due to ability to disengage individual from being in comfort zone and move to higher performance level called Optimal Performance Zone. Further increase in anxiety can tip the individual into the Danger Zone and subsequently performance deterioration occurs as highlighted by Yerkes and Dodson. Paanicucci (2007) having the similar discovery named the Optimal Performance Zone as Growth/Learning Zone and Danger Zone as Panic Zone.

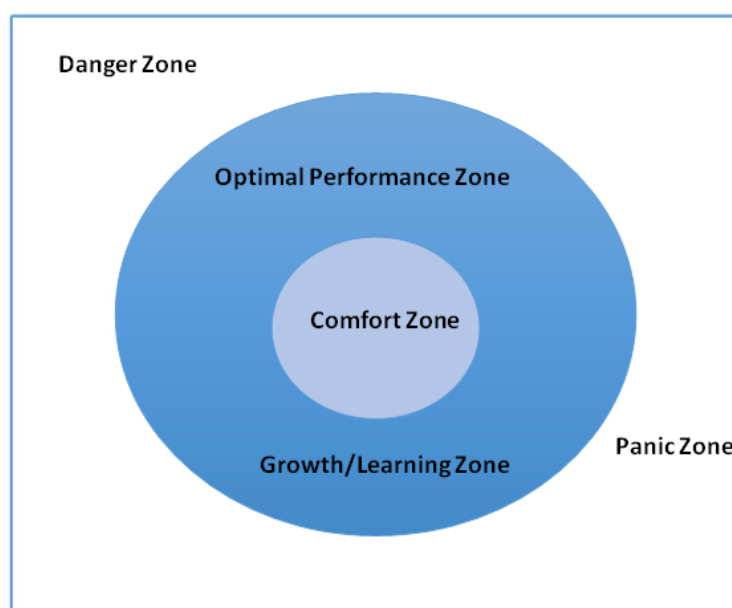


Figure 1: Comfort Zone Model (combination of Yerkes and Dodson (1908) and Paanicucci (2007))

Having the understanding of the nature of comfort zone as one of performance improvement barrier, this study will concentrate on how to overcome or diffuse five common contributors that creates, develops and solidifies the comfort zone experienced by leaders. The five contributors that this study will focus are:

1. Routine and fixed ways to do things.
2. Avoidance of rapid change.
3. Territorial and silo operations.
4. Avoid exploring new challenges.
5. Avoiding high expectations.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to assess whether leadership comfort zone barriers can be overcome by instituting specific training intervention that can improve leadership effectiveness as well as compare the effectiveness of the intervention between the top and middle management.

Method and Interventions

Questionnaire

A questionnaire covering the five common parameters that gravitates leaders toward comfort-zone operations were formulated namely a) routine and fixed ways to do things (Feldman (2000), b) avoidance of rapid change (Kotter 2012), c) territorial and silo operations (Burge, 1993), d) avoid exploring new challenges (Durban 2004) and e) avoiding high expectations (Shilpa, 2016).

We created these questions based on the 5 areas identified to denote a comfort zone as previously highlighted.

Research participants

Two groups containing 33 top managers and 250 middle managers of a leading multi-national company in Malaysia were provided with the questionnaire. The leaders were evaluated on their current thinking, perception and practises in all these five areas.

Training interventions

A 3-day training programme was deployed to all 33 Top Management leaders and 250 Middle Management leaders in batches of 30. The groups were again subjected to three day training program with an interval of two months in between them. Their receptive performance was evaluated after a period of six months in relation the changes and improvements made in all the five areas.

Upon completion of training sessions, leaders were given projects to test their ability for resource optimisation, enhance current best practises and operating procedures as well as optimize current performance.

During the training programmes, leaders were taught to identify the blind-spots that prevent them from being able to see the areas that require them to change. The training included the identification and application of techniques to overcome the blind spots.

In order to break the fire wall of territorial and silo operations, leaders from various departments who are relevant to the job scope and inter-connected to produce the results for the organization were given joint projects towards achieving a shared key performance index (KPI).

To overcome initial negative psychological reactions towards high expectations, we avoided using terminologies such as high goals, stretch KPI, high potential goals, quantum leap jump targets etc. Such terminologies generally create fear, induce high self-defence mechanisms and become a barrier to achieve real potential results. Instead, the training heightened the level of the leaders’ concern and consciousness to contribute towards the organisation’s growth by involving them in lab sessions. The lab sessions were carried out to establish the best effort and action that the leaders could be able to initiate at the current leadership capacity. Leaders were asked to explore to answer and provide solutions to the questions, “Are you giving your best in your current role?” and “What is your best action and effort that can improve current performance and bring the organisation to the next height than can make you feel proud of?”

The procedure of the training intervention is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Intervention sequence, details and duration

Month	Intervention
One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre programme evaluation • 3 days Contextualise Leadership Execution module 1 workshop.
Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification and application of techniques to overcome the blind spots. • Projects to test their ability for resource optimisation and enhance current best practises and operating procedures
Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lab session to improve implementation and improve performance.
Four	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 days Contextualise Leadership Execution module 2 workshop. • Project to optimize performance. • Initiating cross divisional collective KPIs by co-creation process.
Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lab session to improve implementation and improve performance.
Six	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post programme evaluation on performance improvement and compilation of performance improvement evidences

Results

Improvement analysis

The following section presents the improvement analysis of the results of improvement analysis between top and middle management groups.

Willing to move away from routine and fixed way of doing things

Figure 2 presents the improvement analysis for willingness to move away from routine and fixed way of doing things.

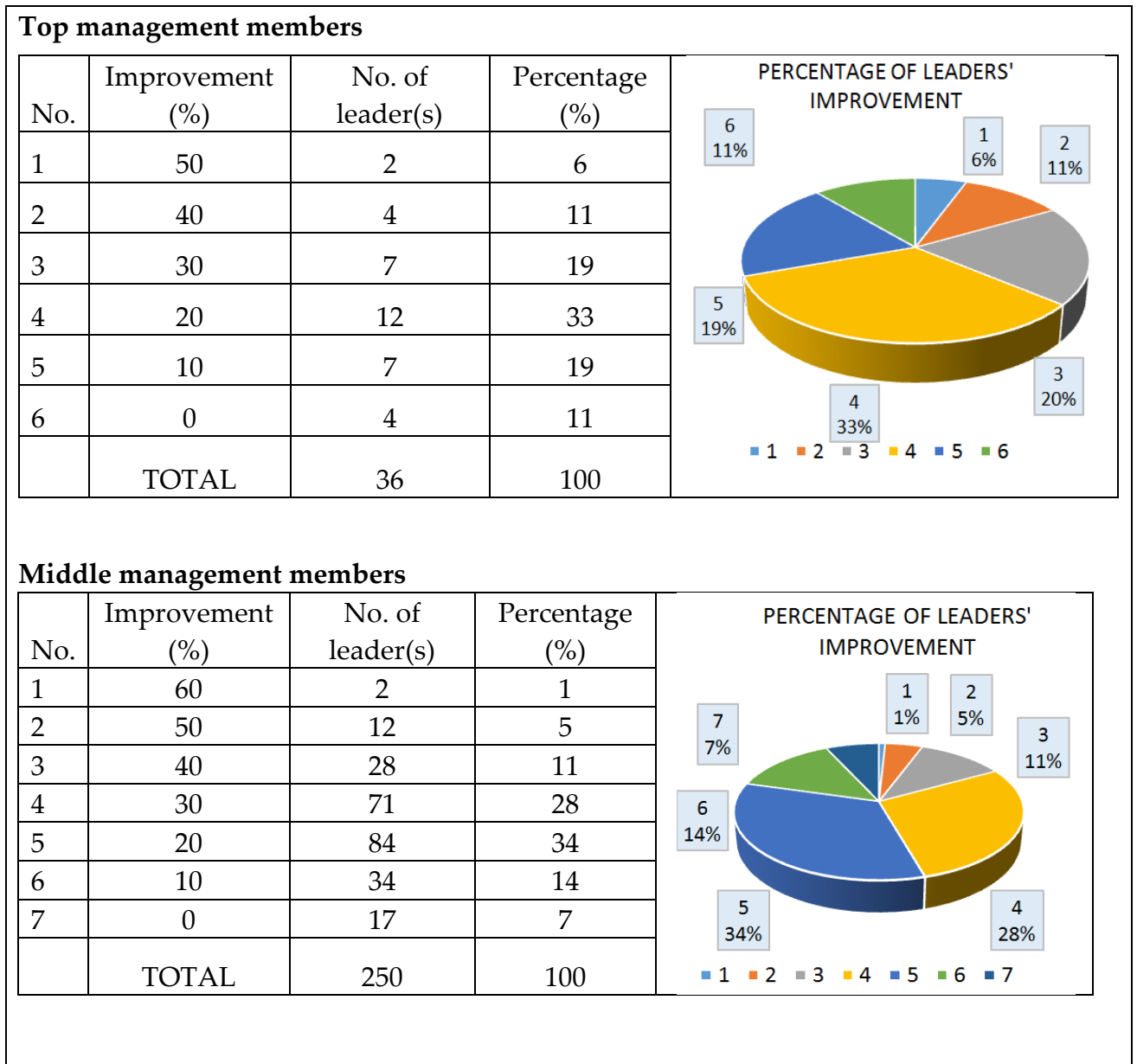


Figure 2: Effect of training on participants towards the willingness to move away from routine and fixed way of doing things

Top Management Leaders

As seen in Figure 2, leaders from the top management team by engaging them on projects involving resource optimisation, increased the willingness of leaders to come out from their comfort zone of routine work. 33% of the leaders recorded 20% increase in their leadership performance towards this effort. 19% of the leaders experienced 30% increase while 11% and 6% leaders recorded the highest improvement percentage of 40% and 50% respectively. Another 19% only improved 10% in this area. At the same time, 11% of them did not improve at all before and after the intervention.

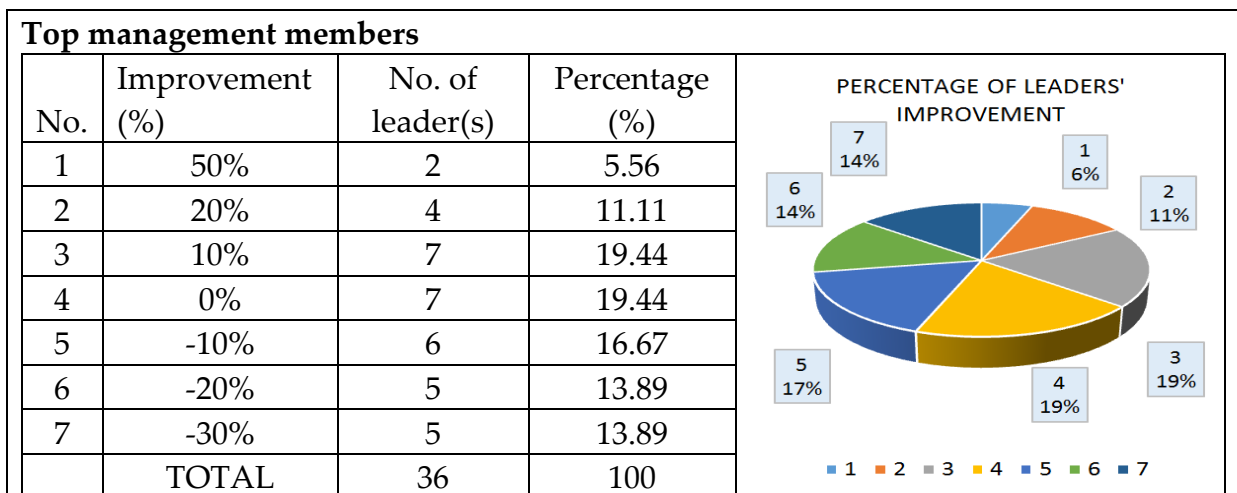
Post intervention leadership attributes improvements highlights that 13% of top management leaders began to spend more time discussing issues with staff members as well as provide clear objectives. 4% of the members stated they did not get agitated as before when dealing with their subordinate’s shortcomings or hearing superior’s comment on themselves.

Middle Management leaders

Leaders from the middle management group generally showed a good improvement towards willingness to move away from routine work. Among them, 34% leaders improved by 20%, 28% and 11% recorded 30% and 40% of improvement. Besides that, 5% of leaders improved by 50% and 1% of them showed the highest score of 60% improvement. Only 7% of the leaders did not show any changes in this area. A total of 13% of leaders in this group began to get feedback from subordinates on regular basis. Another 13% reported that they were spending more time to discuss issues and clarify objectives with subordinates (Refer Figure 2).

4.1.2 Embracing Rapid Change.

Figure 3 presents improvement analysis of the effect of training on the two groups of participants towards embracing rapid change.



Middle management members

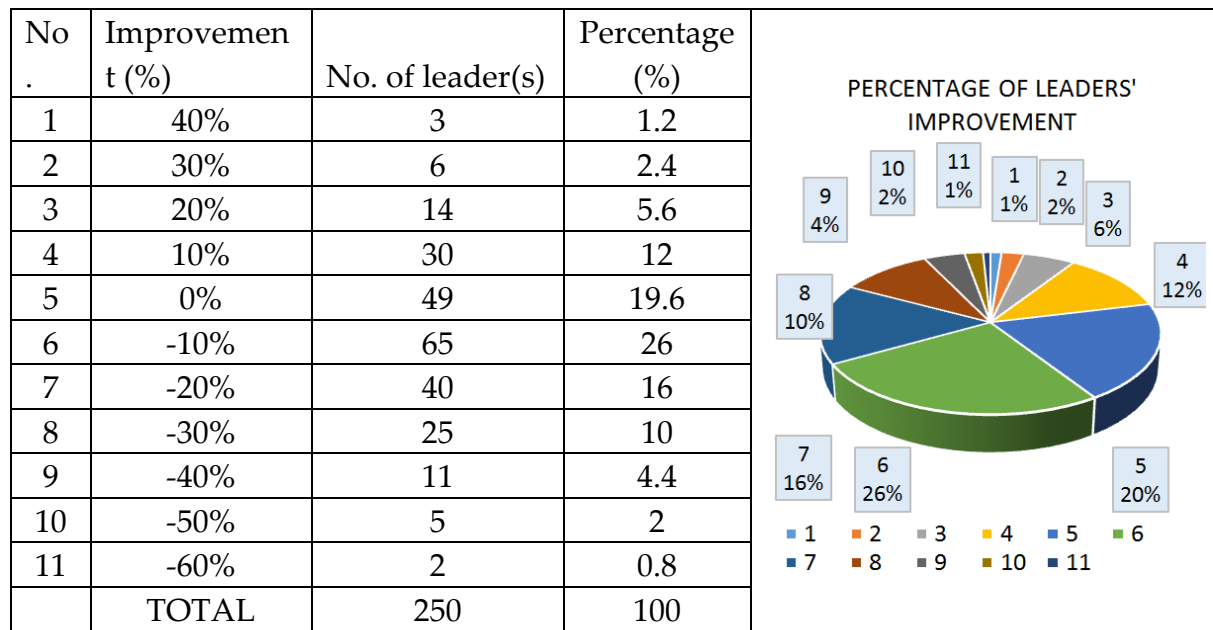


Figure 3: Effect of training on participants towards embracing rapid change

Top Management Leaders

The data in Figure 3 shows that effort to engage leaders towards rapid change has provided both positive and negative outcomes. The results provide evidence of a “double edge sword” effect where the intervention resulted in opposite outcomes. Only 6% and 11% improved by 50% and 20% respectively. Besides that 19% of leaders showed respectively 10% and 0 % improvement.

The intervention showed a reverse effect as evidenced by 17% of leaders towards 10% deterioration of their ability to embrace rapid change prior to the intervention, 14% of them experience 20% deterioration and another 14% of them experienced 30% deterioration respectively.

Middle Management Team

Embracing rapid change was not encouraging in the middle management leaders. Only 12% and 6% showed a 10% and 20% improvement respectively. There was only 2% and 1% of leaders who recorded the highest improvement scores of 30% and 40% respectively. However another 20% of leaders did not show any changes in their pre and post-intervention scores.

A total of 26% of leaders in this group showed resistance towards embracing rapid change as evidence by their drop in their scores. Besides that, 16% and 10% of

leaders dropped to 20% and 10% respectively. A marked drop of 50% and 60% were seen in only 2% and 1% respectively.

Non-Territorial and Silo-Operation.

Figure 4 presents the improvement analysis for reducing the tendency of being territorial and operating in silo manner.

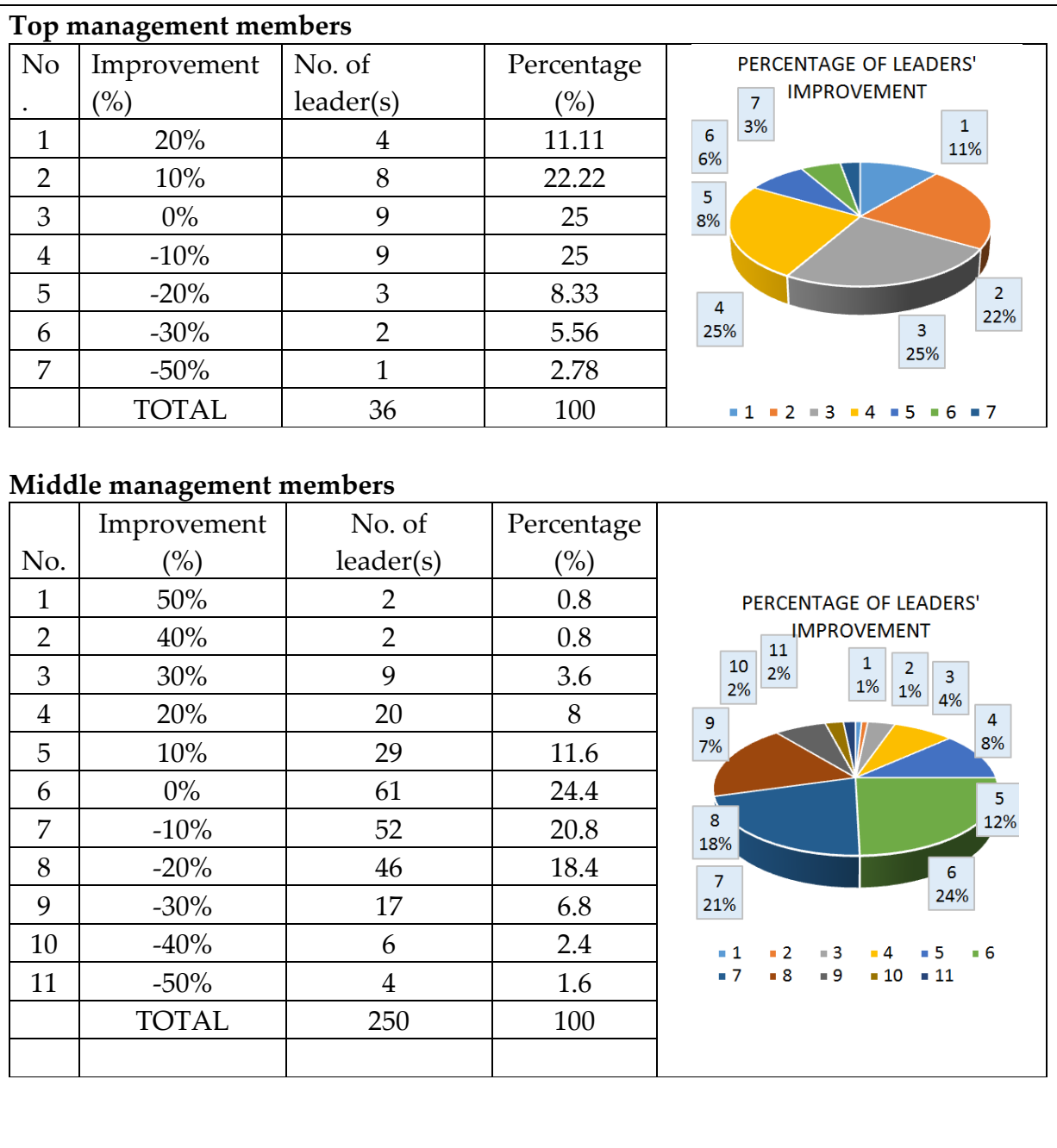


Figure 4: Effect of training on participants towards reducing the tendency of being territorial and operating in silo manner

Top Management Leaders

The Figure 4 indicates that the effort to work in cross-functional projects have helped certain leaders to break out from their comfort zones. A total of 22% and 11 % of the top leaders improved by 10% and 20% respectively towards being non-territorial and silo operational. Another 25% of them did not record any changes. At the same time, the intervention showed the development of a certain level of resistance towards breaking away from their comfort zone. A total of 25% of leaders increased their comfort-zone by having a 10% decrease. 8% and 6% showed a 20% and 30% decrease respectively.

A total of 13% of leaders in this group highlighted that they have developed greater trust in others allowing them to do their work independently. 11% of them stated that they have initiated greater information sharing sessions with peers in relation to projects which have resulted in better buy-in. These informal gatherings after work hours have shown greater synergy among groups

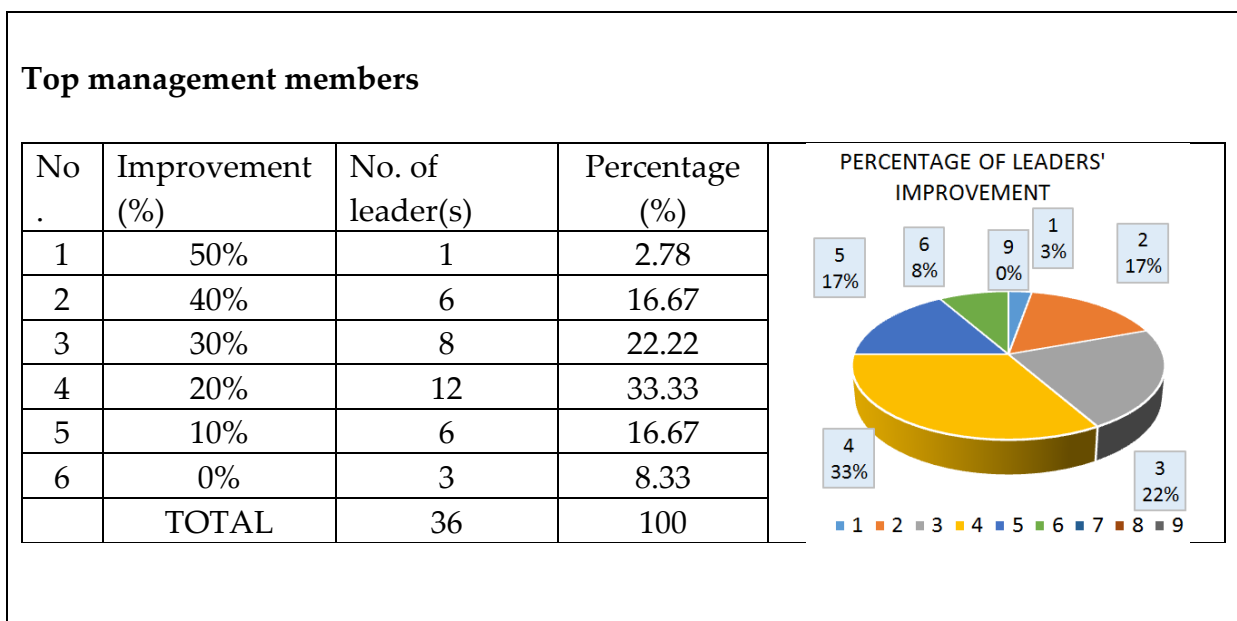
Middle Management Leaders

A total of 24% leaders did not record any change at all after the training programme. 21%, 18% and 7% showed a dip of 10%, 20% and 30% respectively. 12% and 8% of them showed 10% and 20% improvement. Only 1% showed 50% improvement.

Besides that 8% of leaders in this group developed greater trust and allow others to do their work independently. More outings with team members have been shown to enhance cohesiveness among the team members.

Exploring New Challenges

Figure 5 presents the results of analysis for exploring new challenges.



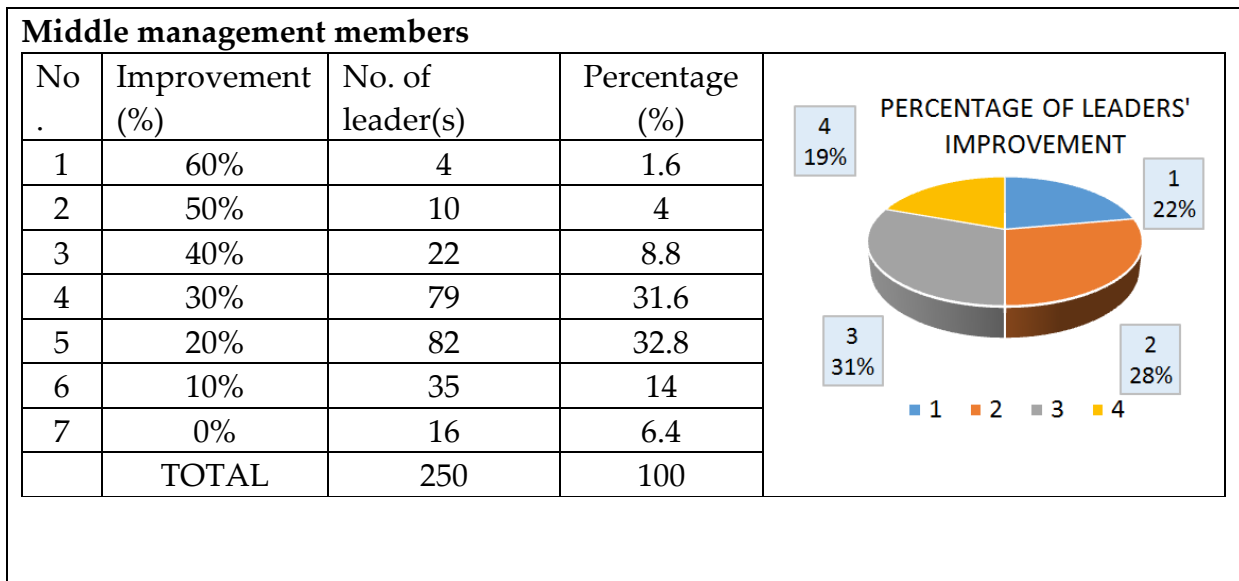


Figure 5: Effect of training on participants towards exploring new challenges

Top Management leaders

As seen in Table 5, the above scores are very encouraging to provide evidence that the attribute of exploring new challenges can help leaders to bring the organisation to the next level. 33%, 22% and 17% of the top management leaders improved by 20%, 30% and 40% respectively. Only 3% improved by 50%. 8% did not show any improvement. There was no reverse impact or resistance to change.

A total of 21% of leaders in this group stated that they took not only effort to understand challenges faced by the team members but offered solutions as well. Another 6% of them improved their effort to empower their subordinates .

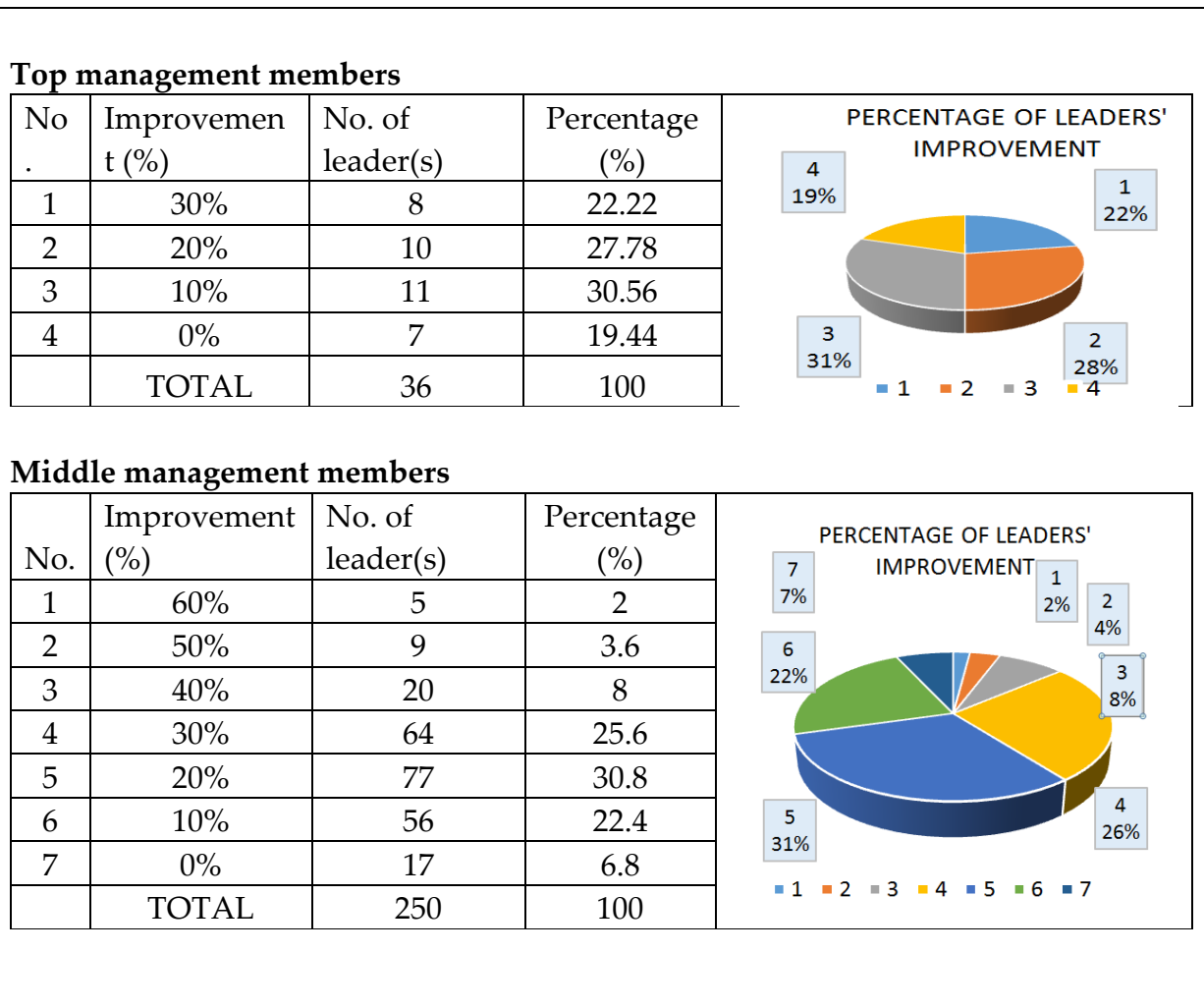
Middle Management Team

Leaders from the middle management team showed a similar experience with the top management team, where exploring new challenges provided evidence of an improvement in the leadership performance. 33%, 32% and 9% showed a 20%, 30% and 40% improvement respectively. A small group of 4% and 2% recorded 50% and 60% improvement. Generally a total of 94% improved an average of 25%.

22% of leaders in this group took effort to understand challenges faced by the team members and offered solutions and 9% of them stated they were able to accept new challenges positively.

Take Initiatives to Meet Higher Expectations

Figure 6 presents the results of analysis for the effect of training on the leaders towards taking initiatives to meet higher expectations.



issues on a firefighting basis. Another 4% reported giving importance to the group goal than focusing on deploying initiatives to just gain self- credit .

Middle Management Leaders

Leaders from middle management group scored higher improvement scores compared to top management leaders. 8%, 4% and 2% scored 40%, 50% and 60% improvement respectively, compared to leaders of top management team who scored 30% as the highest improvement score. 31% and 26% of middle management leaders scored 20% and 30 % improvement respectively. In general, 93% of middle management leaders showed improvement.

11% of the leaders developed the capability to handle issues related to subordinates objectively by orientating them more towards understanding the vision and mission

of the organisation. 9% of them improved towards giving importance to the group goal rather than deploying initiatives just to gain self-credit. 7% of leaders stated that they spent more time to achieve their KPI and enhance team dynamics. 5% recorded being more focused in planning, project execution and handling issues on firefighting basis

Effects of the innervations on leadership effectiveness

The main objective of this study is to assess whether leadership comfort zone barriers can be overcome by instituting specific training intervention that can improve leadership effectiveness as well as compare the effectiveness of the intervention between the top and middle management. The results of the research are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2: Effects of the training intervention on leadership effectiveness between the two leader groups for the five common parameters of comfort zones.

Pre and post measurement effect	Value	F	df, df2	Sig.	Effect size (Partial Eta Squared η^2)
Routine and fixed ways to do things					
Pre-Post Pillai's Trace	.572	380.219	1, 248	.000***	.572 (large)
Pre-Post*group Pillai's Trace	.003	.837	1, 248	.361	-
Avoidance of rapid change					
Pre-Post Pillai's Trace	.033	9.638	1, 248	.002**	.033 (small)
Pre-Post*group Pillai's Trace	.015	4.379	1, 248	.037*	.015 (small)
Territorial and silo operations					
Pre-Post Pillai's Trace	.019	5.541	1, 248	.019*	.019 (small)
Pre-Post*group Pillai's Trace	.002	.441	1, 248	.507	-
Avoid exploring new challenges					
Pre-Post Pillai's Trace	.601	427.199	1, 248	.000***	.601 (large)
Pre-Post*group Pillai's Trace	.001	.234	1, 248	.629	-
Avoiding high expectations					
Pre-Post Pillai's Trace	.466	248.210	1, 248	.000***	.466 (large)
Pre-Post*group Pillai's Trace	.027	7.836	1, 248	.005**	.027 (small)

Note: Effect size based on partial Eta Squared (η^2) - small: .01 - .05; moderate: .06 - .13; large: .14 and above. The effect size benchmark is based on Cohen (1988).

The Table 2 shows that pre and post measurement comparison is significant for the five common parameters of comfort zones. Post test score out-performances the pre-test score, indicates that the intervention is effective and it has positive effects on Routine and fixed ways to do things [$F(1, 284) = 308.219, p < .001$; large effect size $\eta^2 = .572$], Avoidance of rapid change [$F(1, 284) = 9.638, p < .005$; small effect size $\eta^2 = .033$], Territorial and silo operations [$F(1, 284) = 5.541, p < .05$; small effect size $\eta^2 = .019$], Avoid exploring new challenges [$F(1, 284) = 427.199, p < .001$; large effect size $\eta^2 = .601$] and Avoiding high expectations [$F(1, 284) = 248.210, p < .001$; large effect size $\eta^2 = .466$].

Comparing effectiveness between top management and middle management

Table 3 presents the effect of the intervention on the two management groups. The intervention is effective for three of the five aspects for the top management group. The aspects are Routine and fixed ways to do things, Avoid exploring new challenges and Avoiding high expectations, and it is effective for the five aspects for the middle management group.

Comparing the effects of intervention between the two management groups, as seen in the Table 3, the intervention has a larger effect on middle management compared to the top management for all of the five aspects, i.e. for Routine and fixed ways to do things [effect size η^2 : top management = .728, $p < .001$; middle management = .780, $p < .001$], Avoidance of rapid change [top management = .007 (insignificant); middle management = .181, $p < .001$], Territorial and silo operations (top management = .032, insignificant; middle management = .065, $p < .001$); Avoid exploring new challenges (top management = .775, $p < .001$; middle management = .780, $p < .001$); and Avoiding high expectations (top management = .683, $p < .001$; middle management = .723, $p < .001$). As a whole, the results indicate that the intervention is more effective for the middle management compared to the top management.

Table 3: Comparing pre-test and post-test effects of intervention for top management and middle management group

Group	Aspect	Pre-test score	Post-test score	Value	F	df1, df2	Sig.	Effect size (Partial Eta Squared η^2)
Top management	Routine and fixed ways to do things	5.81	7.97	.728	93.889	1, 35	.000***	.728 (large)
Middle management		5.38	7.76	.770	833.788	1,249	.000***	.770 (large)
Top management	Avoidance of rapid change	4.81	4.64	.007	.245	1, 35	.624	-
Middle management		5.82	4.96	.181	55.167	1,249	.000***	.181 (large)
Top management	Territorial and silo operations	3.83	3.56	.032	1.141	1, 35	.293	-
Middle management		4.66	4.16	.065	17.393	1,249	.000***	.065 (moderate)
Top management	Avoid exploring new challenges	5.44	7.75	.775	120.377	1, 35	.000***	.775 (large)
Middle management		5.05	7.46	.780	884.648	1,249	.000***	.780 (large)
Top management	Avoiding high expectations	6.75	8.28	.683	75.463	1, 35	.000***	.683 (large)
Middle management		5.95	8.14	.723	650.449	1,249	.000***	.723 (large)

Discussion and Conclusion

The study provides conclusive evidence that poor leadership performance is often due to the leaders gravitating to comfort-zones. The study provides evidence that if training interventions are directed to breaking this barrier, leadership performance can be enhanced.

One of the most common trappings of comfort-zone lies in deploying performance in a fixed and routine manner. Feldman (2000) defines routines as “repeated patterns of behaviour that are bound by rules and customs and that do not change very much from one iteration to another. The repeated acts of doing things in a fixed manner will provide a false confidence or a pseudo effect of being effective and efficient. The comfort zone trappings will confer leaders a false feel good factor and confidence that that they possess all knowledge in relation to the routine task. This in turn will become a source of influence to encourage others in working within the comfort range further gravitating leaders to only work within familiar terrain. This can enhance the size of the defence walls insulating them in certain comfort levels.

Both leaders from the top and middle management teams showed improvement after the training by breaking away from their comfort zone. Both groups when sensitized to their respective blind spots were able to move away from their routine work and engage productively to optimize performance. Both teams recorded an

average of 5.5% of them showing 50% improvement. Middle management leaders (28%) however showed higher improvement scores of 30% compared to the top management (19%) teams. In general we could see that the middle management team was willing to take more effort to break their routine practises as evidenced by their personal improvement and enhanced performance. One of the possible reasons why lesser percentage of top management leaders had higher improvement scores is possibly due to the dilemma and confusion it might cause subordinates, if routine standard operating practices were changed. This indirectly will also affect their own leadership credibility. It is possible that most of the Top management team retain routine practises to form a basis for determining career growth.

Willingness to embrace rapid change is another attribute seen in people coming out of their comfort zone. A major stressor influenced by rapid change and globalization is job insecurity (Pavalko, 1993). Inability to manage such situations impacts leadership confidence and control of a situation given at any moment especially leaders who are not mentally prepared to face challenges. Such situations will enhance current routine gravitating further into their comfort zone. Deploying initiatives always functions as a catalyst to unleash new leadership potential. The exercise enables the leader to check on the robustness of operations. Rapid change carried out with precise planning and clear outcomes will further refine the competency of leaders and subordinates. Such initiatives will also help to purge out hidden shortcomings, process deficiency and unwanted practises. Leaders will be able to see the real problem and actualise real-results.

It is interesting to note that both teams showed greater resistance to rapid change as evidenced by the scores implicating their discomfort to come out from their comfort-zone when rapid change is demanded from them. 44% and 59% of Top and Middle Management leaders in fact dipped the score by 20% and 35% respectively towards the ability to embrace rapid change. Hence rapid change therefore was something that both groups detested and only 36% of Top Management leaders improved 27% in average. The Middle Management leaders scored even lower, where only 21% of them scored 25% improvement. This clearly shows that interventions or demand for rapid change should only to be instituted or call for if it is really critical. If not, efforts will mainly be towards handling the resistance rather than utilising it to achieve the desired outcome. However, in comparison the Top management team was able to embrace better than the Middle management. This can be due to the years of gathered experience facing similar situations while climbing the corporate leader. Also most of the time it is the top management leaders who initiate such changes and therefore they would be better prepared to deploy tasks.

Leaders who are enjoying being in comfort-zone will evade situations or involvements that demands him or her to engage in a task or function that leads to a rapid change. Rapid change will create a sense of urgency for one to get out from their current comfort zone (Kotter 2012). This will create a losing sense of life

purpose because of uncertainty and loss of control (Anatonovsky, 1979; Burton, 1988). People continuously work relentlessly but their action is not contributing towards the primary goal of the business. This leads to unproductive results, and eventually, burnout (Kotter. 2012).

Leadership beliefs or modification in psychological habits may take place if the reason to get involved and committed to take up a new task or endeavour is made in a demanding rapid nature. This too only if provided with over-powering or inspiring reasons for this. If not, most of the time leaders do not prefer rapid change due to intense pain experienced to get out of their comfort-zone. Rapid change always demands greater ability to adopt and adapt to many unknown and uncertain situations. Leaders need to develop courage and prepare to have greater confidence towards handling the unknown, compared to having confidence due to comfort-zone of certainty. Leaders in this study, during the training, were taken through a systematic process of raising leadership consciousness where they were made to realize the greater reason or meaning behind what they currently doing. The study provided evidence that mentally preparing leaders to embrace rapid change is far more critical than the outcome of the change expected because it may create more damage than good.

The Top Management leaders have shown a good percentage of improvement in breaking the trap of being territorial and silo compared to the Middle Management leaders. Approximately 25% of both Top Management and Middle Management leaders did not show any changes after the training intervention to take them out from their comfort zone. The Middle Management leaders were finding it difficult to overcome their comfort zone and were resisting more compared to the Top Management leaders. An average of 19.6% of them scored 15% drop in average compared to 16.7% of Top Management leaders who scored 15% drop in average.

Greater changes in the leadership behaviour were seen in both teams where they stated that they had increased their trust towards their subordinates and this conferred greater independence. The Top management leaders initiated efforts for greater information sharing with their subordinates to obtain better buy-in as well as establish greater group synergy. The study provides evidence that leaders after the training were willing to contribute more effort towards the same job function and area of performance. This broke down silo walls.

The notion that "I am doing things right" when given more importance than "I am doing the right thing" leads to silo operation where leaders in order to further protect and preserve his area of control and authority. The study reminds us that it is important when a change is considered to be mindful of leadership control and authority as there are major factors to break silo operations. Failing to understand that such efforts compound to poor inter-departmental collaboration resulting in a

strong disconnect from one another (Neebe, 1987) and this in turn will stagnate the process flow of the organisation.

Silos operations exist mainly not just physically in an organisation but in the mind of employees who have shared among each other and made it real (Diamond & Allcorn, 2004, 2009). They establish safety and comfort by keeping others away who they don't like and create strong boundaries that deter collaborations, which in turn causes anxiety in employees. When groups are trapped in silo mentality, systemic thinking and the vision of the organisation will be compromised (Burge, 1993). In their fight towards one-ness, they create mental boundary where they feel safe, detached and untouchable but fail to realise the invisible imprisonment and outer incompetence characterised by noise, politics and time wastage (Lawrence, 1999).

Traditionally the organisational psychology literature views silo as conscious, rational and objective entities. But the effect of silo behaviour seems to relate to behaviour happening below the surface in terms of unconscious and irrational implications and impact (Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle & Pooley, 2004). Such unconscious pattern includes ego defence mechanism to provide containment for his own anxiety (Robbinson & Zarate, 1997; Klein, 1997). Greenberg & Baron, 2003 uses silo as metaphor to denote organisation dysfunction and fragmented which creates feeling of disconnection not knowing what others are doing, isolation, lack of trust, respect, collaboration and collegiality. As highlighted (Patrick J. Boland and Brian Sick, 2016), sacred time and space are allocated and established for greater commitment to meet and break the silo walls. Employees should lead not by position or power but by ownership to collaborate, the ability to work in team and facilitate given responsibilities.

Intervention to explore new challenges has provided a significant impact on both Top and Middle Management leaders. Both team have scored very high improvement scores, where 88.9% of Top management leaders and 87.2% of Middle Management leaders scored 25% improvement in average. This is a significant evidence to show that engaging leaders into exploring new challenges will empower leaders to come out of the comfort zone. Both teams have taken the effort to not only understand challenges faced by their team members but to also offer solutions. The Top management leaders began to empower their subordinates more than before. This in return developed positive acceptance towards the new challenges they needed to face. Leaders tend to lower their defence in protecting their comfort zone when inspiring approaches were shown which in turn lead towards unleashing hidden potentials. This is in accordance with Durban (Durban 2004) who stated that leaders must look at the challenges as a lifelong endeavor and an opportunity for organizational and individual growth.

The pain to explore new challenges is mainly contributed by a high level of anxiety due to not knowing the future outcome. Feeling unknown of future outcomes

dilutes the level of confidence and control. Hence leaders must make resistance to step in to face new challenges their second nature to avoid such discomfort. However it is only natural that when such interventions are introduced, people immediately may seek more reasons to resist from participation and therefore sympathetic leaders must exert energy and resources to provide the right motivation.

It is important to understand that every emerging challenge faced by leaders is a positive indication that the time has come for one to move out of their current comfort-zone to the next platform to sustain performance improvement or business profits.

Leaders can be seduced and trapped by past and current successes and this can yet be another gateway to the comfort zone. The past and current successes will influence the perception of leaders on performance. This false confidence on their leadership capabilities may make them fails to evaluate the current changing landscapes and thereby compromise their decision making skills. They will remain stubborn with their biased views and hence avoid facing or listening to any fact that contradicts with their perception. This superiority complex will blind them from realising the reality of the situation, succumbing towards a denial mode which eventually gravitate them into the invisible quicksand .

The training aimed specially at breaking the comfort zone raised the leadership consciousness in both groups thereby enabling them to accept new challenges and promoting greater motivation for leader to tap their respective potential.

Leaders generally resist higher expectation and experience a lot of stress meeting them. But the present study showed otherwise as both groups improved significantly. The Top and middle Management leaders scored 30% and 60% respectively as the highest improvement score respectively.19% and 7% of Top and Middle Management leaders did not show any change due to the intervention. The Middle Management leaders appeared to be more receptive and were willing to give their best to meet the higher expectations. The potential for improvement was more for the middle than the Top Management leaders. The Middle management leaders were beginning to spend more time ensuring that the subordinates understand the vision and mission of the organisation. Both teams deployed more time to achieve their KPIs and showed enhanced team dynamics towards achieving sustainable results. They also increased their focus on work planning, project execution and took efforts to minimize fire-fighting activities.

Generally leaders avoid accepting or taking responsibilities to meet higher expectation because it disturbs their current comfort levels. Higher expectations are seen as disrupters of current performance. It will also destabilise the leader's level of confidence in executing his/her role. The pressure to learn and unlearn to meet the

new high expectation also creates discomfort and dissatisfaction towards the top management.

In such situations, leaders initially will justify the effectiveness of current performance and highlight possible setbacks by adopting to achieve higher expectations. Resistance to accept, change and adapt will affect current performance and more effort is deployed towards defending the leader's point of view. Leaders must be made to be aware that, accepting and working towards high expectations at all time will bring about a dynamic growth to the organisation and will prevent sub-optimal performance. Driving the leaders towards higher expectation will also naturally eliminate current hidden weaknesses as well as induce natural housekeeping.

The effect of setting high expectations on people, coined the Pygmalion effect, was first postulated in a study of teachers' impact on students (Rossenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Pygmalion effects are a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy in which leaders' expectations regarding their followers increases the effort and performance of followers. In recent meta- analyses findings show that Pygmalion based leadership has the highest effect of three broad groups of leadership theories (Avolio et al. 2009) and that manager expectations are among the variables having most impact on leader-follower exchange (Dulebohn et al. 2012).

In a study of 151 workplace leader-follower dyads in California Whiteley, Sy, and Johnson (2012) find that follower performance is higher when leader expectations are high. Many studies of Pygmalion leadership highlights that high leader expectations increase followers' effort (White and Locke 2000, Whiteley, Sy and Johnson 2012, McNatt 2000). Encouraging managers to have higher expectations for certain subordinates had self-fulfilling impacts on the performance of these subordinates (King, 1971; 1974).

The study demonstrates that leadership training to be effective must not be a generic one but focus on deliverable outcomes or behavioural change. In the present study we used comfort zone and showed identifiable attributes that contributes to the zone. The study provides conclusive evidence that training focused on breaking comfort zone produced results. We compared the results between two groups and showed different effects. Both showed improvements in their scores.

Exploring new challenges contributed the highest improvement scores to break the performance Comfort Zone for both Top and Middle Management leader followed by willingness to move away from routine as well as fixed way of doing things and taking initiatives to meet higher expectations. All these contributors did not show a reverse in performance as compared to the other two contributors namely, embracing rapid change and being non-territorial and silo operations.

In general, Middle Management leaders have scored higher improvement scores in all the 3 highest contributors compared to the Top Management leaders. In contrast, the Top Management has scored higher improvement scores in both embracing rapid change and being non-territorial and silo operations contributors compare to Middle Management leaders.

The study showed that leadership training has to be audience target specific in order to achieve the desired results.

Recommendation

Below are some recommendations that may help future research or training providers to improve leadership performance while addressing the subject of breaking comfort zone:

1. Prior instituting intervention to break leadership comfort zone, efforts must be made to raise leadership consciousness in order for them to gain a greater meaning for their existence and play a meaningful role in the organization .
2. Co-creation and coaching should be the major ingredient of leadership approach taken in all effort to break the comfort zone to reduce change resistance and obtain greater buy-in. These approaches were induced in all aspects of the interventions to enhance greater engagement and close all possible gaps of understanding and perspectives among leaders.
3. Rapid change initiatives should only be deployed if it is crucial and unavoidable as the tendency from both groups of leaders is to resist rapid change. In the event of facing such a rapid change it becomes imperative that mind-set preparation of leaders and subordinates to embrace the change should be instituted.
4. Both exploring new challenges and embarking towards meeting higher expectations can invoke less change resistance compared to breaking other factors contributing towards comfort zone.

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