

The Strategic Value of an In-House Leadership Academy

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I recently experienced one of the great privileges of leadership development. Watching a cohort of leaders, having spent a year in deep immersion around their leadership brands and leadership responsibilities, present their insights and learning to the more experienced leaders within their organisation during the final close-out session was both humbling and inspiring.

These moments are powerful. They reinforce learning for those sharing their experiences while simultaneously reminding established leaders of their own commitment to leadership and the standards required to sustain the organisation's culture. In many respects, the academy becomes a conversation between generations of leaders, renewing the organisation's leadership philosophy and strengthening the culture that underpins its success.

It brought back memories of an experience many years ago at Eveready, where we reached a conclusion that profoundly influenced our approach to leadership. We recognised that culture was not simply a "soft" issue or a set of values hanging on a wall. Culture was part of our competitive advantage. It influenced our ability to attract talented people, retain them and create an environment in which employees could bring their best selves to work.

Like many organisations, we developed a clear culture statement and identified the behaviours that we believed should define us. We called these the Eveready Best Behaviours. We introduced a 360-degree assessment process, not simply to measure people, but to ensure that we held one another accountable for living the values we professed.

One of the most powerful initiatives we undertook was the establishment of the Eveready Leadership College. Initially, the intention was straightforward. Most professionals are educated in functional expertise but receive very little formal preparation for the responsibility of leading people. Engineers learn engineering, accountants learn accounting, and technicians learn technical skills, but very few are taught how to lead. We wanted to provide our first and second-line leaders with what we regarded as a licence to lead.

Over the course of a year, leaders from across the organisation came together regularly to immerse themselves in the discipline of leadership. While this was a structured educational process, its impact proved to be far greater than we had anticipated.

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Firstly, the Leadership College became a vehicle for embedding culture. Leaders did not merely hear about the culture from senior executives; they experienced it, discussed it and translated it into daily practice. Culture ceased to be an aspiration and became a shared way of behaving.

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Secondly, we created a community of leaders who possessed a common language and a common understanding of what good leadership looked like. Leadership stopped being an individual endeavour and became a collective responsibility. Silos diminished and a broader organisational perspective emerged.

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Thirdly, the College established a clear standard against which leadership behaviour could be measured. Expectations became visible and transparent. Leaders understood what was required and the organisation was able to identify where leadership behaviour was inconsistent with the desired culture.

Perhaps one of the greatest but least recognised benefits was that the Leadership College became a repository of institutional memory. Leaders come and go, strategies evolve and management teams change. Yet the academy provided continuity. It ensured that the philosophy, values and standards of leadership were transferred from one generation of leaders to the next. In many respects, it became the custodian of the organisation's leadership culture.

Over the past decade, since establishing the Trust-Based Leadership Academy, we have witnessed these same principles at work across multiple organisations and industries. Whether in automotive, legal, agriculture, FMCG, pharmaceutical or manufacturing environments, organisations that have invested in structured leadership academies have experienced similar outcomes. Some have chosen formally accredited programmes aligned to the National Qualifications Framework and supported through skills levies and training incentives, while others have adopted privately certified programmes tailored to their own cultures and strategic priorities. Regardless of the format, the effect has been remarkably consistent.

When senior leaders commit both time and resources to developing leadership capability, they send a powerful message. Employees understand that leadership matters. They recognise that leadership is not left to chance or acquired simply through promotion. It is a capability worthy of deliberate investment.

Over time, successive groups of leaders emerge with a shared philosophy, a common language and an aligned understanding of what the organisation stands for. New leaders are socialised into the culture, while experienced leaders reinforce and sustain it. In this way, the academy becomes a succession engine, developing future leaders from within and reducing reliance on importing culture from outside.

An in-house leadership academy should therefore not be viewed merely as a training intervention. It is one of the most powerful tools available for shaping culture. It transforms culture from something declared by the executive team into something understood, practised and reinforced throughout the organisation.

Culture does not change because values are written down. Culture changes when leaders think alike, speak alike and consistently behave in ways that reflect the organisation's purpose and values.

Perhaps that is the greatest value of an in-house leadership academy. It does not simply develop leaders. It preserves institutional memory, creates a pipeline of future leadership, builds leadership capability and, over time, creates a culture that becomes a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

As I look back over many years, there is little that gives me greater satisfaction than seeing leaders discover that leadership is not a position, but a discipline. Watching one generation of leaders share their learning with the next reminds us that culture is not inherited automatically. It is taught, reinforced and renewed. And perhaps that is the true purpose of an in-house leadership academy: *not simply to teach leadership, but to safeguard the culture of the organisation for generations to come.*