Grooming Top Leaders
Cultural Perspectives from China, India, Singapore, and the United States

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Executive Summary

Competent business and public service leaders prepared to run global organizations are in short supply and are in demand as never before. Strategies to prepare today's managers for future leadership roles must be crafted carefully and cannot be left to chance.

Coursework and training are not enough. Organizations must create systems and processes that enable managers to learn leadership from experience. They must provide them with a clear sense of what needs to be learned, surround them with people who support their efforts to develop themselves, and promote effective developmental practices such as reflection, dialogue, intentional goal-setting, and feedback.

These insights about development are derived from the *Lessons of Experience* research and other studies conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®). Our findings have been validated and extended by recent research conducted in partnership with organizations in China, India, Singapore, and the United States.

CCL researchers have identified five basic experiences that deliver valuable leadership learning. **These "basic five" include experiences that involve bosses and superiors, turnarounds, increases in scope, horizontal moves, and new initiatives.** But our research also shows that some developmental experiences are more country-specific. We have identified the top two developmental experiences for each of the four countries in our studies. **Mistakes in China and the United States, crossing culture events in India, and stakeholder engagements in Singapore are examples of these "plus two" experiences by country.**

Although many different lessons can be learned from each of the experiences cited in our study, some patterns of learning singularly link particular experiences to specific lessons. For example, "managing direct reports" is a lesson commonly learned from bosses and superiors and from an increase in job scope. Other patterns of learning are unique to a particular country. For example, only Indian managers report learning "confidence" from bosses and superiors, new initiatives, and **personal experiences**.

To address the pressing need for future leadership talent, organizations must build systems and processes that help upcoming leaders learn from their experiences more intentionally and systematically.

Key Findings

- In China, India, Singapore, and the United States, there are important similarities and differences in the way leadership is learned from experiences.

- There are **five universally important sources of leadership learning** in the four countries we studied: **bosses and superiors, turnarounds, increases in job scope, horizontal moves,** and **new initiatives**.

- There are also **two unique sources of leadership learning** specific to each country:

—China: **personal experiences** and **mistakes**

—India: **personal experiences** and **crossing cultures**

—Singapore: **stakeholder engagements** and **crises**

—United States: **mistakes** and **ethical dilemmas**

- Among the leadership lessons learned from experiences, three are ranked as universally important in all four countries: **managing direct reports**, **self-awareness,** and **executing effectively**.

Why the key findings matter:

- Research shows many leadership skills are primarily learned from experiences.
- Understanding the key experiences that teach leadership is important to the development of future leaders.
- The developmental experiences and leadership lessons valued by leaders in some regions may benefit leaders in all regions.

Based on the key findings, recommended next steps:

- Organizations must build systems and processes that help upcoming leaders learn from their experiences more intentionally and systematically. To do this, organizations must:

  1. Develop a leadership strategy that complements business strategy.
  2. Identify critical developmental experiences and lessons to be learned.
  3. Enroll top leaders and bosses in supporting learning and growth.

The Need for More and Better Business Leaders

Competent business leaders are in demand as never before.

Organizations are chasing fast-paced, global growth to improve their profitability. They are aided by breakthroughs in telecommunication technologies that enable interconnectivity and make it easier to create a global footprint. To succeed on a continually evolving, volatile, and complex global stage, organizations must intertwine their ambitious business growth strategies with sensible leadership development strategies.

Better prepared leaders—and more of them— are the need of the hour. But it is extremely challenging to craft an effective global leadership strategy. The task is complicated by the sheer numbers of leaders required at all levels, the high degree of competence they need, and the intensity of the work they must take on.

It is naïve to believe some individuals are born with leadership talent and that we simply need to identify and rank-order them to take their place in the succession line. Nor is it fruitful to rely on past selection and development practices. The context for business is changing so fast that new, carefully crafted strategies are needed based on the best knowledge available. Leadership development cannot be left to chance.

How Leadership Development Happens

A research-based, time-tested guideline for developing managers proposes engaging them with three clusters of experience, using a 70-20-10 ratio: challenging assignments (70%), developmental relationships (20%), and coursework and training (10%).

Despite the popularity of the 70-20-10 rule, most organizations are still not systematic or intentional about using a synergistic combination of assignments-relationships-coursework to groom future leaders. Why so? Some reasons may be as follows:

- The 70-20-10 rule does not offer detailed guidance about which experiences contribute the most to learning and growth. So, managers and their bosses do not have the knowledge they need to select and sequence work assignments and career moves.

- The rule does not specify the leadership lessons learned from each experience. Organizations are unable to match the learning needs of high-potential managers to the experiences most likely to provide that learning.

- Past research has focused primarily on the experiences and learning of managers in US-based corporations. Today's global organizations may find it inappropriate to generalize this knowledge outside the United States.

The 70-20-10 Rule for Leadership Development
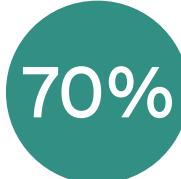
70%

CHALLENGING ASSIGNMENTS

20%

DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

10%

COURSEWORK & TRAINING

The 70-20-10 rule emerged from 30 years of CCL's *Lessons of Experience* research, which explores how executives learn, grow, and change over the course of their careers.

The underlying assumption is that leadership is learned. We believe that today, even more than before, a manager's ability and willingness to learn from experience is the foundation for leading with impact.

Vital Experiences:
Basic Five Plus Two

Since 2005, CCL researchers have complemented their US data-gathering with new global initiatives. We have collaborated with organizations in India, China, and Singapore to review and extend what we know about how leadership is learned (see Table 2). Our cross-country comparison uncovered more than 40 types of developmental experiences. Among them are five basic experiences universally important across all countries in our study, plus two additional experiences uniquely important in each specific country.

- The **Basic Five** are among the most frequently described sources of learning across all studies:

Bosses and superiors

Turnarounds

Increases in scope

Horizontal moves

New initiatives

These experiences are developmentally rich and teach a diverse range of leadership lessons. They were typically among the top seven sources of development and were cited by at least 20% of interviewees from three of the four countries in our study.

- The Plus Two are two additional experiences uniquely important in each country.

  —China: **personal experiences** and **mistakes**

  —India: **personal experiences** and **crossing cultures**

  —Singapore: **stakeholder engagements** and **crises**

  —United States: **mistakes** and **ethical dilemmas**

Each was cited by a minimum of 20% of the country's interviewees and ranked among the top seven sources of development.

The **Basic Five Plus Two** graphic is an overview of the top seven development experiences most likely to stimulate leader development in each country (see Figure 1 on page 8). The arc of seven experiences shows the relative importance of the five basic experiences and displays the two unique experiences for each country.

Coursework and training often come to mind when people think of leader development. Skilled training specialists can help an organization establish a shared knowledge base and align around a common leadership vision. But coursework and training alone are not enough. They were mentioned by just 9%–15% of interviewees in our four regional studies and were not among the top seven sources of leadership learning. However, our view is that well-designed coursework and training have an amplifier effect on leader development. For example, a program module that incorporates tools and experiential practice sessions can help managers become more effective learners and leaders.

Basic Five: Mastering the Fundamentals

The **Basic Five** developmental experiences identified by our research are delivering a powerful learning opportunity to leaders in each of the countries in our study.

Bosses and superiors

When it comes to developing leaders, the people who matter the most are bosses and superiors. Some lessons are learned directly through instruction, guidance, feedback, coaching, and mentoring. Others are learned indirectly by watching and experiencing how the leader behaves and handles workplace challenges.

Variation in descriptions of boss-subordinate relationships in cross-country studies raises important questions about the influence of culture on what superiors and subordinates expect from each other. Our interviewees described five roles bosses can play: positive role models, teachers, catalysts, mentors, and negative role models who have a positive impact.

It is crucial for bosses and superiors to be mindful of their own influence and impact. The myriad ways in which they manage, motivate, develop, and inspire those who report to them are frequently observed and often imitated, cascading throughout the organization.

Positive Role Model

Bosses often make a positive impression on subordinates, even without always intending to do so. Subordinates who regard their boss as effective will frequently emulate the individual's words and actions

Teacher

Effective bosses provide situation-specific instructions and advice to subordinates—from how to dress or talk to how to conduct a business meeting. We found boss-as-teacher to be an especially common scenario in India, where the guru-shishya tradition leads bosses to provide selected subordinates with an extra measure of holistic coaching.

Catalyst

Bosses can provide momentous experiences that combine stretch assignments, encouragement, and support. They can step aside and give subordinates the autonomy to experiment, improvise, and handle a tough project or situation by themselves. This develops the young manager's technical and relationship skills and promotes self-insight. In effect, the catalyst boss jolts a subordinate out of a comfort zone and helps the individual perform at a higher level.

Mentor

Bosses who mentor their subordinates create meaningful personal relationships. They share expertise, offer career advice (especially when difficult decisions have to be made), and express a sustained interest in the subordinate's career over time.

Negative Role Models

Some bosses and superiors teach important managerial lessons through destructive or offensive words and actions. Subordinates promise themselves they will never talk or act the same way.

Figure 1

Basic Five Plus Two: China, India, Singapore, and United States
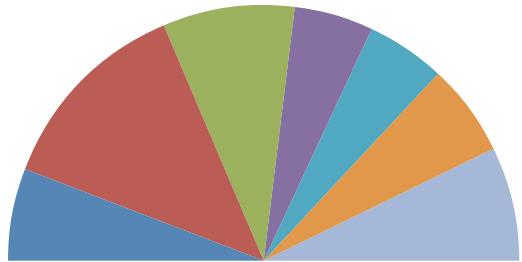
CHINA: BASIC FIVE PLUS TWO
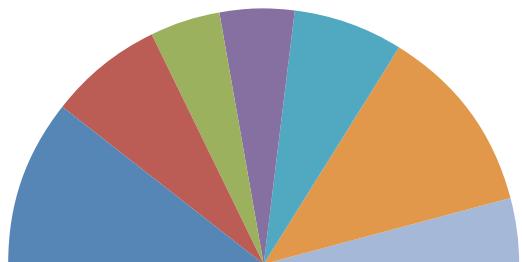
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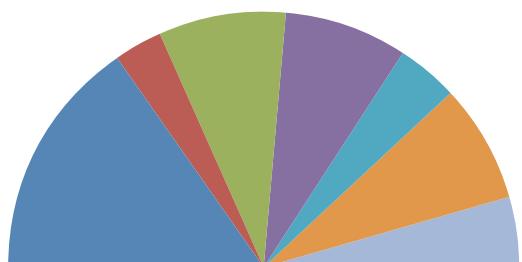
SINGAPORE: BASIC FIVE PLUS TWO
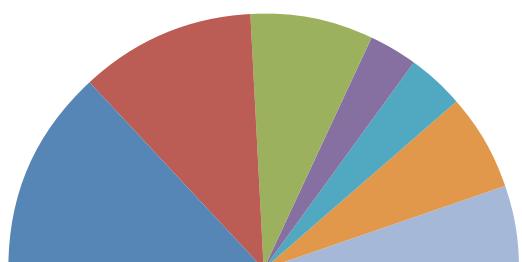
UNITED STATES: BASIC FIVE PLUS TWO

BASIC FIVE

Constructive bosses/superiors

Turnaround

Increase in scope

Horizontal move

New initiative

PLUS TWO

China

Personal experiences

Mistakes

India

Personal experiences

Crossing cultures

Singapore

Stakeholder engagement

Crisis

United States

Mistakes

Ethical dilemmas

Turnarounds

Turnarounds involve fixing a failing or underperforming operation so it can operate efficiently within budget or turn a profit. On a larger scale, turnarounds involve organizational restructuring and culture change.

The need for a turnaround can be brought on by plummeting market share, botched market expansion plans, mismanaged operations, technology challenges, troubled client relationships, low employee morale, and other unstable situations.

Turnaround experiences were most frequently reported as developmental by leaders in China. The account from one Chinese manager (see box below) illustrates the initial anxiety felt by most managers who handle turnarounds.

A Turnaround in China: Eyewitness Account

"In October, I was transferred to a subbranch to evaluate an annual task. When I went there and saw the data, I was astounded and suddenly at a loss, because it was already October, but they had only finished 20%-30% of the annual task. I had no idea what was wrong with them and I had to think about how to make up the work in the final quarter.

I found the team small and disconnected. Communication and cooperation did not go smoothly between different departments. There were no relevant evaluation and incentive systems to inspire employees. So although time was limited, I still insisted on the establishment of evaluation and incentive systems in the shortest time and made sure that each department was clear about what would happen to their income if the task was not finished on time. Their performance would be reflected in their pockets.

In my opinion, I think it is critical to be confident as a leader to convince employees. At that time, many people preferred to give up the task that year and start anew from the next year, saying that it would be easier if we start the next year and it wouldn't affect me much since I had only been transferred here in October. I said that was not the point. The point was that as a leader, I had to be responsible. And if we fully devoted ourselves this quarter, we would probably fulfill the annual task. Everyone had to be responsible for his own task and take action to achieve it.

Finally, after three months of hard work, we succeeded and fulfilled the annual task. From this event, I learned everyone has potential and should be confident about it. In the following two years, their performance was also among the best in all branches."

Increases in job scope

Increases in job scope often involve a promotion and always mean an increase in the manager's responsibilities and visibility. The broader scope might involve an increase in budget, number of people to manage, access to resources, and/or complexity of tasks. Job scope increases occur naturally at several points in most managerial careers as a professional takes on a first or expanded supervisory role or receives a significant promotion. Work life in organizations today sometimes necessitates job scope increases without a promotion.

United States: Making the Jump to the Executive Suite

In the United States, research shows 80% of job scope increases involve responsibilities that are both broader and different from what has gone before. These increases in scope are typical when a general manager transitions into a senior leadership role or switches to a new business with significantly more people, dollars, and functions to manage.

A senior executive in the aerospace industry said, "I took over a large operations group of close to 5,000 employees and was overwhelmed by the number of problems that came every day. Every day people came to my office with major problems . . . In frustration, I asked, 'Do we ever have a good day in Operations?' An 'old timer' looked at me, and said, 'You have 5,000 people working for you. Someone is going to screw up every day. It is how we handle the situation that will make the difference between success and failure.' I realized I could not turn this big ship by myself. I started that moment looking for the best talent available to get the job done, and we put together a great team that had huge successes."

Another senior executive in the building products industry described the significant increase in scope he experienced during a very short timeframe: "I went from being a CEO for a $30 million company to a $300 million division to a $700 million dollar company in the span of 18 months. I learned that 'size does not matter.' It's about people, common sense, problem-solving, listening, and adding another zero to the financials. The company was losing 1% of sales and in three years we were making 7% profit margins."

Horizontal moves

Developmental experiences can also result from horizontal transitions to another function, line of business, organization, industry sector, or region. A horizontal move is not a promotion, but calls for new expertise. It enables managers to experience a different work culture, a different nature and purpose of work, and different systems and processes.

The Singapore Story

In the Singapore public service sector, emerging leaders are intentionally rotated among statutory boards, agencies, and ministries. The purpose of these horizontal moves is to prepare leaders to handle a diversity of governmental operations and to broaden their strategic perspective. But other lessons are learned along the way.

As one senior civil service leader said:

"I found it very useful when I had my community posting and had to work with very senior people. Senior, in the sense that they were not senior in rank, but they were senior in experience . . . One thing which I learned is humility . . . you must acknowledge who they are. And only when they feel that sense of certain genuine posture from you would they then become very open and help you in the things you wanted to achieve."

New initiatives

Leadership development opportunities can be propelled by ambitious plans for domestic and/or international business growth. There may be opportunities to develop or launch new products and services, adopt new technologies, craft a new policy or process, build a plant or unit from scratch, develop a new market, embark on a new line of business, or create a new business entity. These assignments can be exhilarating and engender pride as managers create something new, achieve something special, and engage in new learning.

India: Manifestations of New Initiatives

Start-up—Opening a new branch or sales office, a factory or green-field unit, or a subsidiary of a foreign multinational

Diversification—Developing new products or launching a campaign that creates a brand and develops brand loyalty

Joint ventures and collaborations—Establishing public-private sector partnerships or sourcing internationally to develop a supply chain

Policy initiatives—Championing trend-setting legislation involving high-level stakeholders

Plus Two: Enhancing Leadership Capacity

The two additional developmental experiences identified for each of the countries in our research can also enhance leadership capacity by providing a rich opportunity for learning within a given culture.

EXPERIENCE	CHINA	INDIA	SINGAPORE	UNITED STATES
Crisis			●	
Crossing Cultures		●		
Ethical Dilemmas				●
Mistakes	●			●
Personal Experiences	●	●		
Stakeholder Engagements			●	

Personal experiences help us form values, set direction, and develop an approach to life and/or work. Many more managers from India and China shared stories about childhood impressions, apprenticeships, and first jobs than their counterparts from Singapore or the United States.

Personal experiences differ from country to country. For example, Indian managers spoke of the impact of parents, job interviews, and first jobs on their leadership ideals—attributing their success as leaders to values and principles they learned. Chinese managers talked about the pressures associated with early work experiences and life in rural areas. From this they learned the value of hard work and adjusting to dramatically different and physically demanding living and working conditions.

Personal experiences are not something an organization can provide for its managers. That said, in countries where **personal experiences** have played an important role in development, it is surely important, particularly in a coaching relationship, that a coachee have the opportunity to reflect on such experiences and clarify leadership lessons learned early on. That can provide an important base for subsequent development.

Mistakes include errors that can derail an individual or team or impede an organization's goals. **Mistakes** can be strategic—such as a business venture that collapses due to a poor market-entry plan. **Mistakes** can be technical or professional—such as errors of judgment. Sometimes ethical mistakes are made due to inexperience.

Mistakes were described as developmental experiences most often by Chinese managers. US managers also reported learning important lessons from **mistakes**.

Recovering from a Mistake

From a Chinese Manager:

"I still remember an event clearly although it happened many years ago. Once, we produced four tanks of yogurt on the night of a Middle Autumn day (one of the most important festivals on the Chinese calendar). But something went wrong and we had to abandon all of it. In order not to let workers down, we decided to pour the yogurt out secretly, at night. This event impressed me so much that I can never erase it from my mind."

The managers decided to assume responsibility for the poor quality of the yogurt—neither passing on the lower quality yogurt to customers nor disappointing the workers who had met their production quotas.

From a US Manager:

"I made a large mistake early in my career and was fortunate to have had an opportunity to make up for that mistake. It taught me that anyone can make a mistake–even large ones–and people deserve an opportunity to learn from those mistakes."

Mistakes cannot and should not be engineered. However, these experiences are a very important source of potential learning when they occur. What is most important is to provide support for reflection. Often it takes time and hindsight for people to understand what they've learned from a mistake. Without the benefit of reflection and coaching, **mistakes** may lead to nothing more than cynical lessons and fail to enhance leadership learning or performance.

Cultural crossings involve regular, direct contact with coworkers whose values, motivations, language, life routines, and cultural customs are different from one's own. Political, legal, economic conditions and organizational practices are unfamiliar, and leadership expectations are simply not the same as "back home." Managers must step up and make adjustments in order to achieve business goals.

Leading effectively in a culturally diverse environment demands speedy learning and adaptability. Indian managers describe **crossing cultures** and learning to "work across differences" far more frequently than managers from other countries. With one of the world's most rapidly expanding economies and free-flowing interactions with the West, opportunities to learn from cultural crossings abound.

Adjusting to Different Cultural Worldviews

A senior Indian manager working for a multinational consumer goods company was assigned to work in Indonesia. He expected to adjust easily to working with his Javanese employees, as they too were Asians. His Indian upbringing, though, taught him to say out loud whatever was on his mind. What he thought was "normal" discussion was considered confrontational by his Javanese counterparts and subordinates. They preferred politeness, consensus, and harmony.

Gradually he realized his coworkers were not going to tell him what was on their minds. He would have to learn to "read" people and infer what they were communicating from body signals and facial expressions. Once he began to pay attention, he could tell the difference between "resistance" and "boredom" and could sense whether others were disagreeing without openly saying so.

Stakeholder engagements teach leaders to reconcile competing points of view and develop solutions in situations where they have little or no formal authority. These experiences were reported as a development opportunity primarily by public service managers in Singapore. Examples include multilateral negotiations involving trade, security, or public health; regulatory work to manage scarce resources or protect the public interest; policy implementation; industry restructuring; and high-level public relations initiatives.

Compared to other assignments, **stakeholder engagements** are more externally focused and more likely to involve controversy, failure, or false starts.

For instance, when negotiating a technology transfer, progress might be sabotaged by tensions among government officials, vendors, and prospective customers. Organizations initially enthusiastic about collaborating on a project might encounter unexpected differences in how decisions are made and information is shared. This causes misunderstandings that stall the work.

Singapore's public service leaders report that a boundary-spanning mindset is a uniquely important lesson learned from many **stakeholder engagements**. Leaders with a "boundary-spanning mindset" consistently collaborate across group boundaries to act collectively and achieve a common vision.

The Singapore Public Service Sector's Boundary-spanning Mindset

To run the Singapore government effectively, senior public service leaders adopt a "whole-of-government" approach and routinely cooperate across agencies, citizen groups, and social, economic and industrial sectors. Their work also involves interacting with various external constituencies, including representatives from other countries. In describing what he had learned by working with multiple constituencies, one senior leader said:

"I was asked to lead a team to review policies with many agencies involved. I had to make sure that their interests are protected. I strongly agree with the need to make sure that when we look at an issue, all the different perspectives are taken into account. If you don't have that in the very beginning, everybody will have a different view of what is the national interest."

Crisis, by its nature, is an unexpected and shocking event with the potential to create negative impact and unfavorable publicity. The disorder that follows injures the interests of individuals, organizations, and even countries. Caused by factors such as natural disasters, fraudulent or illegal activities, poor ethical practices, or negligence, **crises** cannot be completely controlled and often pose a threat to the reputation and survival of top leaders and their organizations.

Among the leaders participating in CCL's studies, those working with Singapore public service organizations talked about crisis events most often. The examples they cited included financial turmoil, business setbacks, threats to national security or public health and safety, the loss of jobs or housing, corruption scandals, and injuries or loss of life due to supervisory negligence.

Ethical dilemmas occur when fraudulent, illegal, or immoral behavior by a senior leader is observed and endured by a lower-level manager. These vivid, value-laden experiences can create long-lasting learning.

In our studies, "integrity" is defined as honestly and publicly expressing one's values. It implies courage and a sense of fair play. When managers take responsibility for protecting themselves, their company, or a coworker against actions by others that go against their own deeply held values, they are showing integrity in the face of an ethical dilemma.

Ethical dilemmas were cited most often by US managers and involved making choices between the well-being of others versus the organization.

Behaving with Integrity

A senior US manager described a profound lesson about maintaining his personal leadership integrity. He had discovered fraud in his organization, which was being ignored by his boss. He brought the situation to the attention of his superiors, who assisted in correcting the problem. This was not easy because his career progress was in the hands of his boss. Fortunately, he was protected by his superiors. He learned that it takes a lot of courage to stand alone and be a whistleblower. Lives were at stake, though, so he felt he had to do what he did.

The Experience-Lesson Link

Clearly, organizations aiming for global growth must grow their talent pool and strengthen the caliber of their leaders.

We propose that the first step in this process is simply to pay attention to which on-the-job experiences are the most developmental. Look to the "basic five" and "plus two" experiences defined for China, India, Singapore, and the United States for guidance. Providing a suitable mix of experiences can help your organization be more intentional in developing early and mid-career managers.

The second step is to pay attention to which leadership lessons are the most important to your organization and the experiences most likely to teach them. Our research findings emphasize that three leadership lessons are relevant across all countries and can be learned from the **Basic Five Plus Two**. These are:

- Managing direct reports
- Becoming self-aware
- Executing effectively

Complementing these universally relevant lessons are several that are uniquely important in some countries, but not in others (see Table 1 on page 19). In our view, the fact that some lessons are reported more often in one country over another is due to the prevailing historical, political, economic, and social context at the time the research was conducted. These seemingly unique lessons are learned by managers in other countries as well.

In China:
Communication, establishing systems and regulations, building and managing a team, and functional and technical expertise

In India:
Confidence, working across differences, innovation and entrepreneurship, and managing career and life goals

In Singapore:
Managing stakeholders, boundary-spanning mindset, and insights about leadership

In the United States:
Managing career and life goals, managing stakeholders, managing change, and empathy

Universally Important Lessons: Observations and Insights

Managing direct reports and **self-awareness** are among the top five lessons learned in all four countries in our study. **Executing effectively** ranks among the top five in three countries. Since these lessons are broadly viewed as important, they warrant a deeper look.

Managing direct reports involves many separate but related tasks—such as delegating and following up, developing others and motivating people with diverse needs. This lesson can be learned from a range of very different experiences. Examples include:

- Being managed exceptionally well by one's own boss and by watching how to delegate effectively, coach others and motivate diverse employees.
- Direct experience as one rises up through the ranks, first learning to manage hourly employees as a supervisor, then managing other managers and supervisors, and finally managing people who are quite senior in the organization. Each successive increase in scope provides unique lessons in how to manage others.
- Managing direct reports during a turnaround— from overseeing layoffs to coaching and motivating those who remain.

Self-awareness often increases when one has an opportunity to confront and reflect on new challenges. This happens with:

- An increase in scope, as the demands of managing more people, a larger budget or a greater span of responsibility tests a manager's skills. Feedback from others on strengths and development needs then increases **self-awareness**.
- A boss or superior who skillfully provides appropriate feedback and coaching to promote **self-awareness**, even when job demands do not change.

Executing effectively is learned from turnarounds in China and India. This is not surprising since turnarounds call for close attention to managing relationships and resources. Singapore's public service managers, however, are more likely to learn this lesson by watching bosses and superiors execute effectively.

Table 1

The Experience-Lesson Link (most frequently reported experiences and lessons only, by country)

C— China   **I**— India   **S**—Singapore   **U**—USA

Leadership lessons	Experiences										
	Bosses & superiors	Turnarounds	Increases in job scope	Horizontal moves	New initiatives	Personal experiences	Mistakes	Stakeholder engagements	Crisis	Cultural crossings	Ethical dilemmas
Managing direct reports	CISU	CU	CISU				U		S		
Self-awareness	SU		CSU	S		I					
Executing effectively	S	CI									
Integrity	SU						U				U
Managing stakeholders	U		U						S		
Communication		C									
Building & managing teams		C									
Insights about leadership	SU										
Managing change		U									
Confidence	I				I	I					
Functional and technical expertise				C			C				
Innovation and entrepreneurship		I			I						
Empathy	U										
Career & life goals	U					I					
Working across differences										I	
Boundary-spanning mindset								S			
Establishing systems & regulations		C	C				C				

Uniquely Important Lessons: Observations and Insights

Unique **Plus Two** experiences also can lead to important developmental lessons. For example, in India, **personal experiences** are an often-cited source of lessons about **confidence**, while **cultural crossings** can teach managers about **working across differences**. Neither of these event-lesson combinations was as frequently mentioned in other countries.

Chinese managers learn from mistakes the importance of establishing **systems and regulations**. **Stakeholder engagements** help Singaporean public service leaders develop a **boundary-spanning mindset**. **Ethical dilemmas** help US managers learn integrity.

To understand these unique features of our studies, it is important to consider the context in which the managers live their lives. The country-specific insights below are illustrative, not exhaustive.

China

The shift to a market economy occurred mid-career for most managers in our study. The transition from state to private ownership required leaders to set up systems and regulations for running a very different kind of organization.

India

Most of our respondents were hitting their career stride during a period of rapid economic growth and international expansion. They experienced a significant focus on innovation, entrepreneurship and risk-taking. Managers needed to become confident and to learn to work across differences with their counterparts from various countries.

Singapore

The country's small size and limited resources make it imperative for public service leaders to collaborate across various industrial and social sectors and achieve an overarching vision for citizens. A boundary-spanning mindset makes collaboration possible.

United States

Historical ideals about fair play and equal opportunity may encourage managers to confront ethical dilemmas. Similar dilemmas in other countries may not evoke as ardent a sense of personal responsibility for making value-based choices and for acting with integrity.

How important are these more unique leadership lessons? And can leaders from other geographies be encouraged to learn from equivalent experiences?

Among the more unique event-lesson links in our study, there are two that are especially important and deserve to be highlighted:

- The link between stakeholder engagement and boundary-spanning mindset.

- The link between **crossing cultures** and working across differences.

Both these lessons are increasingly critical for people leading in today's complex global environment.

Fortunately, opportunities for stakeholder engagement are abundant. For example, this experience follows from initiatives involving social responsibility and environmental sustainability, community and media relations, customer service and supply chain management.

Experiences in **crossing cultures** can start within an organization, functionally or regionally, and can be implemented through projects, team assignments or other responsibilities that cross internal organizational boundaries. Later in the manager's career, culture-crossing assignments can become more significant in scope and scale. They can be globally focused and cross both organizational boundaries and national cultures.

However it is done, in today's world it is critical to equip leaders with a global boundary-spanning mindset and the ability to work across differences. It is critical to leadership effectiveness and to the sustainability of the organization.

Our research team is in the early stages of determining how leaders from different parts of the globe can best learn to become more skillful as leaders. For those responsible for global learning and development, this evolving body of knowledge is especially pertinent. Leadership lessons learned in some regions may benefit leaders in all regions.

Implications for Grooming Top Leaders

Consider the challenge facing the HR vice president for a global firm with five lines of business and 27,000 employees in 11 countries. This company, based in an emerging economy, aims to double its USD 2 billion annual revenues within five to seven years. To meet its target, though, the company quickly needs to prepare second-tier leaders to assume top-level positions.

Working with the company's five business heads, HR embarks upon an ambitious program to cycle high-potential managers through a minimum of three assignments over 30 months, selected from among the following:

1. Assume expanded regional responsibilities.
2. Close an unprofitable manufacturing unit.
3. Formalize and manage a vendor network.
4. Diversify a line of business by developing new products.
5. Rotate into a different function.
6. Take on a mentorship role for a cohort of first-time supervisors.

To understand the learning potential embedded in these six assignments, HR maps them to work experiences defined in the research literature: increase in scope, turnaround, stakeholder engagement, new initiative, horizontal move, and becoming a better boss or superior, respectively.

Business mentors and coaches are carefully selected and trained to help the future top leaders successfully meet new challenges. Experiential training is provided to all stakeholders to engage them with new concepts, provide an opportunity to practice communication and collaboration, and help them learn from experience.

Individual managers receive detailed descriptions of various developmental experiences so they can map a long-term development and career plan in consultation with their bosses and HR. Their development becomes more focused and more outcome-oriented because the lessons they need to learn can be sourced in real-world experiences. Business mentors and coaches guide them as they learn and perform.

This is one of many possible scenarios. You can devise innovative solutions for your own organization by reflecting on current practices and the changes needed in order to leverage learning from experience.

Questions for Reflection

To develop a leadership strategy that complements business strategy:

• What are the three leadership capabilities your future top leaders are most encouraged to develop?

• How would the development of these three capabilities advance your organization's business objectives?

To identify experiences and learned lessons:

• What are the specific events or experiences used to impart leadership insights?

• Has your organization identified vital experiences or work assignments that can develop critically necessary capabilities?

• How willing are the leaders in your organization to reflect on and tell stories about what they have learned about leadership through experience?

To support learning and growth among your future top leaders:

• In what ways are managers encouraged to practice and improve their leadership effectiveness?

• What processes are used to encourage learning from personal experiences, mistakes, crises or ethical dilemmas?

• To what extent are top leaders and bosses willing to become mentors and/ or coaches?

• To what extent do top leaders and bosses have the skills to mentor or coach?

• Are there barriers that impede reflection on experiences and lessons learned?

We have focused on insights that can be used to develop top leadership talent across multiple countries. Our objective is to build on previous knowledge and to make the most recent insights from CCL's Lessons of Experience studies available to senior leaders and human resource practitioners who are responsible for leadership strategy. We propose that organizations become more deliberate in grooming a new generation of top leaders by creating systems and processes that help managers learn leadership from workplace and **personal experiences**.

About the Research

We asked 393 top and senior executives in China, Singapore, India, and the United States to describe experiences or events that significantly shaped their way of managing and leading. Their narrative responses helped us pinpoint experiences or events most likely to unleash leadership potential among managers in these four countries today. The narratives also tell us about the specific leadership lessons learned from each experience. Some lessons learned are common across all geographies, while others are country- and context-specific.

Table 2

Overview of 21st Century Lessons of Experience (LOE) Studies

Country	Year Completed	Number of Participants	Type of Organizations
China	2009	54	4 state-owned and 2 private-sector companies
Singapore	2008	34	12 government ministries and 18 government agencies
India	2007	71	8 global private-sector companies
United States	2005	234	117 private sector companies, 21 public sector companies, and 13 nonprofit organizations

Resources

Previous publications based on the Lessons of Experience methodology

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Acknowledgments

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To learn more about this topic or the Center for Creative Leadership's programs and products, please contact our Client Services team.

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