



LEADERSHIP CIRCLES

EVALUATION 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary of the evaluation of Leadership Circles presents five statements that are related to the five major sections of the evaluation sheet.

- The great majority of respondents in this evaluation of Leadership Circles were positive about the experience they had been involved in.
- The respondents tended to perceive the processes used as effective but some would have liked a more structured group process.
- Members of these Leadership Circles commented favourably about the attributes of facilitators. As would be expected, there were some suggestions as to how facilitators could improve their skills.
- In terms of outcomes the three most frequently identified were the value obtained from the guest speakers, acquiring a greater self awareness and knowledge of self development and an appreciation of networking and relationships with others.
- Circle member would like a continuing association in some form with their group members or to participate in another group.

INTRODUCTION

During 2008 a series of 9 Leadership Circles were conducted by The Growing Edge Consultancy Services. Since 1999 this consultancy has been organising Leadership Circles in many contexts. However, all Circles have had the same objective and this has been '*Creating more confident and successful leaders*'.

Each of the Leadership Circles participated in 10 or 11 meetings; each of which lasted 3 to 4 hours. The Growing Edge Consultancy developed an evaluation sheet that was suitable for use across various Circles and this was distributed late in 2008. There were 66 participants in the 2008 Leadership Circles and 34 completed this evaluation sheet. The 34 respondents represents 52% of the total participants in the Circles and given that there were respondents from each of the nine Circles the quantitative and qualitative data obtained is likely to be sufficient and satisfactory in terms of representing the views of participants.

Two previous evaluations have been conducted by this evaluator.

A feature of the initial reading of responses was an awareness that questions had generated some strong responses and indeed passion. In an endeavour to provide an initial feeling as to the nature of the data I will quote some of these responses. One example was the response to the question:

What were your major learning/outcomes from the Circle?

Now most respondents made a considerable amount of positive statements in responding to this question but one simply wrote one word:

'Limited'.

The first observation about an evaluation of a group process is that it is not always possible to carry every participant to a satisfying and possibly rewarding experience. The pressing question, which we cannot answer with the current information, is what were the reasons behind this response?

Another participant wrote the following response to the above question:

'I fit in here.

And confirmed my own beliefs.

- ***Attitude counts more than ability.***
- ***Life is what you make it'.***

The second observation about an evaluation of a group process is that it is not always abundantly clear what meaning should be attached to a written statement. Based on other responses on this particular evaluation sheet I believe that this Circle member decided during the meetings they did belong to the organisation upon which this Circle focussed.

There were other participants who perceive they achieved what they wanted from the sessions and the following statement reinforces this:

'A great programme that has helped me to assess where I am, where I want to be and what I need to work on to get there'.

The third observation about this particular evaluation is that the responses were obtained immediately after the last meeting of Circles and thus represent perceptions at a particular point in time: would these perceptions remain with the passage of time?

DATA PRESENTATION

The first three questions of the evaluation required the respondents to rate aspects of Leadership Circles on a five point scale where 1 was the lowest possible score and 5 the highest possible score.

The three questions to be rated on the five point scale were:

QUESTION 1: Was the Leadership Circle a worthwhile experience?

QUESTION 2: How would you rate the process used?

QUESTION 3: How would you rate the facilitator's skills/expertise?

The ratings by the 34 respondents were combined and the table on page 6 is a bar graph of the results. This graph has on the vertical axis the range of ratings from 2 to 5. The lowest rating of 1 was not included in the bar graph as this rating was not used by the members of Circles who responded. The horizontal axis is based on percentage and thus it is possible to show the percentage of respondents scoring 2 to 5 for the three questions.

Example--Interpreting the bar graph

The graph is interpreted in the following manner. If you look at the rating or score of 5, three pieces of information are available and these are:

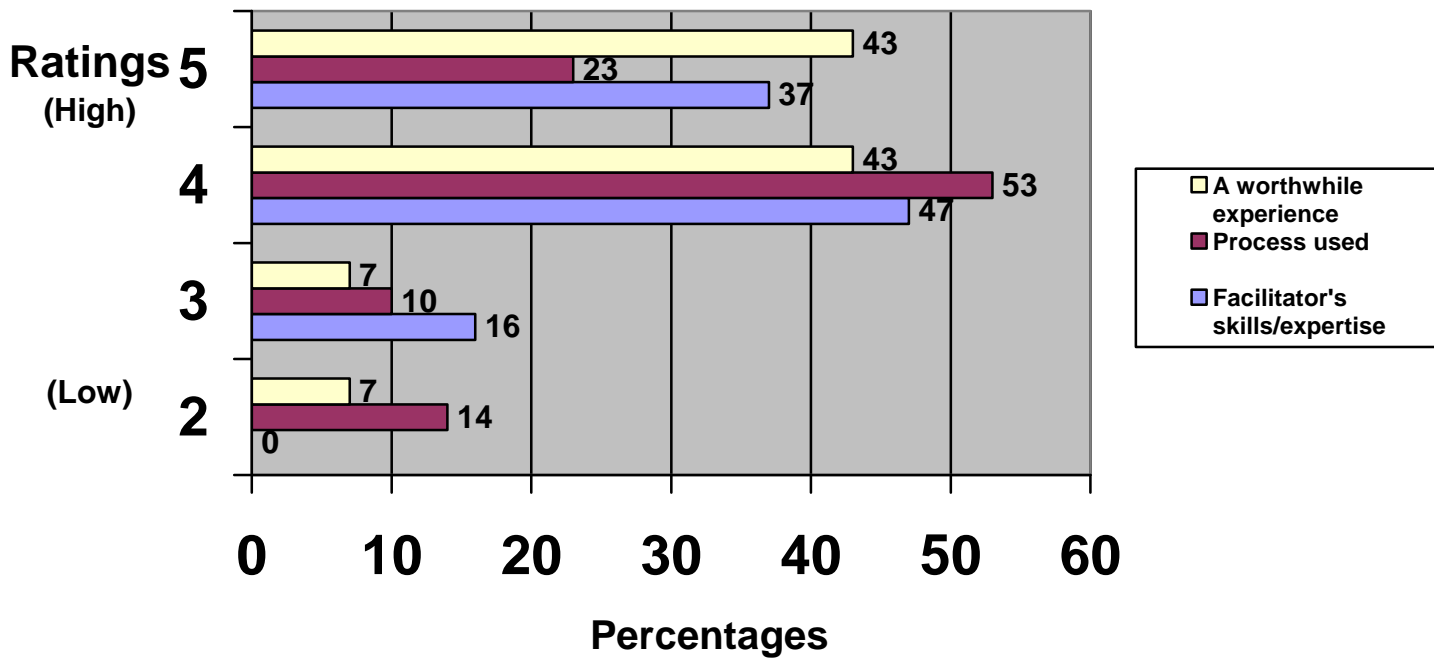
- For Question 1. **Was the Leadership Circle a worthwhile experience?**
43% of respondents used the highest rating of 5.
- For Question 2. **How would you rate the processes used?**
23 % of respondents used the highest rating of 5.
- For Question 3. **How would you rate the facilitator's skills/expertise?**
37% of respondents used the highest rating of 5.

Major Information Contained in the Graph

There are two major pieces of information.

- The great majority of respondents used either a 5 or 4 when rating the three first questions on the evaluation sheet.
- There were respondents who used ratings lower on the scale. For example, 7% gave Leadership Circles as a worthwhile experience a rating of 2. It should be noted that as percentages were rounded, this 7% translates into 2 of the 34 respondents.

RATINGS OF LEADERSHIP CIRCLES



DESCRIPTIVE COMMENTS

Each of the first three questions requiring a rating was also accompanied by an 'Any comments?' request.

(i) Any comments on Leadership Circles being a worthwhile experience?

Sixteen participants did write additional comments and I have endeavoured to select statements which I felt conveyed a reasonable representation of those provided. Each of these statements is accompanied by a Leadership Circle affiliation.

- **X facilitated a fantastic learning experience through the duration of the year. (GU1)**
- **I have got to know my work colleagues who participated a lot better. This has helped build better relationships. (GU2)**
- **Too much focus on the one project. (FBS)**
- **Very positive and supportive environment in which to be open and frank. (Mag Z)**
- **Invaluable rounding of my views on management and leadership. (Big C)**
- **Great forum to bring colleagues together as our work environment does not always permit. (E&P)**
- **Far better than I expected it to be. Made me rethink several things. (North Pipe)**
- **Contributed to obtaining career objectives. (North Pipe)**
- **It was worthwhile and I would certainly recommend this type of activity to others. (B Club)**

The participant who responded tended to make rather supportive comments but two members of the FBS Circle expressed some concern about the time spent on one project.

(ii) Any comments on the process used in the Leadership Circles?

The written statements made by 18 participants tended to range from those expressing praise to those suggesting modifications.

- **Would have liked a brief 'concept ' discussion each meeting. (GU1)**
- **It took a long time to get going and then it was over. (GU2)**
- **Sometimes it required a bit more structure to keep it within the time so all topics got covered. (Big C)**
- **Excellent to hear from experts who have been there and done that. (Mag Z)**
- **X has a very engaging style and casual style that encourages everyone's participation. (Mag Z)**

- **I'm of the view that the 'here and now' opportunity to highlight group process was not optimised to the fullest. Too much time on 'checking in' and not enough spent on the following up on issues of concern. (E&P)**
- **Liked that there was a set routine. (P C)**
- **Initially I was not sure about it but after a couple of sessions it really worked well. (North Pipe)**

In summary, it is worth noting that making what respondents perceived as suggestions for improvement should not be taken as implying dissatisfaction. In fact the great majority of Circle members suggesting improvements rated the process used as either 5 or 4.

Two members who did not identify which Circle they belonged to made statements about the handling of issues. One suggested that **'In dealing with issues I would like to see a more definite action plan so the plan is actually achieved'**. The other wrote **'Monthly action schedule- That is at each check in tick off the actions from the previous meeting'**.

(iii) Any comments regarding the facilitator's skill/expertise?

Fifteen of the respondents from the Leadership Circles wrote comments about this question and the following are examples of responses:

- **Uses a low key process. (GU1)**
- **Excellent- He is very knowledgeable and experienced. (GU1)**
- **Not necessarily suited to the audiences requirements. (GU2)**
- **Manage time better. (Big C)**
- **Absolutely suited me. A genuine facilitator. (B Club)**
- **Amazing the contacts he has and knowledge of resources (Mag Z)**
- **Is very skilled in people management. (Mag Z)**
- **An excellent facilitator...compassionate person that is comfortable to let the group unfold. I'd be more inclined to have more structure particularly for groups that have not experienced this type of process. (E&P)**

QUESTION 4--What were your major learnings/outcomes from the Circle?

Given the nature of this question it is not surprising that it drew so much comment. It may well be that the 34 respondents perceived this as the critical question in the evaluation. This was their opportunity to question whether the time and money put into the Circles was worthwhile. As there was quite a diversity of comments it was decided to do a content analysis on this set of data. In this process, the written statements were examined to establish if there were any obvious and even reoccurring themes or concepts evident. These themes and the frequency with which they were identified in the written statements are reported in the following table.

PERCEIVED OUTCOMES FROM CIRCLES

Observed Themes	Frequency
Value of guest speakers	11
Self development and awareness	10
Networking and relationships	7
About leadership style	5
A life balance	4
Reflection	4
Understanding differences	3
Learning from issues of others	3
Getting feedback	3
The comfort zone challenge	1
Accessing information sources	1
Planning and goal setting	1
Tapping leadership in an organisation	1

OBSERVED THEMES

Given that a feature of each Circle meeting was the guest speaker it is no surprise that the value of speakers was mentioned as a beneficial outcome by eleven Leadership Circle members. Self development and awareness was mentioned as an outcome by ten Circle members. Again this is no surprise as leaders, or aspiring leaders, are likely to be aware of their own perceptions of self and how these may impact on leadership attributes in specific contexts.

For each of the above themes examples are now provided that indicate the tenor of the comments. In a couple of instances I will also mention what might be viewed as negatively perceived outcomes of Circles.

Value of guest speakers

- **Achieved lessons from experiences of guest speakers. (GU1)**
- **Good insights from the speakers. (GU2)**
- **Valued the experiences of successful speakers. (Big C)**
- **Learning from the life experiences of speakers. (Mag Z)**

- **In general the speakers were of considerable value. (North Pipe)**
- **The best outcome I got from the LC was learning from the experiences of guest speakers as well as my fellow circlers. (Mag Z)**

Self development and awareness

- **Learned skills of how to develop myself. (GU1)**
- **Greater understanding of my strengths and weaknesses and what I need to develop further. (GU1)**
- **My ability to self-assess and share the results with others. (Big C)**
- **Improved self-confidence and self-value. (Big C)**
- **I am convinced that I should give more thought to my self development. I now know what things I should concentrate on. Thank you. (North Pipe)**

One respondent wrote 'self awareness yes, but to the extent that I know I am a long way away from where I would like to be ...frustrating'.

About leadership style

- **Work as a team leader not by yourself. (FBS)**
- **My 'drive' may be construed as competition'.(E&P)**
- **How different leadership styles can make a difference. (PC)**
- **There is no doubt that the leadership style used can influence a career. (North Pipe)**

A lengthy comment was made about the many 'sorts' of leaders in business and concluded with the following: 'However...I dread being like some I know'.

Networking and relationships

- **Need more understanding, sharing and building of relationships. (GU2)**
- **Provided a network of support of leadership members. (FBS)**
- **Colleagues now see me as I am...networking. (E&P)**
- **Understanding/listening to colleagues and others. (Mag Z)**

One respondent argued that 'until now I have been against networking... may take my good ideas'.

Life balance

- **Need to confirm the approaches I have taken for life balance. (Mag Z)**

- **Highlight the values between... career, personal, family and social objectives. (PC)**
- **Listening to others I think I have achieved 'life balance' half right. (B Club)**

Reflection

- **Reflect continuously on my practice and actually think about its impact on others. (GU1)**
- **Make more time for reflection. (GU2)**

Understanding differences

- **Tolerance of the difference of others. (E&P)**
- **Understanding the personalities of others...how they think. (FBS)**
- **How to work with those who are quite different to me. (PC)**

Learning from issues of others

- **Learning from issues placed on the table. (PC)**
- **Empowerment --How to deal with the issues that confront you. (FBS)**

Feedback

- **Useful personal feedback from facilitator and peers. (GU1)**
- **Some extremely good feedback from Circle members. (Mag Z)**

Challenge yourself and comfort zone

- **The need to take on challenges and get out of your comfort zone. (Mag Z)**

Gaining information.

- **I especially enjoyed the books and readings-especially having someone filter these. (Big C)**

Planning and goal setting.

- **Put more effort into planning and goal setting. (Mag Z)**

Tapping leadership in an organisation

- **How to tap the wealth of leadership in an organisation. (E&P)**

QUESTION 5--What further actions and/or follow up would you like to see?

The responses to this question tend to have a very strong focus on the maintaining of links among Circle members in the future. These responses range from suggestions of an informal get together to formal meetings and even comments about implied structure. I have little doubt that the great majority of responding Circle members would like to see a continuation of some type of processes. However, as the following comments indicate there is no precision as to what exactly is wanted. Many of the comments about 'maintaining links' do not make mention that the suggestions made imply use of resources. The issue of further cost is made by one respondent. In my opinion the responses to this question raise queries that only the individual or organisational 'funders' of Circles can answer.

The comments regarding maintaining Circle links will be reported on the basis of each Circle

MAINTAINING CIRCLE LINKS

Circle GU1

- **I will maintain links.**
- **Would like continue in a mixed group outside the organisation in which I work.**
- **Will be getting together informally as a group to further our networking and share experiences. (Three made similar comments.)**
- **Perhaps a once a year catch up with the facilitator--at a cost.**

Circle GU2

- **More meetings with other managers.**
- **A regular breakfast once a quarter to keep network alive.**
- **A continuation of meetings. (Two with similar comments.)**

Circle Big C

- **Can a continuing 'group page' be set up?**
- **A monthly newsletter (by Ken) with musings, readings and responses from participants.**

Circle FBS

- **Some form of ongoing team building.**
- **Suggest a return to the 2007 model. (This was to do with the organisation of speakers.)**

Circle Mag Z

- **Reunion in 3 to 5 years.**
- **Opportunity exists for further participation and networking.**
- **I would like to see more enthusiasm from my fellow circlers to take advantage of what the facilitator and co have to offer. (Note: This is wider than maintaining links.)**

Circle E&P

- Another session to revisit where Circle members are up to--Has anything changed.
- A periodic gathering of participants across LCs--quarterly or half yearly. L C graduates could give a talk.
- Natural process of forming and disbanding a group-so you can get to know more people in E&P. Vertical slice of the organisation rather than a flat would be preferred. I am sure the reservations about being guarded in their responses can be managed.

Circle PC

- Some follow up articles would be very helpful.
- Hear about what other Circle members did and what they think.

North Pipe

- I hope there is a chance to follow up as there are issue I would still like to clarify.

B Club

- It is really up to us. If we want to continue to talk about issues then we need to make a positive move and not just talk about it.

QUESTION--6 Any other comments?

This question generated the least amount of written comments, probably because by this time respondents had made the points they thought most relevant.

The comments made tend to be general and positive: they also included 'thank you' comments. There was however ideas expressed in a few comments that had not been aired previously. These comments included the following:

Commitment to process

- **I was highly committed to this process and that is why I think this was a very effective forum. (GU1)**

Connecting to speakers

- **I found the guest speakers difficult to connect with when they just told their life stories. (PC)**

Recommend to others

- **I would recommend this process to others as it was an involvement in a process that was both new and challenging to me. (PC)**

Learning Experience

- **I had no idea what to expect and initially may have been a bit negative about the process...it was far more a learning experience than I anticipated. (Mag Z)**

Looking Ahead

- **I hope this experience does not just end in a few months. This has been good for me and I have been challenged. How can I look ahead and know that a good but challenging experience will occur again. There is a question I have. Who is responsible for ensuring that "we" are refreshed again? Is it up to me or the organisation? Perhaps both. It has really helped with my job satisfaction. (B Club)**

CONCLUSIONS

Was the Leadership Circle a worthwhile experience?

In responding to this question 86% of Circle members used the two highest assessment ratings. That, is they circled either a 5 or 4 rating.

The written comments by the majority of respondents tended to be extremely favourable and words like 'fantastic', 'excellent', 'positive' and 'supportive' were used. However, indication of strong support for the experience does not imply that there will be no criticism or suggestions for improvement. For example two respondents circled a rating of 5 but suggested there had been too much focus on one project.

How would you rate the processes used?

Of those responding, 76% used either a rating of 5 or 4. This suggests there was considerable satisfaction with the processes used during Circle meetings. However, I am sure the consulting group and facilitators would prefer a higher percentage of respondents scoring 5 than 4.

There were a range of individual comments with some saying they liked the set routine, hearing from experts and the style of the facilitator. Others suggested more structure was needed and less time devoted to checking in.

How would you rate the facilitator's skill/expertise?

Eighty four percent of respondents used either a rating of 4 or 5 for this question and again this seems to suggest the great majority were more than satisfied with the skills of the facilitators.

There were comments about the excellent knowledge of facilitators, their skilled management of persons and of being compassionate. One respondent indicated the facilitator may not be suited to the audience's requirements and another that time management could be improved.

What were your major learnings/outcomes from the Circle?

An analysis of written comments indicated that 54 perceived learnings or outcomes could be identified from this group of 34 Circle members. Eleven of these perceived outcomes were linked to aspects of guest speakers. Some Circle members felt they got useful tips from speakers; others were interested in, or found value in, their work or broader life experiences. In other instances Circles members felt they had gained knowledge that was relevant to issues they faced in their workplace.

Ten statements were written about Circle learning being related to self development and awareness. These statements suggested respondents gained a greater awareness of their strengths and weaknesses especially as a leader. Appreciating the advantages of networking with others, gaining greater understanding of leadership styles, reflecting and considering the challenges of obtaining a degree of life balance were also identified as outcomes from members of the Leadership Circles.

What further actions and/or follow ups would you like to see?

The written comments made upon completion of the Circles certainly suggest a desire by most members to continue the association with the other members in some way. The precise manner of an ongoing association varies across the members. There were those who state they would just like to maintain contact and others who want to have an informal association. The possibility of joining a 'mixed group' was raised. Such a group could contain people from a variety of organisations or represent a vertical slice through the levels in one organisation.

There are statements that suggest a meeting or breakfast be held 'quarterly', 'half yearly' or 'yearly'. In one instance it is suggested that a reunion be held every three to five years. There are those who would like to see follow up articles, a group page or even a monthly newsletter.

Based on the written comments I believe that there is a desire to maintain what the Circle has given members. There are two issues that arise. First who is to take the initiative to maintain links and second who provides the necessary resources?

Any other comments?

By the time most respondents reached this question they had made the important points they wanted to about Leadership Circles. Several made general positive comments about their experiences and others reiterated points they had made in response to other questions. There were several who thanked the sponsors and facilitators for their efforts.

One of the more interest responses to this question was as follows:

- **We all need this type of involvement...what a shame all do not get this experience. We all need to reflect in a reasonably structured environment and ask our self a few questions...where am I going? Does my plan for work, life, family and friends make sense? If not, why not? Am I willing to make the necessary adjustments? (P&E)**

Overall Perspective

The qualitative and quantitative data obtained for this evaluation suggests that leaders, or aspiring leaders, from a range of different work contexts felt genuine value had been gained from participating in a Leadership Circle.

There are many leaders and aspiring leaders in workplaces who experience stress in the execution of their roles, or who are eager to gain a greater appreciation of the elements involved in being a leader. Given that the current and prior evaluations indicate the value of Leadership Circles how can we ensure that such experiences become more widely available?