



Case Study

# A Three-tiered Approach to Leadership Training

Using blended learning to drive culture and  
leadership

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## In this Case Study

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Leadership training focuses on enabling leaders to achieve business goals through people. In multi-national companies, cultural awareness is important at all levels of the organization, but especially at the leadership levels where it needs to be addressed on a daily basis. Developing cultural competence and integrating it into a company's workforce can be one of the most challenging aspects of leadership development. Leveraging cultural competence in today's markets can mean the difference between success and failure when executing business strategies.

Leadership training formats should help key employees create connections with others and share real world experiences. When used effectively, online learning, with its ability to reach a broader audience than classroom training, can help build bridges across different working styles and cultures.

This case study discusses how Air Products and Chemicals, Inc. (Air Products) uses an integrated approach that combines custom and off-the-shelf courseware to expand its leadership training programs. The programs are tailored to meet the needs of new, mid-level, and senior managers.

## The Leadership Training Challenge

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Air Products is a diversified manufacturing company with nearly 20,000 employees and annual revenues of \$7.4B. The company has operations in more than 30 countries.

Air Products encountered a well-known and fairly typical concern when exploring the expansion of its leadership and management programs: *the current format simply wasn't scalable*. Although the existing leadership education program was strong, it reached only a small portion of the more than 1,500 managers across the company. With managers actively serving customers in the field, Air Products had to explore an alternate approach. A new solution had to reach a wider audience without trading the social learning that was so critical to support the cultural needs of the company.

Aside from developing a more scalable program, Air Products had a unique problem to solve: **How do you blend traditional management training with customized culture-development?**

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## How do managers find the right courses for their level?

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The company found many vendors with large libraries of traditional, U.S.-centric content, but struggled to figure out how employees could wade through these libraries to select the appropriate courses for their competency level. Air Products needed a curriculum plan which varied by management level.

## How to build Cultural Skills and General Management Skills?

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In addition, these large libraries were missing the cultural factors essential to any leadership program. Air Products was concerned that while many of these vendors had strong content, employees would miss the social interactivity available with more traditional training methods. With locations in more than 30 countries, Air Products needed a solution that was scalable, efficient, and effective – yet focused on development of cultural skills in addition to traditional management skills.

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## The Solution: A Three-Tier Blended Approach

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For Air Products, the solution was not to be found with a single vendor. The company approached two of its key vendors, eCornell and TMC, with an idea to develop a partnership that blends each of its unique niches to create a singular approach to its business problem. In this alliance, Air Products brings the expertise on internal topics, eCornell provides the online management content, while TMC provides a wealth of experience and knowledge on cultural awareness. Together, they have developed a comprehensive management curriculum based on Air Products Leadership Competencies that provides a one-stop shop for employee management training.

This approach blends online learning, electronic support tools, classroom courses, and technology-based learning to fill the demands of its learners around the world.

Air Products separates its managers into the following three levels (see Figure 1):

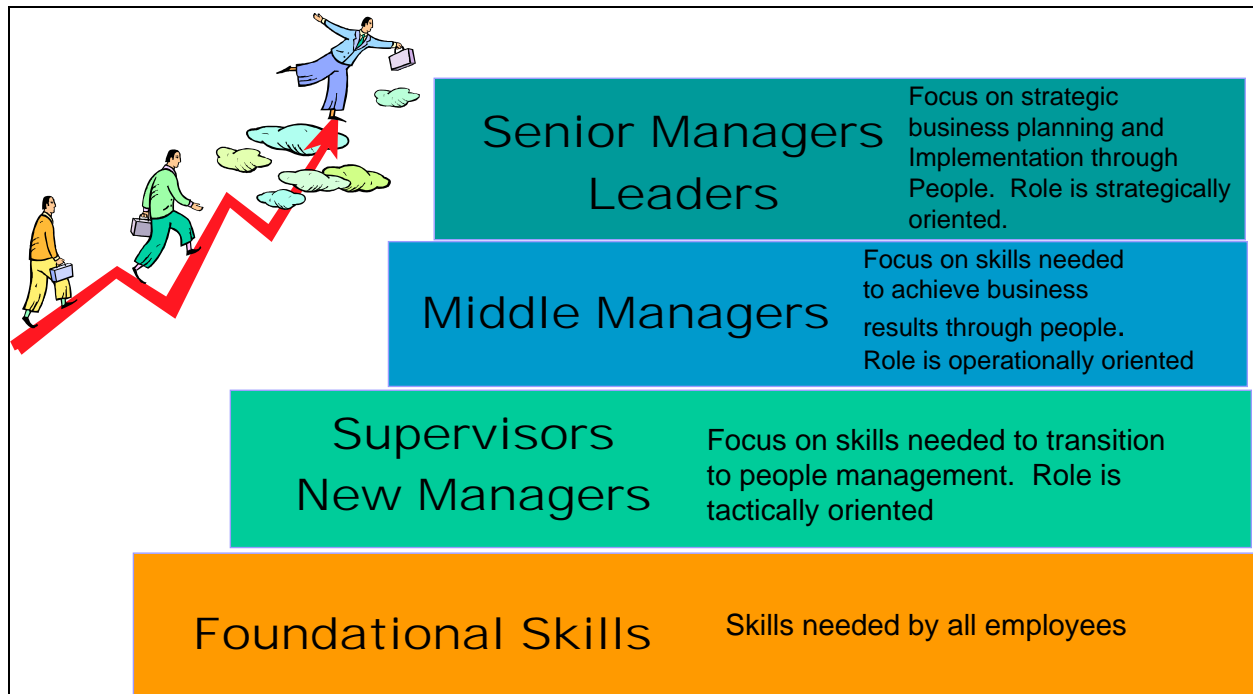


Figure 1 - Air Products uses three tiers of management development programs

### 1. New Managers / Supervisors

New supervisors and managers on the front line need a significant amount of coaching and on-the-job training as well as skills to help balance their functional work. They often are focused on tactical tasks, and the development they receive needs to reflect this profile.

### 2. Mid-level Managers

Mid-level managers focus on optimizing processes and systems and achieving business results. They may not yet be focused on strategic planning, but need these skills in order to advance to the next level.

### 3. Senior Managers / Leaders

Senior managers and leaders focus on strategically-oriented work, integrating people, processes, and technologies. They need the ability to cascade business goals down through the entire employee base in order to develop alignment and drive execution of the goals of the company.

Air Products currently has programs in place for all three management groups.

## Foundational Skills

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### **Audience: New Managers / Supervisors**

This program focuses on transitioning from an individual contributor to a manager. Participants start with a three day, in-class orientation session and learn about the company's model and the competencies they are expected to develop as a manager in order to support their direct reports and the company.

After the orientation session, the participant teams with a partner student and begins an 18 month online experience designed to develop the foundational skills needed as a new manager. The partner approach creates a support network as they learn together.

The participants, in groups of 25-30, take online courses that are self-paced, yet supported by instructors with scheduled start and end dates. These courses incorporate strong elements of interactivity, as course takers participate with both instructors and peers through discussion groups, with instructors always on-hand to set expectations, answer questions, and review projects and exercises. Participants are expected to complete a couple of classes a month, with short breaks interspersed throughout the program to help reduce the stress of participating in the program. Also available are internal coaches from the Employee Development organization who assist with immediate issues or questions as the new manager moves through the program.

To complete the certification the new managers work in *virtual teams* to apply their skills on a project that directly benefits the company.

The project uses current Air Products situations to provide the new managers an opportunity to apply and reinforce new skills. In addition, the participant has an opportunity to engage in an action-learning experience that addresses managing and working in virtual teams. The participant defines the problem, develops possible solutions, and then presents them to the case owner who uses this information to help resolve the business issue.

## Intermediate Skills

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### **Audience: Mid-level Managers**

In this program managers begin with an assessment to determine their strengths as well as any skill gaps. Recognizing that at this level managers have solid experience managing others, the expectation is that they now need to focus on developing stronger

business skills to achieve their business goals through people. If their assessment shows gaps in people management skills they are directed to courses that can close these gaps.

Like the new manager program, courses are delivered through a mix of e-learning, technology, and traditional classroom approaches (see Figure 3). Air Products Employee Development group delivers company-specific topics, such as performance management or compensation, either in the corporate office or on site.

Managers at Air Products, as in other companies, are very busy and often cannot take the time to attend a multiple-day workshop. For topics that require learning in a classroom environment, Air Products decided they needed to consider alternative delivery approaches to deal with this problem.

In partnership with one of its vendors, they built a pilot program to create *single topics that can be delivered over a two-hour period of time*. These short blocks of learning, such as Performance Management, easily can be combined into a series. This series consists of an Introduction to Air Products performance management practices, followed by two hour learning blocks on each of the following topics:

- Developing People
- Motivating People
- Giving Performance Feedback
- Recognizing and Rewarding
- Conducting an Appraisal Discussion

Managers can participate in the learning blocks over a three-month period and earn a certificate in Performance Management. Developing learning blocks in this way allows the Employee Development group to maximize delivery flexibility by using the blocks as standalone topics or by combining them into one-day or multiple-day experiences. These blocks also can be used to easily create a customized program for a workgroup.

Recognizing that delivering learning in short chunks would not satisfy all learning needs or styles, Air Products worked with its partners, eCornell and Training Management Corporation, to develop the Management Navigator (see Figure 2).

**AIR PRODUCTS** **MANAGEMENT NAVIGATOR** TMC

**Dear Colleagues,**

With great pleasure and a warm welcome you to our new Central Navigator™ Air Products operates in more than 30 countries and we do business in many different languages. To truly act as one company in this diverse and complex marketplace requires all of us to act with a global mind and skill set. This means that in our communications, management practices and approaches, teamwork, partnerships and service to our customers, we are mindful of the profound effect of cultural differences based on our individual and collective success.

In this spirit, we want you to know that we are attracted to the diversity and multiculturalism of our workforce and our marketplace. The Central Navigator™ complements this view. More than a website, it is a tool that provides information, resources, training, assessment and access to experts helping all of us navigate the cross-cultural dimensions of how we work together, manage and lead our business. Use of this tool can help all of us grow our skills and develop greater ability to work effectively on a global basis with our customers, our co-workers and communities we do business in. It can help each of us deliver the difference!

by: Michele  
Vice President Human Resources

**Login**

Email:

Password:

First Time Users

**Learning Zone**

The Learning Zone is an access point to a suite of powerful learning solutions available remotely through the internet.

“ A conference is a gathering of important people who singly can do nothing, but together can decide that nothing can be done. ”

-- Fred Allen

**Managing Across Cultures**

Managing Across Cultures enables you to compare and contrast critical management differences between national cultures and identify key differences in processes and practices.

**Managing This?**

You are the team leader of a cross-functional team. You have been under pressure to meet a deadline, and you knew from the onset that it would be difficult to get the work done. One of the team members, John Gilmore of the IT group, had complained that he would not be able to finish his work. As a result, you met with him to work out a plan so that the project could be completed in time for the client meeting. John promised that his work would be complete, and you felt confident when you scheduled the client meeting.

**Management Toolbox**

Management ToolBox provides users with access to a variety of InfoPacks that contain concise, resolution-oriented information, tips and tools that address key global management issues.

**Site Rating & Feedback**

**Current Site Rating:** ★★★★★

**TMC Wants to Hear From You!**  
Click [here](#) to rate this site and give us your feedback.

TMC Management Navigator Website v1.0 Copyright 2005, Training Management Corporation. All rights reserved.

Figure 2 - The Management Navigator

The Management Navigator mirrors the coursework in the management development curriculum by providing supporting materials, skills practice scenarios, assessments, and other background information.

Air Products keeps the learning effective and efficient by using conferencing technology to address one-hour topics on policies and practices, management and the law, health and wellness, and HR topics. These classes, presented by internal experts, are delivered to large numbers of managers at multiple locations.

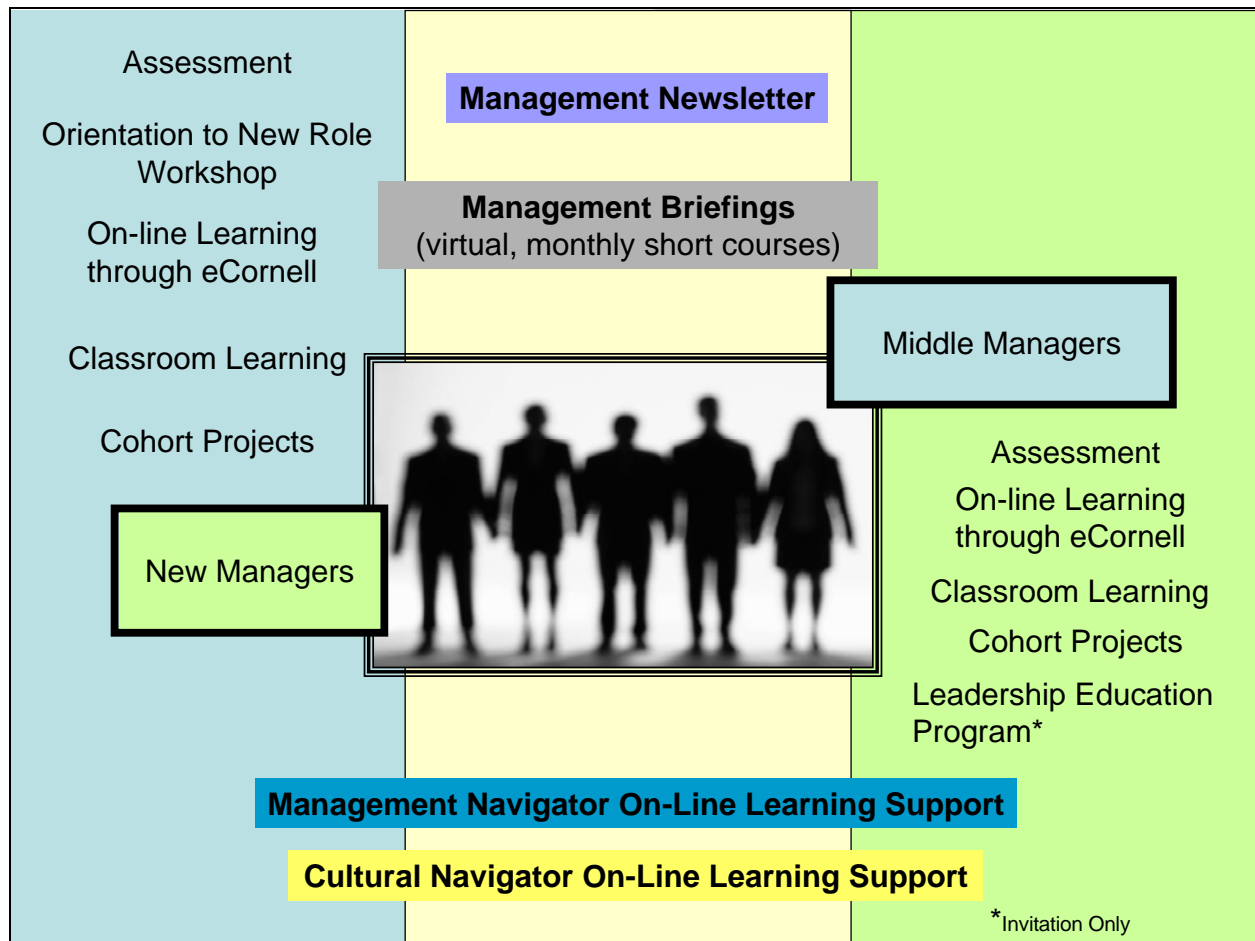


Figure 3 - Air Products uses a structured blend for training first-line and middle managers

## Advanced Skills

### Audience: Senior Managers / Leaders

The needs of senior managers and leaders are addressed through Air Product's Leadership Education program. In existence since 1996, the program is delivered in three, three-day sessions over a one-year period of time.

This program uses "leaders teaching leaders" to focus on leadership self-awareness, developing cohesive global teams, and change through strategic thinking and innovation. Participants come from all regions of the world to develop a community, as well as their own personal leadership skills. In addition, this group has the opportunity to attend executive education experiences through university programs at Wharton, INSEAD, Harvard, or other

relevant programs. They also are welcome to participate in, or use any of, the management development curriculum's products or services.

## Conclusion

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Modern leadership and cultural awareness programs are migrating toward a diversified offering of delivery modes and target audiences. Technology will never replace the interaction, mentoring, and networking that are needed to develop leaders. However, Bersin & Associates recommends that managers of organizational development incorporate technology into their larger-scale programs where it makes sense.

This case study demonstrates that online coaching, workshops, self-study courseware, and teamwork must be used in combination to increase reach yet maintain program effectiveness.

More information on this topic is available to Bersin & Associates research subscribers in the paper, *"Blended Learning in Leadership Training: What Works<sup>TM1</sup>"*.

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<sup>1</sup> Blended Learning in Leadership Training: What Works® is available to Bersin & Associates research members or for purchase at <http://store.bersinassociates.com/leadership-study.html>

## About Us

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Bersin & Associates is the only research and consulting firm solely focused on What Works® enterprise learning research. With more than 20 years of experience in e-learning, training, and enterprise technology, Bersin & Associates provides a wide range of services, including market research, best practices, benchmarking, vendor and product analysis, corporate workshops, corporate implementation plans, and sales and marketing programs. Some of Bersin & Associates innovations include a complete methodology for Learning Management Systems (LMS) selection and application usage, an end-to-end architecture and solution for training analytics, and one of the industry's largest research studies on blended learning implementations.

Bersin & Associates offers the industry's first enterprise learning research subscription, "*The Enterprise Learning Research Center*" (<http://www.elearningresearch.com>), which offers up-to-date research, product selection guides, white papers, and access to other experts online. This service enables corporate training managers, vendors, and consultants to make faster, better decisions about enterprise learning strategy, programs, and technology.

Bersin & Associates can be reached at <http://www.bersin.com> or at (510) 654-8500.

## About This Research

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