



CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION



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RAPIDLY GROWING ORGANIZATION



The New York City Department of Education Prepares Its Next Generation of Leaders

Many organizations struggle with how to prepare their next generation of leaders. They realize that to thrive in today's volatile and complex environment, requires consistent flow of well-trained individuals. Moreover, there is a growing recognition that leadership development should not be restricted to the few who are in, or close to, the C-suite.¹

The problem is that even well-intentioned organizations find it difficult to develop effective leadership training programs. When they do develop programs, many of them are generic and ineffective. The programs aren't scalable, and they ignore the impact that the organization's culture has on shaping people's behavior once they leave their developmental experience.

Fortunately, these challenges don't stop organizations that are committed to effective leadership development.

In 2016, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) identified the need to provide intensive development opportunities to high-potential leaders to prepare them for long-term success in leadership roles across the organization. The result of their planning efforts was the LeadDOE program.

The program is intended to support participants with the capacity to:

- Influence and persuade colleagues and stakeholders across the NYCDOE using a systems-thinking mindset
- Strengthen interpersonal communication and relationship building skills
- Understand strategies for managing conflict and change
- Apply emotional intelligence to lead people and support organizational values
- Learn strategies on developing the capacity of employees through coaching and feedback
- Lead with cultural sensitivity and navigate resistance
- Build a community of leaders to collaborate harmoniously, cross-functionally and to share knowledge and resources by developing the ability of leaders to turn around and teach others

The Need

Yvonne Soto, Executive Director of the Office of Organizational Development and Effectiveness, was the visionary for the LeadDOE program. She saw LeadDOE as an opportunity to support the NYCDOE's diversity and inclusion efforts. "We are a large school system, but we are also a civil service agency. The program is evidence of our desire to deepen our commitment to diversity and inclusion while creating a program that would produce a pipeline of emerging leaders."

In the beginning, LeadDOE was a two-day program where three vendors were contracted to run various sessions. gothamCulture provided assessment, design, and facilitation for a portion of the program.

That changed in year two. "During the first year, participants didn't get to build a rapport with the facilitators. And because each vendor had their own approach, the program didn't feel cohesive," Yvonne explains. "So, in the end, based on the evaluations and anecdotal feedback, I felt that gothamCulture was the best vendor because they were aligned with our vision for the program."

Feedback from the 2016 program, while positive, highlighted several opportunities for improvement. gothamCulture was engaged to design, develop, and facilitate the full LeadDOE program, improving on the previous year and introducing innovative new elements to the program.

The Intervention

In 2017, the second year of the program, gothamCulture sought to design a leadership experience that was as deep as it was wide. The revised program, which took place over six months, asked participants to grow in self-awareness through assessments and personal reflection exercises. Participants engaged in peer learning sessions and worked to transfer new skills to others while working with their teams.

gothamCulture created and led a brief needs assessment, created and facilitated five in-residence cohorts, facilitated four group coaching sessions for each cohort, provided input and feedback to the orientation and closing sessions, and led the measurement and evaluation effort for the entire program.

In 2018 and 2019, the program evolved based on feedback from the participants. Currently, in addition to individual and group coaching as well as pre- and post-session reading and assignments, the program is made up of six sessions as shown in the following diagram.

Program Details

Target Audience: Senior leaders throughout the Central Office, including members of the Chancellor's office and the Chiefs of staff of the various operating functions

Program Components

- Denison 360 leadership assessment
- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® personality assessment
- Active practice of new skills
- Peer coaching
- Feedback

- 1-1 Coaching
- ★ Group Coaching



The Impact

The LeadDOE program in the hands of gothamCulture was well received. “Over the years, the program became a coveted experience for non-instructional staff,” shares Yvonne. “Out of 7,000 employees, we only have approximately 40 participants annually. Each year we were asked to increase the number of participants.” To date, we have had 177 participants.

Since the 2017 cohorts, the program has spanned two chancellors starting with Carmen Farina and continued under the leadership of Chancellor Richard Carranza.

gothamCulture has continued to iterate the design of the program, including an embedded group coaching process and a capstone project that focused on Chancellor Carranza’s priorities.

Participants reported improved relationships with their direct reports and colleagues and increased confidence that helped them be more effective as leaders. Many also reported that LeadDOE helped them strengthen their networks within the NYCDOE, thanks to interactions with individuals from diverse offices and backgrounds.

“LeadDOE provided me with the opportunity to think about leveraging my strengths, working on areas of development, and increasing my knowledge of what I know and don’t know. As a result, I have a clear vision of who I am as a leader and how I want to develop. I have also become more confident in my abilities to lead and develop strong partnerships to move the work forward together. I also think that LeadDOE provided my supervisors with the opportunity to openly invest in me and my peers’ leadership in a way that is open, valued, and respected. I have never felt more supported by supervisors and DOE Senior Leadership, and LeadDOE is definitely one of the reasons.”

- 2017 Program Participant

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Participants showcased their learning in presentations at the program’s closing ceremony, naming skills such as peer coaching, understanding of individual preferences, and utilizing their personal strengths as leadership skills that they would continue to develop. At the end of LeadDOE 2019, participants presented capstone projects to the Chancellor, who made an authentic effort to connect participants to leaders and see that their recommendations and reflections were embedded into the culture of the NYCDOE.



“First, being given the opportunity to participate in the program gave me the sense of reward and value from my leaders. Second, receiving feedback and the individualized coaching to work through that feedback made me feel like I was receiving a benefit usually only available in a private setting, not in public service. Third, being able to share experience and experiences with peers from other offices created a sense of community that is often not there in my individual setting as I don’t have many peers within my office.”

- 2018 Program Participant

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"I'm very excited about the program. Our staff is as well," reveals Yvonne. "I've seen so many of our alumni of the program go on to have really senior roles. I feel they represent our program well because they are high performers within organizations that are highly respected. Fortunately, the good news is that there continues to be a commitment among NYCDOE leadership to offering LeadDOE."

"During a time of great professional change, the curriculum was very well aligned to the support I needed. I'm not sure I'd be at the DOE now without the support of my cohort, learning partner group, and the content of the classes. My leadership coach was incredible. I feel prepared with a plan for my professional career. I don't typically take time to reflect on my professional plans, and appreciated the space and her guidance."

- 2019 Program Participant

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The Future

The LeadDOE program plays a vital role at the NYCDOE. "We don't have true succession planning in our organization," admits Yvonne. "So, I am trying to fill that gap by providing a pool of leaders that have a track record of success. Leaders who've been developed to have a certain skillset and alignment with our DOE competencies around communication, execution, and equity. My vision for the program is for it to serve as a way to build a deep bench of high-performing leaders."

Yvonne credits gothamCulture with the success of the program. "gothamCulture is a unique organization where they're not just delivering off-the-shelf courses. The team at gothamCulture truly listens to what the organization's needs are, and they are able to offer customized programming that really meets the needs of the organization."

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HELPING NAVIGATE CHANGE

About gothamCulture

gothamCulture is an organizational culture consulting firm that draws on our associate's comprehensive expertise and experience in the areas of culture, leadership, and people strategy to provide innovative solutions and client-service excellence. Our work is guided by our deeply held shared values, including a commitment to each other and our clients, unwavering integrity, the pursuit of excellence, relatable expertise, and authentic community.

For more information,
visit www.gothamCulture.com

* Icons by Fajar Hasyim from the Noun Project

1. Harvard Business Review. [The Future of Leadership Development](#). 2019.