

A Head Start in Teaching Managers to Lead



If there is one Holy Grail of business school knowledge, it is this: How do you teach leadership? Professors at The University of Texas at Dallas are trying to bring scientific rigor to the quest.

The Leadership Center in the School of Management has teamed up with the University's Center for BrainHealth to introduce its BrainHealth Physical, based on 20 years of Center research, to executives at some of the world's top corporations. Managers from Ericsson, the Swedish phone company, and Accor, the French hotels group, are pilot participants.

Each manager spends two hours in a windowless room, face-to-face with a researcher, Jerry Hoag, associate dean for executive education at UT Dallas, explained. "You really have to focus," he said.

Tests include analyzing whether a manager can "zoom in and zoom out," as Mr. Hoag put it. "Leaders need to be able to gather information quickly and then summarize it in a coherent format."

Executives also must be able to block out information. One test for this is to get participants to listen to a male voice and a female voice articulate a series of words. The manager has to remember everything uttered by one or the other, blocking out one voice entirely to maximize his or her final performance score. Tests are also included that evaluate an individual's creativity.

On completion of the tasks, managers' results are charted against the test population as a whole. If there are any areas in which they are weak, they are given exercises to help them improve in those areas.

"Leadership is all about behavior, and you can't change behavior with a two or three-day intervention," said Mr. Hoag. "Changing behavior is really tough."

Given the success of the BrainHealth Physical in corporate programs, the school plans to incorporate it into its Executive MBA curriculum.



Jerry Hoag is the executive director of the UT Dallas Leadership Center