

Assignments - Other People - Coursework Comparison Six *Lessons of Experience* Studies

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In using the findings from CCL’s original Lessons of Experience (LOE) research to inform practical advice for developing executives, Bob Eichinger and Mike Lombardo (co-founders of Lominger) coined the “70-20-10” formula or guideline, i.e., 70% of executive development comes from jobs, 20% from other people, 10% from courses.

These percentages might be confusing to those who are familiar with the findings from the original LOE research (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). For example, about 56% of the 616 developmental events reported by the executives in the original study were categorized as Challenging Assignments (not 70%). And what happened to the Hardships category? It turns out that the 70-20-10 distribution is consistent with the LOE data if you do what Eichinger and Lombardo did and (a) delete the Hardship events and the Personal Life events (because these are not events that organizations would give to executives to promote their development) and (b) recalculate how the remaining events are distributed across Challenging Assignments, Other People, and Coursework. The table below provides examples of more specific categories of events that are included in the broader Challenging Assignments and Other People domains. (Coursework is a narrower domain and thus is not broken down into more specific categories.)

Challenging Assignments	Other People
Start from scratch/new initiatives	Role models
Fix-it/turnaround	Helpful/constructive bosses
Increase in scope	Bad bosses
Move to corporate staff	Difficult people
Joint ventures/alliances	Peers
Special projects/task forces	Mentors
Negotiations	Getting feedback
Horizontal moves	Feedback and coaching
Crossing cultures	

And a reminder of the *key event question* that generated the research data:

When you think about your career as a manager, certain events or episodes probably stand out in your mind—things that led to a lasting change in you as a manager.

Identify at least three “key events” in your career: things that made a difference in the way you manage now. What happened? What did you learn from it (for better or worse)?

There have been at least five replications of the LOE research over the last 30 years. *Do each of these studies yield the 70-20-10 distribution of assignments, other people, and coursework events?*

The original study (Lindsey, Homes, & McCall, 1987) collected key event data from 191 successful executives (189 men and 2 women) in six North American based companies. Five of the companies were Fortune 50. Subsequent studies asked the same key event question to:

- 76 successful women executives in 25 Fortune-100-size, North American companies (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987)
- 288 managers in a variety of companies based primarily in the U.S. who were attending a leadership development program (Douglas, 2003) . This sample was intentionally more diverse in terms of gender (30% female), race (44% African-American), and organizational level (50% middle managers, 25% upper-middle managers, 25% executives).
- 101 successful executives (92 men and 9 women) from 36 countries and working for 16 global companies (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002).
- 159 successful executives in China, India, and Singapore (146 men and 13 women). The Chinese executives were from 6 indigenous Chinese companies (4 state-controlled and 2 private) (Zhang, Chandrasekar, & Wei, 2009). The Indian executives were from 8 home-grown global Indian companies (Wilson, 2008). In Singapore, the executives were from public sector organizations (ministries and state boards) (Yip & Wilson, 2008). (Note: Data were combined across these countries for this summary; however, data from each country can be separately examined in the noted publications.)
- 234 C-level U.S. executives (197 men and 37 women) in a variety of companies. All were participants in CCL’s Leadership at the Peak Program.

Comparative results across studies are shown in the table below. It summarizes the number and percentage of key events in each of the three broad domains for each study (deleting Hardship and Personal Life events). More detailed data used to generate this table can be found in the Appendix.

Study	Challenging Assignments <i>Freq (%)</i>	Other People <i>Freq (%)</i>	Course-work <i>Freq (%)</i>
Original Lessons of Experience Study (data from Lindsey, Homes, & McCall, 1987)	344 (69.8)	111 (22.5)	38 (7.7)
Executive Women’s Study (data from Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987)	98 (55.7)	68 (38.6)	10 (5.7)
Lessons of a Diverse Workforce Study (data from Douglas, 2003)	220 (48.2)	213 (46.7)	23 (5.1)
Global Executives Study (data from McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002)	186 (73.0)	40 (15.7)	29 (11.4)
Asia Study (data from Wilson, 2008; Yip & Wilson, 2008; Zhang, Chandrasekar, & Wei, 2009)	321 (68.4)	125 (26.6)	10 (4.9)
LAP Study (data from unpublished study)	217 (55.4)	152 (38.8)	23 (5.8)

Looking across these studies, the distribution in three of the studies (Original, Global Executives, and Asia) more closely approximate the 70-20-10 distribution. These three studies took place in different decades and involved executives from around the globe. However, in the remaining studies (Executive Women, Diverse Workforce, and LAP Participants), a higher percentage of key events are from Other People and a lower percentage from Challenging Assignments. These latter studies differ from the others on several dimensions:

- All three studies have larger percentages of women executives among their participants.
- Two of the studies used samples drawn from leadership development program attendees. We do not know the degree to which these individuals were considered “successful” in their organizations, whereas this was a specific criterion given to organizations who nominated the participants in the other studies.
- The sample in one of the studies was much more diverse than the others in terms of race and managerial level.

Although the largest percentage of key events are consistently Challenging Assignments (followed by Other People and Coursework), the more specific 70-20-10 distribution does not appear to generalize across all populations.

RESOURCES

Original Study

Lindsey, E.H., Homes, V., & McCall, M.W., Jr. (1987). *Key events in executives' lives*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

McCall, M. W., Jr., Lombardo, M. M., & Morrison, A. M. (1988). *The lessons of experience: How successful executives develop on the job*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Executive Women Study

Morrison, A. M., White, R.P., & Van Velsor, E. (1987). *Breaking the glass ceiling: Can women reach the top of America's largest corporations?* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Van Velsor, E., & Hughes, M.W. (1990). *Gender difference in the development of managers: How women managers learn from experience*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Lessons of a Diverse Workforce Study

Douglas, C. A. (2003). *Key events and lessons for managers in a diverse workforce: A report of research and findings*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Global Executives Study

McCall, M. W., Jr., & Hollenbeck, G. P. (2002). *Developing global executives: The lessons of international experience*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Asia Study

Van Velsor, E., Wilson, M. S., Criswell, C., & Chandrasekar, A. (in press). Learning to lead: A comparison of developmental events and learning. *Asian Business and Management*.

Wilson, M. S. (2008). *Developing future leaders for high-growth Indian companies: New perspectives*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Wilson, M.S., (2010). *Developing tomorrow's leaders today: Insights from corporate India*. Singapore: Wiley Asia.

Wilson, M. S., Van Velsor, E., Chandrasekar, A. & Criswell, C. (2011). *Grooming top leaders: Cultural perspectives from China, India, Singapore and the United States*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Yip, J., & Wilson, M. (2008). *Developing public service leaders in Singapore*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Zhang, Y, Chandrasekar, A., & Wei, R. (2009). *Developing Chinese leaders in the 21st century*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

LAP Study

Wilson, M. S., Van Velsor, E., Chandrasekar, A. & Criswell, C. (2011). *Grooming top leaders: Cultural perspectives from China, India, Singapore and the United States*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

APPENDIX

Process for cross-study comparison

- Use the original study as the base (because that's what was used for the original derivation of 70-20-10) and place event categories from subsequent studies into the four original groupings: Challenging Assignments, Hardships, Other People, Other Events.
- Delete Hardships and any non-Coursework Other Events.
- Recalculate percentages for Challenging Assignments, Other People, and Coursework

New categories in studies beyond the original study were placed into one of the four original domains based on definitions of the categories and judgments on where to best place them. For example, Conflict events were placed in the Hardship group and Feedback events were placed in the Other People group. An argument could be made to place the difficult boss/others events into the Hardship group; however, the original study did not separate out positive and negative other people events, so for the subsequent studies, both were included in the Other People group.

Lessons of Experience – Original Study

Key event descriptions from 191 successful executives (616 total events) were categorized into the following taxonomy:

Event Category	Frequency (percentage of all events)
Challenging Assignments: 344 (55.8%)	
Start from Scratch	34 (5.5%)
Fix-it/Turnaround	67 (10.9%)
Project/Task Force	76 (12.3%)
Increase in Scope	104 (16.9%)
Line-to-Staff Switch	13 (2.1%)
Early Work (prior to management)	20 (3.2%)
First Supervisory Job	30 (4.9%)
Hardships: 107 (17.4%)	
Business Failures and Mistakes	24 (3.9%)
Demotions/Missed Promotions	27 (4.4%)
Breaking Out of Career Ruts	24 (3.9%)
Personal Trauma	11 (1.8%)
Subordinate Performance Problems	21 (3.4%)
Other People: 111 (18.0%)	
Role Models	46 (7.5%)
Values-Playing-Out Episodes	65 (10.6%)
Other Events: 54 (8.8%)	
Coursework	38 (6.2%)
Personal Life Events	16 (2.6%)

Delete the 107 Hardship Events and the 16 Personal Life Events. Recalculate percentages based on 493 Events.

Challenging Assignments	344 (69.8%)
Other People	111 (22.5%)
Coursework	38 (7.7%)

Lessons of Experience – Women’s Study

Key event descriptions from 76 successful executive women (261 total events) were categorized into 25 events within four broad domains (Challenging Assignments, Other People, Hardships, and Other Events) :

Event Category	Frequency (percentage of all events)
Challenging Assignments: 98 (37.5%)	
Fix-It	6 (2.3%)
Negotiation	7 (2.7%)
Chair Task Force or Team	6 (2.3%)
Other Assignments	7 (2.7%)
First Management Job	17 (6.5%)
First General Manager Job	17 (6.5%)
Career Change	18 (6.9%)
Move to Corporate Staff	10 (3.8%)
Staff to Line	5 (1.9%)
Other Promotions	5 (1.9%)
Hardships: 60 (23.0%)	
Rocky Road	20 (7.7%)
Confronting Problem Employees	10 (3.8%)
Firing a Problem Employee	7 (2.7%)
Making a Mistake	9 (3.4%)
A Conflict	8 (3.1%)
Missing a Promotion	6 (2.3%)
Other People: 68 (26.1%)	
Helpful Bosses	26 (10.0%)
Helpful Others	11 (4.2%)
Bad Bosses	18 (6.9%)
Getting Feedback	13 (5.0%)
Other Events: 35 (13.4%)	
Coursework	10 (3.8%)
Milestones in Corporate Savvy	10 (3.8%)
Having Children	6 (2.3%)
Family Changes and Relocation	7 (2.7%)
Miscellaneous	2 (1.8%)

Delete the 60 Hardship Events and the 25 Non-Coursework Other Events. Recalculate percentages based on 176 Events.

Challenging Assignments	98 (55.7%)
Other People	68 (38.6%)
Coursework	10 (5.7%)

Lessons of Experience – Lessons of a Diverse Workforce

Key event descriptions from 288 managers (middle, upper-middle, and executive level) (752 total events) were categorized into the following taxonomy:

Event Category	Frequency (percentage of all events)
Challenging Assignments: 220 (29.3%)	
Start from Scratch	12 (1.6%)
Fix-it/Turnaround	34 (4.5%)
Project/Task Force	45 (6.0%)
Change in Scope	88 (11.7%)
Line-to-Staff Switch	6 (0.8%)
Early Work Experience	8 (1.1%)
First Supervision	12 (1.6%)
Breaking a Rut	15 (2.0%)
Hardships: 259 (34.4%)	
Business Mistake	89 (11.8%)
Lousy Job/Missed Promotions	41 (5.5%)
Personal Trauma	12 (1.6%)
Problems with Subordinates	58 (7.7%)
Race Mattered	29 (3.9%)
Downsizing	30 (4.0%)
Other People: 213 (28.3%)	
Role Models	61 (8.1%)
Values Played Out	66 (8.8%)
Mentors	21 (2.8%)
Peers	17 (2.3%)
Feedback	48 (6.4%)
Other Events: 60 (8.0%)	
Coursework	23 (3.1%)
Personal Life Events	5 (0.7%)
Business Success	32 (4.3%)

Delete the 259 Hardship Events and the 37 Non-Coursework Other Events. Recalculate percentages based on 456 Events.

Challenging Assignments	220 (48.2%)
Other People	213 (46.7%)
Coursework	23 (5.1%)

Lessons of Experience – Global Executives Study

Key event descriptions from 101 successful global executives (332 total events) were categorized into 18 event categories within four broad domains (Challenging Assignments, Other People, Hardships, and Other Events) :

Event Category	Frequency (percentage of all events)
Challenging Assignments: 186 (56.0%)	
Business Turnarounds	35 (10.5%)
Building or Evolving a Business	19 (5.7%)
Joint Ventures, Alliances, Mergers, or Acquisitions	13 (3.9%)
Business Start-ups	10 (3.0%)
Special Projects, Consulting Roles, and Staff Advisory Jobs	27 (8.1%)
Negotiations	10 (3.0%)
Stint at Headquarters	7 (2.1%)
Changes in Scope or Scale	21 (6.3%)
Early Work	12 (3.6%)
First Managerial Responsibility	7 (2.1%)
Career Shifts	25 (7.5%)
Hardships: 69 (20.8%)	
Culture Shock	29 (8.7%)
Confrontations with Reality	21 (6.3%)
Mistakes and Errors in Judgment	12 (3.6%)
Crisis	7 (2.1%)
Other People: 40 (12.0%)	
Significant Other People	40 (12.0%)
Other Events: 37 (11.1%)	
Developmental and Educational Experiences	29 (8.7%)
Family and Personal Challenges	8 (2.4%)

Delete the 69 Hardship Events and the 8 Non-Coursework Other Events. Recalculate percentages based on 255 Events.

Challenging Assignments	186 (73.0%)
Other People	40 (15.7%)
Coursework	29 (11.4%)

Lessons of Experience - Asia Studies

Key event descriptions from 159 successful executives in China, India, and Singapore (618 total events) were categorized into 16 events within four broad domains (Challenging Assignments, Other People, Hardships, and Other Events):

Event Category	Frequency (percentage of all events)
Challenging Assignments: 321 (51.9%)	
Increase in Scope	65 (10.5 %)
Horizontal Move	58 (9.4%)
Boundary Spanning	42 (6.8%)
New Initiative	56 (9.1%)
Turnaround	76 (12.3%)
Crossing Cultures	24 (3.9%)
Hardships: 73 (11.8%)	
Crisis	26 (4.2%)
Mistakes	36 (5.8%)
Career Setbacks	4 (.6%)
Ethical Dilemmas	7 (1.3%)
Other People: 125 (20.2%)	
Constructive Bosses/Superiors	110 (17.8%)
Difficult People	13 (2.1%)
Feedback & Coaching	2 (.3%)
Other Events: 99 (16.0%)	
Coursework & Training	23 (3.7%)
Personal Experiences	76 (12.3%)

Delete the 73 Hardship Events and the 76 Personal Experiences. Recalculate percentages based on 469 Events.

Challenging Assignments	321 (68.4%)
Other People	125 (26.6%)
Coursework	23 (4.9%)

Note: The distribution across Challenging Assignments, Other People, and Coursework was similar for data from China, India, and Singapore. However, at the Event Category level, there are some major differences across these three countries.

Lessons of Experience – Leadership at the Peak

Key event descriptions from 234 U.S. top-level executives (537 total events) were categorized into 16 events within four broad domains (Challenging Assignments, Other People, Hardships, and Other Events) :

Event Category	Frequency (percentage of all events)
Challenging Assignments: 217 (40.4%)	
Increase in Scope	62 (11.5%)
Horizontal Move	23 (4.3%)
Boundary Spanning	8 (1.5%)
New Initiative	29 (5.4%)
Turnaround	85 (15.8%)
Crossing Cultures	10 (1.9%)
Hardships: 113 (21.0%)	
Crisis	9 (1.7%)
Mistake	48 (8.9%)
Career Setbacks	17 (3.2%)
Ethical Dilemmas	39 (7.3%)
Other People: 152 (28.3%)	
Constructive Bosses/Superiors	104 (19.4%)
Difficult People	17 (3.2%)
Feedback & Coaching	31 (5.8%)
Other Events: 55 (10.2%)	
Coursework & Training	23 (4.3%)
Personal Experiences	32 (6.0%)

Delete the 113 Hardship Events and the 32 Personal Experiences. Recalculate percentages based on 392 Events.

Challenging Assignments	217 (55.5%)
Other People	152 (38.8%)
Coursework	23 (5.9%)