



# ***Making Asia a Great Place to Work***

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## **Leadership Learning in the New Millennium**

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In these dynamic times we are challenged to resolve issues at an ever-quickening pace. Increasingly we find ourselves facing challenges that have no precedents, at least within our own experience base. Networking with your peers can play a vital role in supporting real-time applied learning. Facilitated Peer Learning (FPL) enables peers to explore ideas with others who are facing common challenges.

FPL is proving to be the learning method of choice. An increasing number of FPL meetings are taking place. At these meetings each participant is able to speak from personal experience and learn from the successes and mistakes of others, accelerating applied learning.

At a CEO facilitated peer learning meeting held in Singapore in May 1999, participants were particularly interested in discovering the commonality of issues and problems that faced them all. "We all share the same issues and are in

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the same boat, struggling against the same things," as one of the CEOs put it.

"Being together enables us to look at the issues from different perspectives and learn from each other. While we face similar challenges we all have different approaches." The facilitator helps to bring these learnings out of the experience base of the group.

CEOs proved, perhaps surprisingly, very open to discussing their mistakes as well as their successes, even though many had not previously met. A peer level facilitator who could guide the discussions and establish an open forum set this learning environment. This openness enables leaders to brainstorm ideas and gain valuable insights into their own leadership practices, resulting in a better understanding of what it takes to be a successful leader in Asia.

Similarly, at a HR peer learning group meeting, held in Singapore in August 1999, HR Directors from global and Asian multinational companies and Singapore Government Ministries seized the opportunity to exchange their personal leadership



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challenges and experiences. Relying upon the facilitator to guide the discussion, they discussed a range of key questions addressing the employee-employer relationship and the characteristics of best workplaces. The end result was a better understanding of what it took to become an 'employer of choice' in Singapore.

Facilitated peer learning is stimulating as well as practical. Hearing new perspectives on attracting and rewarding employees, and thinking 'out of the box', was cited by one participant as the most valuable takeaway gained from the HR FPL session. Others also valued the different perspectives on what leaders and employees actually think about each other and their workplaces that they were given from the findings of surveys conducted with CEOs and employees. Realizing that everyone wants to be a star performer and that our HR systems should be designed to realize that potential in everyone was a key insight taken home by many.

Sharing experience and information, learning from peers and interacting with each other were the most interesting aspects of the meeting agreed the delegates. All said they would be interested in future HR FPL sessions.

Peer exchange is obviously a successful and valuable aspect of on-going management education. It should not, however, end with one meeting and not start until the next – maybe a year or more away. On-going contact and follow-up is crucial. Getting busy people together on a frequent basis is not, however, a practical consideration. So how can leaders continue to learn from each other?

Using Internet technology to establish a FPL network is one possible solution. A true peer learning forum is one where not only two, but also multi-way discussions take place.

Early attempts at such electronic forums, through website discussion lists, were not generally successful primarily owing to non user-friendly interaction, and attempts by advertisers to use such

forums for 'spamming' their products. Today, however, the Internet is an increasingly popular and easy to use business tool and usage among senior managers is on the rise in Asia.

The 1999 Goldman Sachs Asia Web Report relating to Internet use in Asia states that there is a PC penetration of 40% in Singapore, among the highest in Asia. For Asia as a whole, the number of Internet users will grow from 15 million in 1998 to 64 million by 2003. "This growth rate is twice as much as that expected in the US during the same period."

86% of CEOs at the 1999 May FPL forum said that they were regular Internet users and 80% said that they would be interested in joining an electronic peer forum.

At the HR FPL forum 86% expressed interest in joining an electronic peer forum – although a lower figure, 80%, said that they were currently regular Internet users. Presumably a handful of respondents access the Internet infrequently but would be prepared to access a peer learning website.

There is a convergence of technology, usage, access and needs, that now enables us to make on-line peer learning a reality. Building upon its success as a real-time FPL, therefore, Singapore-based international leadership consultancy Steve Morris Associates (S) Pte Ltd is establishing two Internet-based peer learning forums: [www.ceo2ceo.com](http://www.ceo2ceo.com) and [www.hr2hr.com](http://www.hr2hr.com). HR professionals and CEOs who register an interest in continuing to learn from each other can receive information and ideas via these websites and also route questions and suggestions to their peers.

Available after April 2000, these on-line forums will act as a virtual 'meeting place' for those interested in people and leadership issues and will provide networking and announcement facilities for members. Using a Web interface it is easy for leaders to get involved and make their mark on the forum by initiating and participating in discussions, posting news, announcements, questions and answers.

In addition to helping with continuous peer learning, such a learning platform can also help to reduce content 'overload' of face-to-face meetings, allowing them to be more of an opportunity for leaders to network and enjoy each others' company. Virtual peer learning forums will never completely replace the benefits of face-to-face events. Learning in the new millennium will, however, be increasingly relevant to leadership in their own unique situations and fun too! When we can enjoy and immediately apply what we learn, the learning lasts.

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### **About the author**

In 1998, Steve Morris founded Steve Morris Associates to assist leaders in Asia to respond to new economic and organizational challenges. Steve coaches and inspires chief executives and their teams within a multitude of cultures and industries to develop themselves and those around them to achieve personal goals, job satisfaction and business performance. He is one of a handful of coaches in Asia that specialize in helping leaders nurture and refine their command of the softer skills of people development and motivation.

### **About the company**

International leadership consultancy Steve Morris Associates, the first dedicated leadership coaching company in Asia, assists leaders in Asia to respond to new economic and organizational challenges by forging stronger teamwork at the top of the organization and fully developing employee potential. SMA designs and conducts leadership development and feedback programs that are linked to the achievement of business goals by working directly with employees at all levels.

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