
Developing Creative Leaders Effectively And Creatively: Investigating Long-Term Impacts

Detlef Reis¹

Thinkergy Limited, Suite A, 6/F, Ritz Plaza, 122 Austin Road
Tsimshatsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong
E-mail: dr.d@thinkergy.com

Brian Hunt²

Bangkok, Thailand
E-mail: briannormanh@gmail.com

Abstract:

Creative leadership aims to lead organizations creatively through times of disruption and the innovation economy. In this exploratory longitudinal paper, we investigate the *long-term* impacts of a creative leader development (CLD) program on its graduates' creative minds and career evolution. The paper tracks how, over almost a decade, the mindsets-oriented CLD program *Genius Journey* (GJ) has impacted graduates' creative leader confidence, competence, and career progression. We also explore what methodological contents and pedagogical features graduates still recall and have applied in their careers.

Part 1 discusses the relevance of CLD and the challenges of doing it effectively. The second part briefly outlines different CLD approaches portrayed in the literature. After introducing our chosen research design in part 3, we present the empirical findings of the GJ program's long-term impacts on businesspeople in part 4. The final part outlines subsequent research directions and the implications of our findings for CLD practitioners.

Keywords: Creative Leadership, Creative Leader Development, Creative Mindsets, Creative Leadership Methodology, Creative Leadership Pedagogy.

¹ Dr. Detlef Reis is the Founder and Chief Ideator of the innovation company [Thinkergy](http://Thinkergy.com). He is also an Adjunct Associate Professor at the Hong Kong Baptist University, and an Innovation Advisor at the Institute for Knowledge & Innovation South-East Asia (IKI-SEA), Bangkok University in Bangkok, Thailand.

Dr. Reis is the creator of four proprietary innovation methods used by Thinkergy: The innovation process method X-IDEA; the innovation people profiling method TIPS; the innovation culture transformation method Cool - Creativity UnLimited; and the creative leadership method Genius Journey. Dr. Reis is also the author of "The Executive's Guide to Innovation" (targeted for publication in 2H.2023).

² Now retired, Dr. Brian Hunt was formerly Assistant Dean (Quality Assurance) and Assistant Professor at the College of Management, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand. He now researches and writes academic books on management.

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1 Introduction: The appeal for effective creative leader development programs. What happened?

1.1 Research background and relevance

In various recent practitioners' surveys (e.g., IBM, 2010; World Economic Forum, 2015), C-level executives highlighted the pivotal importance of creativity as a crucial leadership trait to respond to the challenges of the modern VUCA world (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) with new solutions (von Stamm, 2017) and successfully lead their organizations in times of the innovation economy (e.g., Canton, 2007) aka creative economy (Howkins, 2001). In the IBM (2010) study, CEOs expressed an urgent need for organizations to develop more top talents and executives into creative leaders.

Interestingly, a subsequent IBM (2011) study found that two out of three Chief Human Resources Officers of the world's leading organizations admitted being nonplussed for how to develop creative leaders effectively (as mandated by their CEOs). The study authors suggested that most organizations failed to develop creative leaders because they continued to rely on traditional leadership development programs using conventional methodological and pedagogical formats that are not particularly creative. The IBM authors stressed that to develop creative leaders effectively, the respective creative leader development ("CLD") programs must employ a creative methodology and pedagogy, not a traditional, long-established one.

1.2 Research subject, problem and objectives

In response to the call above for new training formats for creative leadership development, the first author of this paper purpose-designed a new creative leader development method named *Genius Journey* ("GJ," Reis, 2015). The said program sets out to enable learners to acquire the creative success mindsets (attitudes and action routines) of outstanding creative leaders and to gradually expand their creative confidence, competence, and consciousness levels (Reis, 2015, 2020b, 2021). The program employs a journey metaphor as an experiential pedagogical device to teach candidates the said mindsets both effectively and creatively (Reis, 2015, 2021).

Our latest paper expands an ongoing CLD research program designed to investigate the effectiveness and creativeness of the GJ program, and continues the following research trajectory (see also Figure 1):

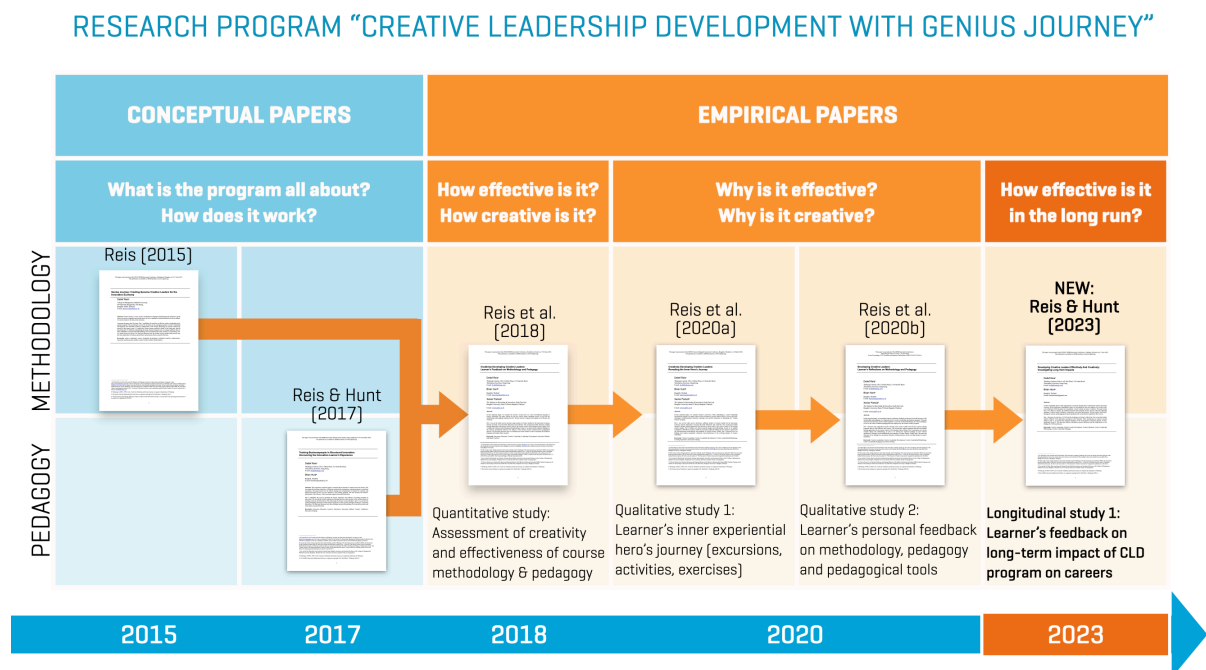


Figure 1 Overview of earlier and the present research publications in the Genius Journey program

- A second conceptual paper (Reis & Hunt, 2017) details out the experiential pedagogy (structure, tools, and activities) employed in this new CLD program.

- In a first empirical paper (Reis et al. (2018)), learners rated the GJ program's methodology and pedagogy in *quantitative* terms and confirmed in general terms the effectiveness and creativity of the chosen approach.
- In two subsequent empirical papers, Reis et al. (2020a and 2020b) investigated how learners experience their inner heroes' journeys while undergoing the GJ program and evaluated the value, effectiveness and creativity of the GJ methodology and pedagogy at the conclusion of the program.

With our new longitudinal study, we want to investigate to what extent the beneficial creative mindset shifts in GJ program graduates (as identified in our earlier studies) have endured over time and positively impacted their career paths.

1.3 Research-guiding questions

This study aims to develop the overriding research question (RQ):

What are the long-term impacts of a proven³ creative leadership development program on its graduates' creative leader mindset acquisition and professional career progression?

We investigated this overarching RQ a set of five subordinated research questions as follows:

1. With roughly a decade elapsed since undergoing the CL program, what do program graduates still remember of a) the GJ method of CLD (in general and with regards to the GJ mindsets)? b) the pedagogical tools, activities and special experiences from the GJ program?
2. To what extent has the course contributed to the acquisition of a lasting creative leader mindset?
3. How has the program influenced the graduates' career choices and progression? What creative leader mindsets have most helped the graduates in their career progression? To what extent has the course contributed to the acquisition of a lasting creative leader mindset?
4. To what extent have the course graduates experienced: a) subsequent professional successes that they attribute to the GJ mindsets? b) creative flow states? c) a moment of breakthrough creativity?
5. Almost a decade later, how do program graduates rate the a) effectiveness and b) creativity of both the methodology and pedagogy of the GJ program to developing creative leaders?

As far as we know, our research is the first to study the long-term impacts of a CLD program.

2 Developing creative leaders: A literature review on methodologies and pedagogy

Creative leadership (CL) is a developing domain within management studies that intersects the domains of individual creativity, innovation, and leadership. One of its niche domains is creative leader development (CLD), which blends educational theories with the literature on creative leadership. Various perspectives have been adopted in the pertinent CLD literature. A number of scholars (e.g., Basadur, 2004; Pucco et al., 2011; Williams & Foti, 2011) suggests to employ classic creative process methods and creative thinking strategies to develop creative leaders. Similarly, Mumford et al. (2007) recommend an CLD approach focusing on capabilities needed to lead creative work efforts. Conversely, Sternberg et al. (2004) connect the subject matter to different strategic action programs. Parush & Koivunen (2014) advocate using art-based leadership development workshops for CLD. Antes and Schuelke (2011) argue for using technological tools (simulations, e-mentoring, and social media, among others) to build up creative leadership capacity.

Finally, van Velsor et al. (2010) approach CLD more as an extension of accepted leadership styles.

In line with Hughes et al. (2018), we champion a mindsets-based approach of CLD. The first author of this paper has created a CLD program named Genius Journey (GJ) with a novel, well-structured methodology (Reis, 2015) and a supporting experiential pedagogy (Reis, 2017). The GJ method helps creative leader candidates to achieve a creative mindset shift by adopting ten creativity-empowering mindsets (attitudes and action routines that distinguish creative leaders from more conventional ones) and disengaging from ten creativity-limiting mindsets (Reis, 2015).

³ Proven: In our earlier research confirmed by the learners to be effective, creative, and transformational thanks to both its methodology and pedagogy.

The GJ method has its theoretical foundations in psychological studies on traits of genius (e.g., Feist, 1999, Sternberg, 1999), biographies of creative leaders (e.g., Branson, 1998; Isaacson, 2007, 2011), semi-biographical training programs on creative leaders (e.g., Gelb, 1998, 2002 and 2007; Thorpe, 2000), and training programs to enhance individual creativity (e.g., Ray, 1986; Cameron, 1992), among others.

In his GJ model, Reis (2015, 2020b) proposes a specific sequential order based on a hierarchy of expanding consciousness levels for the acquisition of the conducive mindsets. To cultivate the creative success mindsets of creative leaders in candidates in a genuinely creative format, the GJ method uses the creative device of a journey metaphor. Moreover, the first author developed an experiential creative leadership development program aligned with Kolb's (1984, 2015) experiential learning cycle theory as well as Campbell's (1949) monomyth model to pedagogically animate the GJ method.

3 Research design and methodology

This heuristic-exploratory, longitudinal study follows a mixed quantitative and qualitative research design. We collected data from graduates of a CLD program in February and March 2023 using an online survey. Our survey used a set of 6-point Likert scales to determine the former program graduates' relative agreement to statements capturing their recall of key course contents and pedagogical parameters and the long-term impacts of the program on their careers, creativity, and CL mindset development.

Overall, we successfully contacted 92 former participants of a course in Creative Leadership via email, social media, and telephone. The said program was an elective course in a master's in management program at a leading university in Thailand. In total, we collected 55 usable survey responses (n: 55).⁴ The corresponding response rate of 60% is high, particularly considering the time passed since the graduates completed the CL course program. This time span varied from 7.5 to 10.5 years, with the mean time passed being 9 years and 2 months. A detailed description of the sample's demographics and related career-specific distributions can be found in Appendix 1.

Our data analysis is twofold: We employed descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative data in this study. (Note: We also analyzed existing relationships between variables using multivariate statistical procedures and intend to report these findings in a separate paper). To process the qualitative answers from the survey, we followed a double-layered coding approach: On the one hand, we extracted key themes aligning with the GJ methodological structure (i.e., its destination stops and related mindsets) and the GJ pedagogical tools. On the other hand, we identified comments that addressed the research questions directly.

4 Findings: Tracking the long-term impacts of a CLD program on its graduates

4.1. Investigating the long-term recollection of the Genius Journey methodology and pedagogy

Our first research question aimed to investigate what methodological contents, pedagogical tools, activities, and extraordinary experiences from the GJ program are still present in the minds of the course graduates with roughly a decade passed since undergoing the CL course. Although almost all respondents are non-native English speakers, we report the qualitative data in the original verbatim to preserve a respondent's authentic voice.

LT recall of the GJ methodology and related CL mindsets

With regards to the overall method, graduates still recall the GJ program's overall structure ("*Systematic process of the Genius Journey method*"), approach (i.e., to replace disempowering STOP mindsets with creative START mindsets of genius: "*Whenever I started to have any stop journey in my mind. I will have to reset my mind with the start journey and keep follow the path of genius journey*") and purpose (develop into a creative leader by applying "*The focus of each Genius stop that finally bringing to Eureka moment*").

When asked to recollect the taught contents in detail, a few former learners admitted going blank ("*Unfortunately I don't remember the details, although I recall the picture. I would love to revisit all of it!*"). Fortunately, however, most learners can still recall content details, often related to those GJ mindsets constituting their greatest obstacles *en route* to developing a CL mindset. As Figure 2 illustrates, while all mindsets were relevant and recalled by some learners, clearly, there were more sticky "mindset hotspots" that were mentioned more

⁴ Only 41 respondents answered all quantitative questions. We kept the remaining 14 responses in the dataset due to the value of their qualitative feedback.

frequently, indicating they represented the most significant challenges in learners' mindset transformation journeys. Often, these learnings also were anchored by a related GJ excursion.

Overall, the first author of this paper (and creator of the GJ method and related CLD course program) was positively surprised about how many details, in general, the learners still collectively recalled as a cohort. The findings also suggest that all GJ mindsets are critical as individuals have to surmount different personal blockages inhibiting their creativity. Due to scope limitations, we present how CL graduates recall the contents of each *single* GJ destination stop and related GJ mindset in their own words in Appendix 2, thereby given evidence of the collective content recollection of the cohorts.

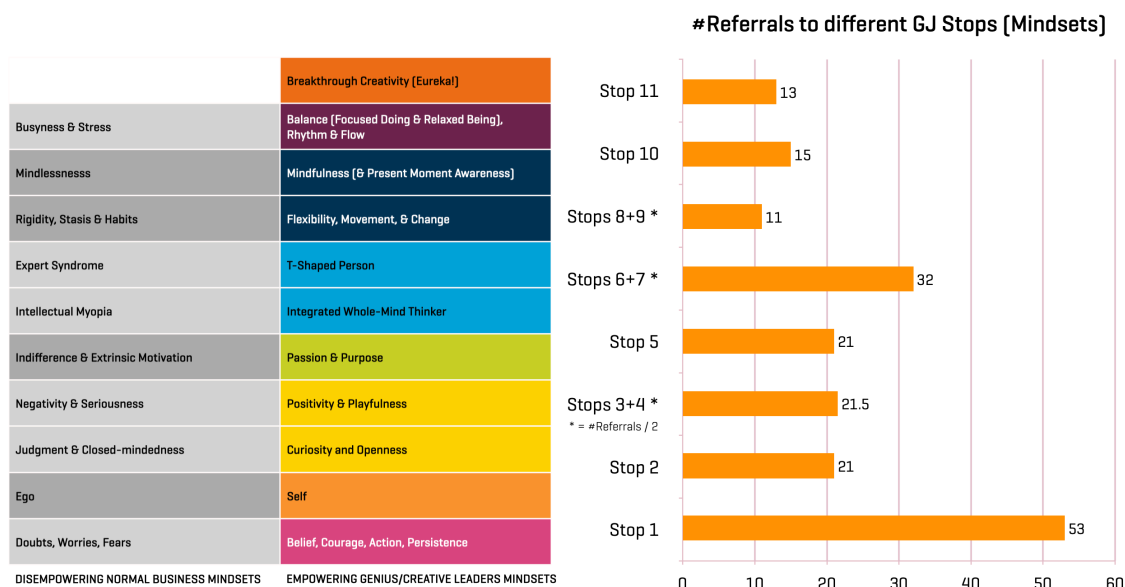


Figure 2 Number of comments and references related to the different GJ Stops and related CL mindsets

LT recall of the experiential, creative GJ pedagogy employed to develop CL

Many learners expressed appreciation for the unique experiential pedagogy used to develop CL (such as “it was always very playful, lots of examples,” “The class is really fun and interactive,” and “All of the course was surprising me because I have to do some things I never get into it”). One graduate commented, “It was very fun and interesting learning methods to learn and easy to get the key takeaways.” Another noted, “It was a very entertaining course and different because of the set up too, it was more casual but it really made us to think about ourselves and push the barriers.” Interestingly, one graduate observed that “each experience we had during the course was experienced as a group but felt extremely personal and self-centered in a way.” Another graduate recalled the experiential nature of the course:

“I remember the whole course as one big special experience, different to other courses in business school (way more interesting!) with you as a very special lecturer.”

A few learners also implicitly acknowledged the creative value and transformational nature of the “Genius Journey” metaphor as a pedagogical construct (“Just have fun and enjoy the journey!”). Here, the GJ excursions are the key element of the GJ pedagogy to animate the central pedagogical device of the creative journey metaphor. These GJ field trips bring the related GJ mindsets and exercises to life, thus supporting CL candidates to anchor the GJ tenets to be learned. Figure 3 depicts the frequency of mentioning of the various out-of-classroom tours, which one graduate characterized as “going out and doing something crazy.” To comply with the given scope for this paper, we summarized personal accounts detailing the strong impact of the various GJ excursions on individual learners in Appendix 2.

The 88 Genius Exercises are another essential pedagogical component of the GJ program. Highlighting their high value, one graduate commented: “All the homework that I got is most surprising - it’s not the same as academic. It’s new to me.” Another added: “They have to do the homework to truly get benefits from the course.” Learners also recalled specific genius exercises that stuck in their minds, such as the “power pose,” “thought experiments,” “mind mapping,” the impact of “body language” on one’s thoughts, and “Exercise when things get stuck in your mind, it does help.”

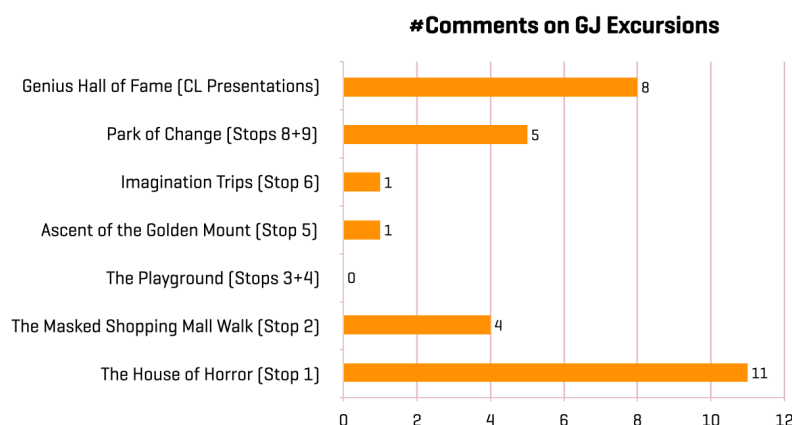


Figure 3 Number of comments and references related to the different GJ Excursions

The Genius Exercises are summed up in an GJ Exercise Book that, together with the comprehensive GJ Handout, constitute the main written course materials supporting the acquisition of the GJ mindsets. Interestingly, they are still actively used today, as an award-winning Thai Digital Marketer reported: “Yes, I have lot of materials from *Creative Leadership to fulfill my creativity for my marketing skill*.” Another graduate recommended, “To keep the material and take notes as it could be very useful at some points in your career. I wish I could redo some exercises that I can't find anymore.” Likewise, another graduate from Denmark sent the first author this social media chat message: “I've responded to the survey, and it actually made me think how much I would love to refresh the learnings from the course. I have lost the workbook we used back then - is there any way to get it again?”

Other pedagogical tools used in the GJ program that graduates recalled include “Journaling” in a notebook, the open-ended “Puzzle quizzes” that “Making you think outside the box,” and the genius talisman given to each learner by the course instructor (“I still keep the relaxing ball. It helped me relaxing my mind after work”).

One final aspect of the pedagogical experience flagged up by former learners is that instructors delivering the program need to be an authentic creative leader themselves. “The passion of Dr. D was contagious, so every stop had its own relevance and impact,” noted one Spanish graduate, and another Belgium graduate named as her most memorable experience of the course: “The teacher.”

4.2. Investigating the long-term impact of the Genius Journey program on creative leadership development

Our second research question inquired to what extent the CL course contributed to the acquisition of an enduring creative leader mindset. Therefore, we investigated how the GJ program affected in the long-term course graduates’ build-up of creative confidence and creative competence, their ability to access advanced levels of creativity (residing beyond the realm of their conscious mind), and the acquisition of leadership qualities. Moreover, we probed to what extent the graduates feel confident and competent in being authentic creative leaders and if the required GJ mindsets endure in their minds. We collected feedback on these parameters using quantitative measures (see Figure 4) and qualitative inquiry.

Long-term creativity impact (creative confidence, creative competence and advanced creativity):

By definition, creative leaders must be creative. By the end of the course program, the majority of learners asserted that the GJ program has allowed them to develop *creative confidence* (self-belief in one’s creativity) and *creative competence* (knowledge and skills in the fields of creativity and innovation) through lots of creative activities, puzzles, and homework assignments (Reis et al. (2020b). With in average 9 years 2 months passed, the respondents confirm the enduring effect of their creativity empowerment: More than 6 out of 10 graduates (strongly) agree that the GJ program has enhanced their creative confidence (mean: 4.76) and their creative competence (4.79) and also enabled them to connect to advanced states of creativity where big ideas originate (mean: 4.57).

One former learner commented that, “the course give me mindset to create more idea and bring the idea to solve the challenge i have in my real work.” The co-founder of a sustainable Thai garment start-up expressed that confidence and competence in her creativity is an everyday CL job requirement: “My company is using

waste as a resource so every project requires some understand and creativity to deal with the limitation of materials.”

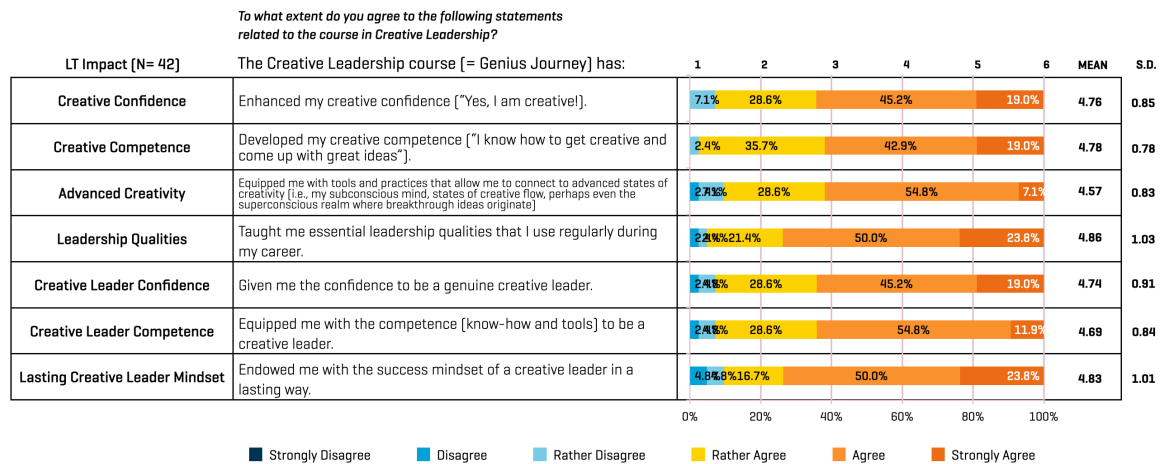


Figure 4 Long-term impact of the Genius Journey on graduates’ creativity and creative leader capacity

One award-winning Thai graduate explained in detail how he used GJ contents to live creative confidence and competence in his marketing role:

“Yes I think I have. I use T-shape learning method to checkup and for self-learning. I learn new things and connect it together to do something new to my surrounding. Then I become one of 40Under40 2021: Proven leaders with ample potential in APAC marcomms by CampaignAsia.”

Long-term impact on leadership quality developments:

Apart from developing creativity, the CL course also aimed to instill essential leadership qualities that learners can use regularly during their career. Here, 73.8% of graduates (strongly) affirmed that this aim was achieved (mean: 4.86). For example, one former learner stated:

“Most of times I have to work with many kinds of people and have so many process about work to finish in each projects. If I have to in charge of Project Manager, I need to be the leader and guiding and idea to team, the genius journey would be more helpful to run my project.”

Long-term creative leadership development impact (CL confidence, CL competence, enduring CL mindset acquisition)

One essential aspect of any training program is to what extent the desired build-up of know-how lasts. So, we also investigated to what extent the graduates expressed confidence and competence in their ability to be and act in the capacity of a creative leader. Two in three graduates voiced strong agreement that the GJ program has given them the confidence (mean: 4.74) and competence (mean: 4.69) to be a genuine creative leader. This result can be explained by 73.8% of respondents also (strongly) agreeing that the GJ program has endowed them with the success mindset of a creative leader in an enduring way (mean: 4.84).

For example, one course graduate sums up his lasting CL mindset as follows: “Thinking outside the box and intuitively. Inspiring others around me. Being a natural leader. This does not come from my position/title, but from my inner strength.” Another one affirms the validity of GJ’s mindset-oriented approach of CLD: “Mindset is a powerful tool, it can take wherever you want to be. We all need to be equipped with Creative Leadership Mindset.” Finally, one of the German graduates summed-up his lasting CL mindset as follows:

“During my career, I was told by several managers that I have a talent for being a (natural) leader and for positively impacting people around me. Further, I was told several times that I am exceptionally good at compartmentalizing. I can easily focus on only what matters (mindfully). Further, I recently changed industries and successfully joined the real estate (finance) industry as a new starter, because I wanted to learn something new and prove myself. Since then, I am being admired by my colleagues for having been so open minded and courageous.”

4.3. Long-term career impact (creative career choice, career progression)

In the following, we discuss the impact of the GJ program on graduates' careers against the backdrop of their present career background as outlined in Appendix 1 and the quantitative results depicted in Figure 5. Interestingly, our quantitative data confirm a strong career impact of the CL course. Half of the program graduates (strongly) agreed that the GJ course program directed them towards more creative career choices, with another 38% rather agreeing (mean 4.55). Likewise, 57.2% of graduates voiced (strong) agreement that the course positively impacted their career progression (with another 33.3% stating they rather agree (mean 4.6). Moreover, 73.8% of respondent (strongly) affirmed that the GJ program taught them essential creative success mindsets that have been valuable for their professional career evolution (21.6% rather agreed; mean: 4.88).

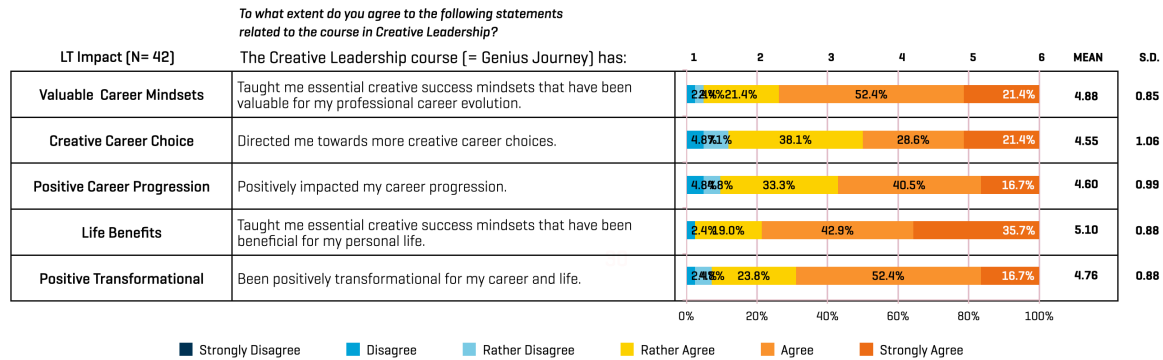


Figure 5 Long-term impact of the CL course on graduates' career and life evolution

Feedback on the career implications in the qualitative survey responses fall into three broad categories:

- When asked if the CL course influenced their career choices and helped their career progression over the past decade, 60% affirmed it affected both ("Yes", "I believe yes").
- Quite a few learners emphasized that the course inspired them to work in a career that they feel passionate about (GJ Mindset 5). Working now as Senior Manager Media & Brand Activation in a Danish MNC, one Italian graduate commented: *"Absolutely yes. It helped me picking the industry that I could see myself working in the most (travel), by realizing I couldn't have picked a job without being truly passionate about the industry."* A German course graduate also confirmed the strong impact of the CL course on his early career: *"Yes, especially during the first 5 years of my career, where I worked in startups."* Yet another Thai graduate shared:

"Believe it or not this is the single course that had an impact on my career! Do you remember the little ball "know how to wow" that you gave us at the end of the course? It the object I brought to the interview when I was asked to bring an object to represent me and has been on my desk since day one!"

- Many former learners said the CL course helped them to approach their job roles and responsibilities more creatively and effectively. *"Yes the course directly help my career and my progression as I need to be creative in my role,"* shared a Senior Marketing Manager working in a MNC in Thailand. One Economist at a Thai Think Tank commented, *"I used some of theory to maintain my team."* One Thai graduate now works as Regional Marketing Manager in an MNC in Singapore, which she attributes to GJ mindsets acquired:

"The Creative Leadership course influenced me in both personal and professional. Especially, my perspective about fear. It helps to make me decide to take on the role that previously I don't feel I may not qualify and also move to another country to work."

The former learners also confirmed that the GJ program was positively transformational for their career and life (mean 4.76). Interestingly, the highest mean score (5.1) flagged up when probing for the life benefits of the GJ method. A whopping four out of five program graduates (strongly) agreed that the creative success mindsets taught in the GJ program have been beneficial for their personal lives (with a further 19% rather agreeing). One GJ graduate recommends that future learners, *"Open minded to take this course, you will found something that will shape your life better. Not only for the work but also your life."* Three other former learners commented on the GJ program's life benefits in greater detail:

"I have, it was the time to decide to take the job at Aviation base and moved out of Bangkok. There were lots of worries at the time if I could adjust with everything as It meant new people, new environment. Finally, when things were settled, It was the life I wished for." —Thai female, now Learning and Development Manager

“It was the part that I aware deep down inside my mind, to know myself and know that creativity is all around me. I just need to keep practicing my mind until it became habit and it did.” —Thai female, now Marketing Manager at LuxuryGoods MNC

“Probably the idea of wanting to leave a life in my own terms. I deeply analyzed all the components of my life, as a sort of SWOT analysis, and realized I needed to change something. I wanted to work for fun and be free, not to work for money and be a slave. This allowed me to come up with an idea of ideal scenario and then put a plan in place to achieve it i.e., getting a remote role and directly contributing to something bigger than selling products.” —Spanish Male, Senior Strategy Consultant in Travel Industry

4.4. LT creative success experiences (professional success, flow states, breakthrough ideas)

We also probed to what extent the graduates linked specific (creative) success experiences they enjoyed since program completion to the genius mindsets and practices acquired in the GJ program (see Figure 6). Half of the former participants (strongly) attributed a major professional success (e.g., promotion, prestigious assignment, award, innovative product launches) to the acquired genius mindsets. One Thai Digital Marketer earned a nomination to [CampaignAsia](#)’s “40 Under 40 2021: Proven leaders with ample potential in APAC marcomms” list. He attributed his success to one creative GJ mindset: “*I use T-shape learning method to checkup and for self-learning. I learn new things and connect it together to do something new to my surrounding.*”

Another Thai graduate who also works in digital marketing linked “*a successful campaign that brought over 1.3 M USD revenue for the company*” to “*this kind of mindset to be creative with the asset*” and “*test and try, fail and learn.*” Now leading the Thai subsidiary of an MNC in animal health, one former learner reported using the GJ mindsets to “*link all the stakeholders together*” when “*I launched my ex-company product*” in Thailand. One American former GJ traveler shared, “*I regularly represent companies on large stages and have the skills and especially mindset to do so without fear.*” Last but not least, a Thai graduate co-founded a sustainable textile start-up which turns fabric waste into new textiles. In 2022, the German channel [DW TV](#) featured her and her company [Moreloop](#) in a documentary as a sustainability best practice venture.

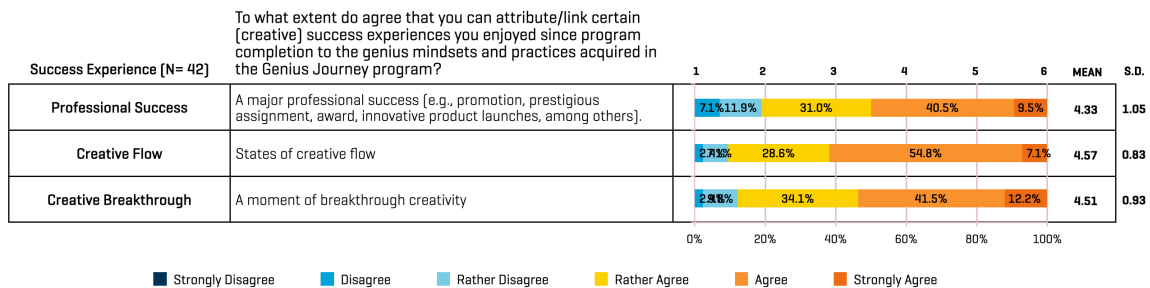


Figure 6 Long-term impact of the GJ program on success experiences of graduates

One of the end goals of the GJ program is to equip graduates with creative mindsets that can induce the experience of flow (which Csikszentmihalyi (1990) labeled as the ‘state of optimal experience’). More than six out of ten learners (strongly) concurred that they experience states of creative flow (or “*being in the zone*”). For example, one female Italian graduate stated: “*That creative project was a constant creative flow.*” A Danish graduate who went on to become the Global Program Manager for Google Funding reported that “*when working on big sales pitches, suddenly everything just made sense, and by being customer-centric, the whole narrative becomes clear.*” A German graduate shared how he even reaches flow states in a finance career: “*Yes, constantly when working on financial analyses and forecasts. It feels easy for me to reach this state.*” Yet another former Thai graduate who has advanced to be the Regional Head Integration Services of a Pharma MNC described her flow experience as follows: “*Yes, sometimes, I just forget the time and keep continue to think and work.*” Another learner shared a flow-like experience in greater detail:

“It wasn’t a state of creative flow per-se but it felt like being in the zone. After a tough period at work I was very stressed, and felt burnt-out, unfortunately we still had a very important audit that we needed to do well, then it would be New Year holiday. I somehow talked to myself and put myself in a focus mode, and during the 2 days-audit everything worked out, I could find solutions to all obstacles, everything clicked. We passed the audit with very good results.”

The ultimate goal (and final destination of the Genius Journey) is to increase the likelihood of program graduates experiencing a moment of creative breakthrough. Surprisingly, 75.6% of former learners affirmed

having experienced a creative breakthrough (mean: 4.51). 12.2% of graduates even strongly agree, suggesting they indeed experienced a Eureka moment. One American graduate describes how his transformational *“Eureka moment completely changed the way I looked at how I wanted my career to progress.”* One Spanish graduate shares how his courage to opt for the path less traveled was rewarded with subsequent Eureka-experiences:

“Yes. When I decided to leave a comfortable corporate job at a large firm to pursue the idea of doing something meaningful and help communities through tourism through a very small firm. It was a risky decision, but overcoming fear was key. Since then, I had many 'Eureka' moments that made me very happy.”

The ‘40 under 40 marcomm leader’ reported that *“Most of the breakthrough idea happen in business process. Quite so technical, but it help me a lot for self confident and also inspiring other people with my success.”*

On the other hand, two former learners from Germany acknowledged that they have not yet had a true Eureka moment. *“I did not experience „the“ moment. Certainly there were many situations when I recap to the Genius Journey,”* commented one, while the other one stated: *“Unfortunately not (yet)! This is mainly due to the fact that the applicability of creativity in my (finance) jobs so far is unfortunately very limited.”*

4.5. Investigating the long-term effectiveness and creativeness of the Genius Journey program

In the earlier sections of this chapter, the respondents shared their vivid recollections of the CL course and the substantial long-term impact it had on the evolution of their careers and lives and their creative leadership capacity. Given these results, it is little wonder that the vast majority of CL graduates confirm the high effectiveness and creativity of both the GJ method (78.6% echo strong agreement; mean: 5.02) and the experiential pedagogical approach in which the CLD program is delivered (83.4% do (strongly) agree here; mean: 5.07). Figure 7 illustrates the respective data.

A French female graduate who nowadays works for an MNC as Area Sales Manager EMEA sums up the powerful long-term impact of the GJ method and pedagogy of CLD:

“I didn't think creativity could be taught, for me it was a quality that one has or not but I found interesting that we can all work on it and improve it. Today my colleagues refers to me as the creative one but i never pictured myself as creative at all.”

Another graduate affirmed:

“I successfully founded a company, likely also motivated in the learnings of this course.”

Even though these findings confirm the long-term effectiveness and creativity of the GJ program, quite a few former learners suggested that they would like to retake or refresh it. *“I would love to revisit all of it!”* stated one Danish graduate, and one American graduate recommended future candidates, *“Enjoy and immerse into the course to its fullest and repeat it a few years later again.”*

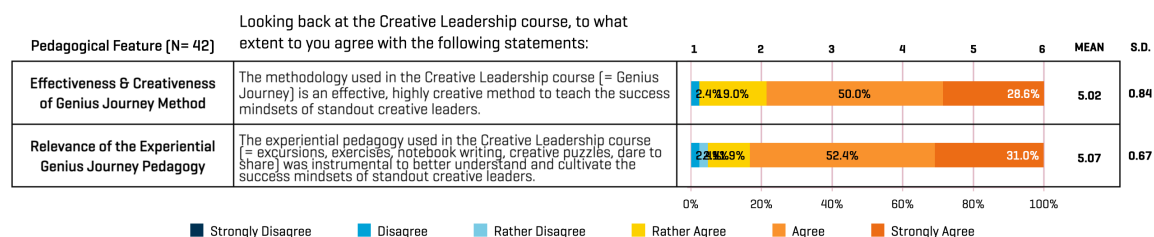


Figure 7 Long-term effectiveness and creativity of the Genius Journey method and experiential pedagogy

5 Discussion

Conclusion: Creative leaders can be developed with an enduring impact using a mindsets-based approach coupled with an experiential pedagogy

Three of our earlier studies (Reis et al. (2018, 2020a and 2020b) suggested that the course graduates deemed the Genius Journey method of CLD with its experiential pedagogy both to be an effective and creative CLD approach. Our present findings confirm the method's effectiveness, creativity and enduring personal transformational effect not only in the short run, but also long-term with a time lag of almost a decade. Thereby, graduates of the CL program affirmed both in quantitative and qualitative terms:

- the viability of GJ's mindset-based approach of CLD.
- the importance of animating the CLD methodology with a corresponding experiential pedagogy.
- that creative leaders are not born, but can be developed by sending candidates on the Genius Journey.
- a strong and lasting impact of the CL course on graduates' career choice and progression, which also reflects in the vertical upward mobility and horizontal flexibility of many active creative leaders.

Our findings also suggest that there seems to be indeed a hierarchy of creative mindsets and an optimal sequence of mindset acquisition (Reis, 2015), which other CLD methods overlook as they suggest that creative mindsets can be developed in parallel (e.g., Gelb, 1998 and 2003; Thorpe, 1998).

While we intend to explore this phenomenon further in a subsequent qualitative research study with standout graduates, our present findings also offers initial evidence that the GJ method delivers on its ultimate goal — allowing more CL to come up with breakthrough ideas. Comments from some graduates indicate that they indeed experienced a Eureka moment of personal breakthrough creativity.

The GJ stops that had some especially evocative excursions had a good recall of contents, too. So linking the desired learnings of a particular CLD session (i.e., in the case of the GJ program, the acquisition of a particular creativity-supporting GJ mindset) to the essential spirit and attraction of an excursion is a strategy recommended to achieve greater insights and long-term stickiness of contents.

Recommendations for future research

The findings of our explorative empirical paper into the long-term impacts of the Genius Journey program of CLD on learners open the door for more comprehensive future research investigations. We intend to deepen the insights from the present paper in a subsequent *qualitative* study where we will interview those program graduates who reported extraordinary career progressions and successes (awards, nominations, Eureka's). Moreover, we also intend to report in a separate *quantitative* research paper the relationships between variables that we observed when using multivariate statistical procedures on the dataset.

Recommendations for CLD program designers and educators

"Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire." In line with William Butler Yeats' adage, our findings underline the importance of using an experiential approach in line with Kolb's (2000) learning cycle as well as a variety of creative pedagogical tools (memorable out-of-class excursions, exercises for both mind and body, puzzles, notebook journaling, etc.). Furthermore, our findings underline the importance of running a CLD program with a course instructor who genuinely lives and breathes creative leadership himself.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. General demographical and career-specific distributions of the sample

In this section, we introduce data outlining the demographical background and career-related specifics of the sample (see also Figure 8):

- *Gender:* The 55 respondents we included in the sample were equally split between male and female course graduates.
- *Age:* The age of the responding former CLD course graduates ranges between 30 to 43 years, with a mean of 35.2 years.
- *Nationality and residence:* The majority of respondents are Thai nationals (68.1%), with the rest coming from Europe (one in four learners) as well as Singapore, Brazil, and the US (one participant each). Four respondents currently work and reside in a country other than their home country.
- *Organisational types:* Almost two in five CL graduates currently pursue careers in a Multinational Corporation (MNC), and another 13% in a Large Local Corporation (LLC). Slightly more than one in four respondents work in a family business or SME, while 11.1% of the former learners joined a start-up and scale-up venture, often as (co-)founders.
- *Hierarchy level:* 37.4% of the course graduates hold senior executive positions, 47.3% work in Middle Management or as Senior Functional Specialist and only 15.4% are still in lower-level roles.
- *Career mobility and agility:* The GJ course graduates had, on average, 2.3 vertical career jumps (= promotions) and 1.8 horizontal career moves (= new industry, business function, country) over an average of 9.2 years since taking the course. These numbers indicate the group's relatively higher upward mobility and horizontal agility compared to an overall work population.
- *Industry:* The sample covers 25 different industries spanning technology (17%), consumer goods (9.4%), creative industries (such as advertising, PR, and other creative agencies; 7.5%) to conservative industries such as banking & finance (7.5%), energy & utilities, and the government sector. Overall, roughly 6 out of ten pursue their careers in more agile, dynamic industries that require higher levels of creativity, while 3 out of ten sought employment in more static, systemic industries that are more efficiency-focused (with reference to the dilemma of innovation management (Reis, 2023)).
- *Functional job responsibility:* The sample covered 19 functional roles in business, whereby most respondents worked in marketing/advertising (17.0%), sales (13.2%), education/training (9.4%), General Management, and Project Management (both 7.5%). Again, six out of ten CL graduates work in functional roles that are more creativity- rather than efficiency-driven.
- *Corporate lifecycle stages:* 52% of the course graduates work in a company in one of the dynamic, creative company lifecycle phases (Creation, Growth, Re-creation), while 48% joined organizations in more static and analytical phases (Solidifying, Systems). This balanced mix is noteworthy as most organizations reside in the company lifecycle's latter phases (Fall & Winter).

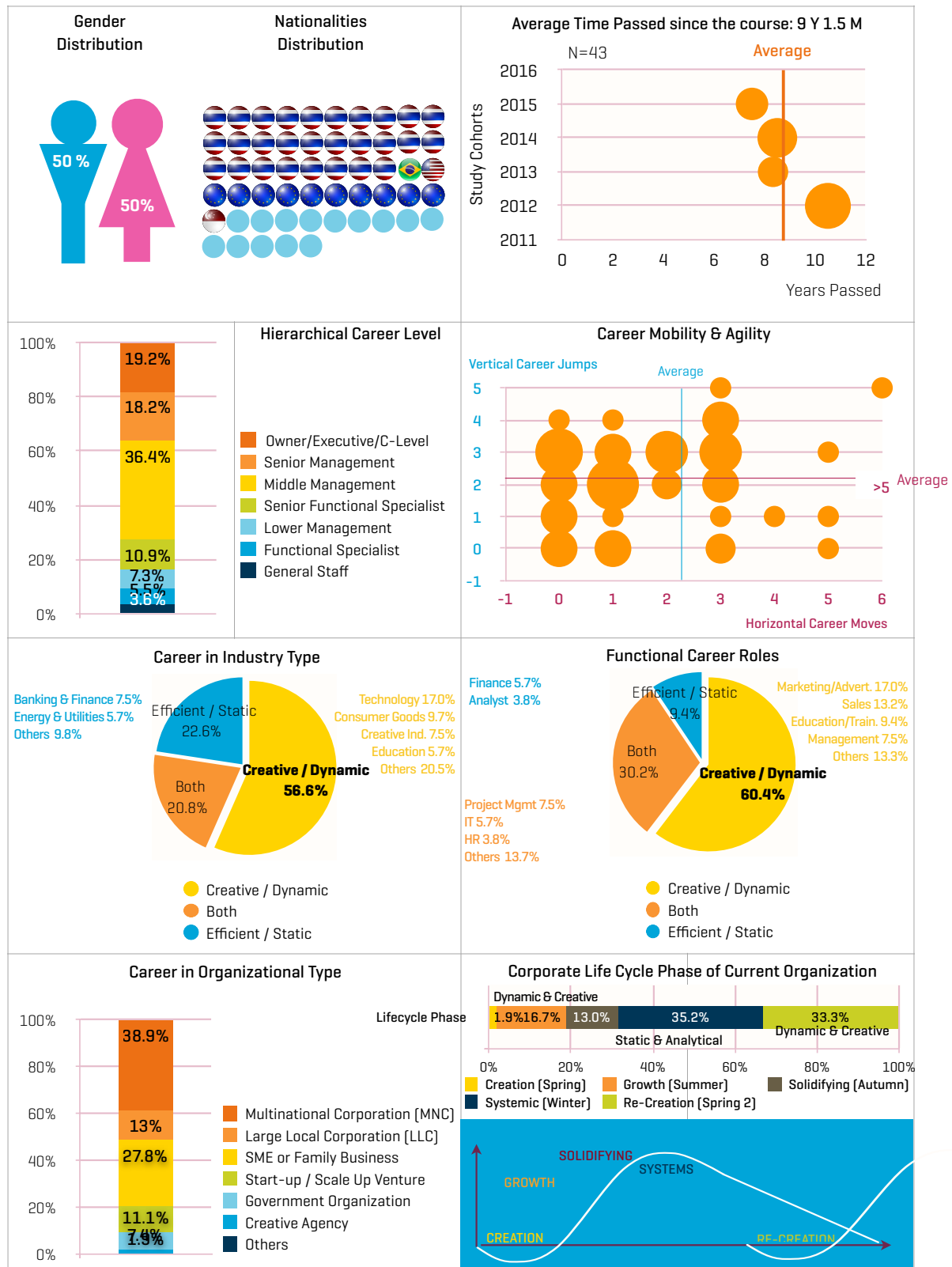


Figure 8 Demographic and career-specific sample distributions

Appendix 2. Qualitative feedback on the GJ stops and related experiential excursions

In this section, we present the CL graduates qualitative recollections of the various GJ stops and related out-of-class course excursions. The said comments expand on the discussion in Part 4.1 and are reported here in order to keep within the scope of an ISPIM paper.

LT recollection of the GJ mindsets and how they impacted CL graduates

Unsurprisingly, GJ Stop 1 was the biggest initial hurdle for most graduates who learned to “*Stop my doubts, worries and fear*” and replace it with “*Persistence action courage belief*.” One former learner noted the pivotal importance of this first destination stop: “*For me, the 1st stop is very important. In real life, everything is always difficult at the beginning but You must not be afraid to start. Because if you don't start, you will never go forward or be successful.*” Another echoed this sentiment: “*For me step #1 is the most important, you have to throw off your fear and start to be creative. And also told yourself that you can be creative.*” So, as another learner added: “*Be fearless and you can find something incredible.*”

After having mastered the lesson “*Do not be afraid to start something new*,” the learners moved to GJ Stop 2, where they learned how to overcome their worst enemy (“*Ego that we must be changed*”) and “*finding my inner self*” and “*Being self-confident and authentic.*” As one learner put it: “*It is better to be yourself and speak up than to put a mask on.*”

Quite a few graduates also recalled the empowering mindsets at the interconnected GJ Stops 3 and 4 (“*being open & curious, being positive and playful*”) and to “*Stop being judgmental and closed-minded*” as well as negative and serious. Interestingly, some former learners also commented on the “*importance of body language*,” thus signalling they captured how the body-mind connection impacts one’s thoughts on this level.

Many learners elaborated on the crucial importance for a CL of “*not working just for the money*” and instead “*Find your passion and what you love to do*” (GJ Stop 5). One learner commented: “*Passion/Purpose, it was valuable because it helped me later in life realizing I couldn't have been good at any job unless I did something within an industry/for a company that reflects my personal values and passions/interests.*” Another former learner from Germany admitted that he is still searching:

“I also remember very well the lessons about “working only for money” and “do what you love”, because so far I still don't fully love what I'm doing (professionally) and I seem to work (only) for money - so I better start thinking about the course more (haha!)”

Most graduates have vivid recollections on the creativity-related GJ Stops 6 and 7. Stop 6 alerts CL candidates “*That an exclusively rational mind limits your full potential*” and to engage in integrated “*whole-mind thinking*” instead. Many learners commented they recalled “*All the thinking out of the box*” and doing creative activities such as “*brainstorming and mind maps*” or “*use X-IDEA*.” One former learner from Belgium stated: “*With this course, I realized that analytics is not the only important thing! And this is helping me on my day to day work.*” Likewise, a German manager now working in a financial field agreed: “*That it's very important to not only use your rational mind at work, because this would limit oneself. Having learned about thinking unconventionally and outside the box still sticks in my mind today.*”

GJ Stop 7 is about “*stop being an expert, which came surprising to me*” and starting being a “*T-shaped person*” (i.e., someone combining deep domain expertise with a broad general knowledge, skills, and experience repertoire) who “*collect and connect the dots*” to arrive at original creative solutions. One Thai graduate shared that “*Being a T shape person can really helps you get far in your career.*” Another MNC Country Manager from Thailand noted that “*Most of the time I use X-IDEA to brainstorm but use the T to frame my work.*” Furthermore, a Functional Manager in a Thai Pharmaceutical MNC regarded this aspect as personally impactful: “*For me, it would be the “T shape” person. I was a Ph.D. in Science and we were thought [taught] to be excel in specific field. This aspect is kind of opposite but interesting for me.*”

Fewer learners referenced the interconnected GJ Stops 8 and 9, which remind CL candidates of “*Being focus and mindful and be flexible*” instead of being habitual, static, and mindless.

While overall mentioned less frequently, one Spanish Strategy Consultant identified “*Stop number 10*” (i.e. balance focused doing with relaxed being) as the most relevant mindset for him (he also reported experiencing flow states regularly); this stop also had significance for one Thai Senior HR Manager who recalled she needs to avoid “*doing things in disharmony and stress.*” One Italian graduate also highlights the importance of balance and taking a break as follows:

“I remember being advised by Dr.D to sometimes make sure to take a break from routine and do something different, even a small thing throughout the day. That really stuck to my mind and even now when I feel overwhelmed I adopt that suggestion.”

LT recollection of the GJ mindset-related out-of-class excursions

As expected, and by design, the first GJ excursion was the most sticky one in the mind of former learners: the visit to a realistic yet staged Haunted House that helped the learners to confront and overcome their doubts, worries, and fears (*"the haunting house I'll never forget!"*). Two graduates recall the experience and its impact on them in vivid detail:

"OVERCOME THE FEARS" - I would say this word has changed my life completely. You know what I was the one who never thinking about going to haunted house because I was really scared of unexpected things coming to approach me. After that they I realized that it was nothing. In my real life, I was scared of making mistakes and failures that a reason why my previous part of life wasn't that colorful and successful. After that day, I have changed my mindset. And everything are getting better. I have been trying to do many things including having my own business. Well, just face it first - not fear first. Thank you so much." —Thai entrepreneur and pastry chef

"We went to the haunting house discussing on the topic of Fear. It impacted me that I usually had the thought of fear to start the journey. Actually, most of the fear comes from our own thought in the head rather than being there for real. From that experience, I tended to have more courage to trial and error and if I failed, I merely learned from it." —Thai Learning & Development Manager

A highly effective excursion was also the second trip where the learners toured a luxury shopping mall with a self-made paper bag mask, symbolizing the masks behind which many people hide their true selves. (Later, we also visited a wax works museum). *"I like the mask one,"* noted one former learner on his favorite tour, and another one commented that *"Going out wearing a paper bag and being unidentified"* gave them *"more courage to do things."* One German graduate stated that the experience made him realize, *"Most people are just interested in themselves. There is nothing to be scared of."*

A female graduate from Italy shared how the ascent of the Golden Mount (an excursion related to GJ Stop 5) made a deep, transformational impression on her:

"Climbing on top of a Buddhist monastery in Bangkok, as for some reason for me was a big moment for self reflection and made me realise how lucky I was to be in that specific place, in that specific moment. despite some other things in my life weren't going as planned. I also think it was nice I could enjoy it as a self-reflective moment despite we were in a group sharing that experience."

Another excursion to the Garden of Change stayed on the minds of quite a few learners, too. It gave each learner a chance to *"step out of my comfort zone"* physically, encouraged them to *"Exercise regularly,"* and become aware of the changing nature and interconnectedness of everything alive. The tour also invited the cohort to learn to *"exercise our mindfulness"* and cultivate present-moment awareness and multi-sensory perception through doing usual things in unusual ways (*"walked with bare feet"* and *"hugged the tree"*).

A final sticky highlight of the course was the Genius Hall of Fame. Here, each learner portrayed the life and achievement of one genius leader they had researched in parallel throughout the course. One learner commented that he enjoyed *"The time I study profile of Benjamin Franklin."* Another graduate stated it *"makes me inspired a lot from the person who I chose to present,"* and yet another added: *"I love when I show my leader that I want to be like them."*

"Researching on a leader" allowed each learner to reconcile the journey of their chosen creative leader with their struggles, as one graduate noted: *"The final creative leader presentations were an insightful exercise that forced us to look ourselves in the mirror and understand who represented the creative values we wanted to achieve someday."* Even more importantly, all the *"inspirational speeches"* allowed the entire cohort to notice that all featured creative top achievers lived by most or all of the GJ mindsets taught in the CL course. One graduate accentuated this aspect explicitly: *"When we did the essay about the creative leader portrait, all of the leaders presented in class had the characteristics for being genius and creative leaders per Genius Leader."*