

CEDEP Voices is a series of impact stories that highlights the real-world transformation and strategic value CEDEP executive education programs create for leaders and their organisations. Leadership in Practice brings forward the experiences of alumni from our Achieving Managerial Excellence Program, offering insights into their leadership practices and how they navigate complexity with greater confidence and clarity.

CEDEP VOICES: LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

Unlocking Leadership Transformation: Real Stories. Real Reflection. Real Impact.

Achieving Managerial Excellence (AME)

01. *"The AME program helped me unblock long-held myths, redefine how I lead, and understand the kind of environment I want to create as a leader."*

— Varun Saxena, Senior IT Director at
Garrett-Advancing Motion



A Self-Reflective Journey Into Leadership

Varun Saxena described his AME experience as a self-reflective exercise. For him, this wasn't just a moment of introspection—it was a turning point.

What did you discover about yourself through the AME process?

One of the profound reflections I had was understanding why I do things the way I do. Through deeper coaching sessions and my lifecycle graph, I began to see how my current behaviors were shaped by strengths developed over time. That awareness brought me closer to recognizing my shortcomings too—because strengths can also create blind spots, limitations, and ultimately myths about ourselves.

Seeing Blind Spots Clearly—and Differently

High performance had always been central to Varun's identity. But AME helped him understand the story behind it.

Were there any blind spots you became aware of during the program? How did confronting them help you grow?

Being a high performer, shaped by circumstances while growing up. I usually operated in silos striving

for perfection. Although I was aware of the power of collaboration, it didn't truly sink in until I realized that "high performance" had become a shield—my defense mechanism. Confronting this reality during the program helped me embrace vulnerability, lean into the power of the collective, and collaborate more openly. Today, I'm far less hesitant to approach people, and far more committed to working as a unit for greater impact with performance.

Leading With Empathy in Uncertainty

How has the experience changed the way you lead or make decisions—especially under uncertainty?

It has made me more empathetic—both in how I lead my teams and collaborate across the organization. As a result, I've strengthened my influence and executive presence. My team feels more connected and empowered, and the rigor and engagement they bring to topics has increased. I'm also more comfortable making decisions based on what truly matters, rather than waiting for all inputs to drive perfection.

Transforming an Enterprise-Level Challenge

Can you share an example of how the program helped you approach a challenge differently?

The business challenge I am working on is enterprise wide, impacting 4,000 people across processes, systems, and ways of working. My challenge was getting stakeholders to think from a future-focused perspective and embrace digital tools. The AME program gave me new ways to influence—top-down set of stakeholders—while improving how I collaborate, communicate and network. Storytelling and strategic communication became powerful levers to move the organization forward.

The Power of Peer Learning

What was it like to learn alongside peers from other companies and industries?

It was eye-opening. We all face similar challenges, but approach them differently. Hearing best practices and

seeing how diverse organizations—from heavy industrial engineering to consumer-focused businesses—operate expanded my perspective.

How did hearing others' perspectives challenge or reinforce your thinking?

While I genuinely enjoyed the camaraderie within my cohort, the experience was most fulfilling because it created space for open, unhindered reflection. We were able to share our thoughts freely, which led to valuable insights. Through this process, I was able to shed some of my own self-imposed myths and gain a fresh, unbiased perspective on my challenges. I also had the opportunity to observe and learn from many different leadership styles, which has helped shape my own approach to leading in diverse and evolving environments.

A Moment That Stays With Him

What's one insight or moment that has stayed with you?

One takeaway I always carry with me is the idea of the "smell of the place." Realizing that this atmosphere is something we, as leaders, define—no one else—made a profound impact on me. It reinforced my belief that I, as a leader, can and should be accountable for driving change and shaping the environment in which our team, department, or company operates and feels.

AME's Lasting Impact

How does the program continue to support and inspire you today?

It strengthened my self-belief, boosted my confidence, and made me more empathetic and collaborative. I continue to apply my learnings—from situational leadership (including lessons from the horse-whisperer)—to the power of voice, networking, and defining the "smell of the place"—to achieve big goals and develop the next generation of leaders.

In One Sentence

The program is reflective and helps unblock one's myths, while fine-tuning leadership styles to make decisions in the realm of uncertainty.

About the AME

The Achieving Managerial Excellence (AME) program is CEDEP's flagship leadership development experience for high-potential leaders stepping into broader responsibilities. Participants explore personal leadership drivers, strengthen influence, sharpen decision-making under uncertainty, and build the self-awareness needed to lead with authenticity and impact.



CEDEP is a not-for-profit executive education club that empowers leaders to navigate an ever-changing business world and shape organizations for more sustainable and positive impact. In collaboration with our global ecosystem of members, clients, faculty, and industry experts, we co-design transformational leadership development programs that provide a unique space to challenge conventions, collaborate, and succeed together.

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