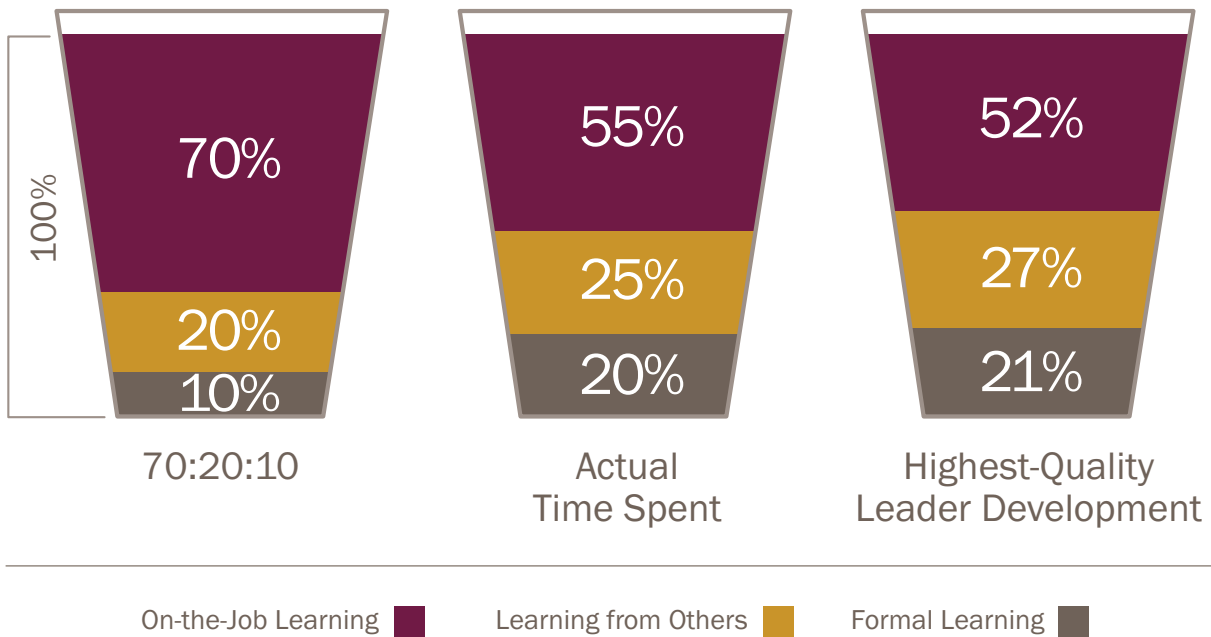


70:20:10

The Right Ratio... or So We All Thought

Leaders Thirst for More Structured Development and Learning from Others



Get Rid of the Old Bumper Sticker

The most common piece of wisdom on how leaders learn is the 70:20:10 ratio—70 represents learning that occurs on the job; 20, learning from others; and 10, learning from formal development. This ratio originated in decades-old research that asked leaders to look *backward* at the retrospective value of learning types. It has evolved to something very different, however: a near-universal planning edict, looking *forward* to how leaders should seek and receive development. Even the ratio’s originators have stated publicly that they never intended it to be used as the prescriptive tool it has become.*

These disconnects—along with not a single piece of supportive recent research—prompted us to find out if this ratio is fact or myth when put to the test with over 13,000 of today’s leaders. As the illustration at left shows, the time leaders spend on learning has a very different ratio, one that significantly emphasizes formal learning and learning from others while de-emphasizing on-the-job learning. Surprisingly, this 55:25:20 ratio of actual learning time spent varies very little by leader level.

Next, we wanted to know what ratio is used by organizations that provide the highest-quality leader development. To do so, we isolated organizations that exceed their peers in leadership development quality as viewed by the leaders themselves. The resulting data showed that 52:27:21 is strongly associated with high quality—a ratio that closely matches how leaders actually spend their time. We also asked leaders how much time they spend on leadership development as well as how much time they’d like to spend. Their answers: 5.4 hours/month now, 8.1 hours/month desired. When asked where they would most prefer spending those additional learning hours, the chart at right shows their pointed response: more formal learning and learning from others.

From all these data, we concluded that overreliance on 70:20:10 misrepresents leaders’ reality and doesn’t match the practices of organizations with the highest-quality development or what leaders themselves prefer. Even more problematic, the 70:20:10 ratio—in fact, any ratio—emphasizes the separation of learning methods rather than their integration. Allowing learning methods to compete rather than integrating them so they can build on one another undermines their impact and their value.

* McCall, M.W., Yost, P.R., McHenry, J.J., O’Connor, P., & Plunkett, M. (2014, May), *Beyond 70-20-10 Leadership Development*.

Now What



- .01** Though 70:20:10 does not match reality, leaders generally will spend a greater proportion of their time in **on-the-job learning**. As such, carefully choose and sequence components of formal learning with learning from others.
- .02** Do not place too much weight on percentages. Effective learning requires someone (a “master blender”) who can put together the **right combination of learning activities** to meet the needs of both learners and the business.
- .03** While experiential learning and learning from others are key to an effective blend, consider allocating more time on formal learning to **build foundational leader competencies** that can have wide-ranging benefits while matching up well with leaders’ learning preferences.
- .04** Organizations benefit when **formal learning is a vital component of the learning mix**, establishing a framework and foundation for on-the-job learning. This foundation enables job experiences to be easily converted into sustained, well-supported behavior change.

Percent More Time Leaders Want for Each Type of Learning

