Leadership Development Methods
One Size Does Not Fit All

Most Effective Leadership Development Methods at Each Management Level

Percent of Organizations Using Method

Percent of Leaders Rating the Method as Effective

- Developmental Assignments
  - First-Level: 58%
  - Mid-Level: 68%
  - Higher-Level: 73%
  - Senior-Level: 76%
- Formal Training
  - First-Level: 63%
  - Mid-Level: 61%
  - Higher-Level: 57%
  - Senior-Level: 54%
- Coaching from Current Manager
  - First-Level: 31%
  - Mid-Level: 53%
  - Higher-Level: 56%
  - Senior-Level: 54%
- Coaching from Internal Coaches
  - First-Level: 41%
  - Mid-Level: 43%
  - Higher-Level: 43%
  - Senior-Level: 46%
- Coaching from External Coaches
  - First-Level: 40%
  - Mid-Level: 38%
  - Higher-Level: 41%
  - Senior-Level: 37%
- Technology-Enabled Methods
  - First-Level: 9%
  - Mid-Level: 8%
  - Higher-Level: 8%
  - Senior-Level: 8%

#GLF2014

Maximize Effectiveness by Level

A company that has invested energy and expense in finding and hiring the best talent will, of course, want to use the most effective methods to develop leaders and continue to grow their skills. How can an organization maximize the effectiveness of development choices?

To explore this question and to identify the most effective development methods across four leadership levels, we asked leaders to identify which methods are most effective for developing their skills. We also asked HR to tell us what methods their organizations are focusing on (see the graphic on the previous page).

We found that leaders across-the-board said in-role assignments are most effective for developing their leadership skills, followed by formal training. Formal training appears to be more valuable early in a leader’s career to build the foundational skills they’ll draw upon later and is increasingly replaced by the benefits they receive from developmental assignments as they rise to the top.

Coaching from one’s manager was the third most effective method. It’s also worth noting that even though external coaching is not heavily utilized or emphasized (only a third of organizations are using external coaching regularly), it was incrementally more effective across the pipeline and more effective than internal coaching/mentoring for all but the first level. Why? The more complex challenges facing leaders at higher levels often require a greater level of sensitivity and impartiality that makes external coaches more suitable advisors.

Ranking last in effectiveness were technology-enabled training methods, such as instructor-led online training or mobile-accessible and social learning applications. These methods may be less favorable when leaders have access to in-person development, but it is also worth considering that far fewer programs currently incorporate technology-enabled methods (only one in eight organizations), and as a result, few leaders may have exposure to or familiarity with them. Currently, these methods are more likely to be seen as supplements to formal learning or developmental assignments than as stand-alone learning methods. This is likely to change, however, as more programs incorporate these methods and as organizations integrate technology more deeply within their learning strategies.

Now What

.01 Build options and flexibility for leader development that take into account the methods leaders find most valuable, which vary notably across leader levels.

.02 Look outside the organization for coaching guidance as leaders’ roles grow more complex. Leaders earlier in their careers benefit most from formal development and internal coaching, but even at mid-level, leaders indicate greater value of having external coaches.

.03 Use technology as a way to reach leaders who otherwise would have limited opportunity for development. Technology-enabled development methods will be more successful in reaching leaders who are globally dispersed.