

Nurture great leaders

Development plans that succeed





Development planning

Does that phrase conjure up happy thoughts of success and achievement or not-so-happy thoughts of forms, documentation and disillusionment?

Most employees want to develop their skills to prepare themselves for higher level positions. Others want to develop their skills to enhance performance in their current roles. At the same time, organizations need to develop the skills of their employees to prepare future leaders, execute business strategies and initiatives, and retain high-performing individuals. And yet, most leaders shy away from having discussions about performance and, in particular, conversations about development.

If employees and organizations see the necessity of development, why are the vast majority of development plans stored away on a hard drive or in a drawer or, worse yet, in the recycling bin?

For the purpose of this white paper, development means building the capabilities of people who are currently meeting or exceeding performance expectations. It's not about individuals who are not meeting expectations or who might be on a performance improvement plan. Although some of the same problems that plague development plans also plague performance improvement plans, development is about helping successful people become even more successful in current and future roles.

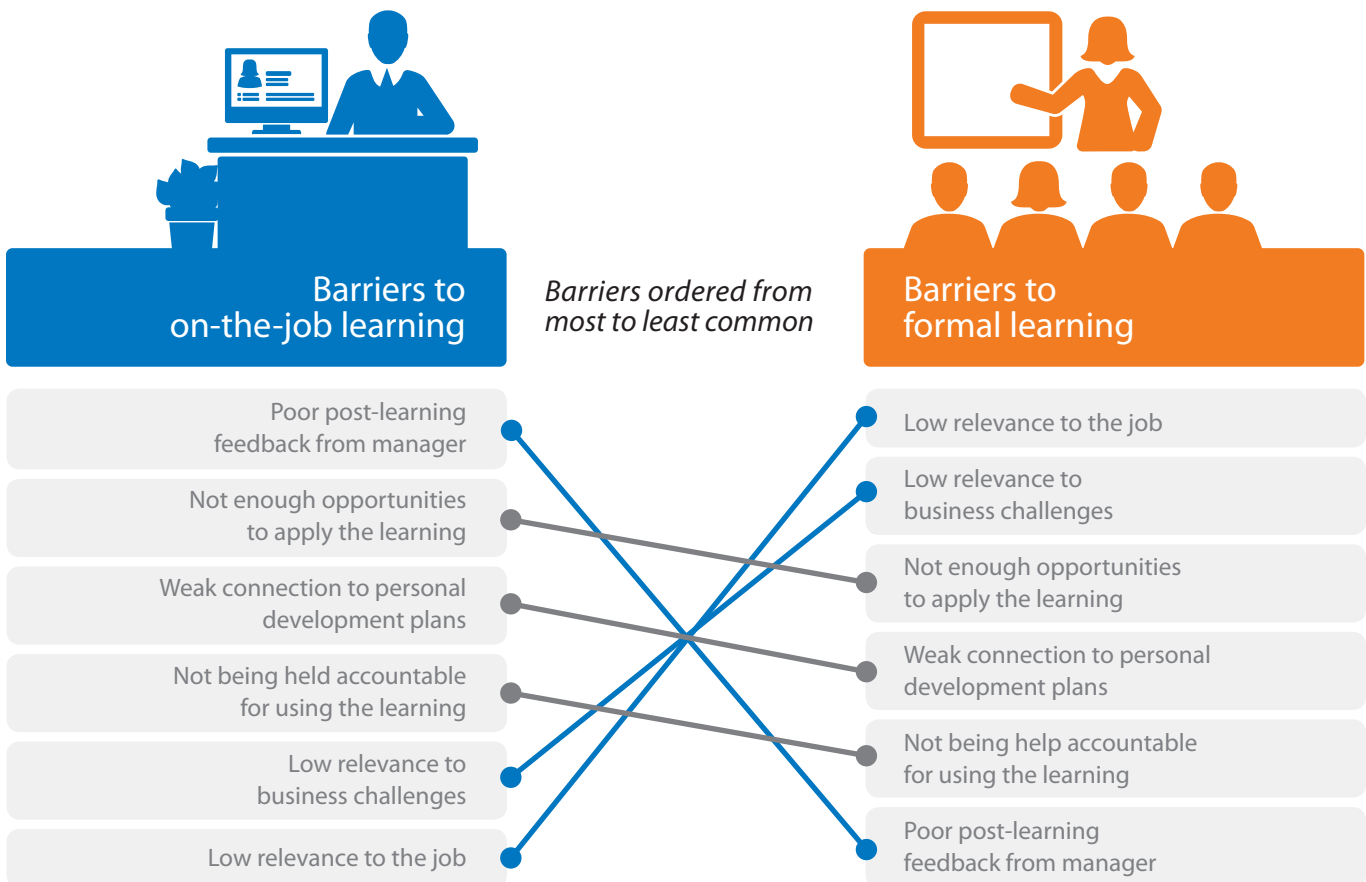
What gets in the way

When 13,000 leaders around the world were asked what prevented them from learning and applying new skills and behaviors, Development Dimensions International (DDI) found some interesting results. When the barriers to formal learning (workshops, courses, books and articles, etc.) were compared with barriers to informal, or on-the-job learning (developmental assignments, coaching and feedback, special projects, etc.), the results were nearly opposite. The top two barriers for formal learning, low relevance to the job and low relevance to business challenges, are at the bottom of the list of barriers for informal learning.

And the top two barriers to informal learning, poor post-learning feedback from the manager and insufficient opportunities to apply learning, are lower on the list of barriers to formal learning.¹

This suggests that formal learning in organizations isn't directly connected to job performance or to the organization's business challenges. This isn't a surprising finding given that many organizations still view formal learning as an isolated event rather than part of a planned, integrated curriculum or learning journey. The results also suggest that informal learning isn't as effective as it could

be if employees had support and coaching from their manager or if they actually had an opportunity to apply new skills. When the barriers to formal learning are compared to those for on-the-job learning, it becomes even more apparent that the two learning methods are not integrated in a planned way. As a result, many organizations have a sort of hodgepodge approach to learning and development rather than a thoughtful plan that identifies business initiatives and challenges and then provides formal and informal learning approaches to meet those business challenges.



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¹ Sinar, E., Wellins, R. S., Ray, R.L., Lui Abel, A., & Neal, S. (2014). *The Global Leadership Forecast 2014|2015: Ready-Now Leaders, Meeting Tomorrow's Business Challenges*. Pittsburgh, PA: DDI.



How to overcome the barriers

So how can your organization create effective learning and development plans?

Strategic workforce planning is one way your company can ensure learning is connected to organizational strategy and initiatives, as it helps your organization predict talent gaps based on business strategy and objectives.

Identifying those gaps enables your company to proactively and strategically build

the competencies to create strong talent pools. Managers and individuals are also better able to identify the competencies and knowledge needed to successfully contribute to your organization's success.

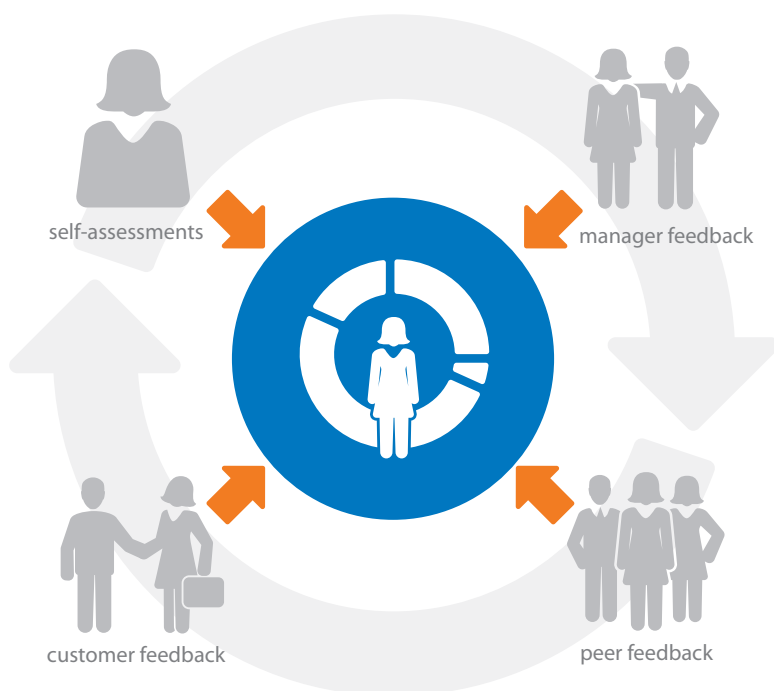
Once your managers know the skills and knowledge their team members will need now and in the future, they can work with direct reports to identify a development plan that supports the needs of your organization, department or group, as well as the development needs of the individual. The figure below illustrates the overlap of organization, department and individual needs. Integrating all three needs reveals a development area that is connected to organizational business needs or strategy, supports an important goal or objective of the department or group, and helps employees address a personal development area.

This "sweet spot" of development also helps address the issues of time, or lack thereof, and lack of managerial feedback and support. Because the development area directly supports the employee's actual job performance rather than some "nice-to-have" skill, it enables the person to develop in that area while performing actual job responsibilities. As a result, day-to-day work becomes the way to achieve development rather than a barrier. And, because the department and the organization will benefit from successful execution of the development plan, it's more likely the person's manager will support the plan and provide the feedback and coaching needed.



What to develop

Assessment data collected from various sources will likely identify a number of development areas as well as strengths.



With your organization's business strategy and a specific department's or group's business objectives in mind, the next step is to identify specific development areas. There are a number of methods for identifying individual development needs, including self-assessments, manager coaching and feedback, feedback from peers and customers, and more formal tools like 360-degree assessments or assessment centers. The key is to use multiple data points to ensure a complete picture of your employee's development areas. Reviewing this assessment data will likely identify a number of development areas as well as strengths.

There has been a great deal of focus recently on developing strengths and ignoring weaknesses. But ignoring weaknesses, particularly for aspiring leaders, can prevent individuals from achieving higher levels of performance. For example, one of your leaders may be strong in long-range planning, but have a weakness in gaining commitment from others. As a result, a plan may fail to achieve its objectives because it lacks the support needed to be executed well. That's why it's important to consider both strengths and weaknesses (growth areas) when creating development plans.

Sometimes, people try to work on all the development areas they've identified. This is where development plans often go awry. No one can develop multiple areas while continuing to perform day-to-day job responsibilities. By focusing the development plan on one strength and one growth area, the person is much more likely to successfully complete the development plan. For example, if someone in your organization is skilled in developing and maintaining strong relationships with customers, that person can leverage that skill while he or she learns to resolve more difficult or challenging customer complaints or issues. Your employee's existing strength makes it easier to achieve the development goal of taking on more challenging customer interactions.

The final step in determining development areas is to think about application. If you look at the data gathered from leaders around the world, you can see that lack of opportunities to apply new skills is the second most common barrier to on-the-job learning. The old adage, "if you don't use it, you'll lose it" is cliché but true: learning without immediate application will likely result in wasted learning and no development. By identifying application opportunities when selecting development areas, managers can address that barrier and ensure their employees can immediately apply what they've learned in the workplace. If there is no opportunity to apply new skills, then it's likely the wrong development area was selected because it's clearly not connected to actual job performance.



How to execute the plan

Once a plan has been established that integrates personal, organizational and departmental needs, as well as identifies a development area and an existing strength, it is ready to execute.

In most cases, the plan starts with acquisition of new skills or knowledge. This can be accomplished using formal or informal learning methods. Formal learning includes either traditional or virtual facilitator-led classroom sessions, online or web-based courses, webinars, reading, etc. This formal learning is essential when a person has little or no previous knowledge, experience or expertise.

In cases where one of your employees is leveraging an existing strength or skill, formal learning may not be necessary. This individual can use more informal methods for skill acquisition or enhancement including learning from others, coaching and feedback from their manager, job shadowing, observing others in the workplace,

or an actual work experience such as a stretch assignment, in-place development experience, or job rotation. In general, because these informal learning approaches occur while performing job responsibilities, the skills learned will be relevant to the person's actual job performance.

When it comes to skill acquisition, using a combination of learning methods works best. For example, an employee might attend a formal, instructor-led classroom session to acquire the skills, then try a small application of the skills followed by coaching and feedback from his or her manager or a trusted peer before attempting a more challenging application.

How to apply new learning

The second most frequently cited barrier to development is not enough opportunities to apply new learning. You can overcome this barrier by identifying an application opportunity when selecting the development area.

However, identifying application opportunities isn't a "one-and-done" proposition. It should begin with smaller, less risky applications to give the person an opportunity to try new skills in a safe environment. As each application is completed, a new, more challenging one can, and should, be taken on. Building on a series of applications builds an employee's confidence and competence and encourages them to continue applying new skills in the workplace.

But how do your managers and employees know whether or not each application is successful? Measurement. Throughout the development process from acquisition to application, there needs to be an agreement on measures of success. To ensure that development is actually occurring, progress measures act

as "lead indicators" to help your employees and managers track acquisition and application and answer the question, "How am I doing?" Outcome measures are the "lag indicators" that capture the impact of new skills and provide the data people need to determine if they've achieved the development goal for this application.

The development process



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How to sustain development

Clearly, manager support and feedback are critical to a successful development effort.²

Managers are in a unique position to reinforce learning by connecting it to job performance and business needs and by holding learners accountable for converting that learning to behavior change. Unfortunately, DDI's research cites lack of post-learning feedback from an individual's manager as the number one barrier to on-the-job learning. And, a recent study found only 8% of organizations believed their managers were skilled at giving timely, actionable feedback.³ The reality for many managers is they simply don't know how to reinforce learning and hold learners accountable for using new skills in the workplace.

Because your managers are the linchpin in the process of transfer of learning, engaging them before their employees complete a formal learning event and establishing their role in the development process is critical. At a minimum, managers should be introduced to the content that learners will be experiencing so they are prepared to reinforce the use of new skills in the workplace. More importantly, you need to ensure your managers understand the importance of their post-learning role to recognize and reinforce application of new skills in the workplace.



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² Brinkerhoff, Robert O., & Montesiño, Max U., (1995). *Partnerships for training transfer: Lessons from Corporate Study*. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 263 – 273; Cromwell, Susan E., & Kolb, Judith K., (2004). *An examination of work-environment support factors affecting transfer of supervisory skill training in the workplace*. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Winter 2004, 449 – 471.

³ Loew, Laci (2015). *Performance Management 2015: Coaching for Development Needed*. Brandon Hall Group, February 2015.

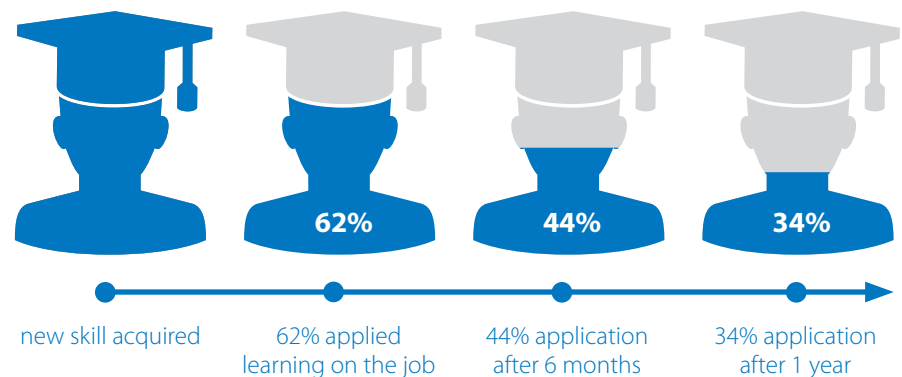
How to sustain development (Continued)

Could direct reports develop themselves without support and feedback from their manager? Of course. But very few learners will transfer those skills without ongoing coaching and feedback.

In fact, one study found that while 62% of learners immediately applied learning on the job, only 44% were applying that learning after six months and only 34% after one year.⁴ By reinforcing the application of new skills over time and holding employees accountable, managers can significantly improve these transfer statistics and, more importantly, enhance the performance of their

employees and ultimately the organization as a whole.

Learning and development is a business investment no different from other business investments – you and your organization should be looking for a return on that investment. Otherwise, it's just training for training's sake and the result is waste – a wasted investment and wasted, or "scrap," learning.



The bottom line?

By approaching development strategically, identifying organizational and departmental skill gaps, and helping employees select development areas that benefit them, the department and the business, your organization can get the return on investment of development funds and resources it needs. And you can significantly affect the future of your enterprise in the process.

⁴ Saks, Alan M., & Belcourt, M (2006). *An investment of training activities and transfer of training in organizations. Human Resource Management, Winter 2006, Vol. 45, No. 4, 629 – 648.*

Halogen Software and Development Dimensions International: Helping organizations accelerate leadership and employee development

Halogen Software and Development Dimensions International (DDI) have partnered to integrate DDI's proven leadership development content and comprehensive, newly-updated behavior-based competency library into the Halogen TalentSpace™ suite. Through this partnership, customers can choose from a variety of content bundles and use DDI competencies and learning modules pre-configured within Halogen TalentSpace, to establish a company-wide language and framework for attracting, assessing, retaining and developing talent at all levels, business-wide.



Development Dimensions International helps companies transform the way they hire, promote and develop their leaders and workforce. The outcome? People ready to execute business strategy and address challenges head-on.

Our clients are Fortune 500s and multinationals, doing business across a vast array of industries, from Shanghai to San Francisco, through 42 DDI-owned or closely affiliated offices. www.ddiworld.com.



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