



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**JENNIFER DONAHUE
AND
KRIS ROUTCH**
DEVELOPMENT
DIMENSIONS
INTERNATIONAL (DDI)

NANCY THOMAS
THE INSTITUTE FOR
EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

STRENGTHENING THE MIDDLE

The *Strengthening the Middle* report synthesizes the thoughts of 20 talent management executives around best practices for assessing and developing mid-level leaders. Executives talk candidly about their challenges, and represent global organizations such as Cargill, Halliburton, IBM, and Nokia. The report presents their advice, as well as averaged ratings of their organizations' performance in best-practice areas.

KEY THEMES AND FINDINGS

THEME: There is a growing recognition that the mid-level holds the key to long-term business performance.

FINDING: The role of the mid-level leader is changing and organizations recognize they need to provide more support.

FINDING: 75% of the companies we interviewed are either increasing or maintaining talent management investments at the mid-level.

THEME: Leadership development methods are evolving as dramatically as the mid-level role itself.

FINDING: Mid-level development remains a work in progress; it's evolving to meet specific business needs and shape organizational cultures.

FINDING: Even leading organizations rated themselves as "average" in individual development planning at the mid-level.

THEME: Organizations are making 70/20/10 add up to success at the mid-level.

FINDING: While expanded use of technology continues to be explored, many leading companies still find face-to-face learning to be most effective.

FINDING: Leading organizations are recognizing the importance of relationships in developing mid-level leaders.

FINDING: For developing mid-level leaders, the workplace has become a "life experimentation" lab.

THEME: When it comes to assessing mid-level leaders, 360s are most popular, yet assessment centers are most powerful.

FINDING: 360s are most widely used for larger mid-level leader populations.

FINDING: Assessment centers are viewed as the most impactful assessment option.

THEME: Most organizations lack a strategy for integrating assessment and development.

FINDING: When it comes to assessment, consistency is a common challenge.

FINDING: Assessment and development practices still aren't integrated.

THEME: When it comes to measuring the impact of their initiatives, most organizations are still trying to "crack the code."

FINDING: Organizations are relying on many different metrics to gauge the effectiveness of their mid-level assessment and development programs.

BEST PRACTICE BENCHMARKS

The leaders we talked to scored their organizations on eight key best practices in leadership development. Their ratings (**with 5 being the best**) were averaged, and the average rating for all organizations is as follows:

Rating	Best Practices
4.4	Performance expectations at the mid-level are tied to business goals/strategies.
4.1	Our CEO and senior management champion our mid-level talent management initiatives. <i>(They sponsor them, promote them, serve as speakers, etc.)</i>
3.3	Mid-level leaders share accountability for preparing and executing formal development plans. They own their development.
3.3	Managers of mid-level leaders are accountable for developing them.
3.7	We have a formal process for early identification and growth of high-potential talent at the mid-level.
2.9	HR systems for the mid-level are integrated (e.g., selection, development, performance management, succession management), often based on a common competency model.
2.4	Assessment or other diagnostics are used to determine mid-level training and development needs.
2.2	Metrics for the effectiveness of our mid-level development program have been established and are evaluated regularly.

CONTACT INFORMATION

WORLD HEADQUARTERS
412.257.0600

E-MAIL INFO@DDIWORLD.COM

WWW.DDIWORLD.COM/LOCATIONS

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