



# 7 Best Practices for Leadership Readiness

The pressure is mounting for HR leaders and their teams to do more with less, demonstrate ROI, and keep pace with a rapidly changing business landscape.

Now, it is more critical than ever for them to plan and execute leadership programs and initiatives that have a positive impact on their organization and its leaders.

There are a number of dangers that HR leaders can fall victim to.

Learn about the 7 best practices to help you avoid these dangers, and deliver substantial value for your organization, leaders, and culture.



**1. Don't look back! Be future oriented and align with the business landscape.**

The business landscape is quickly changing and evolving due to various factors. In turn, this new landscape has changed the blueprint for leadership success, and reshaped leadership programs.

# Challenges you'll face

In today's VUCA\* world, the leadership skills needed to be effective have changed significantly, and challenges have ensued as a result. Challenges such as:

- Ability to identify and execute changes in direction, strategy, and tactics.
- Ability to keep employees engaged and confident in the organization's future.

\*VUCA = Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous

# Actions you can take

- Stay on top of the changing business landscape.
- Continually monitor and evaluate the utility and impact of approaches to readiness.





## 2. Identify fault lines in career paths that represent the greatest risks for leaders.

# What are “fault lines”?

Fault lines are transition points in leadership careers where leaders cannot be successful if they rely only on skills and behaviors they used successfully in the past.

# Challenges you'll face

Selection decisions are often made by relying only on a candidate's track record and loyalty.

These accolades should be rewarded, but aren't sufficient to make decisions for potential and readiness for a transition.

# Stressful and risky fault line transitions include:

- Moving from an individual contributor to leading, coaching, and motivating others.
- Moving from a role requiring working through others to a role having to develop tactics and plans for enabling strategy.
- Moving from a role that executes strategy to one that formulates strategy.
- Moving from a strategy development role to a C-level enterprise guardian.

# Actions you can take

- Help leaders acquire new skills and knowledge while achieving greater proficiency in existing skills.
- Help leaders gain greater awareness of personal dispositions that enable their success, and how to manage their derailers.



### **3. Analyze business challenges to create blueprints for leader success.**

Create blueprints that focus on the business and cultural challenges leaders face at each transition (fault line). Blueprints are most useful when defined in behavioral terms, or “how to.”

Blueprints should also include:

- Experiences
- Knowledge
- Personal attributes
- Competencies

# Two common mistakes to avoid with leadership blueprints:

1. **Oversimplifying** – Don't assume the same blueprint fits all levels! Each level needs its own blueprint.
2. **Overthinking** – Don't spend too much time analyzing the differences at each leadership level.



# Context is crucial!

When defining leadership blueprints, it is critical to:

- Understand the specifics of the business.
- Fully grasp competitive and cultural challenges leaders face.
- Gain in-depth understanding of how specific challenges impact leader blueprints for success at each level.

# How do you develop a leadership blueprint?

There are 4 critical steps:

1. Focus on understanding the business.
2. Place immediate business issues in a broader context.
3. Focus on line leaders' true expertise.
4. Be an expert in the “how’s.”

# 1. Focus on understanding the business

HR leaders must engage successful line managers in discussing the business challenges they face. They live the business challenges and know the implications for leaders at various levels. These discussions can focus on a specific unit or function, or the entire enterprise.

## 2. Place immediate business issues in a broader context

Ensure the discussion doesn't focus on only one specific issue or challenge that is immediate and urgent. This leads to “flavor of the month” programs that fail to fully address all critical business challenges.

Immediate problems need to be dealt with, but in the broader context that addresses all major challenges.

### 3. Focus on line leaders' true expertise

Line leaders are not experts in defining leadership competencies! They are, however, experts in the business challenges leaders must address (see step #1.) Avoid asking them to define needed leadership skills; this often results in blueprints that fail to provide the “how to” – the key behaviors that enable leader success.

## 4. Be an expert in the “how’s”

Use the information from Step #1 to develop leadership blueprints that have a workable number of competencies, personal attributes, and role-relevant knowledge and experience. Competencies define the “how to” of leadership needed at each career transition to ensure future success.



**4. Don't develop all leaders equally. Invest disproportionately in assessment and development programs to mitigate fault-line risks.**

# Making decisions on who to hire, promote, and accelerate is difficult.

## Challenges You'll Face

- Understanding the difficulty in succeeding in a transition and underestimating the risks to the business and the leader's success.
- Awareness of how the “game” has changed since decision makers occupied lower level positions.
- Placing too much weight on individual leaders loyalty and past accomplishments.



# Making decisions on who to hire, promote, and accelerate is difficult.

## Challenges You'll Face:

- Favoring those who think and act similar to those making decisions, or those with whom they are most familiar.
- Overcoming a manager's overconfidence in the opinions he or she formed about others.
- Not being fully aware of how much these sources of potential bias influence decision making.

When individuals who are a poor fit or aren't ready for a career transition are promoted they are likely to experience:

- Stress
- Blows to their reputation
- Poor results
- Dissatisfied customers and direct reports

# There are distinct differences between performance, potential, and readiness

**Performance:** The degree of an individual's success in executing objectives and competencies required in the current role.

**Potential:** The likelihood an individual can/will grow into a successful leader or into a role with significantly expanded leadership responsibilities.

**Readiness:** One's fit with a specific role, job, or job family.

Failure to understand these differences and use of programs that measure them is often to blame for poor impact of acceleration programs and the resulting accuracy of their promotion and succession decision.

# Actions you can take

- Leverage reliable and accurate information and insights through inventories and simulations.
- Use reliable data to overcome the common tendency for decision makers to over-emphasize results, knowledge, and experiences while under-emphasizing the importance of competencies and attributes.

# Use data to identify potential

Strong performance (results and competencies) along with assessment of leadership potential (the motivation and ability to succeed in a transition) should be the major determinants of who should have access to accelerated development for career transitions.

Improving the pool = more ready now leaders.

# Use data to identify potential

When assessing potential, it's been shown that manager judgments have little accuracy.

At **high levels**, potential is best measured through a structured evaluation process completed by individual managers, then discussed by a panel of managers making the decisions.

At **lower levels**, self-insight assessments completed by the aspiring candidates will improve decision accuracy and ensure leader success.

# Use data to accelerate readiness

Assessment that simulates the new challenges a leader is likely to face at the next level provides better data to address gaps and capitalize on strengths through focused development plans.



Inventories accompanied by assessment provide information on attributes that are “hard wired” and not likely to be altered by training.

Inventories, when properly interpreted by trained professionals, increase awareness of attributes that enhance performance, as well as those that may derail leaders.



## 5. Don't plan assessment and development programs in silos.

Assessment alone, training alone, or coaching and mentoring alone aren't enough to enable readiness for a leadership transition.

*However*, programs that include all of these elements, in a planful and integrated way, can have enormous results.

# Challenges you'll face

Without a solid foundation, companies may assess and train using approaches that are inconsistent and not optimally timed to improve selection decisions or accelerate development. In that case:

- Learners and managers may fail to see the value and relevance of these programs.
- Large expenditures of time and resources may result in only marginal behavior change and minimal impact.

# Actions you can take

**ALL leadership programs must be fully integrated through a common framework and have well-defined roles for all involved in the acceleration plan.**

The leadership blueprints should link business challenges and the content of all programs.

They create a common framework that establishes clear and reinforcing links between assessment results and specific learning activities.

The development implications of assessment should be apparent—and development should address those implications.

The fusion of assessment and development with these approaches and tools (below) facilitates learning and accelerates growth.



When well designed and properly timed to meet acceleration needs, fusion increases impact and efficiency, and lowers costs.

Fusion also substantially enhances the **value** of all program components and drives **impact** that is greater than the sum of program components.



A strategic framework for HR investments is critical given the enhanced emphasis on demonstrating the ROI of HR programs, and the difficult business challenges faced by an organization's leaders.

Using either assessment or development on its own and without fusion is a missed opportunity.



## 6. Don't just respond to problems. Commit to a plan.

# Challenges you'll face

Lack of a leader readiness plan is costly and can produce insufficient buy-in, growth, and impact.

It is *imperative* that senior leaders have a plan to ready leaders for career transitions.

# There are 6 critical elements to consider when developing your plan:

1. Leadership priorities
2. Leadership capacity gaps
3. An engine for accelerating growth
4. A dashboard
5. Sustainability tactics
6. Lead and lag measures to evaluate success

For more detail on these elements, please reference

***A Perspective on Leadership Readiness*** on

<http://www.ddiworld.com/resources/library/articles/a-perspective-on-leadership-readiness>



Measurement is extremely important and must take place during planning and implementation.

# Initial measures should assess the direct impact on leadership capabilities

- Changes in participants' leadership behaviors
- Quality of development plans and results
- Leader proficiency
- Leader readiness
- Time to full productivity
- Perceptions of the organizations' leaders and acceleration process (evaluated by participants and stakeholders)

The solution's impact on the organization's collective leadership capability should also be assessed. For example:

- Quality and size of bench and promotions
- Levels of readiness for advancement
- Number of positions filled on time with internal and/or fully ready individuals

Measures should assess the impact on the groups that participants lead.

They should also assess the impact on business results that participants directly or indirectly impact.



# Actions you can take

Strategic planning creates a better understanding of the expected outcomes of a solution. Stakeholders should agree upon the organizational “must haves” and elements of the solution that can be configured by regions, as well as determine how to measure the solution’s impact.



**7. Don't "do it to them."  
Get everyone onboard  
and involved.**

There are four ways to promote buy-in and involvement for a leadership initiative. These four considerations add to the perceived fairness, accuracy, and acceptance of these critical decisions.

1. Lead the process
2. Inform and involve those interested in leadership transitions
3. Inform and involve managers
4. Inform participants of the organization's decisions

# Challenges you'll face

When functions work independently without a focus on a common blueprint, they often rely too heavily on functional expertise. While they may be technically sound, these programs can be over-engineered, inconsistent with one-another, and miss the mark on being relevant to the business.

*This lessens their value.*

# 1. Lead the Process

Create a business-relevant architecture that integrates assessment and development programs. This requires leadership from the most senior HR leaders.

They must lead the strategies to sell the programs to stakeholders and participants; then shape the design, launch, and execution of readiness programs that yield the best results.

Integrated programs that help realize blueprints for leader success produce **greater growth for leaders** and **greater business impact**, and thereby gain the support of users and stakeholders.

## **2. Inform and Involve Those Interested in Leadership Transitions**

Those interested in a leadership transition should be provided with a balanced and realistic orientation to the challenges and opportunities they will face.



It's important that potential candidates discuss career decisions with HR and line managers. Discussions are made easier if the organization's career paths are designed so that leadership is *not* the *only* path to growth or status. When leadership *is* the only path, individuals may pursue it even when they know they are a poor skill or motivational fit.

### **3. Inform and involve managers**

Inform managers through objective assessment that provides valuable insight to improve decisions regarding readiness.

Involve managers' expertise and knowledge of the business, and of individual candidates in the decision making process.

## 4. Inform Participants of the Organization's Decisions

Participants, regardless of the outcome of the process, should be given feedback on their assessment results and provided with insights to help them plan both their development and their careers.

# In Conclusion...

For HR to impact their organization's success and create value and ROI, they must collaborate with key stakeholders to build a focused approach for elevating the building of leadership capability to a business strategy.

# 7 steps to impact organizational success:

1. Understand the VUCA world challenges and their implications for both the organization as well as HR investments in leadership readiness.
2. Identify leadership transitions where risks—to both leader and organization—are greatest.
3. Create blueprints for leadership success shaped by the organization's specific business and cultural challenges.
4. Mitigate risks associated with transitions by investing in programs that provide data and insights to improve selection decisions and build participants awareness of the need for growth.

# 7 steps to impact organizational success:

5. Ensure assessment and development programs are integrated for maximum impact on accelerating development.
6. Commit to an overall plan that ensures goals are met, and impact is measured.
7. Provide decision makers and participants with predictive information about potential and readiness for leadership transitions. Actively involve all stakeholders in these decisions for greater accuracy and acceptance.