LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Tapping the Inner Teacher: Delivering High-Impact Learning through Leader-Led Development

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SPRING 2010

The Value of Leader-Led Development

Think of the best teacher that you ever had. Now, think about why and how that teacher was so effective. What made your learning stick? Were real-world examples and personal stories—such as successes, failures, and life lessons—used to help you make the connection between a concept and your experience?

When leaders take the time to communicate the organization's priorities in a compelling story with a teachable point of view during each learning interaction, learning is more impactful and drives greater business results.

"Winning companies—those that consistently outperform competitors and reward shareholders—[have] moved beyond learning organizations to become teaching organizations," writes Noel Tichy.[1] "That's because teaching organizations are more agile, come up with better strategies, and are able to implement them more effectively."

Despite the clear advantages of leader-led development, however, many organizations have not yet established formal mechanisms for encouraging and supporting leaders as they take on teaching, coaching, and other development responsibilities. Leaders may avoid taking on these roles due to lack of time, resources, or their own lack of comfort with this role—without realizing that they could easily be imparting valuable informal learning to their teams every day.

Where Does Learning Happen?

Learning need not—and, most of the time, does not—take place in a formal training environment with a certified instructor; rather, most teaching and learning happens informally throughout the work day. As Bossidy and Charan write in *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done,* "Keep in mind that 80% of learning takes place outside the classroom. Every leader and supervisor needs to be a teacher."[2]

With this much learning taking place informally, leaders clearly need to be prepared. Leaders are uniquely positioned to provide organizational context for learning and to communicate the right information to their team at the moment of need. And leader-led development goes beyond coaching direct reports. Leaders have opportunities to guide and mentor individuals throughout their organizations.

According to Jay A. Conger, "Using practicing leaders [to provide instruction] ensures that learning remains grounded in the reality of the workplace and culture. Leaders directly convey their beliefs, experience, and expectations to program participants, thereby facilitating the transmission of cultural knowledge."[3]

Leaders can play a number of roles when developing their teams in formal learning settings. Leaders can teach or co-facilitate a leadership development workshop, present at a live or virtual seminar, or appear in videos that become part of an online learning experience.

However, there are even more opportunities for leaders to engage with their teams informally and, as we shall see, many benefits to doing so. This paper will examine why and how leader-led development can harness the power of informal learning to provide meaningful learning experiences that have a positive impact on organizations, learners and leaders alike. (see figure 1)

What We Mean by Leader-led Development

First, we must address the term "leader-led development" as it is used in this paper.

The concept of leader-led development, like many concepts in our industry, is referred to by various names. You may have heard the terms "leader as coach," "leader-led development," and "leader as teacher" used interchangeably to describe a wide variety of leader-led development initiatives, ranging from leaders who teach in formal classroom situations to leaders who informally coach others. We will use the term "leader-led development" throughout this paper; however, others that we quote as industry sources may use a different term to mean the same thing.

All Leaders Can—and Must—Be Teachers

Developing talent increasingly is becoming a critical part of a leader's job description.

In a survey that Harvard Business Publishing concluded in January 2010, 18% of the organizations surveyed have a formal, tracked expectation that leaders will develop talent, and 73% have an informal expectation that senior-level leaders will develop their teams. According to the same survey, 70% currently coach or mentor direct reports.[4] (see figure 2)

Several forces are driving the leader-led development trend, including:

Expectation: As seen in figure 2, the expectation in many companies is, quite simply, that managers will assume responsibility for developing their talent.

"At companies that are good at growing leaders, operating managers, not HR executives, are at the front line of planning and development," write Jeffrey M. Cohn, Rakesh Khurana, and Laura Reeves.[5] "In fact, many senior executives now hold their line managers directly responsible for these activities.

Leader-led Development in Action figure 1

Indicate the typical ways in which senior-level leaders currently participate in developing managers at your organization (choose all that apply).

Coach or mentor direct reports	70%
Participate in leadership development events/sessions	63%
Work with direct reports on professional development plans	59%
Contribute to overall strategy and goals for leadership development	52%
Involved in the launch of leadership development initiatives	41%
Lead or facilitate leadership development events/sessions	38%
Influence design of development programs	36%
Mentor others inside the organization	35%
Define or monitor action learning projects	20%

Source: E-Survey of Learning Professionals: What's Next for Leadership Development? Harvard Business Publishing, January 2010.

In this world view, it is part of the line manager's job to recognize his subordinates' developmental needs, to help them cultivate new skills, and to provide them opportunities for professional development and personal growth."

Managers are the people within the organization who define the roles of their subordinates, who are the most knowledgeable about their strengths and weaknesses and who interact with them frequently. As a result, managers are in the best position to assess what each employee needs to know to do his or her job better, and to provide the relevant information at the right time.

Time: Workers today have less time to attend formal training sessions than they did in the past or to figure out how concepts apply to them when they get back to their jobs. At-work learning opportunities provide an efficient way for workers to obtain information that is immediately applicable to their jobs.

Cost: As training budgets for formal classroom learning shrink, leader-led informal learning makes sense from a cost standpoint.

Leaders Set the Tone for Learning

Even with these forces driving the leader-led development movement, many organizations still struggle with engaging, incenting, and enabling leaders to get involved.

While this can be a challenging process for leaders and organizations alike, there are many sound reasons for organizations to actively cultivate leader-led development. Leaders are in a unique position to:
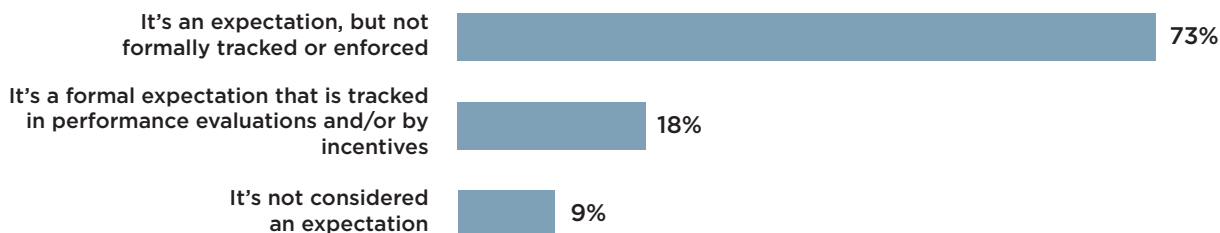
○ *Provide personalized, one-to-one development.* Since they work with their team members every day and know their team members' individual skill sets and learning styles, leaders can contextualize learning with organizational

content and make it relevant to each person's day-to-day job responsibilities. As a result, leader-led learning experiences generally have more impact and credibility than those led by human resources or an outside trainer.

○ *Give and receive organizational knowledge.* Organizational knowledge that in the past may only have resided in people's heads is more likely to be captured, retained and shared when leaders are directly responsible for developing their teams.

○ *Drive participation and involvement.* When your boss is the person providing you with information and monitoring your progress, you are more likely than you would be with any other teacher to attend, do the work, and be prepared. As a result, you are likely to be more engaged in learning.

○ *Promote bi-directional learning.* The process of transferring knowledge to individuals in more junior roles allows leaders to learn new skills from younger workers, and to receive information about what's happening on the front lines within the organization or with customers or suppliers.

○ *Increase mastery of content.* The act of teaching requires leaders to demonstrate expertise. In the process of developing others, leaders will master content and business practices more deeply.

○ *Increase the speed of change.* "When managers go through a program together, they emerge with a consensus view of the opportunities and problems and how best to attack them. The result: faster and more effective change." [6]

○ *Create a culture of ongoing learning and teaching.* Organizations that encourage dialogue, questioning, and inter-departmental information exchanges are more likely to see enhanced collaboration that can lead to greater business success.

Expectations for Leader-Led Development figure 2

Which of the following best describes the level of expectation that your organization has of your senior-level leaders when it comes to developing their teams?

It's an expectation, but not formally tracked or enforced	73%
It's a formal expectation that is tracked in performance evaluations and/or by incentives	18%
It's not considered an expectation	9%

Source: E-Survey of Learning Professionals: What's Next for Leadership Development? Harvard Business Publishing, January 2010.

Engaging Learners and Building a Culture of Continuous Learning

The crucial first step toward creating a strategic and agile teaching organization is engaging learners so that knowledge is retained, applied, and cascaded throughout the organization. The question of how to engage learners may seem daunting to a leader who has never taught or coached; however, engaging learners in informal learning situations often is as straightforward as having a discussion with a friend.

Share the following tips to guide your organization's leaders in their coaching and teaching efforts to help ensure a rewarding experience for leaders and learners alike:

o *Create a teachable point of view.* To convey information about a specific topic clearly and logically, a leader must first distill the many available data points he or she has about that topic to arrive at a "teachable point of view." Tichy defines a teachable point of view as "the ability to coalesce judgments about products, services, distribution channels, market dynamics, and all the other components of running a business, and the ability to cultivate that knowledge in less-experienced minds."[7]

o *Tell stories.* The leader's teachable point of view should be the basis for a dynamic, compelling story to be shared with others. As anyone from a best-selling novelist to a successful sales person can attest, a good story can drive home a message more effectively than just about any other means of communication.

"At the end of the day, words and ideas presented in a way that engages listeners' emotions are what carry stories," writes Peter Guber.[8] "It is this oral tradition that lies at the center of our ability to motivate, sell, inspire, engage, and lead."

o *Ask questions—and listen to the answers.* One of the major advantages of informal learning is that it allows for and encourages open and honest two-way conversation in a way that is not possible in most formal learning environments. By asking questions of one another, learners and leaders can gain greater insight into the material. In addition, learners "own" the material more when they can freely question what is being said.

"When leaders actively question and listen to employees—and thereby prompt dialogue and debate—people in the institution feel encouraged to learn. If leaders signal the importance of spending time on problem identification,

OVERCOME OBSTACLES TO LEADER-LED DEVELOPMENT

Why are leader-led development efforts so successful at some organizations but not at others? Why do some leaders embrace the role of teacher, while others resist or are unable to cascade knowledge, whether in an informal or formal leadership development situation? The chart below shows some typical obstacles and how to help leaders overcome them.

TYPICAL OBSTACLES	HOW TO AVOID OR OVERCOME THESE OBSTACLES
Limited time and bandwidth	■ Encourage leaders to identify and leverage the informal "learning-teaching moments" that occur throughout the day.
Lack of comfort or capability with the teaching or coaching role	■ Provide leaders with train-the-trainer sessions. ■ Create and provide easy-to-use facilitator/coaching guides around key business imperatives. ■ In teaching situations, partner inexperienced individuals with those who have some teaching experience. ■ Involve leaders in program design based on organizational goals.
Lack of formal performance expectations	Provide clearly defined expectations that are linked to performance review incentives.

5

TAPPING THE INNER TEACHER

knowledge transfer, and reflective post-audits, these activities are likely to flourish."[9]

○ *Provide accessible and ongoing learning opportunities.* Classroom and other formal learning frameworks provide a clearly defined time and place for teaching and learning; however, they do not provide the same opportunity for learners to obtain on-the-fly, job-specific knowledge at the moment of need—and for busy leaders to supply this information. As a result, the majority of successful leader-led development occurs outside the classroom, in informal "teachable moments."

According to Cohen and Tichy, once the leaders they studied had established teachable points of view, "they thought of creative ways to find teaching and learning opportunities. They tried to turn every interaction with their people into a learning and teaching event."[10]

Leader-led Development Creates Stronger Organizations

By bringing together their own life, work, and development experiences and passing them on informally throughout the work day, leaders can provide their teams with immediately actionable and relevant information. And, with the ongoing opportunity to mentor others, leaders can hone their leadership skills while reinforcing and broadening their existing knowledge.

The potential benefits to organizations that promote a culture of learning and teaching by encouraging and rewarding leader-led development are enormous. Organizations that embrace this approach can realize significant business results, such as a more productive sales force, greater R&D innovation, more engaged employees across the board, and better-prepared talent for future leadership roles.

Leader-led development can be a highly effective method of sharing information in non-traditional learning environments. Once the objections of leader preparedness and cultural readiness are overcome, organizations will need to provide just enough structure to ensure consistency with the organization's philosophy and goals as content and practices are cascaded throughout the organization. Learn more on how to address this challenge in the companion white paper titled "Develop Others: Grab-and-Go Resources to Promote Leader-Led Development." ◆

LEADER-LED DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS ORGANIZATIONS, LEARNERS AND LEADERS ALIKE

ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS

■ Aligning and communicating the organization's priorities and values helps drive business results.

■ Continuous learning cascade enables ongoing transformation and the ability to innovate.

■ Scalability extends the scope of development with minimal resource investment while providing an efficient way to develop deep levels of leadership and management skills at all levels.

■ Leader-led development strengthens organizational culture and prepares a solid pipeline of future leaders.

LEADER BENEFITS

■ Teaching improves leadership skills. As one leader who develops others puts it, "One benefit is access to direct, honest feedback about the company's strategy and performance and the opportunity to integrate that feedback into my thinking, which helps make me a better leader."[11]

■ Teaching others reinforces earlier learning.

■ Cross-pollinating ideas and developing networks outside of their normal areas allows leaders to benefit continually from new points of view from their team and others.

LEARNER BENEFITS

■ Learners gain important management and leadership concepts within the context of their situations.

■ Learners discover how principles can be applied in a manner consistent with the company's culture, values and policy.

■ Learners gain insight on current priorities and future plans.

■ Learners obtain ongoing access to support and feedback from their leader.

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TAPPING THE INNER TEACHER

6

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