

## COMMENTARIES

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# Ten Catalysts to Spark On-the-Job Development in Your Organization

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If most leadership development occurs on the job, the critical question facing most organizations is how can on-the-job development (OJD) be strategically and systematically leveraged? McCall (2010) suggests that organizations haven't been very effective at this in the past and it is time to "bet on a different horse," moving beyond the tired, old human resources (HR) systems that we have typically relied on. We suggest that it's still a little premature to completely abandon this horse and send it to the glue factory. The real issue is closing the gap between what we know about leadership development and what we actually do to develop our leaders. HR processes can be drivers for change rather than merely support systems. On the basis of our experience and review of the research, here are 10 ways that traditional HR systems can be used to promote OJD (Yost & Plunkett, 2009).

### Build a Leadership Map

As McCall noted, most organizations today have leadership competency models, but very few have expanded this model to include other important dimensions that

industrial–organizational (I–O) psychologists know are equally important in the development of leaders: experiences, relationships, and learning agility or capabilities. What if every organization included these *four* dimensions in their leadership models (see Table 1) and made the taxonomy available to all leaders in the organization (Yost & Plunkett, 2010)? The taxonomy would be a "map" that aspiring leaders could use to assess themselves on their competencies, as well as the extent to which they have acquired key developmental experiences, built the right kinds of relationships with internal/external stakeholders, and developed the learning capabilities that will allow them to capture the lessons of their experiences. Once developed, the leadership map could also be used to guide succession planning activities, direct development planning activities, and allow all leaders to think more strategically about their development.

### Publish a List of OJD Experiences

Managers are regularly provided lists of training courses they should consider including in their development plans, but they seldom are provided equally detailed lists of OJD activities. I–O psychologists know a lot about the experiences that are most important and how managers can develop in place. Several lists are readily available (e.g., Lombardo & Eichinger, 1988; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988; McCauley, 2006). An easy first step

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**Table 1.** *Building a Leadership Map*

Experiences	Competencies	Key relationships	Learning capabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Start-up business</li><li>• Sustaining business</li><li>• Turnaround business</li><li>• Corporate staff role</li><li>• Sales/marketing role</li><li>• Global experience</li><li>• Others</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategic thinking</li><li>• Building organizations</li><li>• Integrity</li><li>• Business acumen</li><li>• Technical expertise</li><li>• Judgment and decision making</li><li>• Drive for results</li><li>• Others</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Senior executives</li><li>• Key customers</li><li>• Key suppliers</li><li>• Board of directors</li><li>• Government relations</li><li>• Union relations</li><li>• Community relations</li><li>• Mentor/champion</li><li>• Others</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intellectual horsepower</li><li>• Openness to experience</li><li>• Integrity</li><li>• Comfort with ambiguity</li><li>• Openness to feedback</li><li>• Others</li></ul>

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is to post a list of OJD activities on the corporate intranet. Once created, the list can be linked to a broad range of talent management processes (e.g., including the link inside of the performance management form, building the concepts into leadership development programs, etc.).

**Help Leaders Capture the Lessons**

Although it is important to identify a list of developmental experiences in your business, this alone will not ensure that people will be able to capture the lessons of experiences. After all, not everyone who goes through a developmental experience necessarily emerges a better leader on the other side. To help leaders focus their efforts, identify the lessons and competencies leaders should take away from each experience (see McCall et al., 1988; McCauley, 2006). In addition, describe the specific actions that leaders can take to maximize their learning in the experiences (e.g., find stretch assignments that will force you to develop the skills you want to develop, set learning goals, actively seek feedback from others, apply the lessons that you are learning to future challenges).

**Separate Goal Setting and Development Discussions**

Performance management processes that are used for multiple purposes can get

messy (Cleveland, Murphy, & Williams, 1989; Jawahar & Williams, 1997). It has been our experience that performance and development goals should be discussed at separate times. Why? When they are combined, managers and employees tend to spend so much time talking about performance goals for the coming year that development is overlooked, or, if it does come up, it is more often than not only focused on what people did poorly last year and should be improved in the coming year. Discussions of the employees’ long-term career plans, the future skills they are going to need, and their future potential tend to be overlooked. To solve this problem, some organizations ask managers to set performance goals at the beginning of the year and discuss development goals at mid-year. If this isn’t possible, direct managers to schedule two separate meetings to discuss performance and development goals.

**Hardwire OJD Into Employee Development Plans**

Create cues on your development plan form that make OJD a natural part of the discussions (Yost & Plunkett, 2009). For example, in the instructions include a brief explanation that most development occurs on the job. Then, for each development activity, have people check a box indicating if the activity is OJD (70%), other people (20%), or training (10%), compelling

employees to monitor where they are planning to get most of their development. As noted above, provide a link on the development plan form to a list of key experiences. Create a simple *Reader's Digest* type self-assessment at the end of the form that people can use to assess how good/bad their development plan really is.

### **Require Development Plans**

Track and hold managers accountable for ensuring that every employee has a development plan. At the organizational level, monitor completion rates and the quality of the plans. Some employees will resist, but given today's dynamic markets, continuous development is a business imperative. Include ideas for all employees. For example, encourage senior employees about to retire to coach and mentor younger employees in their development plans. Generating a development plan is essential, but the quality of the development plans is equally important, so consider auditing a random sample of development plans to assess their quality (e.g., percentage of development activities that are on-the-job vs. other people, vs. training, specificity and quality of learning goals, etc.). To increase visibility, audit the development plans of high-potential leaders or leaders on succession plans and leverage the results to illustrate the importance of ongoing development in the organization.

### **Turn Training into OJD**

Training is the most effective when it drives behavior and extends beyond the classroom (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Velada, Caetano, Michel, Lyons, & Kavanagh, 2007). Challenge your training department to ask themselves, "How can I design this program so 90% of the development occurs outside the classroom?" Have participants work on their own business challenges in class and leverage action learning, break the training program into modules with the majority of work being done among sessions, create

networking and peer coaching opportunities inside the class, and focus on transfer issues (e.g., reward systems and management support).

### **Challenge Employees to Create a Personal Advisory Board**

Recent work suggests that in today's dynamic organizations, leaders should draw on a broad network of people for their development rather than relying on a single mentor (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Encourage managers to identify between five and seven people in their lives who can serve as personal advisory boards. Provide guidance on how they can select and leverage this group (Ibarra & Hunter, 2007).

### **Focus on Transitions**

Focusing on transitions is particularly powerful because it serves two important organizational purposes: It helps leaders and employees perform effectively as quickly as possible in their new roles, and it helps them develop self-regulatory skills that can help them capture the lessons of experience wherever they are. As I-O psychologists, we know the major reasons people fail in transitions and what they can do to navigate through them more effectively (Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2008; Watkins, 2009). Moreover, we know that people tend to be the most open to learning and feedback during these times (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007), which makes this an ideal place to help people learn how to develop on-the-job in real time. To take advantage of these opportunities, a simple tool like a transition checklist can be created outlining the actions that people should take during transitions (e.g., identifying and meeting with key stakeholders, getting agreement on how success will be measured in the new job, seeking feedback from others, identifying new skills to be developed, and building relationships with direct reports to understand their skills, performance, and development plans). Once crafted, the

transition checklist can be put online, and the guide can be used to enhance a variety of other talent management processes (e.g., new employee orientation, leadership development programs, and high-potential programs).

## Reward OJD

Ensure that your reward systems reinforce both performance and development (Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Hall & Karaevli, 2002). For example, have you promoted leaders who get results *and* develop the people on their teams? Are the people who have successfully navigated several critical experiences in your organization compensated more favorably than those who stay in a role? Have you continued to provide them with new assignments, promotion opportunities, and involvement on strategic projects?

If you've fallen off the horse, sometimes the best thing to do is get back on. Traditional HR systems still offer numerous opportunities to build OJD into the DNA of an organization. As McCall suggests, the best development happens *while* people are running the business. So, in addition to McCall's "different horse" ideas, I-O and HR professionals should always consider how they can also make HR systems work for them.

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