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WHITE PAPER

LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS

How to Maximize Leadership Development and Succession Planning

By Kristina Stiffler

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LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS

HOW TO MAXIMIZE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

By Kristina Stiffler

Leadership gaps are a serious problem in most companies. According to a 2006 poll by Bersin and Associates, over 50 percent of companies identified gaps in the leadership pipeline as a major challenge.¹ Unfortunately, the reality is that companies often set themselves up to fail when it comes to leadership. How? In filling any leadership position there are two choices. Hire someone from the outside who has the required leadership skills and teach them the necessary organizational knowledge. Or hire someone from the inside who has the organizational knowledge and teach them the necessary leadership skills.

The vast majority of companies execute both scenarios poorly. Why? Most companies have no formalized way to pass down valuable organizational knowledge from experienced workers to those next in line. In most cases, succession planning isn't linked to leadership development programs.² And finally, managers aren't held accountable for helping their direct reports grow in either organizational knowledge or leadership skills.³

The truth is most new leaders are left to figure out a brand new landscape on their own – and most will have difficulty making the adjustment. The fact that some do it spectacularly well doesn't make it any less a system of chance that creates many more failures than successes. This paper will examine the impact of poor leadership development practices and provide a roadmap for creating consistently successful leaders.



¹ BersinAssociates.com, "Developing a High Impact Talent Management Strategy," http://www.bersin.com/research/hitm_top22.asp

² Hbr.harvardbusiness.org, "Developing Your Leadership Pipeline," <http://hbr.harvardbusiness.org/2003/12/developing-your-leadership-pipeline/ar/>

³ Hreonline.com, "Accountability for Talent Management," <http://www.hreonline.com/HRE/story.jsp?storyId=141392680>

LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD LEADERS?

Why is the need for finding and cultivating corporate leaders such a pressing issue? The first reason is demographic. **Forrester Research** estimates that over the next 10 years 76 million people will be retiring as the baby boomer generation exits the workforce. The problem? Only 46 million people will be entering the workforce during that period, creating a shortage of over 25 million workers.⁴ Leadership ranks will be among those hardest hit by the exodus, since corporate leadership is often comprised of older and more experienced staff. Current economic conditions may slow the retirement wave, but as the population ages it inevitably will occur.

The leadership crisis isn't strictly one of numbers; it's also created through lost opportunities. Many companies haven't adequately planned for the loss of experienced employees either in terms of recruitment or development programs. The majority of organizations have no processes to assist in the transfer of valuable business information from one generation of worker to the next. And relying on knowledge transfer to happen "naturally" isn't a safe bet. According to Deborah Gilburg, a principal at the **Gilburg Leadership Institute, Inc.**, **"With all the downsizing that has dominated the workplace, training and development programs have been marginalized, leaving little focus on the transfer of hard knowledge, institutional knowledge, relationships and networks — all key for leaders."**⁵

Amidst these market factors, one thing stands out. Leadership decisions drive organizations. The question is whether those decisions drive companies to success or failure. A turbulent and ever-changing marketplace only magnifies missteps or superior choices. And the choices aren't just those related to sourcing, products and pricing. The choices are about people and how an organization's talent pool is managed – or mismanaged. A recent quarterly survey conducted by **Duke University** and **CFO** magazine found that difficulty in attracting and retaining quality employees is a top concern for CFOs, even in a downturned economy.⁶ The irony is that an organization's existing leaders and leadership practices are the greatest predictor of whether recruiting and retaining top talent is going to be problematic.

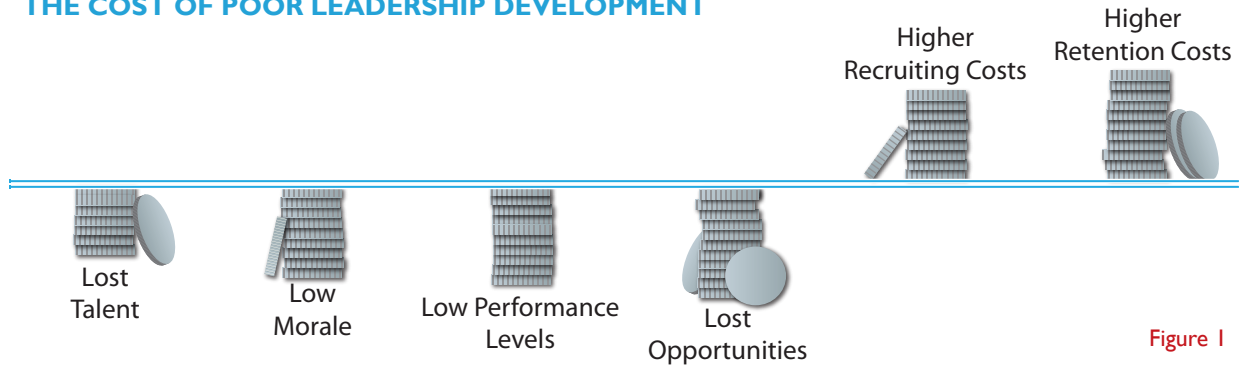
Poor leadership practices translate into significant costs for companies (see Figure 1 on next page). Risky decision making, poor communication, and lack of creativity in meeting the demands of a quickly changing world are only part of the story. Other, more insidious effects are often not seen until problems are rampant and difficult to address. These include higher turnover, increased retention costs, low employee engagement, and dysfunctional teams that fail to perform consistently. Think leaders and their approach to running things doesn't matter that much? Think again. All else remaining equal, everything from wars to sporting events have been won or lost depending on who called the shots. Developing effective leaders and investing in strong leadership practices is one of the soundest investments a company can make for long term success.

⁴ Astd.org, "The Maturing Workforce – Managing the Crisis Before It Hits," <http://www.astd.org/LC/2006/>

⁵ Sun.com, Sun Executive Boardroom, "Baby Boomer Exit Creates Leadership Gap," <http://www.sun.com/emrkt/boardroom/newsletter/0407expertinsight.html>

⁶ CNNMoney.com, "Economic rebound at least a year away," http://money.cnn.com/2008/06/18/news/economy/duke_cfo/index.htm?eref=rss_topstories

THE COST OF POOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



PROMOTING STAR PERFORMERS ISN'T ALWAYS THE ANSWER

The approach to leadership selection and development in most companies goes something like this:

- John is a fabulous [whatever it is that John does so well] so let's promote him into a leadership position. It's the logical next step in his career.
- John is excited and happy that the organization has taken note of his contributions and gladly accepts the promotion and accompanying raise, perks, etc.
- John who used to spend his day doing [whatever it is that John does so well] now spends his day doing something entirely different, usually with minimal guidance or training.
- John either:
 - Fails utterly and is demoted
 - Fails utterly and is asked to leave
 - Becomes frustrated and quits
 - Micromanages his subordinates in an effort to recapture doing what he was good at (creating everything from poor performance levels to additional lost talent)

OR

- Figures out the new landscape on his own

As you have already guessed, most people don't figure out the new landscape on their own with great success. Most will fail costing the organization not only that top performer, but the other top performers around them. Since top **performers out-perform average performers by over 40 percent**, that's a high cost for poor leadership development practices.⁷ Need an example? There are several, but we'll just take one. It illustrates the typical story in one of the most successful companies in America.

⁷ Robert W. Eichinger and Michael M. Lombardo, "The ROI on People – The 7 Vectors of Research," Lominger Limited, Inc.

Coca-Cola was run successfully for many years by Robert Goizueta. In fact, Goizueta was wildly successful and not only launched Coca-Cola into a top U.S. company with a global vision, but also created more wealth for shareholders than any other CEO in history.⁸ Goizueta's second in command was M. Douglas Ivester. Ivester was a long-time Coca-Cola employee who worked next to Goizuta for many years and was in line to be his replacement. So when Goizueta died Ivester took over. That's when things get interesting. Despite being second in command to a successful leader, Ivester was forced to resign in less than three years. Why? Serious communication missteps, poor product handling of a contamination issue in Europe, and a depressed stock price.⁹

Ivester, and the others like him, suffer from the same problem. They excel in skills that provide a lot of value to the organization and therefore place them in a position to be promoted into a leadership position. The skills that got them promoted into a leadership position aren't the same skills that would allow them to excel there. And there was no consideration on the part of the organization as to how that gap would be bridged. In many cases, there is not even acknowledgement that the gap exists. As the Coca-Cola example illustrates, this is a costly mistake.

THE CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP SELECTION AND DEVELOPMENT

It is clear that companies cost themselves and their stakeholders significantly when they don't utilize strong leadership selection and development practices. In the end the cost is not just money, but talent. And in today's knowledge driven workplace, talent is the one thing companies cannot afford to lose. As Jim Collins, author of Good to Great puts it, **"Money is a commodity. Talent is not. Time and talent can often compensate for lack of money, but money cannot ever compensate for lack of the right people."**¹⁰

So why do so many companies face significant challenges when it comes to leadership selection and development? They don't effectively handle the gap between where an existing star performer is and where they need to be in order to lead. They don't link two important and fundamental corporate tasks – succession planning and leadership development. Leadership potential is not mined out of the entire organization. Systems for passing on organizational knowledge and business relationships either don't exist or aren't utilized. And there is still a bias in the business world that leaders are "born" and not "made." Let's look at each of these.

THE GAP BETWEEN A STAR AND A LEADER

A star performer does not a leader make. At least not automatically. The skills that make a star sales person are not the same as those needed by a successful sales manager. Ditto for software development, finance, customer service, and virtually

⁸ Wikipedia.org, "Robert Goizuta," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roberto_Goizueta

⁹ Hbr.harvardbusiness.org, "Developing Your Leadership Pipeline," <http://hbr.harvardbusiness.org/2003/12/developing-your-leadership-pipeline/ar/>

¹⁰ Jim Collins.com, "Lecture Hall," <http://www.jimcollins.com/audio/Money%20is%20a%20commodity;%20talent%20is%20not.mp3>

The Challenges of Leadership Selection and Development

The Gap between a Star and a Leader

any other corporate specialty not listed here. Individual contributors often have years of educational and job experience that have helped them to excel in their current role. It is reasonable to expect they will need appropriate assessment, training and mentoring in order to excel in a new role with new skill requirements, namely leadership (see Table 1).

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR	LEADER
Apply task-specific skills (accounting, coding, etc.) to solve specific problems	Apply coordination and communication skills to ensure problems are solved
Responsible for own work	Responsible for the work of others; motivating groups to higher performance levels
Tasking is generally structured; rules predetermined	Responsible for creating structure, even in new situations
Responsible for developing own skills	Responsible for not only own skills, but developing the skills of others
Responsible for operating within the work environment	Responsible for creating and facilitating a healthy and optimal work environment

Table 1

SUCCESSION PLANNING IS NOT A LIST

Most companies define succession planning as keeping a list of who would replace current key personnel. This definition of succession planning is insufficient and even detrimental to the long term health of the company. Why? It doesn't account for the rapidity of change in today's world, and it isn't linked to leadership development programs.¹¹ Don't assume that leadership mentoring will happen "naturally." New leaders report to and work with existing leaders but there is no accountability for their development. So while 92 percent of business leaders recognize that superior talent and leadership provides a vital competitive advantage, less than 10 percent hold their managers accountable for developing the company's talent pool.¹² Succession planning means knowing not only who would be considered to replace a particular key individual, but also what deficits the new person may have, and what steps the organization will take to help them gain those skills to make a smooth transition.

FAILURE TO UTILIZE THE EXISTING TALENT POOL

The corollary mistake to not ensuring that star performers successfully transition to a new leadership role is only looking at star performers to fill leadership positions. To use our earlier example, because John is fabulous at [whatever it is that John does so well] doesn't mean that he will make a fabulous leader. **Leadership has its own skill set**, and John may or may not be willing to learn those skills to the same level of expertise as his current skills. On the other hand, another employee who is currently performing at the mid-level may have exactly the skills which would predispose them to fulfilling a leadership role nicely given the necessary development. To have a robust leadership pipeline it is necessary to maximize the entire existing talent pool of the organization.

¹¹ BHbr.harvardbusiness.org, "Developing Your Leadership Pipeline," <http://hbr.harvardbusiness.org/2003/12/developing-your-leadership-pipeline/ar/>

¹² Hreonline.com, "Accountability for Talent Management," <http://www.hreonline.com/HRE/story.jsp?storyId=141392680>

PASSING ON ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Don't underestimate the importance of organizational knowledge to being a successful leader. **Understanding and leveraging the culture, procedures and network of relationships** that exist within and around organizations is a key part of leadership success. Yet most organizations have no structured way to pass on this information from one generation of worker to the next. In addition, many organizations have a bias toward hiring from the outside to solve perceived gaps in their internal leadership pipeline. While hiring in "new blood" may be the right move, it may also compound the problem. Employees hired from the outside will need to learn the organizational knowledge that internal people already know. And, depending on their prior experience and training, they may also have gaps in leadership skills on top of organizational knowledge deficits. It is a dangerous illusion to believe that one "star performer" hired in from the outside will magically turn an existing team around, especially in the absence of strong leadership development practices.¹³

LEADERS ARE BORN, NOT MADE

Investment in leadership development programs is still compromised by the attitude that leaders are "born" and not "made." This is like saying you cannot teach someone music because they have to be born able to play. This is a fallacy. Music is a skill-set which can be taught and you don't have to be Mozart to learn to play piano competently. Similarly, leadership is a skill-set which can be taught and practiced in order to gain excellence. While some people may be born with predispositions that make learning that skill-set easier, most will be able to learn it to competence given the proper development.

AN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Effective leadership development is a critical component of successful business operations. Properly trained leaders are more likely to make tactical decisions that will increase the value of the business and ensure ongoing success. Effective leadership development programs reduce attrition of outstanding performers and help ensure that leaders properly manage the most expensive asset a company has – its talent pool.

Effective leadership development programs share a few key characteristics. First, programs are established and managed with the assumption that **leadership is a learnable skill**. To ensure long term excellence, leadership development programs are tied to succession planning. In addition, **managers are held accountable for developing their staff**. The entire talent pool of the organization must be mined when searching for future leaders. And finally, effective leadership development programs formalize the **handoff of organizational knowledge** from one generation of worker to the next.

¹⁴ Sloanreview.mit.edu, "The Myth of the Lone Star: Why Top Performer May Not Shine as Brightly as You Hope," <http://sloanreview.mit.edu/business-insight/articles/2009/1/5/15/the-myth-of-the-lone-star-why-one-top-performer-may-not-shine-as-brightly-as-you-hope/>

LEADERSHIP IS A LEARNABLE SKILL

Effective leadership development starts with the assumption that leadership is a learnable skill. The task is then determining which skills are most necessary for new leaders vs. leaders who have had more job experience. For example, basic communication and coaching skills may be appropriate for a leader who has little experience with people, while experienced leaders may need guidance with strategic planning and advanced communication skills. Once an overall skill-set is defined, then individuals can be assessed for strengths and weaknesses, and interventions can be put into place.

TIE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TO THE PIPELINE

Ensure that any leadership development program is tied to succession planning. If a candidate is considered the front-runner to step into a leadership role, the time to assess and train that individual is now. That way, the candidate can hit the ground running when the company is in need of their leadership skills (see Figure 2).

UTILIZE EXISTING LEADERS

Most new leaders would greatly benefit from being mentored by an existing leader. Yet if you ask most new leaders, they will tell you this is one area they feel is lacking. Why? Statistics back up this anecdotal evidence. **Less than 10 percent of managers are held accountable for developing their own reports.**¹⁴ This begs the question. If managers are not responsible for developing their people, who is? Hold them accountable! Ensure that their objectives, evaluation, and compensation reflect their people responsibilities, as well as their other tactical objectives.

MINE THE TALENT POOL

Don't reserve leadership development programs for existing leaders. While existing leaders may need to enhance particular skills and should be provided that opportunity, it is equally important to ensure the company has a robust leadership pipeline. One way to do that is to **use leadership development programs to screen potential future leaders.** For example, by rolling out development in communication or strategic thinking to the entire organization, the overall

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT = SUCCESSION PLANNING



Figure 2

¹⁴ Hreonline.com, "Accountability for Talent Management," <http://www.hreonline.com/HRE/story.jsp?storyId=141392680>

talent pool is enhanced. How? First, these skills are valuable to the organization regardless of the individual's current role. But more importantly, the rollout can be used to mine the overall talent pool for its leadership potential. Remember, leadership potential may be present in those individuals who are not current star performers. Find and develop it!

TEACH ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Knowing and utilizing organizational knowledge is a key component of leadership. Successful leaders understand and leverage not only company culture and procedures, but also networks of relationships with colleagues, vendors, investors, etc. This kind of information isn't the kind typically found in training manuals. It's in the heads of individuals who are currently successful in leadership positions. Ensure that this knowledge escapes their heads!! Use mentoring programs. Conduct interviews. Document case studies. Record presentations. Hold seminars. Be creative, but don't stop until this knowledge is systemically passed on.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION

Effective leadership development affects the entire organization because it impacts every employee. In a 2005 survey by consultancy **Hay Group**, a mere 40% of employees commended their companies for retaining high-quality workers. Only 41% agreed that performance evaluations were fair.¹⁵ Poor leadership practices contribute significantly to both of these issues. Alternatively, **effective leadership development practices can contribute to improved performance and retention**. Consider a typical performance management process.

POOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

Rhonda is a new sales manager. She has been in her job for approximately six months, and was promoted into sales management because of her exceptional record in sales. Her "management training" curriculum was learning how internal sales budgets are generated and managed. It is now performance review time, and she has been given a directive to complete a performance review for all her direct reports.

Rhonda's only experience with performance reviews are those that she received from her previous manager. She worked for her previous manager for six years, but she only received three formal performance evaluations during that time. Most of her compensation adjustments came through sales incentives and raises which were approved by HR.

Rhonda is anxious about giving performance feedback to her six direct reports because of her lack of experience and short tenure as a manager. She is worried about two in particular. The first is Jose. Rhonda has been receiving complaints that Jose is often overbearing with his customers, belligerent with the sales support staff, and is falling behind submitting

¹⁵ Keith H. Hammonds, "Why We Hate HR," *Fast Company*, Issue 97 (August 2005): 40.

his orders to accounting. Rhonda needs to tell him that while she is happy that he is meeting his sales targets, his behavior is unacceptable. On the flip side, Rhonda also has a direct report who is a star performer. Jamie has been letting Rhonda know that she is looking for additional challenges and wants to better understand her career growth options. Rhonda wants to keep Jamie motivated in her current role and bring her to even higher levels of performance. Rhonda doesn't feel she has the experience, training or support to provide adequate coaching to her staff to meet these goals.

In addition, Rhonda's company has introduced a new product line which isn't popular or well-understood amongst the sales staff. Despite heavy compensation incentives, the product isn't selling well and the sales staff is unhappy with the negative impact it is having on their paychecks. She has been receiving a number of questions about how the new product fits into company strategy and what goals the company hopes to achieve by replacing the existing product. Rhonda received the same product training as her reports and largely agrees with the assessment of the sales staff. She certainly doesn't feel she understands the company's decision well enough to explain it to others.

To finish her performance reviews, Rhonda puts in extra preparation time. The meeting with Jose goes badly. Rhonda explains that while she is happy his sales figures are good; his overall behavior is unacceptable. Jose is angry and defensive. He sulks for a week and in a month everything is exactly as it was before. Fortunately for Rhonda, the meeting with Jamie goes better. She is much more comfortable providing positive feedback but is still unsure how to coach Jamie to the next level or how to help her develop her career. More than ever, she is afraid that she is going to lose Jamie to another company. She did her best to address the concerns regarding the new product introduction in all of her meetings, but has been unable to get any additional information on how the new product fits into the company's business strategy. The most consistent answer she has been given is that the sales people need to review their product training and the sales will eventually come.

While Rhonda survived her performance reviews, she has come to dread the time involved and the anxiety of handling so many difficult conversations with no support. She was initially happy about the track her career had taken, but now wonders if moving into management was the right decision for her. She begins casually shopping other companies to see what top sales positions are available.

STRONG LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

In an organization with strong leadership development practices, everyone wins. First, Rhonda would have been given leadership training prior to moving into her position. Once in her position she would be mentored in her role as a new manager. How do you have a difficult conversation with an employee experiencing performance issues? What are the options for career growth and other opportunities for her staff? What skills would best benefit the company today and tomorrow? Rhonda would have been provided the training she needs to have effective performance management conversations with her staff. In addition, she would be able to assign training to her staff, which could be used in conjunction with mentoring to generate higher levels of performance. In addition, all of the company's leadership would understand how the new product fits into the overall business strategy and what the company's goals are in relation to its success.

SELECTING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

When seeking a learning and development company who can aid in leadership development, many factors should be considered, including:

Length of Experience: Look for providers who have been providing learning and development services for many years and have a good track record for successful programs. Ask about their renewal rates, as customer retention is often a key indicator of past successful implementations.

Applicable Topics: Consider providers who have basic learning and development interventions that broadly apply to leadership, such as communication skills. In addition, determine whether interventions for leaders with differing experience levels are available. For example, universal topics needed for leadership development might include effective communication skills and working well with people of different personality types. Topics for leaders with more experience might include change management, compliance topics or corporate finance.

Easily Distribute Training Interventions: The most easily distributed form of learning and development interventions is e-learning. When looking for an e-learning vendor, consider not only the topics available but how those topics will be delivered. Do you have an LMS in place? If so, does the vendor in question work well with the LMS system you already have? If not, does the vendor have a delivery platform which will meet your organization's distribution and management needs? Be specific about exactly which distribution features your organization really needs. Paying additional dollars for a component to customize off the shelf training is a waste of money unless there are clearly identified needs for which training would be customized and which internal resources would do that work.

Provide Metrics for Learning and Development Interventions: Look for vendors which can provide learning and development metrics which fit your needs. For example, it may be less interesting that 50% of staff took 20 hours of training over the last year and more interesting that 90% of the manager assigned interventions were taken and those business units had measurable performance gains.

Incorporation of Specialized Learning Resources: Ask providers about their ability to create learning and development interventions for passing on organizational knowledge. In addition, most organizations have existing internal resources which would be helpful for their leadership development program, such as white papers, reports, and PowerPoint presentations. Find out how difficult it would be to incorporate these items into your learning and development delivery system.

Easily Gather Training Needs: Seek out providers that have an efficient and effective solution for gathering training needs, both at the individual and departmental level. Effective leadership development isn't just about "assigning down" learning and development interventions to employees; it is also about helping employees develop their careers and move to the next level.

Selecting Effective Leadership Development Partners

Ability to Meet Changing Strategic Goals: Ask providers how they handle updating learning and development interventions to meet changing strategic goals. How often is new learning and development released? How easy is it to re-deploy learning and development resources to employees? Can learning plans be created? If so, how does that work and is it personalized to the individual or assigned based upon job description?

Compatibility with Existing Talent Management Processes: Seek out vendors whose learning and development solution can be easily integrated with existing programs or processes, such as performance reviews. For example, a learning and development vendor who can create and manage learning plans to help facilitate performance management conversations may be helpful for a company implementing a new performance management process.

Provide Superior Service: Look for learning and development providers who have a track record of going the extra mile and really servicing their customers' needs. Choose a vendor who is willing to partner with you to meet your leadership development goals.

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MindLeaders has been an innovative learning and development provider for over twenty-five years. To find out more about MindLeaders, visit www.mindleaders.com or call **1-800-223-3732**.