SELECTION AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

WHERE ARE YOUR "READY-NOW" LEADERS?

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FOUR STEPS YOUR ORGANIZATION CAN TAKE TO AVERT A FRONTLINE LEADERSHIP CRISIS

DDI's *2011 Global Leadership Forecast*[1] found that only 18 percent of HR professionals rate their leadership bench strength as strong or very strong. The lack of leaders who are ready for a frontline role is a particular problem for organizations. Filling frontline leader positions is tough because of both how difficult the transition can be for a first time leader and the sheer number of frontline leaders that organizations need. This drives a number of promotions into frontline leader roles of individuals who are just not yet equipped with the leadership skills they need to be effective.

And it shows. Over the past two years DDI has assessed the readiness of thousands of new and existing frontline leaders across the nine competencies most critical for leadership success. Table 1 lists each competency, and shows the percentage of people we've assessed who require

development in each competency. The data backs up our hypothesis: frontline leaders need to develop their skills to truly be ready for their roles.

– Table 1 –
Percent of Managers with Development Needs

COMPETENCY	% WITH NEED
Empowerment/Delegation	55%
Guiding Interactions	54%
Managing Relationships	38%
Coaching for Improvement	32%
Coaching for Success	28%
Problem/Opportunity Analysis	26%
Influencing	23%
Planning and Organizing	22%
Judgment	21%

Source: DDI's Assessment Data

Let's take a closer look at one competency as an example: Empowerment/Delegation—a competency where 55 percent of frontline leaders possess a development need. Skill gaps in delegation prevent leaders from getting things done through their teams, which, in turn, will affect their ability to execute. If your organization is relying on your frontline leaders to execute major strategic initiatives, the success of those initiatives could be in jeopardy if you have a large number of frontline leaders with a skill gap in delegation.

Newly-minted leaders frequently exhibit these gaps, but this data includes plenty of long-term incumbents. And an army of frontline leaders with gaps in any single one of these areas—or several, as we frequently

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see—could be a potential crisis for your organization. This whitepaper will focus on the root causes of this crisis in many organizations and detail four steps that your organization can take to avert the crisis.

A CRISIS OF PROCESS

The *Leadership Forecast* found that the lack of ready-now frontline leaders comes from organizations' inability to successfully identify and develop enough high-quality individuals to step into those roles. Table 2 below shows that only 31 percent of HR professionals and leaders feel their leadership selection system is effective. Development programs and learning opportunities for frontline leaders are only slightly better with 39 percent of leaders and 31 percent of HR professionals rating them as effective in their organizations.

– Table 2 –
Effectiveness of Talent Management Systems

Leadership selection
- Leader: 31%
- HR: 31%

Development programs and learning opportunities for frontline leaders
- Leader: 39%
- HR: 31%

Development programs and learning opportunities for mid-level leaders
- Leader: 39%
- HR: 30%

Development programs and learning opportunities for senior leaders
- Leader: 43%
- HR: 33%

Performance management
- Leader: 46%
- HR: 42%

Leadership succession
- Leader: 33%
- HR: 22%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%

Leader ▬▬ HR ▬▬

Percent Reporting System Is Effective

The bottom line is that selection processes are putting people who are not ready into frontline leader positions and development programs are not getting those people to where they need to be quickly enough to help them perform at a high level.

Our experience with hundreds of organizations worldwide points to four reasons why this happens.

Organizations:

1. Promote technical experts **without an accurate diagnosis** of whether they are ready for the role or where their leadership skills gaps exist.

2. **Lack effective development plans** that focus leaders on closing their leadership skills gaps.

3. **Lack effective development programs** that ensure learning acquisition and application back in the job.

4. **Provide insufficient support** to frontline leaders' leadership development.

IMPROVING THE PROCESS; AVERTING THE CRISIS

So why do these things happen and what steps can you take if your organization is struggling with one or more of them?

Step One:
Look Past the Technical Skills

DDI's *Finding the First Rung*[2] study found that the most common reason why someone got their first leadership position was because they were "the best technical expert" (33 percent of respondents). When we compared the assessment results of leaders who were promoted based on technical expertise to all frontline leaders, we found that the technical experts had significantly higher percentages of development needs in seven of nine competencies (see Table 3 on the next page).

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– Table 3 –

Percent of Technical Experts with Leadership Development Needs

COMPETENCY	% WITH NEED
Guiding Interactions	88%
Coaching for Improvement	69%
Empowerment/Delegation	68%
Managing Relationships	54%
Judgment	37%
Problem/Opportunity Analysis	34%
Coaching for Success	28%
Influencing	27%
Planning and Organizing	20%

Source: *DDI's Assessment Data*

The requirements for successful leadership—or for any job—fall into one of four areas. As depicted in the illustration below, you need to consider what people know (knowledge), what they have done (experience), what they can do (competencies), and who they are (personal attributes and motivations).

– Table 4 –

The Success Profile℠

What People KNOW
Technical and/or professional information needed to successfully perform job activities

What People CAN DO
A cluster of behaviors performed on a job

What People HAVE DONE
Educational and work achievements needed to successfully perform job activities

Who People ARE
Personal dispositions and motivations that relate to job satisfaction, job success or failure

KNOWLEDGE   COMPETENCIES
EXPERIENCE   PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

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When you promote technical experts, you're really only getting a read on the individual relative to the two areas on the left side of the Success Profile℠. The whole right side—whether they have the capability or the disposition to be a leader—relates to the key leadership competencies listed above, and is completely discounted when a decision is made on technical skills alone.

Focused behavioral interviews and leadership assessments are effective methods to eliminate promotion blind spots. But choosing the right assessment(s) for your organization's frontline leaders can be very difficult. Just Google "frontline leader assessment" and 13,300,000 results appear. There are three main criteria you should use to determine which assessments are most appropriate for evaluating your current and potential frontline leaders:

> **What they measure.** Make sure that you look for assessments that cover all of the behavioral competencies and personality traits that are absolutely critical for frontline leadership success.

> **How accurately they predict what they measure.** An assessment that evaluates coaching is only good if it actually predicts whether someone is good at coaching. So if you're considering a specific assessment, ask the provider to share validation results they have with you.

> **How they are measured.** Leadership assessments can range from simple, multiple-choice tests to day-in-the-life behavioral assessments. Multiple-choice tests are cost-effective—particularly for large numbers of candidates. However, they lack some of the accuracy and depth of insight you get from behavioral assessments because they allow the participant to "pick" their behavior instead of demonstrating it.

Step Two:
Get People on the Same Page

Only 45 percent of U.S. frontline leaders who participated in the *Finding the First Rung in China and India*[3] study told us that they have sat down with their manager and agreed to a specific, written plan for

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their development (see Table 5). But even this percentage is misleading—research tells us that at least half of formal development plans that are in place are ineffective.

– Table 5 –
My Manager and I Have Agreed to a
Specific Written Plan for My Development

45%
Yes

55%
No

Effective development planning starts with bringing the learner and the manager together to discuss where to focus development. Data gathered from leadership assessments or even informal feedback from coworkers can be highly effective at helping the two of them narrow developmental focus on the leadership skills that will provide the highest payoff to both the learner and the organization.

Once the learner and the manager are on the same page about development priorities, they still need to work together to establish an effective individual development plan to ensure development occurs. The components of an effective plan include:

> Clarity and specificity in the development goals.

> Identifying specific opportunities in the job where the leader can apply and master skills that need to be developed.

> Formal measurement criteria to hold leaders accountable for achieving their development goals.

Organizations can address each of these problem areas by training their leaders on the components of a good development plan and by conducting thorough audits of completed plans.

Step Three:
Build Effective Development Programs

It is clear that managerial support plays a critical role in helping technical experts understand their leadership skill gaps and supporting the creation and execution of their development plans to close those gaps. But what about the plan itself? How do you ensure that offering development and learning opportunities will lead to better leaders?

Once the 'whats' are clearly defined and understood, then focus shifts to the 'hows'—that is, how the skills will be acquired, applied, and measured. It is how we will know that leader is better.

Successful development requires both formal and informal learning as well as application opportunities. This is often referred to as '70-20-10', or some may use the term 'learning journey.' Learning journeys are well-defined series of development experiences designed for participants who engage in the process, over time, as a collective group. This approach tends to be more successful because it allows for our basic needs as social beings to interact, discuss, and learn from each other as well as trial application in a safe environment.

As noted, we know that the learning journey approach works. A recent DDI–HR.com[4] study showed that HR professionals in organizations using a learning journey-like approach were overwhelmingly more confident in their front-line leaders' ability to succeed than those using open enrollment programs. Seventy-nine percent of respondents said their confidence was high in frontline leaders' ability to execute when a learning journey approach was taken while only 21 percent felt the same for an open enrollment approach.

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Step Four:
Build their Manager's Skills

Ask any learning and development professional and they can clearly articulate the importance of the role of the leader of the learner. However, ask those same professionals HOW they get the leader of the learner to support their direct report, frontline leader in growing their skills, and the answer you receive is rarely consistent. Often, there are tales of unsuccessful attempts to engage and involve the leader of the learner (see Table 6).

– Table 6 –

Percentage of U.S. Leaders Who Perceive They are Supported

My manager has the knowledge and tools to support my development ·················· 58%

My manager is committed to my development ···························· 50%

I get sufficient feedback about my performance ························· 58%

My development assignments are sufficiently challenging ············ 70% to be good learning experiences

I am satisfied with my organization's current leadership ·············· 44% development offerings

Source: *Finding the First Rung in China, India, and U.S. data.*

Unfortunately, there is no 'one size fits all' solution when it comes to garnering leader of learner and senior leader support for training initiatives, and a variety of methods exist. The most important thing is to determine what senior leaders and/or the leader of the learner need to do.

From DDI's perspective, the role of the leader of the learner and senior leaders is to support, model, reinforce, and recognize the learner. These are simple things yet they do take time and effort.

A few best practices or 'must haves' include:

> Put time into planning the learner's and leader of the learner's desired participation.

This best practice goes back to knowing what you want when planning the initiative or learning journey, and clearly planning the role of the leader beyond the learner. Have

one or two of them involved in the planning process, and get their buy-in early by giving them options. Be clear about the expectations and don't start with too many things—keep it simple.

> Don't feel you, the learning and development professional, must carry this ball alone.

Create a learning counsel that engages people from frontline to senior leader ranks to meet quarterly. You know who the advocates of learning are in your organization, so harness that enthusiasm and—with your guidance—apply it to the creation of learning approaches. Not only do you get their valuable input, but they'll carry their enthusiasm back into the organization as advocates.

> Provide appropriate course work and tools to achieve the desired result.

Many training providers have a course for leaders of learners and more senior people. This is a frequently under-utilized resource, but it can bolster an initiative when used well. Some organizations have the leader of the learner take the same curriculum or mini-chunks of the curriculum their direct reports are taking. This is not doable for every organization but can be very effective.

Providing templates and tools also delivers necessary support. For example, if you want the leader of the learner to meet with the learner after attending courses to discuss how they will apply, have a template for the discussion available to both of them. Have reminders sent via email or other tools that are practical and efficient in your organization. Make available any tools that the learner has access to so the leader of the learner can become familiar with those tools.

> Have senior leaders and leaders of the learner be a part of the learning journey.

If a learning journey approach is used, invite the leader of the learner and senior leaders to attend (even virtually) key milestone updates along the way. Don't bombard them with commitments, but a few well-placed and appropriate events can make a difference. Choose ones where you are sharing outcomes or measurement milestones.

> Remind the leader and learner this is a shared responsibility.

As always this is important. Organizations take varying approaches on who is in charge of development, and mechanisms that learning and development professionals set up can allow for encouraging joint responsibility.

> Measure, measure, measure.

Everyone agrees in theory, but the practice of measurement can at times be an after-thought. So, include measurement in your planning phase. Understand what your stakeholders want to know. Make it an actionable part of the initiative/journey plan.

What needs to be measured to show outcomes and continue the program in the future? Measuring attendance as well as behavior change could be very valuable and important to continuing a program.

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ARE YOU READY FOR READY-NOW LEADERS?

Following the steps described here takes a fair amount of effort. But it's effort that will pay dividends on your investment in this strategy. Consider the following:

> According to a 2012 report from Aberdeen[5], top performing or 'best-in-class' organizations are nearly one-and-a-half times more likely to use post-hire assessments than average or lagging organizations (55 percent versus 24 percent). Best-in-class organizations are also 75 percent more likely to have a defined process to apply assessment results into development planning[6].

> Ninety-two percent of best-in-class organizations secure senior-level buy-in for assessment strategies, compared to just 60 percent of laggards (which are also struggling to tie assessments to organizational impact).

> According to DDI's *Global Leadership Forecast*, only 1 in 3 organizations report that leaders have high-quality, effective development plans. However, development planning is a hallmark of organizations that have effective talent management systems: 48 percent use it, compared to just 8 percent of those with ineffective systems.

With the steps outlined in this paper, you can construct a process to ensure you aren't on the dark side of statistics like these. Are you ready to create ready-now leaders?

[1] Boatman & Wellins (2011) Global Leadership Forecast 2011, Development Dimensions International

[2] Erker & Thomas (December, 2010) Finding the First Rung, Development Dimensions International

[3] Thomas, Deshmukh & Liu (2012) Finding the First Rung in China and India, Development Dimensions International

[4] Wellins, Selkovits & McGrath (2013) Be Better than Average: A Study on the State of Frontline Leadership, Development Dimensions International with HR.com

[5] Lombardi & Laurano (January, 2012) Human Capital Management Trends 2012: Managing Talent to Lead Organizational Growth, Aberdeen Group

[6] Lombardi, Mollie (June, 2012) Assessments 2012: Predicting Productivity and Performance, Aberdeen Group

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