

Top 5 Leadership Development Trends For 2020

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Seeing with 20/20 vision is a good thing. As we welcome 2020, and a new decade, it's also a good idea for leadership development directors to have a vision for the future of their department. We're in the midst of a Fourth Industrial Revolution, yet over the last decade or more, most of leadership development has remained stagnant. What is trained, how it is trained, and who is trained is much the same today as it was 10 or even 20 years ago.

To be relevant for the next decade, directors of leadership development have to embrace transformations in every area of training and executive education. Once only talking points, these five areas hold significant promise as they become a reality in 2020.

TREND 1: A Focus on Applying and Sustaining Behaviors

For too long leadership development has been approached as a one-and-done experience. Many programs take new managers, push them through an organization's "academy," then send them out into the world. These leaders are checked on sporadically, perhaps with a 360 or engagement survey. But little attention is paid to sustaining knowledge in the long-term.

What a waste. Most estimates put the global investment in leadership development at over \$300 billion. Further, according to *CLO's* Business Intelligence Board data, 94% of learning organizations plan to increase or maintain their current investment in leadership development.

The "knowing-doing gap" and Ebbinghaus's forgetting curve point to the severity of the problem: We quickly forget most of what we learn unless we consistently apply it. If leaders aren't doing it, they're going to lose anywhere from 40 to 80% of what they encountered in learning and development programs.

Leadership development professionals need to start spending as much time helping people sustain new knowledge and behaviors as they do help those leaders acquire new knowledge and behaviors. Behavioral nudges are moving from the world of social psychology into everyday use by companies, governments, and other organizations. This might include nudges:

- Reminding new managers to review weekly task lists and delegate to team members.
- Prompting middle managers to practice inclusion in their meetings.
- Encouraging senior executives to schedule time for strategic thinking.

Successful leadership development professionals will develop hyper-personalized nudge strategies to deliver the right reminder to the right person at the right time.

TREND 2: Mobile Learning for Millennial Managers

With the average age of the first-time manager being 30, we have entered the age of millennial management; nearly 30% of Millennials hold managerial-level roles. Surveys from a variety of sources show that millennial managers value learning and growth experiences more than previous generations. They are also three times more likely than Baby Boomers to take responsibility for their own re-skilling, according to Upwork's Future Workforce Report. Yet, they want training and development delivered in a new way. They expect mobile access to learning opportunities, anytime, anywhere. Leadership development professionals need to tailor programs to this group of managers and offer more flexible online programs. According to the Korn Ferry Institute, research shows Millennials learn more through online development than time spent in the classroom.

TREND 3: Group Coaching & Democratization of Leadership Development

Traditionally, senior executives are given executive coaches and development via executive education programs at elite universities along with executive seminars and retreats. New managers are typically put through a leadership development academy or boot camp. Middle managers are largely forgotten.

In this new decade, everyone needs to be a leader who actively engages their people. Awareness of this will see leadership development pushed down through the organization, and coaching will become a standard part of every manager's experience.

But how will organizations afford it? One way is to offer group coaching experiences, that utilize one human executive coach for every ten managers. By synchronizing monthly or quarterly topics, one coach can effectively support each manager's needs on a weekly basis and bring everyone together using video conferencing on a monthly basis. Additionally, companies can now leverage AI-powered coach bots and hyper-personalized nudges from companies like LEADx, Butterfly.ai, Qstream, and others.

TREND 4: Alignment to the Engagement Survey

Gallup research has shown that 70% of the variance in employee engagement ties back to the manager. People join a company, but they leave their boss. One reason? What is taught in leadership development academies and included in leadership competency models is often very different than what is measured in employee engagement surveys. Employee experience and employee engagement are hotter than ever before. While most of the emphasis has been on measurement, leadership development professionals must also now realize that changing managerial behaviors is the best way to move the needle on survey outcomes.

In the book *Knowing-Doing Gap*, Pfeffer and Sutton use Intuit as an example of a firm that uses its engagement survey as more than a metric generator. "The measurement, nothing more than an

employee survey, but one that is taken very seriously, affords a way of focusing managerial effort on those dimensions of the culture that most need attention at a given moment.”

To promote employee engagement, the first obvious step is training and coaching managers in how to apply behaviors that unlock emotional commitment. Each organization is different but, in general, managers need to learn specific behaviors such as: using a coach approach to develop team members, giving effective timely feedback, providing strategic recognition, building trust, and fostering belonging.

TREND 5: AI Becomes Invisible

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been hyped for the last several years. Vendors use the term to get attention and convince us there is some magic in their solutions. Yet in the new decade, AI will become the norm, an *assumed* part of leadership development experiences. We already mentioned the power of executive coach chatbots answering questions and providing guidance using natural language processing technology. At the same time, AI is going to be making an impact in personalization. With AI, leaders will be offered hyper-personalized content based on the manager’s personality, competencies, and objectives. As it does for Netflix, Amazon, and Spotify, AI can present targeted information in a learning management or nudge system.

AI is also going to support leadership development directors in gaining the respect of other senior leaders. The cold hard truth is those with the seats at the table can talk in numbers. With AI technology, leadership development can increase its use of dashboards and correlation matrices. More telling than the number of workshop participants or the latest smile sheet survey ratings, metrics in 2020 will quantify:

- How many people are ready to move into leadership?
- How many people are ready to advance from front line to middle manager?
- Which training courses correlate to higher engagement scores?
- Which leadership development experiences correlate to faster promotions?
- Performance review rankings?

Leadership development cultivates the human capital of an organization. As we move into the 2020s, it’s an exciting time for top-to-bottom transformation of our departments. Shaped by these five trends, we can move forward with developing a clear vision for ongoing success in training and sustaining successful leaders.