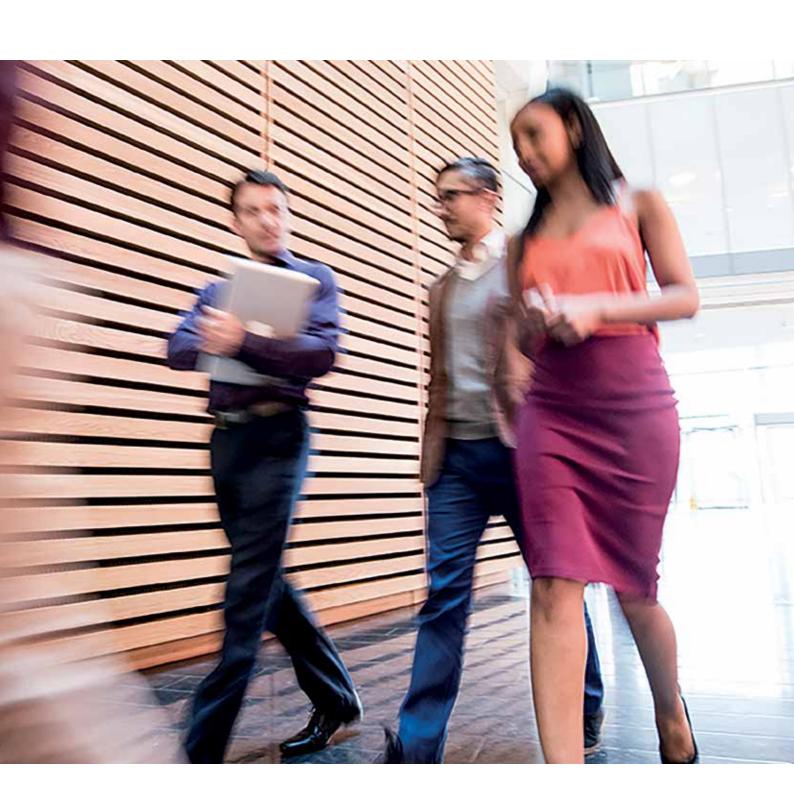
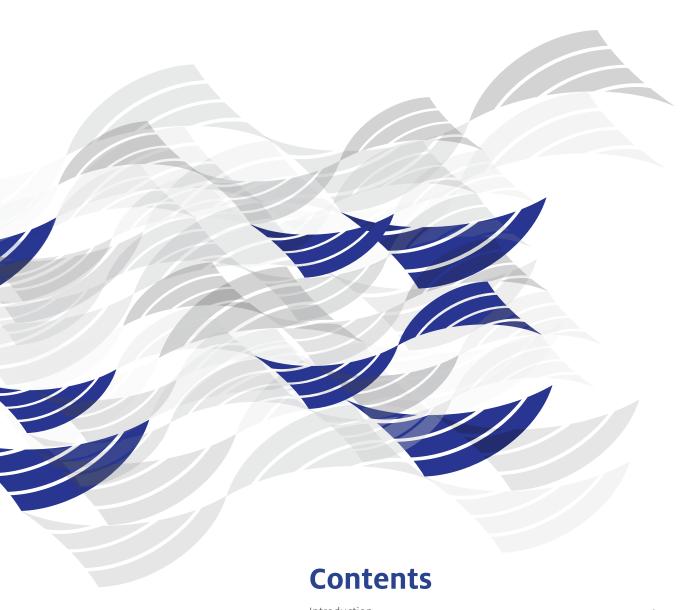
# Putting Experience at the Center of Talent Management



By: Joan Gurvis, Cindy McCauley, and Milynn Swofford





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# Introduction

Can we develop leaders fast enough to meet the demands of our business?

Could we be getting more out of our talent management processes and efforts?

How do I work with line managers to improve the way we manage and develop talent?

Talent management leaders—from organizations of varying sizes and sectors—are asking these questions. Even the most sophisticated and successful talent management functions may struggle to address these questions as the business changes or conditions shift.

In some organizations, individual efforts to attract, develop, and retain talent may be solid but lack consistency and cohesion as a whole. In others, the talent management function is underdeveloped or too narrowly focused. But most organizations have one thing in common:

## They are not maximizing on-the-job opportunities that prepare leaders, develop employees, and advance business goals.

Learning from experience is the number one way development happens. People gain or fine-tune their abilities and perspectives through their day-to-day work. They learn by doing, by trying, by figuring out.

Human resources leaders understand this, often citing the framework that



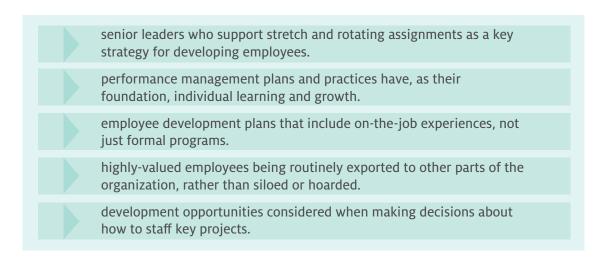
They challenge themselves and their business leaders to leverage the 70%, making on-the-job learning intentional, rather than leaving it to chance or individual effort.

But for experience-driven development to have the greatest impact, we believe it must be integrated into all of talent management—not just function as a leadership development or learning initiative.

> Bob Eichinger and Mike Lombardo coined the phrase **70-20-10** to highlight the relative impact of three types of experiences (challenging assignments, other **people**, and **coursework**) on executive development. They based the percentages of data from CCL's first study of key events in executive's lives, which also identified hardships and personal life experiences as sources of leader development. Learn more about this and subsequent Lessons of Experience research on the **Experience-Driven Leader Development** website.

**Experience-Driven Talent Management** is when experience—carefully designed and executed—becomes the core driver of learning in the organization. Working and learning are no longer separated but bound together, aligned with the business strategy and shaped by a talent strategy. All talent processes enable and support learning from experience and people throughout the organization play important, but different, roles.

When experience-driven development is part of the organizational culture and embedded in all of talent management, you'll see things such as



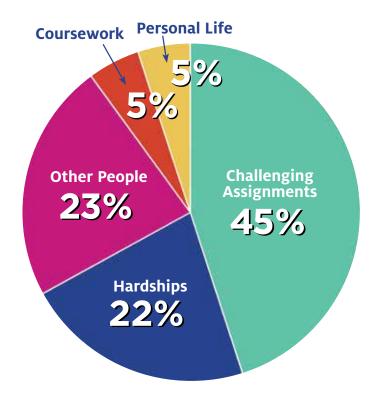
Putting experience-driven development at the center of talent management will boost an organization's efforts to attract and retain talent and accelerate the development of leaders at every level.

In this paper, we share our point of view, as well as recommendations for putting **Experience-Driven Talent Management** into action.

# What is Experience-Driven Development?

Leaders identify on-the-job assignments as a major source of development. This has been true for the four decades that CCL has been asking senior executives about the key developmental experiences in their careers. Looking across studies, challenging assignments make up the largest percentage of key developmental experiences (almost 50%)—twice as frequent as each of the next two sources of development: other people (e.g., bosses, mentors) and hardship experiences (e.g., business mistakes, losing a job) and exponentially more than coursework and personal life experiences (Figure 1).





# Challenging assignments—also called stretch assignments are at the heart of experience-driven development.

Such assignments put individuals in new or uncertain situations where they have to take action, see the outcomes, and refine their approach to be more successful. Over time, these cycles of action and adjustment build new skill sets and deeper expertise. Challenging assignments typically have one or more of these elements: facing unfamiliar or broader responsibilities, creating change, influencing across organizational boundaries, and working with diverse sets of people.

# ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENT

# EXPERIENCE-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT DO 5 THINGS



Identify stretch assignments



Staff for development, not just for performance



Create new experiences



Enhance learning from experience



Promote an experience-driven development culture



**Identify stretch assignments.** Some experiences are more developmental than others. And different experiences teach different things. Identifying stretch assignments includes

- developing a shared language for talking about stretch assignments.
- mapping competencies to stretch assignments.
- creating experience paths for targeted positions or roles—such as a general manager role or those on a high-potential track.
- reserving specific key jobs to use for development only.



**Staff for development, not just for performance.** Matching specific individuals with the right experience requires rigor as well. The key with experience-driven development is to factor in the need to hone new skills and perspectives, not simply make assignments based on past success or current role. Staffing for development includes

- putting processes in place to identify the next assignment needed for each high-potential to continue broadening his or her portfolio of experience.
- making sure that everyone has a "development-in-place" assignment: something in the current job that will challenge and support targeted development.
- staffing key projects with development in mind, asking "Who could benefit from this experience?"
- developing managers' skills at assignment-based development to be sure they are able to identify, implement, and support stretch assignments.



**Create new experiences.** With experience-driven development, talent needs are met primarily through job experiences rather than with training programs. This requires that enough of the right experiences exist to develop people in the ways that are needed. Expanding the array of developmental assignments involves

- creating new types of experiences to meet strategic needs of the organization—more crossfunctional, cross-country, new market, and new client opportunities, for example.
- including developmental assignments in formal development programs. This might be in the form of action-learning projects, special assignments, or job-rotation experiences.
- supporting the pursuit of leadership experiences beyond the workplace, such as volunteer work, board membership, or roles with professional organizations which address development needed in the workplace.



**Enhance learning from experience.** Going through an experience doesn't guarantee a person will learn from it. Support is needed. Organizations need to surround work development experiences with effective learning practices, including

- tools for reflecting on experience and feedback.
- access to relationships for learning, like mentors, peer networks, and communities of practice.
- coaches who challenge and support explicit learning goals and experience-driven development.
- formal coursework and online resources that provide just-in-time learning tailored to the challenges of the specific stretch experience.



Promote an experience-driven development culture. When learning from experience is embedded in the culture, the gap between doing the work and developing the people shrinks. Learning isn't added on—nor is coaching and mentoring and aligning talent. An experience-driven development culture includes

- hiring and developing—as well as recognizing and rewarding—senior leaders who visibly support experience-driven development.
- communicating and tracking on-the-job development (not just job moves, but evidence of development).
- rewarding employees for their own development and for developing others.
- valuing learning agility as a core competency—recruiting for it, selecting for it, developing it. It's a normal part of the conversation.

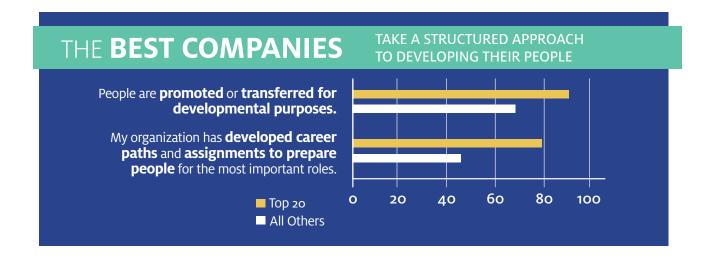
# Why Focus on Experience?

Experience is the number one way people learn. To maximize development at all levels of the organization, you've got to be sure people have the experiences they need to learn what matters most.

Let's look at three more reasons to put experience at the center of your talent management strategy, processes, and roles.

## Top companies use experience-driven development to develop leaders.

According to The Best Companies for Leadership survey, the top 20 companies (including Procter & Gamble, General Electric, and Coca-Cola) take a structured approach to learning and development. They are more likely to use job moves to develop people and create career paths and assignments that prepare people for the most important roles (Hay Group, 2014).



### Performance and experience-driven development go hand-in-hand.

Studies show that stretch assignments and on-the-job learning have a positive impact on employee performance. In fact, the more often that employees experience job challenges (i.e., unfamiliar responsibilities, creating change, high levels of responsibility, managing boundaries, dealing with diversity), the higher their promotability ratings from their boss (De Pater et al., 2009). Plus, managers rate on-the-job learning as three times more impactful on employee performance than formal training programs (Corporate Executive Board, 2009).



## Experience-driven development is critical for attracting and retaining talent.

Opportunities to learn and grow are essential for an employee's work engagement, career success, and willingness to stay. Employees are 2.6 times more engaged when they are learning on the job (Corporate Executive Board, 2009). They are less likely to leave their organization if they have an increase in challenging assignments over time (Preenen et al. 2011).

# In spite of the importance of experience-driven development, organizations struggle to tap into this powerful source of learning.

HR leaders worry the "70%" of learning isn't happening on its own and they are right: 55% of employees do not regularly extract learning from their work (Corporate Executive Board, 2014). Even if organizations work to be more intentional about learning from experience, the application is uneven. For example, women are less likely than men to be tapped for high-visibility projects, mission-critical roles, and international experience (Silva, Carter, & Beninger, 2012).

Development is notably important to millennials. Between 50% and 65% are in their current job because of learning and career opportunities (Deal & Levenson, 2016). A global study of nearly 10,000 millennials found that almost three-quarters say that they have access to learning and development resources at work that will improve their skills—leaving 25% wishing for better (Deal & Levenson, 2016).





# **Experience-Driven Talent Management: The Strategy, The Processes, The Roles**

Experience-Driven Talent Management is when experience—carefully designed and executed—becomes the core driver of learning in the organization. Working and learning are no longer separated but bound together. All elements of the talent system enable and support learning from experience—with the recognition that experience-driven learning is critical for development, attraction, retention, and ultimately, performance.



## Experience-Driven Talent Management involves three things.

**Talent strategy** articulates decisions that guide how the organization will attract, develop, and retain the talent needed to achieve its business strategy.

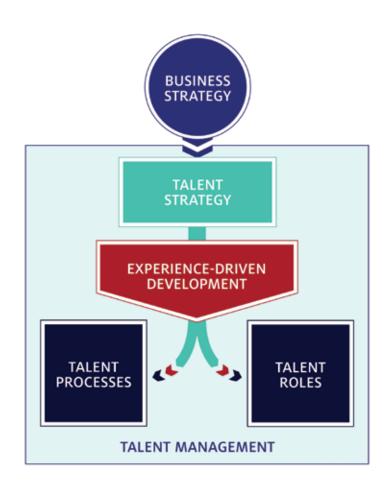


**Talent processes** are the formal programs and structures organizations use to be more intentional and systematic about attracting, developing, and retaining talent.



Talent roles address the people throughout the organization who impact talent attraction, development, and retention in very different—and all important—ways.







# **Talent Strategy**

Talent strategy articulates decisions that guide how the organization will attract, develop, and retain the talent needed to achieve its business strategy.

The talent strategy begins with a clear understanding of the business strategy, so that the organization can make intentional decisions about what is needed to create a strong and sustainable talent pipeline. Research is clear that organizations that develop the talent to match their strategies outperform their competition (Hrebiniak, 2005).

A talent strategy provides guidance for the critical investments an organization will or will not make in people. At a high level, it identifies the critical positions or key players that are critical for the business strategy to be successful and important capabilities to be developed. A talent strategy may set the direction for a high-priority need alone, or it may include the direction for the development of employees overall.

To create a talent strategy, HR and business leaders need to clearly identify the current and future talent needs. Critical questions to be answered include:

What current/future challenges will our leaders need to address?

What kinds of leaders do we need, and how many to execute our business strategy?

What knowledge, skills, experiences, and personal attributes are needed at the organizational level? Within specific groups, functions, or regions? What is critical to our leaders' success?

What critical positions and key players should we invest in now and in the future?

## With the talent specifications broadly defined and understood, the talent strategy can be formed based on insights and priorities. For example:

	BUSINESS STRATEGY	TALENT STRATEGY
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS MANUFACTURER	Achieve growth targets by shifting from a holding company model to alignment and integration of businesses worldwide.	Centralize the talent management function to facilitate the development of leaders by moving them through strategically identified experiences across businesses, functions, and regions.
HOSPITALITY BRAND	Build on our brand value to achieve significant growth in emerging markets through acquisition, strong organic growth, and joint-venture partnerships.	Build functional and leadership capability to support brand building and innovation in both emerging and mature markets.
CONSUMER PRODUCTS COMPANY	Grow through sustainability and by aligning what is good for the business with what is good for society.	Connect the right talent to the right work through consistent attraction, recruitment, hiring, and onboarding processes. Build bench strength for key leadership positions. Deliver talent development opportunities for all employees.
INSURANCE COMPANY	Maintain a steady organic growth trajectory by offering our clients the most innovative products to meet their healthcare needs.	Seek out the most knowledgeable individuals in our field with a strong track record of success in our industry or a related one, and provide them with the opportunity to innovate, learn, and grow.

As you begin to develop your talent strategy, don't get stuck in the details. Your talent strategy will guide the "how-to" plan—but it isn't the plan itself.

An important point to make about talent strategy is that it may or may *not* explicitly take an experience-driven perspective on talent development. The experience element may be seen as part of the "how" decisions, as they are made through talent processes and roles, especially when it is a new or undeveloped perspective in the organization.

When **experience-driven development** is placed front-and-center in the talent strategy, it may include a statement of approach or philosophy:

**Talented employees** who continue to learn and grow are vital for organizational performance. And **opportunities to learn and grow are essential** for employees' work engagement and career success.

Our organization acknowledges that **learning from experience is the number one way that development happens**; we seek to be more intentional and systematic in our efforts to make use of this powerful source of learning.



# **Talent Processes**

Talent processes are the formal programs and structures organizations use to be more intentional and systematic about attracting, developing, and retaining talent.

Talent processes are the core components of the talent management function. They are the essential activities that talent management carries out in service of the larger talent strategy: setting success profiles; recruiting, hiring, onboarding; learning and development; performance management; rewards and recognition; staffing and succession management; employee engagement, and so on. These are things you are probably already doing in some fashion.

Michael Campbell and Roland Smith conducted research and shaped CCL's thinking about talent management in the early 2000s. Their distillation of the 7 core talent processes and 5 talent roles provided the foundation for our Experience-Driven Talent Management work.

## What do talent processes look like with experience-driven development at the center?

#### **TALENT PROCESS EXPERIENCE-DRIVEN PRACTICES** • Build on initial talent strategy efforts to refine the **DEFINE TALENT SPECS** understanding of the current talent versus the What knowledge, skills, needed future talent. experiences, and abilities • Map individual competencies to specific experiences are needed at the that will provide a chance to learn. individual, group, and • Identify the set of experiences that high-potential organizational level? managers should have as they move up in the organization and reach key positions. • Hire people for experiences—especially for **FIND TALENT** experiences that are needed but not strongly How do we connect with and reflected in the current talent pool. bring in the right people? Assert learning agility as a core competency when recruiting and selecting employees. • Include on-the-job learning as a key strategy for pursuing development goals. **DEVELOP TALENT** • Link formal development programs with on-the-job How do we help our development. people learn and develop • Provide training and tools for managers to connect in a way that is valuable to job demands and business needs to employee them and to us? development goals. Provide courses or coaching to help employees improve their ability to learn from experience. **MEASURE PERFORMANCE** • Put systems in place to track employees' experiences How do we identify goals, and what they gain from them. set expectations, and assess • Include learning as a performance outcome. progress? • Recognize employees who take on developmental assignments. **INCENT PERFORMANCE** • Reward managers who develop employees through What do we recognize and stretch assignments. reward? How do we do it? Tout successful experience-driven development stories through communication channels. Identify the next assignment or role for each high potential so that needed experience is clear. **DEPLOY TALENT** • Reserve specific jobs for the purpose of development; How do we make staffing people will take these roles to gain experience and and succession plans and move on. decisions? Help managers make staffing decisions with employee development in mind. **RETAIN TALENT** What are we doing to • Build experience-driven development into the engage and motivate people employee value proposition. so they stay with us and • Use special assignments to retain valued employees. remain valued contributors?

The path to a general management VP in one manufacturing organization includes jobs across different business units and countries, a matrix assignment (managing others in a dotted-line reporting relationship), a high-level staff role, and involvement in an acquisition or turnaround.

> Employees in a regional bank use an online system to regularly update their "portfolio of experiences" and capture what they have gained from each experience.

One organization reserved two key roles in the organization head of a global function and country general manager—as developmental roles for high-potential senior leaders. By designating these as "flow through" roles, no one individual would be in the position for an extended period of time, thus eliminating the problem of others being blocked from accessing the development these roles offered.

As you plan and implement and review talent processes in your organization, ask: How can we incorporate experience-driven development practices with small changes or big steps?

Finally, as you create and evolve your talent processes, be sure to measure their effectiveness. What do you know about the outcomes of your efforts? What do you need to know? What does success look like?

The HR function in any organization is the ideal catalyst for experience-driven talent management. With the overall view of an

organization's people and strategic needs, HR has the vantage point and the expertise to put experience at the center of the organization's talent management practices. While they have this unique perspective, for experience-driven talent management to be most successful, experience-driven development requires support from leaders at the top of the organization to front-line employees.



# **Talent Roles**

Talent roles address the people throughout the organization who impact talent attraction, development, and retention in very different—and all important—ways.

While this has historically been an HR role, talent management is quickly becoming a priority among senior leaders and managers who know they are dependent on having the right pool of people involved in the work, now and in the future. And individuals throughout organizations are seeing they have the primary role in their own learning and career growth.

The expanded interest in talent is an excellent fit for an experience-driven talent management approach.



## How is experience-driven talent management supported by people in different roles?

<b>OVERSEERS</b> The board of directors	<ul> <li>Ensure talent strategy is aligned with business strategy.</li> <li>Support a culture of learning and development.</li> <li>Hold senior leaders accountable for talent management.</li> <li>Oversee succession planning and development for CEO and Executive Committee members.</li> </ul>	A senior leadership
ORCHESTRATORS The CEO and senior leaders	<ul> <li>Champion talent management processes across the organization.</li> <li>Hold organization accountable for implementing talent management plans.</li> <li>Mentor and coach high-potential talent; ensure that they obtain needed stretch assignments.</li> <li>Promote experience-driven development throughout the organization.</li> </ul>	team conducted cross-functional talent calibration conversations to identify the company's top 50 leaders. They worked with the Learning & Development group
CULTIVATORS People managers, line managers	<ul> <li>Make employees' development a core part of their job.</li> <li>Own talent management processes.</li> <li>Work with HR leaders to ensure appropriate development opportunities (i.e., assignments, relationships, and coursework) are available for employees.</li> <li>Mentor and coach direct reports and other key talent.</li> <li>Hold employees accountable for development.</li> </ul>	to create experience- driven development opportunities for all 50 and sponsored peer- coaching groups to help these key leaders leverage their learning.
CATALYSTS Human resource, training and development, or organizational development leaders	<ul> <li>Design and facilitate experience-driven talent management processes that support business strategy and engage employees.</li> <li>Educate others about their roles in talent management and help them take on these roles.</li> <li>Monitor the effectiveness of the talent management system.</li> </ul>	Elizabeth asked her supervisor for a stretch assignment supporting a project in the marketing group to determine if her
<b>TALENT</b> All employees	<ul> <li>Actively participate in talent management processes.</li> <li>Take responsibility for learning—on the job, from others, and in formal courses—and encourage others to do the same.</li> <li>Look for opportunities that advance both the organization's work and your personal or career goals.</li> </ul>	interest in marketing was a match for her skills. After a successful launch of the project, Elizabeth was asked to join the marketing team in a newly created position.

Identify specific people who are the strongest advocates for, or practitioners of experience-driven development. How can you utilize and learn from them?

# Getting Started with Experience-Driven Talent Management

Depending on your organization, your role, and what's going on with talent management currently, there are a number of things you can do to start putting experience at the center of your talent management practices.

1

**First, set the course.** Assess the current state of talent management practices, in light of the business strategy and future needs. CCL has a comprehensive audit process and works with organizations to gather relevant data from multiple perspectives. Taking time to see the organization and its current talent reality in some way is an important beginning. With that baseline information, you can then determine readiness for an experience-driven approach, define priorities, engage stakeholders and influencers, and set next steps.



2

**Next, start to create and align systems.** This is the beginning of implementation. It may include revising existing talent management practices and creating new ones. It may involve launching pilot projects or working with a part of the business that is ready to test the waters. It likely involves a better process for mapping and leveraging stretch assignments. During this time, it is important to grow partnerships with stakeholders, deepen the learning mindset, and align and connect the "70, 20, and 10." Early results and organizational lessons learned will inform what's next.



3

**Finally—and ongoing—engage the whole.** Revisit implementation plans, identifying changes or improvements to the way experience-driven development can be put at the center of learning and talent systems. How can the learning mindset continue to strengthen and become embedded in the culture? How can you further support and accelerate the development of people and processes so that the organization has the right talent in the right place at the right time?





Experience-Driven Talent Management can be seen in today's talent-savvy organizations, and it plays out in so many different ways. In one organization, newly formed through a merger, the senior leadership team became "talent orchestrators" in response to the Board's mandate to "hit the ground running." They quickly saw the need to have a talent strategy to support the company's business strategy.

Part of that talent strategy was to organize in new ways in order to capture synergies from the merged organization. Another part was to define the organizational capabilities as well as individual skill sets. A third element was to build a new culture by defining the values that would be expected to drive the behaviors of every person.

The senior team and their HR partners ("talent catalysts") already understood the value of experience-driven development. They were determined to put experience at the core of ALL talent practices—otherwise known as experience-driven talent management—as a way to gain the full benefit of the merged talent pool.

With a talent strategy outlined, the work began to engage the rest of the organization in identifying, testing, and developing a set of leadership principles. Through a series of meetings and surveys, the organization defined what leadership should be, both though concrete and intangible actions. Rather than being an abstract activity, the process focused on the work of the new organization, allowing experience to be the thread that connected these principles together.



As the principles were defined and communicated, the senior team turned its attention to the development of success profiles for each leader level. Again, input came from employees (talent) and their managers (cultivators) to accurately identify the skills and experiences needed to be successful in the work. For example, experiences such as leading a cross-functional team, building a business strategy execution plan, and developing a client relationship management tool were identified for the mid-level/director-level talent. These success profiles formed the core of the job descriptions used to source talent and measure their subsequent performance.

The skills and experiences for each level and job were then integrated into the related talent practices: development, performance, rewards, sourcing, and ultimately, deployment.

Both cultivators and talent were encouraged to look to experience as the medium for growth and differentiation. Both were coached in identifying what needed to or could be learned through an experience, how to identify experiences within available work, and how to assess whether the experience had provided the desired learning and development or if more was needed. Learning through experience was showcased as part of the development journey at each leader level.

The senior team has also pursued intentional development of culture through a set of organizational values that are widely communicated and modeled. The values are tied to the experience of servant leadership—whether the service is to their customers, their communities, each other, or their Board and investors. The various facets of servant leadership define the values and ultimately many of the organizational metrics, ranging from employee engagement to workplace safety. Self-awareness and learning have been encouraged and rewarded by the senior team as a means for driving these values.

The move to experience-driven talent management had an interesting impact on this organization. Managers and employees have learned to mine for experiences, whether for growth, for reward, or for future roles and responsibilities. Individual Development Plans (IDPs) use success profiles to identify what needs to be learned, what experiences will be utilized, and what metrics will show learning. Conversations focus more on learning and business outcomes and less on check-the-box activities. The organization has begun to value experience as the most essential lever for talent performance and growth.

# **Conclusion**

Putting experience-driven development at the center of talent management changes how people think about and engage in learning. Working and learning become bound together, not separate activities. Learning opportunities are everywhere and everyone knows it. Learning happens every day, all the time, within and through the work.

The purpose of talent management, then, is to help individuals notice what should and could be learned from experience and to find ways to help the organization capitalize on that learning potential. By facilitating a shift in mindset and culture, along with changes in strategy, process, and roles, the talent management function can improve the process of attracting and retaining talent, and developing leaders.



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Cindy McCauley is a senior fellow at the CCL in Greensboro. She designs and manages R&D projects, coaches action-learning teams, writes for multiple audiences, and is a frequent speaker at professional conferences. As a result of her research and applied work, she is an advocate for using on-the-job experience as a central leader development strategy, for seeing leadership as a product of the collective, and for integrating constructive-developmental theories of human growth into leader development practice. Cindy codeveloped two of CCL's assessment tools, Benchmarks and the Job Challenge Profile, and coedited three books for talent development professionals: The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development (Jossey-Bass, 2010), Experience-Driven Leader Development (Wiley, 2013), and Using Experience to Develop Leadership Talent, (Jossey-Bass, 2014). Her most recent book, Change Now! Five Steps to Better Leadership (CCL, 2014) focuses on crafting and enacting development plans.

Milynn Swofford is a senior faculty member with the CCL's Colorado Springs campus. Leveraging her extensive business experience and expert knowledge in the fields of management and leadership, organizational development, and talent management, she facilitates executive education programs as well as designs custom leadership solutions to engage and drive individual, group, and organizational performance. Her focus is on the complex work of enterprise leadership and its key responsibilities of strategy setting, culture building, and talent management. Milynn effectively partners with clients across industries, conducting in-depth discovery in order to craft programs that meet organizational needs and advance talent. Prior to joining the Center for Creative Leadership, Milynn was senior director of Talent Management at ESPN, a segment of The Walt Disney Company. She also held senior talent and development roles with Johnson & Johnson, Bank of America, and Pfizer (formerly Wyeth).

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