

# Ultimate Guide to Leadership Development



## Reference Guide:

Build a  
Foundation for  
Leadership  
Development

Design Exceptional  
Leadership  
Development  
Experiences

Manage a  
Successful  
Leadership  
Development  
Program

Explore Moments  
of Leadership

## Everything You Need to Develop Better Leaders

### The Pressure Is on You to Develop Great Leaders

Talented employees are probably walking out your door right now because they can't stand their boss. Or their manager expects too much from them. Or maybe they want to leave a sinking ship, disillusioned by the company's leadership and direction.

And it's your job to fix it.

A monumental task? Yes. Impossible? No. That's why we've created the Ultimate Guide to Leadership Development. This guide has everything you need to build strong leaders who lead engaged teams. While we have a lot of instructional design and leadership development experts doing excellent research behind the scenes, this is not a whitepaper or research report. Rather, it is a practical guidebook based on our experience working with clients for five decades to successfully implement leadership development initiatives.

This guide is also designed with the understanding that you can't address every challenge at once. As you grow and build your leadership development program, this guide can help you create unique development experiences for leaders in all their big and small moments that can affect the impact of their leadership.

With the demands of leadership and leadership development constantly changing, this guide will continue to evolve. We will update it as we explore new practices in leadership development and encounter new questions from our clients.

If you have a burning question about leadership development, please send it our way at [info@ddiworld.com](mailto:info@ddiworld.com).



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## Explore the Contents



### Build a Foundation for Leadership Development

Like building a house, a solid foundation sets your leadership development initiative up for success. This section looks at key foundational elements such as creating a competency framework, linking development to business priorities, understanding instructional design principles, and building a pool of great leadership facilitators.



### Design Exceptional Leadership Development Experiences

The world of leadership development continues to evolve with new technologies and new approaches to development. This section highlights seven best practices to create effective leadership development initiatives today, tomorrow, and into the future.



### Manage a Successful Leadership Development Program

Don't fall into the trap of "build it and they will come." Invest in a high-impact approach to implementation that includes communication, manager support, engagement, and program kickoff.



### Explore Moments of Leadership

Ultimately, leadership development is there to prepare leaders for and support them through critical leadership moments. This section shares examples of how to align development content and approaches to key macro and micro leadership moments.

## About DDI

DDI is a global leadership consulting firm that helps organizations hire, promote, and develop exceptional leaders. From first-time managers to C-suite executives, DDI is by leaders' sides, supporting them in every critical moment of leadership. Built on five decades of research and experience in the science of leadership, DDI's evidence-based assessment and development solutions enable millions of leaders around the world to succeed, propelling their organizations to new heights.

## About the Authors

**Janice Burns**, principal consultant at DDI, is a development designer who offers years of expertise to help organizations achieve their business goals through stronger leaders.

**Verity Creedy** is a director in DDI's product management team. Usually living in London, Verity has spent time working at five different DDI offices, including our US Headquarters.

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**Bruce Watt, Ph.D.** is a vice president of DDI's operations in Europe, India, and Australia. Based mainly in London, Bruce's role requires him to be very mobile, and he loves working with his teams and clients across such a diverse landscape of regions and cultures.

*And special thanks to DDI's senior content editors, Beth Almes and Nikki Dy-Liacco, for their help in making the Ultimate Guide to Leadership Development come alive.*



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## The State of Leadership Development

### Leadership Is Tough

Let's be clear from the start: Leadership is a tough job. And it's getting tougher. As companies struggle with retention, higher employee expectations, hybrid and remote workplaces, heavier workloads, and so much more, leaders are bearing the brunt of these challenges.

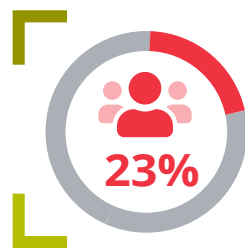
But in the face of these challenges, many methods for supporting and developing leaders aren't holding up.

In fact, DDI's *Global Leadership Forecast* research, which has examined leadership trends and challenges for two decades, has uncovered an alarming trend. In the [most recent forecast](#), just 23% of leaders rated their leadership development as high quality, a significant drop from previous forecasts. In most industries, this low customer feedback score is cause for great concern.

Here's what we know about the current state of leadership development:

- Leaders feel unprepared for the challenges of their roles.
- Organizations struggle to find and develop a healthy pipeline of leaders.
- Leaders at all levels feel increasingly overwhelmed, confused, and stressed about their roles.
- Leaders don't have enough time to dedicate to development, needing to focus on only the right development they need in the moment.
- While HR wants to offer more development opportunities, they struggle to find the time and resources to devote to it, both within their own departments and among leaders.

If you're struggling with these issues at your organization, you're in good company. When we talk with our clients about the current state of leadership development, they share the same set of common issues. But with our own experience working alongside our clients who are top professionals in the field, we've created some foundational principles that can help you make measurable progress toward overcoming these challenges.



Only 23% of leaders rated  
their leadership development  
as high quality.

DDI, *Global Leadership Forecast 2021*



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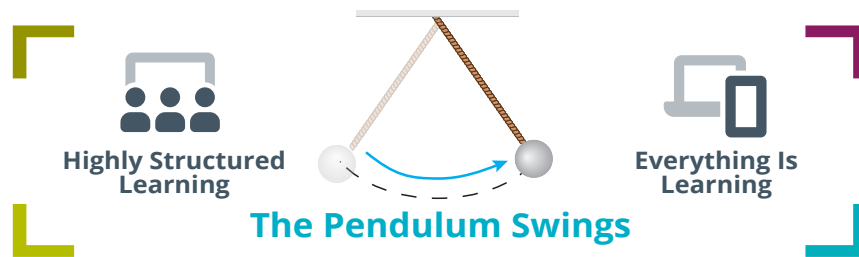
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## The Pendulum of Leadership Development

Most HR and learning professionals are aware of the shortcomings of leadership development programs. Additionally, most agree about what would make a program successful.

But while well-versed in theory, they often struggle to bring their vision to life. In fact, data reported in the *Harvard Business Review* suggests that barely 10% of the \$200 billion annual outlay for corporate training and development in the U.S. delivers concrete results.

At DDI, we like to visualize some of these different approaches for leadership development spread across a spectrum, with a pendulum swinging between extremes on either side. On the left, we think of very traditional approaches—in person, classroom-based, highly structured group learning. On the right are more free-flowing approaches—unstructured, self-driven, largely digital microlearning. And of course, several methods fall somewhere in between.



Working with limited resources, HR and L&D teams feel like they have to pick one approach, often forcing the pendulum to either of the extremes.

For example, pre-pandemic, a lot of companies wanted only traditional, in-person, classroom learning. But the pandemic brought most in-person programs to a grinding halt.

Some reacted by stopping development altogether, losing their program's momentum. Others swung to the other extreme of the pendulum, abandoning a structured approach in favor of giving leaders access to online learning libraries to peruse on their own.

Of course, neither approach satisfied anyone.

Companies that weathered the pandemic better had the resources to diversify their efforts, leveraging both sides of the pendulum based on organizational and individual learner needs. For example, they might have created custom virtual classroom sessions for targeted, critical groups of people, while also offering online courses to give learners real-time access to content when solving for a leadership challenge.

## Finding the Center: A Consistent Leadership Language

As companies swing back and forth on the pendulum, they often struggle to source content that matches the different modalities, approaches, and purposes of different moments. In many cases, they may need to combine materials created in-house with several vendors.

As a result, leaders may receive mixed messages. Leadership development content from various sources will likely have different underlying leadership philosophies, approaches, and solutions. And that could translate into a hodgepodge of leadership models—and taught behaviors.





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As companies seek to offer a diverse range of learning options, they need to ensure that they do so with a clear definition of their leadership language and culture. Throughout this guide, we'll show you how to leverage a wide range of learning modalities and tools, while tying them together with a powerful foundation that defines your leadership culture and meets your critical business goals.



Make development  
a way of work.

## Meeting Leaders in Motion

It can be tough to create a singular leadership language and culture when you feel like the pendulum is swinging out of control, and you have to constantly adapt just to survive. But we need to be prepared for constant change moving forward and meet our leaders in motion.

Throughout this guide, we'll talk about designing leadership experiences that meet your leaders in [critical leadership moments](#).

These moments can be transformative, like learning a [new role](#) or [strategizing to achieve a new business priority](#). We call these macro moments, and they happen when leaders need to master brand-new skills (and fast!) to perform on the job. They also likely need help from others in these moments—whether for coaching, peer feedback, or practice.

The other type of critical leadership moments are micro moments. These challenges occur during a typical workday. They include situations like tough performance conversations, resolving team conflicts, and even informal conversations with direct reports. While these small moments might seem insignificant at the time, they can have a profound impact on their team's engagement and performance.

At the heart of effective leadership development is a commitment to support leaders in motion, both in the big and small moments of leadership. **You're not making leadership development "something else" leaders have to do. You are making leadership development a way of work.**

## Make Development a Way of Work

How can you start making development a way of work? Here are several foundational principles that should underly your strategy:

1. Leadership development needs to be a career-long endeavor of constant improvement, not one-time events.
2. Development must be personalized to leaders' needs to maximize the effectiveness of the time they invest in their development.



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3. Leadership development must be both proactive to build leaders' broad skill sets as well as just-in-time to help them face specific challenges.
4. Development cannot be theory alone. Leaders need to be able to apply their new skills on the job in a way that's observable to others.
5. Leadership development must be applicable to leaders' current needs to earn their focus and practice.

It may seem daunting. But leadership development is fundamental to the success of the entire organization. With a deeply thoughtful approach, you can make serious strides to improve leadership quality in your organization.

### Leadership Development for Every Moment

As you read this guide, we ask that you keep the idea of the pendulum in mind. Ask yourself some key questions:

- How are you helping your leaders make development a way of work? Are you helping them develop and practice essential leadership skills as well as giving them on-demand development to meet their needs in the moment?
- Are you offering consistency (i.e., models, underlying principles, behavioral examples, etc.) across your development approaches? Do you have a central approach that creates a consistent leadership language and culture across all of your leaders?
- How are you building the careers and capabilities of rising leaders? Do you have a steady flow of talent through the pipeline?



You're not making leadership "something else" leaders have to do. You are making leadership development a way of work.



# Build a Foundation for Leadership Development



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## Set Up Your Leadership Programs for Success

Imagine building a house without a blueprint or solid foundation. There's a pretty good chance you won't get the house you were hoping for. And without a solid foundation, cracks and other issues will quickly start to appear. The same applies to building a foundation for leadership development.

It can be tempting to jump right into building content and resources for your leadership programs. But having a solid foundation for leadership development helps you maximize the impact and sustainability of your leadership development initiatives.

In this section, we'll explore several key foundational elements to help you build a successful leadership development program.

First, we'll guide you through connecting your program to your organization's key business priorities. Then we'll help you build a framework that links those strategic priorities to the behaviors your leaders need to demonstrate. Finally, we'll walk you through the elements of instructional design and facilitation to help you deliver a successful program.

These foundational elements are key to helping you shape a clear and intentional leadership culture. With a strong foundation for leadership development, you create a common leadership language across your company. Every leader, regardless of level, will know what's expected of them and what they can expect from each other. And that's how you can begin to create clear and measurable change.

### Identify Your Business Drivers

*This section shows you how to link your development activities and tools to the critical strategic and cultural priorities of your business.*

### Build Your Leadership Competency Framework

*Competencies are at the heart of an effective leadership development strategy. They define the needs of leaders at different levels aligned to your business priorities. This section shows you how to build an effective and relevant competency framework.*

### Adopt Leader-First Instructional Design Principles

*This section introduces a set of design principles that meet the needs of the modern learner. It also provides tips to maximize the instructional quality and impact of your programs.*

### Invest in Great Leadership Facilitators

*Facilitators continue to play a critical role in leadership development. This section shares tips and best practices for identifying and developing great leadership facilitators.*



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## Identify Your Business Drivers

### Context Is the Missing Link

One of the biggest barriers to successful leadership development is a missing link between the skills leaders are learning and the business context. This missing link can be resolved by identifying business drivers.

Yes, certain leadership skills—communication, delegation, coaching, etc.—are universal. But you, your stakeholders, and your leaders still need to know the “why” behind how these skills move your business forward.



“Sometimes your greatest strength can emerge as a weakness if the context changes.”

**-Harsha Bhogle**  
Cricket commentator, journalist

At DDI, we call the “why” your business drivers. And they’re the first step to identifying and prioritizing the key skills you want to build in any leadership development program.

### Identifying Your Business Drivers

DDI defines business drivers as the top three to five most critical leadership challenges that leaders must conquer to drive the strategic and cultural priorities of the organization.

Depending on the scope of your leadership development program, you may be identifying the business drivers of your entire organization. Or you might be looking at the business drivers for a particular business unit, function, or department.

Some examples of business drivers include:



**Engage  
Employees**



**Facilitate  
Product  
Innovation**



**Create a  
Customer-  
Focused  
Culture**



**Improve  
Profitability**

While it’s ideal to have well-rounded leaders, the reality is that few leaders are good at everything. For example, a leader who excels at driving down costs might struggle with innovation. The question is: Are your leaders prepared for what you need them to do next?

That’s why your goal should be to prioritize business drivers that best serve your organization. It’s tempting to say that it’s *all* important. But identifying key behaviors will help you define your leadership culture.



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## Connect Business Drivers to Competencies

It's helpful to prioritize a few key strategies. But strategy is useless unless you bring it to life through leader behavior. That's why we build three key components into each business driver:

- 1. A definition:** The definition describes the essence of what you're trying to accomplish. One person's definition of "building customer relationships" might not be the same as another's. It's important to get on the same page up front.
- 2. Related competencies:** What are the behaviors your leaders need to show to achieve the goal? In many cases, you may have primary competencies that are essential to success as well as secondary competencies. Secondary competencies may not be the area for initial focus but may come into play later.
- 3. Related personality patterns:** Personality patterns are more important at higher levels of leadership than at lower levels. But it may still be relevant to think about personality aspects that enable or derail a particular behavior. Leaders may benefit from awareness about how their personality impacts their key behaviors.

Here's an example of how business drivers can connect to the competencies and personality patterns you're seeking in your leaders:

### BUSINESS DRIVER Build Strategic Partnerships and Relationships

#### Definition

Builds strategic alliances and partnerships with other leaders inside the organization to collaboratively execute business strategies.

#### Competencies

##### Primary:

- Cultivating Networks and Partnerships
- Strategic Influence

##### Secondary:

Compelling Communication

#### Personality Patterns

##### Enabling:

- Strong interpersonal relationships
- Even-tempered, calm in a crisis

##### Derailing:

- Poor interpersonal relationships
- Difficulty building trust, emotionally detached

Competencies define the behaviors that power your business drivers and link your leadership development strategy to your business strategy. So it's important to have an effective leadership competency model with clearly defined and relevant competencies.



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## Build Your Leadership Competency Framework

### What Does Great Leadership Look Like?

Getting to the bottom of this question involves building a leadership competency framework. Without a framework, how can you evaluate your leaders? And more importantly, how can leaders evaluate themselves?

Building a plan for great leadership depends on identifying the behaviors and competencies that leaders need to show.

A leadership competency framework helps you to clearly define your leadership goals and how they will enable your organization to succeed. It also creates a common leadership language that aligns the expectations and actions of leaders at all levels and roles. Leaders know what is expected of them and what they can expect from others. Ultimately, this common leadership language drives consistent behaviors and helps to shape your company culture.

At DDI, we define **five key elements** that make a great competency framework:

1. Built on your business strategy (see previous section on [Business Drivers](#))
2. Focused on well-defined competencies based on observable behaviors
3. Differentiated by level
4. Operationalized
5. Timely

### Key Elements of a Great Competency Framework



### What Is a Competency?

A [competency](#) is a cluster of specific behaviors and abilities—interpersonal skills, leadership skills, business management skills, and/or personal attributes—that define effective performance in a role.

Leadership competencies may seem easy to understand conceptually, but leadership doesn't happen inside one's head. It happens when leaders successfully influence the attitudes and behaviors of others.



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## The Characteristics of Great Competencies

Strong competencies have the following characteristics:

<b>Clearly defined</b>	Many competencies offer broad definitions, but don't get specific about exactly what the competency looks like in practice.
<b>Behavioral</b>	You need to define the behaviors a leader should use to perform the competency.
<b>Observable and measurable</b>	Behaviors related to the competency need to be observable and easy to measure so leaders can receive feedback on their performance of the competency.
<b>Usable in numerous talent management processes</b>	Competencies need to be consistent across processes, including <a href="#">hiring</a> , promotion decisions, <a href="#">assessments</a> , and <a href="#">development</a> . Without consistency, it's hard to measure competency mastery and progress.
<b>Provide a framework for <a href="#">coaching</a> and <a href="#">feedback</a></b>	Team members should be able to give specific feedback about how someone is performing actions based on behaviors outlined in the competency.
<b>Appropriately specific</b> (if not too broad or too narrow)	It's important to be specific enough to know what a behavior looks like, but not so specific that the behavior is limited to a particular role or function.





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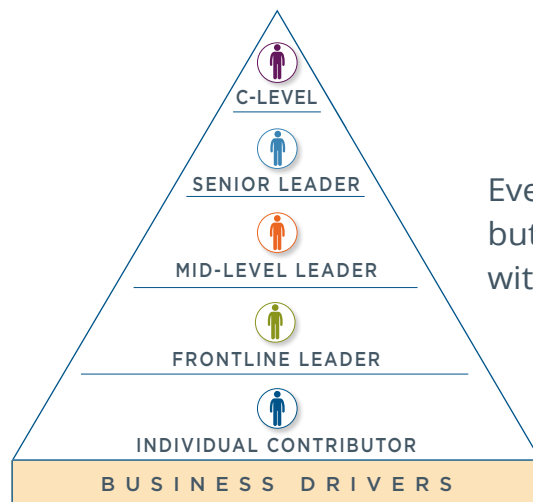
For these reasons, we put a lot of emphasis on the key actions of a competency. Here's an example of a DDI leadership competency:

 <b>Competency:</b> Building Partnerships	 <b>Definition:</b> Developing and leveraging relationships within and across work groups to achieve results.
 <b>Key Actions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Seeks opportunities to build relationships</b>—Proactively builds effective working relationships with those who have the knowledge, experience, resources, or influence to advance work goals.</li> <li>• <b>Clarifies shared goals</b>—Exchanges information about the situation/task to determine mutually beneficial goals and outcomes; identifies issues and concerns; summarizes to check understanding.</li> <li>• <b>Develops others' and own ideas</b>—Contributes own ideas and expands on others' ideas.</li> <li>• <b>Facilitates agreement</b>—Gains commitment from partners to support ideas or take action; uses sound rationale to explain value of actions; confirms agreements, next steps (who will do what by when), needed resources and support, and how to track progress.</li> <li>• <b>Supports partners</b>—Offers valuable information, resources, and/or time to accomplish win-win outcomes; places higher priority on group goals than on own goals.</li> <li>• <b>Involves others</b>—Asks others for their opinions and ideas to gain their support when clarifying the situation, developing solutions, exploring needed resources, and committing to action.</li> <li>• <b>Maintains and enhances self-esteem</b>—Shows others that they are valued by acknowledging their specific contributions, successes, and skills.</li> </ul>	

## Differentiating Your Leadership Competency Framework by Level

One of the big questions we hear from clients is whether they need to differentiate their competency framework by leadership level. The answer? Yes, but only where it matters.

For example, both a [frontline leader](#) and CEO need to communicate effectively. But how they'll each use communication skills in their roles looks very different. It's critical that you define those differences. When companies have a "one size fits all" competency framework, it limits their ability to leverage the competencies—whether for selection, [succession](#), or [development](#) purposes.



Every level is different,  
but **don't** differentiate  
without reason.

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On the flip side, some organizations try to force differentiation where there is none. For example, they may feel the need to define “Coaching and Developing Others” differently at the **executive** level versus **mid-level** leader level. But the reality is that the behaviors you’re looking for when it comes to coaching may be exactly the same at both levels.

Our advice? Make sure your competency framework is differentiated by leadership level without forcing artificial differentiation. There are some legitimate differences by level.

So yes, it’s important that you differentiate your competencies based on level. But only when it matters.

### Sample Cascading Framework Excerpt

Individual Contributor	Frontline Leader	Mid-Level Leader	Senior-Level Leader
			Establishing Strategic Direction
	Inspiring Others	Inspiring Others	Selling the Vision
Collaboration	Building Partnerships	Cultivating Partnerships	Cultivating Partnerships
Work Standards	Execution	Driving Execution	Driving Execution
Adaptability	Facilitating Change	Facilitating Change	Leading Change
Decision Making	Decision Making	Operational Decision Making	Strategic Decision Making
Building Customer Loyalty	Customer Focus	Customer Focus	Customer Focus

### How to Operationalize Your Leadership Competency Framework

The world’s best competency framework is useless if it sits around collecting dust.

What makes a framework effective is how you use it consistently across your leadership and talent systems.

But you don’t need to try to operationalize your competency framework all at one time. Be intentional about where you start and then work your way to other areas.

When choosing where to start, consider the following:

- What areas have the highest priority to clarify the desired competencies for success?
- Where do you have momentum?
- Where do you have excitement and buy-in from stakeholders to embrace a competency model?



In this guide, we’re primarily focused on how competencies come to life in learning and development. But be aware that building your leadership competency framework into your development efforts may have an effect on other areas of talent management. And by integrating your leadership competency framework within your larger talent management model, you will see the highest return on your investment.



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## How Often Should You Update Your Leadership Competency Framework?

Once you've got your leadership competency framework, [how often do you need to update it?](#)

There's no single right answer to that question.

We've worked with clients who update their frameworks like clockwork every year. We've also worked with companies that haven't looked at their competency model in a decade.

Generally speaking, you need to change your competency model as your business strategy changes. Triggers may include mergers and acquisitions, digital [transformation](#), significant shifts in business strategy, or even a global pandemic.

The point is to ask, "How are we responding? What changes are we making to the business? How does this affect our culture and what we need our leaders to do?"

If you don't re-align your framework regularly, you may find yourself without a "North Star" to guide your leadership development strategy.

## A Holistic View of Success

Competencies are at the heart of an effective leadership development initiative, but there are other elements that contribute to success in leadership roles. These are captured in what DDI calls a [Success Profile<sup>SM</sup>](#). A Success Profile includes four key elements of success: knowledge, experience, competencies, and personal attributes.

From a development perspective, most of your focus may be on competencies, but there are times when you might incorporate other elements as part of a comprehensive development plan. For example, you might suggest leaders access certain experiences based on the Success Profile. You might also help leaders understand how their own personality attributes align with those identified for a particular role or level. The Success Profile can act as a powerful blueprint for both [assessment](#) and [development](#).





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## Summary: Use Your Framework to Get Started

We've shared a lot of best practices in this section about creating a solid leadership competency framework. We know—it's a lot.

What's important is to start building the framework to clarify the goals of your leadership development efforts. You don't have to spend years building it. Rather, build it and adjust.

✗ Don't	✓ Do
Just let your model be an "HR thing"	Integrate your competency model with your business strategy
Use broad, unclear competencies	Focus on actionable behaviors
Force-fit competencies by level	Differentiate by level, only where significant
Spend too much time creating your framework	Identify your triggers to update
Let your model sit on the shelf	Operationalize your model into everything you do



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## Adopt Leader-First Instructional Design Principles

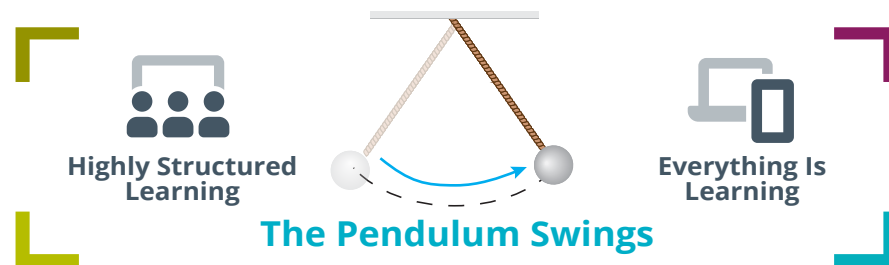
### Are Instructional Design Principles in Vogue These Days?

Remember the [pendulum](#) of leadership development we mentioned in the beginning of this guide? This metaphor becomes relevant again when you consider instructional design.

In the past, instructional design favored the left side of that pendulum. Based on proven techniques, instructional design professionals would carefully craft learning experiences that followed specific principles and rules for learning. Often, this approach also relied on a highly knowledgeable instructor, or the “teacher knows best” approach.

While highly structured learning delivers a lot of clear benefits, it may feel inflexible. This “one size fits all” approach often doesn’t allow enough room for personalized or in-the-moment learning.

As a result, companies began swinging toward the other extreme. Abandoning design completely, they adopted a completely unstructured approach where everything is learning. Articles. [Podcasts](#). Videos. [Short courses](#). All of these count as learning!



And to some extent, that’s true. Everything we do on a daily basis contributes to learning. But the question is whether these self-driven experiences deliver real change. **Learning only matters if it impacts leaders’ behavior.**

Rather than focus on either extreme, a better approach is to apply foundational pillars that place the leader’s needs front and center.

Whether you’re building your own experiences or purchasing content from a vendor, it’s important to be confident in the foundations behind the development approach. These foundations should be applicable whether you’re designing a multi-day leadership program or a 2-minute video.

In this section, we’ll share the instructional design principles that DDI uses to guide our approach to leadership development.



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## Relevant

Great instructional design puts leaders' needs front and center, ensuring that what they learn is deeply relevant to their challenges.

### Design Principle #1: Relevant

Too often, leaders are presented with frameworks and situations that aren't immediately relevant to the challenges they face. Effective learning must address real situations and engage leaders on a practical level.

Leaders need to feel connected to the purpose of an organization. They want to see how their development relates to values, strategic priorities, and broader business purposes.

Building relevance into content and experiences includes several simple but profound elements:

- **Bringing in the Organization Culture:** Find ways to incorporate the leaders' current situation by tying concepts to the company values or current initiatives. Ask leaders, "Does this work at our organization? If not, why?"
- **Leveraging Learner Scenarios:** When introducing a topic, ask leaders to provide examples or scenarios that are relevant for them. Prepared examples can work, but give leaders the option to suggest others. Make it easy to tailor exercises and pull in the leaders' workplace situations.
- **Asking About Learner Needs:** Ask leaders what challenges they face most often. Where do they need the most help now?



## Personalized

Every minute leaders spend on learning needs to be meaningful to the individual. That's why leaders are clamoring for deeper personalization in learning.

### Design Principle #2: Personalized

Leaders have limited time to spend on their development. So it's essential that every minute spent learning is meaningful. That's why personalization is critical—and why leaders are clamoring for it.

Many learning and development practitioners struggle to define what personalized learning really means (and we'll talk about this more [later in this guide](#)). Does it mean that every leader has their own digital learning path? Does personalization mean that content is based on individual [assessment](#) results? Does it mean recommending content based on what a leader engaged with previously? Or does it mean serving leaders content that maximizes their development?



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**Personalized learning** can take all of those forms. At DDI, we believe that personalized leadership development is about meeting leaders in the moment, recognizing their unique needs in light of the challenges they are facing in their work.

What personalized learning is **NOT** is a free-for-all, with every leader learning different models, philosophies, and behaviors. Nor is a personalized learning solution an artificial intelligence (AI) engine that recommends content (although these AI engines can be a huge help!).

Rather, personalized learning is a way of using data and insight to create targeted, personal experiences that resonate deeply with leaders based on their personality, experiences, preferences, and position in the organization. In short, personalization is at the heart of **making development a way of work**.



## Immersive

Immersive learning is the creation of a complete environment where people can interact and perform tasks as they would in real life. Immersion is essential for people to practice and apply their skills.

### Design Principle #3: Immersive

Quick pop quiz: Is **immersive learning** the same thing as virtual reality?

This is the number-one question we hear when we talk about immersive learning. Virtual reality is an incredibly powerful type of immersive learning. But there are other ways to provide an immersive learning experience.

Immersive learning is learning by doing. Learners become active participants in the learning process by directly engaging with situations and challenges they can relate to.

While the pedagogic value of an immersive learning program is strong, it also contributes to learning that is absorbing and satisfying. This is important in a world where leaders are constantly exposed to a full range of engaging experiences outside of formalized learning.

Emerging technologies like virtual reality can be important tools. As we've worked with leaders in VR experiences, we've found that they're useful for creating incredibly effective, empathy-generating experiences. VR also offers a powerful opportunity for realistic practice of leadership skills in a safe space, free from self-consciousness. And leaders love it.





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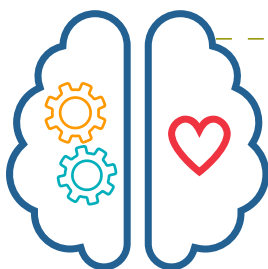
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More traditional simulations (sometimes found in assessment centers) can also provide deeply immersive experiences. These “day in the life” opportunities allow leaders to demonstrate their skills in a realistic scenario, but without the consequences of real life.

At the same time, leaders also place a high value on the more traditional approach of real-time practice of leadership skills such as coaching or delegating with a peer. Learning with and from others satisfies the strong need we all have to connect.

When it comes to immersive experiences, it’s not just about using a specific technology or singular approach. What’s important is that leaders have the opportunity to take a step back and focus deeply on developing the skills that make them better leaders.



## Human

Every person brings their heads and hearts to their work, their role, and every interaction. Leaders need to recognize that their work is deeply human.

### Design Principle #4: Human

This instructional design principle might seem the most obvious, and yet it’s often the most overlooked. In the general zeal to help leaders be better, it’s easy to forget that they are people who are dealing with people. Many of the challenges leaders must manage elicit an intellectual or emotional response—or both.

Leaders bring their heads and hearts to their work, to their role, and to every interaction. Each has their own strengths and weaknesses to manage. And they do the best they can to deal with the expected and unexpected challenges and opportunities that fill each day.

For this reason, leadership development must connect at a human level. At DDI, we accomplish this in several ways throughout our learning design:

- **Engaging the heart.** Evaluate learning content in terms of how and where it causes learners to feel emotion. This can be done through video, candid discussions, real examples, or other methods of engaging leaders in a safe learning environment.
- **Tapping into frustrations.** It’s common for leaders to encounter problems when trying to apply new skills. It’s important to surface challenges and talk about what made those skills difficult to apply.
- **Employing storytelling.** Facilitators should share examples from their own experiences to illustrate points and encourage learners to do the same. You can bring points to life with scenarios and powerful stories.



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## Trusted

In a world driven by search engines, leaders need to know that the development they are getting is credible and effective, not just the most popular.

### Design Principle #5: Trusted

The last instructional design principle is one that is becoming increasingly important in a search-engine-driven world: trusted content.

When you have a question about something, what is your first reaction? Do you go straight to the web? It's quick and convenient, right? In just seconds, you can click through articles, images, videos, and more that can likely answer your question.

But how do you know which content is credible? What do you know about the expertise of the person that created it? How do you know that the answer you receive is correct? Or that the approach recommended is the right fit for you?






You can't compete with the internet or prevent leaders from searching for solutions. But it is important that leaders receive **formal development** that is based on a scientific, data-driven approach. They also need to know that the development you provide will help them build skills and become a better leader. It should be more than a few quick tips to help with the issue at hand.

Even better—what if they could search real-time within your organization for the solutions they need when they have a real-time problem? What if they could get solutions aligned with your organizational vision and their needs? This is what we strive for when we think about meeting leaders in the moment.

### Applying Instructional Design Principles

Every element of learning in your program may not meet all five instructional design principles. And that's OK. Some may meet two or three, while others meet all five.

The most important thing is that you're clear on what your instructional design principles are and how each element of your program meets them. If parts of your program start to fall outside your instructional design principles, ask whether they are really supporting your overall strategy and goals.

 <b>Relevant</b>	 <b>Personalized</b>	 <b>Immersive</b>	 <b>Human</b>	 <b>Trusted</b>
Connect with my challenges and organization	Highlight what the unique value is for me	Let me experience the challenge	Help me feel the emotional connection to the situation	I'm going to get value out of this



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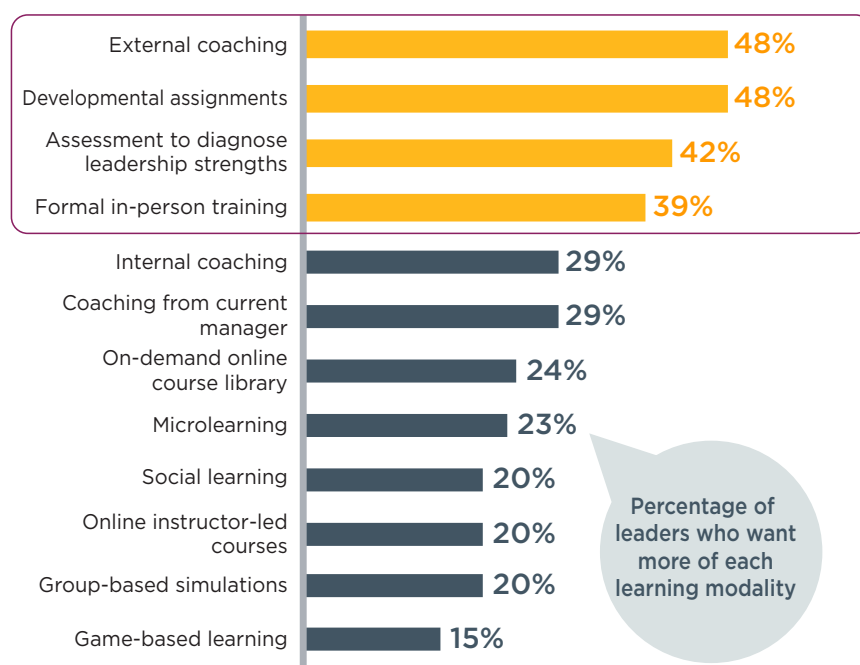
## Invest in Great Leadership Facilitators

### How Important Are Great Facilitators for Effective Leadership Development?

Have digital learning options made the human element of leadership development obsolete? We've seen zero evidence that this is the case, which is why it's still so important to invest in great leadership facilitators for live learning experiences.

In fact, leaders consistently tell us that they want more human interaction in their learning. They want more coaching. More developmental assignments with feedback. And also more formal in-person training. So yes, they are eager to have great facilitators guide them on their leadership development journey!

### How 15,000 Global Leaders Want to Learn



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### Who Should Facilitate Your Group Training Sessions?

The question of “who” should facilitate courses is a big one for many companies.

- Should they rely on the expertise of a vendor’s external facilitators?
- Is it better to certify people in the company’s training department to deliver internal training?
- Should they train people in different parts of the business to facilitate these sessions?

There’s no easy answer to any of these questions, as a lot of it depends on your company culture and budget. Of course, the first question to answer is a practical one: Do you have the bandwidth internally to facilitate?



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For companies that have lean training departments or are juggling multiple initiatives, the clear answer is no. If they wait until their own people have time to facilitate, they might have to put off their development program for a while.

In that case, the answer is easy: use external facilitators.

Additionally, many companies choose to leverage external leadership facilitators because they don't have and can't build internal facilitator expertise when they need it. Other companies choose to use external facilitators because their leaders respond better to the "outside" expert and are more receptive to their coaching and feedback.



### Inspired and Life-Changing

"I personally trained nearly 1,000 managers from all over...during this time, I have been stopped in malls, airports, hotels, and in the street by scores of past participants and thanked for DDI-inspired, life-changing experiences."

- DDI-certified facilitator in the professional services industry, as published in *SPARK!*

### Leveraging Internal Facilitators

In many companies, however, it's important to train and leverage in-house leadership facilitators. Internal facilitators understand the challenges their leaders are facing and present learning that is rooted in the context of the organization. They also may have more scheduling flexibility. Lastly, using internal resources eliminates the out-of-pocket expense of external facilitators.

If you choose to leverage internal resources, you might want to extend your reach beyond the typical HR or L&D departments and tap into your business leaders to facilitate or co-facilitate leadership development training. Internal facilitators are closer to leaders and better positioned to provide [post-training support and reinforcement](#).

While their intentions will be good, leaders often struggle to step into the role of facilitator. They might be able to carve out the time to facilitate the training but fail to schedule adequate time to prepare. And few do it often enough to "wing it." They might be close to the situations that learners are dealing with but lack the skill to handle [sensitive or uncomfortable discussions](#) in the classroom.

Additionally, even when leaders are great facilitators, their positional authority might prevent learners from sharing their experiences and exposing weaknesses or lack of confidence.

Keep in mind that facilitators have a dramatic impact on the effectiveness and impact of the program. An ineffective facilitator who does not create an atmosphere of [psychological safety](#) can negatively affect learning, even with the best training models and content.

Conversely, great facilitators can take learning and practice to a much higher level, helping participants achieve those incredible "Aha!" moments that stay with them for the rest of their careers. So choose wisely!



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	✓ Advantages	✗ Disadvantages
<b>External Facilitators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relieve overburdened HR teams</li> <li>Bring objectivity and external perspective</li> <li>Content and facilitation experts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher cost</li> <li>Less familiar with the company's culture</li> <li>Not available to provide post-training support</li> </ul>
<b>Internal HR Facilitators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can more easily reinforce company values and culture</li> <li>May be able to schedule faster and reach more people</li> <li>Lower expense</li> <li>Available to provide post-training support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Might be perceived as less credible than external facilitators</li> <li>Shifting HR priorities can disrupt or delay planned deliveries</li> </ul>
<b>Internal Business Leaders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Closest to the everyday problems experienced by leaders</li> <li>Builds in manager support for leadership development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants less open when senior leaders deliver training</li> <li>Difficult to carve out adequate time for prep and facilitation</li> </ul>

## Who Should You Consider for Internal Facilitators?

If you decide to use internal facilitators, we suggest using a common set of criteria to choose them:

- **Organizational Awareness:** Does this person have knowledge of systems, situations, pressures, and culture inside the organization to identify potential problems and opportunities? Are they able to perceive the impact and implications of decisions on other parts of the organization?
- **Facilitation of Learning:** Can this person create an environment that fosters learning? Can they use appropriate interpersonal styles and techniques to facilitate learning and gain commitment?
- **Facilitating Change:** Does this person encourage others to seek opportunities for different and innovative approaches to addressing problems and opportunities? Can they facilitate the implementation and acceptance of organizational change?
- **Planning and Organizing:** Can this person create plans to get work done efficiently?
- **Communication:** Is this person capable of clearly conveying information and ideas? Can they do so in a way that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message?
- **Continuous Learning:** Is this person a champion for continuous learning? Do they regularly create and take advantage of learning opportunities?
- **Building Strategic Working Relationships:** Does this person develop collaborative relationships to facilitate the accomplishment of work goals?
- **Adaptability:** Is this person comfortable adjusting to work within new structures, processes, requirements, or cultures? Can they support others in using leadership skills to help them maintain effectiveness during major work changes?
- **Motivational Fit:** Does this person find it personally satisfying to facilitate others' learning?

Every leadership facilitator candidate might not meet all of these criteria. But we urge you to consider each one carefully.



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## The 4 Competencies for Leadership Facilitators

So what are the key skills that leadership facilitators need to demonstrate? Over the past five decades, we have this down to a science.

Every facilitator needs to show four key competencies and the key actions of each:



### 1. Facilitation of Learning

Lead learners through course concepts to accomplish course objectives by using appropriate facilitation techniques suited to the characteristics, experiences, and needs of the audience.

Facilitators demonstrate this skill by:

- Providing clear directions for learning activities and exercises.
- Explaining the purpose of the course content and its components.
- Using learning aids effectively.
- Presenting a road map of the course or unit.
- Making transitions.
- Summarizing key learning points.
- Explaining the benefits of the course and its content for the company, team members, or the learner.
- Demonstrating content knowledge.



### 2. Engaging Communication

Clearly convey and seek information and ideas in a way that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message.

Facilitators demonstrate this skill by:

- Holding audience attention.
- Providing and seeking examples and analogies.
- Sharing relevant business/industry, organizational, and personal context.
- Using appropriate verbal and nonverbal techniques.
- Acting as an advocate for the course and its components.



### 3. Guiding Learners

Provide timely guidance, coaching, and feedback to help learners understand content and strengthen their skills. Keep them moving through course activities in a timely, purposeful way.

Facilitators demonstrate this skill by:

- Providing timely coaching to learners.
- Appropriately redirecting learners.
- Using process skills, such as checking for understanding and making procedural suggestions, to move things forward.
- Managing time effectively.



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#### 4. Facilitator EQ (Emotional Intelligence)

Establish and sustain trusting relationships by accurately perceiving and interpreting your own and others' emotions and behavior. Additionally, use these insights to effectively manage your own response to situations and serve as a positive model.

Facilitators demonstrate this skill by:

- Managing emotional classroom situations.
- Maintaining or enhancing learners' self-esteem.
- Listening and responding to learners with empathy.
- Encouraging learner involvement.

These four competencies enable facilitators to create a safe learning environment, respond to learners' needs, and promote behavior change.

#### Expanding Facilitation Skills

Once you train your leadership facilitators in the four competencies outlined above, the next step is to practice. The more frequently they facilitate sessions, the better they get. They learn how to engage participants, manage their time, and become more confident in the classroom.

And don't forget: Always offer the opportunity for participants to give feedback to facilitators through workshop evaluations. This data can be used to recognize, motivate, and improve facilitators.

Over time, you might find that your facilitators need to build more advanced or new skills. These skills might include keeping up with advanced technologies, going deeper into certain topics, or adding new content or learning methods.

Here are a few areas where you might want to improve leadership facilitation skills over time:

- 1. Facilitating in a virtual classroom:** It's not quite the same as in-person learning. Facilitators need to make sure they are comfortable with the technology and have a strong virtual presence. They also need to develop a heightened ability to recognize and read nonverbal cues from participants. Developing this skill helps to ensure they are still meeting learners' needs.
- 2. Creating an inclusive environment, especially for discussions on tough topics:** As more companies bring diversity and inclusion to the forefront, facilitators need to be thoughtful about how they create psychological safety in the classroom. This is especially important for leading sessions on sensitive topics that might make learners uncomfortable or that elicit strong emotions.
- 3. Integrating virtual reality into learning:** New technologies such as virtual reality are creating a classroom revolution. Many facilitators need a booster to learn how to deal with the practical side of these new technologies. They also need to learn how to leverage tech experiences for deeper discussion in the classroom.

#### Great Facilitators Build Better Leaders

The bottom line? Facilitators are on a learning journey just like your leaders. The better they maintain their skills, the better they will be able to guide your leaders.





# Design Exceptional Leadership Development Experiences



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## 7 Best Practices for Maximizing the Impact of Leadership Development

Leadership development experiences need to focus on preparing and supporting leaders through their most [critical leadership moments](#). While every moment carries its own unique context, adopting a common set of best practices for leadership development gives you the elements to combine for the highest impact.

At the heart of every best practice is an unwavering focus on the leader. And this focus must also include the leader's context, their challenges, and their needs. This focus helps shape how you design and deliver the overall experience for your leaders.

Based on our work and research around the world, we have identified seven best practices for leadership development experiences that effectively deliver better business results. As you reimagine your leadership development program with these practices, you can better develop and support your leaders in the moments they need it most.

### Best Practice #1: Use Micro and Macro Learning Effectively

*What's the difference between micro and macro learning for leadership development? Learn how these learning approaches can be used for different development needs.*

### Best Practice #2: Blend Group and Self-Directed Leadership Development

*Self-directed leadership development can be incredibly effective, but there are some caveats to know to ensure this approach is successful.*

### Best Practice #3: Create Peer Learning Groups

*Leaders love to learn together. Understand the benefits of peer learning groups for leadership development and how to create effective peer learning sessions.*

### Best Practice #4: Leverage Tools for Personalized Leadership Development

*Leaders want personalized leadership development. But what is it? And how can technology be used to personalize learning?*

### Best Practice #5: Use Assessment for Development

*Leadership assessment is key to generating insight for development. Learn about different types of assessment and practical considerations for using assessment in leadership development experiences.*

### Best Practice #6: Employ Leadership Practice Tools

*"Practice makes perfect" certainly applies to leadership development. Learn what makes a good leadership practice tool and how to integrate them into your leadership programs.*

### Best Practice #7: Build in Feedback for Personal Development

*Feedback is key to personal development and growth. Get an overview of the different types of feedback and ways to build it into your leadership development experiences.*



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## Best Practice #1: Use Micro and Macro Learning Effectively

### Different Approaches for Different Needs

*"I love the content. But can you make it shorter?"* We get this request often from clients. Sometimes the answer is yes. And sometimes it's "You could, but you won't get the same results." It comes down to knowing the right moments to use micro and macro learning.

We understand the need to have more efficient approaches to leadership development. But as experts in the field, we also ask clients to consider the implication of using only short courses.

In fact, it's much like building any other skill or muscle. Can you build strong abs with just five minutes of exercise a day? Possibly, if you do the right exercises. But you won't see much progress if that's all you do. Combining those targeted exercises with broader healthy habits—regular activity, good nutrition, etc.—delivers better overall performance.

So what's the quickest way to develop leaders? We suggest clients reframe the question to: *How can I more effectively use micro and macro learning options to maximize the **efficiency** and **impact** of my leadership development efforts?*

We aren't going to tell you what the best learning method is or list methods in order of effectiveness. That would be like trying to pick the one best exercise. The magic is truly in the mix.

What we will do is give you an understanding of different methods and how you can use them to build effective leadership development that supports both [macro and micro moments of leadership](#).



### Micro and Macro Learning

**Microlearning** is a short burst of learning on a specific topic or skill, ideal for helping leaders sharpen their skills in the moment.

**Macrolearning** integrates multiple learning techniques to help leaders develop complete skills and address broad challenges over time.

### What Is Microlearning?

Microlearning is a short burst of learning on a specific topic or skill. Think of a quick game, a short video, a podcast, a short self-assessment, or even a 10-minute microcourse designed to help you boost a specific skill.

The term [microlearning was coined around 2009](#). However, the concept of breaking learning down into small chunks has been around for quite some time. While most microlearning options are in a digital format, you can also have offline methods and activities. For example, a paper job aid or five-minute activity can be a form of microlearning.



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Fundamentally, microlearning is any compressed format of learning that has a specific learning objective. That objective might be to:



## When Should I Use Microlearning?

Microlearning is ideal for reaching leaders quickly in a moment of need. Some examples of these moments might include:

- **Support for an immediate challenge:** Think of a leader who might need to have a conversation about poor performance, and may need just-in-time help to plan how to address the situation. They might quickly brush up on their skills using a microcourse or watch a short video on how to effectively have a tough conversation.
- **Reinforce concepts previously learned in a more in-depth course:** For example, you might offer a microcourse on [leading hybrid teams](#) after a leader goes through a full course on [team dynamics](#).
- **Explore complementary topics:** Microlearning is an ideal way to introduce related concepts to a core skill. For instance, leaders might watch a video or read a blog on [unconscious bias](#) to enhance training they received on interviewing job candidates.
- **Bring relevance to a topic:** Short learning formats can also help a leader go deeper to find how a topic is more relevant for them. For example, a short self-assessment is a type of microlearning that might help leaders understand how a topic is relevant to them and to identify their potential pitfalls. They can also retake assessments to determine whether they are improving and applying what they learn.

## The Pros and Risks of Microlearning

The promise of microlearning is strong: boost your skills with very little investment of time! What's not to love about that?

But that doesn't mean that microlearning is the panacea for all leadership development needs. There are some pros and risks associated with microlearning.

- PRO:** Cognitive science research shows that organizing learning content into smaller, bite-sized pieces can reduce the risk of [cognitive overload](#). Cognitive overload occurs when learners are presented with more information than they are capable of processing at once. Cognitive overload can lead to frustration, stress, disengagement, and [burnout](#).
- PRO:** Leaders love the variety, flexibility, and accessibility of microlearning. DDI's [Global Leadership Forecast 2021](#) found that a third of leaders want more microlearning than they are currently receiving. Giving leaders access to a well-organized and instructionally sound set of microlearning content can be incredibly empowering.
- PRO:** By its very nature, microlearning is faster to develop and easier to change. This makes it ideal for content areas that are likely to change more frequently.



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**RISK:** An unorganized and unstructured approach to microlearning can actually make things worse. Offering leaders free rein over a library of microlearning content can increase the amount of time leaders spend on learning (or at least searching for learning content). Additionally, leaders may feel more confused and frustrated as they try to make sense of all the pieces. The key is curation. How can you help leaders to navigate the microlearning content available to them?

**RISK:** It's hard to build complex knowledge and skills with microlearning alone. Microlearning isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Since it offers fast, effective, and engaging content, it's easy to want to use it for everything. But it's not an appropriate tool for teaching "macro" concepts that need significant focus and attention.

**RISK:** Access is important. It's one thing to have a library of good, quality microlearning content. It's another thing to put it in the hands of your leaders. Microlearning content must be easy to find and access. Today that means making content readily available on [easy-to-use platforms](#) that can be accessed across devices, including mobile.

### Behavior Change vs. "Behavior Do"

One of the biggest challenges with microlearning is how it supports leaders' behavior on the job. Are you trying to convey knowledge? Support long-term behavior change? Or give in-the-moment support?

As discussed earlier, microlearning can be a helpful tool to quickly share information or support long-term behavior change. But in today's business and leadership context, we deal with an immense amount of knowledge and information. And we don't always have the capacity to store all this knowledge for future reference.

So sometimes it is less about behavior change and more about "behavior do." "Behavior do" is guiding leaders through a particular moment. Deloitte describes this as "[learning in the flow of work](#)." It represents how we bring learning closer to moments.

This [concept](#) has been around for some time, but technology is quickly opening new ways to do it. With rapid advancements in mobile technology and artificial intelligence, it is possible to embed learning in the job. And this allows you to anticipate and respond to individual learning needs.

### An Example of "Behavior Do"

A great example of this concept in our day-to-day lives is GPS technology. GPS tells drivers how to get from point A to point B. It doesn't try to teach us the route. GPS also leverages AI and machine learning to collect and use data in real time to incorporate updates based on current road and traffic conditions. The goal is not to learn, but to do.

Leaders themselves have already embraced this concept. But the content and advice they search for and access may not always be reliable. Information returned as the top result on Google isn't necessarily accurate; it's simply highly optimized for web traffic. This is why using [trusted sources](#) is so important.



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Helping leaders perform, in addition to learning, is a key benefit of microlearning. Microlearning can be embedded in the job, minimizing the psychological and physical distance between work and learning. While it will always have an important role to play in leadership development, microlearning is opening new possibilities and opportunities that enable you to be by the side of leaders as they navigate **critical leadership moments**.

### What Is Macrolearning and When Should I Use it?

Macrolearning integrates multiple learning techniques and media to develop larger concepts and more complete skill areas such as coaching. This type of learning typically takes hours or days, rather than minutes.

Additionally, macrolearning is ideal for helping leaders during big moments of change, such as preparing leaders for a **first leadership job**. It is also perfect for preparing leaders across the organization to drive a **new strategic or cultural imperative**, like building a **coaching culture**.

As microlearning has grown in popularity, many L&D professionals wonder if it can replace macrolearning entirely. According to the *Global Leadership Forecast 2021*, the answer is no. Learners want a mix of micro and macro learning.

It makes sense. Leaders recognize that some skills take time to develop and demand a more intensive approach to development. This is where macrolearning shines.



Companies that use learning journeys are **2.9** times more likely to rate highly on leadership strength and **2.5** times more likely to be a top financial performer.

Source: DDI, *Global Leadership Forecast 2018*

### How Macrolearning Fits in a Learning Journey

While still using the **instructional design principles** discussed in the **Foundation section**, macrolearning uses a more structured approach to development often based around a learning journey.

A learning journey approach is based on the principle that behavior change takes time and is achieved through a series of integrated learning and development experiences on and off the job. It typically involves a combination of **assessment tools** and experiences (coaching, formal development, self-directed learning, reinforcement tools) to help individuals develop and apply their capabilities, attributes, and motivations. A **blended learning journey** involves a mix of online and offline activities.

Research continues to show that leaders still prefer formal professional development that gives them the opportunity to engage with peers to share examples, solve problems, and practice skills. While leaders are busy, they still want opportunities for focused development, which is ideal for microlearning.



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## How Microlearning Fits in a Learning Journey

Microlearning is not only for micro moments. It can and should be embedded in leadership development initiatives that support macro moments. Microlearning assets might be embedded in a learning journey before, during, and after more in-depth development experiences such as face-to-face or [virtual classroom](#) sessions.

For example, you might be looking to develop your leaders' coaching abilities. This process could start with a macrolearning experience that dives deep into a coaching model. Then this learning experience could be followed by opportunities to [practice concepts with peers](#).

After establishing a foundation in coaching, learners could build on the concepts with short bursts of learning for skill enhancement. These might include a microcourse about asking the right questions, online practice simulations, videos from company executives sharing their coaching experience, or case studies about improving team skills. The goal of this content should be to apply new skills on the job and drive behavior change.

Leadership development professionals can also use microlearning to develop content that supports individual needs across a learning journey. For example, after a formal workshop, a series of brief skill practices tailored to meet each learner's needs can reinforce concepts as needed. Alternatively, leaders might dive into specific areas based on [feedback](#) received from peers or short assessments.

In each example, the key is to incorporate two to three bite-sized microlearning activities to tackle the larger topic.

For examples of how DDI uses a mix of micro and macro learning activities to tackle different learning needs, refer to the section [Explore Moments of Leadership](#).

## Micro and Macro Learning Together Achieve More

So should you be focused on microlearning or macrolearning? The answer is clearly both, and the appropriate mix will depend on your own context, situation, and goals.

The key is not to be distracted by the appeal of new technologies and approaches without fully appreciating the role and value that each can bring to your leadership development experiences.

### An Example Hybrid Learning Program



#### Macro Learning

Full courses to develop skills

- *Communication: Connect Through Conversations*
- *Leading Teams: Achieve More Together*
- *Executing Strategy at the Frontline*



#### Micro Learning

Short microcourses

- *Leading Hybrid Teams*
- *Leading Virtual Meetings*
- *Building Trust in Your Work Environment*
- *Ensuring Your Team Avoids Burnout*
- *Finding Control During Change*

Application tools

- Team Charter
- "Empathy Is Boss" microgame



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## Best Practice #2: Blend Group and Self-Directed Leadership Development

### Don't Fall into Self-Directed Leadership Development Traps

Once upon a time, group development was the de facto method for learning. But with busier schedules and increasing workloads, it suddenly seemed like a better idea to let people go at their own pace with self-directed leadership development.

There are some strong reasons to choose self-directed leadership development. It's easy to deploy. People can do it when it's convenient for them. And they can pursue exactly the topics that they find valuable.

But putting leadership development solely in the hands of learners also creates major risks.

In this section, we'll explore how to effectively use self-directed leadership development and highlight some of the common traps organizations fall into when using this approach. Plus, we'll share why it's still best to use group-based development in parts of your leadership programs.

### What Is Self-Directed Learning?

Let's start with a definition. Just like it sounds, self-directed learning happens when an individual takes responsibility for their own learning. They decide what they need to learn, set their own learning goals, and choose which learning resources and strategies will work best for them. Above all, they create their learning plan and take charge of carrying it out.

Already you can likely see the danger: People may not do it. That's the number-one problem with self-directed leadership development. Even highly motivated learners are busy. And it can be tough for them to make time for development when they already have a crushing to-do list.



While **24%** of learners want more access to self-directed learning through online learning libraries, **39%** said they want more formal learning.

DDI Global Leadership Forecast 2021

For most companies, the reaction to self-directed learning has been mixed. In our [Global Leadership Forecast 2021](#), about 24% of learners said they wanted more access to self-directed learning through online learning libraries. Meanwhile, 39% said they wanted more formal training such as a workshop.

So is it possible to use self-directed leadership development effectively? Yes, but with some caveats.





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## How to Implement Successful Self-Directed Leadership Development

How the company sets up and supports learners in a self-directed leadership development program has a major impact. Here are six key factors that influence success:

1. There's a thoughtful **communication strategy** about the value of self-directed leadership development and how best to use learning tools.
2. Internal senior leaders sponsor self-directed learning efforts and become advocates of the approach. They encourage and recognize leaders who take charge of their own development. Senior leaders can also add accountability to development by checking on progress at different stages.
3. The learning doesn't happen in isolation and isn't "thrown over the wall." Leaders receive guide rails on which courses or modules would be most impactful for them based on their leadership level and the leadership challenges they face.
4. Self-directed doesn't have to be self-determined. You can **personalize the learning** experience by incorporating different types of **assessments and self-insight tools**. If assessment options are not available, companies can still guide leaders through activities based on their specific learning needs and priorities.
5. Even though learning is self-directed, you can still provide leaders with opportunities to **network with peers**. Leaders should be able to share what they're learning, how they're applying it, and how they're using it to overcome challenges.
6. The leader's manager makes it clear how the self-directed learning is connected to the leader's individual development plan.



### 6 Keys to Successful Self-Directed Leadership Development

- 1 Communicate thoughtfully
- 2 Engage senior stakeholder support
- 3 Give leaders guide rails
- 4 Personalize the experience
- 5 Include peer networking
- 6 Involve the leader's manager

## What Can Cause Self-Directed Learning to Fail?

While self-directed learning can be a valuable part of your approach to leadership development, there are some situations when it can fall short. Self-directed learning will likely go poorly for the leader if:

- A massive online library is available but there's no guidance on how to use it. HR says, "Here you go! Best of luck."
- Learners don't know why and how the learning experience will benefit them.
- Learners don't have incentives to complete the learning.
- Learning doesn't reinforce the benefits and practical outcomes. If new leadership skills don't become habitual early, learning won't stick.



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- Learning isn't connected to the leader's personal development plan.
- Learning content is inconsistent. For example, many learning libraries offer a huge array of content, often with multiple courses on the same topic. How does the leader know which is best? If leaders take different courses on the same topic, there may be no common leadership language creating consistency in the company's leadership culture.
- Learning isn't aligned with the company's values. See this unfortunate example of [inclusion training gone wrong](#).
- Learning doesn't offer opportunities for practice or application.

### Don't Forget Group-Based Learning

Virtual interactions and learning are now normal for many organizations. Some companies assume that they have to move away from in-person, classroom-based experiences toward digital, self-directed options.

However, [leaders still want to learn together](#). They value peer interaction. Development requires more than content. Effective development brings your culture together and builds connections. While leaders can learn a lot alone online via self-directed leadership development, they learn more and the learning is more meaningful when they're together with other leaders.

Hearing other leaders' experiences and discussing topics with other leaders solidifies concepts. Learning together makes it easier for leaders to think about how they can apply new knowledge and skills to what they're facing every day. In a virtual world where leaders are already lacking many networking opportunities, building connections with one another is more important than ever.

The question is, how can we make it easy for leaders to learn together? One option is to use live, instructor-led training. These sessions can be done in-person or in a virtual classroom. The important thing is that they foster deep interaction among leaders, encouraging them to participate in discussion, build connections, and practice skills together.

Another option is to build [peer learning groups](#), which we discuss more in the next section. With peer learning groups, leaders may learn information on their own, but come together to discuss and practice their skills.

#### When can self-directed learning help?



New Role



Immediate  
Need



In Crisis

### When Is Self-Directed Leadership Development Most Valuable?

Self-directed leadership development can be incredibly valuable under the right circumstances. But in *which* situations is it most valuable?



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Here are a few examples:

- 1. Transitioning to a New Role.** When someone steps into a [new leadership role](#), they usually need support right away, especially to solve urgent problems. However, many companies only offer group training on an annual or irregular basis. As a result, leaders may struggle through their first several months or even years in the role. Research in our [Frontline Leader Project](#) showed that, on average, new leaders don't get training until they've been on the job for approximately four years.

These first-time leaders could greatly benefit from self-directed leadership development to help them get started right away. Even if they have access to group training right away, self-directed options can help supplement learnings and provide real-time support to challenges as they come up.

- 2. An Immediate Need.** Meeting immediate leadership needs can be challenging. Leaders may feel that they have a problem today but haven't learned how to deal with this leadership challenge yet. A common example is conflict. A leader might not have had formal training in resolving conflict, but has an immediate issue with two team members.

Leaders often turn to the internet to quickly learn how to have a [challenging conversation](#). But there's a risk of getting the wrong advice or falling into a rabbit hole of fruitless searching.

But if leaders have access to on-demand learning, they can quickly access information that's in-line with your company culture and values. It's especially helpful if you have short [microlearning](#) content, such as quick videos, microcourses, and on-demand tools. That way, they have just-in-time support for the issues they have today.

- 3. There's a Crisis.** Crises come and go in every company. A [crisis](#) can be caused by external factors or internal factors, such as the announcement of a merger, a company scandal, or the sudden departure of a key senior leader.

In these moments, leaders need resources to support their teams quickly. They need to know how to communicate, meeting both the personal and practical needs of concerned team members. They need to show [empathy](#), offer support, and create a vision for the future.

In these cases, a rapid response set of [microlearning](#) resources like videos, [microcourses](#), [podcasts](#), [webinars](#), etc., can be a big help. Leaders can quickly get what they need and respond to their teams.



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## How to Add Self-Directed Learning to Leadership Development

We have seen tremendous benefits when companies combine self-directed learning with traditional [learning journeys](#) that include group-based leadership development, [either in-person or virtual](#). Ideally, you can create a blend, giving learners access to content as they need it to address personal challenges, plus strategic, ongoing opportunities to learn together with peers.

But in practical terms how does this work? Here are a few best practices we recommend:

1. **Hold a [kickoff](#) with senior leaders to introduce the program.** Emphasize the value self-directed learning can offer when combined with traditional, group-based leadership development. Show examples of self-directed content during the [kickoff](#) with examples of how to use it.
2. **Ask learners to complete self-directed content within two weeks of the kickoff.** Allow them to choose their own self-directed learning path. Be sure to give guidance on how to use the technology. Encourage leaders to choose something that will be easy to apply and positively change their behavior on the job.
3. **After two weeks, gather learners in [peer learning groups](#) to discuss what they learned, how they will apply it, and what they want to learn next.** Peers can then coach each other and share ideas for additional application. An important added benefit to this approach is that peers will hear about the different content available to them.
4. **With more traditional parts of your learning program, have your [facilitators](#) reinforce the importance of self-directed learning.** Consider demonstrating the technology to remind leaders what's there. You can even give time in class to complete content and discuss with peers.



### Self-Directed Learning: Definition

Learning where an individual takes responsibility for their own learning, deciding what they learn, setting their own goals, and choosing which strategies work best for them.

## What Does Success Look Like for Self-Directed Leadership Development?

If your leaders are making self-directed learning a habit, then you have been successful. If every time they have a leadership challenge, they use the learning libraries you provide to help them overcome it, then you will see better leadership in your organization. And when your leaders are successful, they will be more engaged, improving your culture and leading to better business results.

But positive habits don't happen by accident. Leaders need an intentional approach to be successful. The most common mistake with self-directed learning is that companies purchase massive online libraries, but don't set up a structure to allow positive habits to flourish.

And don't forget: Learning is just the first part of development. Tracking the number of courses a leader takes or the articles they read or videos they watch doesn't move business metrics. Rather, success happens when you see leaders truly modeling and using the behaviors they learned in their development.



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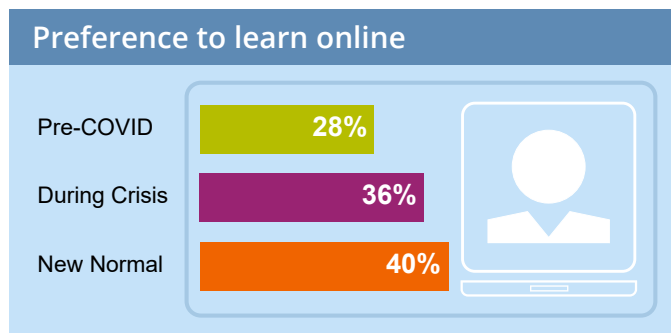
## Best Practice #3: Create Peer Learning Groups

### Leaders Love Learning Together

Think about your last memorable learning experience at work. Were you sitting in front of a screen by yourself? Or were you with others? Our bet is that other people were part of shaping this moment. Peer learning groups are a crucial part of leadership development, and they can be a valuable addition to self-directed learning.

It's no surprise that people like to learn together. (Check out the joy of “[collective effervescence](#).”) While we can absorb an incredible amount of information independently, human interaction can solidify concepts into real-world learning.

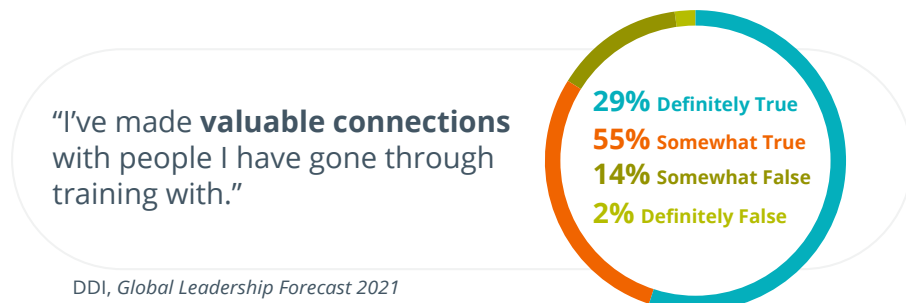
Of course, many of us are growing accustomed to doing more on our own. According to DDI's [2021 Global Leadership Trends](#) research, leaders are increasingly getting used to the idea of online learning as more of us work remotely. That being said, the majority of learners get more value from online learning if they have an outlet where they can discuss and process what they learned.



Source: DDI, 2021 Global Leadership Trends

### The Benefits of Peer Learning Groups for Leadership Development

Our clients use a variety of approaches ranging from all digital to all in-person leadership development (remember the [pendulum](#)?). But companies that incorporate peer learning groups during some or all of their programs tend to see stronger results.



DDI, Global Leadership Forecast 2021

Peer learning groups give leaders the opportunity to network with other leaders, including those from other parts of the company. Group learning can offer leaders a powerful opportunity to get to know one another and create a shared leadership culture.



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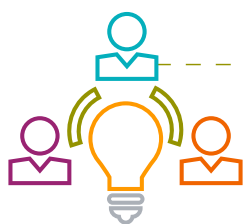
Plus, deeper learning can occur when leaders share experiences. In fact, a [key study from Harvard University](#) showed that students did better on tests when they participated in active learning, versus absorbing information through lecture.

Peer learning groups also provide a safe space for skill practice. Peers offer a comfortable environment for leaders to coach and give feedback, increasing accountability for behavior change. Learning with peers can also apply healthy pressure to use new skills on the job. Leaders who complete development training together can be positive models for each other in the workplace.

Finally, use of peer learning groups facilitates greater diversity to address leadership challenges. Collaborative learning formats bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and challenges to light, making it possible for leaders to consider other approaches and viewpoints. With instant [feedback](#) from multiple perspectives, leaders may quickly get a more nuanced view of the effect their behavior has on others.

### When to Use Peer Learning Groups

As many companies increasingly rely on [self-directed](#) or digital learning, peer learning groups are critical for creating accountability, retention, and skill application.



Peer learning groups are critical for creating accountability, retention, and skill application.

We've often seen self-directed learners try out peer learning groups and experience several "Aha!" moments. For example, we've heard participants say, "I didn't realize that content was there. I'll have to check it out!" or "I never would have thought to apply that skill like that."

Additionally, peer learning groups are helpful for onboarding a leader who is new to their role or to the company. [First-time leaders](#) also often find a sense of camaraderie when learning with other first-time leaders.

### How to Structure Peer Learning Groups

What are best practices for structuring peer learning groups? Here are four tips:

1. **Keep groups small.** We recommend groups of no more than 3-4 leaders each.
2. **Keep learning sessions short.** Schedule peer learning sessions in increments of either 30 or 60 minutes to avoid meeting fatigue.
3. **Consider cadence.** Make sure the cadence is aligned with leaders' schedules and your program's objectives.
4. **Put some thought into the "who."** Pair leaders with individuals from different divisions, functions, or locations to expose them to people they don't normally work with.



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## What Should a Peer Learning Session Look Like?

It's also important to consider how you set up peer learning group sessions. Here are some tips:

1. **Make sure each session is purposeful.** Provide participants with a recommended structure ahead of time with topics and/or questions to prompt thinking. And don't forget to include instructions for any prework leaders should complete before the session.
2. **Remind participants to use communication skills they have learned.** For example, ask them to refresh their knowledge of the [guidelines for having an effective interaction](#).
3. **Leverage content to expand skills.** Ensure the session stays focused on the development of leadership skills. And think about how the session content can be used to achieve this goal.
4. **Set expectations for the participant to discuss insights with their manager.** Ensure a participant's manager is aware that their direct report is part of a leadership development program. Then set expectations about how they can be supportive.
5. **Leave time for group interactions.** For example, incorporate time for groups to share "gold nuggets" with the large peer group.

## How to Set Up a Peer Learning Group for Success

As with every learning experience, the leader of the session plays an important role in the success of the experience. It's up to the session leader to set the tone and environment for discussion. Choosing the right session leader is especially important for the first session because participants need to see positive modeling of new skills.

In many cases, our clients choose to have someone from HR or their learning and development team lead their peer learning sessions. After the first session, you might consider having peer groups lead themselves by assigning a different leader to [facilitate](#) each group discussion.

However, peer-led groups still need structure to ensure success. Provide a clear structure and series of discussion questions to the session leader ahead of time. This will help them prepare and ensure the session stays on track and is completed in the allotted time frame.

Finally, encourage learners to reflect at the end of each session. Ask the session's group leader to compile the group's feedback and send it to your company's learning and development team. Asking for feedback on the session ensures you can adjust quickly so that group learning sessions remain useful and valuable.



### Pro Tip: Facilitation Feedback

At the end of a development session, ask the session's group leader to compile the group's feedback and send it to your company's learning and development team.

## Why Peer Learning Is Key for Leadership Development

As [self-directed learning](#) becomes more common, adding peer learning to your leadership development program can improve accountability, practical application, and your leadership culture. Most of all, leaders really like to learn together.

With these best practices to ensure your peer learning groups are successful, you're well on your way to creating memorable and effective leadership development experiences.





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## Best Practice #4: Leverage Tools for Personalized Leadership Development

### What Leaders Want Most

In the [Foundation section](#), we talked about the importance of personalization in leadership development. Leaders want personalized learning. In our [2018 Global Leadership Forecast](#), it topped the list of what leaders want most. But there's a risk of falsely interpreting "personalized" learning as "isolated" digital learning. So let's clarify what personalized leadership development really is and how to leverage it.

### Defining Personalized Learning for Leadership Development

It's mine.	It's personal <b>and</b> personalized. Personalized means based on your needs—not just your preferences, like learning via <a href="#">podcast</a> or an article.
It's relevant.	Leaders need to immediately understand how learnings can help them in their everyday work. The content can't be abstract. And it needs to be proven to work.
It's not overwhelming.	There are literally millions of resources out there on leadership. And many learning libraries are similar—they offer hundreds of teachers and topics with little guidance on which ones you need or which approach is best.
I can use this right now.	Libraries must include <a href="#">content and tools for leaders</a> to check their understanding of skills, then practice and apply them right away.
It's authentic.	Content resonates with what they're experiencing as a leader and acknowledges the human side of leadership. It connects to the values, strategic priorities, and business purpose of the organization.

### How to Use Technology to Personalize Learning

Technology is quickly creating new ways to personalize learning. Here are five tools that can support personalized leadership development. Some of these will be detailed further in other sections:



- **Assessment:** Assessment is crucial for engagement. Leaders need learning that is based on their personal needs. Assessment makes strengths and weaknesses clear so they know what they need to work on to get better.



- **Recommended Learning:** Based on the assessment and other basic information, you want to employ a recommendation engine. This engine can serve up some learning options personalized for each leader. This can get leaders started with foundational concepts.



- **Personalized Practice Tools:** Personalized tools can help leaders practice. What do we mean by personalized? Consider tools like a chatbot to help with coaching. Or a quick simulation to test understanding of concepts. These start to test skills but will be cemented as leaders practice with one another.





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- **Personal Analytics:** Learners must be able to track their progress. What have they spent time on? Where could they benefit from more focus? Analytics help leaders reflect on the impact of their time spent learning.



- **Individual Exploration:** With the personalized steps learners have already taken, they may know exactly what they want to explore next.



Leadership development *isn't* one-size-fits-all. Designing experiences that match the moment the leader is experiencing can create a **breakthrough** moment.

### Personalized Leadership Development: Meeting Leaders in the Moment

Personalized leadership development ultimately means: “I’m getting the right kind of support for the leadership challenge I’m facing now.” Your challenge is to take all the pieces described here and think about how to combine them appropriately [to meet a leader’s particular needs in any given moment](#).

Effective personalized development uses the right blend of digital experiences and deeply human interactions to make development a way of work. The goal is to establish a culture where leaders are constantly learning—on their own, from their peers, and within their organization.

Development is no longer an extra responsibility to make time for outside of “real work.” Rather, development is part of the work.



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## Best Practice #5: Use Assessment for Development

### The Dream Team: Assessment and Development

When explaining why and how to use assessment for development, we like to ask this question: Would you expect your doctor to prescribe medication without a diagnosis or medical exam? Probably not. A diagnosis guides which treatment you receive, ensuring that it will solve your specific need. The remedy prescribed is specific to the problem you have and the dose and frequency of treatment are personalized for you.

Assessment for development is a similar concept. An assessment ensures development is focused on the right areas. It also helps leaders understand how their mix of [competencies](#), knowledge, experiences, and personal attributes might support or hinder performance in key areas.

### Why Assessment Is Core to Development

We have talked about the importance of [personalization in leadership development](#). Deep personalization is driven by data and insight, and one of the best ways to gain these insights is using [assessment](#) and insight tools.

For example, before undertaking a development journey, leaders might participate in a [360-feedback survey](#) or an immersive [assessment center](#) to ensure they enter the program with a clear understanding of their strengths and development priorities. At various stages throughout the learning journey, leaders might complete a short self-assessment that builds awareness in specific areas or checks on development progress.

One of the other reasons you want to use assessment for development is **time**. [Research](#) has shown that time is the number-one obstacle to leadership development.



When it comes to leadership development, it's not about making everything fit in less time or waiting until there is a better time. It's about making a meaningful and focused investment with the time we have. Data and insights from assessment can help us do that.

### How Assessment and Development Work Together

Too often organizations view [assessment and development](#) as two separate disciplines. However, in practice, the relationship between assessment and development is symbiotic: They exist together in a way that benefits both.

As such, development without assessment leads to a generic, one-size-fits-all approach. And assessment without development does little to move the dial on key skills, competencies, and behaviors.



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So how do they work together? When included as part of a leadership development experience, assessment provides several important insights. Assessments can:

- **Identify competency strengths and development areas** so that leaders know where to put their development focus.
- **Identify critical experience and knowledge gaps** that might be important for current and future roles.
- **Reveal personality attributes and tendencies** that might influence how a leader reacts in certain situations. With this insight, they are better equipped to manage and moderate their behavior across different situations and contexts.
- **Help individuals** and the organization determine readiness to execute business drivers.
- **Provide group insights** that inform cohort-based leadership development initiatives.
- **Track progress** of individual leaders and groups and measure the impact of leadership development initiatives.



### Different Types of Assessment Support Different Development Insights

DDI's [Ultimate Guide to Leadership Assessment](#) provides a comprehensive overview of different types of assessments. It's a great resource when you're exploring how to use assessment for either development programs or selection decisions.

While assessment tools come in many shapes and sizes, most fall within a few basic categories. Additionally, note that while each of these tools is an effective method for collecting assessment information, each also serves fundamentally different purposes.

- **Assessment Centers:** A simulation that immerses leaders in a role at a fictitious company. The leader is required to manage emails, meetings, and other role-specific tasks. The experience might also include a strategic analysis and business planning exercise.
- **360-Degree Feedback:** Also known as a multirater assessment, a 360 provides behavioral feedback from direct reports, colleagues, and managers. It also includes a self-assessment.
- **Leadership Tests:** These tests include a series of questions (usually closed-ended) designed to gather data on a leader's knowledge, experience, and judgment.
- **Personality Tests:** A self-assessment that reveals underlying personality patterns, motivations, and derailing risks.
- **Self-Assessments:** These assessments are not designed to objectively evaluate leaders, but rather to drive self-reflection. As leaders take a moment to think about their skills and habits, it can create an "Aha!" moment for them, fueling their energy for leadership development. For example, a self-assessment might help you reflect on your growth mindset as a coach or think about your natural approach to networking.



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## How Assessment for Development Is Changing

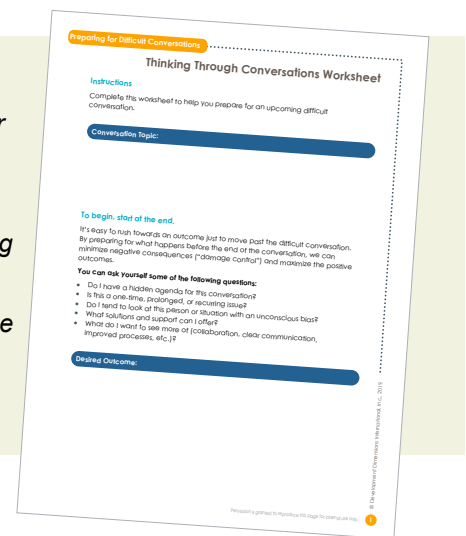
Assessment has been around for quite some time, but several shifts are making assessment for development more powerful and relevant today.

Historically, assessment has often been used to inform development across macro moments. For example, an in-depth assessment of competencies and personality attributes might be used to determine development priorities and readiness for key leadership transitions. This “big bang” approach often involves a comprehensive assessment at the beginning or end of a leadership development journey.

This approach is still deeply powerful for measuring overall readiness for a role. But with advances in technology, assessment can now be used throughout the learning journey and even back on the job to support leaders during micro moments.

### Consider this scenario:

*To prepare for a difficult performance conversation, a leader accesses a quick learning module on facilitating difficult conversations. As part of the module, the leader completes a short online assessment of skills and tendencies, receiving tips and guidance on best practices. They also receive targeted and personalized insights about how to manage the conversation. In this way, assessment is becoming a more regular and integrated part of leadership development.*



## Practical Considerations When Using Assessment for Development

The section on [Best Practices for Implementation](#) provides valuable tips and suggestions for implementing a leadership development initiative. Here are some practical considerations about how to use assessment for development.



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- 1. Begin with the end in mind.** Be clear about what you are assessing and why you are assessing it. Go back to the [business drivers](#) and [competencies](#) and use them as the core criteria for assessment.
- 2. Create Success Profiles<sup>SM</sup>.** Use information captured in a [Success Profile](#) to enhance the quality and scope of assessment insights. Helpful information may include experiences, knowledge, and personal tendencies. Remember, different tools provide different insights.



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- 3. Use multiple types of assessment.** Use comprehensive assessments as well as short, targeted assessments during the learning journey and back on the job. As discussed earlier, short, targeted assessment can provide deeply relevant and personalized insights in a [moment of need](#).
- 4. Seek feedback from coaches.** When using a more in-depth assessment like an [assessment center](#) or personality profiling, use a [coach](#) to provide feedback. While the quality of assessment reports and insight continues to improve, a coach can help leaders make sense of multiple data points. A coach can also bring focus to development needs and priorities.
- 5. Communicate, communicate, and communicate.** When communicating, make sure you cover all potential stakeholders and clarify the purpose and importance of the assessment process. This applies to any aspect of leadership development but is particularly important when using assessment for development. Why? It's good to be mindful of the sensitivities that surround any form of assessment. Avoid messages that imply the assessment is an evaluation of the person or that they pass or fail as a leader. Additionally, your communication can promote and reinforce the value of data and insights for ongoing development.
- 6. Clarify roles and expectations.** It's also important to clarify the roles and expectations of various stakeholders, including the manager of the leader. The manager of the leader has a key role to play in their development. Sharing data and insights from an assessment process can be a good way to build a collaborative relationship about development. The manager might just be the mirror a leader needs to better understand and validate their behavior and actions.
- 7. Think about how assessment data will be used and shared.** Several times in this section we have emphasized the value of data. With that in mind, you need to establish and communicate a clear data-sharing policy. How will the data be used? Who will have access to the data? How will the data be stored and for how long?



Development without assessment leads to a generic, ***one-size-fits-all*** approach. Assessment without development does little to move the dial on key skills, competencies, and behaviors.

### Leaders Value Data—and Want More Assessment!

The good news is that leaders recognize the value and importance of assessment data and insights. Our recent [global study with over 15,000 leaders](#) found that 42% of leaders wanted more assessment to diagnose leadership strengths. In today's complex and ever-changing business environment, leaders understand the value of having good quality data to make business decisions—including on their own development.



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## Best Practice #6: Employ Leadership Practice Tools

### Differentiate Your Leadership Development Program with Practice

Practice is probably the single most overlooked aspect of every leadership development program. Of course, everyone—HR, leaders, senior executives—nods their head when we talk about the importance of practice. Yet leadership practice tools are too often ignored when companies actually launch their programs.

Why? Practice is hard. It's where leaders have to prove that they can apply what they've learned. And they have to receive feedback about what they can do better. But practice is also the game changer that will define whether someone actually develops into a better leader.

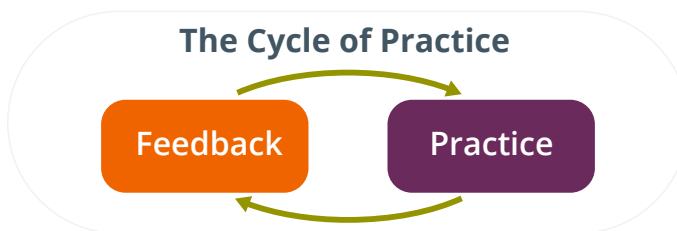
So if you want to differentiate your leadership development program and see results, start thinking about how to incorporate practice.

### The Value of Deliberate Practice

While the value of practice has long been understood, too often practice in leadership development is unstructured or left to chance. Practice is a critical part of leadership development and requires the same focus as other forms of development. Giving leaders access to quality leadership practice tools can greatly enhance the leadership development experience.

Malcolm Gladwell popularized the concept of “deliberate practice” in his book *Outliers*. However, the research and academic origins of the concept can be traced back to the 1990s and the work of [K. Anders Ericsson](#).

Deliberate practice uses a combination of targeted development activities, [coaching](#), and [feedback](#) to support the growth and reinforcement of [competencies](#) and behaviors. It can be built into a formal leadership program and learning journey or used in support of [self-directed learning](#).



Programs can use leadership practice tools to support learning for both macro and micro moments. For examples of how leadership practice tools can support different needs, refer to the [Explore Moments of Leadership](#) section of this guide.

### 5 Characteristics of a Good Leadership Practice Tool

Not all practice is created equal, and it is important to contrast play and practice. While there is nothing inherently wrong with play and gaming techniques being used as leadership practice tools, practice is more focused on driving specific outcomes such as behavior change.

There are several characteristics that define an effective leadership practice tool. While you don't have to adhere to all of them, the more you can incorporate, the more effective your leadership practice will be. Leadership practice tools should incorporate the [design principles described earlier](#), including being personalized, relevant, immersive, human, and trusted.



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





Here are five characteristics of an effective leadership practice tool:

1. **Purposeful:** It targets a specific outcome or objective.
2. **Intentionally challenging:** It acts as a circuit breaker, shifting old habits and generating new mindsets.
3. **Uses feedback:** It uses [feedback](#) to reinforce positive behaviors, offer suggestions for improvement, and provide new insights.
4. **Safe:** While challenging, it allows leaders to experiment in a safe and risk-free learning environment.
5. **Reinforces the why:** It helps leaders to reinforce why a particular skill or behavior is important and relevant.

### Variety Is the Spice of Practice

Leadership practice tools should be purposeful and relevant, but it helps to provide leaders with some variety. Variety facilitates a more engaging learning experience with each tool serving a different role.

Emerging technologies are creating new options for practice tools. We recommend using a range of online and offline options to create a more effective and impactful learning experience for leaders. While many of these tools can be used on an ad hoc basis, there is power in using them alongside formal leadership development options such as [courses](#) and [microcourses](#).

	What's in Your Practice Mix	Example
	<b>Chatbots</b> AI-driven tools that simulate conversations and interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simulated coaching conversations</li> <li>• Simulated performance conversations</li> </ul>
	<b>Guided Practice</b> Resources that guide the application of skills and behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job aids</li> <li>• Discussion planners</li> <li>• Templates</li> </ul>
	<b>Games and Simulations</b> Engaging ways to put skills and knowledge to the test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual games or simulations to test and practice skills</li> <li>• Knowledge tests</li> </ul>
	<b>Manager Support</b> Tools for the managers of leaders to encourage and reinforce practice and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill practice tools</li> <li>• Manager support guides and resources</li> </ul>
	<b>Virtual Reality</b> Simulated environments that immerse leaders in real-world scenarios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy-generating scenarios</li> <li>• Skill-building scenarios</li> </ul>
	<b>Peer Learning</b> Practice groups in which leaders can test their skills with one another and get feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer groups that meet periodically</li> <li>• Peer message boards</li> </ul>





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## The Value of a Coach in Practice

The most important part of practice is feedback. Without feedback, how would you know how well you're doing? While some practice tools offer automated feedback or ask the user for self-reflection, the most valuable source of feedback will likely be a coach.

Of course, different people can step into the role of a coach. While a leader's manager is an obvious choice, leaders can also get value from using [peers](#) or even external coaches.

DDI's [Global Leadership Forecast 2021](#) research found that, more than anything, leaders want external coaches to help them grow their skills outside of their day-to-day work. However, they also rated current approaches to coaching as one of the least effective types of development within their own organization.

There are [many types of coaching](#), but coaching for practice is targeted and focused on the application of new skills and behaviors. Coaches can help leaders apply new skills on the job and provide feedback on behaviors.

They can also help leaders better understand themselves and how their unique set of experiences, skills, and personal tendencies might influence behavior. This creates a highly [personalized learning](#) and practice experience.

## Don't Leave Leadership Skills Practice to Chance

When it comes to leadership development, practice does make "perfect." The best way to help your leaders practice the skills they need is to give them effective practice tools.

Don't leave it to chance! Be strategic in selecting leadership practice tools for your initiative.





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## Best Practice #7: Build in Feedback for Personal Development

### Feedback Is Core to Behavior Change

**Research** shows that receptivity to feedback for personal development is one of the strongest indicators of leadership potential.

If your leaders practice key skills and receive feedback, your organization is 4.6 times more likely to have high leader quality and high bench strength compared to those that don't.



**89%** of HR leaders agree that ongoing peer feedback and check-ins are key for successful outcomes.

2018 SHRM/Globoforce Employee Recognition Report

By being open to feedback, leaders can become more self-aware, which can lead to behavioral change and enhanced **emotional intelligence**. Surprisingly, most of us are not very aware of our own behavior and even less aware of how other people see us. A study found that about 95% of people think they are self-aware while only 10-15% actually are.

Feedback is key to personal growth and development and it's also at the heart of **deliberate practice**. While we may not always like what we hear, we can thrive by being open to feedback. In fact, a deficiency of feedback can lead to anxiety, apprehension, and a decline in productivity. But getting productive, regular feedback can spark exponential growth.

### Types of Feedback for Personal Development

It may be tempting to leave the process of giving and receiving feedback open, unstructured, and informal. After all, you want a culture where people organically give and receive feedback without being prompted.

Our research and experience suggest that a formal feedback process not only encourages giving and receiving feedback, but it also helps to reinforce a culture of feedback.

Here are three of the most common types of feedback for personal development:



**1. Point-in-time Feedback.** The most common type of point-in-time feedback is **360-degree feedback**. 360-degree feedback is often used at the start of a leadership development journey or at regular (1-2 year) intervals to obtain feedback on a broad range of **competencies** and behaviors. It is a good method for identifying broad strengths and areas for improvement as well as insights into a leader's overall brand and reputation.



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**2. Pulse Feedback.** Pulse feedback is often used as a follow-up to a more comprehensive assessment or feedback process, such as a 360. It is also used to get feedback on personal development priorities during and after leadership training and employee development. Pulse feedback allows leaders to assess progress, typically in a subset of behaviors over a period of time.



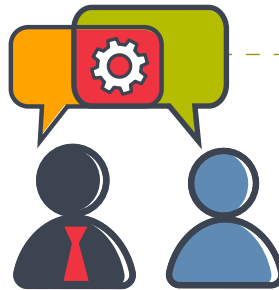
**3. Continuous Feedback.** Continuous feedback allows leaders to obtain feedback on an ongoing basis. It can be used to check on key behaviors across a range of [critical leadership moments](#). The ongoing and repetitive nature of continuous feedback is also very effective when leaders are trying to change old habits or reinforce new habits. In contrast, 360-degree and pulse feedback tend to be driven by an event that occurs at a moment in time based on a specific need. As such, 360s and pulse feedback tend to support development across macro moments.

## The Emergence of Continuous Feedback

While point-in-time and pulse feedback methods remain relevant and important uses of feedback for personal development, new approaches based on continuous feedback are gaining significant momentum. Josh Bersin, a well-known analyst and commentator in the leadership and talent industry, describes continuous employee feedback as the [next killer app](#).

It makes sense: The needs of leaders and organizations are not episodic. Leaders and organizations need ongoing feedback and support during daily critical leadership moments such as project meetings and one-on-one discussions.

Gauging progress and performance at work without feedback systems can be hard to achieve. With the rise of remote and hybrid work, we're also seeing a significant shift in how leaders and employees engage with each other and obtain feedback. That's why it's more important than ever to offer leaders continuous feedback mechanisms that are simple to use, engaging, and [insightful](#).



**30% of new leaders** wanted more coaching and feedback from their managers than they are currently getting, in comparison to only 25% of current leaders.

*DDI, Global Leadership Forecast 2021*

Continuous feedback systems do not function the same as traditional, survey-based platforms. They have unique characteristics that make the process of giving and receiving feedback far more dynamic. Common characteristics include:

- **The process of giving feedback is quick and easy.** It is focused on a small set of relevant and specific behaviors.
- **Technology, including mobile compatibility, is key.** Technology drives the process for giving, receiving, and reviewing feedback. Platforms leverage a mix of push and pull feedback options.



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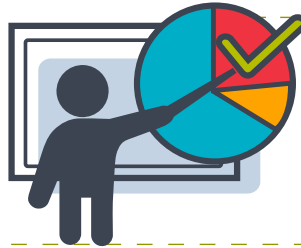
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- **It is engaging.** For example, some platforms use swiping and gaming features to gather feedback.
- **The process of gathering feedback is anonymous.**
- **Data and insights are readily available through personal dashboards.**
- **Individual data is combined to deliver group trends and insights.**

## 5 Best Practices for Giving and Receiving Feedback



"Continuous feedback has an important by-product and that is, it normalizes feedback for the recipient. But maybe more importantly, it normalizes the process of giving feedback."

- Alexander Schwall, Ph.D.  
Co-Founder and Chief Science Officer of Rhabit Analytics

In addition to making feedback tools more readily available, companies also need to reframe workplace perceptions of feedback. Too often feedback has negative connotations and is considered by many a vehicle for sharing what is wrong. Feedback must be seen as constructive and positive, a vehicle for driving change, new habits, and innovation—even when feedback is for improvement. This shift applies to those giving and receiving feedback.

Continuous feedback systems can help reinforce a culture of feedback and [psychological safety](#) in which freedom to try new behaviors and experimentation with new ways of working are encouraged. But no matter how feedback is given, the core principles remain the same and should be promoted and reinforced as part of any leadership development initiative.

Here are five important principles to keep in mind. Feedback should be:

- **Relevant and Specific:** Whether giving or receiving feedback, focus on specific behaviors and actions, not broad generalizations. When discussing feedback for improvement, consider sharing and exploring alternative actions. Link feedback to goals and context.
- **Timely:** Deliver or request feedback as close as possible to the moment a behavior or outcome occurs.
- **Delivered with Empathy:** Deliver and receive feedback with sensitivity and empathy. Why? Giving and receiving feedback represents a moment of vulnerability.
- **Sincere:** While it is tempting to surround feedback for improvement with lots of positives, don't drown out key messages with white noise.
- **Treated as a Gift:** If you're not ready to ask for feedback, you may not be ready to credibly deliver it.



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DDI designed the STAR method for giving feedback and communicating in a behavioral interview. It's based on three simple components (ST: Situation/Task, A: Action, and R: Result). You can read more about it [here](#).



### Don't Forget About Feedback for Personal Development

Feedback is crucial for leaders' growth and personal development. But it's also a driver of self-awareness, which is key to behavior change.

By making feedback for personal development an important element in your leadership programs, you're on your way to building a culture that values feedback. When more team members are comfortable regularly giving and receiving both positive and developmental feedback, they're likely to be growing. Feedback is a gift indeed!



# Manage a Successful Leadership Development Program



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## Don't Leave Implementation to Chance

"I don't know what happened—I had the perfect plan!" It's a lament we've heard often from HR. They've done a tremendous job creating a powerful leadership development program. But then there's a snag in implementation, and the whole thing falls flat. In this section, we'll cover some of the best practices for implementing a successful leadership development program.

With each of these best practices, you take a better step to ensure that your leaders not only commit to their development but practice their skills on the job.



"Ideas are easy.  
Implementation is hard."

Marketing specialist, author, and venture capitalist Guy Kawasaki

### Measure Results

*Start thinking about results first, not after the fact. From day one, form a plan to gather data and track progress along the way so you can look back and celebrate results.*

### Gain Stakeholder Engagement

*Who do you need to engage and influence? What level of commitment do you need? Engage your key stakeholders to influence, support, or accelerate your leadership initiatives.*

### Create a Communication Strategy

*It's not just about getting information out. With a creative and thought-out plan, you can make sure everyone is excited and ready to be part of your program's success.*

### Secure Manager Support

*Having support from the managers of your learners can make all the difference. Explore ways for managers to model commitment and reinforce development.*

### Kick Off Your Program

*It's finally time to kick things off! Build excitement and commitment from all your stakeholders as you launch in four key steps.*



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## How to Measure Results of Leadership Development

### What Does Success Look Like in Leadership Development?

We've all heard the adage "You can't manage what you don't measure." Unfortunately, [research](#) shows that only 18% of organizations measure the business impact of leadership development initiatives. But in most companies, senior leaders are increasingly demanding clearer measures of results.

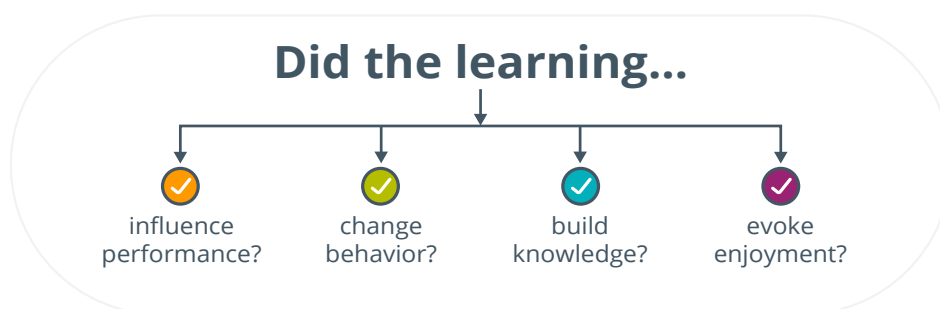
The biggest challenge to measurement is that it's often an afterthought. Without key measures and metrics built in along the way, it can be hard to go back and collect the data you need. That's why it's critical to think about measurement first.

To begin planning how you'll measure results, ask the following questions:

- How will this leadership program impact the business, and is it in line with my stakeholders' needs?
- What would success look like one year from now? Three years from now?
- What data will be valuable to my stakeholders?
- What data collection methods do I have available?
- Who is involved and accountable for tracking progress and measuring results?

Unsurprisingly, when you can show proof of results, you not only benefit the business but build your own credibility. As a result, you may have an easier time gaining the support you need for future initiatives.

In this section, we'll walk you through several different ways to demonstrate results.



### Leadership Can Be Learned, but How Is It Measured?

How do you measure "good" leadership? With our roots in behavioral psychology, DDI's approach focuses on understanding leadership as observable and measurable behaviors that can change over time. We believe that leadership programs can and must deliver behavior change to demonstrate success.

Of course, it's not the easiest thing to measure behavior change. It's much simpler to measure success based on "checking the box" that people attended or completed a certain training. But that doesn't guarantee that leaders are really developing and using the skills they need to be better leaders.

Whether you're looking to measure simple results like attendance or connect development more deeply to business results, the key is to set up your program from the beginning to collect the right types of data.

In this section, we'll cover one of the most popular methods to [measure impact, the Kirkpatrick Model](#). This model evaluates learning and training across four levels. It's the most common approach for L&D practitioners.



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## Level 1 Evaluation: Measure Reaction

How do your leaders respond to your program? In the Kirkpatrick Model, this level is the degree to which participants find the training favorable, engaging, and relevant to their jobs. While many organizations measure Level 1 with “smile sheets,” this model goes beyond participant satisfaction and also includes:

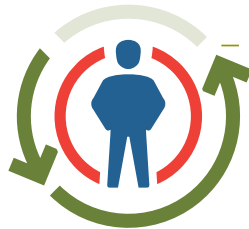
- **Engagement:** The degree to which participants are actively involved in and contributing to the learning experience.
- **Relevance:** The degree to which participants will have the opportunity to use or apply what they learned in training on the job.

Alone, these measures don't tell you whether leaders have actually gained skills. But they can help you predict two key things:

- **Personal Motivation:** Are leaders personally invested in the program? When leaders have high personal motivation, research has shown that they are more likely to apply skills back on the job.
- **Job Relevance:** Did the program provide opportunities to practice new skills before applying them back on the job?

From our own [research](#), personal motivation and job relevance are top factors that predict application of skills or behavior change. So while they don't prove that leaders have changed their behavior, they are positive indicators that your program is headed in the right direction.

However, many companies stop here. While this feedback is important to understanding how well you're engaging participants, it doesn't show whether participants change their behavior on the job.



Personal motivation and job relevance are top factors that predict application of skills or behavior change.

## Level 2 Evaluation: Measure Learning

What should your leaders retain from your program? Kirkpatrick defines this level as the degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence, and commitment based on their participation in the training.

You can determine learning through post-program checks or by testing before and after the training to measure progress. First, you'll need to identify specific learning outcomes that you want your program to deliver. Then you'll need to test for those outcomes both before and after the training.

For example, DDI's online [courses](#) include informal and formal knowledge checks. We also provide knowledge checks for many of our classroom courses.

These checks help to ensure that leaders understand the theory behind what to do, but not whether they are able to demonstrate the skill.



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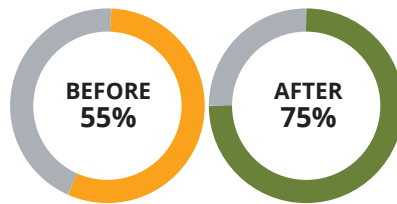
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### Level 3 Evaluation: Measure Behavior Change

Are your leaders applying what they learned in the program? In the Kirkpatrick Model, this level is the degree to which participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job.

Keep in mind that seeing behavior change can take time. Leaders may need to build their confidence and find the right opportunities to apply their knowledge and learning. You can measure behavior change through surveys or interviews, particularly with managers and direct reports of your program participants. It is imperative that survey participants have a clear understanding of the behaviors or [competencies](#) required for leaders to be successful.

At DDI, we measure behavior change by comparing how often leaders engage in effective leadership behaviors before versus after development. It's important that managers, peers, and direct reports provide observations of behavior change. Program participants can also self-report their own change, which helps them to reflect on their own growth.



75% of leaders “often” or “almost always” **display effective leadership behaviors** after a DDI leadership program compared to just 55% prior.

*DDI, PROOF: That DDI's Leadership Training Pays Off*

### Level 4 Evaluation: Measure Results

How do better leaders (i.e., behavior change in your program's participants) impact the business? According to Kirkpatrick, this level measures the degree to which targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training. While this is the most comprehensive form of measurement, it's also where you're most likely to grab the attention of your stakeholders in the business.

Here are some examples from our [research](#) on how organizations evaluated bottom-line results after a DDI leadership program:

- **Reduced Turnover:** More than 700 leaders from a global IT solutions organization participated in a DDI leadership development program aimed at improving employee productivity and performance. For teams involved in the program, employee turnover dropped from 20.4% to 4.8%.
- **Increased Sales:** After implementing a leadership program for sales managers, a pharmaceutical company experienced an overall 105% increase in sales volume. Sales productivity increased by an average of 68% per representative whose managers completed the DDI program.
- **Safety:** To promote a culture that supports employee development, motivation, and retention, nearly 400 employees from a manufacturing company participated in a DDI leadership program. Accidents decreased by 70% and employee turnover also fell by 90%.





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## Examples of Calculating ROI

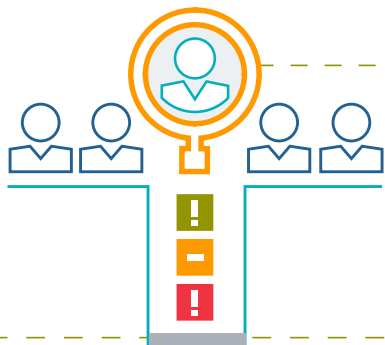
When you quantify the financial impact on business, you can easily calculate the Return on Investment (ROI) based on the cost of your leadership program. Here are two more examples where organizations calculated the ROI of their leadership development program:

- **Higher Productivity:** An automotive manufacturing company introduced a DDI program into several manufacturing plants with a history of low productivity and performance problems. Similar “control” plants were selected as a comparison group. Metrics of quality, on-time delivery of parts, productivity, health and safety, and absenteeism were tracked to determine the impact. Compared to the control plants, the experimental site showed a 21% improvement in productivity. And this resulted in an estimated \$4.4 million in return.
- **Increased Cross-Sales:** After their supervisors completed a DDI program, bank tellers demonstrated substantial improvements in their work productivity. This was evidenced by the bank tellers generating approximately four times more business referrals and new loans per month. They also increased cross-selling, which is the number of loans provided with additional life insurance, by 233%. In addition to the increased productivity, teller overtime was reduced by 92% overall.

## Measuring Implementation Support

The success of your leadership development initiative also depends on your [implementation plan](#) and what support is available to learners. As part of our [Impact Evaluation](#) service, DDI measures the following:

- **Environmental Support:** Does senior management strongly support the program? Are there opportunities to apply newly learned skills on the job? Are there any barriers to leaders participating in additional development opportunities? These external factors can inhibit or accelerate the effectiveness of your leadership program.
- **Manager Reinforcement:** Are managers champions of development and do they show support? Do participants discuss opportunities to apply new skills with their managers? [Manager support](#) is one of the top three predictors for behavior change.



Zero in on what’s working well and what’s not so you can improve your leadership by identifying issues and gaps in an **impact evaluation**.



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## Don't Forget the Lead Indicators

While your ultimate goal is to drive business results and create behavior change in leaders, monitoring early lead indicators can help you determine whether you're on track.

Lead indicators describe the effectiveness of your current strategy and indicate future outcomes. They can include:

- Percentage of leaders reached across your organization
- Participation or attendance rate of learners
- Participation of managers of learners in manager support sessions
- Content accessed (started or launched) from your LMS, LXP, or online learning platform
- Completion rate for content

## Create a Measurement Plan

As we mentioned, one of the biggest challenges with measuring the effectiveness of leadership development is that it often only happens as an afterthought. Without planning ahead of time, it can be much harder to collect data on program success.

That's why it's so important to create a plan to measure results as you design your program. A simple measurement planning grid can help you stay organized and on track. For each success metric you identify, you will need to determine:

- Data sources
- Data collection timeline or due date
- Data output
- Accountability
- Any issues or support needed

Metric	Data Sources	Collection	Output	Accountability	Reporting
Content accessed from LMS	LMS Platform	Monthly	LMS Dashboard or Spreadsheet	HR, IT	Dashboard
Level 1: Reaction	Learners	Post-training	Evaluation Forms	HR, L&D	Completion rates at 40% or lower
Level 2: Learning	Learners	During and post-training	Knowledge Checks	HR, L&D	Knowledge checks not scored

## Measure Results to Plan Next Steps

Don't forget to celebrate success! If you fall short on some goals, use it as an opportunity to learn and make improvements.

With a strong plan to measure results, you'll have data that demonstrates the impact of your programs. You'll also have data to show the value you and your team bring to your organization. Plus, measuring results can create a data-driven approach to plan and design next steps.



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## Gain Stakeholder Engagement for Your Leadership Development Program

### Build Commitment with a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

Your stakeholders can significantly accelerate—or slow down—your leadership development initiatives. Whether you're early in the design phase or in the middle of a program, let's explore why a stakeholder engagement strategy is important. You'll also learn what you can do to build internal champions and get the support you need.

### What Is Stakeholder Engagement?

Stakeholder engagement is a planful approach to identify, understand, and implement specific actions designed to influence, build confidence, or foster buy-in among key individuals or groups. In the context of [leadership development](#), stakeholder engagement is taking a proactive approach to involve and build commitment among those who will determine the success or failure of your program or initiative.

- **Who do I need to engage and influence?** The first step is to clearly identify your stakeholders, which we'll explore further below.
- **Why do I need their commitment?** Perhaps you need their approval, time, or budget. Or maybe the person's point of view is important to someone whose commitment is essential to moving ahead.
- **What level of commitment do I need from this person?** You will need some key people to be champions for your program. But every single person doesn't have to be a raving fan. Even if some stakeholders aren't making the rounds to promote the program, you may still need their commitment to support and follow through on the program.
- **How will I gain their commitment to take action?** Considering what is unique about each individual will help you choose the best strategies to engage, influence, and gain commitment.

### Why Is Stakeholder Engagement Important for Leadership Development?

You're not looking for a quick one-and-done deal. Leadership development has the potential to transform your organization's culture and success, but only if everyone involved is aligned and committed towards the same vision, goals, and expectations. With strategic alignment among your key stakeholders, you have an extended team to share the load of supporting the initiative and driving toward success.



Without stakeholder support, even the best leadership development program can fall flat.



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## Who Are the Stakeholders That Matter?

<p><b>The first step is to identify your stakeholders.</b></p>	<p><b>Here are some key questions to ask:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is the key stakeholder or executive sponsor?</li> <li>• Who is involved and who will benefit from your leadership development initiative?</li> <li>• Who are your key sponsors and allies in various business units and locations?</li> <li>• Who are all the other stakeholders that have a vested interest in this initiative?</li> </ul>
<p><b>From our experience working with clients, here's a list of typical stakeholders for leadership development initiatives.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive sponsor</li> <li>• Learners or participants</li> <li>• Managers of participants</li> <li>• Learning and development team</li> <li>• HR business partners or broader HR/talent community</li> <li>• Business or functional group leaders—i.e., IT</li> <li>• Direct reports of participants</li> </ul>
<p><b>Next, conduct a stakeholder analysis to help you visualize and understand the relationships, hierarchies, and interactions between all of the people who have an interest (or stake) in your initiative. Be intentional about identifying your stakeholders as you create a plan to engage and involve them.</b></p>	<p><b>Here are some questions that can help:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do they want as a result of leadership development?</li> <li>• What do I need from them to ensure success of this initiative?</li> <li>• How do I keep them informed?</li> <li>• Are there any challenges or potential barriers I need to consider that they may either create or help remove?</li> </ul>

## How Can My Stakeholders Get Involved?

Clients often ask us which stakeholders are most important for leadership development initiatives.

These are our top three, along with ways you can engage them:

- **Executive sponsor:** You need a [C-level](#) or senior executive for top-down support and visibility across the organization. Your executive sponsor can also advocate for ongoing budget and resources. Whether it's your CEO or CHRO, ask for their help as a key spokesperson for the program. They can be featured in welcome videos, deliver a [kickoff](#) message, or take part in a capstone event. Above all, keep your executive sponsor involved and the ROV (Return on Visibility) will pay off.
- **Learners or participants:** Your leadership development initiative is designed for them—and their meaningful engagement and participation is obviously crucial to its success. Too often all of the learner's energy is focused on the launch with little left for the ongoing “care and feeding” required to sustain [engagement](#) and ensure results. So it may help to think of learners as your internal



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customers. You can keep them engaged by highlighting the benefits of the program for their career and providing on-demand tools and more opportunities for development. Plus, recognition and ongoing support from L&D teams and their managers show that their journey as a leader is important for the organization.

- **Managers of participants:** You've probably heard your learners ask, "Is my boss going through this, too?" What they are really asking is, "What kind of support can I expect from my boss?" Managers need to understand their role and what's expected of them to support leadership development—not as a one-time event, but on an ongoing basis. Research has shown time and again that manager support is crucial for learners to apply new skills back on the job. Check out the section on [Manager Support](#) in this Guide.

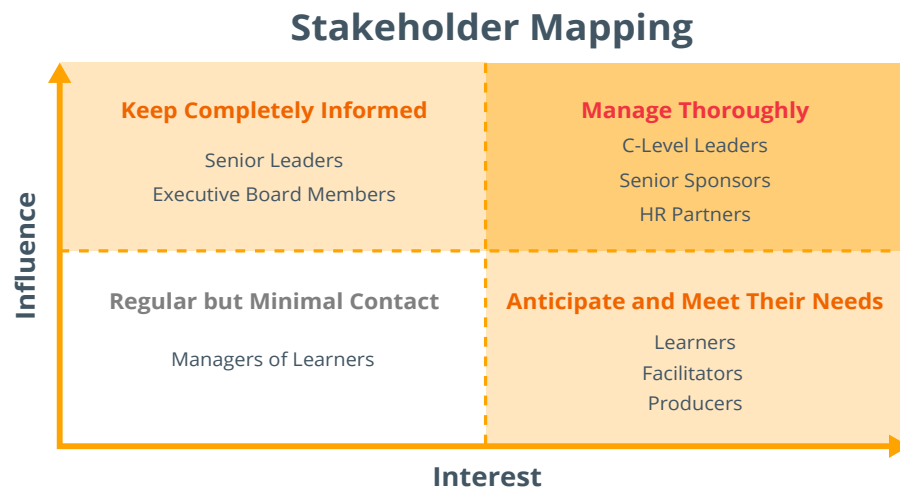


### But Not All Stakeholders Are Equal, Right?

It's nice to make everybody happy. But obviously, not every stakeholder can be involved in the details of your program.

After you've documented stakeholder roles, needs, and expectations, you can cluster them by level of influence in the organization and their interest in leadership development. Taking time to map your stakeholders against a simple quadrant can help you differentiate your next steps.

Stakeholder mapping gives you an opportunity to zoom out and take a big-picture look. Each quadrant enables you to plan out your [communication strategy](#) with each group of stakeholders. Here's an example of what that could look like:





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## Stakeholder Mapping: The Quadrants Explained

- **Manage Thoroughly.** Stakeholders with high influence and high interest, such as your Chief People Officer or CHRO, executive sponsors, and key HR partners, need to be fully engaged. These stakeholders need to champion your leadership development program as you will likely tap them to build excitement across the organization. It's also likely that you'll want them to be key partners in your implementation plan. Expect to communicate frequently and share information and details with this group through regular check-ins and 1:1 meetings.
- **Keep Completely Informed.** This group of high-influence stakeholders may not be interested in the day-to-day details of your leadership development program. For example, outside of your executive sponsors, it's great to have the support of senior leaders like your Executive Board. But it would be sufficient to give them an overview of your program and its goals without getting into the tactics of your rollout plan.
- **Regular but Minimal Contact.** You may not need to involve stakeholders with a lower level of influence in the organization as actively or frequently. They likely have lower interest in the details of your program, so only share information when it is most relevant for them. You may reach out or connect with them through a virtual group session or a newsletter. For example, managers of learners may not be as visible and influential in the organization as your executive sponsor, but they are definitely influential in the success of your leadership development program! You will want them to be invested without getting bogged down with unnecessary details.
- **Anticipate and Meet Their Needs.** Last but not least is your high-interest group of stakeholders who do not have as much influence in the organization. This group includes the learners or participants themselves as well as facilitators or virtual classroom producers. Each has a variety of needs and expectations, and you can plan for many opportunities to engage with this group.



“All stakeholders must participate in the gains and losses of any particular situation.”

-Christine Lagarde

Former French Minister of Economy

## So What's at Stake? Success!

We call them “stakeholders” because there’s something at stake for them! Each has a vested interest in the outcomes of your leadership development initiative. And your goal? To get your stakeholders on board to drive towards developing better leaders. The sooner you can engage your relevant stakeholders, the sooner you will benefit from their support and commitment.





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## Create a Communication Strategy

### It's Time to Put on Your Marketing Hat!

Let's assume you've got a great leadership development strategy. You've identified your [key stakeholders](#). Before you go live and launch, do you have an effective communication strategy in place?

And we don't just mean who will write and send the email to get leaders signed up! A creative and thought-out communication strategy and execution plan will help make sure everyone is informed, excited, and ready to be part of your program's success.

### What Are the Elements of a Communication Strategy?

To help you build out the elements of your communication strategy, consider the following questions. You can gather your L&D team to think these through:

- What is our leadership development strategy and philosophy?
- Who is responsible for our communication strategy, plan, and tactics?
- How will our leadership development initiatives be communicated within the organization?
- How can we sustain interest and momentum over time through communication?
- Who are our stakeholders and what information do they need?
- How will key stakeholders communicate their commitment on a regular basis?
- Who will develop and deliver the messages and when?

As part of your communication strategy, develop and incorporate a powerful theme or creative brand and visuals to add inspiration and excitement to your messages. Looking for a place to start? Here are some examples that we've designed for our clients as part of their [Leadership Development Subscription](#).

**Page 1 Template 1: Add Title of Your Leadership Development Program Here**



**Get Ready to Dive In!**  
(And add this text box as needed)  
**It's Relevant!** New courses offer a broad range of topics facing leaders today.  
**It's Flexible!** Only have a few minutes? Take a 10-minute drive podcast. Want something more in-depth? Dine in a 5- to 4-hour virtual instructor-led course.  
**It's Just-in-Time!** Access ready-to-use tools, templates, and job aids when you need it.


**Your Leadership Program Includes:**

<b>My Pathway: Leadership Core</b> (Approximately 40 hours to complete at your own pace)	Start your learning journey with My Pathway: Leadership Core, a unique, self-paced experience designed to build core leadership skills. Discover your leadership style, strengths, and gain with a quick self-assessment. Based on your results, you'll get recommended content to address the most relevant leadership challenges and build essential skills. You'll also get personal dashboards to track and share progress.
<b>My Pathway: Leadership Core</b> (Approximately 40 hours to complete at your own pace)	Start your learning journey with My Pathway: Leadership Core, a unique, self-paced experience designed to build core leadership skills. Discover your leadership style, strengths, and gain with a quick self-assessment. Based on your results, you'll get recommended content to address the most relevant leadership challenges and build essential skills. You'll also get personal dashboards to track and share progress.
<b>Course Name</b> (Add length of time)	Add course description.
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**Trusted Development for Every Moment of Leadership**

Welcome to Your Leadership Development Subscription



**Mission Statement:**  
Invest in leaders to build new skills, support our leadership culture, and grow for future career success.

Leadership is a deeply human endeavor, and it's incredibly challenging. But we believe in your potential, not only to succeed in your role today but to grow for the future. That's why we're inviting you to participate in your leadership development program with full access to content that will help you grow.

**Here's how it works:** We'll send you invitations to recommended content and courses from time to time as part of our formal program. But this is also about your personal journey. You can explore additional content and tools on your own to build your skills. Whether you are struggling with a current challenge or looking to engage more deeply in your leadership role, you have content at your fingertips to help you in every moment of leadership.

The next two pages show the types of learning included in your subscription as well as more about what's included in your learning journey.

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## Are There Different Types of Communication?

To communicate effectively, you need to align both formal and informal communication efforts. Let's explore the two types.

### Formal Communication

You likely have a variety of internal communication channels already in place. For example, you might have several existing options to share information and updates, such as:



Some of these formal channels may allow you to take advantage of existing forums, giving the program exposure at times and in places where employees already expect information. Leverage the most relevant channel for each stakeholder group to keep them engaged and informed.

### Informal Communication

We don't just mean the rumor mill! Communication takes place across internal social channels, through team collaboration and chat applications, and even on one-on-one calls.

While you don't have the time to micromanage all of these, be aware of (or pay attention to) informal communication channels and consider when it makes sense to use them. For example, to maintain momentum with your learners, you could ask a key stakeholder to post a reflection or application question each month on a Teams or Slack channel.

## Who Will Communicate What by When?

We know that many teams are strapped for time and resources. However, a clear action plan can help your team juggle everything you've got going on. This simple grid can help you:

WHO	WHAT	WHEN
...do we need to communicate to?	...do they need to know?	...do we need to communicate?
...is responsible for creating or delivering the message?	...methods or vehicles will be used?	



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## Is It Internal Marketing?

Time and attention...there's never enough to go around! It's tough to get leaders or their managers excited with just another email that ends up buried in the avalanche. Plus, the prevalence—and our own personal experience—with “edutainment” and social influencers have changed standards for compelling content.

In short, your communication strategy may begin to feel more like internal marketing. And if this starts to happen to you, you need to persuade your leaders of the importance and excitement of your program. Here are some ideas to jump-start your communication strategy:

- **Call out the WIIFM clearly.** If you want them to care and put time and energy behind it, everyone needs to know exactly “What’s in It for Me?” Help your participants understand that this leadership development program isn’t a one-time event, but rather an investment in their careers. Tell managers of learners that this program can improve overall performance of their team.
- **Help leaders feel valued and special.** How can you show each leader that this program was designed just for them? Can your executive sponsor prepare a heartfelt message about their own experience as a leader? Consider sending a “you are important” package to their home address with company swag, snacks, a special [book](#), or a gift card alongside training materials.
- **Make it memorable.** As you plan your launch, create a memorable logo or icon. Come up with a catchy tagline. Use striking visuals and colors. And use all of these across multiple platforms like your presentation slides, brochures or handouts, virtual backgrounds, video messages, and more.

Who	What	How
Senior Leader(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share: Why are we doing this? What role can they play?</li> <li>• High-level overview of program.</li> <li>• Message from the CEO</li> </ul>	Invite sponsor to speak at kickoff
Managers of Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to support/expectations</li> <li>• Summarized program goals</li> <li>• Manager Guides</li> </ul>	30 min-1 hour kickoff
Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's in it for them/program link to organization</li> <li>• Class logistics</li> <li>• Resources available</li> <li>• Learning journey invite/reminders</li> </ul>	30 min-1 hour kickoff
HR Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to support/expectations</li> <li>• List of available content</li> <li>• Summarized program goals</li> </ul>	Present in team meeting
Individual Contributors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available programs by level</li> <li>• Success stories: developing leaders</li> </ul>	Internal newsletter or website announcement

## How Can You Tell If Your Communication Strategy Is Working?

In our work with clients across industries of varying sizes, we’ve seen that communication strategies that look like internal marketing help implementation teams to flip the narrative and do what marketing does best: generate demand.

Over time, these programs transform from initiatives that leaders must complete on top of other work and busy schedules to development opportunities that leaders ask for. Leaders begin to understand a leadership development program as their employer’s investment in their careers.



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## Secure Manager Support for Leadership Development

### “Is My Boss Going Through This Program Too?”

According to our [research](#), one in four leaders say their manager isn’t effective at coaching them to develop into a better leader. It’s clear that many leaders lack manager support in their development experiences. But why is manager support so important?

While many factors contribute to the success of your leadership program, our [research](#) shows that involving managers to support and reinforce application of new skills is the biggest lever you can pull to increase program success.

Many organizations struggle to get manager support because they assume managers already have what it takes to be a good role model. But that’s not always the case. In fact, many higher-level leaders still haven’t mastered key leadership skills, despite their higher-level role.

The good news is that there are simple, actionable steps every manager can take to support leadership development. And let’s not forget that managers are leaders too—and they need just as much support as leaders actively training in your development program.



Organizations in which leaders receive feedback from their managers on their leadership skills are **4.6x** more likely to have high leadership quality and bench strength.

DDI, *Global Leadership Forecast 2021*

### What Are the Barriers to Manager Support?

Are your managers the biggest champions of leadership development? Or is development one more thing on their never-ending to-do list? If they are only lukewarm, it may be because of some common challenges:

- Managers feel resistant or hesitant because they don’t think direct reports need development.
- Managers think the leadership program is nice to have, but not critical for improvement.
- Managers think the program isn’t related to business needs and objectives.
- Managers think that leadership development is HR’s responsibility and has nothing to do with them.
- Managers believe that training doesn’t fit with their [organization’s culture](#).
- Senior leaders expect leaders to use their new skills yet fail to model the skills themselves.
- Conflicting priorities keep leaders from participating in manager overview or prep sessions.



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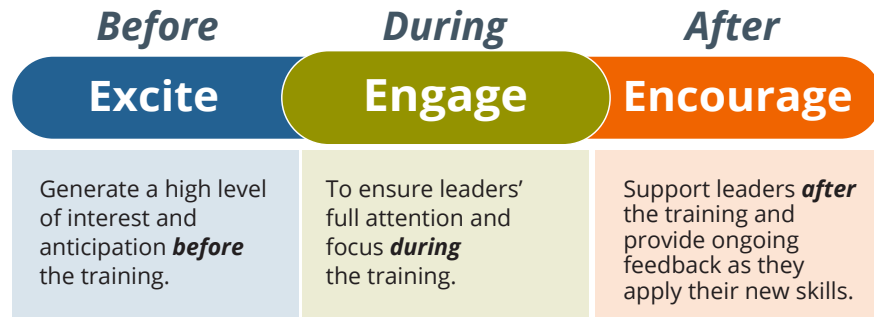
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## How Can Managers Support Development?

A manager's role in reinforcing and supporting leadership development is invaluable. Their actions, not just their words, can significantly impact how successfully and consistently leaders transfer their newly learned skills to the workplace. Managers can help your organization see a return on investment in training when they excite, engage, and encourage leaders about growth.

The following model illustrates three actions a manager can take to reinforce and support leaders before, during, and after their leadership training.



These three actions reinforce that leadership development is not a single event but rather a journey towards transformation and growth.

## What Type of Manager Support Is Needed?

Here are some action steps and practical tips for managers to support the leaders on their teams:

### Model Commitment

Managers should connect with leaders as early as possible to demonstrate their commitment and support. They can champion the value of leadership development by sharing personal examples of how they benefited from similar learning and growth opportunities in their careers.

### Give the Gift of Space and Time

Managers should require—not just encourage—leaders to disconnect from day-to-day work when they are engaging in any type of leadership development, including digital and [self-directed learning](#). That also means managers should avoid sending non-urgent messages or work requests that can distract or disrupt. With manager support, leaders can embrace development as a way of work and a priority during normal work hours.

### Personalize a Focused Development Plan

Managers can make learning more relevant by linking the leadership program to specific problems that leaders need to solve. Leaders may feel overwhelmed with too many needs to address and not knowing where to start. Managers can help them determine what to tackle first.

Managers can also help leaders understand what can be tackled simultaneously and what development gaps aren't worth worrying about. In other words, managers can help shape a focused development plan that addresses the leadership skills needed to be successful. Unfortunately, [research](#) shows that 40% of leaders don't have a written, up-to-date development plan.



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### Build Accountability to Apply Skills

Without accountability to apply lessons, learning experiences may go to waste. No one is better positioned to hold learners accountable than their direct managers. Managers can emphasize the importance of practicing new leadership skills right away and making them part of daily work life. They can also provide opportunities such as new job responsibilities, in-role developmental assignments, and cross-functional projects.

### Celebrate Small (and Big) Wins

Verbal or virtual “high fives” can go a long way. Managers can recognize and reward trying out new skills or adjusting behaviors for improved results. It’s a way to encourage continuous learning and development among leaders.

### Check In Frequently

Too often feedback from managers is infrequent, inconsistent, and inadequate. Regular check-ins with timely feedback and focused coaching can provide support and reinforcement. Managers can initiate a healthy dialog, especially when they spot gaps and opportunities for improvement. There are simple questions that managers can ask to increase the likelihood that leaders will apply their learning in the workplace:

- What have you learned?
- How will you apply it?
- How can I support you?

## What Support Do Managers Need?

As leaders themselves, managers are feeling the pressure of continuous change in the global business environment. With this in mind, it is important to support managers as they support their leaders. While some managers may have natural capabilities supporting and reinforcing development, others may need a little help. Here are a few ways you can provide the support managers need.



Managers are feeling the pressure of continuous change in the global business environment. With this in mind, it is important to support managers as they support their leaders.

### Motivation and Clear Expectations

Too often managers don’t realize the critical role they play, so you need to educate and motivate them. Share [data](#) like this to heighten their awareness: Leaders confirmed that the three factors that drive application of new skills are job relevance, personal motivation, and manager support.

Motivation should come from the top. Your Executive Sponsor can explain leadership development expectations for the managers of the learners. Executive Sponsors can also work with HR or L&D to identify metrics to make sure it’s happening. You can choose to include this in the program kickoff or host an additional session just for managers.



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### **The Right Skills and Tools**

Most managers don't have time to take the same leadership program as their direct reports just to gain an understanding of what leaders are learning. At DDI, we do this by providing some simple resources, such as a Manager's Guide with an overview of learning objectives, core concepts, and key learning tools. But that's not enough.

A short, synchronous session that presents research about the importance of the manager's role can build managers' confidence and capabilities. Armed with insights and information, managers are better equipped to support their employees. They'll also be in a better position to hold their employees accountable for applying what they've learned.

### **Managers Make a Big Difference**

It's important that managers remain patient and encourage patience, particularly if leaders fall back into old habits after making initial progress.

Often, changing behavior can take longer than anticipated. But with patience and perseverance, the support managers provide can truly make a difference.



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## How to Kick Off Your Leadership Development Program

### Think Strategically About Implementation

As you move into the launch phase of your leadership development program, it's time to build excitement and energy about the initiative. That's why it's crucial to think strategically about how to kick off your leadership development program.

In this section, we will share why a kickoff strategy matters and offer some tried and tested steps to launch your leadership development program with impact.

### Why a Kickoff Strategy Matters

Whether virtual or in-person, a kickoff is an opportunity to build excitement and [commitment](#) for your leadership development program. You are excited for your leaders to dive in and start learning. The kickoff is a way to extend that excitement to senior [stakeholders](#), managers of leaders, and of course, leaders themselves.

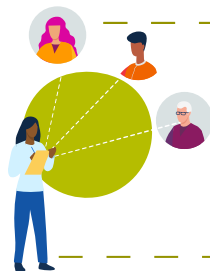
Keep in mind that a successful kickoff is not a one-time event. It's a series of events or touchpoints to engage participants and stakeholders by generating enthusiasm and setting expectations for the culture of development you want to create. At each kickoff touchpoint, participants and stakeholders should draw positive energy and see examples of how this development program is an important commitment for your organization. Make sure to include all of your stakeholder groups, in addition to participants themselves.

### A Successful Kickoff in 4 Steps

Here are four steps we recommend when setting up your kickoff:

#### 1. CEO Message

This message can be recorded and used for multiple cohorts or delivered live. The goal is to convey to leaders the importance of the leadership program. The message doesn't have to be long; 10-15 minutes is plenty of time to build energy.



The message also doesn't have to be delivered by the CEO. There may be another senior leader that employees respect who is a good fit to make the exciting announcement.

You'll want to spend time supporting your senior stakeholder to discuss how they'll deliver the message. They need to build up excitement about the program and talk about the impact of developing current leaders at your organization. Make sure the message articulates what better leaders are going to do for the future of your company, your strategy, your culture, and your customers.





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## 2. Kickoff Meeting

Similar to the CEO message, the kickoff meeting can happen in-person or virtually. This meeting should include both the leaders and their managers and accomplish the following objectives:

- Sets expectations for the learning journey.
- Explains what's in it for leaders, the organization, and your clients.
- Answers leaders' questions.
- Defines what great leadership looks like at your organization.

This meeting is most effective delivered live because leaders can engage with questions in real time.

It is best practice for managers of the leaders to attend a kickoff with their leaders. Why? By holding one event, everyone hears exactly the same message and can draw energy from each other. After the kickoff, managers can use the same messages to support and build momentum for their leader's development journey.

Another option is to hold separate kickoff meetings for leaders' managers. Holding a separate kickoff may allow you to tailor the content and help managers understand how they can support leaders.

## 3. Activating

The third step involves putting some responsibility on leaders to begin accessing learning content on their own.

Introduce leaders to [microlearning options](#) that target specific topics or [moments](#). This first learning experience typically includes a curated set of content that's available to leaders through your program's delivery platform.

Content should be relevant and focused on areas related to the overall program, but might also give leaders an opportunity to explore areas of particular interest. For example, there may be an option for learners to access resources on how to address poor performance on their team. Or how to have [difficult conversations](#) with their teams.

Having the autonomy to quickly access content on their own, and content that addresses immediate needs, will help build your learners' excitement for your company's leadership development program.

## 4. Meet in Peer Learning Groups

In the final step of a successful kickoff, leaders should meet with other leaders going through the same development journey using [peer learning groups](#). In this first peer group session, it makes sense to schedule future peer group sessions and establish ground rules. If the group of peers doesn't know each other well yet, some "speed networking" may be helpful.

## The Kickoff Is Crucial

It's important to the success of your program to include the kickoff as a strategic part of your leadership development program.

Following these four steps for how to kick off your leadership development initiative will help you set clear expectations for everyone involved from the get-go and get everyone set up for success. But most importantly, following these kickoff best practices will help to build energy for your program early and help to keep that energy high throughout your leaders' development journeys.



# Explore Moments of Leadership



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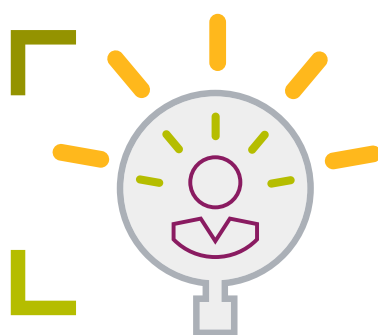
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## Right Development for the Right Moment of Leadership

Up to this point, we have shared many practical tips and concepts to enhance and maximize your approach to leadership development. But what really matters is how these tactics come together to meet leaders' needs in key moments of leadership.

In this section, we will explore a few examples of these moments of leadership, and how you can design leadership experiences for individual moments. To bring these to life in a concrete way, we'll use real examples of how you can use DDI content to meet these needs.



We don't know what the future holds. There will be days when managers don't know what hit them. For those leadership moments, it is good to always **be prepared**.

### Macro vs. Micro Moments: The Known and the Unknown

#### What are macro moments?

Earlier in this guide we highlighted that macro moments often occur at predictable times in a leader's career. For example, we know that leaders may be challenged in **new roles**, such as their very **first leadership job** or a transition from operational leader to strategic senior leader.

Other macro moments might occur when there's a major shift in the business. For example, leaders may need to learn new core skills, mindsets, and behaviors after a merger or as a new CEO shapes a new leadership culture in the organization. The **business drivers** we introduced earlier in this guide represent common macro moments that leaders may face as companies pivot from one priority to another.

The type of development experience that best supports macro moments is typically formal and structured. These experiences also tend to include more opportunities for **insight**, **practice**, **feedback**, and learning (both with **groups** and **individually**).

#### What are micro moments?

Micro moments are the leadership challenges leaders face in their day-to-day roles. While they may be less visible than macro moments, they are the essence of how a leader performs. And in fact, these single interactions can often have a profound effect on others. As these moments are often less predictable than macro moments, leaders need help quickly.

Some of these moments may be common challenges all leaders face, such as having difficult conversations or resolving a conflict. In other cases, leaders may need to react to a sudden change or unexpected crisis.



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By their nature, micro moments are more unpredictable and randomly occurring. So it's important to provide leaders with access to just-in-time learning tools and resources that support them in their moment of need.

## Exploring Moments of Leadership

In this section, we'll highlight examples of macro and micro moments. We'll also suggest ways to apply the concepts covered in this guide to address those needs. Additionally, you can use this section as a blueprint for other types of moments your leaders might face.

We'll take a deeper dive into these moments:

### Macro Moments

- [New Role: Becoming a New Leader](#)
- [Strategy and Culture Shift: Creating an Inclusive Culture](#)

### Micro Moments

- [Just-in-Time Support: Having a Challenging Conversation](#)
- [React to Crisis: Switching to Hybrid or Remote Work](#)





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## New Role: Becoming a New Leader

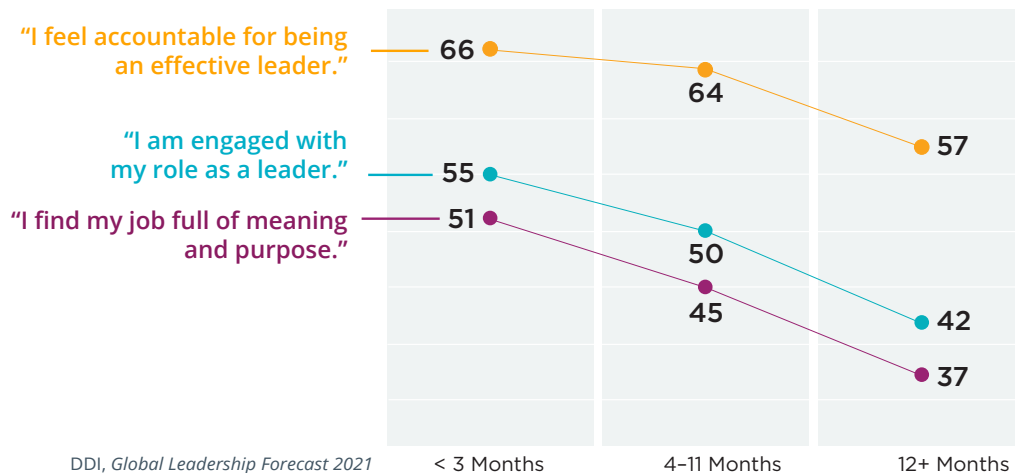
### Transforming People into Leaders

The moment someone becomes a new leader, everything changes. In fact, it's one of the most difficult moments in a career. According to DDI's *Frontline Leader Project*, about 90% of new leaders feel unprepared for the role. They often try to "fake it 'til they make it."

In many cases, that means leaders learn the hard way. But that can have long-term effects. DDI's *Leadership Transitions Report* found that high stress during a role transition had long-term effects. Regardless of how long ago leaders transitioned into their role, leaders who said they had highly stressful transitions were more than three times more likely to feel the effects of *burnout*. And 45% of leaders with high-stress transitions rated themselves as only average or below average compared to their peers.

The same study found that leaders who required more time to transition into their new leadership role felt less accountable for being an effective leader. They also felt significantly less engaged and were less likely to find their jobs fulfilling.

### Leaders Who Take Longer to Get Up To Speed in New Roles Feel Less Engaged



Leaders can learn effectively from their failures. But it's exhausting, time-consuming, and often embarrassing, both for the leader and their team. That's why it's so important to give leaders formal training as quickly as possible.

### What Does a New Leader Need?

What can you do to support leaders through this critical moment? Start by asking three simple questions:

1. What foundational skills do new leaders need?
2. What are the best ways for new leaders to learn these skills?
3. How quickly can I provide this training?

We'll answer all three.



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## What Foundational Skills Do New Leaders Need?

Our research and experience working with clients around the world tells us that the following skills not only prepare leaders for their first leadership job, but they also will support leaders through their leadership career:



- **Communication Skills to Connect with Others:** When we talk about communication as a leadership skill, we don't mean writing better emails or giving great presentations. Rather, we're talking about how to engage and address both the "head" (the practical outcome of the conversation) and the "heart" (the human connection) with [emotional intelligence](#). This foundational skill can be applied to a wide range of workplace situations leaders will face throughout their career.
- **Coaching:** While [coaching](#) can vary across situations, it always aims to help people improve. First-time managers need to differentiate between coaching for success and coaching for improvement.
- **Delegating:** Every leader wants that "dream team" of happy, highly capable individuals who can achieve goals. [Delegating work](#) enables leaders to build team capacity and achieve results. Our research shows that highly effective leaders often struggle to let go of work when they move into a leadership role.
- **Managing Conflict:** For a new leader, it may be uncomfortable to address conflict. After all, in many cases they are managing former peers and friends. But it's critical to teach them to recognize when and how to step in to ensure that conflicts don't spin out of control.
- **Driving Change:** As the direct supervisor for the vast majority of the workforce, [frontline leaders](#) are the primary drivers of change in an organization. First-time leaders need to understand how to turn resistance into commitment and inspire team members to take ownership of change.
- **Inclusion:** Great leadership is [inclusive leadership](#). Fostering an inclusive culture doesn't require us to separate inclusion from other skills, but build it into the core skills leaders practice every day.



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## What Are the Best Ways for New Leaders to Learn These Skills?

It's no secret that leaders—especially new leaders—learn best together. In fact, 78% of new leaders said they made valuable connections with leaders with whom they shared training courses. Additionally, our [research](#) shows formal, in-person training is still a top learning modality for first-time leaders.

This is especially true for younger learners, which is more likely to include new leaders. Young learners strongly prefer formal learning and learning with others over other learning modalities.

New leaders also prefer modalities where they can get insights about themselves, such as [assessment](#). Assessment provides leaders with objective data to know what skills they need to improve to develop into better leaders. New leaders also like developmental assignments that enable them to apply what they learned to on-the-job challenges.

The bottom line? Give new leaders opportunities to learn skills in formal group settings with the support of assessment and real-life application afterward.



## How Quickly Can I Provide New Leaders with Training?

If you can't bring your new leaders together for a live, face-to-face program quickly, leverage the [virtual classroom](#) to conduct cohort-based connected learning. DDI found that [virtual classroom](#), when done right, leads to the same success rate of behavior change and business impact as face-to-face training.

If you can't organize the virtual classroom experience quickly either, don't underestimate the benefits of digital, on-demand solutions for new leaders. In fact, leaders' preference to learn online increased at the height of the pandemic and remains part of today's new normal. On-demand learning gives you the advantage of training potential leaders as they accelerate toward their first leadership role instead of waiting months (or years!) when the cohort is ready.

There's just one caveat to consider. If you use digital learning for new leaders, make sure to provide guidance on the best way to move through topics and learning resources. In many cases, first-time leaders don't know what they don't know.

At DDI, we recommend the best of both worlds: You can blend live classroom sessions (virtual or in-person) with digital learning. Remember: It's not only important that you train new leaders quickly, but that it meets their needs with the right [design principles](#).



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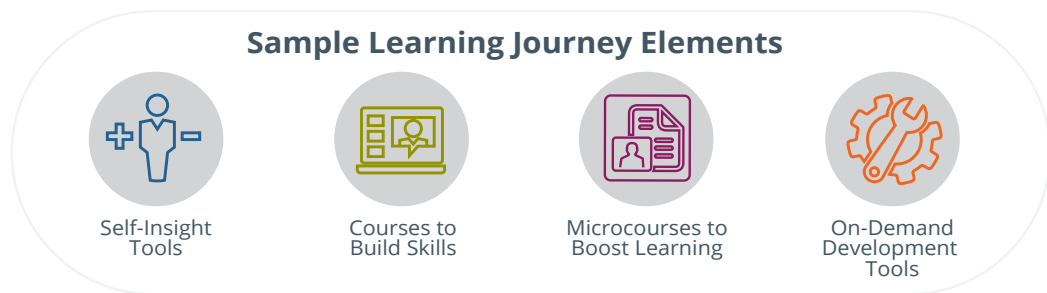
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## An Example New Leader Program

What could a program look like for a new leader? Here's a sample learning journey with a mix of elements to help first-time leaders build, practice, and apply new skills. This blended approach can span several months. You can determine the sequence of events and duration of the journey based on how you plan to roll it out.



## New Leader Program Elements

Let's take a closer look at this learning journey:

- **Self-Insight Tools:** Help your leaders develop self-awareness with [assessments](#) or insight tools that reveal their strengths and gaps. For new leaders, we recommend examining their own and others' emotions. Plus, it's important for new leaders to gain insight into their natural talents as a leader.
- **Courses to Build Skills:** The heart of leadership development is in skill building through live onsite or virtual classroom sessions. Self-paced and online courses are good alternatives if it's impossible to get leaders together. New leaders can benefit from a solid foundation of essential skills in Leading Self, Communication, Coaching, and Delegation. Our course *Your Leadership Journey* eases the transition for individual contributors into their first formal leadership role.
- **Microcourses to Boost Learning:** Bite-sized digital content can provide a burst of [microlearning](#) in approximately 10 minutes on a specific topic or skill. To boost their foundation, new leaders need course work to build their skills in inclusion, change, prioritizing, and setting goals. We typically recommend several microcourses as part of a learning journey. We also recommend allowing leaders to browse [a full library of topics](#) with the opportunity to complete other courses based on interest and need.
- **On-Demand Development Tools:** Leaders can practice, sustain, and apply their skills with a variety of support tools. These range from practical job aids to interactive chatbots, along with application planners and inspiring [podcasts](#).

In addition to these priority topics and modalities, we've worked with organizations to design kickoff sessions, integrate manager support, and incorporate program measurement to demonstrate leader and business impact.

## Build a Strong Foundation for Success

By preparing new leaders for success, you can accelerate their capability to engage their teams, drive results, and improve your bottom line. And we have evidence to support this: Companies that have transition programs for new leaders are two times more likely to be in the top 20% of organizations in financial performance. So don't let new leaders sink or swim; set them up for success with a leadership development program.





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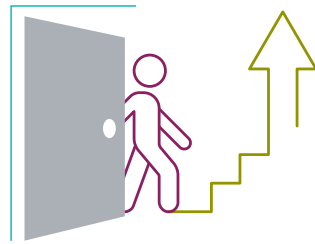
## Strategy and Culture Shift: Creating an Inclusive Culture

### Leaders Create the Environment for a Strategy and Culture Shift

Every leader is responsible for creating the environment in which their team can thrive. That's why when the company shifts its business strategy, the first thing HR needs to do is look at the leadership culture.

In many cases, leaders may need to learn new skills or significantly change their leadership approach to support the culture shift. That's why this is one of the “macro moments” of leadership when leaders may need a lot of development quickly.

There are a wide range of business strategies that can trigger the need for a culture change. In this section, we'll walk through an example of a company that has made inclusion a critical part of its talent and business strategy, and how they might develop their leaders to demonstrate inclusion on a daily basis.



**35%** of leaders from racial and ethnic minorities say they expect to change companies to advance to higher levels of leadership, compared to **27%** of non-minorities.

Source: DDI, *Diversity and Inclusion Report 2020*

### Which Leadership Skills Create an Inclusive Culture?

How can leaders create an inclusive culture? It's going to take more than watching a video on [unconscious bias](#) or completing an online training course. Leaders need to build skills that enable them to practice inclusion every day.

In our research, we've identified [seven leadership behaviors](#) that drive inclusion:

- 1. Build Empathy:** Leaders need to be able to put themselves in the shoes of everyone on their team, and understand how exclusion may feel to them and affect their performance.
- 2. Communicate Inclusively:** Inclusion must live in the micro moments of every leadership interaction, ensuring every team member feels valued, respected, trusted, supported, and included.
- 3. Run Inclusive Meetings:** Leaders need to include the right people—for ideation and decision making—and empower them to contribute fully.
- 4. Delegate for Opportunity:** It's easy for leaders to get into a habit of giving the same assignments to the same people. Leaders should assign projects equally and offer opportunities fairly.



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5. **Give Honest Feedback:** Many leaders are uncomfortable giving honest [feedback](#) to people who are different from themselves. But failure to provide honest feedback robs team members of critical developmental insight for future success. Leaders need to give structure to both their positive and developmental feedback, and ensure everyone on the team is getting the same types and equal amounts of feedback.
6. **Coach Inclusively for Growth:** People from different backgrounds are often left out of informal networks and conversations that help them learn, grow, and influence others. Leaders need strong coaching skills to accelerate performance and use fair performance standards across their team.
7. **Resolve Conflict Fairly:** Healthy conflict on diverse teams drives more well-rounded decisions and innovation. But it's also critical that leaders pay special attention to how they resolve conflict, ensuring that multiple viewpoints are heard and evaluated.



Companies need to create an inclusive culture, where people of all backgrounds feel welcomed and appreciated and can contribute at their highest potential.

### Sample Program to Develop Inclusive Leaders

So how can you support leaders as they strive to become more inclusive in their everyday leadership moments?

Here are key elements that you can include as you design your leadership program:

- **Self-Insight Tools:** Self-awareness is critical when it comes to inclusion. There are a variety of ways to build awareness. One tool we use is a self-assessment called *Inclusion in Action*, which invites leaders to reflect on what they do each day that fosters or hinders an inclusive company culture. Another assessment asks leaders to think about how their reactions focus on themselves or others.
  - **Try new technology:** Because self-awareness is so crucial to inclusion, this may also be a time to try something new to spark engagement with leaders. In this case, we have used [virtual reality to drive empathy for inclusion](#), which can be a powerful catalyst to build commitment.
- **Courses to Build Skills:** Whether live onsite, in a [virtual classroom](#), or self-paced online, courses can help leaders weave inclusion into their everyday interactions. For example, we recommend these courses to help leaders practice inclusion within the context of their broader leadership skills:
  - [Inclusion: Take Action](#)
  - [Communication: Connect Through Conversations](#)
  - [Coaching: Move People Forward](#)
  - [Leading Meetings: Use Time Effectively](#)
  - [Resolving Workplace Conflict](#)



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- **Microcourses to Boost Learning:** As leaders begin shifting how they think about leadership, microcourses can help them to stay engaged and deepen their learning. Here are some of the topics we cover in a learning journey to support inclusion:

- *Building an Inclusive Culture*
- *Unconscious Bias: Awareness into Action*
- *Leveraging Diversity*
- *Handling Emotion and Upset*
- *Managing a Multigenerational Team*
- *Preparing for Difficult Conversations*
- *Letting Go and Delegating More*

- **On-Demand Development Tools:** Creating an inclusive culture takes time. It's important for leaders to have access to ongoing support through tools and resources like job aids, practice exercises, and discussion planners.

In addition to the above resources, we've also worked with organizations to design executive stakeholder sessions, [build leadership habits through ongoing feedback](#), and measure program effectiveness to demonstrate behavior change and impact on the business.

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"When we did the [DDI] experience with our inclusion council, I had a person on my team who sat in, and we had a conversation afterward and he said he was amazed that senior leaders can experience exclusion, too. That was a real 'wow' moment."



Taiwan Brown, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Realpage,  
in *Human Resource Executive* magazine

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**Better Leaders for a Better Future**

When your company is undergoing a shift in business strategy, one of the biggest mistakes you can make is to assume your leaders know how to execute it. That won't cut it. As the example we shared shows, it can take significant effort to change the way your leaders think and operate.

Your leaders need targeted support to build the skills wired to your strategy. So think carefully about how you can support your leaders in this moment. And most importantly, make sure that leaders are getting consistent support and messaging across the board. If you want to see your culture shift, every leader needs to be on board.



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## Just-in-Time Support for Leaders: Having a Challenging Conversation

### Help Leaders in a Tough Moment

Sleepless nights. Anxious commutes. Panicked Googling to quickly find resources.

Every leader experiences tough moments that they dread, like having a difficult performance conversation with a colleague you're close with or driving an unpopular change. As the moment approaches, they're seeking out just-in-time support to boost their confidence.

Often, leaders turn to a quick internet search, hoping to quickly find something inspiring. But of course, there's no telling the quality of what they'll find online, or if it fits with your leadership culture. That's why it's critical to ensure they have access to on-demand learning tools and resources to give them support in the moment.

In this section, we'll show an example of how you can give just-in-time support to leaders when they have a challenging conversation coming up.

### Tackling Challenging Conversations at the Time of Need

Ideally, you are already helping leaders develop the right foundational leadership skills as soon as they [become a leader](#). But as they approach a challenge in the moment, they can leverage on-demand content to refresh and reinforce their skills.

We'll explore some ways you can do that, using DDI content as an example. We'll cover formats including microcourses, tools, and short content.



"From performance reviews to one-on-ones to on-the-fly visits at my door, conversations with my reports are how I spend a good part of my day. It's also proven to be my **biggest challenge**."

### Microcourses for Just-in-Time Support for Leaders

[Microcourses](#) are one of the best ways to help leaders quickly brush up on their skills. These short online courses can be completed in less than 10 minutes and help leaders focus on a particular aspect of a skill.



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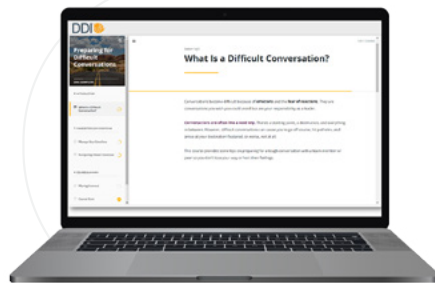
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Here are examples of topics that might be addressed in the microcourse format to help leaders have challenging conversations. Note that each can help leaders address a specific concern they may be dealing with in the moment:

- ***Addressing Poor Work Habits***  
This practical course shares problem-solving tips to discuss and resolve poor work habits, such as punctuality, meeting preparation, etc. Expert coaches provide advice on how to make positive habits stick.
- ***Giving Feedback for Improvement***  
This course focuses on giving feedback that drives meaningful change. It shares common mistakes and offers a DDI framework called the **STAR/AR model** that leaders can use when delivering feedback for improvement.
- ***Handling Emotion and Upset***  
In this course, leaders learn about three common approaches that make negative feelings worse. They also learn how to use empathy to help an upset employee return to a calm, productive state.
- ***Preparing for Difficult Conversations***  
This course helps leaders to prepare for a difficult conversation. It shares common pitfalls and helps leaders to understand their personal approach and how they can adapt it to be more effective.
- ***Resolving a Conflict You're Involved In***  
This course uses DDI's Interaction Essentials<sup>SM</sup> to uncover the causes of conflict, establish a more positive working relationship, and develop solutions that all parties can support.



DDI offers several **microcourses** that deal with different types of conversations and behaviors that can be applied across multiple situations and challenges.

### On-Demand Practice Tools

In addition to getting tips and information from microcourses, leaders may want the chance to quickly practice their skills. That's where you can use elements like simulations, chatbots, and digital practice tools. These offer a great opportunity to simulate real-world challenges to boost a leader's confidence and skills before doing the real thing.

For example, we have used chatbots to simulate a typical conversation with a peer or direct report. With this tool, leaders get instant feedback from a virtual coach about how they respond to the situation, helping them to think about the impact of their responses.



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DDI's **Chatbot Exercises**  
simulate a typical  
conversation with a  
peer or direct report.



Another example of an on-demand resource is a self-insight tool. We often use these to help leaders understand their personal tendencies and behaviors that may influence their approach to a difficult conversation. After using this tool, leaders can go into conversations knowing where they may struggle and focus on strategies to override their natural tendencies.

### Application Tools and Resources

One of the most important things leaders can use in the moment are application tools. At DDI, we have found that conversation planners are incredibly powerful in these situations. They can help leaders plan out what they're going to do and say, in line with what they've learned in courses. That way, they can think through a conversation ahead of time and plan how they will apply their leadership skills.

For example, DDI's Thinking Through Conversations worksheet from the [Preparing for Difficult Conversations](#) microcourse offers a series of questions to help leaders prepare for a difficult conversation:

- Do I have a hidden agenda for this conversation?
- Is this a one-time, prolonged, or recurring issue?
- Do I tend to look at this person or situation with an **unconscious bias**?
- What solutions and support can I offer?
- What do I want to see more of (collaboration, clear communication, improved processes, etc.)?

These resources are incredibly powerful for helping a leader feel prepared—and less anxious—about a tough conversation.

### Leadership Happens in the Moment

When we talk about supporting leaders in the moment, we're not suggesting that they try to learn major new skills in a few minutes. Rather, the goal is to help them refresh their knowledge or dive a little deeper into the exact challenge they are facing. And most of all, you want to give them support to practice and apply skills in the moment.

By giving just-in-time support to leaders, they can apply what they've learned in courses they took six weeks or six years ago. And that's how leadership skills truly come to life.



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## React to Crisis: Switch to Remote and Hybrid Work

### Your Leaders Are Blindsided, Too

In a crisis, people immediately look to their leaders for answers. But often, leaders are just as blindsided as everyone else. It's up to them to react to crises quickly and—more importantly—appropriately.

Crises can come in many shapes and forms, such as:

- Crisis specific to the team, such as the [loss of a team member](#)
- Crisis specific to the company, such as a product recall or a data breach
- External crisis, which includes major events in the industry or world at large

Regardless of the source of the crisis, leaders need to address the situation right away. And how they do it will likely shape their leadership legacy—for better or worse—for a long time to come.

In these moments, HR is often wondering what they can do to support their leaders as quickly as possible. In this piece, we'll share an example of supporting leaders in an external crisis: the shift to remote work that occurred at the onset of the pandemic in 2020.

### The Sudden Change To Leading Hybrid Teams

According to DDI's [Global Leadership Forecast 2021](#), few leaders were ready for the shift to virtual and hybrid work. In fact, just 20% of leaders rated themselves as “very effective” at leading [virtual teams](#).



#### Hybrid Workplace: Definition

A flexible work structure where some employees work remotely and other team members work from a central location or office, or employees do a mix of both.

But when the pandemic hit in early 2020, many companies switched to a virtual workplace literally overnight. Leaders suddenly had to figure out how their teams could stay productive under such difficult and dramatically different circumstances. In addition to figuring out practical needs (Does everyone have the equipment they need? Can everyone jump on Zoom?), leaders had to find ways to help their teams feel connected in a remote environment.

According to DDI research, leaders needed to focus immediately on [five best practices for leading hybrid teams](#). They are:

- Build trust and inclusion.
- Communicate well and often.
- Drive focus and accountability.
- Create a strong team culture.
- Avoid burnout with empathy.

Here are some ways that HR and learning teams can quickly deploy resources so leaders can support a rapid shift.





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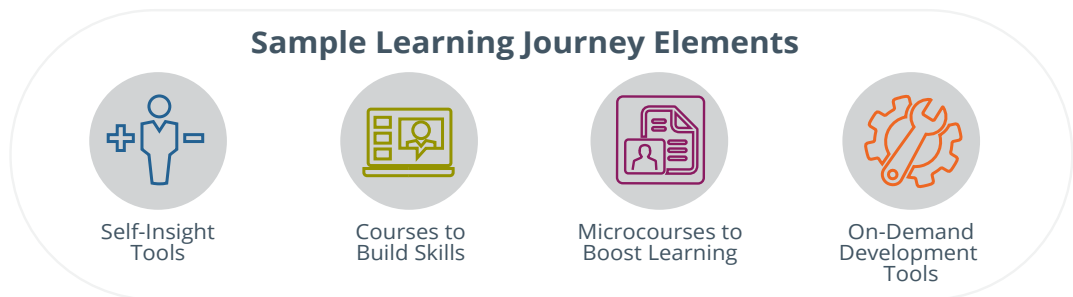
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## Sample Learning Journey: Leading Hybrid Teams

In this sample learning journey, we share a complete picture of what it could look like to rapidly build skills that help leaders adjust to a remote or hybrid workplace. But keep in mind that this can be flexible, depending on the timeline of the crisis and the baseline skills of your leaders. [Download the details of this sample program.](#)



### Start with a Self-Insight Tool

Self-insight tools are a powerful way to help leaders quickly align their focus around their biggest challenges. In this example, we'd start with a Team Effectiveness tool, which analyzes the following [six factors](#):

- Shared Purpose
- Role Clarity
- Enabling Processes
- Emotional Security
- Collaborative Spirit
- Growth Orientation

The first three factors address the practical side of teams. Team members need to understand team purpose, roles, and processes. The last three factors address their personal needs. They ensure team members feel safe and valued, work well together, and are challenged to learn and grow.

Once leaders have a sense of where their teams are struggling, they can focus on building and practicing the skills that will help their teams adjust.

### Use Courses to Build Skills

In a crisis, you may or may not have time to have your leaders join courses. In the situation of the pandemic and switch to remote work, some companies had little time for learning and chose to focus more on microcourses and on-demand tools.

But other companies found that people initially had some time on their hands and, more importantly, craved learning. They especially wanted to learn in groups (virtually, of course) to maintain a sense of connection as they weathered the crisis together.



**Reference Guide:**

Build a  
Foundation for  
Leadership  
Development

Design Exceptional  
Leadership  
Development  
Experiences

Manage a  
Successful  
Leadership  
Development  
Program

Explore Moments  
of Leadership

Based on the five best practices for leading hybrid teams, here are some courses that helped leaders build key skills for remote work. Offered in-person or through [virtual classroom](#), these group experiences gave leaders a chance to share challenges, triumphs, and lessons they learned in a difficult time.

- **Communication: Connect Through Conversations**

The ability to connect and engage employees through effective communication and conversation skills is crucial. While these skills have always been important, they become even more important in a hybrid work environment where employees can sometimes feel disconnected.

- **Leading Teams: Achieve More Together**

Leaders are often engaging with team members remotely where it can be more difficult to gauge and respond to nonverbal cues. This course helps leaders boost team performance.

- **Executing Strategy at the Front Line**

Leaders are also the custodians of the strategy at the frontline. They need to mobilize their team members with clear goals and plans. Additionally, they need to manage the dynamics of a team environment. In a hybrid workplace, they may not always have line of sight to how team members are working together.



**40%** of workers say they will quit if they have to give up remote work.

Source: Morning Consult poll on behalf of Bloomberg News, June 2021

## Microcourses to Boost Learning

For a quick boost of learning, microcourses offer fast opportunities to deepen skills. As people rapidly switched to remote work, we saw leaders using microcourses on [building trust](#), [leading a virtual meeting](#), [helping team members to avoid burnout](#), [finding control during change](#), and [leading hybrid teams](#).

## On-Demand Development Tools

Leaders can practice, reinforce, and apply their skills using a series of on-demand tools. For example, a team charter worksheet can be used by the leader to quickly establish team protocols and expectations with team members operating in a hybrid working environment.

Or, as the pandemic required leaders to show more empathy than ever, we saw an uptick in our “Empathy Is Boss” microgame, which helped leaders quickly practice the empathy skills that are so important in a hybrid work context.

In a crisis, these tools can help leaders slow down for just a few minutes and re-focus their energy on key skills that help them engage their teams.

## Back to the Future

The shift to hybrid is just one example of a crisis that leaders may face. By supporting leaders through changes and crises like this with the right mix of development, you can ensure that leaders are better equipped to drive engagement and productivity across their teams. In doing so, you bring the focus back to the future.



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## Conclusion

### Your Opportunity to Deliver Breakthrough Moments

So what happens when you get leadership development right? What happens when you meet leaders in the moment and deliver the development they need?

When you do it right, you can create breakthrough moments.

Breakthrough moments deliver the insights your leaders will remember and carry with them for the rest of their careers. These moments happen when people feel a connection to their role as leaders. They see how what they learned was directly related to their job. And they see how their behavior positively impacts others and the organization as a whole.

As learning professionals, these are the moments we should strive to create. From moments of challenge, aim to create breakthrough moments that will stay with leaders the rest of their careers.



Behind every leader is a person doing their best in an environment of changing expectations and uncertainty.

### DDI By Your Side

At DDI we believe that better leaders can have profound and positive impacts across all areas of life, including business, community, and home. We also recognize that behind every leader is a person doing their best in an environment of changing expectations and uncertainty.

We bring this perspective to every leader we help, in every leadership moment. And we are here for you, helping you to deliver success in every part of your leadership development programs.

For every critical moment of leadership, DDI is ready to be by your side.

Want to learn more about how we can help? Explore [DDI Leadership Development subscriptions](#).

Or if you'd like to chat about our solutions (or think we missed any topics in this guide!), contact us at [info@ddiworld.com](mailto:info@ddiworld.com).