

Build a future-ready leadership pipeline with targeted development - Training Journal

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the challenge of developing senior leaders in today's complex business environment, arguing that traditional broad-brush training approaches are insufficient. Steve George, drawing on CIPD research and focus groups with senior HR professionals across healthcare, construction and tech sectors, presents a framework for strategic leadership development. The article emphasizes that effective leadership development requires tailored, experiential approaches including executive coaching, real-world stretch assignments, and structured feedback mechanisms. Key evidence includes CIPD's Good Work Index showing correlation between effective leadership and employee engagement, and research indicating organizations see best returns when focusing investment on those needing the most support. The article concludes that leadership development must be strategic, aligned with succession planning, and integrated with organizational talent planning to create future-ready leadership pipelines.

Key Insights

1. Senior leaders require different development approaches than the broader workforce, with tailored and experiential methods proving more effective than scaled-up general training
2. CIPD research indicates organizations achieve best returns by focusing leadership development investment on those needing the most support to develop good leadership skills
3. Practical skills like goal-setting, performance appraisals, listening, and mentoring translate most effectively into leader behavior according to CIPD analysis

Practical Takeaways

- Leadership development programs should begin with needs assessment rather than assumptions, establishing clear learning goals based on identified capability gaps
- Effective leadership development combines multiple methods including coaching, stretch assignments, and structured feedback rather than relying on single approaches

Frameworks Mentioned

360-Degree Review — Structured feedback method involving multiple perspectives to assess leadership capabilities and development needs

Critical Analysis

Strengths include backing from CIPD research and insights from cross-sector HR professional interviews, providing practical methods based on organizational experience. The article effectively connects leadership development to broader business outcomes through employee engagement data. However, limitations include lack of specific measurement criteria for program effectiveness, limited discussion of implementation challenges or costs, and prescriptive tone without acknowledging that optimal approaches may vary by organizational context. The focus on 'homegrown' talent development may overlook benefits of external leadership recruitment in certain situations.

Organizational Practice

Organizations are implementing leadership development through executive coaching, stretch assignments, 360-degree feedback, immersive programs, group coaching, and multi-tiered leadership pathways, with focus groups conducted across healthcare, construction and tech sectors showing these approaches in practice

Strategic Implications

The article suggests leadership development is shifting from traditional training models toward more strategic, individualized approaches that integrate with succession planning and organizational talent pipeline management, with emphasis on developing internal talent rather than external recruitment

Validation Status: passed