

Two in five employees do not think their manager is trained enough, survey finds - People Management

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the widespread gap in formal management training across UK organisations, drawing on two surveys: Unmind's Closing the Leadership Skills Gap report (n=6,000) and the Chartered Management Institute's October 2023 Better Managers report (n=4,500+). The central argument, advanced by Unmind, the CMI, and the CIPD, is that organisations systematically promote employees into management roles based on technical competence rather than people leadership capability, producing what the CMI terms 'accidental managers.' Key findings indicate that 39% of employees doubt their manager's competence, 84% of managers received no formal people leadership training since promotion, and 35% of employees have left a job due to poor management. Independent corroboration from the CMI — finding that 82% of new managers received no formal training — lends cross-source validity to the core claim. Experts from the CMI and CIPD identify downstream consequences including reduced employee engagement, elevated turnover, and suppressed organisational productivity. The article concludes that structured, formal management development programmes are positioned as a systemic necessity rather than an optional investment.

Key Insights

1. 84% of managers surveyed by Unmind reported receiving no formal training in people leadership skills since becoming a manager, a figure closely mirrored by CMI's finding that 82% of those entering management had no proper training.
2. 35% of employees reported having left a job due to a poor manager, with a further 33% having considered leaving for the same reason, pointing to management quality as a material driver of voluntary turnover.
3. The 'accidental manager' phenomenon — promotion based on technical performance rather than people management capability — is identified by both the CMI and CIPD as a structural organisational pattern with consequences for engagement, retention, and productivity.

Practical Takeaways

- Organisations that treat management as a reward for individual performance rather than a distinct role requiring people-specific skills face measurable exposure in engagement, retention, and productivity metrics.
- Cross-referencing employee and manager perceptions reveals alignment: both groups independently report inadequate training provision, which strengthens the internal validity of the Unmind survey's findings.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article triangulates findings across two separate surveys (Unmind, n=6,000; CMI, n=4,500+), increasing confidence in the core finding around untrained managers. Expert commentary is sourced from three distinct organisations — Unmind, CMI, and CIPD — providing some plurality of perspective. **Limitations:** The primary survey was commissioned by Unmind, a workplace mental health technology vendor with a commercial interest in the findings; this introduces potential framing bias in how questions were constructed and results interpreted. The article does not disclose survey methodology details such as sampling approach, response rates, or whether samples were nationally representative. All commentary is directionally aligned with the article's central premise, with no dissenting voices or alternative interpretations presented. The article also conflates correlation with causation in several places — for instance, attributing productivity loss directly to lack of training without controlling for other variables. Geography is UK-centric but not explicitly stated for all data points.

Organizational Practice

Organisations commonly promote high-performing individual contributors into management roles without providing formal people leadership training, a pattern described as producing 'accidental managers.' This practice prioritises technical or operational competence as the basis for advancement, leaving new managers without structured development in communication, coaching, conflict resolution, or team-building. Some organisations lack formalised management training programmes entirely, relying on managers to self-navigate their new responsibilities.

Strategic Implications

The convergence of findings across two independently conducted surveys suggests the undertrained manager phenomenon is a systemic rather than isolated issue in UK organisations. If management quality is as consistently linked to voluntary turnover as the data implies, talent retention strategies that focus solely on compensation or culture without addressing line manager capability may be addressing symptoms rather than causes. The scale of the gap — 84% of managers without formal people leadership training — points to a structural design choice in how organisations define career progression, with downstream effects on engagement and productivity metrics that aggregate to macroeconomic impact, as noted by CMI commentary referencing UK productivity stagnation.

Validation Status: warning