

THE FIVE SEISMIC SHIFTS

Changing the leadership development landscape

Executive leadership development has been recognized as an important organizational activity for a long time now. Programs have proliferated over the years to include a wide spectrum of open-source, outsourced, off-the-shelf and customized programs. They tackle skills that run the gamut from building self-awareness to leading organizational transformations.

Yet never before has the conversation of how to best develop those senior-most leaders been more pertinent than today, driven by some long-term seismic shifts.

These shifts are changing forever our mental models of how to develop great leaders.

1 Formal ⇔ Informal

Most of us now know the 80/20 or the 70/20/10 ratios that purport to depict where learning actually occurs: in the informal, social space of organizations. Not in the classroom.

In other words, real development occurs on the job, as close to the actual work as possible, with and among people. While this may seem intuitive, the actual dollars spent on development and the systematic approach to designing it have yet to follow. Most leadership development investment is spent sending executives away from work to a classroom.

It is time to rethink how to design and enable learning using many more informal methods such as: discussion forums, peer-to-peer engagement, gamification, stretch projects, mentorship and coaching.

It's time for the dollars to start embracing learner experience design in a more holistic, informal manner. Classes and seminars can still be powerful but the traditional dependence on them must diminish.

2 Scheduled ⇔ 24/7

Learning happens all the time, everywhere. Content should therefore be available 24/7 to learners, as it naturally is outside of the "walls" of the corporation.

This means leveraging technology to enhance the access to the needed content any time. This shift is fueled by the recognition that the best learning happens when driven by an actual need, and no learning sticks more than when it takes place as close to that point of need as possible.

For example, if a leader needs to have a difficult conversation in the next 30 minutes, the framework that could help this person should be instantly available (delivered by audio or video). It will be instantly helpful because it immediately addresses the specific need, in the moment.

3 Fixed Place ⇔ Mobile

While the shift to 24/7 is about availability (when), the shift to mobile is more about access (where).

Some people prefer to learn techniques and knowledge via video, others via articles, others yet via online forums.

Learning must therefore deal with these preferences by offering mobile access: on mobile phones on the commute to work, on tablets in the lunchroom, or via laptops in the business trip hotel room. Mobile makes this all possible.

4 Standard Content ⇔ Project Based

A fixed, set curriculum, with its own scope and sequence has been the norm for some time. The problem with this approach is that it tends to be far less agile and relevant than is needed in today's fast-moving world.

In addition, the learning is often removed from the actual needs of the moment. It's not uncommon for learners to leave with plenty of tools and insights, only to then return back to the normalcy of the day-to-day, unable to consistently apply those new lessons to the actual work at hand.

By shifting development resources to project-based, work-embedded approaches, HR can ensure relevance

and lean into the struggles of day-to-day work itself as the very platform upon which to build the requisite skills.

This work-driven approach requires a more agile and adaptive mindset to leadership development, wherein supportive materials, pre-work and post-work are often molded in real time.

5 Long “Lessons” ⇒ Short and Micro

The last shift moves us away from day- or week-long seminar-like trainings and towards shorter and shorter exposure to content. The reasons behind this shift are many, from burdened schedules and lowered attention spans to emerging research on how the brain functions and what we remember.

And when we say short, some content chunks may be only minutes long, depending on what’s being shared. The more tactical or procedural the skill, the more applicable micro-learning approaches become. The challenge, in this case, is to make sure that such micro approaches don’t sacrifice efficacy for efficiency.

To be sure, these five shifts are not new, nor are they surprising to veterans of executive leadership development. They are also not going away—quite the contrary. Their importance and impact are only increasing over time, as they converge onto one another into one great call for changing the status quo. Are we ready to answer that call? What will it take for us to answer that call? Who is listening?

Where are you on the River Strength Meter?

THE RIVER STRENGTH METER					
WEAK		MODERATE		STRONG	
Building Bad	Hurt Locker	Uphill Climb	Benign Neglect	Strong Pipeline	A Tribe of Leaders
Promotion and retention of destructive leaders. Executives are known or suspected to champion favorites not respected in organization. Bad begets bad and turnover is rampant.	No pipeline exists. Ineffective and toxic leaders endure without correction. Most vacancies filled externally due to lack of internal talent. Turnover is high.	No pipeline exists. Isolated cases of good leaders emerge but receive little development and are often demoralized by the bad leaders around them. Vacancies are common and lasting.	No identification of future leadership talent. Some leaders receive training but staffing and coaching are random and inconsistent. Vacancies endure longer than expected.	Key roles have three credible and respected candidates identified. Leaders active in developing key future talent.	All managerial roles have multiple credible and respected candidates identified. Leaders foster a culture of leadership; it is ubiquitous.
LEADERSHIP PIPELINE					

The River Group was formed by clients for clients. The founders met 15 years ago as CEO client and consultant. Over the years, we have worked on many successful transformations together.

This track record of success and fruitful collaboration led us to form The River Group as specialist leadership advisors.

With the client/consultant perspective, The River Group is a different kind of

consulting firm. We combine years of experience leading change ourselves or advising others on leading change.

We have the behavioral know-how of consultants and the focus and pragmatism of the CEO.

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