Hello once again from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I’m pleased to present the latest edition of ideas@work. We publish this journal specifically for business leaders interested in talent development; I hope that you find something that interests you.

Volume 8 of ideas@work includes five of the latest white papers from the UNC Executive Development team. Horace McCormick, a program director here at UNC, draws from over twenty years of corporate experience to offer his tips to help you build a successful and sustainable mentoring program. Kimberly Schaufenbuel, former head of global talent development for a multinational corporation, explores the importance of mindfulness in the workplace, featuring examples of companies incorporating mindfulness into their learning and development efforts. Kirk Lawrence has written about toxic work environments, focusing on the leadership behaviors—passive aggression, destructive gossip, devious politics, negativity, narcissism, resistance to change—which can contribute to a toxic workplace environment. Another paper authored by Kip Kelly considers the value of collaboration, with steps you can take to create a more collaborative culture in your organization. Finally, in The ROI of Talent Development, Sarah Perez looks at how companies are investing in talent development and provides suggestions to help you get the most from your investment.

I hope you enjoy this edition of ideas@work and that you find some practical ideas that you can apply in your organization. If you’re struggling with any of the issues detailed in these white papers, I encourage you to contact us. We work with a number of organizations, representing a wide variety of industries, to help them solve their biggest talent development challenges. Here at UNC Executive Development we specialize in delivering customized leadership development and executive education programs—designed specifically to address your unique business challenges. We deliver these programs all over the world— providing your business leaders with the knowledge, skills, and experience they need to be effective. We always welcome the opportunity to learn about your organization, your talent development needs, and your business challenges.

Please visit our website where you can find all of our white papers, research, webinars, and more. (www.uncexec.com)

Thank you again for your interest in UNC Executive Development and for your continued support.

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At UNC Executive Development, we are committed to providing new, impactful learning experiences to help our partners successfully manage and develop their employee talent.
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(Note: The information or conclusions expressed in the following white papers are the authors’ review of findings expressed by the organizations. All brand representations are registered trademarks owned by the respective companies or organizations.)
How to Build a Successful Mentoring Program

Horace McCormick
Program Director
UNC Executive Development
Introduction

Mentoring is a strategic tool that, when done right, can attract and retain high-potential talent and accelerate leadership development and readiness. Mentoring is also an effective tool for shaping organizational culture and closing engagement and generational gaps. It has often been said that the most important work of a leader is the development of other leaders. Employers are increasingly recognizing the benefits of mentoring in leadership development. According to a Corporate Executive Board survey, 25 percent of U.S. companies now host peer-mentoring programs, a significant increase from before the 2007 recession, when only 4 to 5 percent of U.S. companies reported sponsoring mentorship programs (Rouen, 2012). Unfortunately, as many HR and talent managers can attest, it can be quite challenging to develop and maintain successful mentoring programs.

Promise

This white paper:

• Discusses the benefits of effective mentoring programs, and why more employers are embracing mentoring programs in their organizations;
• Delineates the difference between coaching and mentoring, terms that are often used interchangeably but erroneously;
• Reviews various types of mentoring programs;
• Offers steps HR and talent management professionals can use to launch successful and sustainable mentoring programs in their organizations, and;
• Provides examples of mentoring programs being used in organizations today.

Why Mentoring Programs Are on an Upswing

Mentoring improves employee satisfaction, retention, and recruitment in an organization (Kessler, 2010). It can also improve an organization’s diversity by improving promotion rates for people from under-represented groups like women, African Americans, Latinos, and Asians (DiversityInc, 2014). Mentoring can even be used as a branding tool to attract talent, particularly high-quality college recruits.

Employers who mentor new hires find that they acclimate more quickly to the organization’s culture and work processes which translates to faster ramp up time and return on recruiting investment. This mentoring during the onboarding process can also lower turnover and help identify high-potential employees early on (Vaccaro, 2013). There is another, perhaps more compelling, reason why mentoring is being embraced by more organizations; the Millennial generation, the most populous force in the workplace, craves it.

A 2012 study, “No Collar Workers,” found that three-quarters of Millennials want a mentor. Eighty percent of Millennials responding to the survey said they wanted regular feedback from their boss, and 89 percent said they thought it was important to constantly learn at their job. Two-thirds of Millennial respondents also said they thought they should mentor more experienced workers on technology (Emelo, 2013). This generation is demanding mentoring, and employers are listening.

Mentoring may also be on an upswing because it is an effective and inexpensive way to prepare future business leaders. In an article for Fortune magazine, Brian Kropp, managing director for the Corporate Executive Board, noted that during the recession, mid-level management at large corporations was decimated. Today, mid-level managers have 50 percent more direct reports and 20 percent less time to spend with them. They also have far less time for professional development. Peer mentoring can help in skill development and in improved engagement for this group (Rouen, 2012).
Formal Coaching Versus Formal Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring are both a form of professional development used to develop skills and organizational capabilities, but they are distinct.

Coaching is used to help employees hone their potential and performance capabilities. Coaching can be delivered through the Internet or with a personal coach external to the organization and is aimed primarily at developing skill competence, performance improvement, and very specific leadership opportunities and challenges.

Coaching usually has a shorter timeframe than mentoring and has more finite, tangible learning objectives and goals.

Mentoring is used to help employees in their career development paths, to simplify increased responsibilities, to build confidence, and to help individuals learn and grow in an organization. Mentoring pairs the mentee with another person in the organization. Mentoring relationships can last anywhere from six months to a year.

Types of Mentoring Programs

Today’s mentoring programs come in all shapes and sizes, although traditional one-on-one mentoring remains arguably the most common form. In **one-on-one mentoring**, a mentor and mentee are paired. This one-on-one pairing allows the duo to focus on specific, identified competencies that the mentee would like to further develop. One-on-one mentoring relationships can be nondirective, where the mentor acts as a sounding board, catalyst, or role model. The relationship may also be more of a sponsorship, where a senior executive acts as the mentee’s champion, overseeing the mentee’s career path. A drawback for this mentoring is that there are often more mentees available than mentors (Merrick and O’Brien, 2014; Way et al, 2011).

**E-mentoring** allows organizations to expand mentoring programs beyond one location. It uses social media platforms, email, or specialized software to facilitate communication and to allow the mentee to learn from the mentor’s experience regardless of physical location. This type of mentoring can build organizational relationships across locations and can help match more mentees with mentors (Way et al, 2011).

**Reverse mentoring** pairs a younger mentor with an older mentee to share knowledge that the younger mentor may be more in tune with than the mentee, such as social media and other technology. This type of mentoring can also help close generational gaps by encouraging communication between generations. In **group mentoring**, also known as mentoring circles, one mentor can offer guidance and advice to multiple mentees. **Peer mentoring groups** allow individuals with similar interests to meet together to discuss issues and to learn from each other. Peer mentoring groups may be from a single department in an organization or from many departments (for example, a peer mentoring group for women throughout the organization). Peer mentoring groups can provide a safe, supportive forum in which to discuss challenges and to learn from one another (Way et al).

Employers may use some, all, or a combination of these mentoring approaches in their organizations. If the programs are to succeed, however, they must align with the organization’s business goals and have a clearly articulated strategic purpose. It is equally critical that they are time-limited, so that participants know they have a limited amount of time to achieve their stated goals. This time limitation helps the mentorship relationship move along with purpose.

Source: Merrick and O’Brien, 2014
How to Launch a Successful and Sustainable Mentorship Program

Many mentoring programs miss the mark because of a lack of alignment to business goals and strategy and because they fail to clearly articulate the goals of the program from the outset. Others fail because of poor mentor/mentee matches and insufficient training at the beginning of the program. HR and talent management professionals can avoid these pitfalls and launch successful, enduring mentoring programs using the following steps:

- Lay the groundwork – business case, buy-in, sponsorship
- Prepare for the launch – tools, communicate intentions with laser focus
- Launch the program and train mentors and mentees on process and tools
- Build relationships and assess progress and momentum
- Evaluate effectiveness of the mentoring program and pairings at regular intervals

Step 1: Lay the groundwork

Laying the groundwork for the mentoring program is a time-consuming but critical step in the program’s ultimate success, and it is one in which HR and talent management professionals must take the lead. There are several stages to this step:

- Recognize the need and set program objectives
- Determine program structure
- Plan for program launch (Insala staff, 2014)

Stage 1: Recognize the need and set program objectives
Successful mentoring programs are designed to address organizational needs or skills gaps usually identified through a needs assessment.

Examples of these needs or skills gaps may include improved onboarding, transitioning into a new culture, leadership development, more effective succession

DiversityInc’s Top Ten Companies for Mentoring

1. KPMG
2. Sodexo
3. PricewaterhouseCoopers
4. Target
5. EY
6. Abbott
7. Accenture
8. Cleveland Clinic
9. Prudential Financial
10. Johnson & Johnson

Source: DiversityInc staff, 2014
planning, development of a specific skill, and more. Once the needs are identified, the objectives of the mentoring program can be set. HR and talent management professionals should be as specific as possible when articulating program objectives, using SMART goal formatting and linking them to business goals (Insala staff, 2014).

It is recommended that at this stage, HR and talent management professionals form a governing committee for the mentorship program. HR should be represented on the committee, but it should also be comprised of other stakeholders. If the mentoring program is limited to one particular company location, for example, committee membership could include representatives from throughout that location. The committee may initially offer input to HR about the program objectives, structure, metrics to be used to measure success, etc., but once the program is launched, the committee will serve to identify mentors who meet specified selection criteria. To avoid stagnation and to ensure the introduction of new ideas and recommendations, committee members should serve on a 12-month rotation as a best practice.

There are several reasons why forming a governing committee is recommended. It helps define HR’s role in the mentoring program. HR should serve as a thought leader for the program’s design, which means it needs to do the homework to determine how mentoring fits into the organizational culture. HR should lead in identifying mentoring best practices and program objectives as well as in aligning program goals and objectives to organizational strategy. HR should also be responsible for measuring the program’s effectiveness. The governing committee, however, should provide input and feedback to HR about organizational needs. The governing committee also serves to create interest about and support for the program, a critical piece of a successful mentoring program. Once the committee is formed and objectives are identified and set, it is time to develop the program’s structure.

Example: Adcap Mentors for Talent Development

Adcap, an Atlanta-based technology service company, works in a niche industry which makes it difficult to find qualified talent. Rather than settle for unqualified talent from outside and training them, the company created two apprenticeship programs to develop technical engineers and sales professionals internally. Fifty percent of the apprenticeship program consists of training, 30 percent consists of practical experience, and 20 percent is spent mentoring. Mentors are encouraged to “share their craft” and work experience one full day a week during the apprenticeship. Apprentices are tied to their mentors for their entire Adcap career, and mentors are given financial incentives to advance their apprentices in the organization.

Source: Wilkins, 2014

Stage 2: Determine the program structure

The program structure will be determined by the organization’s culture, the metrics that flow from the program’s identified objectives, and the people needed to achieve those objectives (Insala staff, 2014). The duration of the mentoring experience (usually a maximum of 12 months) is also established at this stage. Establishing how long the experience will last helps mentors and mentees remain focused and goal-driven. Finally, the type or types of mentoring experiences that can effectively meet program goals and objectives should be identified. The organization’s culture plays a large role in how the program will be structured. If the organization has a formal culture, for example, HR and talent managers may want to create a formal application process for the
program and articulate minimum time requirements (including frequency and duration) for mentor/mentee meetings. If the organization’s culture is informal, less structure may be called for—a simple matching of mentors and mentees, for example. Even with an informal structure, however, it is a good idea to have some minimum requirements in place (Kessler, 2010).

Metrics will be discussed in more detail later, but they should be identified during this phase. If a goal of the mentoring program is to increase the promotion rate of high-potential employees, a metric should be designed at this stage that will demonstrate if the goal was met. For example, a metric that compares the promotion rates of high-potential employees who participated in the mentoring program to a control group of non-participating high-potential employees could be developed. All metrics should be reviewed and approved by the governing committee because at the reporting phase, it will be important to remind all stakeholders and senior leaders that governing committee members agreed that the identified metrics would measure program success.

The next step in this phase is to identify the people available who can help meet the program’s stated objectives. This includes identifying potential mentors with any specialized skills sets and the mentees who would benefit from the mentorship experience. Now that the structure and scope of the program has been determined, the types of mentoring that best fit the program goals should be considered. Mentoring can be done one-on-one, in groups, and virtually. It can be traditional, senior-level leaders to younger executives or managers, peer-to-peer, or reverse mentoring. Each variation or a combination can be used to help meet the program’s objectives. Once all of these stages have been completed, the program is ready to be launched.

Example: KPMG’s Leaders Engaging Leaders Program

At accounting giant KPMG, mentoring is ingrained in their company culture. In fact, everyone in the firm has a mentor. KPMG’s Leaders Engaging Leaders program was established to expand opportunities for leaders. The program pairs the 60 top managers in the company with members of the management committee, the board of directors, and national managing partners. The program’s objective is to show mentees that there are leadership opportunities available to them farther up the corporate ladder. It also helps senior leaders get to know managers who they would otherwise never meet or get to work with.

Source: Rouen, 2012

Step 2: Prepare for the launch

First and foremost, communicate, communicate, and communicate some more. Employees at all levels should be told about the program, its goals, objectives, target population, requirements, and the process to participate. The program’s progress should be reported at every step of the way, from the needs assessment stage to its conclusion, and on the metrics that demonstrate the program’s success. Communication will be key to obtaining initial and ongoing senior-level buy in and management support. It will also be helpful to identify interested mentors and mentees. It is important to be transparent about why a specific section of the workforce population was selected for mentoring. Everyone should be informed of the strategy. If not, employees who don’t participate will perceive the program as unfair or exclusive. HR and talent management professionals should share the strategy with the broader population. This communication helps enlist people’s support of the initiative, even when they are not part of the targeted group.
Before the program can be launched, a process to match mentors and mentees will need to be developed. Way et al (2011) recommend selecting a matching method that works well with the company’s organizational culture and program objectives. The process may be formal or informal. At McGraw Hill, for example, the mentoring match process includes a questionnaire, an interview, and a committee recommendation for each mentee (Kessler, 2010). Another method may be to offer the mentor or mentee several options based on an interests/strengths inventory completed by all parties and let them choose. In either case, the process should include some participant choice in selection.

The process should also include how mentors and mentees can best dissolve the partnership if, during the course of the mentorship, one or both realize the pairing is not working (Way et al, 2011). If a person asks for a new mentor or mentee, a member of the governing committee or HR should find out why and see if the issue can be resolved. If it can’t be resolved, HR should contact each party privately and separately to end the relationship and try to find a new match (Way et al, 2011).

The chances of needing to dissolve a partnership diminish significantly if both mentors and mentees are properly trained and have clear expectations about the goals and objectives of the relationship. Linda Phillips-Jones, of The Mentoring Group (Grass Valley, Calif.), offers the following ingredients for a successful mentoring relationship:

1. Purpose: Both parties must take the relationship seriously, make it a high priority, and have clear, mutual goals.

2. Communication: Both parties must understand that communication is two-way. They must also meet in a method both prefer, whether it is in person, by phone, text, or email. Mentors and mentees should meet monthly for one or two hours.

3. Trust: Both parties must agree to keep confidential information confidential and understand that trust is built through honesty and follow-up.

4. Process: Both parties must make an effort to ensure that meetings and other interactions move along at a good pace.

5. Progress: Both parties must identify goals of the mentorship experience and actively work to build the competencies needed to reach those goals. They must also agree to identify and record the interim mileposts that signal achievement toward those goals and link the goals to organizational strategy.

6. Feedback: Both parties must provide constructive and honest feedback and ensure that the feedback is acted on.

HR and talent management professionals may want to use these ingredients to create a verbal or written “mentor/mentee” contract that can be used during mentorship training.

Example: Microsoft Mentors for Motivation

Microsoft recently launched a new twist on mentoring when it paired 300 new senior employees (hired for their entrepreneurial and innovative spirit) with veteran Microsoft employees with similar work experience. In this program, the new senior employees serve as the mentors and the veteran employees are the mentees. The program was designed to keep employees motivated and to increase employee retention, an objective that is particularly challenging in an industry where career advancement and job hopping are often perceived as one and the same.

Source: Rouen, 2014
Step 3: Launch the program and train participants

Natural mentors are a rare find in any organization, so talent management professionals must be prepared to build their own. The mentoring program's launch should begin with training all participants, and it is recommended that the mentors and mentees are trained together in pairs. Pairs should be taught what mentoring is, preferably in a formal, classroom-style setting and led by a professional trainer with mentoring expertise (Kessler, 2010). Pairs should mutually identify the goals of the mentorship and link them to the broader program and organizational goals, establish milestones, and create timelines (when they will meet, how, how often, and for how long) so that expectations are managed. Because feedback is an essential ingredient in effective mentoring relationships, a refresher course on providing constructive feedback might be included in the training. Training mentors and mentees together builds organizational capacity. The mentees learn the skills and behaviors of great mentors.

Step 4: Build relationships and assess progress and momentum

The bulk of the work in this step—relationship building—is the responsibility of the mentor and mentee, but that doesn’t mean that HR and talent management professionals can wash their hands of the program for the time being. It is HR’s role to ensure that relationships are on the right track, goals and objectives are still on target, milestones are being recorded, and that competencies are being acquired. HR and talent management professionals may assume this follow-up or distribute the responsibility among governing committee members. If the latter is the case, HR is still responsible for making sure committee members are checking in with their assigned mentor/mentee pairs. The frequency of follow-up during this stage should be mutually agreed upon among governing committee members during the preparation phase, but some experts suggest check-ins at the two, four, six, and eight month marks with a final meeting after the close of the mentorship experience.
Step 5: Evaluate effectiveness of the mentoring program

By the end of a 12-month mentoring period, there will be many people beyond the mentor and the mentee who have a vested interest in the program’s effectiveness. Senior leaders and the governing committee will want to know how the program met organizational objectives. In addition, the governing committee will want to know if participants met their personal goals and if not, why. HR and talent management professionals will want to know if the program structure was effective and what might need to be tweaked moving forward. All of these metrics should be considered and identified during the preparation stage. At this evaluation stage, it is time for HR and talent management professionals to gather and report the analysis of the data to all stakeholders.

For example, if an identified organizational objective for the mentoring program is to improve time-to-proficiency for new hires, it should be presented during the preparation phase using the SMART (specific, measureable, assignable, realistic, and time-related) goals methodology, e.g., “The mentoring program will improve time-to-proficiency for new hires by XX months.” (Fickenscher, 2013). At the conclusion of the mentoring relationship of a new hire to a veteran employee, that time-to-proficiency should be assessed and compared to the time-to-proficiency for new hires who did not participate in the mentorship program.

Qualitative measures can be used effectively to assess the achievement of the personal goals of the mentorship program. Surveys or interviews can be used at the end of the mentorship program to assess the mentoring pairs’ perceptions of how well personal goals were achieved. Were milestones noted? Were competencies acquired? Did the process improve the mentee’s visibility in the organization? Surveys or interviews should also ask for suggestions on how to improve the program (Way et al, 2011).

Example: Sodexo’s Mentoring Program

Sodexo, a leading provider of food and facilities management services in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, created its mentoring program with several goals in mind. The company wanted to establish a diverse talent pipeline; develop leaders; align resources and strategies; drive organizational culture; cut costs, and; enhance the company’s reputation as an employer of choice. More than 100 mentoring partnerships are formed each year. Mentoring pairs make a one year commitment. After the pairs are trained, the program begins and pairs meet for 90 minutes once a month. The mentoring program team checks in with mentor/mentee pairs at the two month mark. At four and eight months, a webinar is held and at six and 12 months, a survey is conducted to assess progress. A survey of mentors and mentees found that 72 percent of mentees and 79 percent of mentors cited improved job satisfaction, and 72 percent of mentees and 74 percent of mentors cited improved organizational commitment.

Source: DiversityInc staff, n.d.
Qualitative measures also can be used to assess effectiveness. These are relatively straightforward metrics and may include the number of:

- Mentor/mentee applications;
- Applicants who accepted and started a mentorship;
- Successful matches;
- Mentees retained in the organization, and;
- Mentees who advanced in the organization (Way et al, 2011).

Talent management metrics must stay focused on the long-term business outcomes. HR and talent management professionals should take the lead in establishing realistic expectations of mentoring and the timing of the returns. Mentorship effectiveness must be assessed to ensure that all stakeholders—from the senior leadership on down—are provided with tangible proof of the contribution mentoring has made to their organization.

Conclusion

Mentoring can have a positive impact on an organization, improving employee retention, engagement, and shaping culture. It can also serve a strategic purpose when linked to talent strategy, leadership development, workforce planning, and organizational goals. Mentoring programs, however, can quickly flounder if there is no buy in, insufficient structure, or lack of follow-through. HR and talent management professionals who want to establish successful and sustainable mentorship programs must ensure that the groundwork is thoroughly completed, that participants are trained, and that the program is regularly assessed for effectiveness. Mentors and mentees must have both the passion and skill to develop themselves as well as others to really multiply the returns on mentoring for the organization.


How to Cleanse a Toxic Workplace

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Introduction

Just about any HR or talent management professional who has been in the field for a few years has a supply of war stories about employees and supervisors whose presence and/or leadership style can demoralize a work environment in no time flat. Employees have their fair share of war stories too. For this reason, there has been increased attention in the government sector on senior leaders whose style and behavior are outside the boundaries of what is considered acceptable. The government is not alone in this; in the private sector, these types of leaders can also create environments that crush morale, destroy employee trust, and ultimately degrade productivity.

One survey cited by Rachel Feintzeig of *The Wall Street Journal* (in *The Build Network*, 2013) noted that 96 percent of employees say they have been treated rudely at the office and 50 percent of employees responding to a survey by Georgetown University and the Thunderbird School of Global Management say they are treated rudely at work at least once a week. This kind of incivility can actually push people out the door; 26 percent of survey respondents said they had quit a job because of the lack of civility.

If not addressed, a workplace marked by incivility can quickly become a toxic workplace, an environment in which employees feel unvalued and not respected (Lavender and Cavaiola 2014). In truly toxic workplaces, according to Lavender and Cavaiola, people are treated abusively, bullied, harassed, and feel threatened or intimidated. Toxic workplaces lower employee retention and productivity, raise stress, increase health care costs, and can lower workplace safety. In the worst case scenario, a toxic workplace can transcend into a hostile work environment.

Promise

This white paper:

- Provides information on how to identify a toxic workplace;
- Identifies the types of toxic worker behavior, including abusive supervision and workplace bullying;
- Discusses how toxic workplaces affect employees at all levels;
- Offers a 3 prong approach on how to prevent toxic behaviors in the workplace, and;
- Describes how toxic workplaces can become hostile work environments.

When a Workplace Becomes Toxic: The Warning Signs

Toxic workplaces are more prevalent than one would think. A 2009 survey of more than 400 leaders conducted by Mitchell Kusy and Elizabeth Holloway, authors of *Toxic Workplace! Managing Toxic Personalities and Their Systems of Power* (Jossey-Bass), found that 94 percent of respondents said they had worked with a toxic person. While the behaviors did not necessarily rise to the level of bullying or harassment, the toxic behaviors lowered employee productivity and retention, health, and well-being (Slayter, 2009).

Types of toxic behaviors include tearing others down, passive aggressive leadership, destructive gossip, devious politics, and a lot of negativity (Anderson, 2013).

Baird Brightman, a behavioral scientist at Harvard University, notes in an article for *Fast Company* that the six most toxic behaviors include:

1. **Aggressiveness**
   Aggressive employees can undermine safety and lower productivity because they make the people around them go into a “flight or fight” mode.

2. **Narcissism**
   Narcissistic employees have an excessive focus on themselves that interferes with the development of a positive and flexible culture.
3. Lack of credibility
This occurs when employees don’t do what they say they will do, leading to distrust from others.

4. Passivity
This is the opposite of initiative. Passive employees fail to take the ownership needed for optimal performance.

5. Disorganization
Disorganized employees lack the focus, structure, and discipline needed to get the job done.

6. Resistance to change
Rigid and resistant employees will quickly become obsolete in the ever changing workplace—and possibly take others down with them (Brightman, 2013).

These behaviors—individually or combined—can create a toxic workplace environment. It can be difficult, however, for employees who witness or are the victim of toxic behavior to identify it when in the middle of it. Miriam Salpeter, a business consultant, offers some warning signs that HR and talent managers can use to help employees recognize if they are working in a toxic environment:

- The boss is a known bully. His or her bullying behavior may include sexual harassment, practical jokes, picking on the same person frequently, racist, sexist, or homophobic comments, public humiliation, and intimidation.

- Co-workers frequently gang up on each other because there are no consequences for bad behavior.

- Bosses or co-workers frequently take credit for the work of others.

- Employees are insubordinate. If there are no consequences for bad behavior, it is easy for employees to flaunt rules and become rebellious and arrogant.

- Office gossip and false accusations run rampant. If making up stories and false accusations against others are the norm, the environment is toxic.

- The boss is ineffective or absentee. If subordinates lack respect for the boss because he/she is ineffective—or if subordinates look forward to the boss’s absence so they can play—it may be a sign of toxicity in the department.

- Everyone operates under different rules. This occurs when a supervisor fails to apply the rules evenly to everyone in the same role. This leaves employees confused and often at odds with one another.

- Supervisors don’t communicate expectations well or at all. If supervisors cannot communicate their expectations, employees are left at a real disadvantage. They will be unable to establish priorities that are consistent with the supervisor’s (unarticated) expectations and may frequently fail to meet goals.

It is interesting to note that leadership—or the lack of it—lays at the core of each warning sign. When a toxic workplace develops on a peer-to-peer level, it is the lack of leadership that allows it to fester. All too often, however, toxic workplaces are created from the top down when managers or supervisors are the root of the problem. One study found that 37 percent of workers said they had been bullied at work and that the majority of those bullies (72 percent) were bosses (Siegel, 2011).

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### Employer Liability for Harassment

“The employer is automatically liable for harassment by a supervisor that results in a negative employment action such as termination, failure to promote or hire, and loss of wages. If the supervisor’s harassment results in a hostile work environment, the employer can avoid liability only if it can prove that:

1) it reasonably tried to prevent and promptly correct the harassing behavior; and

2) the employee unreasonably failed to take advantage of any preventive or corrective opportunities provided by the employer.”

Toxic Leaders and Abusive Supervision

Although some experts define abusive supervision and bullying differently—abusive supervision lacks physical contact which bullying includes—the emotional and mental effects suffered by recipients of both remain the same. Abusive supervision and bullying (i.e., toxic behavior) can take many forms. These can include ridiculing subordinates in public, taking credit for work done by a subordinate, the inappropriate assigning of blame, rudeness, and angry outbursts (Siegel, 2011). It may also include verbal abuse (which can also be peer-to-peer focused) that is intended to be hurtful or demeaning and can include name calling, insults, and racial, gender, religious, or ethnic slurs. Verbal abuse may also focus on a person’s character, motivation, or physical appearance. These verbal attacks can escalate to the point that under the law, it may be considered a hostile working environment. Abusive behavior by a supervisor or peer-to-peer may also include sexual or other types of harassment (such as gender, race, or religious) that may create a hostile working environment (Lavender and Cavaiola, 2014).

Workplace bullying includes all of that abusive behavior and more. Bullies may go a step further and intimidate victims, including threatening to file false reports against them, threatening to have them fired, and threatening their livelihoods (for example, threatening to give them bad references so they cannot find another job) (Lavender and Cavaiola, 2014). Bullies may also physically intimidate their victims and/or actively sabotage their victim’s work or reputation (Shavin, 2014).

Workplace bullies are more prevalent than one would think. A 2014 survey by VitalSmarts, a corporate training and leadership development firm, found that 96 percent of respondents said they had experienced bullying in the workplace. Eighty-nine percent of those bullies had been bullying for more than a year, and 54 percent had been bullying for five or more years. The survey also found that 80 percent of bullies in the workplace affect five or more people. The survey further found that 62 percent of respondents had witnessed bullies sabotage other people’s work or reputations; 52 percent had witnessed bullies browbeating, threatening, and intimidating others, and; four percent had witnessed bullies physically intimidate or assault another person (Shavin, 2014).

How Toxic Workplaces Affect Employees

Abusive supervision lowers employee performance, increases deviant behavior, heightens tension and emotional exhaustion, lowers self-esteem, and lowers job satisfaction (Siegel, 2011). Other outcomes of abusive supervision includes increased intention to quit, decreased organizational commitment, and increased psychological distress (Tepper, 2007).

These effects associated with abusive supervision and bullying are not limited to the bully’s victims. A University of British Columbia study found that employees who witnessed the bullying had similarly high turnover intentions as the victims themselves. The authors concluded that those who were not directly bullied may be even more inclined to leave their jobs because their more positive treatment led to a sense of moral unease (Korn, 2014). Employees who experience bullying—whether first or second-hand—and who work in toxic environments report higher levels of anxiety and depression and take more sick leave than workers in healthy work environments (Richardson, 2014).

Unfortunately, toxic behavior like bullying behavior appears to pay off in the workplace. A study by Darren C. Treadway of the University of Buffalo’s School of Management found that many bullies receive positive performance evaluations from supervisors and achieve high levels of career success. Treadway concluded that bullies succeed because they can charm supervisors and manipulate others to get ahead, even while they abuse co-workers and subordinates (Hazlewood, 2013).
Why Toxic Workplaces Happen

There are several theories about why abusive supervision occurs. Tepper et al (in Tepper, 2007), for example, found that abusive supervisors were prone to hostility because they had been mistreated as well and were therefore more likely to be abusive to their subordinates. Displaced aggression may be another cause of abusive supervision. This occurs when a supervisor has experienced a breach in the psychological contract—the mutual (but sometime unspoken) beliefs, perceptions, and informal obligations between an employee and employer. Sometimes when this breach occurs, supervisors can become more abusive to subordinates (Hoobler and Brass in Tepper, 2007). For example, part of the psychological contract may be the expectation of career advancement for good work and tenure. If this is not realized, the supervisor may become angry at the perceived breach of psychological contract with his/her employer and take his or her anger out on a subordinate.

For the victims of toxic workplaces, however, why a person becomes toxic is not at the foremost in their minds. It is all about the toxic person's behavior. Workplaces become toxic when people—usually those in positions of authority—abuse power, are narcissistic, paranoid, unfair, and greedy. These negative behaviors adversely affect everyone around them and spur more toxic behavior among peers (Durre, 2010).

How to Prevent Toxic Behaviors in the Workplace

Baird Brightman offers a three-pronged approach to preventing the development of a toxic workplace (Brightman, 2013):

1. Primary prevention
2. Secondary prevention
3. Tertiary prevention

The best way to stop the development of a toxic workplace is to prevent it from occurring in the first place (primary prevention). HR and talent management professionals can use the selection process to identify people who are toxic. Brightman suggests that professionals in the talent management community use approaches like self-assessments and 360-degree observer ratings to detect toxic behaviors. These approaches work better at identifying toxic behaviors than interviews or reference checks.

The secondary prevention phase helps detect toxic behaviors early on in an employee’s tenure with the organization and can minimize toxic behavior. Brightman suggests that leaders direct their HR and talent managers to use education and coaching about toxic behavior during the first few weeks of employment.

Coaching can also be used to help employees identify toxic personality types that may be entrenched in their organizations and the actions they can take to defuse them. Here are some of the toxic personality types noted earlier and coaching tips on how to neutralize them:

- **Backstabbers:** Employees can be coached to be careful of their body language around a backstabber. They should avoid the tendency to nod in agreement when they talk because it signals to the backstabber tacit agreement with the backstabber’s behavior (Simonds, 2013).

- **Credit-takers:** If there is a credit-taker in the office, employees and managers should be coached to speak up and give credit where it is rightfully due before the credit-taker has a chance to (Simonds, 2013).

- **Bullies:** Employees should be coached to document all offensive behavior. Accountability is key in preventing bullying, and it involves more than the victim. The victim should document the incident and report it, but employees should be coached that if they witness bullying, they should document and report it as well. If the bully is not the boss, the boss should also document and report on it, and formal discipline should occur (Simonds, 2013 and Shavin, 2014).
The Toxic Workplace Checklist

Everyone has days when they cringe at routine workplace hassles and stressful working environments—even in the best workplaces. These hassles, though, won’t stress employees to the point of illness. Linnda Durre, author of *Surviving the Toxic Workplace*, notes that toxic working environments usually have one or more types of the following dysfunctions:

Unfairness
- People are doing the work of two or three employees with little to no recognition or appreciation.
- Co-workers take credit for other’s work.
- Some workers get away with behaviors that others do not.
- Bosses or team members deflect responsibility or assign blame for failure to others.

Immoral and Illegal Activities
- Co-workers ask others to cover or lie for them.
- Employees are asked to falsify data, reports, or documents.
- A co-worker uses sexual favors to get ahead at work.
- Someone is having an affair and asks a co-worker to cover for him/her.

Abusive Bosses and Poisonous Co-workers
- Employees are sexually harassed.
- Co-workers miss deadlines, affecting others’ productivity.
- A co-worker or boss routinely tells lewd, racist, or sexist jokes.
- Bosses and peers rely on fear and intimidation.

Physical Danger
- Employees are at risk because of unsafe working conditions.
- Employees have been threatened or assaulted.

Just Plain Annoying
- Co-workers interrupt others’ work, invade their space, and help themselves to other employees’ files.
- Regular gossip, office politics, or spying.

Durre says that any one of these issues indicates a toxic environment, and if several are present in different categories, the workplace may be dangerously poisonous.

Source: Buhl, n.d.
• **Hyper-sensitives:** When managing or addressing a hypersensitive personality type, employees and supervisors should be coached to be respectful when delivering constructive criticism and to make sure it is delivered privately. Constructive criticism should focus on the problem and possible solution (Simonds, 2013).

• **Know-it-alls:** Employees and managers should be coached that when dealing with this toxic personality type, they should acknowledge and compliment the person on his/her depth of knowledge, but they should also politely but firmly let the person know that they are aware of the know-it-all behavior (Simonds, 2013).

• **Hyper-criticals:** Employees and managers should be coached to handle the hyper-critical employees by thanking them for expressing their opinion. And then they should walk away (Simonds, 2013).

Even with extensive screening and coaching, it is sometimes not possible to eliminate a person’s toxic behavioral tendencies. When that happens, it is time to consider tertiary prevention—dismissal. HR and talent management professionals should coach supervisors and employees about how to document the steps that have been taken to address the toxic behavior and the communication that has occurred to try to improve the toxic person’s behavior so the dismissal process can be as smooth as possible (Brightman, 2010).

Leaders ultimately bear the responsibility of establishing an environment free from toxic behaviors. Although terminating an employment relationship is never a desired outcome, it may be necessary. Documenting behavior and incidents, counseling on the need to change behavior, and eventually firing the employee may be necessary to eliminate the toxic buildup. When leaders take action and let their employees know these behaviors will not be tolerated, the change to a positive environment can be drastic. On the other hand, if the leadership of the organization is the root cause, employees must be bold enough to address and seek recourse through HR and talent managers. Toxic workplaces drain employees and lower productivity. If these behaviors are not checked, the workplace can easily drift into a hostile workplace environment with very real legal implications.

### When a Toxic Workplace Becomes a Hostile Work Environment

No workplace is perfect, and there will be days in even the best of work environments when employees behave badly. Those isolated incidents might raise employee stress levels for the day, but unless that toxic behavior is sustained, it does not make for a toxic work environment. Toxic behavior that is sustained, and abusive supervision that is bullying or harassing, however, can make the workplace more than toxic. It can make it hostile, and this violates federal law. HR and talent management professionals must work to prevent toxicity in the workplace before it escalates into a hostile work environment.

According to the Hostile Work Environment Guide, a work environment becomes hostile when there is discriminatory conduct or behavior at work that is unwelcome or offensive to an employee or group of employees in a protected class. This means that the employee or employee group must be in a protected class (race, ethnicity, religion, disability, age, sex, and color) and the complaint must pertain to perceived discrimination that targets that class. “For instance, a boss who yells all the time may cause an intimidating or stressful work environment but as long as he does this in a general manner and refrains from making any discriminatory statements about a particular class, then he is not subject to harassment suits. He may be liable for other charges, however, such as intentional infliction of emotional distress.” (Hostile Work Environment Guide, n.d.).

To establish a hostile work environment claim, the conduct or behavior must be pervasive and constitute a pattern, rather than consist of one or two isolated
EEOC’s Definition of Harassment

“Harassment is a form of employment discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment of 1967 (ADEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

Harassment is unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability, or genetic information. Harassment becomes unlawful where:

1) enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or
2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive.

Anti-discrimination laws also prohibit harassment against individuals in retaliation for filing a discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or lawsuit under these laws; or opposing employment practices that they reasonably believe discriminate against individuals, in violation of these laws.

Petty slights, annoyances, and isolated incidents (unless extremely serious) will not rise to the level of illegality. To be unlawful, the conduct must create a work environment that would be intimidating, hostile, or offensive to reasonable people.

Offensive conduct may include, but is not limited to, offensive jokes, slurs, epithets or name calling, physical assaults or threats, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, offensive objects or pictures, and interference with work performance. Harassment can occur in a variety of circumstances, including, but not limited to the following:

- The harasser can be the victim’s supervisor, a supervisor in another area, an agent of the employer, a co-worker, or a non-employee.
- The victim does not have to be the person harassed, but can be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- Unlawful harassment may occur without economic injury to, or discharge of, the victim.”

Conclusion

Toxic workplaces are less productive, experience higher employee turnover, and negatively affect employee health and welfare. They can also be a small step away from becoming hostile work environments and subject to costly lawsuits. HR and talent management professionals must work from the selection process on to eliminate toxic behaviors in employees and their supervisors.


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Creating a Collaborative Organizational Culture

Kip Kelly
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Banding People Together

Introduction

Collaboration can re-invigorate organizations by fully engaging employees, improving retention, and increasing innovation. It can help employees thrive in an ever-changing, diverse workplace. However, as organizations grow, employees scatter through telework and multiple locations, budgets shrink, and workloads expand, collaboration remains a challenge. Unfortunately, many senior leaders view collaboration as a skill that is best applied on selected projects, rather than as an organization-wide cultural value that should be embedded in the company’s fabric.

This can be seen in the conclusions drawn from a Corporate Executive Board survey on the nature of collaboration in today’s workplaces. The survey confirmed that jobs require more collaboration today than they did three years ago, and that more employees need to regularly coordinate their work with people from different units and supervisory levels. The study concluded that collaboration should be encouraged among teams when projects have a high-potential impact; when diverse perspectives would help the project get completed; and when participants share similar goals (CEB staff, n.d.).

CEB’s conclusion about when to encourage collaboration among teams recognizes the contribution that collaboration can bring to an organization, but it does not go far enough. Most organizations share a similarly narrow definition and relegate collaboration to an activity best used on complex, high-impact projects. A truly collaborative environment involves all organizational levels and is infused in an organization’s cultural identity and day-to-day operations.

Promise

This white paper:
• Redefines collaboration and establishes what a truly collaborative environment is;
• Lists the benefits of sustained collaboration;
• Examines why collaboration often fails in organizations;
• Explores the building blocks required for effective collaboration, and;
• Provides steps on how to encourage collaboration in the workplace.
What Is Collaboration and How Does It Benefit the Bottom Line?

Collaboration is often seen as an activity that involves team members working on a project together. True collaboration is more than an activity, however. It is a process with associated behaviors that can be taught and developed. It is a process governed by a set of norms and behaviors that maximize individual contribution while leveraging the collective intelligence of everyone involved. It is the way in which a group of people collectively explores ideas to generate solutions that extend beyond the limited vision of a single person (Maynard, n.d.).

Since collaboration should be viewed as a process, it is important to identify what a collaborative environment looks like. In a truly collaborative environment, everyone has a voice. When people have a voice, they are able to contribute. When they understand how their contributions fit into their organization’s strategy, it gives them purpose. With that purpose comes belief in their organization. Purpose and belief translate into high levels of engagement. At the most basic level, people want to feel a sense of belonging, and as such, collaboration takes center stage because it helps create an environment in which people want to belong.

Collaboration should not be confused with cooperation. Cooperation is when each person on a team develops his or her own plans and shares those plans with the team. There may be joint discussion, but the focus remains on individual actions and achievement rather than on a collective strategy. Collaboration is when individual goals are subordinated for collective achievement. Joint discussions are focused on the give and take about strategies and ideas, and the outcome often leads to new ways of working (Ashkenas, 2012).

Organizations have conventionally applied collaboration to teams or organizational levels (such as senior leadership) to break down silos, to foster cross-functional activities, and to encourage better innovation. Collaboration—even when applied in this limited manner in an organization—can yield positive results. In addition to increasing innovation, collaboration increases employee energy, creativity, and productivity, which generally leads to less stressed, happier, and more engaged workers (Goman, n.d.).

As many organizations can attest, however, when collaboration is focused only on teams or a single level in an organization, it is extremely difficult to sustain, and this makes the benefits of collaboration fleeting. Organizations must redefine what collaboration means by making it part-and-parcel of the organizational culture and daily operations. True organization-wide collaboration can provide sustained benefits such as:

- Fully engaged workers who are eager to take on new projects and challenges and who embrace change;
- Improved organizational flexibility and agility;
- Improved employee health, wellness, and performance;
- More productive and energized meetings;
- Extremely high retention rates;
- A competitive advantage when attracting top talent;
- The ability to develop and bring products faster to the market, and;
- Increased top-line revenue and better profitability.

Organization-wide collaboration can breathe new life into a company and reinvigorate employees. Sharing new ideas and knowledge lets others see things from different perspectives, spurs their own work in new directions, and moves the organization forward (Contactzilla, n.d.).
Why Collaboration Fails in Organizations

Collaboration often fails in organizations because when it is viewed as an activity, the behaviors necessary for organization-wide collaboration fail to occur. Senior leaders understand the benefits of collaboration and often mandate more of it. It is unrealistic, though, to mandate collaboration without teaching all employees how to collaborate. Collaboration training is frequently offered only to senior leaders and high-potential employees, but training only these groups can be detrimental to creating an organization-wide collaborative environment. Every employee must be able to speak the same collaborative language.

Yet even when collaboration is entrenched in a company’s culture and silos are disbanded, it can be stymied. Studies by Charlan Nemeth, a psychology professor at the University of California at Berkeley, found that the “do not criticize” tenet of brainstorming can cause “groupthink” and can be counterproductive when it comes to collaboration. Nemeth notes that healthy debate and criticism actually stimulate ideas. To cultivate collaboration, then, organizations should encourage debate within groups, not stifle it (Contactzilla staff, n.d.).

Collaboration can also stumble when employees confuse collaboration with teamwork. In teams, employees with different knowledge, skills, and abilities may work side by side on common goals, but not engage in debate. Collaboration involves interaction, debate, and working together towards a common goal. Individual goals may also be a part of collaboration, but those individual goals are achieved through the contributions of knowledge, skills, and abilities of others on the team (Contactzilla staff, n.d.) In other words, teams may be formed, but collaboration is not guaranteed. Collaboration takes an understanding and application of key behaviors that employees should learn and demonstrate.
The Building Blocks Required for Effective Collaboration

Collaboration does not come naturally for most employees, particularly those born before the Millennials. Previous generations were taught that competition was good, and that individual hard work—the “nose to the grindstone” mentality—would be rewarded with steady career progression. The nature of work has changed, however, and the management and knowledge silos that were created in the 20th century are no longer tenable today if organizations are to succeed. Collaboration helps break down those silos so that organizations can be creative, flexible, and ready to meet the changing, demanding needs of business today.

There are a few building blocks that must live within leaders and individual contributors to ensure that collaboration is part of an organization’s culture. These building blocks are trust, communication, and a shared vision and purpose.

Trust

Trust is the foundation of effective collaboration. There are many facets to trust, but vulnerability is the aspect that most affects the collaborative process. Without vulnerability, people will not fully invest themselves or their ideas in collective efforts.

In the collaborative process, trust means creating an environment where everyone can openly express concerns, fears, and differences of opinion (i.e., be vulnerable) without fear of rejection, aggression, or retaliation. When vulnerability is threatened, behaviors that stifle creativity and innovation—like self-editing—take over. Furthermore, when people feel disrespected and see their contributions going unrecognized and unvalued, they disengage and look elsewhere for opportunities to contribute. Trust and respect are the bedrock of collaboration and are the key to building a commitment to collective goals.

HR and talent management professionals can assess the level of trust in an organization through employee surveys and confidential one-on-one interviews. Some questions HR and talent management professionals can ask employees to assess trust levels include:

- Do you feel that risk-taking is encouraged?
- Do you feel safe communicating your ideas and opinions with colleagues?
- Do you believe you are treated fairly and with respect?
- Do you believe your ideas are taken into account during the decision-making process?

Employee responses will help assess trust in the organization. An analysis of the results will identify the level of trust—which includes respect—the organization as a whole is accomplishing and which areas need improvement (Hatch, 2012).

Communication

There is no collaboration without effective communication. Leaders must communicate why collaboration is important to the organization’s success and must outline the strategy and roadmap for how the organization will work collaboratively. Both employees and leaders must share and build ideas, constructively criticize, and provide feedback.

Effective communication requires a substantial level of self-awareness. Employees must understand their own preferences for how they approach a collaborative situation. They must also understand the communication and collaboration styles that other employees may prefer. It is this awareness that allows employees to recognize different communication and collaboration styles and to leverage them. This heightened level of self-awareness allows individuals to modify their behavior and communication styles, which paves the way for increased engagement. All employees must be taught these communication skills for a collaborative environment to be realized. Everyone in the organization must be on the same page, and this can’t be accomplished if senior leaders are the only ones who have the opportunity to develop these communication skills.

Shared Vision and Purpose

The best way to get employees invested in the collaborative process is to give them an opportunity
to contribute to a shared vision and purpose. This is about taking the time to articulate the “why” to everyone involved in the collaborative process on a particular project or initiative. Unfortunately, this can easily get overlooked when managing heavy workloads and deadlines. Instead, it should be prioritized as a necessary investment for increasing individual and team performance and long-term success. Leaders must ensure that all employees understand how their work contributes to the goals of the team and organization and how collaboration will help them meet their goals. When employees understand their broader purpose, they can make more meaningful contributions to their teams.

HR and talent management professionals who take the time to teach and nurture these building blocks—trust, communication, and shared vision and purpose—will lay the groundwork to create an organizational culture based on collaboration. As a result, they will see improved employee retention, less conflict, lower stress, an improved competitive advantage, a higher level of performance, and a healthier bottom line.

How to Encourage Collaboration in the Workplace

If HR and talent management professionals focus solely on improving the building blocks that are critical to creating a truly collaborative work environment, they will see happier employees. To build and sustain a culture of collaboration, however, HR and talent management professionals may want to consider using the following steps.

1. Define what a collaborative environment looks like for the organization.
2. Offer training that teaches specific collaborative skills.
3. Make sure the metrics for success are aligned among different business units.
4. Ensure that leaders understand their role in facilitating collaboration and maintaining a collaborative environment.

Define What a Collaborative Environment Looks Like for the Organization

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions. It also probably lacked a strategy. The same is true when creating an organizational culture of collaboration. Without a strategy and a roadmap that articulates clear goals, employees will have plenty of good intentions, but will fail to act on them.

The “why” for creating a culture of collaboration has already been discussed—collaboration improves employee morale, retention, competitive advantage, and an organization’s bottom line. The next step is to create the “how” that is unique to each organization—the strategy. The strategy and the roadmap must be designed with the input and buy-in of all employees, not just senior leaders.

When creating a strategy, a good exercise to use is visualization. Carol Kinsey Goman, an executive coach, author, and keynote speaker, writes in an article for the Reliable Plant that visualization is a team sport. It will help create a shared purpose and vision, and when the exercise includes all employees, it will increase the likelihood that they will enthusiastically buy-in (Goman, n.d.).

The roadmap provides guidelines for how the strategy will be executed. It should include goals, timelines, and individual roles and responsibilities, but it should not be too detailed. It should provide enough to give employees direction, but not enough to create roadblocks.

Offer Training that Teaches Specific Collaborative Skills

HR and talent management professionals can encourage a collaborative workplace by working with employees to improve collaborative skills. The building blocks discussed earlier—trust, communication, and a shared vision and purpose—can be improved with the help of employee development opportunities and activities. Other
Twelve Habits of Highly Collaborative Organizations

1. **Lead by example.** In highly collaborative organizations, leaders use and demonstrate collaboration tools and strategies and encourage employees at all organizational levels to do the same.

2. **Focus on individual and organizational benefits.** Highly collaborative organizations communicate to employees about how they will personally benefit from a collaborative environment—how it will improve their lives and make their jobs easier—as well as how it will take the organization to the next level.

3. **Emphasize behavior and strategy before technology.** Highly collaborative organizations formulate a strategy (the “why” and “how” of collaboration for their organization) before rushing to buy the latest collaboration platform. The technology should support the strategy.

4. **Learn how to get out of the way.** Leaders and managers in highly collaborative organizations understand that micromanaging stifles collaboration. Best practices and guidelines are fine, but let employees do their work, their way. Empower employees.

5. **Give employees a voice.** In order for someone to feel like they have a voice, they have to have a platform and be acknowledged. This is a simple idea but gets lost quickly at the speed of business.

6. **Integrate collaboration into organizational workflow.** Collaboration should not be viewed as another competency that must be incorporated into an employee’s skill set. It should be integrated into all aspects of their work.

7. **Create a supportive environment.** Collaboration and teamwork should be rewarded. For example, make a percentage of an employee’s bonus tied to how well he or she collaborates with others.

8. **Examine behaviors the organization is rewarding.** Highly collaborative organizations focus on metrics that align different business units.

9. **Practice persistence.** Collaboration should not be confined to teams, employee levels, or pilot programs. Highly collaborative organizations make collaboration a corporate-wide initiative.

10. **Adapt and evolve.** Highly collaborative organizations recognize that collaboration is a perpetual state in their organizations and adapt and evolve as needed.

11. **Recognize that employee collaboration benefits customers.** Happy employees are better performing employees, and this translates into more satisfied, happier customers.

12. **Acknowledge that collaboration generally makes the world a better place.** Highly collaborative organizations recognize that collaboration lowers stress, increases retention and loyalty, and improves the bottom line.

Source: Adapted from Morgan, 2013.
collaborative skills that can also be taught include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- How to embrace change;
- How to ask for input from others;
- How to share information with others;
- How to listen for understanding;
- How to provide constructive feedback;
- How to use negotiation skills;
- How to recognize and reward others;
- How to improve self-awareness, and;
- How to reach consensus.

These skills may be part of an organization’s professional development for employees on a management track, but for a collaborative culture to be realized, they must be part of all employees’ professional development plans. A collaborative culture gives every employee a voice, and so every employee must possess the skills necessary to be able to collaborate. HR and talent management professionals should conduct a needs analysis of where the organization stands in terms of collaboration skills for all employees, and a plan should then be developed that will improve any weaknesses uncovered in the needs analysis.

How to Improve Workplace Collaboration

- **Lead by example.** Be sure that those in leadership positions have the requisite communication and collaboration skills.

- **Build a sense of community.** Employees need a personal connection to one another. Be sure to provide opportunities for co-workers to get to know each other in a casual, non-working setting.

- **Train employees to collaborate.** According to a study by ESI International, 81 percent of the organizations surveyed said their employees needed to improve communication skills and nearly half needed to improve leadership and critical thinking skills.

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities.** Collaboration is greatly facilitated when everyone is on the same page. HR and talent managers should ensure that goals are outlined, responsibilities are articulated, and deadlines are set.

- **Tap into individual talent.** To optimize collaboration, assign roles that fit each person’s strengths. Build teams based on what each person can bring to the table.

- **Hold productive meetings.** Good meetings have clear objectives and an agenda. They should serve to motivate people.

- **Don’t micromanage.** Respect employees and give them autonomy to do their jobs.

- **Consider using collaboration tools and software.** It is rarely possible to have all employees involved at one place at one time. Consider investing in a collaborative software system to provide a centralized hub for communication and project management.

Source: ViewDo Labs Staff, 2014.
Make Sure the Metrics for Success Are Aligned Among Business Units

For an organization to truly be collaborative, metrics must align among various functions of the business. If metrics are not aligned, employees may engage in anti-collaborative behaviors, which may result in silos, intentional lack of inclusion and transparency, and territoriality. An example of this can be seen when examining the classic organizational friction between sales and operations. Sales professionals usually are rewarded by sales volume, margins, and profitability. For that reason, they are motivated to sell things to customers that may fall outside the normal product offering. This “yes we can” type of customization can be critical to closing a deal. Once the sales professional closes the deal, something collaboratively destructive can happen. The sales professional is rewarded in the way of compensation, accolades, increased influence, and in some cases, a promotion. The operations person on the other hand, is rewarded for things like process, execution, and speed of delivery. They invest their time in systems and processes that support how they are ultimately rewarded and compensated. This customized deal is great for the sales person to meet his goal but comes at the expense of the operations person who has to invest extra time and resources to deliver it. A very dangerous zero sum game dynamic has been created. For one person to win, the other person has to lose. This causes a number of collaborative issues and leads to silos, territoriality, and even conflict. For these reasons, it is important for HR professionals and organizations to examine what behaviors are being driven by incentives and compensation plans.

Ensure that Leaders Understand Their Role in Facilitating Collaboration and Maintaining a Collaborative Environment

Although this new definition of collaboration emphasizes giving every employee in an organization a voice, leaders still play a pivotal role in facilitating and maintaining a collaborative environment. In their white paper, *Building a Collaborative Workplace*, authors Shawn Callahan, Mark Schenk, and Nancy White offer six behaviors that leaders display that help build collaboration in the workplace. Leaders who support collaboration in their organizations:

1. Pay attention to collaborative strategies and model collaborative skills and behaviors.
2. Do not sacrifice long-term goals for short-term fixes when faced with a crisis. They recognize that short-term fixes sabotage collaboration.
3. Invest resources that support and encourage collaboration.
4. Act as role models, teachers, and coaches of collaboration.
5. Reward collaborative behavior.
6. Ensure that collaborative talents are recruited and nurtured (Callahan, Schenk and White, 2008).

A seventh behavior that could be added to that list is accountability. To ensure that leaders at all levels actively encourage and maintain collaboration in the workplace, they must be held accountable to invest in, model, and reward collaborative behavior exhibited by their employees consistently. This accountability will ensure that the collaborative culture endures.
Conclusion

A truly collaborative environment involves every employee at every level and department, and it is infused in an organization’s culture and reflected in its daily operations. It can help recruit, retain, and motivate employees; increase productivity; bring new products and services to the market faster; increase customer satisfaction and loyalty; and improve an organization’s bottom line. And because it lowers stress, it makes for a better work environment overall.


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The ROI of Talent Development

Sarah Perez
Executive Director
Executive MBA Programs
Introduction

Training and development budgets took big hits across the globe during the recession, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. According to figures released by Bersin by Deloitte in its 2014 Corporate Learning Factbook, spending on corporate training by U.S. employers increased by 15 percent in 2013, the highest growth rate in seven years. In fact, training and development budgets have been steadily recovering for the past several years. In 2011, U.S. spending on training and development increased by 10 percent, and in 2012, it increased by 12 percent.

This is good news for the U.S. economy as a whole. Organizations that invest in the training and development of their employees at all levels benefit by having stronger talent pools, increased retention, lower turnover, higher employee satisfaction rates, and ultimately, healthier and stronger organizations. But HR and talent management professionals must not celebrate too soon. If HR and talent management professionals want to see their training and development budgets fully recover, they must be prepared to demonstrate the return-on-investment that talent development, particularly talent development at the leadership level, brings to their organizations.

Promise

This white paper:

• Explores the increase in training and development spending over the past several years and why employers are investing more in developing their employees;
• Provides the business case for talent development;
• Provides insights on the focus of talent development efforts, and;
• Offers ways to measure the ROI of talent development at the top organizational levels.

Talent Development by the Numbers

Employers have steadily increased their training and development budgets over the past several years. The Association for Talent Development (ATD), formerly the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), estimates that in 2012, U.S. employers spent $164.2 billion on employee learning and development (ASTD staff, 2013), a significant jump from 2011 when ATD estimated that U.S. employers spent $156.2 billion on employee learning and development. This translates to an average expenditure of $1,182 per employee (Hollon, 2013 and Miller, 2012).

Bersin by Deloitte and ATD both agree that top companies (defined as “mature companies” by Bersin and “BEST companies” by ATD) allocate more money to talent development than other companies. Mature companies spend 34 percent more on training and development than their less mature counterparts (Bersin, 2014). These high impact learning organizations reap the benefits of investing in training and development by financially outperforming their peers. They earn a profit growth three times that of their competitors (Bersin, 2012).

Companies that invest in training and development do so to maintain or improve their competitive edge, but there are other benefits as well. Studies have found that employees at all age levels want to acquire and use new skills—and that they are more likely to stay with employers that offer rich training and development programs.

A recent study by WorkTrends found other benefits as well. The survey asked employees from 97 organizations to rate their training and development experiences in 2012. The survey found that employee engagement levels in organizations that scored the highest on training and development were 40 percent higher than employee engagement scores in organizations that scored the lowest in training and development. That same survey confirms Bersin’s conclusion about the financial benefits of training and development, finding that organizations with high training and development scores experienced three times higher return on assets than lower scoring organizations (Zhang, n.d.).
Why Talent Development
Budgets Are on the Rise

Talent development budgets are a kind of economic bellwether. When talent development budgets shrink, it’s a good indicator that the economy has or will soon be slowing down, and corporations have gone into belt-tightening mode. Conversely, increased talent development budgets often indicate that the economy is expanding, and employers feel more comfortable in putting money back into the development of their people. This is certainly true for this latest trend in increased spending on talent development, but there are other factors at play that make talent development investment more urgent than ever.

As a result of the recession and the slow down of talent development in organizations, employers are starting to see noticeable skills gaps in their organizations. In fact, more than 70 percent of organizations cite “capability gaps” as one of their top five organizational challenges (Bersin, 2014). These gaps, combined with the looming exodus of Baby Boomers from the workplace as they begin to retire, pose a real challenge for employers, particularly since it takes an average of three to five years to get a professional-level employee up-to-speed and fully productive.

The Business Case for
Talent Development

There are a host of reasons why it makes sense for an organization to invest in the development of its existing talent. Perhaps the most persuasive argument is that it costs a lot more—some estimates put it at as much as 150 percent of an employee’s annual salary—to recruit new talent than it does to develop existing employees (Lucas, 2013). The costs of recruiting a new employee include selection costs such as interviewing, reference checks, drug testing, on-the-job training, etc. (SHRM staff, n.d).

Investing in talent development is vital for employers because it directly affects employee retention, motivation, engagement, and productivity (Investor Today staff, 2014). Talent development investment reduces staff turnover because employees are more engaged and satisfied with their jobs and are less likely to leave the organization. Millennial employees, in particular, are interested in learning and have indicated that they are likely to look elsewhere if their employers fail to give them opportunities to learn and acquire new skills (See UNC Executive Development white paper: Managing the Multigenerational Workplace).

The cost of turnover and its link to talent development investment should not be overlooked. While there are physical costs involved with turnover, like separation processing costs, overtime, and the hiring of search firms and temporary agencies, there are also hidden costs. These hidden costs include lower productivity, lower employee morale, overburdened employees, lost knowledge, and training costs (Lucas, 2013). These real and hidden costs of employee turnover can be significantly minimized when employers invest in their existing talent.

Employers’ Focus on
Talent Development
Efforts

Talent development efforts can be split into two broad categories; product, sales, and technical training and “intangible” development focused on developing attributes like leadership skills and abilities, team effectiveness, and diversity (Myatt, 2012). The former category is more training-centric, and the business case to invest in it and the ROI can be more readily calculated. The latter, the intangible efforts, is development-oriented where the focus is on developing skills and abilities that will come in handy in the near future. These developmental efforts, while vital to an organization’s long-term success, can be more challenging to justify in terms of return on investment since the return is not instantaneous. They can also be difficult to assess and to calculate their ROI because of their future focus.
Build or Buy Talent?

According to Ron Katz, president of Penguin Human Resource Consulting, LLC, the decision to build talent or to buy it is all about the interplay between time, money, and people. To begin the “build or buy” decision process, HR and talent management professionals should ask the following questions:

• Do we have the employees with the skills we need now and in the future?
• Do we have the time to develop people to assume the needed roles?
• Is it reasonable to expect someone to learn the needed skills in the time available?
• Can we accept lower productivity early on?
• Can we afford the cost of the training?

If the answers to these questions are no, recruiting talent from the outside (“buy”) may be the recommendation.

Source: Bruce, 2013.

ATD’s 2012 report on training and development spending found that the top three areas of training content comprising about 34 percent of total training and development spending were:

• Supervisory training (13.5 percent);
• Mandatory compliance training (10.8 percent), and;
• Processes, procedures, and business practices training (9.9 percent) (ATD staff, 2013).

The 2010 ATD report on training and development spending found that the bottom three content areas (comprising 17 percent of total spending) were executive development, customer services, and basic skills training (Stern, 2011). These findings indicate that while employers are concerned about the skill gaps they will face in the near future, particularly at the senior leadership levels, the actual focus, at least in terms of the amount of money spent, is still focused on near-term training and not long-term talent development investment.

Although there is value in both training and development, identifying training needs and calculating the success of training efforts is easier than identifying the knowledge, skills, and abilities an organization will need from its leaders in the near future, offering effective development efforts to foster those knowledge, skills, and abilities, and then measuring the results of those efforts. A recent survey by the global consulting firm GAP International found that only a minority of the more than 300 senior executives surveyed said they invest in leadership development programs. In analyzing the results of the survey, Gap International’s CEO, Pontish Yeramyan, concluded that senior executives may be reluctant to invest in leadership development programs because they often fail to meet their stated objectives. Because there is no clear ROI, executives are reluctant to invest in them (Vaccaro, 2014).

Why Focus on Leadership Development

Aging Baby Boomers about to retire and the skills gaps noted by executives both point to a real need to focus on leadership development. A 2014 research survey conducted by the UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School and the Human Capital Institute (HCI) and found that:

• The vast majority (85 percent) of survey respondents said there was an urgent need to step up leadership development;
• Only 21 percent of senior leaders were satisfied with their organization’s bench strength;
• Only 25 percent of senior leaders thought their high-potential employees currently were ready to meet their future business needs, and;
• Less than one-third (30 percent) of senior leaders believed their organization had a strong leadership pipeline (Filipkowski, 2014).
These findings should concern HR and talent management professionals. Studies show that it takes an average of 20.3 months to get high-potential employees prepared to assume a mid-level leadership position and 38.11 months to prepare them for a senior leadership position (Filipkowski, 2014).

To prepare high-potential employees for leadership positions, senior leaders responding to the Kenan-Flagler and HCI survey indicated that they are offering their high-potential employees stretch/special assignments (25 percent), coaching/mentoring/counseling programs (21 percent), formal learning and e-learning programs (15 percent), and cross-functional assignments and job rotations (12 percent). Fifteen percent of survey respondents said they were doing nothing to prepare high-potential employees for leadership roles, although the majority of respondents said they planned to offer more leadership development programs in the next five years (Filipkowski, 2014).

### Measuring the Impact of Leadership Development Programs: Plan for the Long-Term

It is encouraging to see that senior executives are beginning to recognize the need to offer leadership development programs and to support expanding their leadership development offerings. Their support will quickly wane, however, if HR and talent management professionals fail to measure and report on the impact of those programs to their organizations. Unfortunately, only 14 percent of the senior executives responding to the Kenan-Flagler and HCI survey said that their organizations calculated the ROI of their leadership development programs.

It is challenging to measure the impact of leadership development programs because these programs are intended to be long-term investments. The organization is developing people with the intent that they will be prepared, when the time comes, to assume leadership responsibilities. It is possible, however, to gauge the effectiveness of these programs in both the near and long term. HR and talent management professionals should consider using the following approach when developing and measuring the ROI of leadership development programs.

1. **Take a partnership approach.**

Once high-potential employees are identified in the organization (See UNC Executive Development white paper: *Identifying High-Potential Talent in the Workplace*), HR and talent management professionals should establish a partnership approach to leadership development. High-potential employees should understand that they have been selected for leadership development. In addition, the employee and his or her sponsor should understand that it is an investment that will ultimately benefit all parties in the long term.

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**What Senior Leaders Currently Offer to High Potential Employees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stretch/Special Assignments</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching/Mentoring Programs</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal &amp; E-Learning Programs</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross-functional Tasks &amp; Job Rotations</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>15%</td>
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Building Executive Leadership: Open Enrollment and Customized Executive Programs

When faced with the need to build leadership bench strength, many organizations look to top business schools to help build critical knowledge, skills, and experience. Partnering with a business school can be a very effective way for a company to address specific business challenges while developing leadership skills and building business acumen. Executive development programs, like those offered at UNC, can provide relevant and practical tools and frameworks that leaders can apply immediately in their organization. Business school professors draw from an extensive body of research and real-world business consulting to lead the classroom discussion—often bringing the knowledge and experience of the program participants into the conversation to create a dynamic dialogue.

Most world-class programs incorporate hands-on, experiential learning activities to provide an opportunity for participants to apply new skills and practice new behaviors in a risk-free environment. This could include simulations, action learning, team activities, negotiations, and a wide range of non-traditional teaching methodologies.

Many business schools offer a portfolio of non-degree open-enrollment programs focused on specific business topics such as leadership, strategy, general management, operations, and business communication. Longer programs often incorporate a range of these topics to provide a well-rounded business education experience. These programs provide a valuable opportunity for participants to interact and network with a diverse peer set. Participants come from a variety of organizations, both public and private, representing a wide range of industries, countries, and cultures. The diversity of backgrounds and experience in the class provides a unique opportunity to discuss common challenges, explore common solutions, and gain a broader business perspective. UNC’s open enrollment programs traditionally range from two to five days, and participants come from all over the world to strengthen specific skill sets to enhance career potential.

Several business schools also offer customized executive education and leadership development solutions. These custom programs are designed to meet the unique business challenges and talent development objectives of a particular organization. Custom programs can be extremely effective because their tools, frameworks, and examples can all focus on a particular company or industry, and participants are given the opportunity to apply this new knowledge and skill towards real business challenges that they’re experiencing. Participants can also interact and network with others from their organization to gain a deeper understanding of the business. The goal is for participants to leave empowered with new ideas and tools to grow the business and lead more effectively.

Source: UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School Executive Development.
2. Ensure open communication of expectations, commitment, career paths, and timeframes. Communicate early and often.

Successful partnerships require open dialogue between the employee and his or her development sponsor (this could be a supervisor or a senior-level leader in the organization). HR should work with both parties from the outset to articulate expectations from the employee and employer perspective. The employee should understand the level of commitment that will be required to fully participate in the process. Possible career paths should be discussed (but not guaranteed) after completion of the program. Perhaps most importantly, in addition to establishing a definite start and end date for the entire process, timelines should be established every step of the way. It will be these timelines that will be used to gauge success and the ROI of the program in the short term.
Are EMBA’s Worth It to Employers?

There is no question that an EMBA is advantageous to recipients, building skills that can boost their careers, but what is its worth for employers who foot all or part of its cost? According to The Wall Street Journal in a 2008 survey of corporate HR and executive development leaders, the value is not only long term, but immediate as well. More than half of the survey participants said they considered the EMBA as a critical business investment. Sixty-four percent said that sponsoring or allowing employees the time to attend an EMBA program was a good way to retain top talent. In the short term, one quarter of survey participants said they saw tangible results from employees who were stronger managers and leaders immediately after completing their EMBA. One quarter of survey participants said they saw tangible results within a year of employees completing their EMBA.

Source: Dizik, 2008.

3. Develop the game plan together and personalize it for each participant.

What will the development look like? There are a number of effective ways that leadership development can be accomplished, and a leadership development plan should include a combination. For example, if a high-potential’s leadership development plan includes obtaining an MBA or an EMBA, the plan may include the company’s financial sponsorship (in part or all) for successful completion of the MBA or EMBA. Leadership development programs may also include in-house training, participation in outside executive development programs, mentoring, coaching, challenge assignments, and more.

High-potential employees do not come in a “one-size-fits-all” package. Each one will begin the leadership development process with unique strengths and weaknesses, so each program must be developed and personalized to capitalize on those strengths and to improve on the identified weaknesses. A personalized game plan should include an overarching goal—for example, to assume responsibility for a large division in the organization—and smaller goals that will demonstrate how the participant has acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities during the leadership development program. For example, the high-potential participant might need to develop project management knowledge and skills before assuming responsibility for a large division. Participating in project management training may be a goal that is articulated in the plan. The measurement of goal achievement, then, may be assuming responsibility for a new project and successfully managing it to its conclusion.

4. Manage the process.

HR’s role in this step is to check in along the way to see if short-term goals are being met and to ensure that participants and their sponsors are keeping up with the plan. It is important to gauge the successful completion of the short-term goals and to help guide the employee and sponsor if adjustments need to be made as new skills and knowledge are acquired. HR and talent management professionals are there to support the partnership and to ensure accountability of both parties in achieving the game plan.

5. Stay with it until the end.

HR and talent management professionals can measure the ROI of leadership development by answering the following questions:

- Were the long-term goals met?
- Were the established timelines met?
- Have high potentials who participated in the leadership development programs been promoted as a result of the leadership development? If not, why?
• What are their retention rates versus employees who did not participate?
• What are their promotion rates versus employees who were not in the program?
• Was the program successful in building the bench strength needed for the organization’s future?

It is important that the answers to these questions be compiled, analyzed, and reported to senior leadership. The answers to these questions will ultimately make the business case for the value of continued investment in the development of an organization’s talent and will help measure the ROI of the leadership development program.

Conclusion

Investing in developing talent now will help organizations by building the knowledge, skill, and abilities organizations need today and in the future. It rewards employers in the short term by increasing retention, reducing turnover, and improving employee satisfaction and productivity. It rewards employers in the long term by developing leadership pipelines, improving bench strength, and positioning the company to thrive in the future. HR and talent management professionals must ensure that talent development remains a high priority in their organizations by making the business case for both training in the short term and the longer-term development of employees and by assessing and reporting on the ROI of training and development.

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Bringing Mindfulness to the Workplace

Kimberly Schaufenbuel
Program Director
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reflection
adaptive ability
mindfulness
emotional intelligence
memory
focus
clarity of thinking
indecision making ability
workplace
overall happiness
perspective
reduced turnover
Introduction

In today’s work world, we face multiple stress inducing demands and pressures as well as constant connectivity through smart phones, social media, and tablet computers. We are managing numerous fluctuating priorities, working with increased expectations, balancing competing demands for our personal and professional goals, and handling ongoing conflict and ambiguity in complex environments. Consulting firm AON Hewitt estimates that 35 percent of U.S. employers in 2013 offered stress-reduction programs to their employees, and that estimate is expected to grow (AON Hewitt, 2013). HR and talent management professionals are increasingly looking for ways to reduce employee stress, and many employers—like Google, Aetna, Target, and General Mills, to name a few—have found that introducing mindfulness into their workplace not only lowers employee stress, but improves focus, clarity of thinking, decision-making, emotional intelligence, and more.

Promise

This white paper:

• Explains what mindfulness is, and why it can improve employee health and productivity and a business’s bottom line;
• Explores how mindfulness can improve leadership skills;
• Reviews some of the studies that offer insight into the science behind mindfulness;
• Provides examples of organizations that have offered mindfulness courses and discusses how it has impacted their workplaces.

What Mindfulness Is

Mindfulness has roots that go back 2,500 years and uses an anchor—often breathing—to center attention and to bring awareness to the present moment (Stone, 2014). The goal of mindfulness practice is to “quiet the mind’s constant chattering—thoughts, anxieties, and regrets,” writes Frances Weaver for The Week. Mindfulness practitioners learn to focus on the present in everything they do and to accept events in the present moment (Weaver, 2014).

“...The goal of mindfulness practice is to ‘quiet the mind’s constant chattering—thoughts, anxieties, and regrets.’”

Psychologist Ela Amarie of the Switzerland-based consultancy Mindful Brain observes that there are three characteristics of mindfulness; intention, attention, and attitude. Mindfulness practitioners set the intention to be present. They also bring their attention to whatever is happening (noting sights, sounds, thoughts, feelings, etc.) around them or to whatever they are doing (checking email, meetings with co-workers, or taking a coffee break). They also cultivate a particular attitude with that attention, one that is nonjudgmental, patient, trusting, nonreactive, and open (Mindful Brain staff, n.d).

The goal of mindfulness is to recognize and accept inner thoughts and feelings. This is a reflective thought exercise that most people would rather avoid, perhaps because when we aren’t multitasking, we tend to think about the things we haven’t figured out yet, such as difficult personal and professional challenges, and until there is a solution, these thoughts dominate. A series of experiments conducted by Timothy Wilson of the University of Virginia found that the majority of the more than 700 study participants found it unpleasant to be in a room with just their thoughts for company. In one experiment, participants were left in a room in which they
could press a button and shock themselves. Sixty-seven percent of the men and 25 percent of the women in the study opted to shock themselves rather than to sit quietly and think (Williams, 2014). Today's mobile technology world gives people limitless ways to stay busy and avoid reflective opportunities. Practicing mindfulness can help individuals accept those inner thoughts and feelings and let them go, thereby lowering their stress and focusing their attention on the here and now.

The Business Case for Mindfulness in the Workplace

Though mindfulness practitioners can see great impact personally and professionally in recharging and regaining productivity, employers are not easily convinced that investing in reflection, openness, and thoughtfulness will impact the bottom line. Encouraging employees to slow down to focus on the present can seem at odds with a corporate culture of speed and goal attainment. Yet this is actually what makes mindfulness valuable in an organizational context. Studies by the National Institute of Health UK, the University of Massachusetts, and the Mind/Body Medical Institute at Harvard University suggest that mindfulness at work is good for business.

The studies found that practicing mindfulness at work:

- Reduces employee absenteeism and turnover;
- Improves cognitive functions (i.e., concentration, memory, and learning ability);
- Increases employee productivity;
- Enhances employer/employee and client relationships, and;
- Improves job satisfaction (Mindful Brain staff, n.d.).

Mindfulness also helps nurture imagination and improves mental health, according to Manfred Ke De Vries, INSEAD distinguished professor of leadership and development (Williams, 2014). People who practice mindfulness report having improved innovative thinking, better communication skills, and more appropriate reactions to stress. They also say that they are better able to handle conflict at work and experience improved teamwork and team relations (Mindfulnet.org staff, n.d.). In addition, research by Jochen Reb, an associate professor of organizational development at Singapore Management University, found that mindfulness can also improve decision-making by helping clarify objectives and generating options (Karelaia, 2014).

Mindfulness and Leadership

Mindfulness can help all employees, but it can be particularly beneficial for senior leaders. William George, former chief executive of healthcare giant Medtronic, said in an article in FT Magazine: “The main business case for (mindfulness) is that if you’re fully present on the job, you will be a more effective leader, you will make better decisions, and you will work better with other people.” (Gelles, 2012).

To help frame mindfulness, particularly when it comes to making better decisions, consider its opposite; mindlessness. Mindlessness means not taking the time or effort to think. Mindless decision makers don’t take the time to think about new and different options, relying instead on past assumptions or experiences. Mindful decision makers, on the other hand, take the time to consider all of the attributes of the different options, making more informed, current decisions (Ideas for Leaders staff, n.d.).

Mindfulness can also help senior leaders improve their focus on their mindsets, emotional states, and how those two affect how they interact with others. Intentional long-term focus helps improve leaders’ flexibility and adaptability. It also helps them move beyond their familiar ways of thinking and seeing the world and become open to new ways of listening, leading, responding, and innovating (Mindfulnet.org, n.d.).
How to Increase Mindfulness at Work

The Mindful Brain staff offer the following tips on how to increase mindfulness at work.

• **Be aware.**
  Encourage employees to spend 15 minutes before work each day to sit and be aware of the sensations of their breath and body. When their minds wander, teach them to bring their attention back.

• **Take five.**
  Teach employees to use the STOP sign technique whenever they feel stressed:
  - **Stop** what you are doing.
  - **Take** five conscious breaths.
  - **Observe** the sensation of the body and notice what you are thinking about.
  - **Proceed**

• **Do one thing at a time.**
  Teach employees that when their minds wander away, to bring them back to the here and now.

• **Take time outs.**
  Encourage employees to take short breaks (1-5 minutes) every 90 to 120 minutes. Remind them to mindfully stretch, breathe, or walk during those breaks.

• **Eat lunch somewhere else.**
  Encourage employees to eat their lunches away from their computer. Teach them to take a couple of breaths and really notice their hunger levels and the food they are about to eat.

• **Listen.**
  Encourage employees to practice mindful listening during meetings by being fully present for whoever is speaking.

• **Note accomplishments.**
  Encourage employees to make a mindful note of what they accomplished at the end of every day.

Source: Mindful Brain staff, n.d.
The Science of Mindfulness

There is real evidence that improving mindfulness changes the brain for the better. In 2011, a group of Harvard researchers reported in *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* the results of their study on a group of people who practiced mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). Using magnetic resonance images, they found that those who practiced MBSR had increases in gray matter concentrations in the brain. They concluded that “participation in MBSR is associated with changes in gray matter concentration in brain regions involved in learning and memory processes, emotion regulation, self-referential processing, and perspective taking.” (Holzel et al, 2011).

Neuroscientist Richard Davidson of the Center for Investigating Health Minds (Madison, Wisc.) also found that mindfulness changes how the brain functions. His studies found that mindfulness improves cognitive flexibility, creativity and innovation, well-being, emotional regulation, and empathy. Regular practice also improves attention (Mindful Brain staff, n.d.).

Other research has shown that improving one’s mindfulness reduces the levels of cortisol in the brain, a hormone related to stress. When cortisol levels drop, the mind calms down and is able to become more focused (Gelles, 2012). Mindfulness can also lower blood pressure, increase the body’s immune system, and improve emotional stability and sleep quality (Weaver, 2014).

And finally, a recent meta-analysis of mindfulness studies conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins found evidence that improving mindfulness decreases anxiety levels, depression, and pain of practitioners. The researchers concluded that although there was no evidence that practicing mindfulness through regular focus was better than any other treatment approach (like drugs), it was an equivalent alternative (Harnett, 2014).
How Organizations Are Cultivating Mindfulness in the Workplace

Google

Google is, by all accounts (it was named Fortune’s top great place to work in 2014), a world-class employer. The organization prides itself on being socially conscious, offering employees (known as Googlers) substantial benefits and perks like on-site cafes, dry cleaners, nap pods, and more than a dozen mindfulness courses. Google’s most popular “Search Inside Yourself” mindfulness course, offered since 2007, has a six-month wait list and thousands of Googler alumni.

The program consists of 19 sessions or an intensive two-and-a-half day retreat, and is designed as a contemplative training program that helps participants learn to better relate to themselves and to others. The training consists of three parts: attention training, self-knowledge development, and “creating mental habits.” Attention training focuses on developing the ability to bring one’s mind, under any circumstance and at any time, to a place that is calm and clear. Self-knowledge development focuses on becoming more aware of one’s self, creating a quality of self-knowledge and self-awareness that improves over time. This self-awareness helps mindfulness practitioners master their emotions. The third part of the training focuses on creating mental habits—for example, creating a mental habit of kindness. Participants are taught to look at every person they encounter and think “I want this person to be happy.” Once it becomes a mental habit, kindness comes naturally (Baer, 2014).

Google says this and other mindfulness programs are good for the company because they teach emotional intelligence, which helps people better understand their colleagues’ motivations. It also boosts resilience to stress and improves mental focus (Baer, n.d.). Participants of the “Search Inside Yourself” program agree. They report being calmer, more patient, and better able to listen. They also say the program helped them better handle stress and defuse emotions (Kelly, 2012).

Aetna

Healthcare giant Aetna liked the outcome of their study on mindfulness so much they now offer their mindfulness programs to customers, and more than 3,500 employees have participated in the programs. In 2010, Aetna developed, launched, and studied two mindfulness programs—Viniyoga Stress Reduction and Mindfulness at Work—in collaboration with Duke University, eMindful, and the American Viniyoga Institute. The goals of the programs were to help reduce stress and to improve how participants react to stress (Gelles, 2012 and Aetna staff, 2012).

The Viniyoga Stress Reduction program is a 12-week yoga-based program. Participants learn ways to manage and reduce stress through yoga postures, breathing techniques, guided meditation, and mental skills. The Mindfulness at Work program is based on the principles of mindfulness meditation. The program teaches participants relatively brief (5-15 minutes in duration) mindfulness practices designed to reduce work-related stress and to improve work-life balance. During the study, these practices were delivered in person and in an online classroom environment that used audio, visual, and instant messaging.
Participants in both programs showed significant improvement in perceived stress levels. Thirty-three percent in the Viniyoga program and 36 percent in the mindfulness program showed improvement in perceived stress levels, versus 18 percent in a control group. Participants in both programs also showed significant improvement in various heart rate measurements, demonstrating that their bodies were better able to manage stress. In addition, the study found that these improvements could be realized when the programs are presented in person or online; the study showed “statistically equivalent” results between the delivery methods (Aetna staff, 2012).

General Mills has offered voluntary mindfulness programs to its employees in their Minneapolis headquarters since 2006 and as of late 2013, has trained 500 employees and 90 senior leaders. The company offers a four-day retreat for officers and senior managers, a two-day training program for new managers, and a two-hour class that meets for seven consecutive weeks that is available to all employees. The company also offers weekly meditation sessions, yoga classes, and now has a dedicated meditation room in every building on its campus. General Mills offers these mindfulness courses to improve employee focus, clarity, and creativity (Hughlett, 2014 and Gelles, 2014).

The programs appear to be having the desired effect. After one of the seven-week mindfulness courses, participants were surveyed. The survey found that:

- 83 percent of participants said they were taking time each day to improve their personal productivity, up from 23 percent before the course.
- 82 percent of participants said they now made time to eliminate tasks with limited productivity, up from 32 percent before the course.
- Among the seniors who participated, 80 percent said they had experienced a positive change in their ability to make better decisions. Eighty nine percent of participating senior leaders said they were better listeners (Gelles, 2012).

Intel began offering its Awake® Intel mindfulness program in 2012 at two of its locations in Oregon and California. So far, 1,500 employees have participated in 19 sessions, and on average, participants report a two point decrease (on a scale of 1 to 10) in stress and feeling overwhelmed, a three point increase in overall happiness and well-being, and a two point increase in having new ideas, insights, mental clarity, creativity, the ability to focus, the quality of relationships at work, and the level of engagement in meetings, projects, and team efforts—all articulated goals of the program (Wong, 2014).

The program opens with having participants identify what they want to improve through the program. During the program’s first month, participants learn how to quiet their minds and explore the components of emotional intelligence. During the last part of the course, participants learn about mindful listening. Intel recently decided to expand the program and will now make it available to all of its more than 10,000 employees in 63 countries (Wong, 2014).

Target also offers mindfulness meditation training. Its “Meditating Merchants” network began in 2010 at the retail chain’s Minneapolis headquarters. The mindfulness training is open to all employees and now includes nearly 1,000 employees at several company locations.

Waterbury, Vermont-based Green Mountain Coffee Roasters has also embraced mindfulness. It offers monthly day-long mindfulness retreats to its employees, their families, friends, and the community at large (Hughett, 2013 and Gelles, 2012).
Five Steps to More Mindful Meetings

Meetings are a good place to encourage mindfulness because it encourages participants to stay in the present and to not react too quickly to information. It also encourages new perspectives to be explored before making decisions. Here are five steps HR and talent management professionals can take to foster more mindful meetings in their organizations.

1. **Encourage meeting participants to conduct a self-check before the meeting.**
   Instruct all participants to ask themselves “What mental state am I in?” By becoming more aware of their mental state, they can choose the state they want to be in during the meeting.

2. **Encourage meeting leaders to conduct a group check-in.**
   Meeting leaders can take five minutes at the start of every meeting and ask each participant to answer the question, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how present are you right now?” This will help participants reflect on where their attention is and prompt them to be in the present moment.

3. **Encourage meeting leaders to always state their intentions.**
   This goes beyond stating the usual discussion topics. For example, one intention of a meeting may be to give team members a chance to connect with each other.

4. **Encourage meeting leaders to distinguish the meeting parts.**
   Meetings have multiple parts, and it is helpful for participants to know which part they are in.

5. **Teach meeting leaders to always wrap the meeting up.**
   Encourage them to take five minutes at the end of each meeting to intentionally create clear agreements about what is going to happen in the future.

Source: Kashen, n.d.
Conclusion

In today’s work environment, mindfulness is a personal and professional strategy to improve performance and productivity. As Google, Aetna, General Mills, and Target can attest, bringing mindfulness to their workplaces has decreased employees’ stress levels, improved their focus and clarity, improved their listening and decision-making skills, and improved their overall happiness and well-being. Perhaps most importantly from an HR and talent management professional perspective, mindfulness can reduce employee absenteeism and turnover, improve employee and client relationships, and boost job satisfaction.


Our executive development open enrollment offerings combine powerful continuing business education content with real-world work experience. Through action learning and business simulation activities, we challenge participants to think, reflect, and grow as leaders.

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Managing employee talent is vital to the success of any organization. At UNC Executive Development, we provide learning experiences designed to empower participants to think differently and consider new ways to tackle challenges and grow business.

We listen to our partners and develop a deep understanding of their business, industry, and needs. Our approach to program design and delivery draws upon the power of real-world, applicable experiences from our faculty and staff, integrated with the knowledge our client partners share about the challenges they face. We make a commitment to the organizations we work with to meet their business and academic objectives and to provide ongoing support, client management, and follow-up.

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Our goal is to provide memorable, transformational learning which results in stronger individuals leading stronger teams and organizations.