WHAT WORKS IN TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Starting a Talent Development Program

Elaine Biech
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Elaine Biech
For Shane and Thad
who taught me early to find what really works
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About the Series

ATD’s What Works in Talent Development series addresses the most critical topics facing today’s talent development practitioners. Each book in the series is written for trainers, by trainers, and offers a clear pathway to solving real issues. Interwoven with the latest findings in technology and best practices, this series is designed to enhance your current efforts on core subject matter, while offering a practical guide for you to follow. Authored by seasoned experts, each book is jam-packed with easy-to-apply content—including job aids, checklists, and other reference materials—to make the learning transfer process simple.

The What Works in Talent Development series is a unique core collection designed for talent development practitioners at every career level. To date, the books in the series include:

- *Starting a Talent Development Program*
- *Blended Learning*
- *Onboarding*
Introduction

Have you just been asked to start a talent development effort in an organization? Perhaps the organization that employs you offered you an opportunity to start a new department. Or maybe you are a consultant who has had success with employee development in the past, and one of your clients has asked you to provide support for a larger effort. Or perhaps you’ve been hired as the first employee of a new department or direction for an organization that has never had an employee development initiative.

Whatever the situation, you’ve come to the right place to get started. If you are responsible for or helping to start an organizational talent development program, this is a good place to begin your journey. What can you expect? This book provides answers to many of your questions, but possibly more important, it poses additional questions that only you and your organization can answer. Answering them as you begin is crucial to ensure success.

Why Is Starting an Organizational Talent Development Program Important?

Today’s organizations face challenges on multiple fronts. Many of you have heard of the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) environment in which organizations operate. Your organization faces many challenges related to the uncertainty of the future and the changes required to address it. The best organizations recognize that no single leader or employee can be an expert in everything. Organizations need all their employees to be the best that they can to:

- Stay ahead of the competition.
- Use global expansion as an advantage.
- Tap into advanced technology.
- Use data.
- Be competitive when attracting, retaining, and engaging talent.
- Ensure that employees are prepared to spark innovation.
- Create an agile, capable workforce that is responsive to change.
• Build a competent workforce and fill a leadership pipeline.
• Enhance individual and team performance and productivity across the organization.

Every organization faces its own challenges, but ensuring that the workforce is skilled and knowledgeable about how to approach those challenges is a critical step to reaching success. Developing talent and starting an organizational talent development program is the best way to stay a step ahead of the competition and the challenges of the VUCA world.

What Does the Organization Need?
A 2017 research report, *Rewriting the Rules for the Digital Age: 2017 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends*, shows the big-picture reason an organization needs to have a coordinated talent development strategy and focus on employees. The research was extensive, including data from more than 10,000 business and HR leaders in 140 countries. More than half of the top 10 trends related directly to developing employees to create a high-performing workforce and talented leaders for a successful future. Here are the top six trends, with the percentage of respondents reporting “important” or “very important” (Schwartz et al. 2017):

• organization of the future (88 percent)
• careers and learning (83 percent)
• talent acquisition (81 percent)
• employee experience (79 percent)
• performance management (78 percent)
• leadership (78 percent).

Without going into any extensive detail, note that these six trends relate to learning in one form or another. Even the top trend addresses networks of teams that are knowledgeable and empowered to take action. Organizations are hoping to reorganize for speed, agility, and adaptability. Do your employees understand how to be agile and flexible when the need arises? Defining the organization of the future means that continuous learning is critical for business success—always on and always available.

How Can Learning Be Delivered?
The same Deloitte research shows that new methods are overtaking workplace learning. For example, video and mobile comprise the majority of Internet traffic, at about 55 and 60 percent, respectively. Mobile phones are used by more than 60 percent of
the world’s population, so it is natural to expect mobile to be a key learning delivery system (Hootsuite 2017). Thirty-five million people have enrolled in massive open online courses, or MOOCs, in the last four years, and 50 percent of learners use mobile for more than a third of their learning. Learning must be delivered faster. Software engineers report that they must redevelop skills every 12 to 18 months (Schwartz et al. 2017). Almost all professions echo a similar message.

When starting a talent development program, it’s critical for you to think speed, agility, and mobility. Learning is constant across the entire organization, and the role of the learning professional is changing rapidly. We need to be prepared to lead these changes and focus not only on content, but also how to curate the content and bring people together for learning. We need to help our leaders understand what is required and help our supervisors understand their important role in developing their employees.

What Do Employees Want?
All employees want to learn and develop their skills. Development has become key to retaining employees. Because Millennials make up a large portion of the workplace, a number of studies focus on how development relates to retaining this group. For example, Gallup research found that 87 percent of Millennials value development in a job (Adkins and Rigioni 2016). Yet the majority also say they are not receiving as much development and learning opportunities as they would like (Gallup 2016). Millennials want development to be easily accessible and available constantly. Whether employees want development or not and how it is presented to them, it is clear that developing talent is crucial for organizational growth.

About This Book
The chapters in this book first define what a talent development program is and then explain why it’s important, how to design one, how to implement one, how to determine the outcome, and finally what you can do to prepare for the next iteration and for the future. Each chapter ends with a list of thought-provoking questions, which serve to summarize the chapter’s content and guide topics of discussion that you and your organization should consider as you begin your talent development planning. You will also find job aids, templates, and checklists to support your effort. A list of additional resources is provided so that you can continue to address your specific needs.

Chapter 1: Getting Started: What Is Talent Development? This chapter offers an overview of the many facets that can be incorporated into your program and
Introduction

urges you to sort through all your options. Considering what is possible in your organization is as critical as knowing how and where to start. Crucial to your first steps is involvement throughout your organization: How do you rate the organization’s readiness? Who needs to know? Who needs to approve the effort? And who needs to support the effort? How do you prepare leadership? What role will supervisors play?

Equally critical is assessing the needs in your organization: What is lacking in your organization that a talent development program could address? What employee learning and performance gaps need filling? What policies, systems, structures, technology, and equipment are in place to support implementing a talent development program? The chapter offers ideas and recommendations that will help you answer these questions.

You may be thinking, “There are lots of questions that need answering,” and you are right; however, none is more important than the decision about how you tie training to the corporate strategy. You can’t wait until the end to determine success. You need to determine in advance what you will measure and how to evaluate it.

Chapter 2: Shaping the Future: Why Start a Talent Development Program? This chapter focuses on why starting a talent development program for your organization is critical, and presents reasons for you to consider starting your program sooner rather than later. It addresses the benefits to the organization and employees. Research and examples from several sources provide data to demonstrate the impact the effort can have on your organization’s goals and employee engagement. This chapter discusses how an organization with a learning culture supports a talent development program, and suggests what you can do early to ensure a successful impact for your organization. Staying current with the changes in the industry is also addressed.

Chapter 3: Designing Your Talent Development Program: How Do You Start? This chapter explores how you begin designing a talent development program for your organization. There are many things to consider as you begin your design, such as your organization’s rationale, what will be included, and identifying a business case. Tapping into what you learned in chapter 2, this chapter provides guidance for what needs to be in place prior to implementing a talent development effort. The most important lesson in this chapter is making sure your strategy matches your organization’s strategy. You’ll gain practical suggestions to ensure ease, clarity, good communication, budgeting, and other things important to your talent development program. The chapter is lengthy and comprehensive; however, that does not mean it incorporates
everything that you need to consider for your organization. Pay attention to the needs assessment discussion and to the follow-up guidance about required mindsets.

**Chapter 4: Implementing the Plan: How Do You Execute an Effective Talent Development Program?** This chapter guides your implementation. You might consider this “how, part 2,” because it is an extension of the pre-implementation “how” in chapter 3. You will consider what works best in your organization, what implementation decisions you will make, and how to incorporate the effort into your organization’s current business practices. Of course, the meat of this chapter is the execution process. The chapter is long, but it still does not include everything you should consider.

**Chapter 5: Transferring Learning and Evaluating Results: How Do You Demonstrate Success?** This chapter takes you through a process to determine the level of success for implementing your talent development program. Can you demonstrate organizational success? Can you validate individual learner success? Can you determine whether the effort has improved employee engagement? Included are best practices and evaluation methods for the various ways employees learn and develop. The chapter also discusses the impact of talent development on learners and the organization.

**Chapter 6: Planning Next Steps: Where Do You Go From Here?** This chapter provides closure and includes topics that address the question, “Now what?” It includes recommendations for taking your organization to the next level and expanding your talent development program. The chapter also offers suggestions for how to stay ahead of the changes in the world, technology, your organization, and the talent development industry. Probably one of the greatest concerns is ensuring continued accountability for the effort—especially when the world continues to move faster and become more complex. How do you keep everyone in your organization focused on continuous learning?

**How to Get the Most Out of This Book**

This book sets you on the path to creating a talent development program for your organization. It is meant as a guide and overview for the topic, not an all-encompassing reference to deliver a detailed assessment, implementation, and evaluation plan. You’ll gain enough information to get started, as well as a few tools and tips to point you in the right direction. However, to be successful you’ll need to keep in mind the nuances of your organization and its needs. Because the book cannot cover every possible option,
be sure to tap into the resources provided to take your exploration and deliberation to the next level.

Given the brevity of this book, paired with the comprehensive topic, we’ve had to assume your experience covers certain fundamentals:

• You have some background in the knowledge and jargon of talent development, such as instruction systems design, the ADDIE model, 70-20-10, andragogy, and adult learning principles, as well as some basic design elements, such as writing objectives and developing surveys.
• You understand strategy and talent development’s role in organizational success.
• You understand the concept of learning organizations and practices that sustain a learning organization.
• You have some history of the profession and ATD, and know how the association supports talent development.
• You understand how we, as a profession, evolved from training to training and development to learning to workplace learning and performance to employee development and now to talent development, as well as the nuances of each.

Icons Used in This Book
Throughout this book, you’ll find icons highlighting concepts and ideas introduced in the text.

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<th>Icon</th>
<th>What It Means</th>
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<td><img src="lightbulb.png" alt="Tip" /></td>
<td><strong>Tips from professionals</strong> will make your job easier and give you ideas to help apply the techniques and approaches discussed.</td>
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<td><img src="wrench.png" alt="Tools" /></td>
<td><strong>Tools</strong> identify templates, checklists, worksheets, models, outlines, examples, illustrations, and other prototypes that can be a useful place to start.</td>
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<td><img src="magnifying-glass.png" alt="Resources" /></td>
<td><strong>Resources</strong> are the books, blogs, articles, or even people that you can access to add to the information you’ve gained already and take your learning deeper.</td>
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References


Getting Started: What Is Talent Development?

In This Chapter

- An introduction to talent development
- Why starting with a clean slate can be good
- Ideas for how to build a learning culture
- The importance of tying talent development to the organizational strategy
- Four underpinnings that form a strong talent development foundation
- Initial considerations about measuring and evaluating a talent development program
All organizations have missions, and most probably have visions. To achieve both the vision and the mission, an organization requires people who have the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes (often shortened to KSAs) to meet its strategic and operational goals.

A talent development program creates the culture, organizes a system, and delivers the tools and processes to ensure that the organization is prepared to meet its goals. Development may occur because there are:

- business needs or requirements, such as increasing customer satisfaction or market share
- employee needs, such as learning new skills, upgrading current skills, improving or changing performance, or achieving certification
- changes in the environment, such as rewarding quality instead of quantity or teamwork instead of individual achievements
- future organizational needs, such as quickly adapting to change or seizing the next opportunity.

There are certainly other instances, but ultimately by incorporating the 10 areas of expertise in the ATD Competency Model, talent development increases employees’ ability to accomplish their work competently.

**What Is Talent Development?**

If you ask three people to define talent development, you will get three different answers:

- The CEO will tell you it is the competency required to ensure the organization achieves its strategic and operational goals and provides a pipeline of leaders for the future.
- A manager will say it is the ability to accomplish the organization’s work.
- An employee will say it is the way that employees meet the needs of their career goals.

So, who is right? They all are! Talent development is an effort supported and led by organizations to ensure that all employees have the right skills and knowledge at the time that the employee and the organization need them.

In the past (and even today in some organizations), when the topic of talent development, training, or learning arose in conversation, the immediate discussion focused on classes and catalogs. But the workplace has changed—immensely. That is not to say that formal training (for example, workshops, college courses, and instructor-led classes in virtual and traditional settings) is no longer valued. In fact, it plays a critical part of
learning. The change occurring is that more emphasis is currently placed on the other ways employees learn—on the job and from others.

And this change requires a different view of learning. Employees expect to learn constantly, and because the workforce is more mobile and transient than in the past, if employers do not demonstrate that they value talent development, employees will leave to find one that does. Today more and more organizations see the value of talent development and its importance. The implication is that we, the leaders in learning—trainers, talent development professionals, employee developers—need to upgrade our skills and lead the change. We need to stay involved with and informed about the significance and meaning of talent development.

**Talent Development Is Important to Organizations**

As organizations continue changing rapidly, they need to develop employees at an even faster rate. However, because they can’t always define the skills they will require, part of talent development is preparing for an uncertain future.

Developing talent is critical to ensure that organizations are productive and able to stay ahead of their competition. Thus, it’s important for talent development professionals to encourage employees to participate in opportunities to further their learning.

**Talent Development Is Important to Employees**

Employees who are interested in career development take skill enhancement, training, coaching, and mentoring opportunities seriously. They understand that skill and knowledge improvements are essential to maintaining expertise that matches changing times, so they want to stay up-to-date on the most recent industry innovations.

The talent development function nurtures these employees to become reliable resources that benefit the organization. Acting as a joint effort between employees and the employer, talent development works to upgrade existing skills and knowledge in expectation of future requirements. Employees gain professional and personal skills that benefit them on the job and in other aspects of their lives. These efforts enhance employees’ knowledge and increase their sense of contributing to something greater than themselves.

**Start by Asking Questions**

If you are just starting out with an organization or if this is its first foray into talent development, you should be asking lots of questions. To better understand what talent development encompasses—especially for the organization—begin with questions like these:
• How is talent development defined by the organization?
• How will talent development be tied to the organizational strategy?
• What are the key drivers?
• What are the organization’s goals? What are the goals for employees?
• Is a culture in place that will support the learning strategy?
• What policies, systems, structures, technology, and equipment are in place to support implementing a talent development program?
• Why talent development? Why now?
• How are skills gained today?
• What leadership can you expect from the executive team? Will they champion the effort?
• What employee knowledge and skills gaps exist? What is expected in the future?
• How sophisticated is the organization’s learning culture?
• What has occurred to date or what plans are in place to create a culture where learning is valued?
• Who are the learning champions at all levels of the organization?
• What will success look like?
• What tools will help measure success?

If you can answer even half of these questions, you are well on your way.

TOOLS
An “Organizational Readiness Checklist” is at the end of this chapter to help you identify the strengths of your organization and the pitfalls that may hinder success.

Knowing what your organization lacks that a talent development program can supply is critical. This requires discussion throughout the organization.

Get Started on the Right Foot: You Are Lucky
If you’re reading this book because you are truly starting a talent development program, you are at a huge advantage. Sure! I know I’m not in your place right now, and I don’t
know how many loose ends you are trying to knot together. But I still contend that you are very lucky to be starting on the right foot. Why? Here are a few reasons.

**Talent Development Emanates From the Organization’s Strategy**

You have the ability to tie talent development directly to the corporate strategy. A study by Brandon Hall Group (2016) shows that less than 8 percent of organizations with an L&D strategy call it very effective, and less than a third even call it effective. This does not mean that the training efforts themselves are not effective in delivering learning, or that employees are not acquiring new knowledge. What does it mean is that even if the execution is perfect, the strategy itself has little to no impact on the business. You have the opportunity to ensure that your talent development strategy is connected to the business and will deliver bottom-line results.

**Supervisors Will Own Development**

You can ensure that all supervisors and managers realize that effective employee development is “Job One” (to paraphrase a car manufacturer). In many organizations, employee development has been relegated to the human resources department or a training group. You have the opportunity to place that accountability squarely on the supervisors’ shoulders. You won’t have to break any bad habits of “it’s HR’s job” or “it’s the learning department’s job.”

**Employees Will Embrace Talent Development**

You can establish learning as a continuous, on-the-job process, focusing on how employees learn from the work they do and the people they work with. Is classroom training the best way to learn for your organization? Perhaps not. You can create learning programs tailored to the way that employees need to gain access to content. In many organizations, talent development is less effective because it offers only instructor-led training programs, with little focus on what is learned on the job or from others.

**You Will Be Viewed as a Leader of a High-Performing Learning Organization**

As a strategic business adviser to the C-suite, you will gain respect as a brilliant designer for developing the best talent in the right place at the right time, because your strategy will match business needs. Talent development professionals are often seen as facilitators and may not have an opportunity to demonstrate their contribution to the organization.
Chapter 1

If you are thinking that the talent development department is alone in this effort, nothing could be further from the truth. Talent development is owned by supervisors, managers, and leaders, so the success of your efforts will be determined by the degree to which you are able to hold supervisors accountable for developing their employees, ensure that leaders are champions of learning, and tie learning to corporate strategy.

The Most Important Rule: Tie Talent Development to the Organizational Strategy

Organizations continue to struggle with creating a talent development strategy that has a real impact on the business. Without a strategy, organizations lack the guidance necessary to design and deliver effective learning programs that boost both individual and organizational performance. Research shows that 14 percent of companies have no talent development strategy. But, the presence of a learning strategy is not the entire answer. If organizations that have a strategy do not believe it helps to achieve organizational goals, it translates into wasted time and money (Brandon Hall Group 2016).

According to that same survey, most companies recognized the importance of a talent development strategy and were focused on doing something about it. More than half said they were ready to begin aligning the learning strategy with the business strategy. Most significant is that high-performing organizations were even more prepared. Those organizations saw year-over-year improvement in revenue, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, turnover, and organizational productivity. High performers are in a better position to make these changes because they are far more likely to have an effective learning strategy already in place; 66 percent stated that their strategy was either effective or very effective in helping achieve business goals. High-performing organizations are 78 percent more likely to have an effective L&D strategy (Brandon Hall Group 2016). In a study conducted by ATD Research and Rothwell & Associates, 88 percent of respondents believed that aligning learning and business goals was a relevant challenge for organizational talent development needs today (Rothwell 2015).

Embrace the lessons learned in these studies. Make it a priority to align the talent development plan to the organizational strategy.

Foundations of a Successful Talent Development Program

Having key underpinnings in place before you begin designing your talent development program provides a foundation on which to build success. Here are four important considerations before you begin:
• Have a clear understanding of a learning culture.
• Appreciate how the 70-20-10 model can guide you.
• Understand that everyone is responsible for employee development.
• Be aware that employees need to take responsibility for their own learning.

Learning Organizations and Learning Culture
The concept of creating culture isn’t new. Edgar Schein’s Organizational Culture and Leadership introduced us to the importance of culture in 1985. Now in its fifth edition, it’s considered one of the most influential management books ever published. According to Schein (2017), “The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture. If you do not manage culture, it manages you, and you may not even be aware of the extent to which this is happening.”

The concept of trying to make an organization better through learning and generating a learning organization isn’t new either. It’s the reason why Jack Welch said, “If it isn’t broken, break it,” and Michael Hammer coined, “continuous intervention.”

The Fifth Discipline
Peter Senge introduced many of us to the “learning organization” in The Fifth Discipline (1990), defining it as “an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future.” He further defines the five disciplines of a learning organization:

• systems thinking—concerned with the whole
• personal mastery—continually clarifying and developing proficiency
• mental models—assumptions, generalizations, or images that influence how we view the world
• building shared vision—a mutual picture of the future that fosters genuine commitment
• team learning—using dialogue to suspend assumptions and think together to ensure the organization learns.

RESOURCES
If you have never read The Fifth Discipline, do it now. If the last time you read it was when it came out in 1990, go back and read it again. I swear it takes on a new meaning today. Senge was ahead of his time in his thinking.
Although this book is not about building culture, a learning culture is one of the underpinnings of ensuring success as you design your organization’s talent development program. Why? As Senge puts it, “Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we never were able to do. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life.” Those are powerful words. Learning is as fundamental to us as many of our other survival drives.

**PRO TIP**

Make sure your organization does not have a “learning disability.” Senge wrote, “Learning disabilities are tragic in children, but they are fatal in organizations. Because of them, few corporations live even half as long as a person—most die before they reach the age of forty.”

**A Learning Culture’s Impact**

The research supporting ATD’s whitepaper, *Building a Culture of Learning*, found that only 31 percent of organizations have a culture of learning. The research also found that top-performing organizations were five times more likely to have a learning culture, three times more likely to use the learning culture in recruiting, and three times more likely to hold leaders accountable for demonstrating learning’s importance (ATD 2016). It is these statistics that embolden some organizations to use the term high-impact learning culture.

The learning culture concept encourages us to think about learning as an organizational process rather than an individual development process. This idea is critical given what we know about how we learn at work.

**Building a Learning Culture**

The Society for Human Resource Management defines a learning culture as “a community of employees instilled with a growth mindset” (Grossman 2015). At its base, a learning culture operates from a shared set of organizational values, assumptions, beliefs, processes, and practices that encourage individuals—and the organization as a whole—to increase knowledge, competence, and performance. You can diagnose your
organizational culture and make changes to develop a learning culture; however, as you can imagine, there are many opinions about what is needed to build a learning culture. There is no “best” way or even a guaranteed way to build a learning organization. Nevertheless, there are some things to heed.

Most important, make time for learning and create accountability from the top down. This leads to the creation of individual development plans (IDPs). The ATD research report *Building a Culture of Learning* found that making IDPs part of a culture of learning requires:

- regularly updated IDPs for every employee
- employee accountability for the specific learning outlined in their IDPs
- nonfinancial rewards and recognition for employee learning

Making time does not mean the amount of time invested in attending formal learning events. It means that organizations allow employees time on the job to learn, such as time to:

- Receive feedback from supervisors and then plan for how they can improve or change what they heard.
- Learn from a coach or a mentor.
- Learn by serving on a team, shadowing another employee, or creating a solution with an employee from another division or location.
- Discuss projects and updates with supervisors on a daily basis.
- Practice and reflect on what happened and what might be done differently in the future.

A true learning culture tolerates mistakes and celebrates creativity. It encourages risks and understands failure. Employees are allowed to try and learn and fail until they’re successful. Finally, a learning culture has a process that employees can use to share what was learned for the team and organizational learning. A learning culture is a hallmark of a high-performing organization.

**TOOLS**

“Building a Learning Culture” is a tool you can use as a discussion starter with your senior leaders, or to initiate what is required for this foundational success requirement. You’ll find it at the end of this chapter.
Chapter 1

70-20-10 Guidance

If you say the word *learning*, almost everyone conjures up an image from school. This can sometimes lead to a restricted paradigm with a focus primarily on cognitive competency. It also brings to mind a delivery process with a teacher-student relationship, where learning must be transferred. In fact, most learning in the workplace does not occur that way.

Imagine you are at work and you need help. What do you do? Ask a co-worker for assistance? Check your organization’s intranet? Review a previous task? Look in your employee handbook? Ask your boss? Google it? Sure. Any or all of these. You would not necessarily be looking for a teacher to help you. In fact, about 70 percent of what you learn is based on on-the-job assignments, and about 20 percent of what you learn comes from others in a social aspect. Only about 10 percent of what we learn occurs in the way you think of “learning.” This must be taken into consideration when you start a talent development program.

Where do these numbers come from? In the 1980s, a team of research scientists from the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina, studied how successful leaders learn. They determined that 70 percent was learned as hands-on experience on the job, usually directed by a manager; 20 percent was learned through developmental interactions, now called *social learning*; and 10 percent was learned through formal learning, such as attending a class or reading (Lombardo and Eichinger 2011). Since the original work, the study has been replicated in many countries, by many organizations, and with many levels of employees with similar results. The percentages are not meant to be a formula, because they depend upon the organization and the individuals. Instead, they provide a guideline. So, what kinds of learning fit in each category?

**Formal Content: 10 Percent**

- courses, seminars, and workshops
- e-learning and virtual modules
- blended learning
- certification and certificates
- professional accreditation
- college or university classes
- MOOCs, CMOOCs, and SPOCs
- reading
Learning From Others: 20 Percent
- being mentored or coached
- mentoring or reverse-mentoring and interviewing others
- online professional communities and blogs
- advice, opinions, and work debriefs
- curated or shared work
- internal or external networks
- 360-degree feedback processes
- research projects
- training or teaching others.

On-the-Job Assignment: 70 Percent
- problem solving, such as leading a project or action team
- cross-functional activities
- rotational assignments
- community or volunteer activities
- new responsibilities or acting roles
- stretch assignments
- change management activities
- new learning applications
- derail-proofing other employees.

As you design your talent development program, include a plan for how to encourage, support, and budget for all three kinds of learning.

Everyone Is Involved in Employee Development
Learning is not dependent on the talent development department. If you work for a small company and think that you are alone in your one-person talent development shop, think again. You are not. Talent development is everyone’s business.

If you’re used to HR owning organizational learning, prepare yourself for a new paradigm. Over the past few years, a huge role reversal has occurred: Leaders train and trainers lead (Figure 1-1). Organizations are now looking to trainers to lead organizational talent development effort and provide solutions. And although it has been a part of the role all along, supervisors and managers are now expected to develop their employees. Part of the talent development program should be to provide them with all the skills they need to do this.
In her book *Communicate Like a Leader*, Dianna Booher (2017) says, “Make learning a topic of casual discussion and ask, ‘What new learning opportunities have you been able to take advantage of since we last talked about your career?’ Allow time in staff meetings occasionally (and with prior notice) for a few to mention a learning resource (blog, book, podcast, course) they have found helpful and would recommend to their coworkers.”

You will want to improve your supervisors’ and managers’ coaching and development skills. What are the most beneficial skills your managers should have? Here are a few to get you started. Ensure that your managers and supervisors know how to:

- **Develop an employee’s individual development plan.** This is a great place to start because it requires the manager and employee to have a discussion about career goals.

- **Offer development options beyond the job.** Well-rounded employees are a benefit to the organization. They learn new skills and obtain a better understanding of how the organization works if they have opportunities to develop in other departments or even in other organizations. Tools that managers have available include shadowing someone else, a stretch assignment, a rotational assignment, a job swap, or others.

- **Give feedback.** When feedback is delivered regularly and tied to examples employees learn incrementally. Feedback should be both constructive changes and reinforcing comments.

- **Set quantitative performance metrics.** Metrics tell employees what the goal is; incremental objectives are established so that employees see progress. Metrics should be discussed at least once a month.

- **Suggest networks.** Employees who link with others will grow from those relationships. Help them find mentors, coaches, professional associations, or a learning community of practice.
Getting Started: What Is Talent Development?

• **Invest.** Whether it is spending money so the employee can attend a conference, or allowing time to meet with an on-site book club, managers need to invest in their employees’ futures.

• **Remove barriers.** If organizational processes challenge employee development, managers need to find a way to run interference. Make introductions, bridge departments, and find ways to help employees continue to learn.

• **Be a great role model.** Managers have an opportunity to model many things. One of the best things a manager can do is to demonstrate that learning is important. Managers also need to demonstrate how to accept feedback and be open to bad news. Finally, managers and supervisors need to invest in their own learning.

**TOOLS**

At the end of this chapter, you’ll find the tool “IDPs: Who Is Responsible for What?” to use during an IDP discussion. And at the end of chapter 4, you will find “The 4 Cs,” which provides guidance about how to facilitate a career discussion. Both will be helpful for your managers if they are new to the idea of developing their employees.

There are many other things you can do to help supervisors and managers become better employee developers, including recommending books, offering a seminar, partnering them with other managers, providing coaching, or helping them find a mentor.
RESOURCES
The *Developing Employees (Pocket Mentor)* from Harvard Business School Press offers immediate support to managers who need ideas for how to develop employees. Its small size, handy tools, and practical advice will appeal to your managers who need to bolster these skills.

**Individuals Are Accountable for Their Learning**

The last consideration you should build into your foundation is that professionals are becoming more accountable for their own professional development. You may call it lifelong learning. Some use self-directed learning, but its definition is more prescriptive than the discussion here. It is often defined as “a training design in which trainees master packages of predetermined material, at their own pace, without the aid of an instructor” (Piskurich 1993). Self-directed learning has more of an academic implication than an adult learning one.

If employees are going to be held accountable for their learning, one would assume we all know how to learn. But, were you ever taught how to learn? It’s not likely. Researchers from several universities found that the two ways we learn best is through distributed practice (practice over time) and practice testing (often used in MOOCs or even flashcards). Some tools we rely upon, such as rereading, designing a mnemonic, or highlighting what we read, are helpful, but less effective (Dunlosky et al. 2013).

RESOURCES
To find out more about learning to learn, watch one of these short videos:
- “After Watching This, Your Brain Will Not Be the Same,” a TEDx Talk by Lara Boyd [http://bit.ly/29RKdNV]

Whatever you call it, learning is a strategic enabler whether you work for a corporation or for yourself. As employees have become more autonomous in determining the
direction of their careers, they have become lifelong learners and continue to be strategic enablers (ATD 2015). This fact has an upside and a downside: The advantage is that the employees your talent development program serves will have a clear understanding that they need to take charge of their careers and identify which skills and knowledge they need and desire. The downside is that if your talent development program does not offer employees what they’re expecting, they will leave and find employment elsewhere. Turnover is costly to your organization, so you need to stay informed about not only the development of employees, but what it takes to retain them.

Each of these four information blocks—learning culture, 70-20-10, managers as coaches, and individual expectations—fits together to form a solid foundation you need to build upon as you plan your talent development program. The rest of this book shows you how to start a talent development effort for your organization.

Jump-Start Your Efforts
What can you do immediately to begin creating your talent development program? Consider these fact-finding precursors.

Review Engagement Surveys
Engagement surveys include a great deal of information. Read your organization’s last three engagement surveys, compare them, and look for trends. What do they tell you about the learning attitude? How can this information help you plan and design the talent development program?

Get Senior Leaders on Board
Executive support is essential for creating a learning organization and implementing a talent development program. Senior leaders manage the budget and identify business needs, such as increasing customer satisfaction, increasing market share, and improving quality. If you make sure the C-suite is on board, you can work with them to discuss their goals and then tie them to your development plans. Then you decide the best way to meet the goals and how you will know if you are successful.

Assess How Middle Management Approaches Development
Supervisors and managers will not have the same approach to employee development. Some will embrace their role as employee coaches, while others may not see it as part of their job description. Talk to them to find out where they stand. You could also look to retention numbers for more information—employees rarely stay where they are not developed.
Initiate Your Evaluation Plan

Although we won’t discuss the evaluation plan until chapter 5, you need to begin thinking about how you will measure success. What tools are available to you? What do you anticipate your leaders will want to measure?

In *The Business Case for Learning*, Patti and Jack Phillips (2017) home in on the dilemmas facing the learning and talent development field:

- Learning and development is not used on the job as desired.
- Learning programs don’t produce data to demonstrate how they make a difference.
- Talent development teams do not provide measurements desired by organizational executives.

Keep these challenges in mind as you plan how you will measure and evaluate your efforts. Consider how ready your organization is to not only implement a talent development effort, but also invest in the evaluation that will resolve these dilemmas: ensuring learning is transferred to the workplace, proving learning makes a difference, and delivering the data your executives desire. The ease with which you can do this will depend on the size of your organization, the talent development effort, your department, and your budget. It also depends on many of the other elements I’ve written about in this chapter and others, including involvement of your senior leaders, the attitude of your supervisors and managers, and you and your team’s desires for success.

TOOLS

“Is Your Organization Ready for Real World Evaluation?” is an evaluation readiness assessment located at the end of this chapter. It provides initial considerations for your evaluation plan, which you will develop in chapter 5.

What’s Next?

Whether you are a one-person department or the manager of several talent development departments; you work for a company of 100 or 10,000; or you are in a domestic
location or multiple locations around the globe, you’ll find many concepts and tools you can use to start creating a talent development program in this book.

It doesn’t even matter if you are in a traditional talent development role. This book is for anyone who has an interest in starting and shaping a system that is larger than the traditional learning focus. You’ll learn the whys, the hows, and the what’s nexts of starting a talent development program. This book will show you “What Works” and will help your organization take a systems view of learning to become more flexible, agile, and innovative—and at the same time develop your employees.

When successful, the right talent development program helps great employees do an excellent job, and the return on investment goes directly to the bottom line.

Questions to Explore

- Why is talent development important to your organization?
- Why is talent development important to the employees of your organization?
- How do you intend to link the organizational strategy to your talent development program?
- How do you rate your organization’s learning culture?
- How do you envision the 70-20-10 guidance fitting into the talent development program?
- What is in place to support formal learning? Learning from others? On-the-job learning?
- How do you think supervisors and managers will address their role as coaches to their employees?
- What role have IDPs played in your organization’s culture?
- What reviews do you need to conduct to learn how policies, systems, structures, technology, and equipment will support a talent development program?
- How accountable do you think employees are for their development?
- What did the review of engagement surveys tell you about the organization’s efforts for development?
- What are your initial thoughts about evaluation?
Tools for Support

Organizational Readiness Checklist

The Organizational Readiness Checklist will help you determine the degree to which your organization is ready to implement a talent development program.

You can use the tool in several ways: You can use it to determine areas of strength and weakness for your organization. You can also use it as the basis for a facilitated discussion with senior leaders. Ask each to complete the checklist and then review the scores with the group. Lead discussion around questions, such as:

- What are our strengths? Weaknesses?
- How can we use our strengths to shore up our weaknesses?
- What areas may hinder implementing our talent development program?
- How can you help to make improvements? How can I help?

Use the information you collect to improve their readiness level, as well as confirm buy-in of leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Readiness to Implement a Talent Development Program</th>
<th>Not Even Close</th>
<th>A Good Start</th>
<th>Almost There</th>
<th>We Made It</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. LEARNING CULTURE</td>
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<td><em>To what extent do you believe:</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Learning is valued</td>
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<td>2. Individuals are given time to learn</td>
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<td>3. IDPs are expected of all employees</td>
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<td>4. Individuals are encouraged to manage their own learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Learning communities of practice are (or will be) encouraged</td>
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Subtotal:
### Organizational Readiness to Implement a Talent Development Program

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY</th>
<th>Not Even Close 1</th>
<th>A Good Start 2</th>
<th>Almost There 3</th>
<th>We Made It 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you believe:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Policies and procedures are in place, or an efficient way exists to initiate what is necessary</td>
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<td>2. The organization’s mission reflects a commitment to employee development</td>
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<td>3. Human resources are adequate and available to introduce and sustain the talent development program</td>
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<td>4. Financial resources are adequate and available</td>
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<td>5. Resources are dedicated to supporting the administration of talent development</td>
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<td><strong>Subtotal:</strong></td>
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### C. INFRASTRUCTURE

| To what extent do you believe: |                  |                 |                |               |
| 1. Learning methods have been decided and are supported |                  |                 |                |               |
| 2. Authoring tools are in place for e-learning |                  |                 |                |               |
| 3. A platform is available for social learning |                  |                 |                |               |
| 4. Your organization has an LMS in place |                  |                 |                |               |
| 5. Employees have access to appropriate devices and equipment to fully participate |                  |                 |                |               |
| **Subtotal:** |                  |                 |                |               |

### D. ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

<p>| To what extent do you believe: |                  |                 |                |               |
| 1. Staff understand how the mission and goals of your organization relate to talent development |                  |                 |                |               |
| 2. Rewards and recognition are in place for learner initiative |                  |                 |                |               |
| 3. Employees know what they need to learn and why |                  |                 |                |               |
| 4. Open lines of communication are in place in your organization |                  |                 |                |               |
| 5. Innovation and creativity are rewarded |                  |                 |                |               |
| <strong>Subtotal:</strong> |                  |                 |                |               |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Readiness to Implement a Talent Development Program</th>
<th>Not Even Close</th>
<th>A Good Start</th>
<th>Almost There</th>
<th>We Made It</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>E. SENIOR LEADERS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>To what extent do you believe:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Senior leaders consider talent development a strategic necessity</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Senior leaders understand that talent development should be aligned with organizational, regional, or system goals</td>
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<td>3. Financial, mission, or safety reasons exist to implement a talent development program</td>
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<td>4. Senior leaders are convinced of the value of talent development and are committed to dedicating time to it</td>
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<td>5. Senior leaders are willing to work as a team and able to lead, model, and shape the talent development effort</td>
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<td><strong>Subtotal:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>F. EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>To what extent do you believe:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Continuous professional growth and development are desired by employees in your organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Employee preferences for learning were considered when designing the talent development program</td>
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<td>3. Employees are accountable for their own development</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. There is a rationale for the selection of employees for learning opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Employees exhibit a collaborative, sharing attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Readiness to Implement a Talent Development Program</td>
<td>Not Even Close 1</td>
<td>A Good Start 2</td>
<td>Almost There 3</td>
<td>We Made It 4</td>
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</table>

### G. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

**To what extent do you believe:**

1. There is an implementation team in place that represents multiple areas of the organization
2. Talent development has been aligned with succession planning, HR, and other initiatives
3. A plan and time exist during implementation to gather feedback from all who are involved
4. There is a communications plan to share implementation progress with multiple stakeholders, regardless of their involvement
5. There is a plan to monitor and evaluate the talent development program

**Subtotal:**

### H. PRE-IMPLEMENTATION EXECUTION

**To what extent do you believe:**

1. Senior leaders have discussed and made an explicit link between the organization’s strategy, mission, vision, values, and goals
2. Internal marketing has been completed
3. Managers clearly know their responsibility to develop employees
4. Decisions have been made about the use of SMEs, external suppliers, and other experts
5. Initial program components have been decided on

**Subtotal:**

**TOTAL:**

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Building a Learning Culture
Use this tool to facilitate dialogue and learning with senior leaders throughout the organization, or as an initial road map for creating a learning culture. Strategies are loosely arranged in four categories, and each strategy leads to tactics.

Learning Climate
- Create and communicate a shared learning-organization vision.
- Align learning to organizational strategies.
- Ensure all employees have time to learn.
- Participate in mutual learning events with the community, academia, and associations.
- Encourage learning through teamwork.
- Accept and encourage risk, experimentation, creativity, and innovation.
- Celebrate learning and knowledge sharing through demonstrations.
- Focus power and decisions at the place of action.
- Ensure leaders value bad news.
- Encourage candor and dissent.

Learning Capability
- Create easy ways to store, curate, and retrieve knowledge.
- Operate from a systems thinking perspective.
- Create accountability from the top down.
- Ensure everyone has access to data and information they require.
- Embrace change and learn from failure.
- Celebrate informal learning.
- Provide multiple opportunities to learn.
- Acquire and apply relevant technology.
- Promote a growth mindset.

Learning Roles
- Foster collaboration, connection, and communication for learning.
- Expect managers to be mentors and coaches.
- Compel all leaders to be champions and models of continuous learning.
- Empower, encourage, and enable employees to learn.
Getting Started: What Is Talent Development?

- Include customers in the organization’s learning.
- Expect continuous learning for everyone.
- Make learning a part of every job.
- Develop everyone as a leader, ensuring leadership is valued at all levels.
- Promote from within.

Learning Content

- Provide the skills to learn how to learn.
- Identify best practices.
- Develop creative and critical thinking skills.
- Learn personal agility, flexibility, and adaptation.
- Learn and practice dialogue.
- Seek and use knowledge wherever it resides.
- Recognize and reward learning that leads to action.
- Build capabilities for change.
- Teach how, not what.
- Link learning to performance.

Once you’ve determined which strategies will be best for your organization, you can develop tactics for each. For example, “foster collaboration, connection, and communication for learning” could be supported with these tactics:

- Create a climate of mutual respect so employees share with others.
- Design tasks that foster teamwork and shared responsibility.
- Encourage employees to join learning communities of practice.
- Establish a mentoring structure to help employees identify opportunities.
- Support peer groups that encourage discussion about career goals.
IDPs: Who Is Responsible for What?
Share this tool with managers who need a refresher on how to help employees with their IDPs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Manager Responsibilities</strong></th>
<th><strong>Employee Responsibilities</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role of the manager is to initiate and be supportive of employee development, using company resources to do so. Managers:</td>
<td>While it’s imperative for managers and organizations to facilitate employee development, employees have specific responsibilities. Employees:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Initiate the process.</td>
<td>• Provide responses to career-related questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use company-provided frameworks for career planning.</td>
<td>• Self-reflect to identify career and development goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Explain the IDP process and its purpose.</td>
<td>• Evaluate skills and interests openly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide an atmosphere of trust and open communication for their employees to discuss their careers and progress.</td>
<td>• Draft an IDP with input from managers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Guide the career and progress discussions.</td>
<td>• Be open to feedback and taking on new challenges.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ask questions and listen.</td>
<td>• Implement and own the plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identify potential career opportunities for employees.</td>
<td>• Assess progress and initiate follow-ups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identify learning resources and activities.</td>
<td>• Provide constructive feedback.</td>
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</table>

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Is Your Organization Ready for Real World Evaluation?

Use this tool to identify your organization’s readiness for evaluation. You may complete it yourself as preparation for your evaluation role. Or you may wish to have your senior leadership team (or your talent development team) complete the questions and use it as a discussion starter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is Your Organization Ready for Real World Evaluation?</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check the most appropriate level of agreement for each statement (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. My organization is considered a large organization with a wide variety of programs.</td>
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<td>2. We have a large budget that attracts the interest of senior management.</td>
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<td>3. Our organization has a culture of measurement and is focused on establishing a variety of measures in all functions and departments.</td>
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<td>4. My organization is undergoing significant change.</td>
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<td>5. There is pressure from senior management to measure the results of our programs.</td>
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<td>6. My function currently has a very low investment in measurement and evaluation.</td>
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<td>7. My organization has experienced more than one program disaster in the past.</td>
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<td>8. My department has a new leader.</td>
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<td>9. My team would like to be the leaders in our field.</td>
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<td>10. The image of our department is less than satisfactory.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. My clients are demanding that our processes show bottom-line results.</td>
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<td>12. My function competes with other functions within our organization for resources.</td>
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<td>13. There is increased focus on linking our process to the strategic direction of the organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. My function is a key player in change initiatives currently taking place in the organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Our overall budget is growing and we are required to prove the bottom-line value of our processes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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**Scoring**

If you scored:

15-30: You are not yet a candidate for comprehensive measurement and evaluation.

31-45: You are not a strong candidate for comprehensive measurement and evaluation; however, it is time to start pursuing some type of evaluation process.

46-60: You are a candidate for building skills to implement comprehensive measurement and evaluation. At this point there is no real pressure to show impact and ROI, but this is the perfect opportunity to perfect the process within the organization.

61-75: You should already be implementing a comprehensive measurement and evaluation process, including ROI.

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References and Additional Resources


