

HR CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN THE FACE OF HR TRANSFORMATION

A CAHRS White Paper | December 2019 | prepared by Jeff Serbin and Sabrina Williams

I. HR Career Development in the Face of HR Transformation

As HR transformation continues, many of the foundational experiences in a traditional HR career path are either no longer needed or look very different today. Transformation often takes the form of advancements in software and analytics, expansion of shared service centers, and an evolution of the HR Generalist role. Considering the ongoing transformation of the HR function, this research sought to answer the question: How are companies approaching career development?

More specifically, **(1) which skill areas are the focus of development, (2) by what methods are companies developing their HR function, and (3) are companies measuring the effectiveness of their development efforts?**

II. Methodology

This research project was designed to gain a wide perspective on the topic of HR career development and the initiatives that are the products of it. To accomplish obtaining this wide perspective a methodology of using three different population groups was created. The different populations each provided their own specific content and perspectives.

GROUP 1 – CAHRS partner companies – created and curated HR career development

GROUP 2 – Emerging leaders in the HR field – participated in HR career development

GROUP 3 – Master's students focusing in HR – soon to experience HR career development

III. Development Focus Areas

Companies interviewed were asked to share the skills they were most focused on in their development efforts. Figure 3.1 shows the top frequently reported skill areas companies are focused on developing in their HR employees with the size of the bubble corresponding to how often the skill was mentioned. The top six skills identified as target areas for development were Data Analysis, Business Acumen, Org Design, Coaching, Consulting, and Change Management. When asked how these skills were identified companies reported using a combination of internal assessments such as IDP and performance assessments, external trends and reports, as well as direction from HR leadership.



Figure 3.1

The emerging leader population was also surveyed on the skills they identify as focus areas for their own career development. The circles filled or outlined in orange within Figure 3.2 show the top responses received. For the most part they align with what companies report as focus areas for development initiatives. A key difference between the groups was a larger emphasis on leadership and executive skills from the emerging leader population. The group reported a strong interest in developing their skills around people leadership and managing reports as well as building their ability to effectively communicate and influence executive levels of management. Most respondents reported receiving on the job development in these areas and a handful are receiving specific training efforts.



Figure 3.2

IV. Types of Development

Figure 4.1 shows survey responses to the different types of development initiatives offered by the partner companies. Job experience and internal learning platforms are the most common development method offered by 96% of companies surveyed. Mentoring was ranked as the top development interest in both the emerging leaders and graduate students surveys and looks to be a potential opportunity for companies that do not currently offer this type of development. Of the companies surveyed 58% reported using mentoring as a development tool provided evenly to employees at early, mid, and senior career stages. With the reported interest from emerging leaders towards developing softer skills such as people leadership and executive influence from emerging leaders it appears the group could be seeking to achieve this development through people and relationships rather than other development methods such as classroom or online learning.

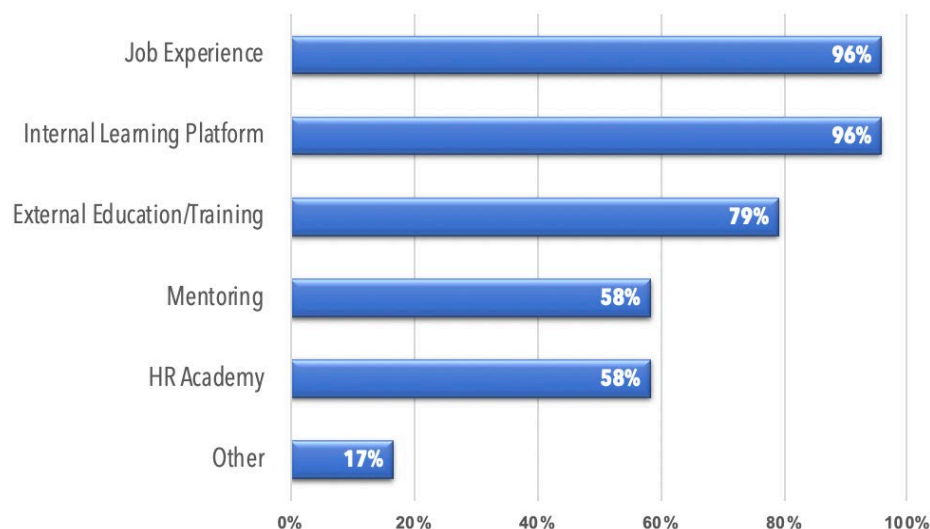


Figure 4.1

Our research findings presented two primary development methods being used by the majority of companies. Rotational programs are being used for early career development and involve more structure. Beyond the early career stage most companies rely on more ad-hoc upskilling in a focused area. Several companies have made direct efforts to upskill the entire HR function or certain populations of the HR function such as HRBPs in targeted areas. For example, when upskilling for data analytics one company partnered with a vendor to create a training curriculum on how to consult with data. The program was primarily administered through online courses but included short case work and in person presentations for the participants to complete.



Beyond the two main development methods companies also reported using the following types of development initiatives:

- **Short Term assignments** Some companies are leveraging short term assignments to place individuals in a role for a compressed amount of time as part of their development. For example, one company uses parental leave as an opportunity to rotate their HR employees through different roles. This method works better at an individual level and requires slightly more attention making it difficult to achieve at scale in larger organizations.
- **Project Marketplaces** are being used at a few companies. This approach allows employees to review a listing of submitted projects and volunteer to work on a project of interest. Their involvement is voluntary in addition to their actual role but provides an opportunity to gain exposure to an area they want to learn more about.
- **SME Train-the-Trainer.** A number of companies mentioned utilizing senior talent as internal coaches to train others. They import the expertise into their organization by sending management out for training and using them to develop and lead a program internally. The benefits of this method included being able to customize the internal training program but the company also reported it can be burdensome to those administering the training in addition to their other job responsibilities.
- **HR Academy and Certifications** are being used in different formats separately or combined. Some companies have developed a learning path of courses for each area of HR that could include a couple days of in person participation at a functional college or a defined learning curriculum with credentials awarded at the end. Other companies do not offer a structured learning academy but award badges or credentials for completing various trainings.

When asked to rate how beneficial different types of development have been to their development, the emerging leader population responded with significantly higher ratings for on the job learning, stretch and special assignments, and mentoring as shown in Figure 4.2. Interestingly, 53% of respondents reported internal learning platforms were “not beneficial” to them. It should be noted that the term “internal learning platform” was left open to interpretation in the survey and not explicitly defined as an e-learning platform. When asked to rate their interest in varying types of career development, graduate student responses echoed the emerging leaders with 85% reporting they are “extremely interested” in mentoring and 52% of graduate students reporting they are only “somewhat interested” in e-learning.

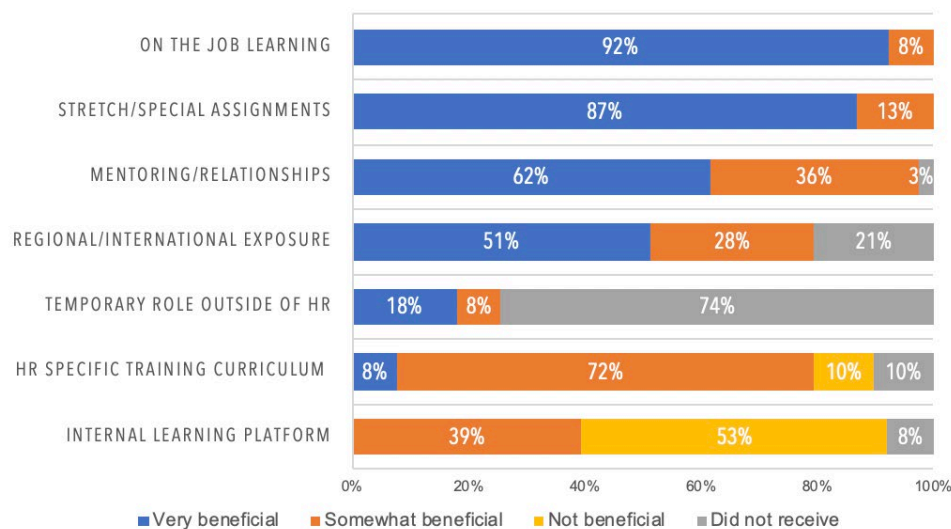


Figure 4.2

Due to being a primary development method, rotational programs became an area of focus throughout the course of our research. The fact that so many surveyed companies (79% of surveyed companies utilize them) use rotational programs afforded our research an understanding of what is typical in terms of structure. Details such as assignments, number of rotations, timing of transitions, and total duration vary but those variations are mostly contained within a small range (Figure 4.4). All partner companies that employ rotational programs include at least one rotation in a Center of Excellence role. Most companies surveyed used an HR Business partner role and/or a HR Shared Services role. Although used by the majority, there is a steep drop off in the use of HR Shared Service roles. Figure 4.3 demonstrates the occurrence of each of the different assignments use by partner companies.

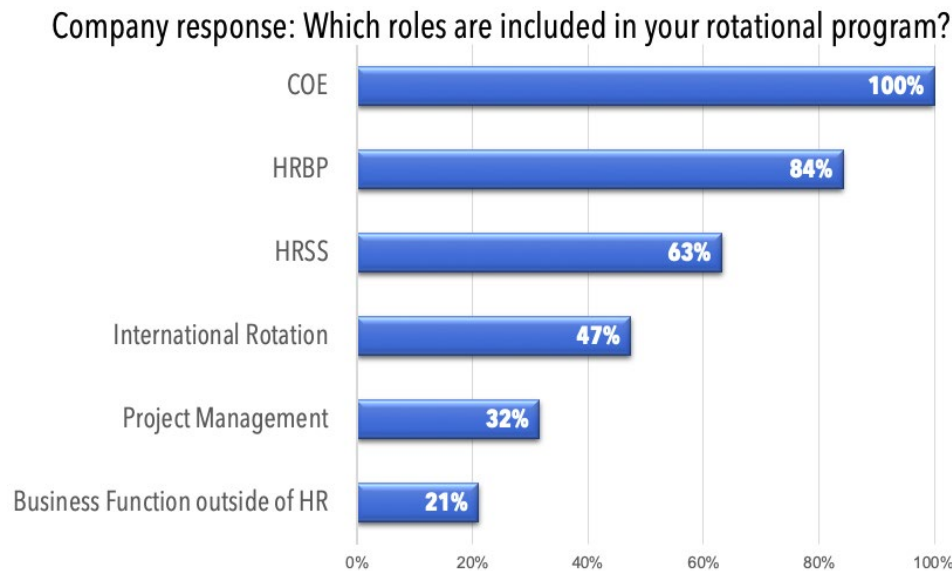


Figure 4.3

Other rotational program characteristics that may be useful for benchmarking include length of rotations, number of rotations, and total program duration. These aspects of rotational programs vary between companies but fall within the ranges detailed in Figure 4.4.

Rotational program characteristics:

Length: **3** to **18** months

Rotations: **2** to **4**

Duration: **1.5** to **4.5** years

Figure 4.4

A finding from the November workshop with CAHRS partner companies indicated that a key motivator for companies running early career rotational programs is to attract top early career talent. This motivation was validated by a survey that was completed by master's students which indicated that the majority of students prefer an early career rotational program to starting in a longer-term traditional entry level role.

Graduate Student response: Given the choice, would you prefer a rotational program over employment into a longer-term role?

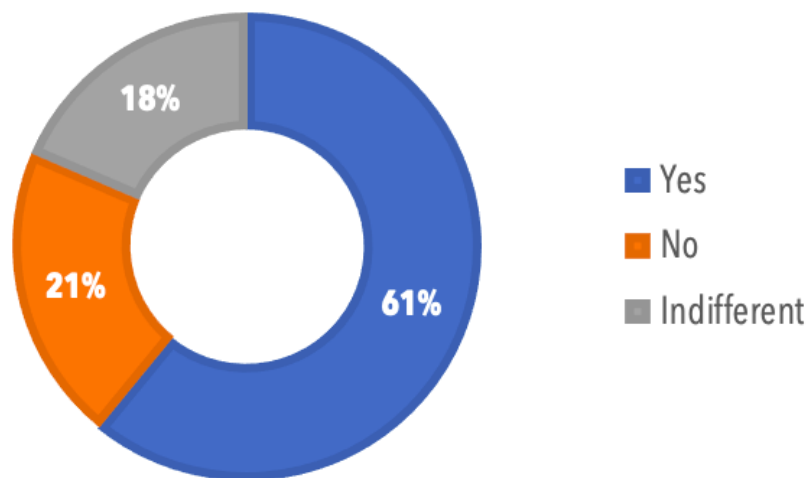


Figure 4.5

Additionally, student responses to the survey gave insight into what they are looking to gain out of a rotational program. This insight may be useful to companies which are redesigning or building a new early career rotational program and are curious about what participants desire.

What are HR graduate students looking to gain from a rotational program?

Rank	Experience
1	Exposure to different roles
2	Discovering areas of interest in HR
3	Building expertise/technical skills
4	Networking & relationship building
5	Better understanding of the company

Figure 4.6

V. Creating a Foundation for future HR Business Partners

In the past the HR generalist role has been used as a foundational experience where employees could gain exposure to a variety of HR roles. After this role has undergone transformation at many companies, those companies still value a variety of experiences to create a foundation in HR experiences. Where they are split is if HRSS is valuable in creating that solid foundation. About half of the companies represented do value HRSS while the other half do not. It's important to note that the ones that do value HRSS put an emphasis on shared services experiences that have high interaction with the business.

VI. Measuring Effectiveness

A common discussion point around career development throughout our research was measuring the effectiveness of development activities on both a macro and micro level. Most partner companies use the 70/20/10 model in determining how to allocate different methods of learning and development. The model is used to guide how much each method of development will be utilized. The most emphasis is given to experiential or on-the-job learning at 70%. This is followed by social learning such as mentoring at 20%. Lastly, there is formal learning such as classroom training at 10%. Two thirds of CAHRS partner companies contacted through our research are measuring effectiveness in at least of these types of development.

Partner companies use a variety of methods to measure effectiveness of their development programs and initiatives. The three most common techniques for measuring are succession readiness, participant survey, and performance assessment in that order. Succession readiness differs from the other two most used techniques in that it is targeted at understanding effectiveness on a macro level, while the other two are focus on a micro level. The macro level considers all programming together and whether HR professionals are prepared to meet the challenges of new roles. The micro level is focused on individual efforts such as a classroom training and isolates the individual effort's effect on the participants. In short, macro level assessment allows you to understand if your program is achieving the desired effect, while micro level assessment allows you to understand what elements specifically are contributing or not contributing to the overall desired effect. Figure 6.1 demonstrates the development methods currently being used as well as the prevalence of each method.

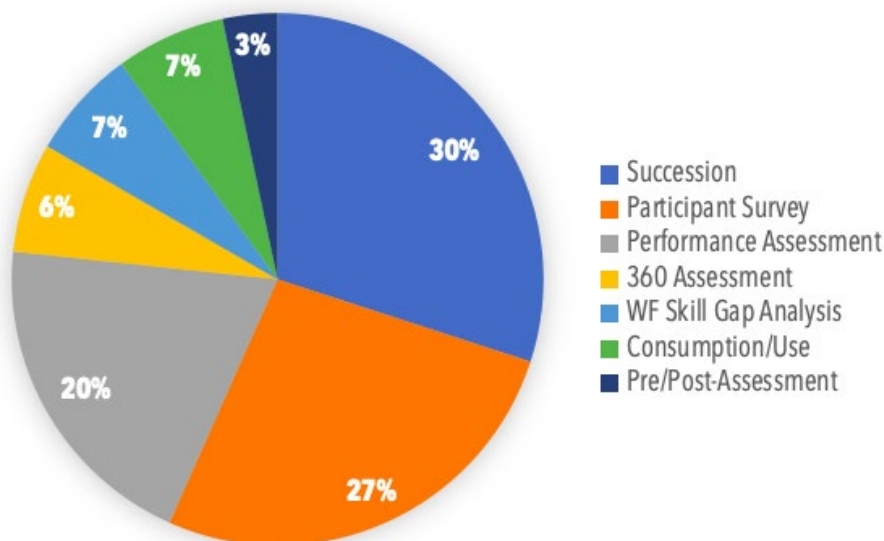


Figure 6.1

One third of partner companies are not measuring effectiveness at all, while those that are measuring commonly mentioned that they have room for improvement. Effective measurement provides opportunity for cost/benefit analysis, trainer performance improvement, and marketing both internally and externally. The ability to perform cost/benefit analysis allows companies to understand if the development initiatives they are conducting are worth providing at all. Effectiveness data can be used to provide specific feedback to trainers allowing them to improve on their skills. Examples of successful development programs may serve as tools for increasing participation in existing initiatives or for gaining support on future initiatives.

In order to improve, companies can start by focusing on measurement methods that lie higher up on Kirkpatrick's Model (see Figure 6.2) for evaluating performance. The companies that indicated that they are currently measuring are often focused on Level 1 of Kirkpatrick's Model which considers the reactions of those who have completed a development course. Focusing on the higher levels of the model such as learning, behaviors, and/or results may allow companies to have better understanding of their program's impact on a target population. Some examples of how companies can measure higher levels are found below:

Level 2: Learning – Focus on knowledge gain. For classroom training use assessments such as tests. Administer the tests before and after the classroom training to understand the knowledge gained through training. A follow up test can be administered in the weeks or months after the training to measure knowledge retention.

Level 3: Behavior – Utilize performance assessments from employee's managers after completing the development initiative. Focus only on attributes covered by the exercise and not the holistic assessment of the employee.

Level 4: Results – Use key metrics such as cost, productivity, turnover, etc. When reviewing results try to isolate the effects of training. This can be completed by using a control

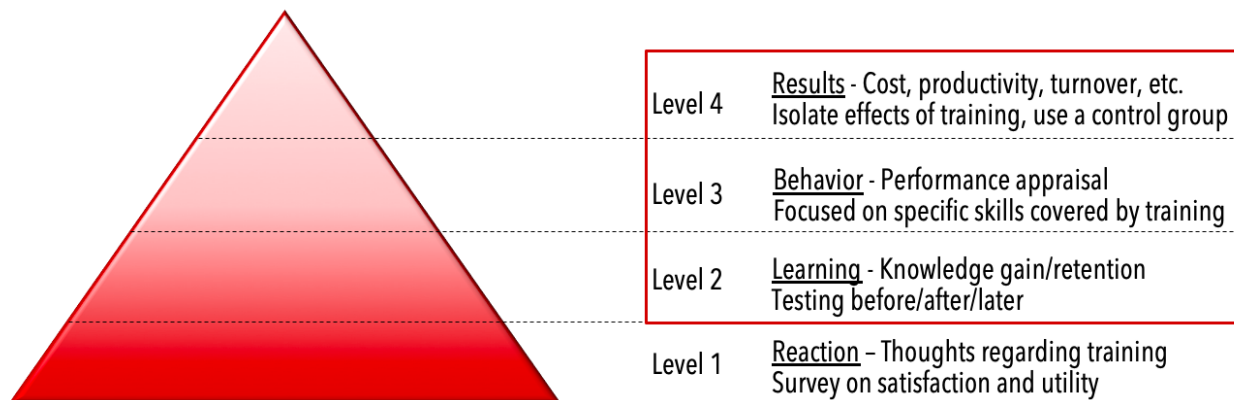


Figure 6.2

Companies should also be conscious in what is necessary to measure. For example, outcomes of the training can be measured, and the process of training can be measured. If outcomes were not successful, was the process to blame? It may make sense to measure the process and determine if it should be the focus of improvement efforts.

Before conducting any measurement, companies should first consider whether it makes sense to measure. Key considerations in determining when to measure include resource intensity, visibility, feasibility, and timing.

Resource Intensity – How much does the activity cost to run? How much does assessing the results cost? In some instances, assessing the activity may cost as much or more than running the activity. In these cases it would most likely not be valuable to assess the activity.

Visibility – Visibility of the development program inside and outside of the organization may be very beneficial or under great scrutiny and merit assessment. Otherwise visibility may be low and not merit assessment.

Feasibility – Some assessments are highly difficult to conduct and achieve results. In these cases, it may not be worth the time or money to invest in assessment.

Timing – Some development programs are one-time events while others are ongoing for weeks, months, or years. It may not be beneficial to assess one-time events where there is no opportunity to improve to even for subsequent sessions.

It is important not to rely on just one factor but to consider all of the factors together and weigh each of them against your unique priorities when determine whether to measure.

VII. Opportunity Areas

Our research uncovered a few development areas that stood out as ideas for further exploration. These were areas not yet being addressed in development efforts but in the pipeline for future initiatives at a few companies. When mentioned it was more often from companies at mature stages of HR transformation.

- **Approach to Upskilling and Reskilling** - Companies are placing more emphasis on the outcomes of development efforts ahead of their upskilling and reskilling programs to determine the desired level of expertise required. One company recommended integrating workforce strategy to hire for some capabilities in place of developing them. For example, if a need for data analysis is identified they recommended hiring fewer employees specialized in data science to perform tasks instead of upskilling the entire function. They described this as understanding the difference between having your hand on the keyboard and understanding the details of the output.
- **Soft Skills** - EQ, empathy, and stewardship were discussed as skills of increasing importance in the future. Companies felt there would be a greater emphasis on soft skills as transactional and administrative work continues to become automated. Although this was frequently discussed as an important area for future development many companies felt unsure about how and when they should offer more development in these areas.
- **Team vs Individual Development** - Discussions of team development and people management emerged throughout our research including interviews, working group discussions, and survey responses from the emerging leader population. These discussions centered around the idea that past career development has focused on the high potential/high performing individual and

- that exponential growth is really driven by high performing teams. A few companies mentioned a desire to spend more effort investing in the people leadership skills of HR professionals and equipping them to cultivate and lead high performing teams.
- **Building a Learning Culture** - A few companies are placing their attention on how to build a continuous learning culture and considering how learning has changed as they do that. They are looking at ways in which the modern learner prefers to receive learning content and how best to administer development efforts. Balancing budget limitations with standardization in a global organization is requiring creativity in how to bring online development offerings to life. One company is integrating simulations and virtual projects into their e-learning in order to maximize effectiveness of the program. This includes video recordings that are sent off for review in their online training programs to provide a means for measurable learning metrics.

When asked what gaps in their HR career development they are looking to strengthen, companies responded with five central themes:

1. **End to End Development** - Many companies felt their development efforts were more reactive than proactive and could be stronger as a more focused and defined approach to career development than ad-hoc offerings. Some companies also mentioned a need for a single global development strategy as they struggled to provide the same opportunities and initiatives across regions.
2. **Diversifying Critical Experiences** - Given the transformation of the HR operating model many companies responded that they are looking to support more job swaps and rotations across the three legs of the stool.
3. **Mid-Career Development** - A few companies reported that they felt their career development efforts were strong for early career and high potential/high performer populations but needed to expand their offerings for their mid-career employees.
4. **Refreshing the Competency Model** - Several companies mentioned either recent change or plans to refresh the framework for their competence model as a result of HR operating model transformation. Some discussed setting up different models for each leg of the operating stool and others discussed a need for more definition in assessing demonstration of skills.
5. **Career Path Guidance** - Following the transformation of the HR operating model employees have access to a wider breadth of opportunities. A lot of companies reported a need to provide more guidance on career paths for their HR employees and clarify the critical experiences required to make a specific career move.

VIII. Conclusion

Transformation of the HR operating model has resulted in more focus on upskilling and reskilling HR professionals than ever before. Companies face the challenge of adapting to rapid technological change, evolving expectations from leaders, and shifts in learning preferences as they making incremental investments to develop the HR leaders of the future.

Throughout this change three themes emerged as key takeaways:

1. Learning by doing is preferred.

Both the companies and emerging leader group reported a strong preference for development through on-the-job experience. Companies largely rely on the 70/20/10 model to develop HR professionals and the emerging leaders consistently ranked on the job experience and stretch assignments as the most beneficial types of development they receive. Because E-learning platforms continue to be a cost-effective way to provide development content at scale some companies are seeking ways to infuse projects and work experiences into online development programs.

2. A variety of experiences is valuable.

Companies overwhelmingly reported a variety of experiences is still valuable to the HRBP role. However, there are differing opinions on whether specific experiences are critical for development. Some believe job rotations across the three legs of the operating model (HRBP, COE, and Shared Services) are essential while others believe sufficient development can be gained through supporting varying areas of the organization.

3. There is an increasing focus on skills vs. tasks.

Where an HR professional may have focused on their ability to complete certain tasks there is now more emphasis on gaining specific HR related skills. With an increased expectation for business leadership, consulting, and coaching development for the future HRBP, the focus is less on the completion of tasks and more on the understanding of processes and how it relates to the business. As an increasing number of foundational tasks become automated, the emphasis of development initiatives shifts from task training to skills development.

IX. Recommendations

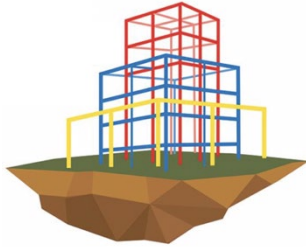


Figure 9.1 shows a sample development model derived from the inputs collected throughout our research. While factors such as organization size, regional span, and employee demographics can all influence optimal development methods, this model attempts to combine our research findings of the development needs most frequently discussed and how different companies are addressing them most effectively.

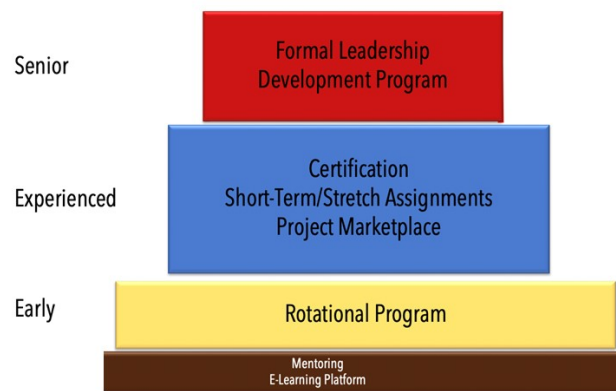


Figure 9.1

Development Opportunities for all:

E-learning platforms continue to be a cost-effective way to offer employees flexible self-directed learning particularly as companies increasingly seek to personalize development efforts. To supplement these offerings companies should also place more emphasis on mentoring. When asked to rate their interest in various types of career development, mentoring was a top care-about from both students and emerging leaders with 85% percent of graduate students surveyed indicating they were “extremely interested” in receiving mentoring. Mentoring initiatives can be managed formally through organized platforms or informally by encouraging leadership to funnel down the expectation.

Early Career Development:

The rotational program format appears to be a good model for early career professionals to gain broad exposure and learn how different functions of HR are interrelated. A working group participant mentioned their observed benefit of working with rotation program graduates who have a more holistic perspective of the HR function when they joined their team.

Mid-Career Development:

As employees move out of the early career stage companies tend to rely on a less structured model for career development. With more experience comes additional complexity and it can be difficult to co-ordinate a rotational program format for large subsets of the organization.

When asked how beneficial different types of development has been for their careers 87% of emerging leaders surveyed reported “stretch/special assignments” as “very beneficial”. Offering short term and flexible assignments can be an effective method for this population to achieve job rotation and gain exposure to different areas. Using a project marketplace, short-term job assignments, or stretch assignments provides the employee an opportunity to develop a new skill or strengthen in a new area while minimizing business disruption. Depending on the organization or individual’s development needs this could be tailored to provide assignments outside the HR function or between different areas of the HR operating model. For those working in remote locations companies can consider the opportunity for them to engage virtually in projects.

As employees become more experienced there is also a benefit to incorporating structured certification paths into career development. A few companies are thinking about ways to develop specific competency models for each of the three stools while some already have them but our research found recipients of current upskilling efforts at a lot of companies were either the entire HR function or the HRBP population. There appears to be an opportunity for more companies to better define curriculum and skill areas for COE and Shared Services professionals to make sure adequate development effort is spent on capabilities specific to those areas. A certification path for each of the three stools would also be one method of attempting to provide more guidance to employees around critical experiences and navigating a career path.

Senior and Executive Development:

Our research found formal leadership development programs are commonly used for executive HR professional development. Many companies put senior HR professionals through programs offered to the entire enterprise as the focus is on executive and leadership skills rather than HR specific content at this level. Cross-functional leadership training was the second highest ranking development opportunity of interest from the emerging leader population after mentoring.

Using experience maps to identify and track development experiences:

Partner companies mentioned that they are currently or planning to track the development of skills through various experiences. They also often explained that they are reconsidering the need to move employees into different roles to gain experiences in which they can use to develop skills. For example, if you are in a COE role and are looking to develop consulting skills maybe you don't need to move into an HRBP role to get consulting experience. You simply must realize how you can gain consulting experience in your current COE role and map that out. We have used our research to create a template (Figure 9.2) that may be used to help track skills gained from different experiences.

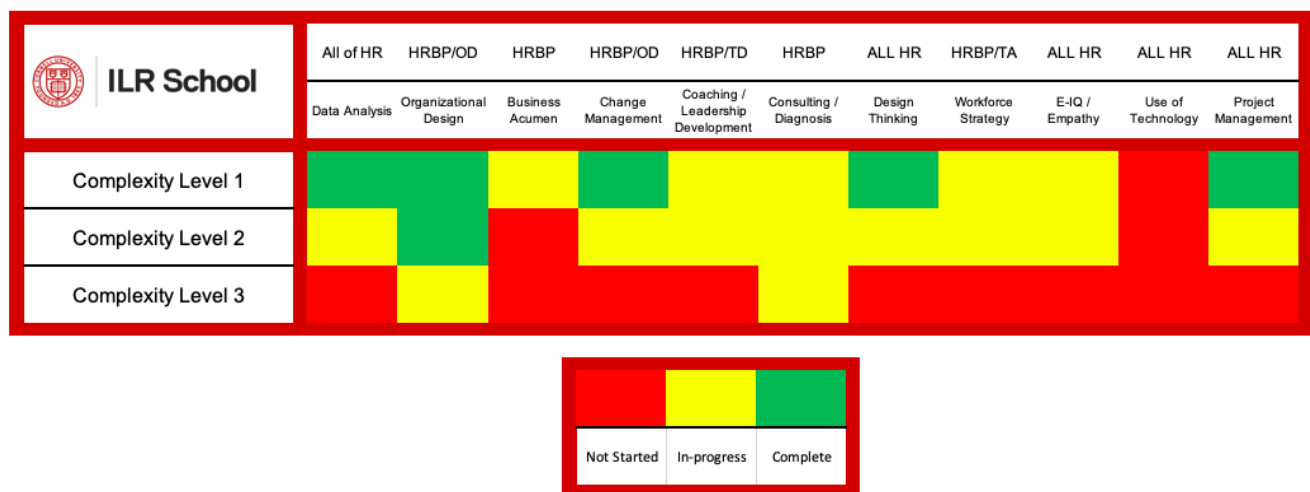


Figure 9.2

Both the employee and the manager would have key roles in this process. To illustrate the use of this template and process, imagine that an HR employee would like to make a transition into a role in Compensation. The manager would ID the skills critical to working in Compensation and the employee would then ID experiences in their current role that could build these skills. The manager would validate the selection of these experiences and the employee would execute on them.

The complexity levels of this template would be used to correspond to levels of complexity in the experience. Complexity could pertain to scope in function or footprint and the complexity pursued should be determined by the manager. Scope in function may look like the following (Level 1 = HRBPs, Level 2 = HR Function, Level 3 = HR Function +) while scope in footprint may look like the following (Level 1 = Local, Level 2 = Regional, Level 3 = Enterprise).

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