

**Strategy Activation**

# Who leaders need to be, and what they need to do.

**About this series.**

In these four articles, we ask: what are the keys to developing agile leaders who can pivot with the needs of the business strategy?

**Part 1. Develop your leaders in context.** Leadership development can be used to put the best minds in a company to work on real, current business problems.

**Part 2. Who leaders need to be and what they need to do.** Each leader's effectiveness depends on a number of factors, including personality traits, personal experience and workplace skills. Effective development addresses all of these.

**Part 3. Realize that development is a journey.** Meaningful change happens over time, but leaders can embrace new behaviors when they've been given time to understand them.

**Part 4. The power of service and purpose.** Serving a greater good is a powerful motivator for a leader to be his or her best self.

Leadership development is a catalyst for personal as well as professional growth—something that is easy to talk about, but very difficult to achieve. To develop and change, leaders need real-world experiences, plus time to reflect on them with their peers. This way they have an opportunity to brainstorm new ideas and plans of action. When leaders discover who they need to be and what they need to do, they are poised for meaningful development.

Korn Ferry's four dimensions of leadership and talent breaks down exactly who leaders need to be and what they need to do to succeed (Crandell, Hazucha, Orr, 2014). Two of these dimensions—competencies and experiences—focus on what leaders need to do. The other two—traits and drivers—focus on who leaders need to be. By addressing the whole person in this way, leadership development moves beyond simple skill building and helps people realize their potential. They can then bring that energy and passion to the teams they lead.





## What leaders need to do.

Leadership development programs need to make sure that tasks challenge the ability of the involved leaders and provide sufficient complexity. Five competencies are specifically important to the executive level: *nimble learning*, *courage*, *resourcefulness*, an ability to *cultivate innovation*, and a capacity for *directing work* (Crandell, Hazucha and Orr, 2014).

Experience is also a key factor in determining a leader's success. However, the types of experience needed to be successful vary (Sevy, Swisher, and Orr 2013). Experiences that help leaders learn how to overcome challenges happen at different times in our lives (Bartunek et al. 1983). Merely having these experiences is not enough; in order to learn and develop leaders need to reflect on the experience, challenge previous ideas, and adopt new, more effective approaches. Programs can be designed to provide these developmental experiences as well as the space and time for reflection and application.

## Who leaders need to be.

Leaders need to be motivated to learn. They also need qualities like authenticity, vitality, agility, and self-awareness to be successful.

- ▶ **Authenticity** is the degree to which a person acts as his or her true self. A leader also needs to be transparent, ethical and able to develop the abilities of a staff (W.L. Gardner et al. 2005). In order to thrive, leaders must tap into all of these elements. Then, they can create shared visions to inspire their teams.
- ▶ **Vitality** is attending to physical, emotional, and mental self-care. Tony Schwartz of the Energy Project urges leaders not to manage time, which is a fixed resource, but to instead focus on managing energy, which is boundless. He states that energy comes from four main places in every person: “the body, emotions, mind and spirit” (Schwartz and McCarthy 2007).
- ▶ **Agility** is knowing what to do when you don't know what to do—or having the resourcefulness to figure it out. Agility can help leaders thrive during times of change.
- ▶ **Self-awareness** is being acutely aware of one's strengths, opportunities, and values—and knowing how to leverage them.

## Leadership development for the whole person.

Focusing on development that truly embodies the whole person is more than a quick fix. Leaders have to commit to this approach. Programs that develop the whole leader focus on both learning through real-life experience and reflection.

**Learning through experience.** Experience and critical reflection go hand in hand. Case studies, learning projects, and perspective-changing exercises give leaders an important foundation for learning. They can then take risks, engage with others and find support (Bartunek et al. 1983). Korn Ferry's Active Leader program asks leaders to transform a fictitious organization, receive peer coaching, and reflect on what they've learned. This kind of experiential learning is key to developing leaders who can thrive when driving change (Hill 2013).



**Reflection.** Reflection boosts self-awareness and clarity, and transformational development programs allow leaders to envision their best selves. Korn Ferry’s Executive to Leader Institute asks leaders to discover how they can impact the world (Cashman 2012). The program, which consists of three coaches working with a group for one year, offers opportunities for deep reflection and action planning.

How do practitioners design programs like this? Each element can be supported by several approaches.

	Focus	How
<b>What leaders need to do.</b>	<b>Develop competencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake challenging leadership experiences</li> <li>• Set aside time for reflection</li> <li>• Experiment</li> <li>• Talk with peers</li> <li>• Engage in a supportive learning environment</li> </ul>
<b>Who leaders need to be.</b>	<b>Build experiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real-life learning</li> <li>• Job rotation</li> <li>• Reflect on changes</li> </ul>
	<b>Authenticity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify purpose and values</li> <li>• Tell one’s life story</li> </ul>
	<b>Vitality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a self-assessment</li> <li>• Eat well and exercise</li> <li>• Stop multi-tasking</li> </ul>
	<b>Self-awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete a 360° assessment</li> <li>• Complete a values assessment</li> <li>• Work with a coach</li> <li>• Take time for critical reflection</li> </ul>
	<b>Agility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek out challenging experiences</li> <li>• Broaden the variety of experiences</li> <li>• Take time for critical reflection</li> </ul>

How do organizations know they’re creating effective leadership development programs? Evaluation of the results is important, but often difficult. Recent research (Day et al. 2014) suggests companies should not link leadership development to financial performance. Instead, companies should define what they want to accomplish, then track those metrics. Retention, performance times, leadership bench strength, innovation, and the readiness of global leaders are a few of the things that can be measured.

Regardless of the specific metrics, programs should be constructed to focus on what leaders need to do, and who they need to be. Building in real-world experience, self-awareness exercises, time for critical reflection, and opportunities to take risks will increase leaders’ readiness to activate any strategy.



## References

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