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Contents

Boosting the Impact of Mentoring

Mentoring is a common development offering, yet only 24% of employees use it and it has hit-or-miss development outcomes. In this article, L&D leaders can explore how to boost mentoring's impact through innovative approaches to mentoring structures and mentor–mentee support.

Mentoring is one of the most popular development tools in HR's toolbelt, with 81% of L&D professionals currently using or planning to use it in their organizations.[1] There are good reasons for its popularity: In addition to being quick to deploy, mentoring supports soft and hard skills development and has low operational costs.

Yet despite efforts to provide effective mentoring programs, HR often sees mentoring falter at three key stages: participation, pairing and development. From the start, participation in mentoring is low, with only 24% of employees participating in any mentoring — formal or informal — leaving 76% uninvolved. At the pairing stage, HR is only 16% more effective at creating pairs than leaving employees to do it themselves: of the employees who participate in mentoring, 58% are paired by HR while 42% matched organically.[1]

Furthermore, the current state of mentoring leads to hit-or-miss development outcomes. Only 57% of mentees think their mentors help them solve problems they have at work, and only 53% think their mentors help them better understand their organizations.[1]

Our research revealed challenges that help explain these hit-or-miss outcomes of mentoring in organizations today.

Mentors Are Hard to Recruit and Retain

Mentoring takes time and attention, yet managers already have nine direct reports, on average, spend 35% of their time in meetings and send 122 emails, on average, every day.[2] In addition, incentives for mentors (e.g., a greater network, exposure to others in different career stages, a sense of giving back) are desirable but don't directly link to career growth.

Mentoring Relationships Are Difficult for HR to Orchestrate

Connecting strangers through mentoring is a delicate operation. A formal mentoring program might help with logistics but can struggle to facilitate effective personal connections, whereas organic mentorships built around personal connections can fail to provide the support of a formal structure and process (e.g., off-the-shelf discussion topics, accountability, access to individual development plans).

Mentees Often Have Unrealistic Expectations

Mentees' goals are often too high-level or abstract to be useful — if they set them at all — yet well-defined goals are necessary to guide mentoring relationships from beginning to end. Inadequately defined goals prevent mentors from giving focused assistance, making it hard for the pair (and HR) to gauge development success or recalibrate to better help each other. Poorly defined goals can ultimately lead to mentee disappointment in mentoring if they are not met.

Make Mentoring Work for Your Organization

Most organizations that include mentoring in their development options struggle with their version of these mentoring challenges. The following strategies address these challenges and guide L&D leaders in creating programs that drive development success for mentees, mentors and HR.

> To build better connections in mentoring relationships, leading organizations empower mentees to take greater control of their mentoring relationships.

Embrace Flexible Mentoring Structures

When thinking about mentoring, organizations often think of a one-on-one partnership consisting of a junior employee and a more senior employee. This kind of partnership usually lasts for at least one year, and mentors impart their expertise from years of working at the organization.

However, this mentoring model might not work for every situation. Employees looking for the benefits of mentoring, such as institutional knowledge, skills development and access to expertise from other areas of the business, may not need a one-on-one, yearlong mentorship. Instead, organizations should provide mentoring solutions in more flexible formats — such as one-off meetings, multiyear mentoring or a group of mentors — that can better provide the guidance mentees need.

Tailoring mentoring to employees' needs allows HR to build comfort around mentoring; tailored, lower-effort programs encourage participation, increase satisfaction and embed mentoring in the organization's culture.

Given the number of formats mentoring can take, HR should be clear about what development needs mentoring will address and then tailor the organization's mentoring solutions to match those needs.

Guide Mentees to Set Small, Clear Goals Early On

Even after a mentoring format is chosen, mentees and mentors often have unclear goals and a vague path to reach them. Mentees, mentors and HR need to know the goals of the mentorship before they begin, not only to choose the right kind of mentoring but also to establish expectations and know when the mentoring has achieved its aims.

Instead of assuming a mentor and mentee understand each other's goals before their mentorship begins, HR should help them create a "contract" that specifies the end goal and the path to get there. The goal can be new skills, connections, perspectives, advice or something else, but those goals must be as clear as possible before the mentorship begins. Be more specific than "better coding skills," for example, by using SMART goal setting. What coding language would be best to learn, careerwise? How is the mentee planning to apply the new coding skills? In what time frame would the mentee need to learn this new coding language?

Breaking down large goals into more manageable goals (e.g., from career progression to specific skills applications) will put the mentorship pair on a more manageable path toward development. This approach helps the mentor and mentee see the results of their work more quickly and creates a clearer endpoint.

Empower Mentees to Take Greater Ownership Over Mentoring

In addition to having a clear end goal, mentorship requires another important ingredient: a personal connection between mentor(s) and mentee. This connection can be difficult for HR to create. To build better connections in mentoring relationships, leading organizations empower mentees to take greater control of their mentoring relationships. Since they are the ones seeking assistance, mentees have the best idea of what will help them most and can best direct the mentorship to meet their needs and eventually reach their goals.

The matching process is the most important step for mentee involvement because it impacts every other component of mentorship. HR often struggles to capture all mentees' needs during the mentor-mentee matching process because mentees may have criteria that aren't practical for HR to use in matching all pairs, meaning some criteria aren't captured by the matching form. It may also be hard for mentees to articulate less tangible factors, such as, "I need a mentor who has an empathetic manner."

By involving mentees earlier and giving them greater ownership over the mentor selection process, organizations can increase the chances pairs have a personal connection that facilitates development.

For more research on providing mentees greater ownership over the mentorship matching process, see "Case Study: Motivation-Informed Mentoring (Coca-Cola HBC)."

Increase Mentoring's Value for Mentors

Most people typically think of mentoring as a development opportunity for the mentee. In most scenarios, the mentee is more junior and needs help developing a particular skill, understanding how the organization works or balancing the demands of work and life. Even in reverse-mentoring arrangements, the focus is still on the mentees, they just happen to be the more senior participants in these situations. This mentee-focused framework is not entirely wrong; however, it leaves one party receiving disproportionate value.

When organizations pay attention to both mentors' and mentees' goals and development needs, mentor buy-in increases and the mentorship becomes more valuable all around. Some leading organizations view the arrangement as more of a "reciprocal mentoring partnership," in which participants are matched based on how they can help each other.

Another way leading organizations ensure mentors gain more value from mentoring relationships is to connect them with other mentors in "mentoring communities." These communities allow them to share mentoring experiences, tips and tricks on how to best help mentees and ways to structure their mentorships to ensure both parties gain value. Mentees can gather expertise from other mentors through similar communities. By connecting mentors and mentees to other mentors and mentees, both groups — particularly mentors — can tap into practical peer support that spans the duration of the mentoring relationship. For further insight into increasing menotoring's value by creating mentor communities, read our case study on Coca-Cola HBC.

Conclusion

By embracing flexible mentoring structures, guiding mentees toward clearer goals, empowering mentees to take greater ownership and increasing value for mentors, mentoring programs can better serve participants and serve as a more effective development tool.

[1] 3Q19 Gartner Global Labor Market Survey

[2] "A New Manager Mandate: Building Connector Managers"

Data Snapshot

2020 Trends in Learning Technologies

The 2020 L&D Innovations Bullseye Report outlines the latest and top trends in learning technologies and innovations. L&D leaders can use this research snapshot to assess their learning technology portfolio and investment strategies.

As the learning landscape changes, the line's skills needs are becoming more complex and employees' learning preferences are evolving. In this increasingly complex learning landscape, L&D executives struggle to find the right technology for learners even though they are ready to spend and increase their learning technology budgets. According to our 2019 Gartner Learning and Development Forecast Survey, almost half of L&D executives say it is a challenge to identify which technologies their learners need.

To help L&D leaders navigate this landscape, we asked 300 L&D professionals globally to rate 53 learning technologies and innovations on their level of adoption in organizations and impact on employee performance, as well as on organizations' expected future investment in them.

The key underlying trend across the learning technologies and innovations we analyzed for 2020 is the growing importance of keeping the learner at the core of learning design, creation, evaluation and updates. Employees' preference for customization and personalization is increasing. L&D professionals recognize there is no one-size-fit-all method. As a result, the learning technologies that offer personalization — such as adaptive learning, user-created content and network learning — are gaining prominence and recognition as most-adopted learning methods.

Network learning has become firmly embedded to become the most-adopted learning method in 2020. Its positive investment outlook has increased by 20 percentage points over the past two years (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Expected Level of Investment in Network Learning Over the Next Two Years
Percentage of L&D Professionals Planning to Increase Investment

	2018	2019	2020
	35%	43%	55%
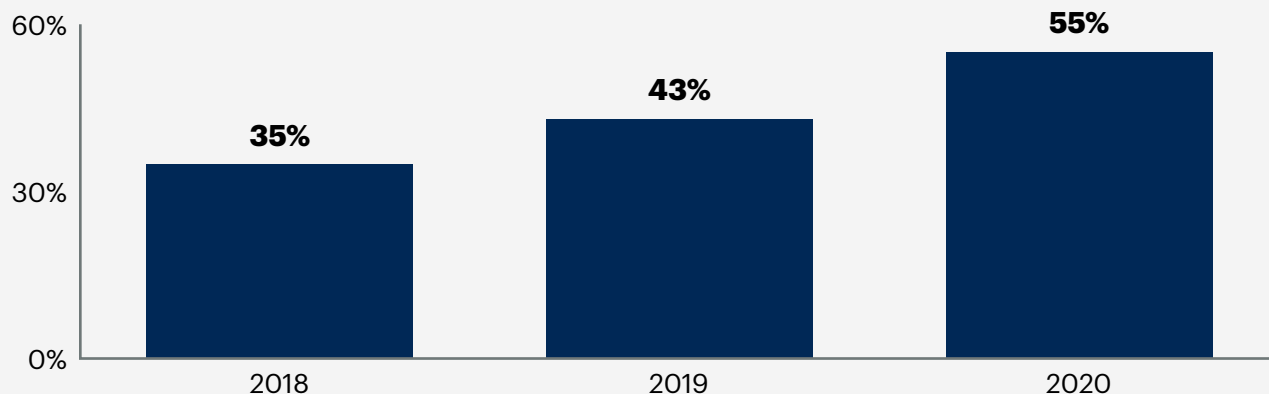
n = 305 (2017); 303 (2018); 300 (2019)

Source: 2017-2019 Gartner Learning Innovations Survey

Another factor is expecting anytime support. To address this shift, L&D looks to implement chatbots that can help answer many of employees' in-the-moment learning needs. Seventy-seven percent of L&D professionals already use or are planning to use chatbots, a 25-percentage-point jump over the past two years (see Figure 2).

A third important trend is an increasing need for tools with reporting capabilities. Indeed, experience APIs (Tin Can/xAPI enablement) are showing a significant increase in impact. Tin Can/xAPI enablement helps organizations collect data about a broad range of learning experiences. The data captured can be used to analyze previous learning experiences or plan personalized training modules for employees. Where deployed, Tin Can/xAPI enablement has created a positive impact, increasing by 17 percentage points over the past two years (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Level of Adoption of Chatbots
Percentage of L&D Professionals Planning, Piloting, Using for Some Time or Scaling Up
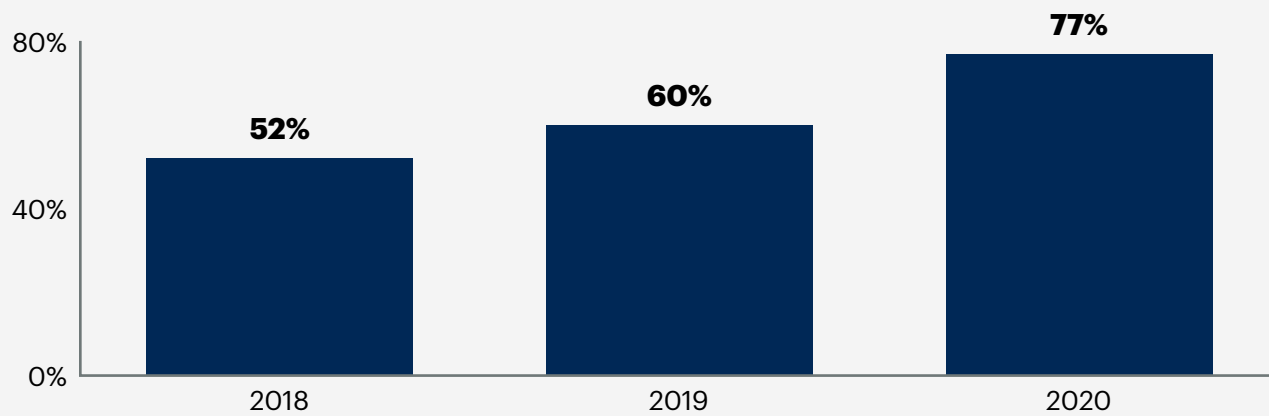
n = 305 (2017); 303 (2018); 300 (2019)
Source: 2017-2019 Gartner Learning Innovations Survey

Figure 3: Degree of Impact of Tin Can/xAPI Enablement
Percentage of L&D Professionals Indicating High Impact on Employee Performance

n = 305 (2017); 303 (2018); 300 (2019)
Source: 2017-2019 Gartner Learning Innovations Survey

How L&D Can Support and Develop Gen Z Employees
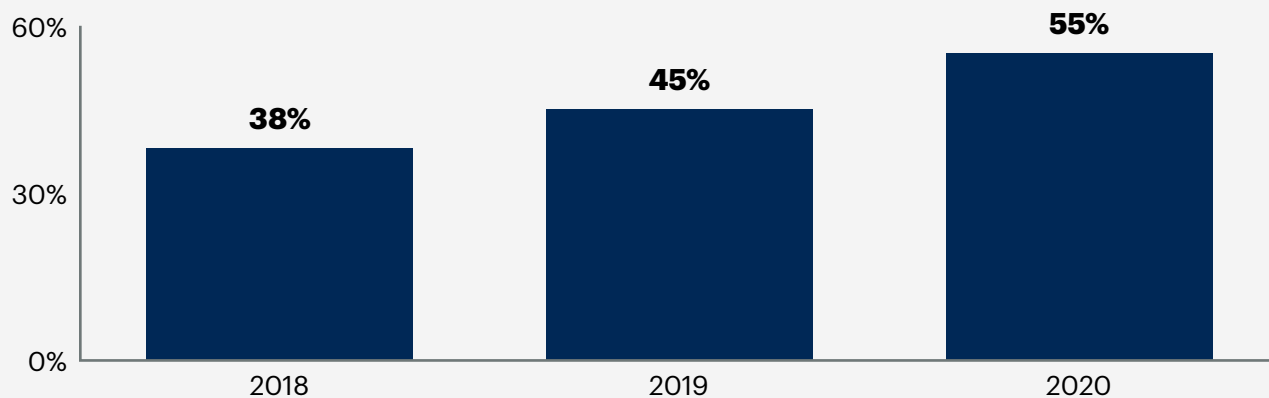
As Gen Z employees enter the workforce, HR leaders try to make sense of this generation's characteristics and EVP preferences. This article uncovers some of the truths that can help L&D leaders understand Gen Zers and highlights action steps leaders can take to support Gen Z employees' development.

As Gen Z begins its mass migration from campus to office, HR leaders are prioritizing priming their talent strategy to accommodate this new generation of employees. The function recognizes the need to shift its strategies to engage, develop and retain this new generation, but what generational differences will truly matter to this shift?

Through our research on Gen Z, it became clear that, as with prior generations, HR leaders hold several assumptions about Gen Z's core attributes. And if we're not careful,

these assumptions, rather than the facts, will shape the mandate of how HR deals with Gen Zers. Gen Zers' most unique attributes are the product of their interaction with critical events in their lives, shaped by a few key societal, economic and technological forces (see Figure 1).

To help L&D executives understand the Gen Z population better, we have tried to unpack some truths about this generation and highlight recommendations for developing Gen Z employees.

Figure 1: Societal Forces Shape Gen Z's Work Values

Societal Force	Incorrect HR Assumption	Actual Gen Z Value
Digital Infancy	Gen Z will join the workforce with confidence and is proficient in technical skills.	Gen Z is more fearful about expiring skills.
Childhood	Gen Z will prioritize compensation over everything else at work.	Gen Z values development over compensation.
Adolescent Social Turbulence	Gen Z will enter the workforce only looking out for itself.	Gen Z prioritizes giving and receiving coaching.

Source: Gartner

Anxiety About Expiring Skills

Many are familiar with Gen Z's reputation as the first true "digital natives" — a population who never knew a world without the internet. Gen Z's effortless adoption of technology does not imply, however, that Gen Z employees are future-proofed or exempt from the pressure to reskill. Rather, Gen Z displays a heightened awareness of its need to reskill and upskill to remain relevant in the workforce of the future. Gen Zers expect almost 40% of the skills they use at work today to expire within three years — surprising, when compared to a mere 30% expiration expectation among millennial and Gen X employees.[1]

A key insight from our early research on Gen Z highlights the cohort's strong desire to keep pace with emerging and evolving skills needs. Fifty-six percent of Gen Z employees agree their roles are changing due to digitalization, while 44% of millennials agree to the same trend (the next highest segment).[1] Gen Z employees prioritize upskilling despite being fresh from an academic environment. If L&D wants to effectively engage Gen Z talent, the function must help Gen Zers understand the skills they'll need in the future; these skills are rapidly and unpredictably shifting.

Development and Reskilling

Knowing this generation is more keenly tuned into the need for reskilling, it may not be surprising to learn that Gen Z values learning and development as an employment attraction driver.[1] In fact, Gen Z has gone so far as to value learning more than compensation — the first generation to do so. Considering the early financial insecurity many Gen Z employees experienced during their recession-era childhoods, this preference for learning over salary is even more puzzling. Further research shows Gen Z's learning priority reflects an earnest concern for remaining employable and keeping jobs amid uncertainty.

Our recommendation around priming HR for Gen Z's entry into the workforce incorporates a familiar and oft relied-upon development conduit for L&D executives: the manager. Managers are likely well aware of millennial employees' preferences for higher-impact coaching. While 77% of millennials agreed in a recent Gartner survey that team leader coaching was highly important to team success, a whopping 83% of Gen Z respondents agreed.[1] With this sky-high importance placed on coaching by both generations, one might wonder how manager coaching practices can be enhanced for Gen Z.

The common approach of increasing the number of coaching hours to employees just doesn't work any longer, regardless of tenure or generation. Results from our study on manager effectiveness show there is no significant relationship between employee performance and manager time spent developing employees.[2] However, organizations can improve the quality of coaching managers provide by building Connector managers.

A Connector manager triples the likelihood that their direct reports will be high performers by making three connections. First, Connector managers connect to their employees to personalize their coaching. They tailor development based on each employee's unique needs and interests. Second, they connect team members to each other. They promote the team's awareness of its strengths and development opportunities and create a climate in which employees feel comfortable learning from each other. Lastly, Connector managers connect individuals to the larger organization by helping their direct reports connect to, share with and learn from peers, experts and leaders.

With a Connector manager approach, L&D can ensure Gen Z employees are both giving to and extracting value from an organizationwide coaching ecosystem. This type of holistic approach to coaching and development helps unburden individual managers, while enhancing the quality and expertise inserted into the organization at large.

Compensation Is Not Enough

For L&D functions, Gen Z's commitment to learning represents a huge opportunity to build workforce skills while simultaneously growing employee engagement. It's a win-win proposition. But make no mistake — crafting the right messaging around development for Gen Z won't just be a matter of communicating existing learning offerings. It is important for L&D executives to truly get to know what Gen Z employees need and drive their most critical

learning outcomes at scale and speed, adapting formal learning channels to handle Gen Z's heavy interest in fast-paced reskilling and on-the-job learning.

Gen Z has fundamentally shifted the conversation around workplace employment value propositions. As previously noted, it's the first generation ever to prioritize development above compensation as a primary value displayed by its employer. Gen Z's top five ranked work values are:

1. Broadening my skill set

2. Gaining relevant experiences

3. Progressing upward in the organization

4. Gaining expertise in specific areas

5. Receiving higher total compensation

As L&D leaders get a sense of this shifted set of priorities, it's clear that learning will play an even more central role in shaping Gen Z's engagement at work than it has for prior generations. To communicate with Gen Z employees about selecting relevant skill-building activities or offerings in their jobs, L&D should think about getting to know the employees of Gen Z on a finer level.

As L&D leaders contemplate Gen Z's entry into the workforce, the recommendations made in this article should help smooth Gen Z's transition. While Gen Z employees are meaningfully different from other workforce generations in some regards, the practices we've recommended for L&D leaders here — empathizing and understanding Gen Zers at work, providing ongoing increased insight into shifting skills and connecting Gen Z employees to coaching throughout the enterprise — are equally valid for employees from any generation and reflect some of the broader work trends we see impacting businesses around the world today.

[1] 2019 Gartner Leader Effectiveness Survey for Employees; n = 3,970 employees

[2] 2017 Gartner Manager Effectiveness Survey; n = 7,309 employees

L&D Innovators

The Young Leaders Development Program

An Interview With Santander's Chema Palomo

This L&D innovators article features Chema Palomo, Global Talent Group Vice President at Santander. L&D leaders can read how Santander's Young Leaders Program employs a more agile, democratic approach to young employee development.

Chema Palomo is Global Talent Group Vice President of Santander, the largest bank in the eurozone by market capitalization with a meaningful presence in 10 core markets in Europe and the Americas.

After graduating in Law and Business Administration, Chema began his career in Consulting and then in Human Resources. He has 16 years of multi-sector experience (manufacturing, pharmaceutical and financial services) working across Europe, Asia-Pacific, Middle-East and Latin America.

In his current role, Chema leads the global initiatives on Talent Management, Talent Acquisition and Diversity & Inclusion. He is passionate about impacting the growth, sustainability and profitability of Santander through talent development, change management and organizational culture transformation. So far, Chema has lived in London, Mexico City, São Paulo, Madrid, Sydney, Beirut, Cairo and Shanghai. This experience helped him to discover new realities and cultures. He also loves sports, socializing and enjoying time with his family.

Uncertainty About Talent Needs for the Future

Ongoing digital change at Santander created uncertainty — not only for young employees about their futures at the company but also for leaders about changing their business strategy. Santander wanted to develop its younger employees for future leadership roles while simultaneously drawing on these employees' digital knowledge to support the bank's digital transformation. Santander realized it needed to create a new type of leadership development program for early-career professionals.

Santander's talent leaders had to overcome a few pitfalls as they designed this new program. First, these types of programs tend to have limited spaces for participants, making them feel exclusive and closed off to much of the employee population. Additionally, once a program starts, it typically cannot adapt to employees' preferences or inputs. Development programs also usually take place in-person, in one local area,

limiting participants' ability to work with employees outside their local geography. Lastly, the programs often provide a uniform, predetermined schedule, leaving participants without the option to identify the program components that are most valuable to them.

Santander's Young Leaders Program

Santander's Young Leaders Program is 18 months long and allows participants to choose from multiple experiential learning channels. In the program's first iteration, 280 early-career professionals from diverse backgrounds participated. Santander structured the program around four pathways, each aligned with one of the company's strategic pillars (see Figure 1):

- Contribute to Our Strategy
- Face New Experiences
- Increase Your Exposure
- Grow as a Leader

Figure 1: Program Structured in Four Pathways Aligned With Strategic Pillars

Contribute to Our Strategy

Components:
- Global Y-Labs
- Local Y-Labs

Face New Experiences

Components:
- Business Competition
- Special Challenges

Increase Your Exposure

Components:
- Reverse Mentoring
- Board Presentations
- Country Visits
- Open Text Chain

Grow as a Leader

Components:
- Young Leaders Academy
- Tribes

Source: Gartner

Palomo cites five practices that contribute to the success of the Young Leaders Program:

- **Democratic Selection to Ensure Diversity in the Program —** Santander wanted the participant selection process to be open and democratic to ensure the program would welcome a diverse group of Young Leaders from throughout the organization. Santander invites employees to nominate peers who they think would make an impact in the program, drawing on input from multiple peers to mitigate the possibility of biased selections by managers. The company allocates program seats in a structured way to ensure diversity by gender and geography.

- **Continuous Dialogue to Target Participant Needs —** The program has multiple feedback channels in place to allow HR to adapt the program based on employees' input. Santander hosts monthly calls with Young Leaders and sends out periodic surveys to solicit feedback on what to change or add to the program. Additionally, there is an open email inbox to which Young Leaders can submit questions or concerns about the program.

- **Offering a Global Digital Experience —** Santander uses technology and balances global and local program components to create a unified experience for participants around the world. "The Space" is a central digital platform for program materials and information and allows participants around the world to access virtual learning sessions and program content 24/7. In-person components also balance local experiences, like skills workshops or group discussions, with global experiences, like the Young Leaders Summit — an event that brings together all participants from around the globe.

- **Participant Ownership Over Program Experience —** Santander empowers Young Leaders to shape their own development journeys in the program. While all participants have access to the same selection of opportunities, all of the program's components are optional. This allows Young Leaders to determine their own path in the program and only participate in the activities that are relevant to them.

- **Multiple Channels to Connect With Senior Leaders —** The program provides a space for building a two-way dialogue between Young Leaders and senior leaders. This allows Young Leaders to build their exposure with senior leaders through reverse-mentoring pairings and quarterly "tribe" meetings with their department heads. Senior leaders also gain decision-making support from Young Leaders, in the form of "Y-Labs" where senior leaders can submit questions and ideas for input from Young Leaders.

Santander has received strong positive feedback about the program from participants and their managers. According to the company, 80% of employees and 81% of managers say the program effectively creates channels for them to contribute to the company's strategy. Ninety percent of managers say the program has a positive impact on employees' development. Ninety percent of employees and 94% of managers would recommend the program to the next generation of participants.

Young Leaders cite many benefits to participating in the program, including increased visibility and recognition within the company, working in multicultural teams and networking opportunities with global participants and senior leaders. This program is an invaluable experience for rising leaders at Santander, enabling them to take on challenges that help them grow while also contributing to the company's global strategy.

Upgrade Your Leadership Development Program

As leaders take on more responsibilities, L&D teams are tasked with supporting them in managing these increased expectations effectively. Use these quick wins to ensure your leadership development programs can keep up with the new context leaders face.

The expectations leaders face in their roles has grown in recent years. Leaders report three main changes to their roles: a greater number of job responsibilities, a greater number of skills requirements and a greater depth of specific knowledge required to succeed.[1] Simply put, leaders are trying to do it all.

To help them keep pace, HR leaders have been focusing on changing leaders' behaviors through development centered on personal transformation. Today's leadership development programs often feature introspective, motivational content that inspires leaders to not only run their businesses better but also personally improve. However, executives struggle to apply personally transformative lessons on the job as urgent daily responsibilities mount. L&D teams should look beyond personal transformation and focus instead on practical application to secure long-term behavior change. Use the following quick wins to upgrade or adapt your development programs for practical application:

1. **Update existing leadership development programs by integrating application throughout the learning experience.**

   – Identify places in current leadership development offerings to strengthen the connection to leaders' day-to-day reality.

   – Use the "Development Contextualization Tool" to help you understand the pressures and priorities leaders face in their daily work.

2. **Personalize leadership development by adapting programs into the language leaders use in their work.**

   – Identify the workflows your leaders are familiar with (e.g., design thinking, hackathons or interviewing) and integrate them into your leadership development programs.

   – Brainstorm workflows that leaders across different parts of your organization use, based on their educational and career backgrounds, with the "Guide to Applying Manager Workflows to Development Programs."

3. **Ensure leaders take full advantage of their networks for peer support and development.**

   – Enable leaders to assess the gaps between their formal networks (their reporting line) and their informal networks (individuals they rely on daily).

   – Help leaders map their formal and informal networks with our "Leader Tool for Network Mapping."

4. **Support leaders to identify and navigate the dichotomous behaviors their organizations expect of them, such as innovation and risk management.**

   – Surface and discuss the behavioral tensions leaders face and help them plan to reconcile these dichotomies.

   – Guide leaders through a discussion on the behavioral tensions they face in their roles, using our "Discussion Guide for Navigating Leadership Tensions."

[1] 2019 Gartner Leader Effectiveness Survey for Leaders

Note: Please search our website or contact your account manager to access the tools mentioned above.

Suggested Reading

In Case You Missed It

To find these and other publications for L&D professionals, search our website or contact your account manager.

What's New?

- "Leveraging Skills Adjacencies for Digital Business Transformation Success"

- "Ignition Guide to Engaging Employees in Reskilling"

- "Neuroscience - What the Brain Tells us About Our Learners"

- "Bringing the Digital Experience to the World of Learning and Development"

- "2020 L&D Innovations Bullseye"

Your Organization's Learning Culture in 2020

As L&D leaders face mounting pressure to ensure their workforce has the skills they need to meet business goals, they should be sure to pay attention to their learning culture. In a recent Gartner survey, we asked more than 2,600 employees about the productivity of their learning culture. L&D leaders can use these data-driven findings to better understand the state of learning culture at today's organizations and assess how their organization compares. Search the Gartner website or contact your account manager to access our State of the Learning Culture report.