The Effect of a Professional Development Network on Leadership Development

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Abstract

Professional development is relevant for the workers themselves, for the organizations, and, in a more macro view, also for the countries. In this sense, this paper aims to discuss the influence of leadership in the professional development of subordinates, pointing out the importance of leadership performance. To achieve this goal, research results are presented on the relationship between leadership and professional development of subordinates. Research in the field shows that professional development is directly related to the day-to-day activities of workers and should be part of a broader process of continuous learning, which results both from formal and informal learning actions. The debate proposed for this paper considers that professional development is more directly related to the combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes that involve learning than the specific results of certain formal or informal learning actions. Thus, we discuss how the relations established with the leadership in the work environment can influence the professional development of the subordinates besides the type of learning provided to the workers. This discussion can shift the focus of research—currently centered on learning modes—to a focus on leadership practices for skills development and the consequent career progression of subordinates.22111q

Keywords

career , progression, leadership, learning at work, professional development, support

I Introduction

Leadership development is the process of creating more effective current and future leaders through learning and skills development opportunities. Individuals can informally develop their leadership skills through experience and other resources. But more often than not, leadership

development comes as part of formal learning and development opportunities within the workplace—ranging from training to coaching and mentorship.

Regardless of the type of leadership development program, the goal is to help existing and potential leaders build the skills they need to empower their teams, make better decisions, and effectively contribute to company growth. At the end of the twentieth century, it was estimated that organizations in the United States spent about $55–200 billion annually on workforce training . This high investment in actions leading to professional development has also driven the demand for scientific research to better understand learning processes at work in the twenty-first century.

A study conducted in the United States with some of the largest US companies numbering 264 shows that most CEOs (62%) believe that building and maintaining a skilled workforce is the most important challenge of the decade. Although this research was done at the beginning of this century, this challenge of developing and maintaining a properly qualified workforce is still present not only for American organizations but also as a global challenge.

II The impact of leadership development

Career development is certainly important to individual employees. But the opportunity to learn and grow shouldn't be viewed as a perk for your teams. When you look at leadership development through a strategic business lens, you can adapt developmental goals to your business needs—which can benefit the workplace in more ways than one.

1. Leadership development helps employees build effective leadership skills

We often distinguish leaders from non-leaders based on their job titles and rank in the organizational hierarchy.

But here's the thing: simply putting an individual in a leadership role doesn't necessarily make them an effective leader—even if leadership is inherently a part of their job. The reality is that only around 10% of managers have a natural talent for leadership. Others need to build the skills necessary to successfully lead a team.

That's where leadership development comes in. Not only does it make for better leaders but the impact of those skills trickles down and reaches far beyond individual performance.

2. Effective leaders help organizations attract and retain top talent

In the modern workplace, employee retention consistently ranks as a top priority. And when over half of workers have left a job because of their manager, it's obvious that leadership is a huge piece of the employee retention puzzle.

Leadership development creates leaders who can successfully support and motivate their teams. Over time, this influences job satisfaction, employee happiness, and ultimately retention.

Investing in leadership development can also help you retain those top leaders. Making sure that top performers and leaders within your organization have access to individualized career development opportunities can go a long way in keeping your best people happy and engaged.

And of course, when you do need to hire external talent—a history of career growth opportunities and strong leadership positions your organization as a desirable place to work.

3. Leadership development supports strategic succession planning

Leadership development goes beyond your current leadership team.

Even in the best companies, talented leaders leave for new opportunities or get promoted into senior roles. This leaves you with big shoes to fill.

Investing in leadership development for potential leaders creates a robust internal talent pipeline to help fill these future roles seamlessly from your existing pool of employees.

Not only does it initially cost 18% more to hire external candidates, but employees who are promoted internally tend to perform better in their new roles.

High-performing internal hires are also less likely to quit, so you'll find yourself with vacant roles less frequently.

4. Leaders impact employee engagement across all levels of the organization

Leadership and people managers are the link between your company and your employees.

Having effective leaders is critical to maintaining employee engagement—which we know impacts everything from employee productivity to business performance. In fact, 70% of employee engagement can be traced back to an employee's relationship with their manager.

But only 36% of employees feel like their leadership is supporting them in a way that makes them feel engaged in the workplace.

Leadership development gives leaders the skills they need to build trust and support their employees. When employees strongly agree that they trust the leadership of their organization, they are 4x as likely to be engaged.

Leadership development also improves happiness and engagement in leaders themselves. With 53% of managers reporting feeling burnt out at work, it's important to equip leaders with the right skills and networks to stay resilient and feel connected in the workplace.

5. Leadership development opportunities foster diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)

Organizations need formal development programs to elevate and empower underrepresented employees. While organizations continue to make strides toward diversity at the leadership level, we know that employees from diverse backgrounds often get left behind.

For example, in 2023 more than half of Fortune 500 board seats are still held by white men.

When we leave leadership development to chance, we know employees from diverse backgrounds—like women of color—are less likely to have access to opportunities and connections that help them step into senior leadership positions.

When formal leadership development programs are part of your DEI and overall business strategy, you can start filling those diversity gaps in your current and future leadership teams.

III Professional development

Professional development is directly related to the day-to-day activities of workers and should be part of a broader process of continuous learning. Professional development corresponds to the growth and maturation of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired throughout the workers' lives, as a result of formal and informal actions of learning at work.

The literature indicates the relationship between formal training, learning at work, and everyday learning. Therefore, different forms of formal and informal learning at work are related to the development of human capital, and they are seen as complementary. The professional development process also involves the experiences and personal experiences that characterize the learning throughout the career.

Thus, we can consider that professional development is supported by the Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory , characterized by a holistic perspective that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior. According to this theory, learning is the process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience into a cyclical model of learning, based on four successive stages: concrete experience, reflexive observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

According to, the four stages of the learning cycle consider that experience is constructed by processes of intention, extension, apprehension, and understanding. In the logic of this model, concrete experiences impel an intentional reflexive action, transforming into an abstract conceptualization, which allows the experience of active experimentation. Thus, the process of professional development involves experience, observation, reflection, and transformation.

Professional development is thus composed of a series of events and activities related to a particular profession, creating or developing sets of skills, knowledge, and attitudes in the areas of people's performance. In this sense, the focus of the concept of professional development is on a combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes, involving formal and informal learning strategies throughout the career.

IV Developing a leadership development program that makes an impact

Leadership development programs can be difficult to get right. It's why we see companies make massive investments with little return. Sure, something is always better than nothing. But if you're taking the time and resources to invest in your leadership, you want your program to effectively target the challenges and opportunities within your specific organization.

Here are things to consider before developing a leadership development program, so you feel confident it will *actually* make an impact.

- **What makes a good leader?** What skills and core competencies does your organization value in leaders? This creates a universal understanding of what leadership is and isn't in your company, which helps current and future leaders know what to strive for. This then informs how you carry out programming and what goes into your curriculum.

- **How does the development program align with organizational goals?** It's not unusual to see organizations jump on talent initiatives because they see other companies doing it. There's no question that leadership development can be impactful. But it's important to understand why your company needs it and how it will help further your overall goals. For instance, is your organization navigating through significant restructures and business transformations? Perhaps you'd want to equip leaders with the skills and mindsets essential for leading change. As a result, the objectives and frameworks of this program would vary to meet distinct needs.

V Leadership

The interest in the topic of leadership has been renewed with an expressive set of studies that correlate leadership to the most diverse themes, as they show frequent meta-analysis. Leadership has an effect on the organization's performance, on the processes of change, on the commitment, satisfaction, and well-being of employees. Leadership theories began in the theory of traits, and successive other theories were being developed, such as behavioral theories, contingency or situational theories, and procedural theories. A review of the main theories about the phenomenon (from trace-based theory to procedural theories, which are predominant in current research) can be found in.

This diversity of theories has led to many styles of leadership and a varied nomenclature, for example, charismatic/bureaucratic leadership, transactional/transformational leadership, autocratic/democratic/visionary-inspirational leadership/laissez-faire, supportive leadership, ethical leadership, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). Each of these styles has specific characteristics, although some styles are derived from others.

VI Leadership and professional development of subordinates

The link between leadership styles and subordinate professional development concepts is supported by different theories of literature. On the one hand, studies in the area of learning at

work indicate that social support—received from the manager and co-workers—has relevance for the transference of learning to work. On the other hand, the concept of knowledge management associates the performance of management with the development of the intellectual capital of companies. Thus, defines knowledge management as the process of embracing knowledge as a strategic asset to boost sustainable business advantage and promote an approach to identify, capture, evaluate, improve, and share its intellectual capital.

Thus, the emphasis on knowledge management was directed to the level of work teams. The actions of leaders, team members, and the organization as a whole act as catalysts for knowledge management. Leadership performance is, therefore, a potentiating element in the generation, development, and sharing of knowledge in teams. In this way, the leadership that encourages a culture oriented to learning, innovation, and open communication contributes to dynamize the processes of professional development of subordinates. Thus, a leadership style oriented toward learning and knowledge encourages innovation and the sharing of knowledge, encouraging open communication and team development.
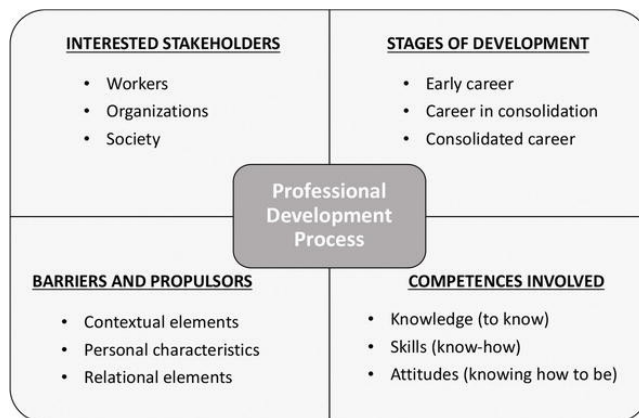
In addition, social interaction and the leader's ability to influence subordinates are considered key elements in leadership theories. In this sense, a transformational style of leadership—aimed at the positive influence of subordinates—would be directly associated with the processes of professional and personal development of subordinates.

Conclusion

At present, professional development is an area of growing interest, mainly due to its implicit consequences, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, job satisfaction, and employability the performance of various job duties and responsibilities and the increase it provides in job satisfaction. Thus, such development is relevant to both the workers themselves and the labor and development organizations of the country. As a result, investments in actions aimed at professional development have grown in the international scenario.

As discussed throughout this chapter, professional development should be understood as a construct that goes beyond the mere sum of a set of courses carried out throughout the career because it is a process of maturing the reflexive capacity. So, the most important is not whether professional development comes from formal or informal learning processes. What matters is that such development is characterized as a growing process of awareness and mastery of know-how at work. This is evidenced in different researches that point to reflective practice as an important element for professional development processes. Therefore, in addition to promoting training and development events for specific activities, leaders should encourage a critical and reflective vision in their respective work teams with a deliberately planned direction. Moreover, it has been notated that leadership can be improved by the proper implication of a professional development network. Effective professional skills are the underlying factors, which enhance leadership styles.

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