

EXTRA

PERFORMER

ORDI

MANAGER

NARY

LEADER

PART 2

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Leadership Development is no longer optional.

Leadership isn't just about personal excellence anymore—it's about creating a ripple effect across the organization. In a world defined by uncertainty, shifting talent demands, and cultural transformation, developing leaders at all levels is a strategic imperative.

Yet, many companies still delay or underinvest.

Leadership development should not be a luxury for the few—it must be a built-in system that involves everyone, every year.

Leadership development isn't just about fixing current problems—it's about building a resilient culture, developing the next generation of talent, and equipping teams to thrive through uncertainty. In Part 1 of this series, we explored what makes individual leaders extraordinary.

In Part 2, we shift our focus to the organizational systems, strategy, and mindset that bring leadership development to life at scale.

— Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman

CHAPTER 1

CREATE A CULTURE THAT PRIORITIZES LEADERSHIP

Z E N G E R F O L K M A N

CREATE A CULTURE THAT PRIORITIZES LEADERSHIP



If culture is how people behave when no one is watching, leadership is the loudest example in the room. The behaviors modeled by leaders become the blueprint for organizational norms.

This is why changing culture—improving collaboration, accountability, innovation—almost always begins with leadership.

8 Elements of an Ideal Leadership Development System

1. A culture that visibly values development
2. Regular, accurate 360-degree assessments
3. Senior team ownership and buy-in
4. Managers actively developing their teams
5. Competency model aligned to future needs
6. Real-world assignments for applied learning
7. Development starts early, not late
8. Internal promotions prioritized over external hires

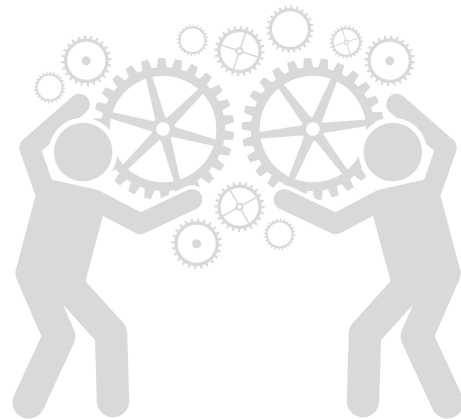


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FROM TRAINING PROGRAM TO ORGANIZATIONAL IMPERATIVE

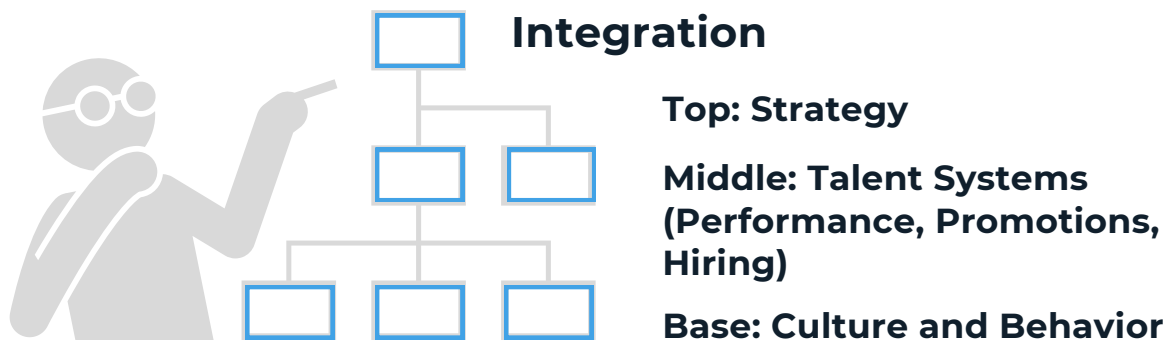
In many organizations, leadership development is still seen as “training”—a series of workshops disconnected from daily work. To truly change culture, leadership development must be:

- **Integrated** into how people are hired, promoted, evaluated, and rewarded.
- **Modeled** by senior executives who participate and champion the initiative.
- **Measured** for effectiveness and business impact.



✦ The goal isn't to run a program. It's to build a system where leadership growth is expected and measured—just like revenue or customer satisfaction.

The question is: Does the way we develop leaders reflect the kind of organization we want to become?



Quick Culture Health Check

- Are leaders receiving regular feedback?
- Is development early, ongoing, and inclusive?
- Are executive teams modeling learning and growth?

CULTURE CHANGE BEGINS WITH LEADERSHIP CHANGE.

360 Assessments provide:

- A reliable measurement system that tracks leadership behavior over time.
- A clear view of how leaders are perceived by peers, direct reports, and supervisors.
- A baseline for development and a way to monitor progress.
- An incentive to change—because data creates awareness, and awareness sparks action.

💬 *“Effective leadership development springs to life when we bring more science into what we do.”*

—Jack Zenger

When feedback becomes part of the culture, people expect it, welcome it, and act on it. And that’s how organizations evolve—one leader at a time.

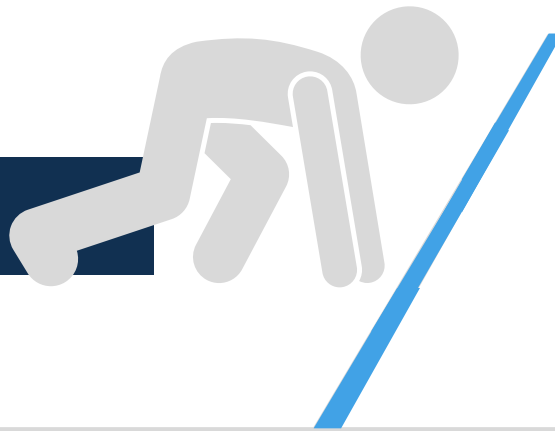


CHAPTER 2

DON'T WAIT TO
DEVELOP—START
EARLY, GO WIDE

ZENGER FOLKMAN

DON'T WAIT TO DEVELOP— START EARLY, GO WIDE



Too often, leadership development is delayed until mid-career—if it happens at all. Our research found the average age of leaders in formal development programs is **46**.

Only 15% are under 35.

That means years—even decades—go by before leaders receive the tools they need to succeed.

And when development is reserved for a small group of “high potentials,” the opportunity to build a broad leadership bench is lost.



Leadership behaviors are easier to build early—and harder to unlearn later.

Joe Folkman,
President Zenger Folkman

WHAT'S AT RISK WHEN YOU WAIT?

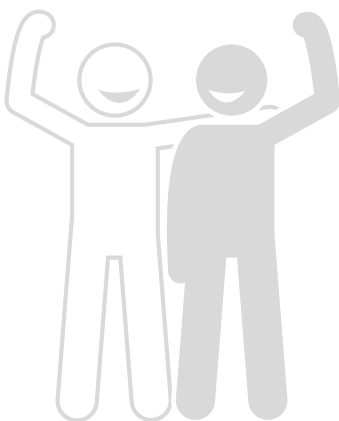
Leadership pipeline becomes dangerously thin.

Leaders operate with blind spots for years.

Culture becomes reactive instead of proactive.

Talented employees leave for growth elsewhere.

From Exclusive to Inclusive



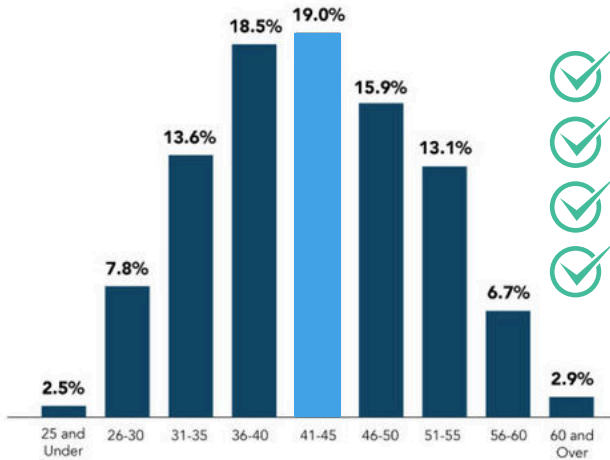
Limiting development to the top 10% leaves untapped potential on the table.

Extraordinary organizations create leadership pathways for individual contributors, frontline supervisors, and mid-level managers—not just the C-suite.

In Practice:

A tech company launched a leadership fundamentals program for employees 0–2 years into their first people-leader role. Within 18 months, they saw significant improvements in employee engagement and retention across those teams.

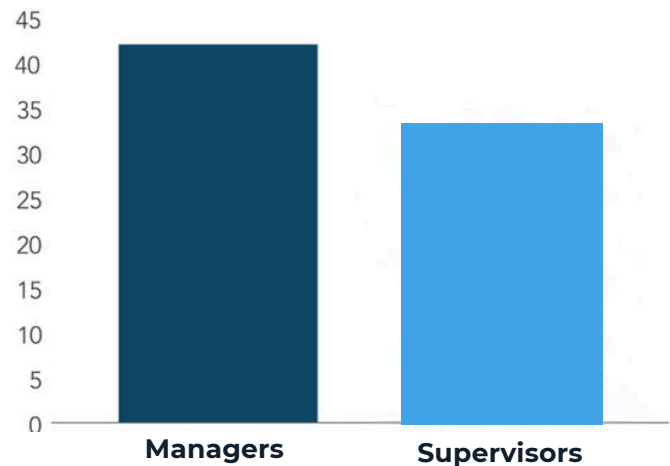
EARLY & BROAD DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST



Average Age of Leadership Development Participants

- ✓ 1. Onboarding includes leadership principles
- ✓ 2. High-potential ICs get stretch assignments
- ✓ 3. Mid-level managers have ongoing coaching
- ✓ 4. Leadership opportunities exist at every level

Fig. 2 – Average Age of Supervisors and Managers



Critics will argue that a young, high-potential employee could leave the organization, rendering the investment wasted. That concern is valid.

Yet during their tenure, the organization benefits from enhanced performance—and often, that alone more than justifies the investment.



“Rather than pirating talent, wouldn’t it make greater sense to grow it from within?”

— Jack Zenger

3

CHAPTER

ENGAGE THE WHOLE ORGANIZATION IN DEVELOPMENT

Z E N G E R F O L K M A N

LEADERSHIP IS A TEAM SPORT



Stop relying on a few stars.

Leadership development often focuses on a small elite group—leaving everyone else to fend for themselves. But organizations aren't built by one or two great leaders. They succeed when leadership is distributed and development is democratized.

Insight

Organizations that engage at least $\frac{1}{3}$ of their leaders in development initiatives report $(2x)$ greater improvements in organizational culture metrics.

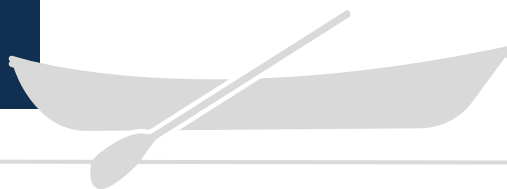
What Development at Scale Looks Like

- Multi-level learning cohorts
- Peer-to-peer coaching circles
- Self-directed learning platforms
- Quarterly 360 feedback refreshers

Leadership should be expected—not exceptional.

3

RAISE THE TIDE LIFT ALL BOATS



Building Depth in the Leadership Bench

When more leaders grow, more teams thrive. That means customers are better served, employees are better coached, and culture improves from the ground up.

Broad engagement doesn't mean low quality. With the right tools and structure, organizations can create development experiences that are personalized, scalable, and impactful.

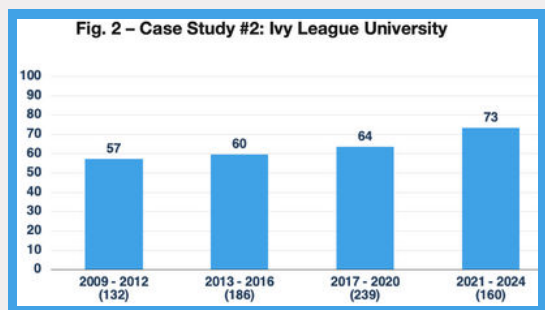
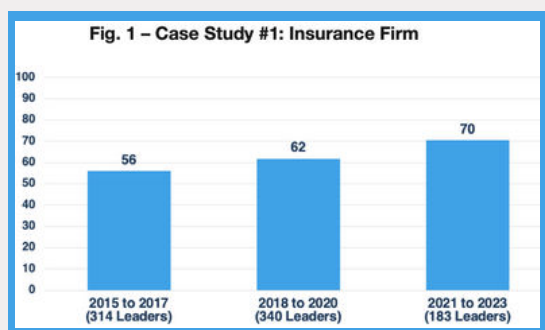
Client Example:

A large retail chain implemented a leadership program across all store managers.

The result: **a 30% drop in turnover** and a measurable increase in customer satisfaction within one year.



Why We Need to Scale Leadership Development



Here is an example from two of our clients who have been with us for many years.

Both the insurance firm and the Ivy League university saw steady increases in 360-degree feedback overall effectiveness scores over time, with early cohorts creating a ripple effect that elevated the baseline for future participants.

As leadership became more widely developed, teams experienced stronger engagement, better collaboration, and a lasting culture of improvement.

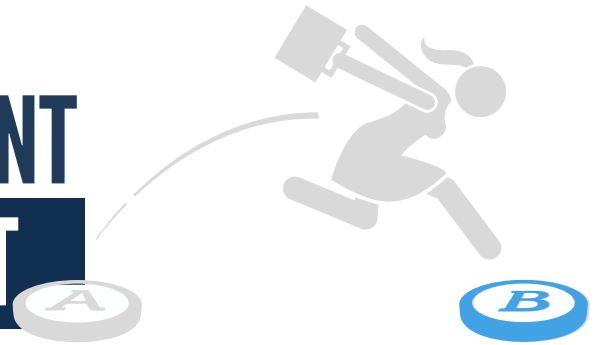


CHAPTER

BUILD LASTING
CHANGE WITH
EXECUTIVE
OWNERSHIP

ZENGER FOLKMAN

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT = CHANGE MANAGEMENT



For Development to Stick, Executives Must Stick With It

Many leadership programs fail not because the content is bad, but because executive involvement is weak. A program framed as "HR's responsibility" won't drive transformation. Change requires top-level ownership.



Insight

Organizations with active executive participation in development see:

- **28%** higher employee trust scores
- **34%** higher program effectiveness

5 LEVELS OF EXECUTIVE SUPPORT

OPPOSED – BLOCKS OR RESISTS THE INITIATIVE

NEUTRAL – DOESN'T INTERFERE, BUT DOESN'T HELP

ATTENTIVE – UNDERSTANDS AND APPROVES FROM AFAR

ENGAGED – PARTICIPATES ALONGSIDE OTHERS

RESPONSIBLE – CHAMPIONS THE INITIATIVE AND HOLDS OTHERS ACCOUNTABLE


BUILD SYSTEMS, NOT JUST EVENTS.

Make Development a Leadership Responsibility

Executives must walk the talk—taking 360 feedback, sharing personal growth goals, and aligning leadership development with strategic priorities.

Leadership development should also be embedded across all touch points:

- Strategy meetings include leadership KPI reviews
- Promotions consider leadership effectiveness
- Culture surveys tie back to leadership behaviors

 *“The more influential the solution, the more support required.”*

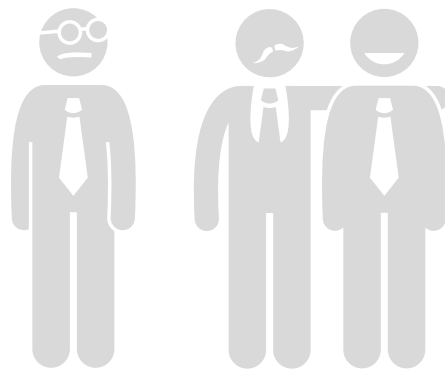
— Joe Folkman

EXECUTIVE BUY-IN CHECKLIST

- ✓ Execs participate in 360 feedback and development
- ✓ Leadership KPIs are part of executive scorecards
- ✓ Senior leaders share personal development stories
- ✓ Execs promote the initiative at every opportunity



**WITHOUT EXECUTIVE SUPPORT →
LOW PROGRAM IMPACT, LOW ENGAGEMENT**



**WITH EXECUTIVE SUPPORT →
HIGH ADOPTION, CULTURE SHIFT**



“Every employee deserves to work for an extraordinary leader. Why stop at a lucky few?”

— Jack Zenger

CONCLUSION

“The best way to predict the future is to develop the people who will lead it.”

–Jack Zenger

The most successful organizations are those that treat leadership development not as a separate function but as an integrated system supported by strategy, culture, and leadership at all levels.

The Four Must-Haves

- ✓ A culture where leadership is part of every process
- ✓ A strategy to start earlier and develop more people
- ✓ A commitment to scale beyond the “top 10%”
- ✓ Active, visible support from executives

Leadership development works. We've seen it. We've measured it. And we know that with the right system in place, your leaders—and your business—can achieve extraordinary results.

EXTRAORDINARY NEXT STEPS

- 1** LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EXTRAORDINARY LEADER DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE.
- 2** TAKE THE EL ABBREVIATED SELF-ASSESSMENT.
- 3** SCHEDULE A CALL TO SEE HOW WE CAN BRING INSPIRING LEADERSHIP TO YOUR ORGANIZATION.

Z E N G E R F O L K M A N