



# Accountability: The Forgotten Element In People Development

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**Over the past few years,** we have surveyed hundreds of team leaders from around the world to find out more about how companies are engaging their employees in learning and development. We expected that many managers had a difficult time holding their people accountable, but we were surprised at just how many leaders struggled with the exact same problem. Despite the fact that 95% of respondents said that people development is critical to their team and company's success, 93% said that they struggle to get their teams to make time for training, apply what they learn, or both. The results uncovered an interesting problem that appeared to affect nearly everyone we talked to: companies want their people to be developed, people want to be developed, and yet nobody seems to be getting developed.

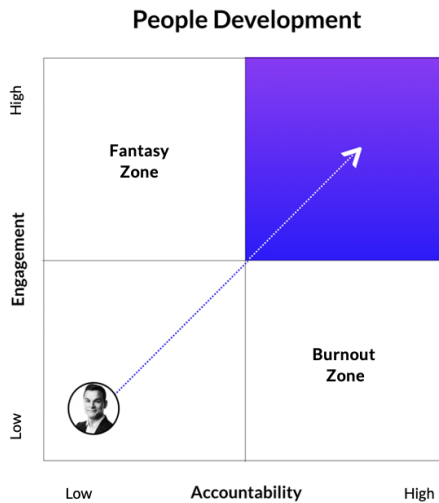
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## Solving the People Development Problem

If you've ever led a team at work, you're probably familiar with the all-too-common response of "I'll get around to it" or "I don't have time" to the question of "How's your training coming along?" When team

members finally do get around to completing the training, they end up hurriedly clicking through PowerPoint slides or passively listening to a video, of which they'll remember little. As managers and business leaders, we all know how important professional development is for building strong and capable teams, yet no matter how many hours of content and training we hurl at our team members, no one seems to have real clarity on how to take responsibility for their own professional growth.



According to the SHRM Body of Knowledge, one of the key markers of a learning organization is that people take responsibility for their own development. In other words, there needs to be a system, and more broadly a culture, in place that holds people accountable for engaging in their own development paths. To clarify, this does not refer to a system that just forces team members to complete trainings in which they are otherwise disengaged. Saying that your team members lack accountability can easily sound like a negative criticism,

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## 1) Creating Clarity and Making a Mutual Commitment to People Development

Creating a culture of continuous people development within your team or organization begins with the creation of transparency around development needs and goals. In other words, both managers and team members can ideally create a mechanism to be on the same page about where skill gaps exist, what needs to be done to address them, and what are the desired results.

This process can take the form of a one-on-one conversation, a team huddle, etc., but ultimately these goals, processes, and desired outcomes ought to be permanent and visible to everyone on the team and individualized to fit each team member's unique goals. By catering the development process not only to an individual's success in their current role, but also to their aspirations for future roles, team members are guaranteed to be more engaged and hold themselves accountable to the goals they have set for themselves.

When defining expectations, it is important to map out Skill Models for each role that specify which areas of development are requisite or critical for that particular role. In each Skill Model, managers will define the leadership, soft skills, role skills, and required skills that people in that role will focus on. Once equipped with his or her Skill Model, each team member will then complete a Skill Assessment to measure where he or she stands in relation to these skills. It is important to recognize that competencies are to be measured objectively, meaning that an individual's skill level ought to be directly



correlated to his or her knowledge and practice of this skill. Upon completing an initial Skill Assessment, each team member will then have an individualized development path laid out in front of them, e.g. they have been told which skills are important to their role, they have identified where they lack competency, and they have created a concrete Action Plan to move forward.

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## 2) Tracking and Measuring Development--Objectively

Performance reviews are often dreaded by both managers and team members. As an example, managers often scratch their heads trying to decide if an individual is a “novice” or “proficient” in leadership capabilities, determine what the difference between those two levels is, and wonder whether the distinction really matters anyway. Team members dread the ambiguity of being told they’re at one level versus another, and likewise, they often have no clear idea of what that means anyway. The problem is that the majority of organizations do not have an objective way to assess and track skill development. This sort of framework not only takes the dreaded awkwardness out of the performance review process, but also the obscurity: managers don’t have to scramble to come up with skill ratings and team members aren’t surprised at the end of the quarter or year with a bad review because it wasn’t clear what was expected of them.

In order to ensure that performance reviews are constructive and the outcomes result in real behavior change, managers develop a framework to focus on objective measures of competency. Some of the questions to consider in your evaluation could be: Do you have a process for implementing this skill? Do you consistently search for new and better ways to execute this process? What results have you achieved as a result of implementing this process into your workflow?

Experienced practitioners in people development recommend that these individualized conversations occur weekly, twice-monthly, or monthly, depending on the nature of your team’s work, and how many direct reports you have. At an organizational level, leaders and executives can use team skill data to reflect on the year’s progress and align on development priorities for the upcoming year.

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## 3) Closing the Loop

Development is a closed-loop process, meaning there is clarity of expectations and specific, objective outcomes linked to a repeatable process. When you assign training or provide your team with a library of content, you are essentially opening the loop by giving them the starting tools to begin their development journeys. But without the necessary follow-up, coaching, and results-tracking, you are only scratching the surface of your team members’ true potential to succeed in their roles.

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