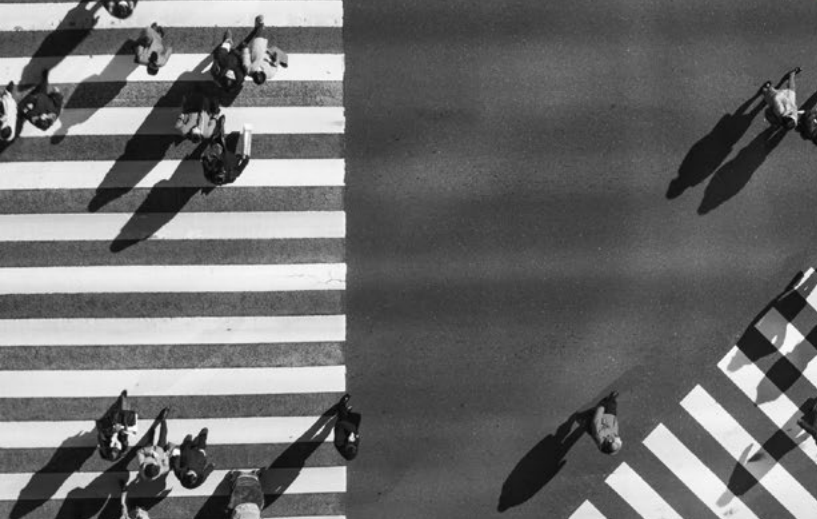


EVALUATING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

7 steps for choosing the
right content for your
leadership team



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The foundations of effective leadership development

Leadership development constructs a powerful foundation for any high-performing organization. However, data shows that more than 80% of organizations face a leadership talent shortage, and 90% of CEOs believe company resources devoted to development programs aren't being used efficiently.

While multiple factors contribute to the current leadership gap, it is critical to recognize that for leadership development to make a lasting change, it must be persistent and multi-dimensional. Unfortunately, constraints surrounding time, staff, or budget too often compel organizations to lean on quick fixes or generic training programs — much to their detriment.

Powerful leadership development is instead achieved through thoughtfully designed, on-the-job stretch experiences. These experiences should be further supplemented with candid coaching, timely coursework, and easy-to-access resources. When implemented well, this combination substantially boosts leaders' personal growth and well-being while simultaneously encouraging engagement, improved performance, and higher retention rates.

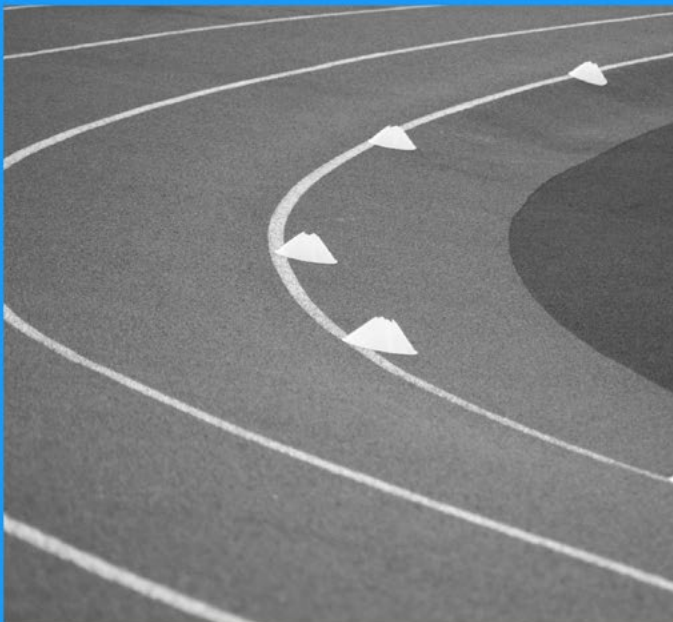
The value of external learning resources

Effective leadership development presents L&D professionals with many challenges. These challenges include providing impactful, engaging content; leveraging experiential assignments; aligning leadership development with business objectives; addressing the needs of multiple leadership levels; and helping to drive and sustain a culture of learning. *All* while working within budget and staffing constraints.

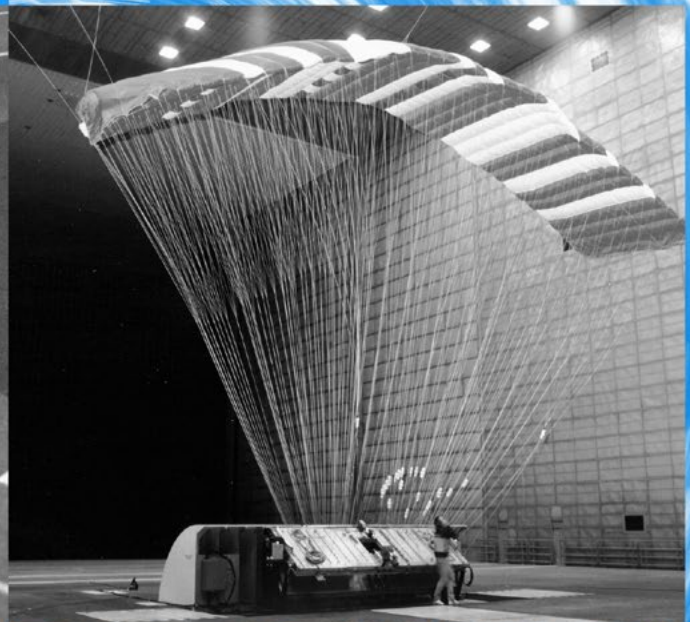
To meet these challenges, most L&D groups seek cost-effective **external learning resources**. These resources not only expand the reach of a group's staff and budget. They also help address the many facets of leadership development by providing:

- High-quality, thought-provoking content that may not be available in-house.
- Technology-based **learning methods** that meet the needs of an increasingly dispersed and diverse workforce.
- Creative **microlearning options** that support on-demand learning.
- Easy-to-access tools that aid L&D professionals.

If artfully designed and easily adaptable to an organization's size and structure, external learning resources offer these opportunities while also engaging leaders to learn and grow.



7 Steps for Choosing the Right Content for Your Leadership Team







7 steps for evaluating external learning resources



While there are multiple benefits to using external resources to expand or enrich a leadership development program, L&D teams must first ask: What criteria should be considered to determine the right content for our leadership team?

The following steps offer an evaluation framework to help you answer that question.





Step One:

Clarify the scope and objectives

Whether a leadership development program is in development or needs a refresh, L&D professionals must explicitly state what they aim to achieve.

Important considerations include:

- Business objectives critical to senior leadership.
- The organization's philosophy and current approach to **leadership development**.
- Senior leadership support for, and commitment to, leadership development.
- The developmental needs and expectations of leaders at each level.
- The leadership capabilities required to achieve those objectives alongside existing or potential **skill gaps**.
- The extent to which changing circumstances require reevaluating either philosophy or approach.

Such a detailed assessment of the program's scope, objectives, and level of advocacy provides L&D with critical information for clarifying which components are best supported in-house and which may benefit from external resources.



Step Two:

Determine how external resources add value

When deciding whether and how to utilize external resources, each L&D group will have a unique perspective based on their circumstances.

In addition to stretching budgets, external resources can aid in addressing these factors.

Components of the current leadership program. Building a comprehensive leadership development program is time and resource-intensive. To ease the burden, L&D may want to include one or more components from an external learning resource. Such components can augment virtual coursework with fresh perspectives, on-the-job experiences with quick refreshers, and leadership discussion groups with compelling content.

L&D composition and deployment. L&D staff are typically pulled in multiple directions and face new expectations as organizations adapt to change. As such, crafting a strong leadership development program may require a strategic examination of how L&D staff are deployed and what qualifies as the best use of their time.

External resources can assist by providing high-quality content that would be too time-intensive or cost-prohibitive to develop internally. They may also significantly increase on-demand content options, helping to expand the reach of the L&D team.

Non-L&D staff support. Ideally, leadership development is structured as an organization-wide responsibility shared by current and emerging leaders. The L&D team can cultivate that mindset by equipping non-L&D staff with the information and tools necessary to fulfill that responsibility. If external resources are engaging and easy to access, they offer a low-barrier means of expanding and embedding leadership development responsibilities throughout the organization.

Step Three:

Assess the relevance and rigor of the instructional design

External resources sometimes paint with too broad of a brush. They opt for generic content in the hopes that one program will address as many topics and individuals as possible. In reality, greater value is likely to be gained by tailoring the program to specific objectives and learner needs.

To avoid this pitfall when choosing external resources, first consider whether the content aligns with the leadership development objectives. Then ask whether **the instructional design** is both relevant and rigorous. Consider:

- The learning objectives for each content element.
- How well the content elements address the objectives.
- The instructional strategy. (For example, does it include story-telling, didactic lectures, the incorporation of media, the inclusion of pre- or post-work, and so on?)
- Style of delivery. (For example, who is delivering the content, and is the delivery intended to inform, entertain, challenge, or motivate?)

An additional assessment factor to analyze is outcomes. To what extent do learners engage with the content? What is their level of satisfaction to date? Have any measurable behavioral results been recorded or observed? And so on.



Step Four:

Evaluate the delivery formats

The learning approaches of many organizations are evolving, in part due to how the organizations themselves are transforming.

Remote work, dispersed workforces, and innovations in learning technology are pushing organizations to adapt quickly.

When evaluating leadership development delivery formats, L&D professionals should consider how well the format meets this new world of work. Does the format streamline access to content? Does it support different technological comfort levels? Can it transition from in-person learning to a more **blended approach**? And does it deliver high-quality content in “digestible bites” that cater to the just-in-time mindset?

It is also critical to assess how well the format addresses the needs and activities of multiple leader levels. For example:

- **Emerging leaders** may benefit from learning designed to lay the groundwork for foundational leadership skills.
- Senior leaders might gain insight from external experts through video lessons and discussions into complex capabilities.
- A new team lead might take advantage of virtual lessons on team and relationship-building.
- Someone with an upcoming presentation might want a summary of **compelling techniques**.
- A leader coach might benefit from an on-demand lesson on **giving feedback**.

The diversity of leadership development programs as well as the differing needs of leaders point to an ever-increasing demand for effective, flexible learning delivery formats.



Step Five:

Appraise quality and credibility

Leadership development can be challenging not only due to its multifaceted attributes but also because it relies on individual motivation.

Because of their expansive responsibilities, leaders at all levels will be reluctant to participate in learning activities they perceive as too time-consuming or not relevant. However, external resources can boost leadership motivation and engagement — especially if leaders anticipate exposure to ideas and information they might not otherwise have access to.

In assessing which resources to incorporate, L&D staff will want to weigh the reputation and experience of the provider, whether the sources are credible, and if the content challenges the learner with compelling information.

Note also that proactive leader engagement can be a powerful factor influencing the **return on investment** (ROI) of learning initiatives. One of the intangible measures that may provide insight into leaders' motivation and commitment is an analysis of what topics they respond to and which presenters they wish to explore further.

Step Six:

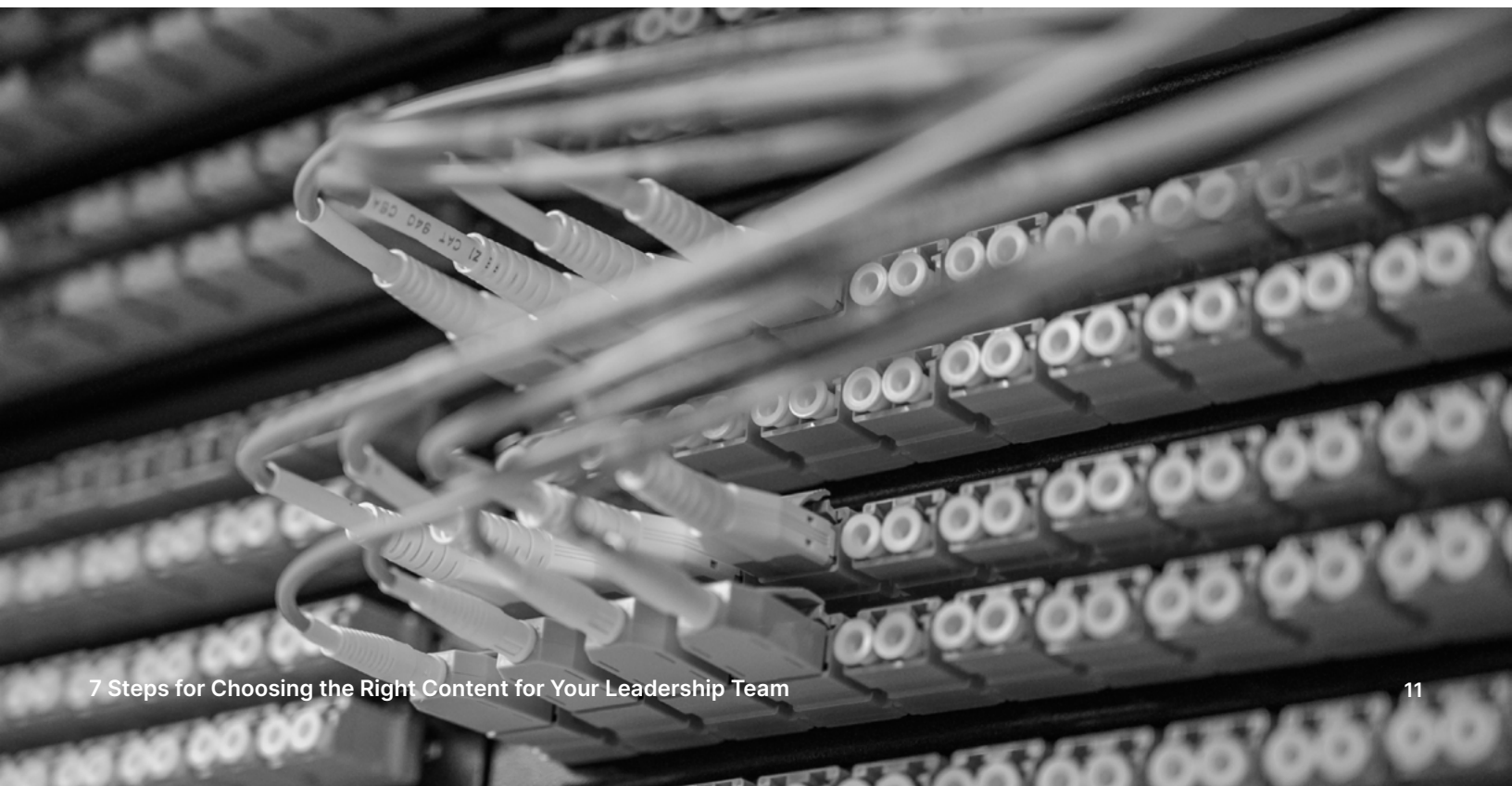
Ensure regular updates and ease of access

Leaders are increasingly demanding and discerning learners. They expect fresh, relevant content that continually offers something new.

As such, when evaluating external resources, L&D should find out how often content is added, updated, and reviewed. It is also beneficial to inquire how the vendor decides on new content.

Another major consideration is the learning platform itself. L&D should determine whether it is designed to easily incorporate new content — both internally developed and externally resourced — as well as if it is accessible in multiple ways from different locations.

Lastly, it's important to keep in mind that even the most well-designed learning platform will struggle to live up to its potential unless the content is compellingly communicated, the benefits convincingly marketed, and the promised experience consistently fulfilled.



Step Seven:

Explore tailored budget options

The effective use of external resources can greatly expand a leadership development program's scope and reach, regardless of the organization's size or finances.

However, to fully leverage their available budget, L&D teams should determine whether an external resource offers:

- A curation of high-value content that addresses the foundational aspects of leadership.
- A selection of compelling topics L&D can easily employ for a variety of learning situations.
- On-demand options that are designed to entice leaders to seek out learning.

Larger, more well-established L&D enterprises may also consider:

- Content that in-house L&D professionals can use to supplement coursework or learning groups.
- Multiple “mini-learning” sessions with content targeted to selected high-demand **leadership skills**.
- Skill reinforcement workshops for leadership support groups such as executive coaches.
- Single-topic content designed to provide insight or guidance for supporting experiential development situations.

One of the most valuable benefits delivered by respected external resources is an array of high-quality leadership content that can stand alone, supplement, or expand an organization's leadership development program — all while contributing to its long-term return on investment.

Harvest the value of external resources

Critical to the success of any **leadership development program** is an ongoing assessment of what is and isn't working. The expectations of an organization's leaders — and what they expect from their development — are rarely static.

L&D plays an essential role in keeping leadership development front and center, which entails not only senior leadership commitment but also the support and engagement of leaders at every level. Creative, thoughtful use of external resources can not only help L&D effectively leverage its budget. It also has the potential to produce more “pull” or demand from leaders for compelling and challenging content.

As a final note, as L&D explores external resources to support leadership development, they also have exposure to the latest research, subject matter experts, and learning technologies. Not only can the leadership development program reap the benefits, but the L&D team can enrich and expand the value they bring to the organization.





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