

MONTHLY MENTOR

“A” Player human capital leadership by
HUNT EXECUTIVE SEARCH

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For twenty seven years, the Monthly Mentor has been a value added service to encourage our employer and candidate clients in their Personal & Professional Development.



LeaderShift Skills Managers Need at Every Level

By Joe Hunt

A few weeks ago, I was asked to analyze a LeaderShift competency model a client had created for her department. It was based on the idea that at different points in the team’s development, potential leaders needed to focus on excelling at different skills and applying different competencies.

One example from their model postulated, “lower-level managers should focus on driving results, while top executives should focus on developing strategic perspectives.” Intuitively, this is reasonable based on widely accepted assumptions.

- Once a skill is mastered, one can begin working towards mastery of more advanced level skills.
- The essential skills and competencies required vary from level to level.
- As a leader advances in level, they must focus more on mastery of new competencies.



The assumption regarding mastery of skills is a principle ingrained into our natures as children in school. For example, once a person knows how to add, we accept they will always be able to add. Daily practice is not required once the skill is mastered. The time previously devoted towards mastery of that skill can now be applied to the development of a new skill, without fear of the mastered skill diminishing.

This way of approaching the process of development works in some circumstances and for certain rudimentary level skills. However, it is not a comprehensive explanation for the improvement and maintenance of all skills. A more nuanced approach, one which provides allowances to exercise foundational skills, is often necessary to promote continued growth and achievement.

Athletics provides a clear demonstration of this principle. All athletes – golfers, football players, runners, swimmers, etc. – continue to practice and develop their fundamental skills throughout their careers. A golfer learns how to putt on day one, but they continue to practice this skill daily throughout their entire career. This repetition of the basics allows athletes to better execute their more advanced tasks. When a flaw develops in those foundational skills, it must be corrected for the athlete to perform at their optimal level. Repetition helps prevent these flaws from occurring.



Focus on Results

As my colleague and I considered the excellent senior executives we know, we recognized that they shared a clear focus on delivering results; a skill their model associated with lower level managers. This reversal also carried over to the best lower level managers, who are absolutely clear about strategy and vision.

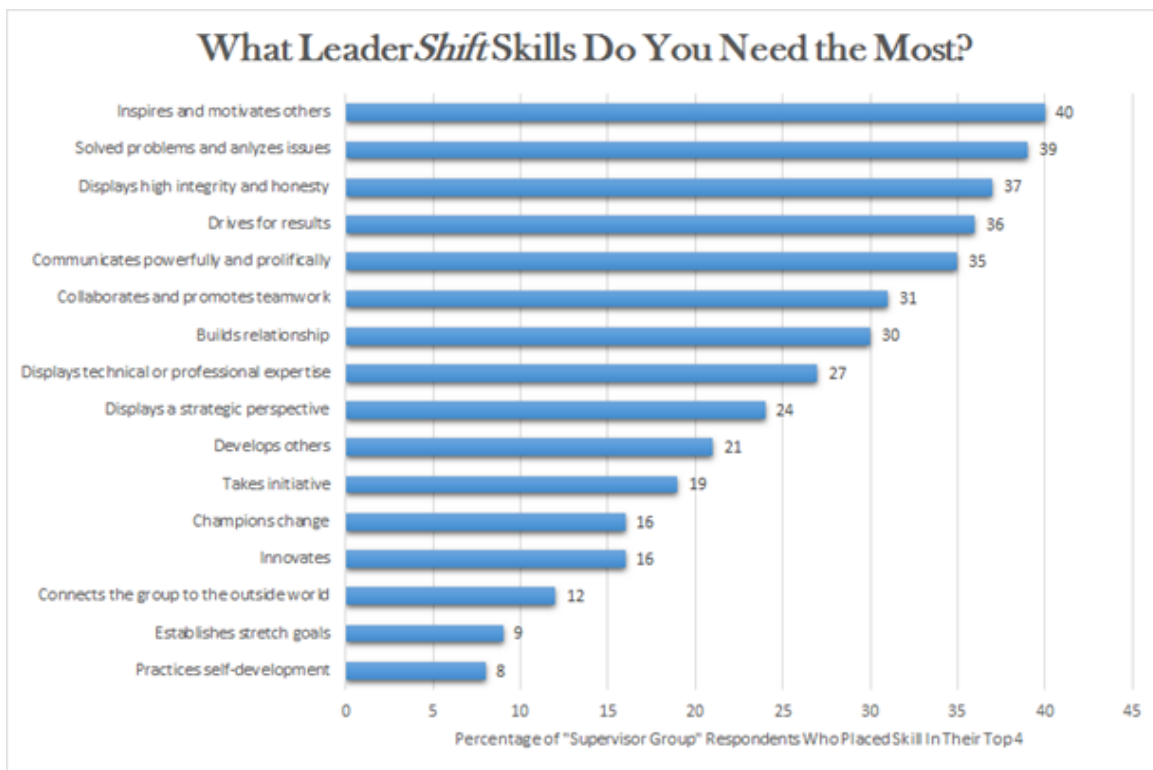
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This led me to question the following. Are some skills less important for leaders at certain levels of the organization, or are there specific skills that are fundamental to excellence regardless of level?

My search to answer this question led me to delve into a dataset in which more than 10,000 CPG bosses, peers, and subordinates were surveyed to determine “which skills have the greatest impact on a leader’s success in the position the respondents currently hold.” Each respondent selected their top four *LeaderShift* Architect competencies (mastery level behavioral descriptor) out of a list of sixteen. An analysis the results was then conducted that differentiated between managers at all levels.

As you might expect, the skills people reported needing depended, not only on their level in the organization, but also on the job they held and their particular circumstances. Even with this consideration, the data revealed a remarkable consistency regarding the skills which were perceived as most essential across all four leadership levels, and throughout the multiple functional verticals of these organizations.



The top seven competencies identified as essential were consistent throughout the supervisor group, middle managers, and senior managers. Six of these seven topped the list for our top executives grouping. Respondents at every organizational level expressed the necessity to exhibit balanced mastery of these top competencies. Across the totality of the dataset, the remaining nine competencies were chosen at a rate that was at best half as frequent as the top seven.

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The consistency of the most valued competencies, regardless of level, suggests that as people move up the organization, the fundamental skills they need will not dramatically change. Our data does however indicate the relative importance of those top seven skills does vary to some degree as the leadership levels increase.

The graph on the previous page reflects the relative importance for each LeaderShift competency as viewed by the supervisory group. Recall, these top seven traits (not the order) were the same for each group with only one exception.

Regarding the variation of primacy, our middle manager respondents weighed “Solving Problems” above all other competencies. For the senior management group, “Communicating Powerfully and Prolifically,” rose to the number two priority. Only among our top executives does a new competency enter this top mix. For this group, the ability to “Display a Strategic Perspective” rises to the number five position.

It should also be mentioned that ranking of the “Strategic Perspective” competency displayed a direct correlation with the leadership level. It was most valued by our top executives. It shifted down the list as level decreased, ultimately being least valued (relative to the other levels) by our supervisory group.

So what conclusions can be drawn from this? How can this data be leveraged to improve your leadership team or promote personal-professional development?



Developing your Core Strength

While it seems logical to focus on distinct competencies at different stages of leadership development, the data indicates that it is more important to maintain proficiency in the core competencies most valued throughout the rising levels of leadership. Even with the slight variation of priority for these competencies due to level, functional vertical, or corporate culture; the fundamental skills that promote individual or collaborative success will be essentially the same regardless of one’s current or future position.

Just as a golfer who neglects to practice putting will struggle to find success on the course, leaders who fail to practice these essential competencies will struggle to inspire their teams or achieve personal excellence.

Additionally, a leader who waits to develop a next-level skill – such as “strategic perspective” – until it is needed is likely to fail. A lack of a strategic perspective is considered a fatal flaw, even when the current job does not require it. Decision makers promote and build their teams with individuals who demonstrate proficiency of this next-level skill before it is needed.

Ask yourself, “Which competencies are most critical for me right now?”

Ask yourself, “Which competencies are going to be most critical in the future for the next level job?”

Demonstrating an aptitude for, and practicing next-level skills in your current position provides evidence that you are prepared to succeed at executing elevated responsibilities.

Be proactive and transparent about developing the requisite competencies that will enable success now and at the next level. Identify the most important competencies for each person on your team and work on their development collaboratively. Others will assuredly take notice, and will quickly conclude you and your team are prepared to tackle next-level opportunities.

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