



TRANSFORM

# INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: BEST PRACTICES



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT



MERGER & ACQUISITION



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TALENT MANAGEMENT

Denison Consulting's research over the past two decades suggests that it is critical to create a culture that encourages, supports, and invests in the short- and long-term development of employees. The benefits of investing in employees are numerous, including higher levels of **Quality, Employee and Customer Satisfaction**, and **Innovation**.

Employees' professional development should be an ongoing process to ensure employees are staying current (if not one step ahead) in their fields and mission-critical competencies. Because employees operate within teams, divisions, and the organization as a whole, planning for individual development must be anchored to the organization and team's vision, strategies, and goals – as well as be tied to the employee's work and career goals.

The Consulting and Research teams at Denison have prepared an overview of effective **Individual Development Plans (IDP's)** – which are often a key contributor to the Capability Development index of the Denison Culture Model.

The overview and recommendations presented below are based on a review of current research and publications as well as action plans and 'best practices' gathered from client organizations. Clients are always encouraged to consider these practices and to develop an approach that they 'own' and believe is credible in their setting.

## Capability Development

Leaders who know how to create highly involved and engaged organizations strongly encourage employee development and participation. By promoting collaboration among skilled employees, the leader can rely on voluntary effort rather than formal, bureaucratic directives. Creating a sense of ownership results in greater commitment to the organization, an increasing capacity for leadership, and a sense that each employee can 'make a difference'.

A critical component of creating a high involvement workforce is the development of employee capabilities. It is important that leaders and managers demonstrate a sincere commitment to the ongoing development of employees' skills and knowledge to meet both the current and future needs of the organization, as well as the individual development goals of the individual.

It is also important to distinguish between the 'intent' of an IDP and the vehicle or tools used to capture and track progress of the plan. Many organizations create formal documents and on-line tools to capture an individual's IDP, accompanied by a mandate that the plans be captured by a certain date and updated on a regular basis. The tools and mandates can become the focus of everyone's effort – while the intent is lost or overshadowed along the way.

**A note of caution:** Leaders and managers should make every effort to convey a sincere interest in the development of their employees and to ensure that each employee is given the resources and support necessary to achieve the developmental opportunities identified in the IDP. A failure to demonstrate that interest or to make those resources available will breed cynicism and mistrust and will ultimately undermine the IDP process.

**Effective** IDP's typically begin with a few important questions for consideration by the individual and their supervisor or manager.



Those questions include:

1. What direction is our organization taking and what capabilities will the organization need from its employees in the future?
2. What are the key strategies (priorities) for the organization and our team as we look out over the next 12–24 months?
3. What are my personal job/career goals over the next two to five years?
4. What are my greatest strengths and how can I effectively build on them? (Note: The Denison Leadership 360 assessment is a useful tool to help determine these strengths)
5. Do I have any serious weaknesses that make it difficult to do my job or will prevent me from reaching my goals and the goals of our team/organization? (Note: Again, the Denison Leadership 360 assessment is a useful tool to help determine these gaps)

After answering these questions, the employee and their manager should try to identify developmental opportunities that will:

- **Leverage** the identified strengths in a way that the employee can better serve the organization's needs and reach the individual's personal development goals.
- **Improve** in areas that represent current challenges, gaps, or growth opportunities.

It is important to remember that developmental opportunities can take many forms, and a mix of training and experiential learning should be included in the IDP.

Formal training in a classroom setting (the most common and costly option) is only one developmental opportunity.

Other excellent developmental opportunities include shadowing senior executives, mentoring, independent learning through the internet or intranet, assignment to a project team, cross-training, exposure to supervisory responsibilities, and temporary assignments in other offices. Organizations that score high in the Capability Development area often employ a range of these activities and rarely rely on only one development mechanism.

The employee's final IDP should be mutually agreed upon with the supervisor or manager and should be realistic given the resources available. The IDP becomes a non-binding contract, by which the employee makes a commitment to follow through on the IDP and the supervisor acknowledges the need to support the plan. The IDP should be reviewed and revised periodically to reflect the changing needs of the employee, team, and organization.

### Characteristics of Effective IDP's include:

- **Joint ownership:** The IDP's are co-developed and co-supported by the employee and his/her manager.
- **Alignment to organizational and team objectives:** The employee and manager can clearly articulate how the employee's development plan will support the individual, team, and organization.
- **Specific goals and objectives:** The development objectives are specific progress.

Too often the goals are general in nature, such as 'improve communication' or 'become a better team player'. Specific expectations are needed to assess progress.

- **Realistic goals and objectives:** In addition to being specific, the goals are realistic given the resources available.
- **The role of the supervisor/manager is clearly articulated:** The employee and supervisor/manager should discuss what the employee can expect from their manager, the frequency of progress check-ins, and the resources to be allocated.



## Other Capability Development Practices:

### I. Align IDP's with a comprehensive Performance Management System that includes regular feedback:

- Assess employee strength on basic job skills.
- Identify additional skills to be developed and a plan for developing those skills (through the IDP).
- Generate goals that are aligned with team/organizational goals.
- Include the **Core Values** – rating employees on how well they demonstrate the values as they do their work and interact with co-workers and customers.

### II. Stretch Assignments

- Offer employees opportunities to work on projects and assignments that stretch the individual's capabilities or to shadow employees in other parts of the organization – gaining exposure to broader organizational activities.

### III. 1-on-1 Check-ins

- Conduct regular face-to-face meetings used to check-in with the employee on a number of issues including their ongoing skill development

### IV. Mentoring Programs

- Offer mentoring and coaching – particularly to high-potential employees.

### V. Annual 360 Assessments

- Provide feedback to leaders and managers from their Direct Reports, Peers, and Boss.

### VI. Cross-Functional Task Forces

- Present employees with the opportunity to work with colleagues from other parts of the organization – expanding their understanding of the organization and



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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