



Presented by DeVry University

CAREER ADVISORY BOARD 2019 ANNUAL SURVEY

Talent Activation 2.0: The Role of the Employee

Sponsored by DeVryWORKS

Talent activation is a new way of thinking about talent management that focuses on deliberately connecting the experiences, processes, and metrics that create a productive and loyal workforce. It involves all company stakeholders to promote a strong experience across the employee lifecycle, transcending traditional HR disciplines and integrating day-to-day work into big picture company strategy.

Our 2018 talent activation survey asked HR directors and above how they were activating talent and creating specific employee experiences and development opportunities at the recruitment, onboarding, learning, and performance stages – and how they were using

technology to facilitate coordinated activities. In doing so, we provided employers with guidance to acquire and retain strong talent, plan for succession, and most importantly, close skills gaps.

When we published the research, our readers noted that our brand of talent activation put a lot of onus on the employer. They wanted to know: what role do entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level employees play in activating themselves? Uncovering this answer was the purpose of this survey, Talent Activation 2.0. Here, we explored the actions employees undertake to facilitate professional growth and achieve meaning in their everyday work lives.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **The organization can't do it alone.** Only 24 percent of hiring manager respondents cited their employees as “definitely” proactive in taking charge of their own activation and development. Hiring managers of senior-level employees, however, were more positive about the degree of proactivity.
- **The performance review is not the only game in town.** While over 60 percent still discuss employee development needs during performance reviews, nearly as many (57 percent) also do so during regular in-person or phone check-ins.
- **Employee-driven talent activation strategies are diverse.** Employees at all levels are most likely to activate via online courses and webinars and internal educational trainings, but somewhat paradoxically, senior-level employees are more likely to take advantage of mentorship opportunities.
- **Career paths are gaining flexibility.** Fewer than a quarter of respondents said that it's difficult to deviate from a clearly delineated succession plan, which may imply it's getting easier to move around established organizations and gain additional cross-functional opportunities and expertise.
- **Talent activation measurement has taken a foothold.** Only 11 percent of respondents commented that they aren't measuring the success of employee-driven talent activation. Most hiring managers have personally observed a retention increase now that employees are activated to take charge of learning and development.

MANAGER ATTITUDES ABOUT EMPLOYEE PROACTIVITY

Effective talent activation is, above all, a partnership. Our research reflected an ongoing shift from an employer-driven to an employee-driven model, but there’s work to be done. Examining the total group of hiring managers, only 24 percent cited their employees as “definitely” proactive. Hiring managers of senior-level employees, however, were generally more positive about the degree of proactivity.

Similarly, less than half (41 percent) of the total group of hiring managers “strongly agreed” that their employees recognize the importance of being learning agile (in other words, determining the new skills they need to do their jobs more efficiently and pursuing the acquisition of those skills).

Most respondents felt that organizational culture is shifting from a “we tell employees exactly what they need to do to perform their individual jobs effectively” mentality to an “employees are in the best position to determine how their individual jobs should be performed” mentality, with 72 percent of managers for all levels agreeing with the statement.

Proactivity is critically important for new leaders. Nine out of 10 hiring managers for all levels agreed with the statement “emerging managers need to take an active role in developing their leadership competencies if they are to be successful.” Fortunately, hiring managers seemed confident that this is doable via mentorship (cited by 63 percent of respondents), internal leadership courses (62 percent), on-the-job training (60 percent), and external leadership courses (53 percent).

But, hiring managers aren’t universally comfortable with employee proactivity as it pertains to innovation especially. We asked our respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “If my activated employee wants to use an innovative new approach to solve a problem associated with their role in our business, the organization and I do our best to support it even if there are risks involved.” Thirty-five percent of the total group of hiring managers “strongly agreed,” though as one might expect, this figure was higher for senior-level hiring managers (44 percent).

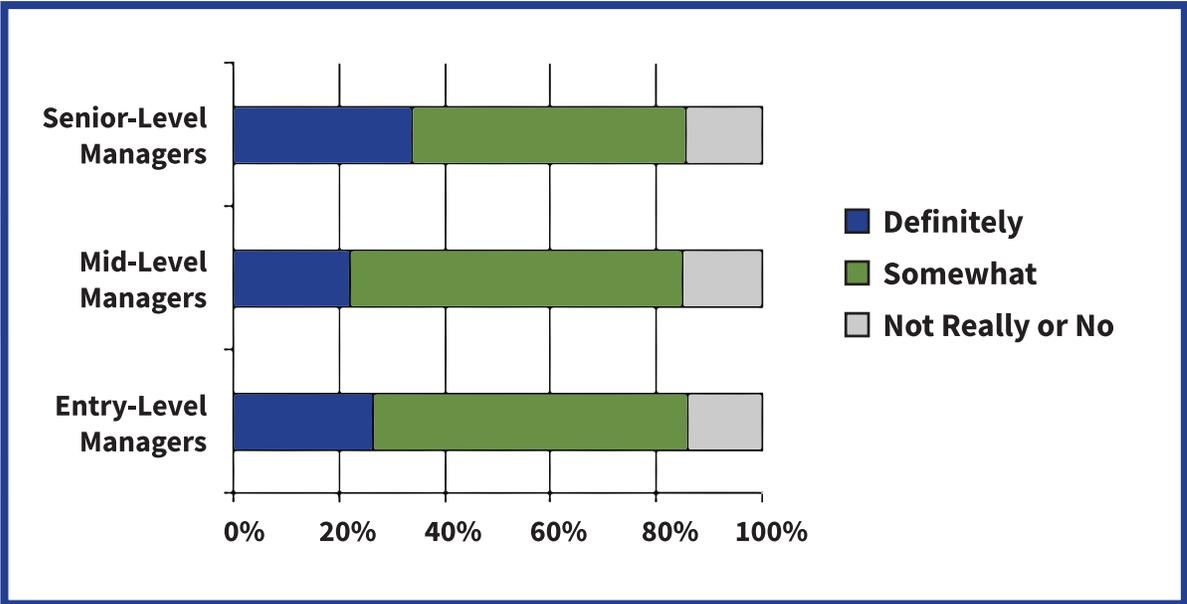


Figure 1: Hiring manager responses to the question: “In your opinion as a manager, do your employees take charge of their own talent activation via professional development and growth?”

TALENT ACTIVATION DURING THE EMPLOYEE LIFECYCLE

At various points during the employee experience, individuals can be more or less activated to advance their careers. As might be expected, employee motivation aligns with company-driven learning and development and performance management cycles. Sixty-eight percent of hiring managers at all levels reported their employees most activated during learning and development, while 57 percent said activation most frequently occurred during performance management. However, a substantial number of employees are also highly activated during the recruitment (43 percent at all levels) and onboarding (32 percent at all levels) stages.

Our respondents illustrated that talent activation is most successful when there is open and frequent communication between manager and employee. Managers for all levels want to better understand their employees' real-time development needs, so while over 60 percent still discuss them during performance reviews, nearly as many (57 percent) ask directly during regular in-person or phone check-ins, and more than two-thirds maintain an open-door policy.

Additionally, two-thirds of hiring managers for all levels work with employees to set goals during the official performance review process, while 40 percent rely on the employee to guide the process through one-on-one conversations as new challenges and opportunities arise.

Eighty-two percent of respondents learn about employee development needs through email, text, or another technology platform. But whatever method they use, managers want to be certain their conversations have depth: 86 percent of managers for all three levels "agreed" that employees feel comfortable talking to them about how they can make daily job responsibilities more personally meaningful.

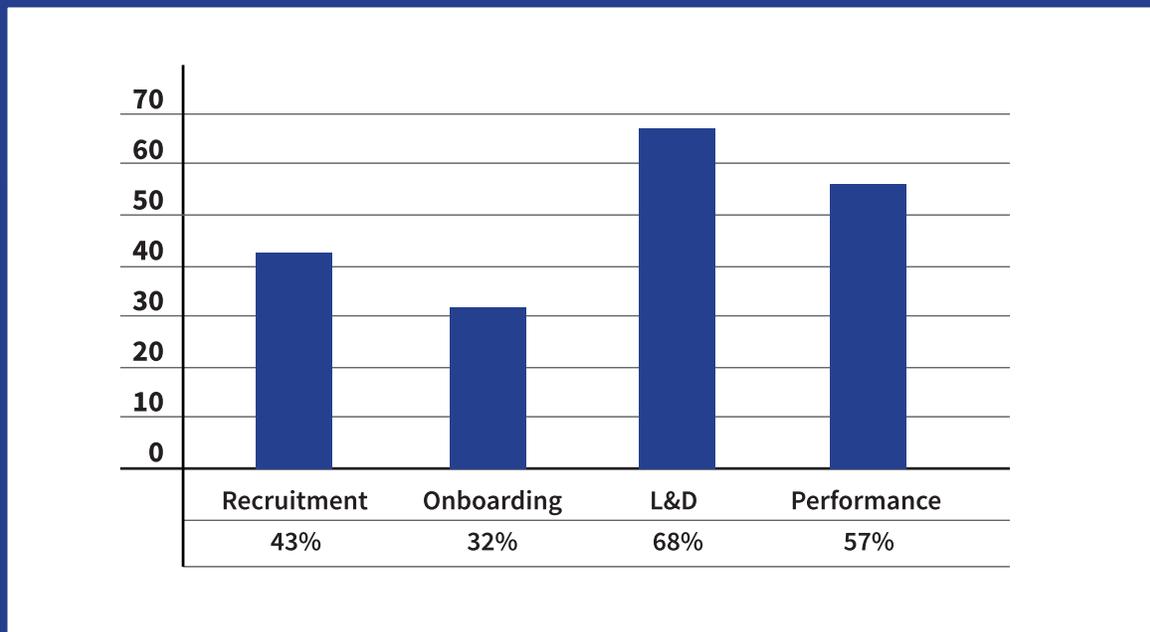


Figure 2: The employee lifecycle stages in which employees are the most highly activated.

EMPLOYEE-DRIVEN TALENT ACTIVATION ACTIVITIES

The organization plays an important role in activating talent, but employees should be equally invested. Hiring managers for all three levels shared several benefits of activated employees who own their professional development, including that employees can come to their managers with a strategy for career growth and progression (59 percent); employees have more choice about how and where they learn skills (50 percent); employees best know what they need to become well-rounded contributors (47 percent); and employees best know how to perform their jobs more efficiently (44 percent).

Respondents cited a variety of resources commonly used by activated employees, including online courses and webinars (57 percent), internal educational trainings (54 percent), tuition reimbursement (47 percent), mentorship programs (45 percent), job information portals (43 percent), and university partnerships (27 percent). Hiring managers for all levels said that employees are most likely to engage online courses and webinars and internal educational trainings, but interestingly, senior-level employees are more likely to take advantage of mentorship opportunities.

And, in general, fully activated employees work diligently to close their skills gaps: specifically, they take internal coursework (53 percent online, 38 percent in person) and external coursework (39 percent online, 29 percent in person), accept new job responsibilities (56 percent), and collaborate with other departments (44 percent).

Most organizations leverage technology to facilitate employee-driven talent activation at all three levels, including online portals (60 percent), on-demand training videos (59 percent), internal social networks (31 percent), and skill acquisition applications (31 percent).

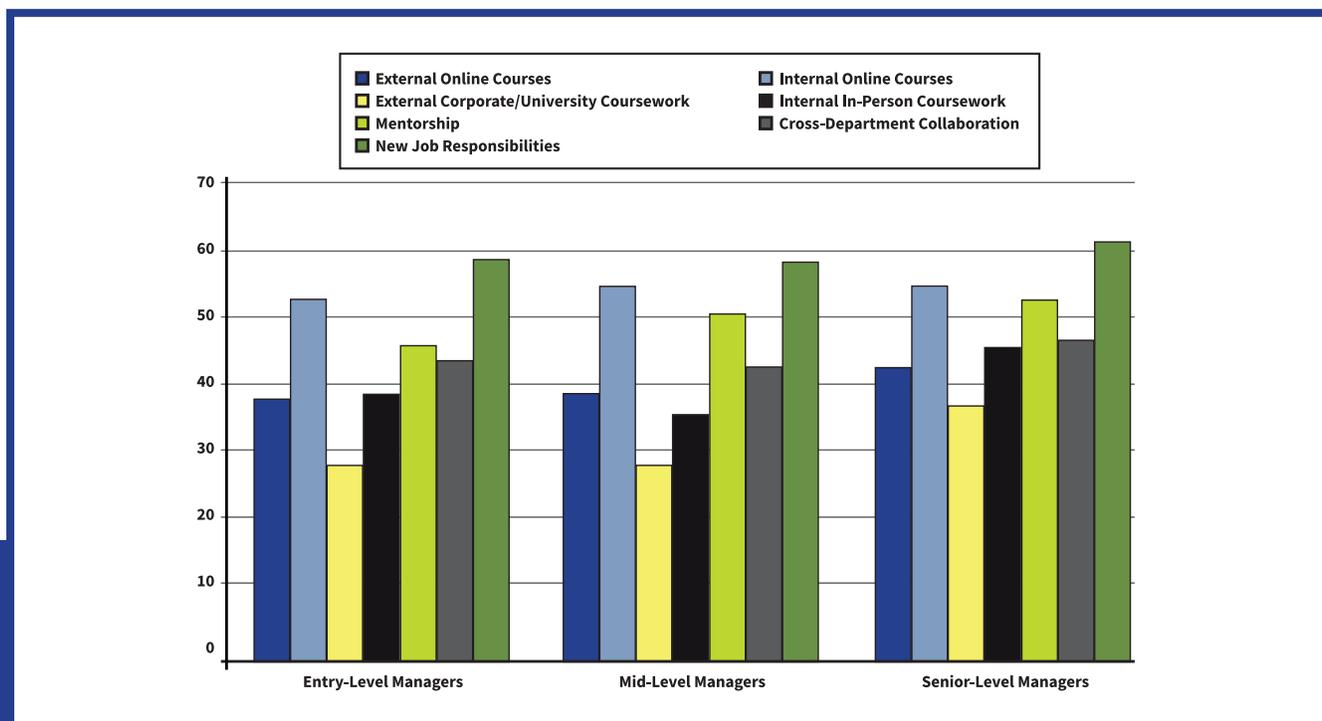


Figure 3: Hiring manager responses to the question: “What are activated employees doing to close their skills gaps?”

OBSTACLES TO EMPLOYEE-DRIVEN TALENT ACTIVATION

Activated employees are always a win/win, but sometimes there are barriers at play. Hiring manager respondents genuinely want employees to own their development and career paths, but they cited understandable concerns, including that talent activation takes the focus off immediate job responsibilities (36 percent); that activated employees might decide to go in a direction that doesn't support the business (34 percent); and that the business might struggle to retain them if they realize the grass is greener elsewhere (33 percent).

Interestingly, less than a quarter of respondents felt it was difficult to deviate from a clearly delineated succession plan. This may imply it's getting easier to move around established organizations to gain additional cross-functional opportunities and expertise.

While hiring managers for all three levels were mostly optimistic about employees' ability to close their skills gaps, some employees lack enough motivation (reported by 60 percent of respondents), time (38 percent), and resources (32 percent) to do so.

Organizational factors preventing stronger talent activation included a lack of budget (cited by 27 percent of respondents as the #1 obstacle), insufficient learning and development resources (cited by 20 percent), failure to prioritize talent activation (cited by 19 percent), and lack of executive sponsorship (cited by 15 percent).

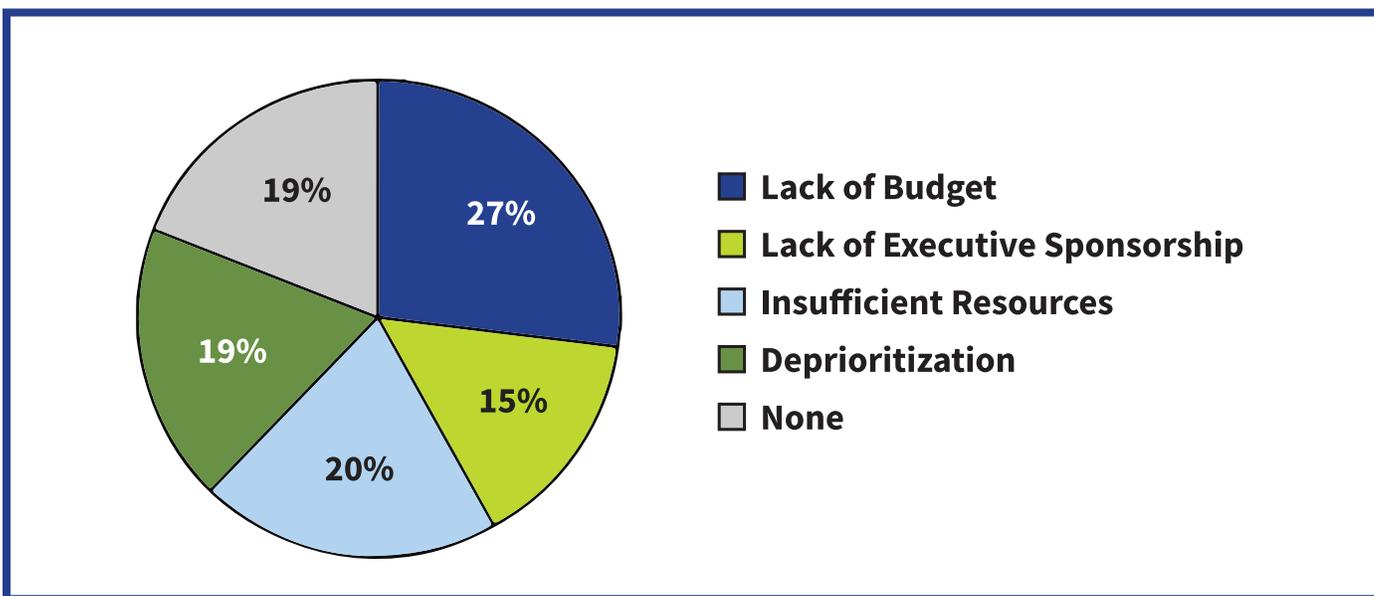


Figure 4: #1 organizational obstacles to stronger talent activation.



MEASURING SUCCESS OF EMPLOYEE-DRIVEN ACTIVATION

Fortunately, organizations have made strides to accurately assess whether employee-driven talent activation is occurring. Nearly half of hiring managers for all three levels are measuring engagement, nearly 40 percent are tracking whether employees are satisfied with learning and development offerings, one-third is measuring individual productivity, and one-third is tracking the employees who complete on-demand coursework. Only 11 percent of respondents commented that they aren't measuring the success of employee-driven talent activation at all.

Most hiring managers for all three levels have personally observed an increase in employee retention since employees have been activated and empowered to take charge of their learning and development, but more hiring managers for the senior level have seen “a lot of improvement” when compared with hiring managers for the entry and mid-levels (25 and 22 percent respectively).

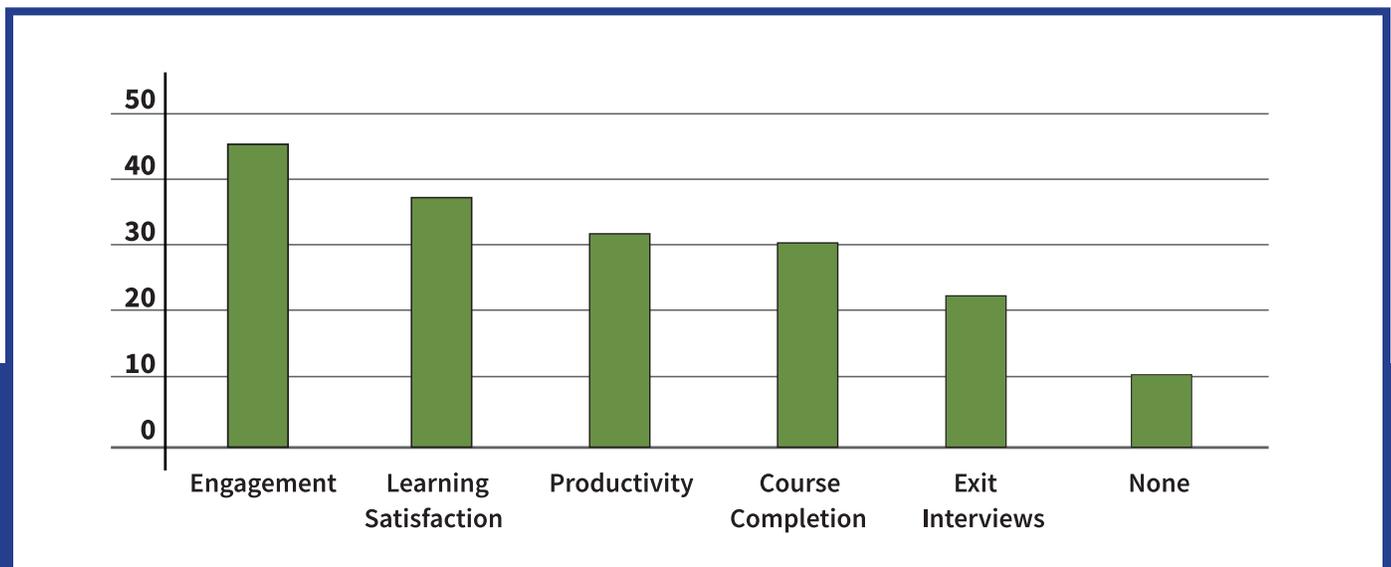


Figure 5: How companies are measuring the success of employee-driven learning and development.

KEY ACTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Based on our findings, the Career Advisory Board recommends the following next steps for organizations seeking stronger employee-driven talent activation:

Build proactivity into performance expectations. It's not enough for employees to engage in learning and development activities upon specific direction. In light of the fact that nearly all hiring managers for all levels agreed with the statement "emerging managers need to take an active role in developing their leadership competencies if they are to be successful," these employees especially should be rewarded for trying new skill acquisition techniques and creating new experiences that will drive their professional growth.

Support employees driving innovation. Encouraging your people to pursue new and compelling solutions to vexing business problems sounds good, but many employers are still risk-averse. Create experiences such as internal hackathons and intrapreneurship committees to institutionalize this form of talent activation.

Boost motivation to activate. Although our research illustrated that employee-driven talent activation is already happening, it's not universal and employees have competing priorities. Educate your people about the benefits of dedicating personal time and resources to scouting development opportunities and using them to close skills gaps.

Fund ongoing training processes. Several board members' technology backgrounds, as well as CAB's prior research on applied technology skills, lead us to suggest that because technology is advancing so rapidly, many related skills will require continuous updating. Ensure that your most popular talent activation vehicles, such as online courses/webinars and in-house educational trainings, are up to the task, and secure external partnerships with academic institutions if necessary.

Educate your top leaders. For the second year in a row, we've found that strong talent activation is hindered by a lack of budget and insufficient resources. Measurement of talent activation initiatives is a helpful start in providing your c-suite with a business case for investing in development experiences throughout the employee lifecycle.



ABOUT THE TALENT ACTIVATION SURVEY

The Talent Activation 2.0 research was conducted online within the United States by DeVry University on behalf of the Career Advisory Board in May 2019. Survey respondents included 520 US-based individuals (56 percent male, 44 percent female) with full-time positions at the supervisor level or above, in companies with more than 1,000 employees (mean company size was large at 22,000). Our respondents primarily hire, develop, and manage employee development at the entry, middle, and executive levels, and 72 percent have been doing so for more than five years.

ABOUT THE CAREER ADVISORY BOARD

Established in 2010 by DeVry University, the Career Advisory Board is comprised of leading representatives from business and academia who deliver valuable insights on today's most important career trends and provide actionable advice for job seekers. The Career Advisory Board generates original research and commentary, and creates tools, insights and resources to prepare job seekers for success. Its members include executives from DeVry University, GE, PwC, Apple, and Salesforce, as well as nationally recognized career experts. For more information, visit CareerAdvisoryBoard.org.



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