Section 1: Your Development Need(s)

Unskilled

☐ Not agile or versatile in learning to deal with first-time or unusual problems
☐ May not analyze problems carefully or search for multiple clues and parallels
☐ May be afraid to take a chance on the unknown
☐ Learns new things slowly
☐ May be stuck in historical, tried-and-true methods, uncomfortable with ambiguity and quick to jump to a solution
☐ Doesn’t look under rocks, just sticks to the obvious
☐ Looks for the simplest explanation too soon
☐ Gives up too soon and accepts a marginal solution
☐ Functions on the surface, doesn’t go deep

Select one to three of the competencies listed below to use as a substitute for this competency if you decide not to work on it directly.

Substitutes: 1,2,5,14,16,17,24,28,30,33,43,45,46,50,51,61

Skilled

☐ Learns quickly when facing new problems
☐ A relentless and versatile learner
☐ Open to change
☐ Analyzes both successes and failures for clues to improvement
☐ Experiments and will try anything to find solutions
☐ Enjoys the challenge of unfamiliar tasks
☐ Quickly grasps the essence and the underlying structure of anything

Overused Skill

☐ May leave others behind
☐ May frustrate others with his/her need for change
☐ May tend to change things too often
☐ People may interpret openness as indecisiveness or being wishy-washy
☐ May seek out change for change’s sake regardless of the situation
May not be good at routine administration or unchallenging tasks or jobs

Select one to three of the competencies listed below to work on to compensate for an overuse of this skill.

Compensators: 27, 33, 39, 41, 43, 47, 52, 59

Some Causes

- Don’t analyze successes and failures for clues
- Historical problem solver
- Not a risk taker
- Not self-confident
- Perfectionist
- Stuck in the past
- Too narrow in search for parallels

Leadership Architect® Factors and Clusters

This competency is in the Strategic Skills Factor (I). This competency is in the Making Complex Decisions Cluster (B) with: 17, 30, 51. You may want to check other competencies in the same Factor/Cluster for related tips.

The Map

Most of us are good at applying what we have seen and done in the past. Most of us can apply solutions that have worked for us before. We are all pretty good at solving problems we’ve seen before. A rarer skill is doing things for the first time. Solving problems we’ve never seen before. Trying solutions we have never tried before. Analyzing problems in new contexts and in new ways. With the increasing pace of change, being quick to learn and apply first-time solutions is becoming a crucial skill. It involves taking risks, being less than perfect, discarding the past, going against the grain, and cutting new paths.

Section 2: Learning on Your Own

These self-development remedies will help you build your skill(s).

Some Remedies

1. Trouble making sense of the issues? Dig for root causes. Keep asking why, see how many causes you can come up with, and how many organizing buckets you can put them in. This increases the chance of a better solution because you can see more connections. Chess masters recognize thousands of possible patterns of chess pieces. Look for patterns in data; don’t just collect information. Put it in categories that make sense to you. To better understand new and difficult learning, read The Future of Leadership by White, Hodgson and Crainer.
2. Where to start? Locate the essence of the problem. What are the key factors or elements in this problem? Experts usually solve problems by figuring out what the deep underlying principles are and working forward from there; the less adept focus on desired outcomes/solutions and either work backward or concentrate on the surface facts. What are the deep principles of what you’re working on? Once you’ve done this, search the past for parallels—your past, the business past, the historical past. One common mistake here is to search in parallel organizations because “only they would know.” Backing up and asking a broader question will aid in the search for solutions. When Motorola wanted to find out how to process orders more quickly, they went not to other electronics firms, but to Domino’s Pizza and Federal Express.

3. How to generalize? Look for patterns. Look for patterns in personal, organization, or the world, in general successes and failures. What was common to each success or what was present in each failure but never present in a success? Focus on the successes; failures are easier to analyze but don’t in themselves tell you what would work. Comparing successes, while less exciting, yields more information about underlying principles. The bottom line is to reduce your insights to principles or rules of thumb you think might be repeatable. When faced with the next new problem, those general underlying principles will apply again.

4. Want to speed up the learning cycle? Try different solutions and learn from the results. Don’t expect to get it right the first time. This leads to safe and stale solutions. Many studies show that the second or third try is when we really understand the underlying dynamics of problems. To increase learning, shorten your act and get feedback loops aiming to make them as immediate as possible. The more frequent the cycles, the more opportunities to learn; if we do something in each of three days instead of one thing every three days, we triple our learning opportunities and increase our chances of finding the right answer. Be more willing to experiment.

5. Need help? Use experts. Find an expert or experts in your functional/technical/business area and go find out how they think and solve new problems. Ask them what are the critical principles/drivers/things they look for. Have them tell you how they thought through a new problem in this area; the major skills they look for in sizing up people’s proficiency in this area; key questions they ask about a problem; how they would suggest you go about learning quickly in this area.

6. Need to change it up? Reverse your approach. People who think in opposite cases when confronted with a problem tend to do better. Turn the problem upside down. Ask what is the least likely thing it could be, what the problem is not, what’s missing from the problem, or what the mirror image of the problem is.
7. **Want to learn from others? Assemble a team.** Teams of people with the widest diversity of backgrounds produce the most innovative solutions to problems. Get others with different backgrounds to analyze and make sense with you. When working together, come up with as many questions about it as you can. Set up a competition with another group or individual, asking them to work on exactly what you are working on. Set a certain time frame and have a postmortem to try to deduce some of the practices and procedures that work best. Find a team or individual that faces problems quite similar to what you face and set up dialogues on a number of specific topics.

8. **Can’t see the parallels? Use oddball tactics.** What is a direct analogy between something you are working on and a natural occurrence? Ask what in nature parallels your problem. When the terrible surfs and motion of the tide threatened to defeat their massive dam project, the Delta Works, the Dutch used the violence of the North Sea to drive in the pilings, ending the danger of the south of the Netherlands flooding. Practice picking out anomalies—unusual facts that don’t quite fit, like sales going down when they should have gone up. What do these odd things imply for strategy?

9. **Mistakes? Do quick experiments and trials.** Studies show that 80% of innovations occur in the wrong place, are created by the wrong people—dye makers developed detergent; Post-it® Notes was an error in a glue formula—and 30-50% of technical innovations fail in tests within the company. Even among those that make it to the marketplace, 70-90% fail. The bottom line on change is a 95% failure rate, and the most successful innovators try lots of quick, inexpensive experiments to increase the chances of success.

10. **Too focused on a solution? Take time to ask questions and define the problem.** Too often we think first and only of solutions. In studies of problem-solving sessions, solutions outweigh questions eight to one. Most meetings on a problem start with people offering solutions. Early solutions are not likely to be the best. Set aside 50% of the time for questions and problem definition, and the last 50% for solutions. Asking more questions early helps you rethink the problem and come to more and different solutions.

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**Section 3: Learning from Feedback**

*These sources would give you the most accurate and detailed feedback on your skill(s).*

1. **Direct Boss**

Your direct boss has important information about you, your performance, and your prospects. The challenge is to get this information. There are formal processes (e.g., performance appraisals). There are day-to-day opportunities. To help, signal your boss that you want and can handle direct and timely feedback. Many bosses have trouble giving feedback, so you will have to work at it over a period of time.
2. Human Resource Professionals

Human Resource professionals have both a formal and informal feedback role. Since they have access to unique and confidential information, they can provide the right context for feedback you’ve received. Sometimes they may be “directed” to give you feedback. Other times, they may pass on feedback just to be helpful to you.

3. Internal and External Customers

Customers interact with you as a person and as a supplier or vendor of products and services. You’re important to them because you can either help address and solve their problems or stand in their way. In customer service and programs such as TQM, ISO and Six Sigma, clients and customers become a more prominent source of feedback.

4. Natural Mentors

Natural mentors have a special relationship with you and are interested in your success and your future. Since they are usually not in your direct chain of command, you can have more open, relaxed, and fruitful discussions about yourself and your career prospects. They can be a very important source for candid or critical feedback others may not give you.

5. Past Associates/Constituencies

When confronted with a present performance problem, some claim, “I wasn’t like that before; it must be the current situation.” When feedback is available from former associates, about 50% support that claim. In the other half of the cases, the people were like that before and probably didn’t know it. It sometimes makes sense to access the past to clearly see the present.

Section 4: Learning from Develop-in-Place Assignments

These part-time develop-in-place assignments will help you build your skill(s).

- Work short rotations in other units, functions, or geographies you’ve not been exposed to before.
- Study and summarize a new trend, product, service, technique, or process, and present and sell it to others.
- Benchmark innovative practices, processes, products, or services of competitors, vendors, suppliers, or customers, and present a report making recommendations for change.
- Work on a project that involves travel and study of an international issue, acquisition, or joint venture and report back to management.
- Relaunch an existing product or service that’s not doing well.
- Teach a course, seminar, or workshop on something you know a lot about.
- Manage a temporary group of “green,” inexperienced people as their coach, teacher, guide, mentor, etc.
- Volunteer to fill an open management job temporarily until it’s filled.
- Help shut down a plant, regional office, product line, business, operation, etc.
- Take on a tough and undoable project, one where others who have tried it have failed.

### Section 5: Learning from Full-Time Jobs

*These full-time jobs offer the opportunity to build your skill(s).*

#### □ 1. Change Manager

The core demands to qualify as a Change Manager are: (1) Leader of a significant effort to change something or implement something of significance. (2) Success and failure will be evident. (3) Always something new and unique to the organization. (4) Must get many others to buy in and cooperate. (5) Involves cross-boundary change. (6) High visibility sponsor. (7) Exposure to significant decision makers and key stakeholders. (8) Resistance is expected and near-universal. (9) Cost of failure is significant. Examples include: (1) Total Work Systems like TQM, ISO, or Six Sigma. (2) Business restructurings like a move away from a core competence and into a new product space or industry, i.e., American carmakers move into smaller, more fuel-efficient products. (3) Installing major systems (like an ERP or HRIS) and procedures for the first time. (4) M&A integrations, responding to major competitor initiatives that threaten the organization. (5) Extensive reorganizations. (6) Long-term post-corporate scandal recovery.

#### □ 2. Crisis Manager

The core demands to qualify as Crisis Manager are: (1) Leader responsible for an unpredictable, unique crisis of significant proportion. (2) Success and failure will be evident and visible. (3) Takes Herculean effort to solve. (4) Learning something on the fly. (5) Solution requires cross-boundary team. (6) Leader will be a spokesperson and potentially subjected to media scrutiny. (7) Hostile questioning and suspicious atmosphere is common. (8) Time pressure is extreme. (9) Solution involves working with parties outside the organization. (10) Usually short-term (up to three months). (11) Other parts of job would have to be temporarily set aside. Examples of crisis management would be: (1) A product safety recall; product or system failure. (2) Unexpected death of a CEO or senior corporate executive. (3) Unexpected termination or scandal involving a CEO or senior corporate executive. (4) Trouble with a key customer or supplier that decreases revenue or production. (5) Natural disasters. (6) Terrorist attacks. (7) Kidnapping or arrest of employees; violent crime against employees.

#### □ 3. Cross-Moves

The core demands necessary to qualify as a Cross-Move are: (1) Move to a very different set of challenges. (2) Abrupt jump/shift in tasks/activities. (3) Never been there before. (4) New setting/conditions.

4. Heavy Strategic Demands
The core demands necessary to qualify as a Heavy Strategic Demands assignment are: (1) Requires significant strategic thinking and planning most couldn’t do. (2) Charts new ground strategically. (3) Plan must be presented, challenged, adopted, and implemented. (4) Exposure to significant decision makers and executives. Examples of jobs with Heavy Strategic Demands: (1) Strategic planning position. (2) Job involving repositioning of a product, service, or organization.

5. International Assignments
The core demands to qualify as an International assignment are: (1) First-time working in the country. (2) Significant challenges like new language, hardship location, unique business rules/practices, significant cultural/marketplace differences, different functional task, etc. (3) More than a year assignment. (4) No automatic return deal. (5) Not necessarily a change in job challenge, technical content, or responsibilities. Examples of International assignments would be: (1) Managing local operations for an office located outside your home country. (2) Leading the expansion into new global markets. (3) International sales position. (4) Country/region head. (5) Managing transition for outsourced operations at an international location. (6) Head of supply chain or manufacturing for global business. (7) Global compliance manager at an international post.

6. Small Entrepreneurial
The core demands for qualifying as a Small Entrepreneurial assignment are: (1) Founder or core team member of a company or brand. (2) Personal financial stake in the business’s success or failure. (3) Success and failure will be evident. (4) Build business case and secure funding from investors. (5) Chart new market strategy for new product line. (6) Manage all aspects of the business—from product design/development, supply chain, marketing, sales, finance, HR. Examples of Small Entrepreneurial jobs would be: (1) Small business owner. (2) Among the first employees of a growing company. (3) Starting an incubator business or a new business line. (4) Launching a new brand or new product line. (5) Entering a new market. (6) Responsible for a new product/system through entire cycle.
Section 6: Learning from Your Plan

These additional remedies will help make this development plan more effective for you.

Learning to Learn Better

☐ 1. Keep a Learning Journal
Keep a learning log or diary about the issues and opportunities you’ve faced and how you’ve acted. Focus on how you’ve used your strengths and weaknesses. Deduce your effective and successful rules of thumb—what worked and what didn’t, and how you would have done it differently.

☐ 2. Learn New and Frivolous Skills to Study How You Learn
Practice learning frivolous and fun skills (like juggling, square dancing, skeet shooting, video games, etc.) to see yourself under different and less personal or stressful learning conditions. Ask yourself why that was easy while developing new personal/managerial skills is so hard. Try something harder with the same tactics.

☐ 3. Try Some New Things out of Your Normal Comfort Zone
Periodically, practice going against your grain (what’s normal for you) and getting out of your comfort zone. Try something different and opposite to your nature; take a learning risk. Explore: If you’re a thinker, act; if you’re an action person, think. Test the unfamiliar; try the new; go beyond your self-determined limits and boundaries.

☐ 4. Throw Yourself into Something New with More Vigor Than Usual
Throw yourself into a new area, something you’ve not done before so you will have to learn quickly, such as a new technical area, a new management practice, or a self-development project. Pick something that is out of your skill and strength set.

☐ 5. Preview a Plan with a Test Audience
Before committing to a plan, find someone agreeable to a wide-ranging discussion about the issue or problem you face. Explore all sides and options; go with the flow; let what you need to do emerge from the process; develop a plan as you go.

Learning from Experience, Feedback, and Other People

☐ 6. Learning from Bosses
Bosses can be an excellent and ready source for learning. All bosses do some things exceptionally well and other things poorly. Distance your feelings from the boss/direct report relationship and study things that
work and things that don’t work for your boss. What would you have done? What could you use and what should you avoid?

7. Getting Feedback from Bosses and Superiors

Many bosses are reluctant to give negative feedback. They lack the managerial courage to face people directly with criticism. You can help by soliciting feedback and setting the tone. Show them you can handle criticism and that you are willing to work on issues they see as important.

8. Openness to Feedback

Nothing discourages feedback more than defensiveness, resistance, irritation, and excuses. People don’t like giving feedback anyway, and much less to those who don’t listen or are unresponsive. To help the feedback giver, be open, listen, ask for examples and details, take notes, keep a journal, and thank them for their interest.

9. Learning from Mistakes

Since we’re human, we all make mistakes. The key is to focus on why you made the mistake. Spend more time locating causes and less worrying about the effects. Check how you react to mistakes. How much time do you spend being angry with yourself? Do you waste time stewing or do you move on? More importantly, do you learn? Ask why you made the mistake. Are you likely to repeat it under similar situations? Was it a lack of skill? Judgment? Style? Not enough data? Reading people? Misreading the challenge? Misreading the politics? Or was it just random? A good strategy that just didn’t work? Others who let you down? The key is to avoid two common reactions to your mistakes: (1) avoiding similar situations instead of learning and trying again, and (2) trying to repeat what you did, only more diligently and harder, hoping to break through the problem, yet making the same mistake again and with greater impact. Neither trap leaves us with better strategies for the future. Neither is a learning strategy. To learn to do something differently, focus on the patterns in your behavior that get you in trouble and go back to first causes, those that tell you something about your shortcomings. Facing ourselves squarely is always the best way to learn.

Learning from Courses

10. Insight Events

These are courses designed around assessing skills and providing feedback to the participants. These events can be a powerful source of self-knowledge and can lead to significant development if done right. When selecting a self-insight course, consider the following: (1) Are the skills assessed the important ones? (2) Are the assessment techniques and instruments sound? (3) Are those who are providing the feedback trained and professional? (4) Is the feedback provided in a user-friendly and “actionable” format?
(5) Does the feedback include development planning? (6) Is the setting comfortable and conducive to reflection and learning? (7) Are the other participants the kinds of people you could learn from? (8) Are you in the right frame of mind to learn from this kind of intense experience? Select events on the basis of positive answers to these eight questions.

*Only by being open to change will you have a true opportunity to get the most from your talent.* Nolan Ryan – American baseball pitcher
Suggested Readings


