ACCEL

The Skills That Make a Winning Manager

WHO PARTICIPATED?

847 Talent Development Professionals

Frontline Managers Supervise and Develop Employees
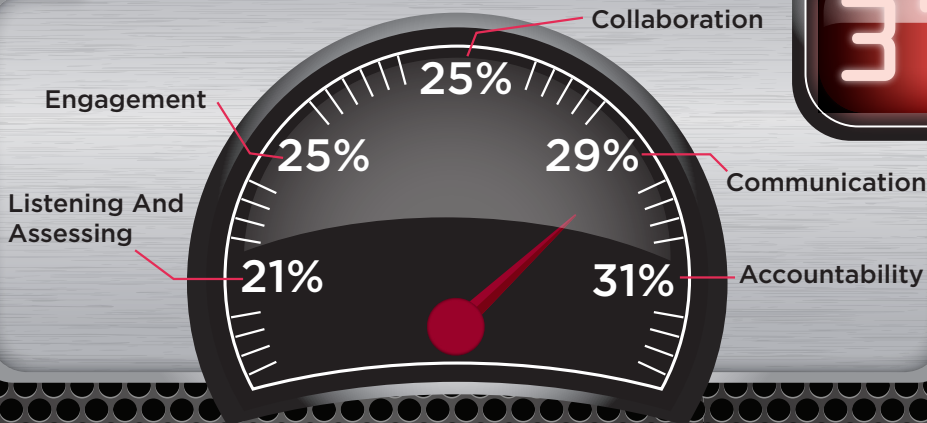
DO MANAGERS ACTUALLY EXHIBIT ACCEL SKILLS TO A HIGH EXTENT?

- Collaboration **25%**
- Engagement **25%**
- Communication **29%**
- Listening And Assessing **21%**
- Accountability **31%**

37% REWARD MANAGERS who are successful at developing their direct reports with promotions

At the Average Organization, Frontline Managers Have **15** Direct Reports

ACCEL

The Skills That Make a Winning Manager

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By design and by request, our executive education programs focus on organizational performance—not just individual performance—and being part of the change that inspires leaders to develop themselves and others. By promoting learning and growth in their direct reports, managers can help their teams gain a fresh perspective, challenge the norms, and learn to identify organizational opportunities.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> Frontline managers are critical to an organization's overall business success because they are responsible for the development of their direct reports.

In *ACCEL: The Skills That Make a Winning Manager* (hereafter, the Study), the Association for Talent Development (ATD) set out to examine the development of five specific skills—accountability, communication, collaboration, engagement, and listening and assessing—that are crucial to managerial success. Together, these five skills comprise the ACCEL model, which is a framework ATD developed. Based on a questionnaire administered to 847 talent development professionals, this Study primarily focused on identifying:

- ▶ the barriers that prevent managers from exhibiting ACCEL skills

- ▶ how ACCEL skills training is typically delivered

- ▶ what type of measurement is used to determine success in developing direct reports

- ▶ if success in exhibiting ACCEL skills is rewarded and recognized.

Frontline managers are at the very first level of management of other employees ("people managers") across a company's business operations and functions. Although these individuals manage others, they typically do not oversee the direction and strategy of the organization or entire department.

Managers are an important part of any organization, because their behavior often sets the tone for their teams. For example, Travis Bradberry, president of TalentSmart, explains how managers' lack of emotional intelligence—a key to listening and assessing—can negatively affect their direct reports. Bradberry explains that those in leadership positions often "feel that they are no longer held to the same standard of treating people well and responding to people's needs. They feel like that's no longer required of them. When in reality it's actually more of a requirement, because they are priming the emotional state of not only people who directly report to them but everyone that it trickles down to." Put simply, managerial behavior can be contagious; when managers misbehave, their direct reports will follow suit. As such, bad managers can have a profound effect on a company's bottom line. Thus, it's vital that talent development professionals focus on training managers to embody the ACCEL skills, particularly in relation to developing their own direct reports.

Interestingly, although ACCEL skills were identified by practitioners as essential for managerial success, the Study found that only 21 to 32 percent of respondents thought managers at their organization actually exhibited each individual ACCEL skill. The discrepancy between the skills practitioners think managers should possess and what skills managers actually possess is alarming, particularly given the influence they have and the role they play within an organization.

Because the actual demonstration of the ACCEL skills is so low, it's necessary to discuss the primary barriers that prevent managers from exhibiting these skills. The Study found that the majority of respondents (70 percent) thought the primary barrier was that managers do not have time or have other priorities. To overcome this barrier, talent development professionals should encourage managers to set aside time for coaching and one-on-one conversations with their employees.

Managers not being held accountable for developing their direct reports was another top barrier. Jamie Millard, author and executive partner at Lexington Leadership Partners, suggests that talent development practitioners should "define what you want managers to do [after training in ACCEL skills] to reinforce the training. Then be sure to build accountability into the training." Then, talent development professionals should clearly define and illustrate the behaviors managers should exhibit in the future. Organizations should consider rewarding, or at least recognizing, managers who effectively exhibit ACCEL skills and develop their direct reports, and having consequences for those who do not.

Given the importance of ACCEL skills, it may be somewhat surprising that nearly a third of respondents indicated that their organization does not reward frontline managers in any way for successfully developing their direct reports. Considering this finding, along with the second-biggest barrier, the results paint a grim picture for talent development: little attention—be it positive with rewards and recognition, or negative by being held accountable—is given to whether managers are developing their direct reports. This is a concerning realization because a primary function of management is to develop direct reports (ATD 2014).

WHITEPAPER

The ACCEL Model

This report introduces ATD's new management framework, the ACCEL model, which was developed to identify the five primary skills that contribute to managerial success:

- ▶ accountability
- ▶ collaboration
- ▶ communication
- ▶ engagement
- ▶ listening and assessing.

Talent development professionals should focus on helping frontline managers cultivate these essential skills. In the Study, ATD Research applied the ACCEL framework to examine the skills necessary for managers to develop the talent of their direct reports.

Building the ACCEL Framework

In late 2015, ATD Research conducted a short survey of nearly 300 talent development leaders (managers and above) to identify the top skills most associated with successful frontline managers. The ACCEL skills were selected for inclusion in the framework because they had the highest percentage of participants indicating that each contributed to success in managing others to a high or very high extent. In fact, 83 percent of participants said that communication is the skill most related to success as a manager, followed by engagement (76 percent), listening and assessing (71 percent), accountability (70 percent), and collaboration (69 percent).

83%
of participants said that communication is the skill most related to success as a manager.

Defining the ACCEL Model

Accountability: Accountability skills refer to performance management and the delegation of responsibility to direct reports. Managers who are adept at creating a culture of accountability encourage team members to be accountable for self-development and meeting their own development goals.

Collaboration: Collaboration is defined as creating an environment and culture of teamwork (in this case, the team comprises the manager and direct reports). Managers who excel in this skill foster trust and relationships between all team members, clarify team roles, and encourage cooperation toward achieving a common goal (OPM 1997). By encouraging trust and relationship building between team members, direct reports can share knowledge with and learn from one another.

Communication: Communication is defined as the exchange of information and feedback between managers and their direct reports. Communication also involves a willingness to engage in three types of conversations with employees: disciplinary, coaching, and praise. Managers who are adept at communication foster a transparent, open, and honest team atmosphere. At the individual level, effective communication—including targeted, actionable feedback—can build awareness and action toward better employee performance.

Engagement: Engagement is defined as motivating, inspiring, and involving one's direct reports. Engaged employees understand their specific role and its importance. By engaging team members, managers will have direct reports who are psychologically committed to their work and who make positive contributions to their own development and the company (Crabtree 2013).

Listening and Assessing: Listening and assessing involves the information-gathering, critical-thinking, and processing skills of a manager during interactions with direct reports. Listening and assessing also encompasses emotional intelligence, which entails recognizing one's own and others' emotions and using emotional information to guide one's behavior and assessments. Managers who are skilled at listening and assessing use these abilities to identify areas of strength and improvement in direct reports.

The Participants

In early 2016, ATD Research surveyed 847 talent development professionals about the ACCEL skills of managers in their organization. This group was different from the group of talent development leaders that was surveyed to establish the ACCEL framework. All data in the rest of this report are based on this sample's responses. Nearly half of the participants indicated that they had more than 15 years of experience in the talent development field (Figure 1). Moreover, 30 percent of respondents identified themselves as senior leaders within their organization (executives and directors), and 40 percent were managers, supervisors, and team leaders (Figure 2).

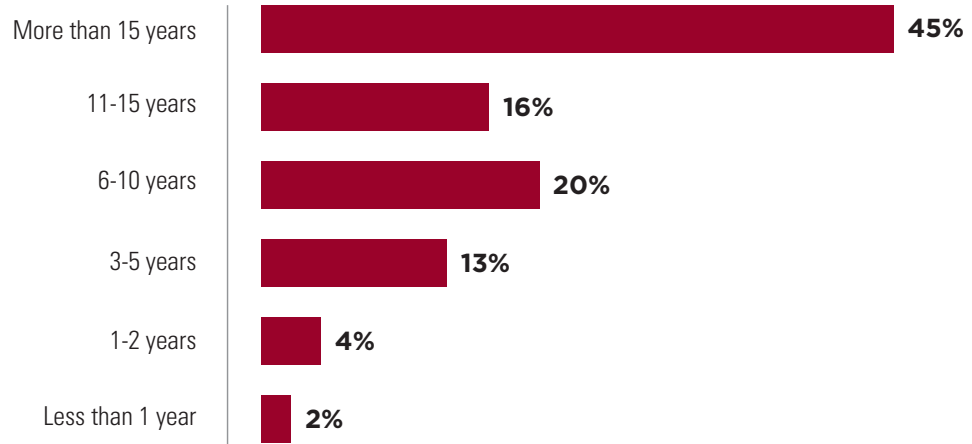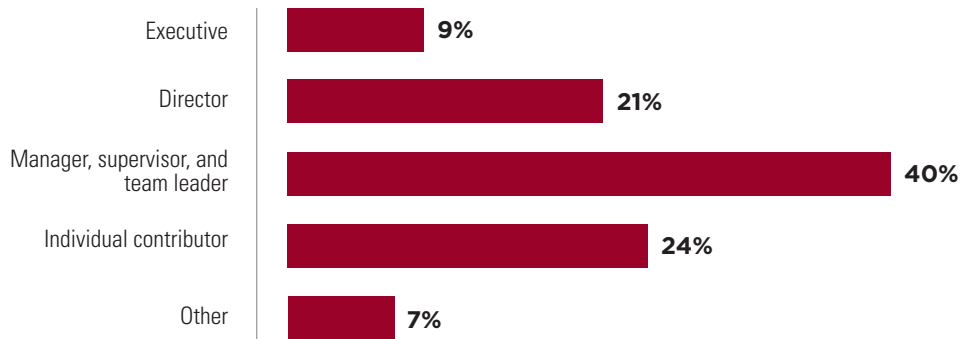**FIGURE 1:** YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN TALENT DEVELOPMENT

More than 15 years	45%
11-15 years	16%
6-10 years	20%
3-5 years	13%
1-2 years	4%
Less than 1 year	2%

FIGURE 2: SPAN OF CONTROL

Executive	9%
Director	21%
Manager, supervisor, and team leader	40%
Individual contributor	24%
Other	7%

Organization Demographics

The majority of participants work for national organizations that only operate in the country, and most respondents reported that their organization has fewer than 9,999 employees (Figure 3). Moreover, 22 percent of participants indicated that their organization has a talent development budget (defined as the total training, learning, and development budget) between $100,000 and $999,999 (Figure 4). Participants also stated that at their organization, managers have an average of 15 direct reports. Because managers are responsible for so many employees, it's crucial to equip them with the skills necessary to successfully develop direct reports.

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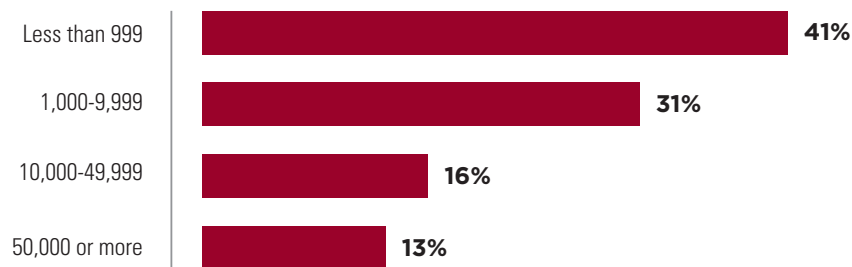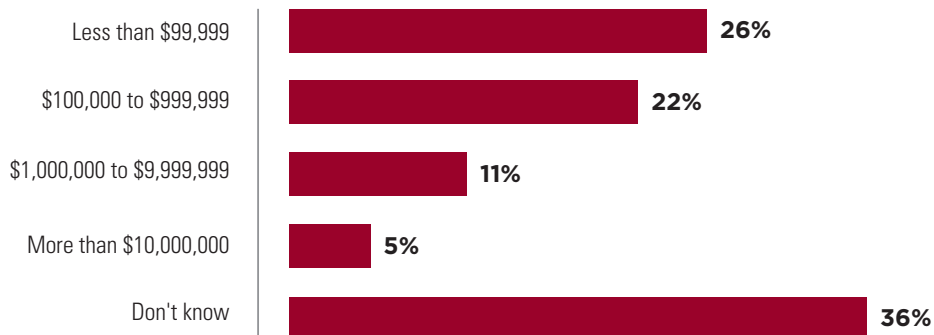The average number of direct reports a manager has.

FIGURE 3: WORKFORCE SIZE

Less than 999	41%
1,000-9,999	31%
10,000-49,999	16%
50,000 or more	13%

FIGURE 4: TALENT DEVELOPMENT BUDGET

Less than $99,999	26%
$100,000 to $999,999	22%
$1,000,000 to $9,999,999	11%
More than $10,000,000	5%
Don't know	36%

Key Findings

The data presented in this Study are intended to assist those in talent development in understanding the skills needed for managerial success. The data are also useful for managers to learn the skills necessary for developing their employees.

Several key findings in the research are:

- ▶ Less than half (46 percent) of respondents indicated that their organization had identified the specific skills related to managerial success in developing direct reports.

- ▶ The majority of participants (56 percent) reported that their organization measured managers' success in developing their direct reports by looking at the performance of their direct reports based on business metrics.

Identification of Skills Related to Success

Less than half of respondents indicated that their organization had identified specific skills related to managers' success in developing their direct reports (46 percent), while 38 percent said their organization had not identified any such skills (Figure 5). This finding may be cause for concern due to the importance of managers to an organization. Although 38 percent have not identified specific skills related to success in developing direct reports, managerial success can still be determined through performance metrics.

FIGURE 5:   SPECIFIC SKILLS IDENTIFIED IN MANAGERIAL SUCCESS
For managers who are deemed successful, has your organization identified specific skills related to their success in developing their direct reports?

16%

46%

38%

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
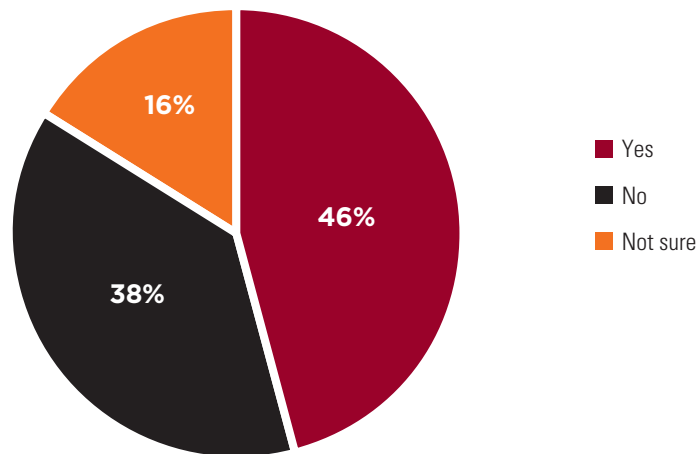
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Frontline managers are responsible for developing their direct reports, which makes them a crucial part of any organization. As such, it is necessary to devote time and training to develop frontline managers, particularly in regard to the ACCEL skills presented and described in this Study. Moreover, it is imperative that talent development professionals enable managers to overcome key barriers to effectively exhibiting ACCEL skills, including a lack of time or other priorities and not being held accountable for developing direct reports.

Recommendations

Based on the Study's findings and the insights provided by talent development professionals and subject matter experts, ATD offers the following recommendations:

▶ **Consider the content before choosing a delivery method.** Create a training program that best caters to the skill you want to teach. For example, if you're teaching communication skills with a focus on one-on-one conversations, it's probably best to have face-to-face training rather than an online course. This helps managers practice skills in a similar setting to what they will experience later on. Or, "If they are going to be communicating remotely, either via Skype or email," says Kevin Sheridan, "then that's how they should be trained. It's closer to their reality."

▶ **Focus on developing one or two skills at a time.** Create a training program that isolates one or two skills at a time, rather than all five ACCEL skills at once. Employees will find it easier to make changes in their behavior if they only have to focus on one or two skills. Practice is also key, so ask managers to utilize their new skills every day. Travis Bradberry says that by trying to incorporate that one skill into your life every day "you form new pathways in the brain that reinforce that behavior, and then you'll catch yourself doing it without even thinking about it, and that's when you move on to the next behavior."

▶ **Reinforce ACCEL skills training.** Ultimately, one training session may not be enough to get managers to truly grasp the concepts and change their behavior. Instead, offer other forms of learning—such as simulations, videos, or hypotheticals—after or between training sessions to reinforce the ideas that were taught. Bradberry advises incorporating both experiential and interactive elements to the classroom training, and practicing between sessions. He explains, "You need to practice for the behaviors to become habitual. The real key is did they get to practice afterward, not how much time is spent in the classroom."

▶ **Emphasize the importance of developing direct reports.** Make it a priority for managers to develop their direct reports by exhibiting ACCEL skills. Hold managers accountable by recognizing or rewarding their commitment to and success in developing their direct reports. Acknowledging their efforts will signal to others in the organization that it is an important achievement.

▶ **Couple online learning with in-person mentoring or coaching.** For many of the ACCEL skills, in-person learning is best; however, online learning can be more flexible and cost effective. "In-person training, particularly for engagement, is a little more effective but it may be cost prohibitive," explains Michael Lee Stallard. "Create those mentoring relationships locally [when using online learning] to help them develop those skills." Mentoring or coaching by more experienced managers and senior leaders can save costs and benefit the mentor or coach as well.

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- ▶ **Travis Bradberry**, PhD, President, TalentSmart, and Bestselling Co-Author, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*

- ▶ **Norma Dávila**, Partner, The Human Factor Consulting Group, and Co-Author, *Cutting Through the Noise* and *Passing the Torch*

- ▶ **Jamie Millard**, Executive Partner, Lexington Leadership Partners, and Co-Author, *Becoming a Can-Do Leader*

- ▶ **Wanda Piña-Ramírez**, Partner, The Human Factor Consulting Group, and Co-Author, *Cutting Through the Noise* and *Passing the Torch*

- ▶ **Frank Satterthwaite**, PhD, Professor, Johnson & Wales University, and Co-Author, *Becoming a Can-Do Leader*

- ▶ **Kevin Sheridan**, Speaker, Consultant, and Bestselling Author, *Building a Magnetic Culture* and *The Virtual Manager*

- ▶ **Michael Lee Stallard**, President, E Pluribus Partners, Author, *Connection Culture*, and Co-Author, *Fired Up or Burned Out*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND CONTRIBUTORS

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APPENDIX:
SURVEY OVERVIEW

Target Survey Population

The target survey population for this Study was talent development professionals who train managers in their organization. Overall, 847 unique participants completed the survey.

Survey Instrument

The survey was composed of a total of 22 questions, including those geared toward the demographics of respondents.

Procedure

ATD Research distributed a link to an online survey to the target population in March 2016. The survey closed in May 2016. In-depth interviews with subject matter experts were conducted at the ATD 2016 International Conference & Exposition, May 22-25.

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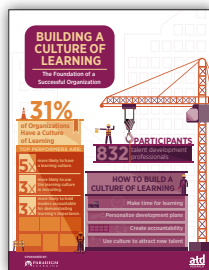
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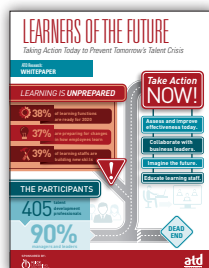
In a mere five years, learning will look dramatically different from what it looks like today, and organizational learning and development functions aren't prepared to meet the needs of tomorrow's learners. To find out what actions learning functions can take now, ATD and i4cp interviewed several leaders of learning functions that are actively imagining and preparing for the future. *Learners of the Future: Taking Action Today to Prevent Tomorrow's Talent Crisis* presents the findings. For more information, visit **www.td.org/LOTF**.

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