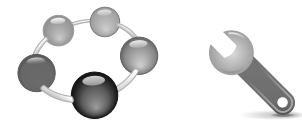


Intensity and Stretch: The Drivers of On-the-Job Development*

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MY COLLEAGUES AND I have worked with a number of organizations to develop *experience models* that describe the most critical development experiences for their leaders (see *Building Organization-Specific Knowledge About Developmental Experience* on page 37 of this book). Our work was motivated by the realization that, while experience is acknowledged to be a powerful source of learning, leadership development professionals are generally not able to provide more than the most basic guidance to aspiring leaders who seek answers to two simple questions: “Which experiences do I need to be successful in my organization?” and “What should I learn from those experiences?”

Our client work provided company-specific insight into the most important developmental experiences and the lessons that they teach. However, the approach was resource-intensive—it took a great deal of time and care in each organization. Through the process, we created experience models for several organizations. To do this, we interviewed and held group discussions with more than two hundred highly successful leaders and analyzed nearly 250 hours of interview transcripts.

*Note: Part of this contribution is adapted from the author’s book *FrameBreaking Leadership Development*, published in 2012 by Experience-Based Development Associates, LLC.

After looking back at the extensive data that we collected on the career experiences of highly successful leaders, our team posed a new research question: “What common dynamics are at play across all of the developmental experiences we have documented?” Rather than seeking to list the content of various specific developmental experiences, we now sought to understand the developmental potential of *any* experience. We distilled the essential dynamics of all of the experiences from leaders in our sample down to two fundamental dimensions: *Intensity* and *Stretch*. These dimensions are conceptually distinct measures of the developmental potential of an experience, and they combine to form the FrameBreaking™ Model.

Intensity is the extent to which an experience involves higher performance demands than an individual has faced in prior career experiences (see Exhibit 1.1). High-intensity experiences have the potential to be developmental because they push the individual to perform at a higher level, requiring full engagement and learning in order to handle difficult challenges under pressure. One must *thrive* to survive in such situations, hence the acronym THRIVE is used to summarize the dimensions of intensity.

Exhibit 1.1. Defining Intensity—THRIVE

Time pressure—Requiring action within specific, aggressive time constraints and with high costs for delays, versus being open-ended with no time constraints

Holistic responsibility—Involving responsibility for an entire outcome or set of outcomes, versus participation as one of many contributors to an outcome

Risk—Involving high financial, reputational, or other stakes and a moderate risk of failure, versus low stakes and low risk of failure

Impact—Involving results that are critical for business survival, profit, growth, or other success metric, versus being a discretionary activity yielding nice-to-have results

Visibility—Involving visibility at the highest levels and to a large population, versus being private or visible to only a small, local population

Expectations—Degree to which others expect success versus have no or low expectations for results.

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Stretch describes the extent to which an experience pushes one outside an area of expertise, background, or preparation (see Exhibit 1.2). For example, if you asked an IT manager to participate in a sales call that might be routine for a sales professional, the IT manager would likely feel pushed outside of a familiar comfort zone: “How do I act on a sales call? What does the customer want to know? What do I need to know about what we are selling?”

These and other questions would likely be raised because the IT manager's frame of reference lacks information applicable to the new situation. One must *reach* to master these new situations, hence the acronym REACH is used to summarize the dimensions of Stretch.

Exhibit 1.2. Defining Stretch—REACH

Relationships—Involving the need to interact with people who hold differing perspectives, outlooks, or viewpoints

Expertise or knowledge—Involving the need to develop expertise or knowledge in an unfamiliar area in order to be successful

Adaptability—Involving the need to handle more ambiguity than one is used to

Context—Involving the need to work within a different function/department/area or culture

How-to skills—Involving the need to spend time doing things he or she doesn't know how to do

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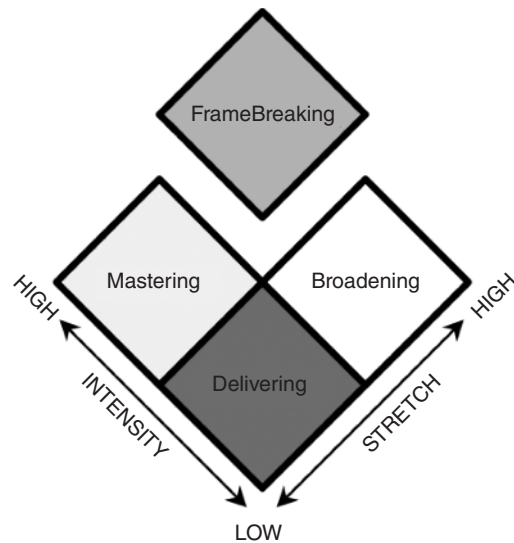
The FrameBreaking Model combines the Intensity and Stretch dimensions. The four quadrants of the model describe four broad, but distinct, types of experiences (see Figure 1.1):

1. *Delivering*—using already developed capabilities;
2. *Mastering*—taking on greater challenges within an already-established area of experience or domain;
3. *Broadening*—taking on new types of work or relating to new types of people and situations; and
4. *FrameBreaking*—handling both higher levels of challenge and new types of work or people and situations.

The FrameBreaking Model is a subjective, dynamic, descriptive, and developmental lens for thinking about experiences.

- *Subjective*: Intensity and Stretch are not objective properties of a developmental opportunity, but properties of the interaction between the opportunity and the individual. Exhibits 1.1 and 1.2 describe an illustrative range of values for each dimension of Intensity and Stretch. However, the important factor for understanding the developmental potential of an experience for an individual is the *individual's subjective experience* of each Intensity and Stretch dimension.

Figure 1.1. The FrameBreaking Model



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- Dynamic:* Throughout a career, most people will spend time in each of the four types of experience. A typical career arc will involve a wide range of situations, some of which involve utilizing well-established skills on familiar ground while others push the individual to develop in new ways. Moreover, any given assignment may involve a mix of the familiar and the new.
- Descriptive:* No one type of experience is better than the others. Although the model is referred to as the FrameBreaking Model, that is not to suggest that FrameBreaking is a “better” type of experience for leader development than Delivering, Mastering, or Broadening. FrameBreaking experiences offer the greatest developmental potential, but they also present the greatest risk for failure. And it may not be necessary for an aspiring leader to take such risks to achieve desired career goals.
- Developmental:* The model reflects growth of capabilities over time. Think of the size of the Delivering quadrant as one’s level of proven capability. Early in a career, the Delivering quadrant is relatively small. The young professional has not acquired a very large or broad repertoire of experiences and cannot make large contributions to an organization. Early on, many work activities are experienced as Mastering, Broadening, or even FrameBreaking, because they are almost all outside the small, but growing, Delivering zone. Over time, as a young professional engages in various Mastering, Broadening, and FrameBreaking experiences, the size of his or her Delivering zone grows and the capacity to contribute increases.

The FrameBreaking Leadership Development Process

You can use the FrameBreaking Model in a five-step process to help leaders reflect on the developmental patterns in their careers and construct a robust, experience-based development plan aimed at achieving both short-term results and long-term career goals. The process described below has been implemented through workshops (half-day, full-day), coaching engagements, and as self-paced instruction (with the support of a suite of online tools). In all cases, the support and involvement of others in the organization (for example, one's manager, a sponsor, a mentor, or a coach) are especially important to achieving results.

Step 1: Gain Insight from Prior Experiences and Understand Development Needs

The first step highlights the types of experience an individual has had and the key learning the individual has gained. Ask individuals to start by identifying a long-term career goal. This helps to ensure that reflection about where they have been in the past will be done in the context of where they want to go in the future. With this career goal in mind, have individuals document each step of their careers (even jobs that seem unrelated to the career goal), along with a few key pieces of information about each job: (1) key experiences in the job, (2) significant learning from the job, (3) an assessment of the type of experience that best characterizes one's time in the job (Delivering, Mastering, Broadening, or FrameBreaking), and (4) an assessment of the THRIVE and REACH dimensions that were most salient.

Next, have individuals create a visual display of the information they have just generated:

- Write each job on a sticky note using a specific color to indicate the type of experience the job represented (red = Delivering; blue = Mastering; yellow = Broadening; green = FrameBreaking).
- For each job, write the significant lessons learned on a separate white (or other contrasting color) sticky note.
- On a sheet of flipchart paper draw an x-axis at the bottom and label it "time"; draw a y-axis on the left side and label it "level of responsibility."
- Organize the first set of sticky notes onto the chart to reflect when the job occurred and the level of responsibility it entailed. Early jobs would start in the lower left corner, and subsequent jobs would progress upward to the right corner.
- Place each learning note next to its associated job.

If you conduct this exercise in a classroom setting, individuals can share their visual career summary in pairs, triads, or small groups. Each person should explain the experiences and key lessons on his or her flipchart and enlist input from others in the group in thinking through possible patterns: Are some experience types missing or over/underrepresented? Are

there other things that may have been learned from a key experience that the individual has not considered? What type of trajectory is the individual on?

Step 2: Draft a Career Story and Understand a Personal Development Arc

With the perspective gained from reflecting on the key experiences in one's career and insights gained from those experiences, ask individuals to organize their career highlights into a story with a beginning, middle, and end (in this case, the career goal). This simple and intuitive structure helps individuals discern important patterns that have influenced their careers, understand the development arc they are on, and identify the types of experiences still needed to reach their career goals. Beyond the self-awareness gained from understanding how the pieces of one's career fit together, being able to concisely tell one's story is useful preparation for discussing personal development with a manager whose support they may need.

Step 3: Identify Potential Development Experiences

In the third step, individuals use the FrameBreaking Model to identify the *right* development experiences needed for continued career progress. Ask individuals to generate possible development experiences they could pursue and to reflect on each experience using the THRIVE and REACH dimensions to compare the development potential of each. They can use the form in Exhibit 1.3 to rate an experience on each of the dimensions. An experience that involves more of a dimension (for example, time pressure) represents a greater opportunity for development than one that involves a level of the dimension that has been successfully managed in the past.

As a second part to this step, encourage individuals to consider the potential risks that may be involved in taking on development activities that will push them on an under-developed dimension. For example, what should they watch out for if an experience will involve a higher degree of visibility than one has had previously?

Step 4: Create an Experience-Based Development Plan

Once individuals have gone through the first three steps, they are prepared to formalize their development plans. In fact, the hard work of creating the development plan is already done because the preceding steps have guided the developing leader through the identification of a long-term career goal, the development needed to make progress toward that goal, an appropriate development experience given the need, the specific learning sought from the activity, and a number of potential risks to be managed. At this point, the formalization of the development plan merely involves reviewing those elements and identifying resources or support that may be needed.

Exhibit 1.3. Evaluating Your Development Experience

My development experience:

Think about the development experience relative to past experiences you have had in your career. Will this experience involve Less, About the Same, or More of each dimension below than your prior experiences have involved? Circle your responses in the space below. Items that involve More of a dimension represent potential learning opportunities.

Time pressure	Less	About the Same	More
Holistic responsibility	Less	About the Same	More
Risk	Less	About the Same	More
Impact	Less	About the Same	More
Visibility	Less	About the Same	More
Expectations	Less	About the Same	More
Relationships	Less	About the Same	More
Expertise/knowledge	Less	About the Same	More
Adaptability	Less	About the Same	More
Context	Less	About the Same	More
How-to skills	Less	About the Same	More

For any item rated “More,” ask the question: What can I learn by the way I will be pushed on this dimension in this particular experience? Write your answers below.

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Step 5: Use Ongoing Reflection to Gain the Most Out of Experience

As individuals engage in a developmental experience, it is important for them to keep focused on their learning agenda. A simple, structured set of questions for reflection on the experience and what they learned is a powerful tool to ensure that learning is kept top-of-mind. Advise individuals to regularly schedule conversations to review development progress with a manager, sponsor, coach, or mentor, and prepare for those conversations with these simple questions:

- What challenge or issue have I faced?
- Is what I am doing to handle it working?
- If what I am doing is working, why? If not, why not?
- Where else can I apply what I am learning?

The key to making this routine successful is *never* skipping the last question. This is where individuals mentally rehearse the application of newly generated insights to new situations—a critical step for making what is learned useful in the future.

Additional Applications of the FrameBreaking Model

The FrameBreaking Leadership Development process outlined here is the most comprehensive and robust application of the FrameBreaking Model. However, the model itself can be a useful tool for discussing experiences with leaders. The simple and accessible language of the model provides an intuitively appealing lens for leaders to think about where they have been and where they need to go in their careers.

The model can also be introduced quickly, so it's ideal for use in leadership development programs or talent reviews to guide thought-provoking discussions about a range of topics:

- What types of experiences are the people in a particular group or function having?
- Are too many people in Delivering experiences?
- Are top talent individuals being given the kinds of development experiences that they need to prepare them for the future?
- Which leaders are having FrameBreaking experiences, and what is being done to support them?
- Does the organization encourage siloed development by rewarding Mastering experiences and discouraging Broadening experiences?

Resources

Kizilos, M.A. (2012). *FrameBreaking leadership development: Think differently about work experiences to achieve more, faster*. Chanhassen, MN: Experience-Based Development Associates.

More information about the FrameBreaking model can be found at <http://framebreaking.com/>