

***Project 365*© Mid-Level Leadership Training and Coaching**

**Kristin J. Pronschinske, MBA**

## **Executive Summary**

As organizations navigate an increasingly dynamic business landscape, the role of mid-level leaders has become critical to achieving operational excellence and strategic alignment. These leaders serve as the link between senior executives and frontline teams, making their skills and capabilities pivotal to an organization's success. These leaders are key in translating strategic vision into operational reality, fostering employee engagement, and ensuring organizational resilience. However, many mid-level leaders lack the targeted training needed to effectively bridge this gap, leading to missed opportunities for operational efficiency, team engagement, and strategic execution.

## Table of Contents

### Introduction

The Role of Mid-Level Leaders.....	1
Challenges Faced by Mid-Level Leaders.....	1
The Need for Mid-Level Leadership Training.....	2
Research Conducted.....	3
Survey Methodology Overview.....	3
Findings and Results.....	4-8
Key points based on the research.....	8
Recommendations for a mid-level leadership development program.....	8
Leadership Training Models.....	9
Integrating Training into Organizational Culture.....	9
Measuring the Effectiveness of Mid-Level Leadership Training.....	9
Conclusion and Recommendations.....	10
References.....	11

## Introduction

*Project 365*© is an innovative training initiative designed to provide mid-level leaders with the essential skills, knowledge, and resources they need to thrive in their roles and contribute to their organizations' long-term success. Targeted at professionals with five to ten years of experience, the program draws upon a comprehensive MBA framework while addressing the specific challenges faced by mid-level managers. As the critical link between senior leadership and frontline employees, mid-level leaders are uniquely positioned to drive organizational performance, yet many lack the structured training required to fully realize their potential.

This white paper explores the significance of mid-level leadership training, the growing need for such initiatives, and their impact on organizational success. It highlights the competencies that are key to effective mid-level leadership, including communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and change management, which are vital for fostering collaboration and driving performance across teams.

Through *Project 365*©, organizations can expect to see improved team productivity, higher employee engagement, and stronger alignment with strategic objectives. The program aims to develop a more resilient leadership pipeline, ensuring organizational continuity, enhancing talent retention, and strengthening the overall agility of the workforce. By investing in mid-level leadership development, companies can build a robust foundation for sustainable success and long-term competitiveness.

## The Role of Mid-Level Leaders

Mid-level leaders play a critical role in the success of any organization. Positioned between senior leadership and frontline employees, they act as the essential bridge, translating high-level strategic goals into actionable plans and ensuring the smooth execution of daily operations. These leaders are responsible for not only managing teams and projects but also influencing organizational culture, fostering collaboration, and driving change. As such, mid-level leaders are pivotal in shaping the direction of their teams and contributing to broader organizational objectives.

## Challenges Faced by Mid-Level Leaders

Despite their critical role, mid-level leaders face a unique set of challenges that can impede their effectiveness and hinder their potential for success. The demands placed on them are often complex and multifaceted, requiring a balance of leadership, management, and communication skills. Key challenges include:

- **Role Ambiguity** Mid-level leaders frequently experience role ambiguity, which can lead to confusion regarding their decision-making authority, accountability, and scope of responsibility. Unlike senior leaders who have clear strategic mandates or frontline employees with well-defined operational tasks, mid-level managers often find themselves caught in a gray area. This lack of clarity can cause uncertainty around expectations and hinder their ability to make confident, effective decisions.

- **Performance Pressure** Mid-level managers are under constant pressure to meet ambitious performance targets, often with limited resources and insufficient support. They must navigate competing demands—balancing organizational goals, budget constraints, and the expectations of both senior leadership and their teams. This pressure to deliver results can be overwhelming, especially when leaders are required to maintain high productivity while also managing the day-to-day challenges of their teams.
- **People Management** As the primary point of contact between senior leadership and frontline employees, mid-level leaders are responsible for managing both upwards and downwards. They must excel in people management, acting as communicators, motivators, and conflict resolvers. Ensuring that their teams remain engaged, aligned with organizational goals, and motivated in the face of challenges is a critical aspect of their role. This requires emotional intelligence, empathy, and strong interpersonal skills.
- **Change Management** Mid-level leaders are often at the forefront of change initiatives within their organizations. Whether it's implementing new strategies, technologies, or processes, they must guide their teams through these transitions, all while managing resistance, addressing concerns, and maintaining morale. Effectively leading change requires a deep understanding of both the human and operational aspects of transformation. Mid-level leaders must inspire confidence in their teams, ensuring that change is not only accepted but embraced.

Given the complex and often conflicting demands faced by mid-level leaders, there is an urgent need for targeted leadership development programs to address these challenges. Without the right skills and support, mid-level managers may struggle to meet the expectations placed on them, impacting both individual and organizational performance. Training initiatives such as Project 365© are designed to equip mid-level leaders with the tools they need to overcome these challenges, enhance their leadership capabilities, and ultimately drive success within their teams and organizations.

Mid-level leaders have a profound influence on organizational performance. Their effectiveness can directly impact:

- **Employee Engagement:** Good mid-level managers foster an environment of trust, respect, and support, leading to higher employee morale, retention, and productivity.
- **Execution of Strategy:** Mid-level leaders are responsible for translating high-level strategy into actionable plans. Their ability to align team goals with organizational objectives is crucial for successful execution.
- **Innovation and Agility:** Mid-level leaders often serve as the innovation hubs within teams. Their ability to promote creative problem-solving and adaptability helps the organization respond quickly to market changes.

### **The Need for Mid-Level Leadership Training**

Despite the crucial role mid-level leaders play, many are underprepared for the challenges of leadership. While they may possess strong technical expertise in their field, they often lack the strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, and management skills necessary to lead effectively. Common skill gaps include:

- **Strategic Thinking:** Mid-level managers may struggle to connect day-to-day operations with broader organizational goals, limiting their ability to make decisions that align with long-term strategy.
- **Emotional Intelligence (EQ):** Effective leadership requires empathy, self-awareness, and social skills—traits often underdeveloped in those promoted primarily for technical proficiency.
- **Communication and Influence:** Mid-level managers must communicate effectively both up and down the organizational hierarchy, often needing to influence stakeholders and peers without direct authority.
- **Change Leadership:** Successfully leading teams through change requires a deep understanding of human behavior, resilience, and the ability to manage both the technical and emotional components of transformation.

Research suggests without proper mid-level leadership training and coaching, these leaders tend to feel higher levels of burnout, anxiety, unable to have crucial conversations, unable to provide feedback to direct reports, and an increase in higher resignations and employee turnover rates (Bhaskaran, S., Davis, A., Desbriere, S., & Wasserteil, S. 2022). Failing to invest in mid-level leadership development can have serious consequences:

- **Increased Turnover:** Managers who are ill-prepared for their roles may experience higher stress and burnout, leading to turnover within their teams.
- **Operational Inefficiency:** Poorly trained leaders may struggle to execute strategic objectives, leading to inefficiencies and missed opportunities.
- **Reduced Employee Engagement:** A lack of effective leadership can contribute to disengagement among employees, who often cite poor management as a key reason for leaving their jobs.
- **Strategic Misalignment:** Without the right skills, mid-level managers may fail to align team actions with organizational goals, resulting in miscommunication and poor execution of business strategies.

## Research Conducted

### Survey Methodology Overview:

The author of *Project 365*© developed and implemented a survey to assess the need for mid-level leadership training and explore the potential of a subscription-based model to address leadership gaps and provide development opportunities for mid-level leaders. A total of 92 surveys were distributed between April 3 and April 9, 2024. These surveys were sent to two primary groups:

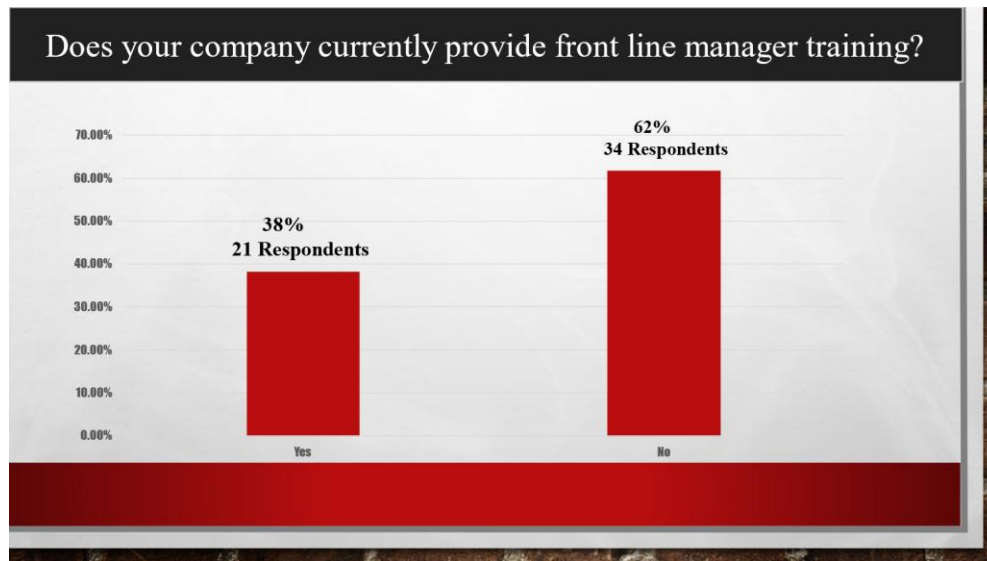
- **80 individuals** in the dairy and agricultural industries, with job titles such as Directors, Executive Directors, Vice Presidents of Sales, and Front-Line Managers.
- **12 individuals** in sectors such as healthcare, finance, pharmaceuticals, energy, and industrial manufacturing, with roles including Chief Executive Officers, Human Resources professionals, Project Managers, Chief Marketing Officers, and Technical Sales Engineers.

In total, 55 responses were received, yielding a **59% response rate**. This is considered an excellent response rate, as typical survey response rates range from 5% to 30%, and rates above 50% are regarded as outstanding (Siegle, 2024).

The email survey method was selected for several reasons: it allowed for rapid distribution to a geographically diverse group, ensured respondent anonymity, and provided a more efficient means of gathering data compared to phone calls or direct mail.

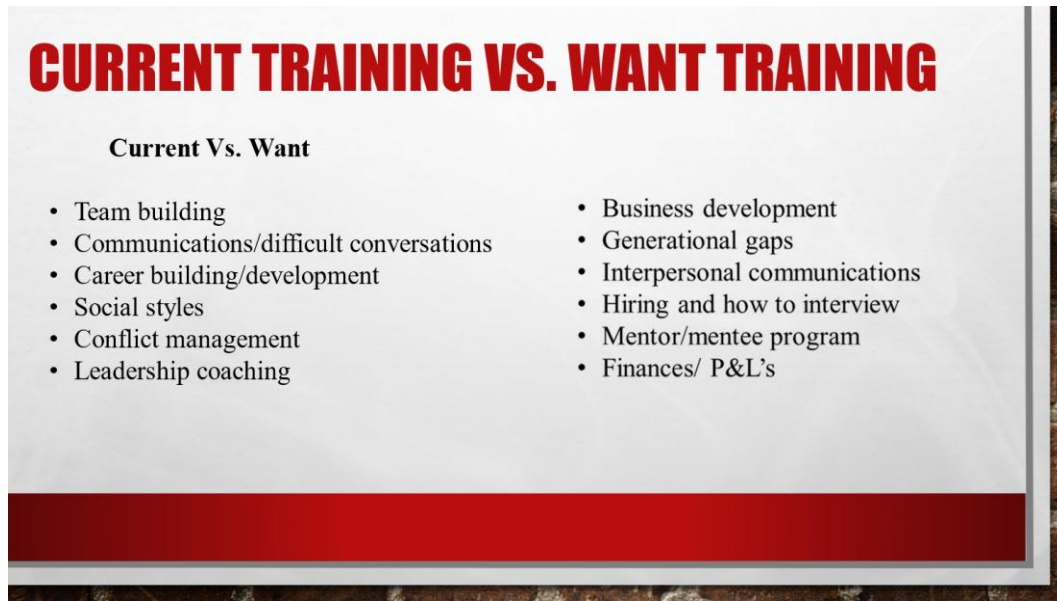
## Findings and Results

The following are data charts that were collected by the author of *Project 365*©.

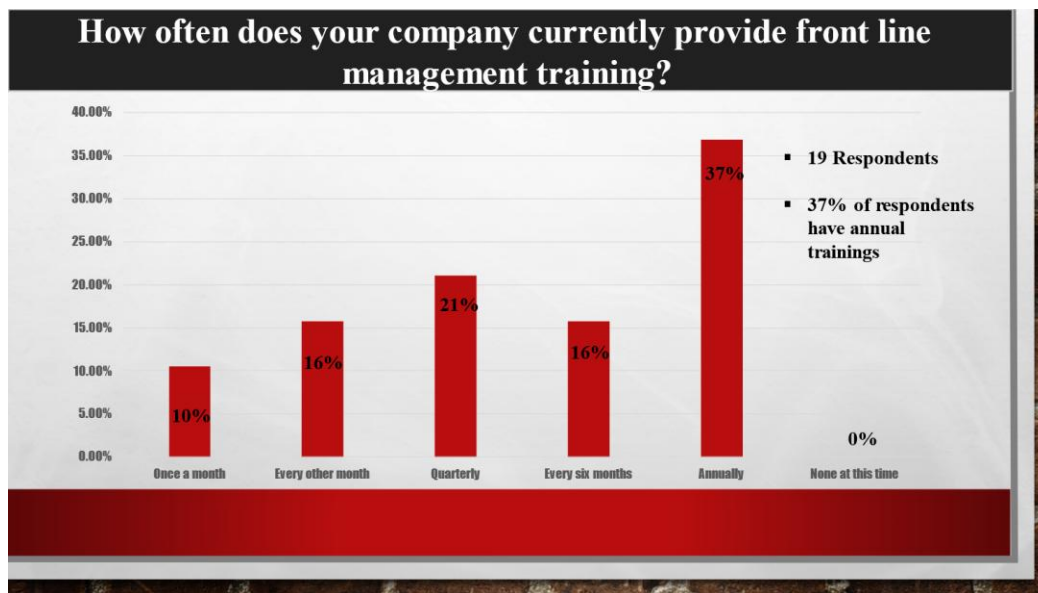


\*First question asked on the survey – Does your company currently provide front line manager training?

Another question asked on the survey was what types of current trainings are being offered to what training programs are needed.

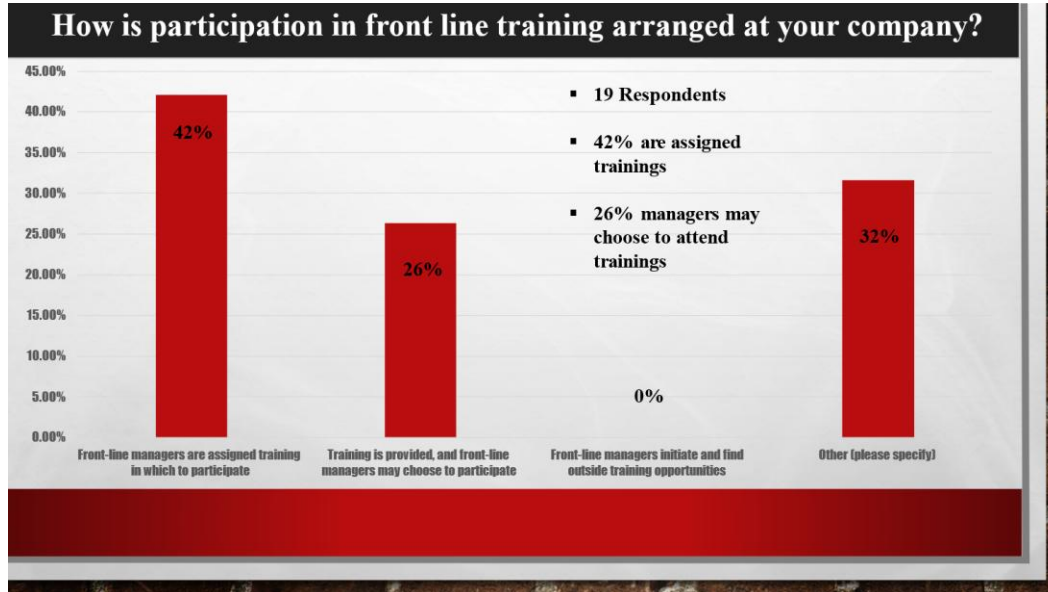


The respondents that responded “yes” to their companies providing mid-level leadership training, the question on the survey asked, “how often does your company provide this type of training?”

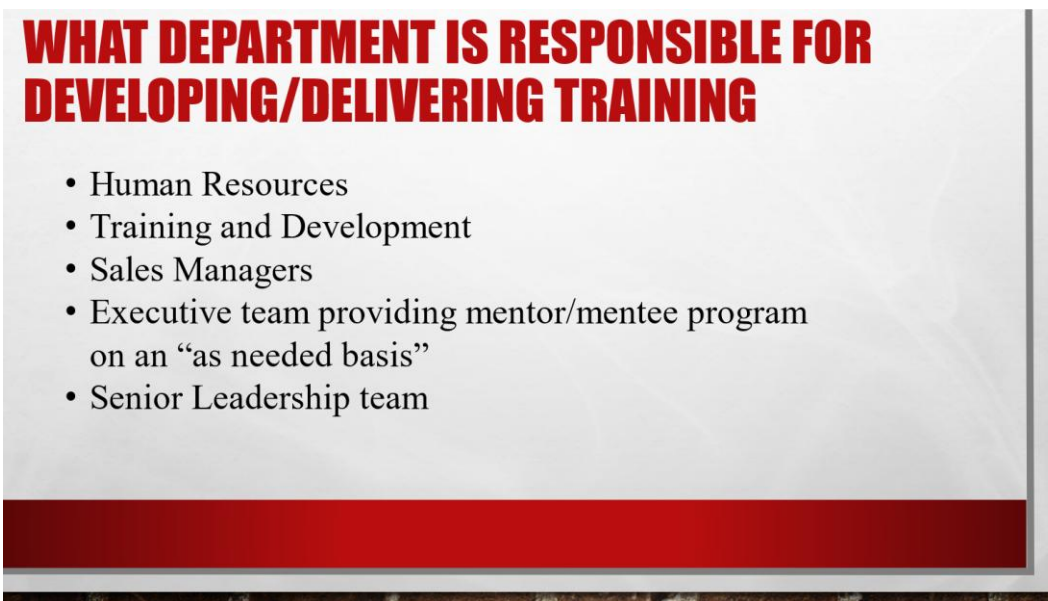




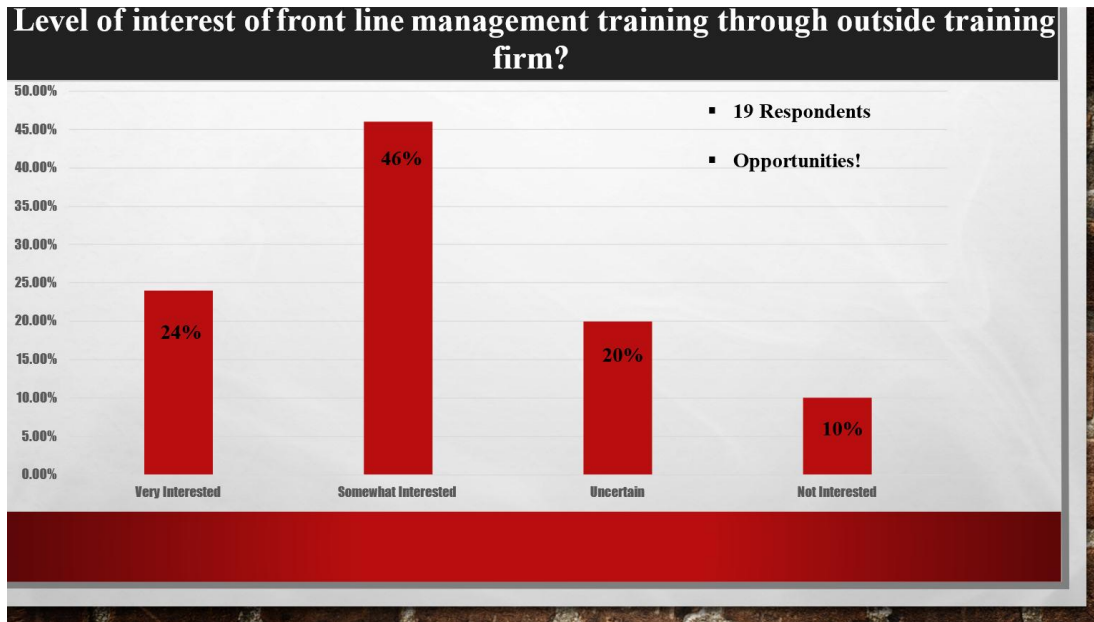
The next question asked was “how are mid-level trainings arranged at your company?”



What department is responsible for developing/delivering mid-level leadership trainings?



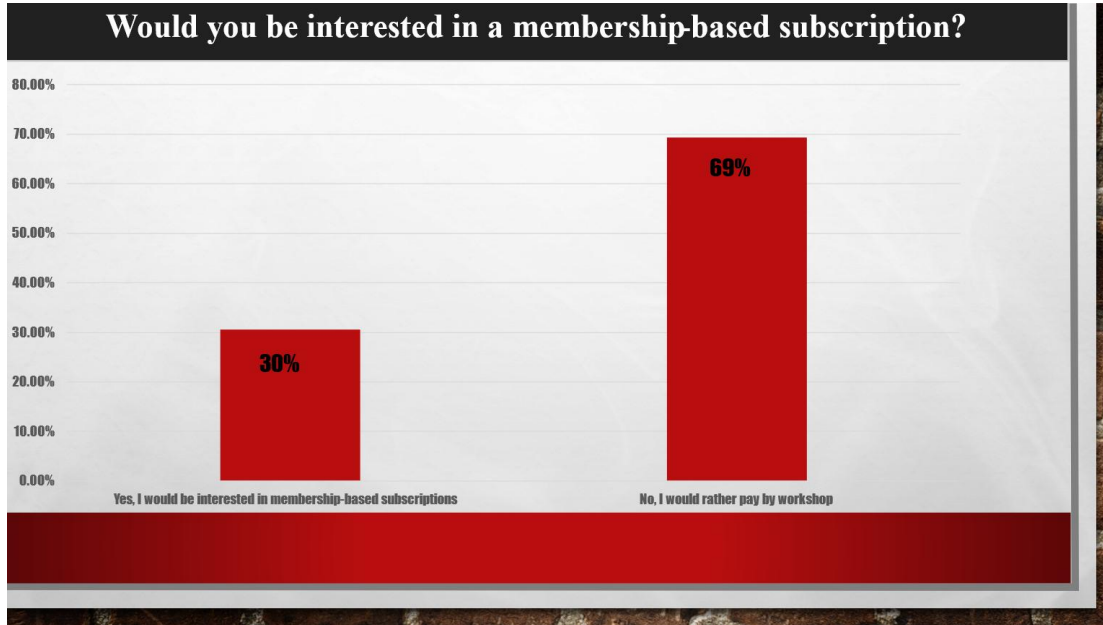
Level of interest for a mid-level leadership training through an outside training firm?



How often would you be interested in this training?



Would you be interested in a mid-level leadership training membership?



### Key Points Based on the Research:

- **Continuous Learning:** Mid-level leaders need ongoing development to adapt to the evolving challenges they face in their roles. A series of interconnected training modules could provide both foundational and advanced leadership skills, ensuring that these leaders grow progressively.
- **Coaching and Support:** In addition to training, coaching plays a critical role in reinforcing learning and addressing individual leadership challenges. Providing one-on-one coaching or mentorship opportunities as part of the program could help leaders apply new skills in real-world situations and navigate complex dynamics within their teams and organizations.
- **Tailored Content:** The training should focus on the specific challenges mid-level leaders face, such as managing up and down, balancing operational and strategic responsibilities, and navigating organizational politics. Research suggests that addressing these nuances directly can make leadership development programs more relevant and impactful.
- **Blended Approach:** A mix of self-paced learning, live workshops, and peer learning opportunities would allow for flexibility while maintaining engagement. Interactive components such as case studies, group discussions, and scenario-based exercises can enhance understanding and application.

### Recommendation for a Mid-Level Leadership Development Program:

- **Modular Training Framework** – Design a series of progressive, bite-sized modules that cover key leadership competencies, such as emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, strategic thinking, and team management.

- **Ongoing Coaching** – Integrate coaching sessions at regular intervals to support personalized development, with coaches providing guidance on overcoming leadership challenges and refining key skills.
- **Peer Learning and Networking** – Create opportunities for mid-level leaders to connect with peers from different functions or organizations to share best practices, challenges, and solutions.
- **Metrics and Evaluation** – Build in mechanisms for measuring progress through assessments or feedback surveys, allowing for adjustments to the program based on participant needs and effectiveness.

By combining structured training with personalized coaching and support, this approach could significantly enhance the leadership capabilities of mid-level managers, ultimately fostering better organizational outcomes.

## Leadership Training Models

Several effective models can be used to structure mid-level leadership training:

- **Blended Learning:** Combining classroom instruction with digital resources and on-the-job learning experiences to ensure managers receive comprehensive training.
- **Coaching and Mentorship:** Pairing mid-level leaders with senior leaders or external coaches who can provide guidance, feedback, and support.
- **Action Learning Projects:** Giving managers real-world problems to solve in a group setting, allowing them to apply leadership skills in a practical context while learning from their peers.
- **360-Degree Feedback:** Utilizing feedback from supervisors, peers, and subordinates to help mid-level leaders identify strengths and areas for improvement.

## Integrating Training into Organizational Culture

Leadership development should be an ongoing process, not a one-time event. To integrate training into the fabric of the organization:

- **Create a Culture of Continuous Learning:** Encourage a growth mindset where leadership development is seen as a lifelong process.
- **Align Training with Organizational Goals:** Ensure leadership training programs are designed to meet the specific strategic objectives and challenges of the organization.
- **Offer Opportunities for Application:** Provide managers with opportunities to apply what they learn in real-world settings, such as stretch assignments, cross-functional projects, or leadership rotations.

## Measuring the Effectiveness of Mid-Level Leadership Training

To ensure that leadership training programs are delivering results, organizations must establish clear metrics to assess their impact. These might include:

- **Employee Engagement Scores:** Measuring the impact of mid-level leadership on employee satisfaction and morale.
- **Turnover Rates:** Monitoring retention rates among teams led by trained vs. untrained mid-level managers.
- **Performance Metrics:** Tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) such as productivity, profitability, and project completion rates.
- **360-Degree Feedback:** Gathering feedback from employees on the effectiveness of their managers' leadership behaviors and decision-making.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Mid-level leaders are the backbone of an organization's operational success. Given the complexity of their role, it is essential that organizations invest in targeted training to equip these managers with the necessary leadership skills. By doing so, companies will not only improve the performance and engagement of their teams but will also create a pipeline of future senior leaders. By prioritizing mid-level leadership development, organizations can build a stronger, more resilient leadership pipeline that drives strategic alignment, fosters employee engagement, and ultimately leads to sustainable success.

## References

- Bhaskaran, S., Davis, A., Desbriere, S., & Wasserteil, S. (2022, July 21). *Bridging the Advancement Gap: What Frontline Employees Want-and what employers think they want*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/bridging-the-advancement-gap-what-frontline-employees-want-and-what-employers-think-they-want>
- Siegle, D. (2024). Survey Research Response Rates. <https://researchbasics.education.uconn.edu/survey-research-response-rates/>