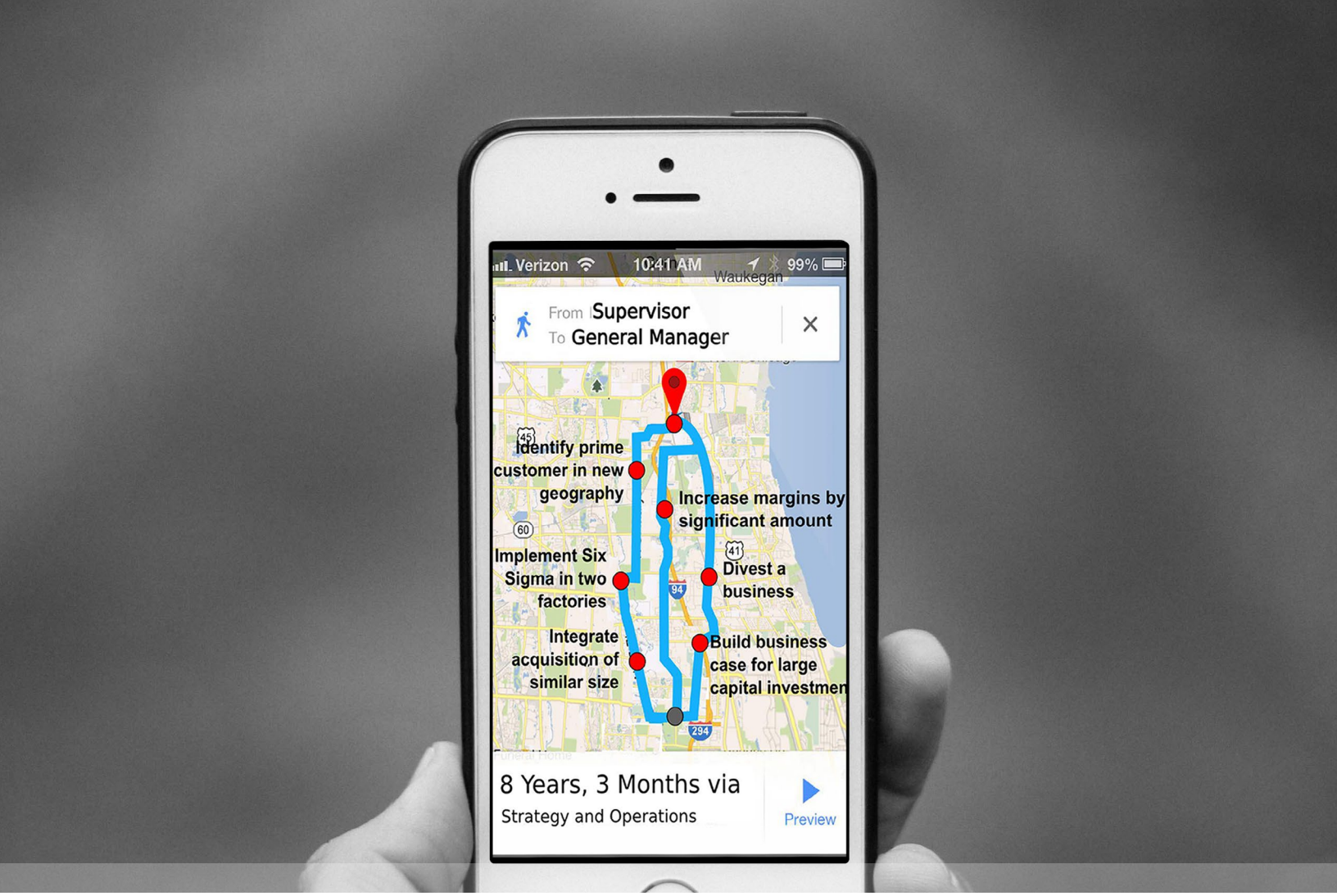

Using **Experience Maps** to Accelerate Talent Development

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Marc Effron
Talent Strategy Group

the Talent Strategy Group
SCIENCE + SIMPLICITY

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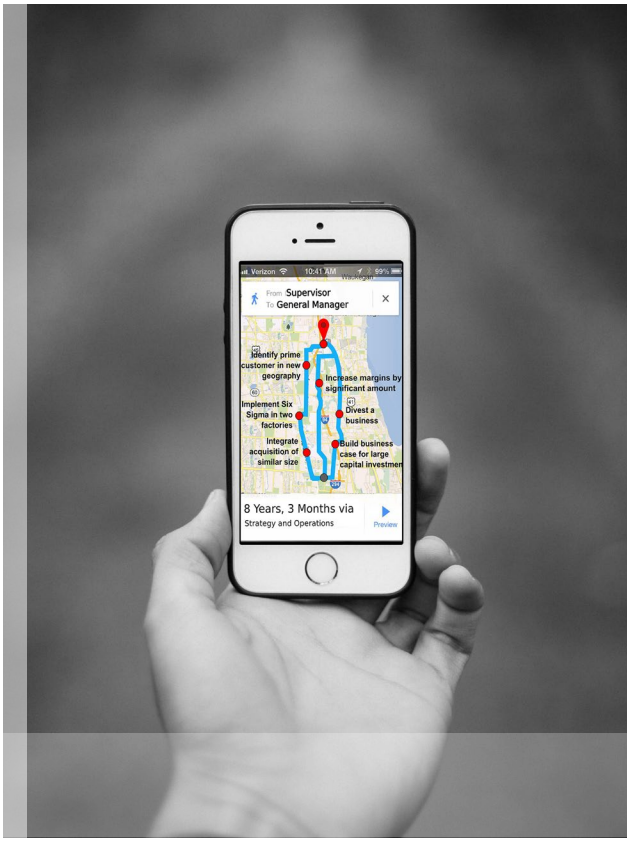

by Marc Effron, Talent Strategy Group

There's something for everyone to dislike about how companies develop talent today. Employers are frustrated that expensive learning investments yield questionable results. Managers are frustrated that complex development processes deliver little value. Employees are frustrated that companies provide them with few practical insights about how to grow their capabilities.

These frustrations play out against a back-drop of rapidly changing corporate needs, unpredictable economical cycles and increasingly project-based work that call into question whether companies should invest in talent development at all.

Given these challenges, it may be helpful to reflect on three key facts:

First, we know that better quality talent – in key roles – delivers better business results. This implies that there's potential value in activities that improve talent quality. Of course that value must be measured against the effort that activity requires.

Second, we know that our customer – the executive team – wants talent that's proven effective and available now.

Third, we know that experiences accelerate development and demonstrate a leader's capabilities. If properly applied, experiences will give our customers better talent faster.

Those combined facts suggest a rather straightforward solution to improve talent development: To get our customers better quality talent faster, give key talent powerful experiences using the most efficient possible process. Simple.

Moving from Competencies to Experiences

Unfortunately, despite widespread recognition that experiences accelerate development, few companies use them as their development framework. Instead, managers and employees are left to struggle with complex and difficult to apply competency models.

Those models rely on managers to determine how to best develop employees, which leads to training-based development plans. They don't prioritize which capabilities are most valuable to the company, so development efforts are often misdirected. They don't easily fit into a larger career framework, so employees don't understand how today's development contributes to future career growth.

In short, typical competency approaches don't help managers to accelerate development or provide employees with a guide for managing their careers. A fundamentally different solution is needed if we want to grow better talent faster.

The Experience Map

An approach called Experience Maps[1] shows promise as a far more efficient, and easier to navigate, path for talent development. Applying the *One Page Talent Management* mindset, Experience Maps answer the question: What's the easiest way to help managers and employees quickly develop new capabilities?

An Experience Map accelerates job and career development by defining the specific experiences needed to excel in a role or function. It describes the outcomes that someone must demonstrate to prove competence (i.e. create a business strategy for a $50M unit; bring a factory to ISO9001 standards) while a competency model only describes the precursors to that outcome (i.e. is a strategic thinker; understands factory management).

An Experience Map isn't intended to be an exhaustive list of capabilities or a job description. Rather, it describes the key experiences needed to grow or evaluate one's competence.

For example, a Human Resources Experience Map (see Exhibit 1) shows the core experiences that contribute to being fully competent in talent management, talent acquisition, business partnering and compensation.

1 The Experience Map concept was originally tested at Avon Products by Paige Ross and Marc Effron, with the assistance of Karen Caswell

Exhibit 1: Example of a Human Resources Experience Map

EXECUTIVE EXPERIENCES	LEAD FUNCTION OR MULTIPLE FUNCTIONS			
PROVING EXPERIENCES (get at Director and VP level)	LIFECYCLE	MANAGEMENT	GEOGRAPHIC	
	Execute successfully in different phases of corporate life cycle	Manage a sub-function, strategic project or portfolio	Work in multiple geographic locations	
CORE EXPERIENCES (get at Manager and Director level)	TALENT MANAGEMENT	TALENT ACQUISITION	COMPENSATION	BUSINESS PARTNER
	Design and implement performance management process	Partner with major executive assignment	Conduct job pricing below the executive level	Conduct investigation into potentially illegal behavior (i.e. accusations of theft, harassment)
	Design talent review and succession planning processes	Create and implement an undergraduate recruiting program	Manage the end of year bonus cycle	Roll out program from corporate HR (talent, recruiting, compensation etc.)
	Facilitate talent review session at senior levels	Create and implement an MBA recruiting program	Design and roll out a sales incentive program	Management engagement survey follow up process
	Conduct an executive assessment using personality or cognitive tools	Design an employment brand and integrate into the hiring process	Design and roll out a non-sales compensation plan	Adapt corporate process to meet local unit needs
	Create executive development plans	Conduct analysis of hiring effectiveness	Design an expatriate compensation plan	Develop and roll out HR policies at local level
	Provide executive feedback and coaching	Lead the design and roll out of new sourcing technology	Create an integrated executive compensation package	Develop and conduct on-boarding program
	Create and manage an engagement survey process		Design a compensation presentation for the board of directors	

I'm blown away by the quality of development conversations that leaders are having. All we did was shift the conversation from 'what development do you need' to 'what experiences do you need.'

The map also shows Proving Experiences where a manager demonstrates their ability to apply their core experiences in different scenarios. For example, an HR business partner who proved herself successful in a growth environment would be given the same functional challenge in a turnaround environment.

Proving Experiences both assess the manager and allow them to demonstrate the potential to move to more challenging roles. (NOTE: The map shown is an example. Experience Maps should be customized for your organization.)

Showing Promise

Companies are finding that Experience Maps make it easier to plan and manage career growth. At Parsons, a $3B+, 10,000 employee, global engineering firm, talent executive

Sherryl Stalinski first advanced the concept in 2012.

"We had 17 different versions of development templates and IDPs were largely focused on training," says Stalinski. "We needed a more effective way to grow project managers (many of whom manage $100MM+ assignments) and high potential talent."

Experience Maps were created using interviews with the VPs managing specific sectors and the corresponding division HR director. The interviews provided insights to the critical experiences that defined success in the selected roles. There were immediate benefits when the Experience Map concept was applied.

"Everyone is much more involved in development planning now. It's more practical because managers can speak from their own experience," according to Stalinski. "It took some effort to break away from traditional thinking like assuming development should happen on an annual cycle. Managers have learned to track experiences and measure an employee's progress over time."

Experience Maps are now required for all executive succession candidates within Par-sons Government Services, and her goal is that 75% of leaders will be using Experience Maps by the end of 2013.

Why They Work

Experience Maps make talent development easier because they are:

- **Easy to understand:** While competencies can feel abstract, experiences are real, tangible and familiar. "Create a strategy for a $50M business" is easier to comprehend than "Increase your strategic thinking capability."
- **Easy to assess:** It's a simple process to evaluate which experiences someone has had and which they need. Given that experiences are tangible and observable, assessing their completion is far more objective than assessing progress against a competency.
- **Focused on results:** Experience Maps describe actual outcomes that must be achieved, not the behaviors or skills that precede an outcome. As an analogy, Experience Maps describe the finished cake; competency models describe the ingredients.
- **Practical career guides:** While no guarantees are made, Experience Maps provide specific insights about what's needed to move up or over in an organization.

CASE STUDY: DEVELOPING GENERAL MANAGERS USING EXPERIENCE MAPS

ABC Manufacturing is a $10B diversified manufacturer that used experience maps to improve how they select and develop general managers.

A delayering exercise at ABC Manufacturing significantly increased Unit General Managers' (UGM) revenue and managerial responsibilities. Most UGMs had been managing businesses of $10M - $20M. They were now responsible for a collection of those businesses with revenues of $50MM - $200MM. In addition, UGMs now had greater responsibility for managing those businesses' marketing and sales activities.

ABC needed an accurate and simple process to assess and develop UGM candidates for this structure. They also wanted to communicate to UGM hopefuls at all levels how they could progress towards the role.

Their first attempt to identify UGM competencies created a multi-page document that was an amalgam of skills, behaviors and standards. It fully captured the role but provided few practical insights for development. Line executives felt the model couldn't be easily used to select or develop UGMs.

Seeking a more practical solution, ABC mined their competency interview data and conducted additional interviews to identify the specific core experiences needed for the UGM role. They categorized these experiences under the headings of Strategy, Operations, Finance and Talent, allowing them to build an integrated and easy to understand Experience Map of a successful UGM. The Experience Map is now the primary tool used to identify, assess and develop potential UGMs.

MANAGING STRATEGY	OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT	FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	TALENT MANAGEMENT
• Define a GMT strategy for a global "prime" customer • Execute a restructuring plan, execute the communication plan then monitor and track progress of the change • Identify "prime" customers in new geographic territory • Develop plan to commercialize new product/service offering • Integrate an acquired company of similar size	• Develop business plan for operations (strategy, roadmap and measurement) • Start up in a new country or location - set up production • Lead at least one ISO9000 or Six Sigma project at a $100MM revenue site • Deliver market share growth above competitors while maintaining margins • Manage in both Developing Growth and Market Growth countries	• Run a P&L through multiple/ different business cycles • Meet a challenging margin improvement goal • Divest a business or significant portion of a business • Lead a major cost reduction strategy that meets goals within timeframe • Build the business case for a significant capital investment	• Create a compelling vision for area of responsibility • Lead a major change within the organization and mobilize the organization to embrace the change • Create and execute on robust succession and development plans for talent within area of responsibility • Meaningfully increase engagement or maintain engagement at superior levels

- **More certain:** The human brain craves certainty and predictability [2] – such as knowing the potential paths for career advancement. Stress levels increase as certainty decreases. Making concepts like career progress more explicit can potentially reduce stress and the workplace distractions it causes.

Building Experience Maps

Creating an Experience Map begins with interviewing deep functional experts in each area. Those experts identify the core functional categories and the most important experiences to have in each.

These insights drive the map's content, so it's essential that those who provide input are truly experts. If you don't have functional experts in your company, use a search firm or consulting firm to provide this detail.

2 Rock, David, SCARF: A brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others, first published in the NeuroLeadership Journal, Issue 1, 2008.

Those interviews generate a long list of experiences that is reduced to those with the great power to create functional expertise. Experiences should be phrased in a way that's specific, achievable and easy to understand.

Supporting Experience Maps

While Experience Maps are a helpful tool, they're more successful when all of a company's development activities are experience-focused. Our article ***Delusions of Employee Development*** offers six changes that will support implementing Experience Maps.

One key lever we'll mention again here is to orient your development processes entirely around experiences. Examples include turning your Individual Development Plans into Individual Experience Plans and requiring two-up approval for any development activity that isn't an experience.

Managers and employees should meet to review the Experience Map and discuss which next experience makes the most business sense to pursue. It should be the manager who makes the final decision about that experience. This avoids the pursuit of unrealistic career goals or activities that aren't aligned with core business needs.

In Search of A New Solution

We know that better talent delivers better business results. We know that critical skill gaps exist that leave millions of well-paid, high skill jobs unfilled. Unfortunately, the well-intentioned complexity of traditional development solutions renders them largely useless to address these opportunities.

Experience Maps provide a new alternative for accelerating talent development. Easy to understand and easy to apply, they may be the answer to the talent development challenges that are constraining corporate growth worldwide.

States Parsons' Stalinski, "I'm blown away by the quality of development conversations that leaders are having. All we did was shift the conversation from 'what development do you need' to 'what experiences do you need' and it's made all the difference in the world."

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