

# Rethinking Manager-Led Development

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From Continuous Coaching  
to Coaching Connections



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## From Continuous Coaching to Coaching Connections

### Managers Are Being Asked the Unachievable

Imagine you're a manager with 8 to 10 direct reports. You spend about 35% of your day in meetings, almost as much time reading and responding to 120+ e-mails, and nearly 10% of your time coaching and giving feedback to your team.

Now imagine that Learning and Development (L&D) says you should be spending four times as much time developing your people—36% of your workweek. Who is going to give you more hours in the day? How is this even possible?

Now imagine that you give a good faith effort to meeting this mandate. You offer the sustained, continuous coaching L&D is calling for only to find out that this effort not only failed to boost the group's performance but actually degraded it. Does



this sound unlikely or counterintuitive? Actually, it happens time and again. Entrenched principles of employee development call for strategies that often backfire. The world of work changed, but traditional thinking about development didn't.

**There have been tectonic changes in the workplace.** As organizations shift from hierarchical to more matrixed structures, employees have to work with and through more people across the organization. As organizations change their performance management systems, including removing ratings, employees are requiring more performance feedback within work. And lastly, as career paths become less linear and more lateral, people change roles often and work on a wide range of activities across their careers.

**These changes bring new urgency to skills development.** By our estimates, nearly 40% of the skills employees apply on the job today were gained within the last year.<sup>1</sup> Two-thirds of employees expect new learning to occur outside the classroom and in the moment.<sup>2</sup> As a result, L&D needs to rethink how its programs are designed and delivered.

**L&D is betting big on managers.** While overall L&D budgets are expected to be down 3% in 2017, spending on manager development is up 11% for training, online resources, and coaching programs, among other things.<sup>3</sup> It's clear L&D is looking to managers to have a bigger role in carrying out its mission. But what does L&D expect from managers, and is it the right thing?

## New Manager Profiles Emerge

We conducted a global survey with more than 7,300 employees and managers across a variety of industries, functions, and geographies. We also talked with more than 100 heads of L&D globally and surveyed 225 L&D executives to understand their challenges and strategies. We wanted to answer the question:

### What are the best managers doing to develop employees in today's work environment?

Our analysis of nearly 90 variables evaluating demonstrated manager behaviors and their effectiveness found that managers exhibit four approaches to coaching and development:



**Teacher Managers** develop employees based on their expertise and experience, providing advice-oriented feedback and directing their employees' development.



**Always On Managers** provide continuous, frequent coaching, drive their employees' development, and give feedback across a breadth of skills.



**Connector Managers** introduce employees to others for coaching and development and create a positive team environment while providing targeted feedback to their employees.



**Cheerleader Managers** take a hands-off approach to development; give empowering, positive feedback; and enable their employees to direct their own development.

## Four Manager Approaches to Employee Development

### Teacher



"I develop my employees using **my expertise and experience.**"

### Always On



"I provide **continuous coaching and feedback** across a breadth of skills."

### Connector



"I introduce my employees to **the right people** for their development needs."

### Cheerleader



"I enable my employees to take their development **into their own hands.**"

**As you look at the manager types, ask yourself: which one would you prefer to have in your organization?**

In many ways, they all look good.

But as we reviewed our data and analysis, we found that these approaches do not have the same impact on employee performance.

Source: CEB analysis.



# Busting the Big Myths of Employee Development

Our research found some surprising conclusions about manager-led development that go against entrenched conventional wisdom.

## Myth 1

**Managers know best.** Managers should be the primary go-to resources for people development because they know their direct reports better than anyone and have the most access to their work.

**In fact, employees are better served by development that comes from their manager AND peers.**

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## Myth 2

**Managers need to spend more time on development.** Performance will improve if only managers would devote way more time to employee development—from 9% currently to more than 35% of their time.<sup>4</sup>

**In fact, our data shows no correlation between coaching time and better employee performance.**

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## Myth 3

**Managers can do it all.** Managers should be effective at coaching across a broad range of triggers, such as developing a current skill or providing career development advice.<sup>5</sup>

**In fact, most managers do not have the time or skills to provide guidance on all the development needs of their employees.**

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## Myth 4

**Employee engagement improves through more coaching.** Employees will be more proficient in their work and more engaged if their managers give them more ongoing coaching and feedback.

**In fact, continuous coaching and feedback can actually degrade employee performance.**

## Not All Manager Approaches Have the Same Impact

Let's start with the first and most obvious limitations: time and ability. Managers are already overburdened, and nearly half are not confident they can develop the skills their people need across all those career milestones.<sup>6</sup>

Their people tend to agree; only 40% of employees think their managers help them develop the skills they need in their current roles,<sup>7</sup> and nearly 5% of workers leave the organization each year because of perceived low-quality managers.<sup>8</sup>

## An Unexpected Winner

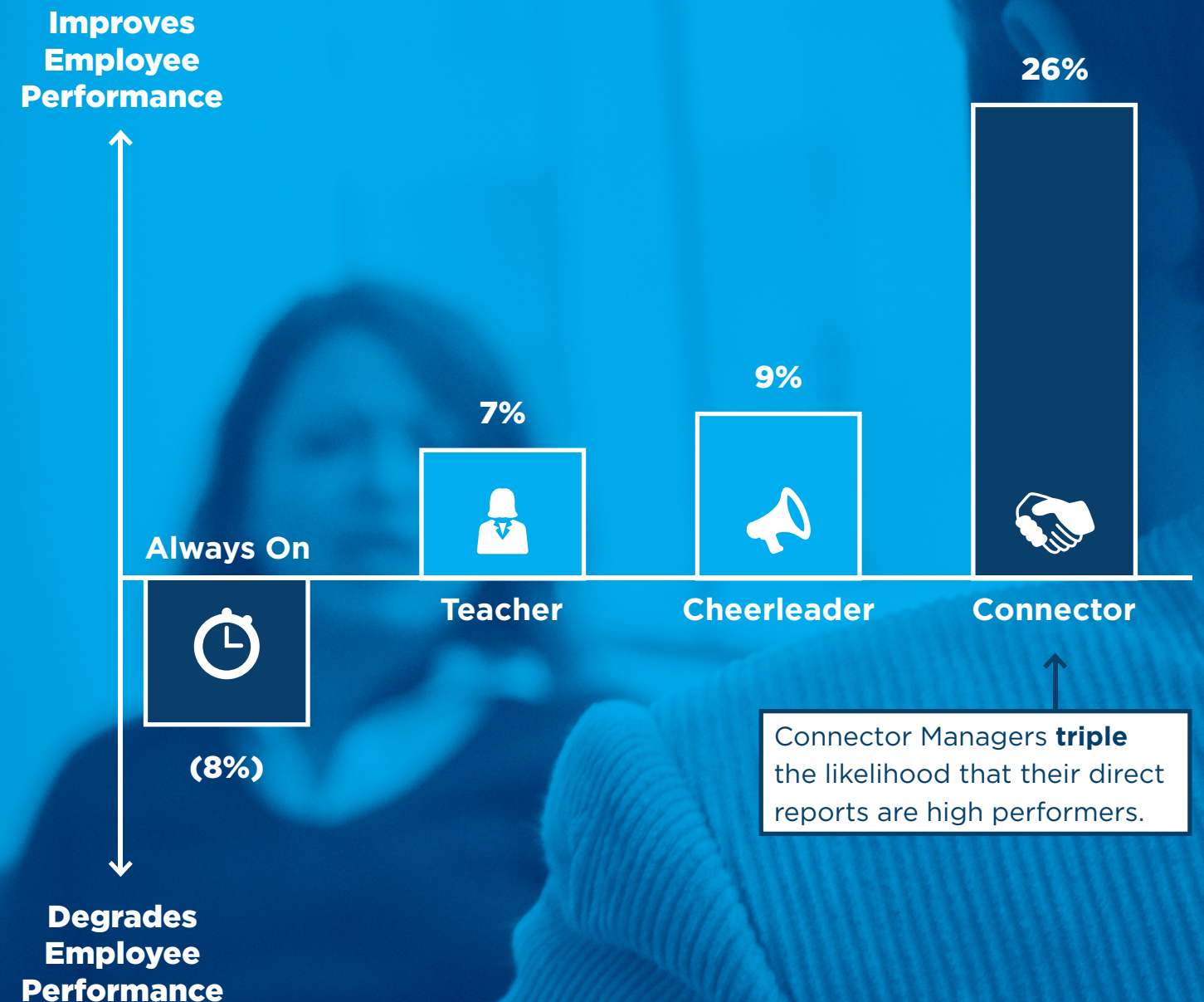
As interesting as it is that all managers fall into these distinctive profiles, it's really the second finding that has proven completely surprising. When you look at each manager's impact on employee performance (in other words, how well that employee completes their work but also contributes to others' performance), you find something very dramatic. One manager profile particularly performs above the rest, while one falls dramatically behind—going against conventional wisdom.

### So who is the best?

Connector Managers are best by a long shot, as they improve employee performance by up to 26% and triple the likelihood that their direct reports become high performers. On the other hand, the manager Heads of L&D strongly prioritized above all others—the Always On Manager—does more harm than good. In fact, the Always On Manager was the worst-performing type, actually degrading performance. Providing constant feedback can leave employees feeling disengaged. But also providing feedback on areas in which the manager lacks know-how can lead to inaccurate and misleading development—this is the negative impact on performance.

## One Winner and a Clear Loser

*Maximum Impact on Employee Performance, Given Manager Approaches to Coaching and Development*



It is generally assumed that the always-on approach is best practice. The reality is that this is doing more harm than good. The connector approach has the strongest impact.

Source: CEB analysis.

## What Connector Managers Do

The Connector Manager model makes sense. After all, 57% of employees report that they already develop new skills through their colleagues.<sup>9</sup> However, Connector Managers don't just pair up employees with colleague mentors and wish them well. They perform many core coaching activities, and they foster three distinct types of connections—to the employee, the team, and the organization.



Connector Managers **personalize for employee resonance** by tailoring development to employee needs and interests. They can then focus on making connections for quality, targeted development.



Connector Managers **power the team for peer development** by promoting reciprocal and real-time development within the team. They share individual and team development goals to ensure that development is reciprocal, relevant, and aligned to changing work needs.



Connector Managers **partner for best-fit connections** by teaching employees how to learn from new connections and helping employees expand their networks and experiences outside the manager's realm. After all, the current and future skills needed for success could exist elsewhere in the organization.



### Core Manager Activities

- Onboard new employees.
- Provide feedback.
- Communicate performance standards.
- Identify employee skill gaps.
- Promote on-the-job development.
- Have career conversations.

Source: CEB analysis.

# What Connector Managers Don't Do

The Connector Manager may be different than you think. Let's take a closer look at four common assumptions.

1

*They don't just delegate* development responsibilities; they take an active role in ensuring high-quality development connections.

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2

*They don't necessarily have a bigger network of* connections, but they help employees get more development value from those connections.

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3

*They don't coach and develop less* than other manager types; they just prioritize that time differently.

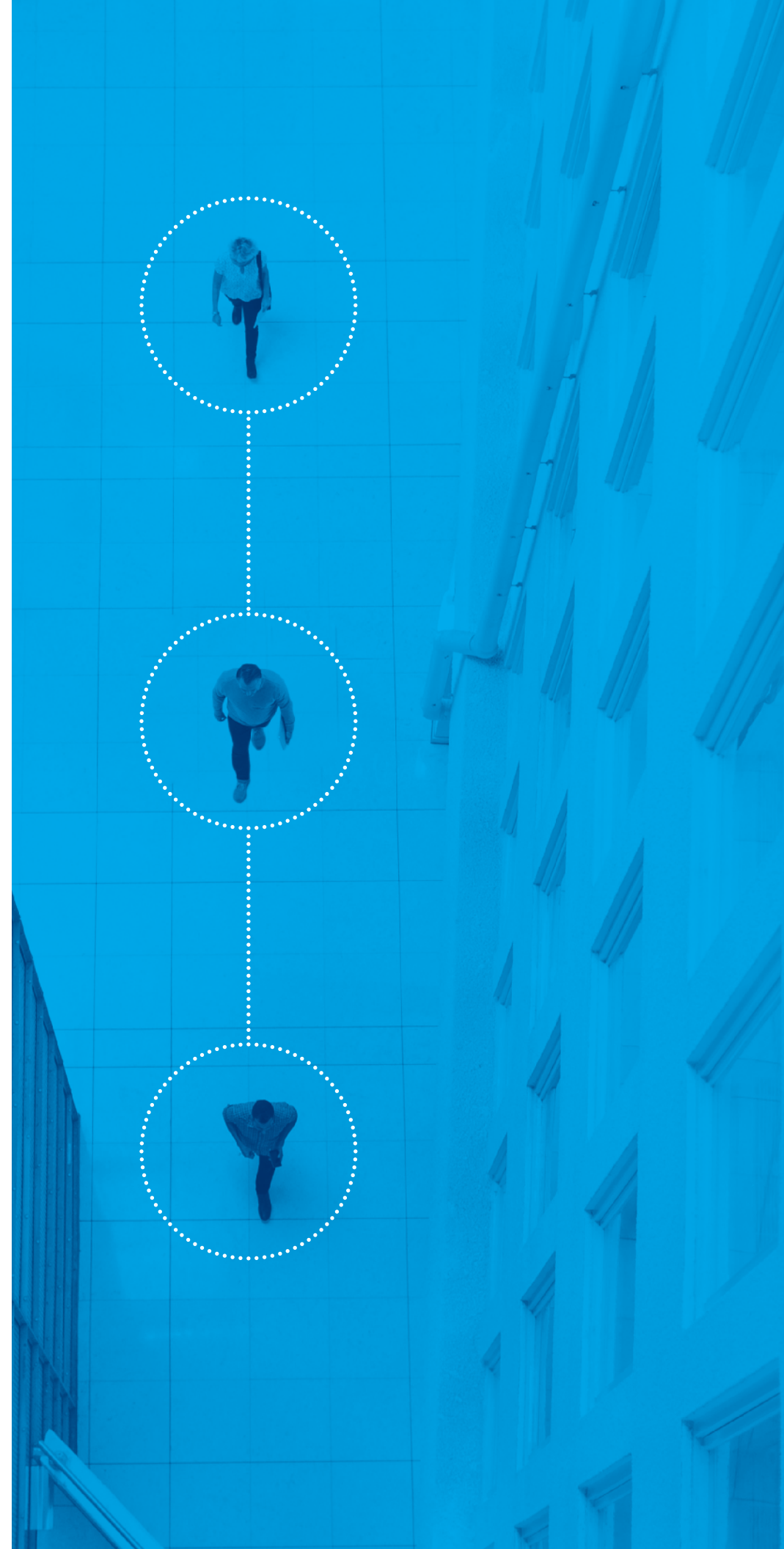
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4

*They don't neglect core development activities* such as communicating performance standards and having career conversations.

# Three Steps to Building Connector Managers

If you want to empower managers to drive better performance without alienating their people, shift your focus to developing Connector Managers across the organization. This means three things:



## 1. Develop managers who can diagnose employee needs.

Instead of asking managers to coach and develop across all of their employees' needs, focus on helping managers a) diagnose individual employee development needs and interests, and b) tailor development activities to suit.



## 2. Equip managers to foster team development.

Instead of focusing exclusively on helping managers understand how to drive individual employee development, equip them to foster team development and peer skill sharing.



## 3. Enable managers to improve connection quality.

Instead of just enabling employees to make more development connections, empower managers with the tools and processes to increase the quality of those connections.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> CEB 2017 Manager Effectiveness Survey.
- <sup>2</sup> CEB 2016 L&D Digital Learner Survey; CEB 2014 Learning Culture Survey.
- <sup>3</sup> CEB 2017 Learning and Development Agenda Poll; CEB 2017 Head of L&D Manager Effectiveness Survey.
- <sup>4</sup> CEB 2017 Head of L&D Manager Effectiveness Survey; CEB 2017 Manager Effectiveness Survey.
- <sup>5</sup> CEB 2017 Head of L&D Manager Effectiveness Survey.
- <sup>6</sup> CEB 2017 Manager Effectiveness Survey.
- <sup>7</sup> CEB 2017 Manager Effectiveness Survey.
- <sup>8</sup> CEB 2016 Turnover Benchmark; CEB 2016 Departure View Exit Survey.
- <sup>9</sup> CEB 2016 Digital Learner Survey.

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Gartner for HR Leaders provides heads of HR with access to our New Manager Mandate research and enables them to take action in a number of key areas, including:

- Building internal training programs to drive manager quality
- Preparing employees for future skills through connector coaching
- Creating a learning culture

### Learn more at:

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