



INSIGHT. EVIDENCE. INSPIRATION.

MRG Research Summary



**NEW
FINDINGS!**
2024 Edition

Stepping Up:

The Behaviors Leaders Need to Increase
(and Decrease) as they Climb the Ranks

Questions:

- Are there differences in what effective leaders do at different levels?
- What behavioral adaptations do effective leaders need to undergo to succeed at the next level?

There is an ongoing need for organizations to think about developing their leadership pipeline. Baby boomers are retiring, a trend that increased during the COVID pandemic, and Millennials, many of whom have not received any form of leadership development, are becoming the largest generation in the workforce¹. Millennials and Gen Z employees expect to be promoted at a fast pace², but many are unprepared for the next level.

Most middle managers (87%) wish they had received more management training³. Most managers (58%), regardless of level, do not receive management training and many of those who do are unsatisfied with training provided on the job. Compounding the problem is the fact that about half of managers (45%) do not feel confident in their ability to develop employees. The result is that 50-70% of senior executives fail within the first 18 months⁴.

Not all is lost. Coaches can play an important role in ensuring that managers who get promoted succeed. This research

The Study



Assessments completed between 2018 and 2023



15,452 leaders from around the world



Over 150,000 observers (bosses, peers and direct reports). Observer scores for each leader were combined and weighted by observer group.



Highly effective leaders were grouped by management level



The behaviors of adjacent groups were compared to understand what shifts are required so leaders remain effective.

The Instrument

- The LEA 360™ is a multi-rater leadership assessment
- The LEA 360™ is a uniquely powerful instrument for developing a nuanced understanding of an individual's unique approach to leadership both from their own perspective and in the eyes of their colleagues
- It measures 22 leadership behaviors and 32 leadership competencies, including a measure of Overall Leadership Effectiveness

¹ Fry, R. (2018). Millennials are the largest generation in the U.S. labor force. Pew Research Center.

² Maurer, R. (2016). Millennials expect raises, promotions more often than older generations. SHRM. Friedman, Z. (2019). Gen Z: We expect to be promoted within 12 months. Forbes.

³ Gartner says 45% of managers lack confidence to help employees develop the skills they need today. (2019). Gartner.

⁴ Sturt, D., & Nordstrom, T. (2018). 10 shocking workplace stats you need to know. Forbes.

How Do We Define Highly Effective Leadership?

Highly effective leaders were those who, according to observer ratings, scored in the top 20% on Overall Leadership Effectiveness at their management level

provides empirical insights about the specific behavioral shifts that will increase a leader's chances of success as they climb the organizational ranks from individual contributor to senior leader. With these tools in hand, coaches can fill in the developmental gaps in leadership development. Organizations will be able to build healthy leadership pipelines. Individual managers and leaders will have greater chances of success throughout their careers, especially during the tricky transitions, where responsibilities grow and uncertainty about what to do can be high.

The Findings

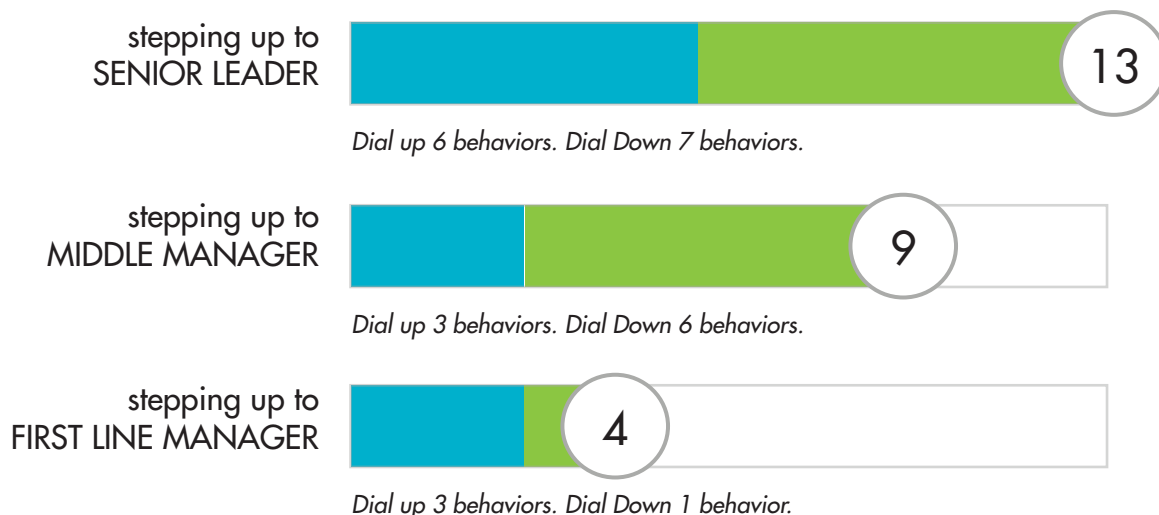
We took a developmental approach to studying how effective leadership changes by management level. Effective leaders at adjacent management levels were compared on all 22 LEA behaviors to identify behaviors that leaders and their coaches should target to continue to be successful after any transition.

Individual Contributor to First Line Manager

Highly effective individual contributors are successful in part because they spend time winning people over and getting them aligned to their point of view.

To be successful in the transition from highly effective individual contributor to highly effective first-line manager, individuals need to shift to focusing less on winning people over through persuasion and become more aligned with the organizational vision and

Behavior Shifts Required to SUCCESSFULLY STEP UP...



The leadership landscape is complex, but not all is lost. Coaches can play an important role in ensuring that managers and leaders who get promoted succeed.

the management authority system and, as a result, develop slightly more deference to authority.

At the same time, they need to rely more on other people's talents by delegating, and develop their direct reports' talents by providing direct, straightforward feedback on how they are performing.

The bottom line: New first-line managers should aim for a better understanding of organizational chain of command and pay more attention to the success of others.



First Line Manager to Middle Manager

Making the transition from a highly effective first-line manager to a highly effective middle manager requires a slightly larger shift in behavior than the prior transition.

To become effective middle managers, individuals must more fully embrace the accountability and responsibility in the leadership role, set ambitious goals for

themselves and their teams, and become even more compelling through persuasion.

At the same time, they must reduce their deference to authority and rely more on themselves as the decision maker, a reversal from the previous transition.

New middle managers should place less emphasis on structuring and organizing. They should be comfortable with a greater degree of risk and not rely solely on their professional expertise as their decisions will involve broader areas. They should maintain a certain level of formality in their interactions and ensure they are not prioritizing the needs of others over their own.

The bottom line: New middle managers should take more risks while assuming more responsibility; establish more accountability for higher level goals; rely on First line Managers for tactical execution.

Rising first-line managers do best by being slightly more deferential to their more senior counterparts. When climbing into middle or senior roles, however, effective leaders show dial down the adherence to organizational rules.



Not surprisingly, the biggest change in the leadership hierarchy involves the transition from a highly effective middle manager to a highly effective senior leader. Our research shows that being successful in this transition requires a shift in 13 leadership behaviors.

Continuing the pattern we found in the prior transitions, highly effective senior leaders must embrace the accountability and responsibility of the management role, delegate more, and become even more persuasive. Further, individuals must focus more on achieving results, being assertive and growing comfortable exploring and challenging tradition.

At the same time, highly effective senior leaders should rely less on specialized professional expertise, place less

emphasis on deference to authority, on creating structure and procedures, and compromising with others as a default. They must become even more comfortable taking risks and being selective about who they need to keep informed of ongoing issues. Finally, they must recognize that their ability to connect with others at an individual level will be reduced.

The bottom line: To succeed in the transition from middle manager to senior leader, individuals must focus on three themes:

- 1. Stay at the executive level:** Ensure all work is done at the optimum level in the organization.
- 2. Focus on achieving complex results:** Help the organization stretch to achieve ambitious, sometimes innovative goals.
- 3. Don't explain; convince:** Create a compelling case for others to align with.

The biggest behavioral challenge: transitioning from middle manager to a highly effective senior leader.



Research in Action:

4 Things Leaders Must do to Step Up Successfully

When preparing leaders for the succession pipeline, it is important to target the behaviors that are most likely to impact their effectiveness. This is especially important when leaders who are seen as effective in their current role are promoted to a higher leadership level. The findings from this research suggest that:

1. **GET OUT OF YOUR GROOVE:** Effective leadership at new levels does not require more of the same.

There is no one combination of behaviors that work across all leadership transitions. Every leader will need to learn to adopt a new pattern of behavior when they transition to a new position in the leadership ranks.

2. **STAY AGILE:** The direction of emphasis can change at different transition points.

Not only is more of the same the wrong approach to remaining effective through leadership transitions, but leaders need to recognize when the behavior that helped them succeed in the previous transition could be detrimental in the current transition. For example, deference to authority may lead to effectiveness as one starts the journey as a first line manager. But, with the expanding responsibility that follows the next two transitions, it is expected that effective leaders will rely less on those in senior roles and more on their own point of view when making decisions.

3. **BE READY FOR BIGGER AND BIGGER STRETCHES:** The distance between an effective leader at one level and an effective leader at the next level grows as leaders move up the organizational hierarchy.

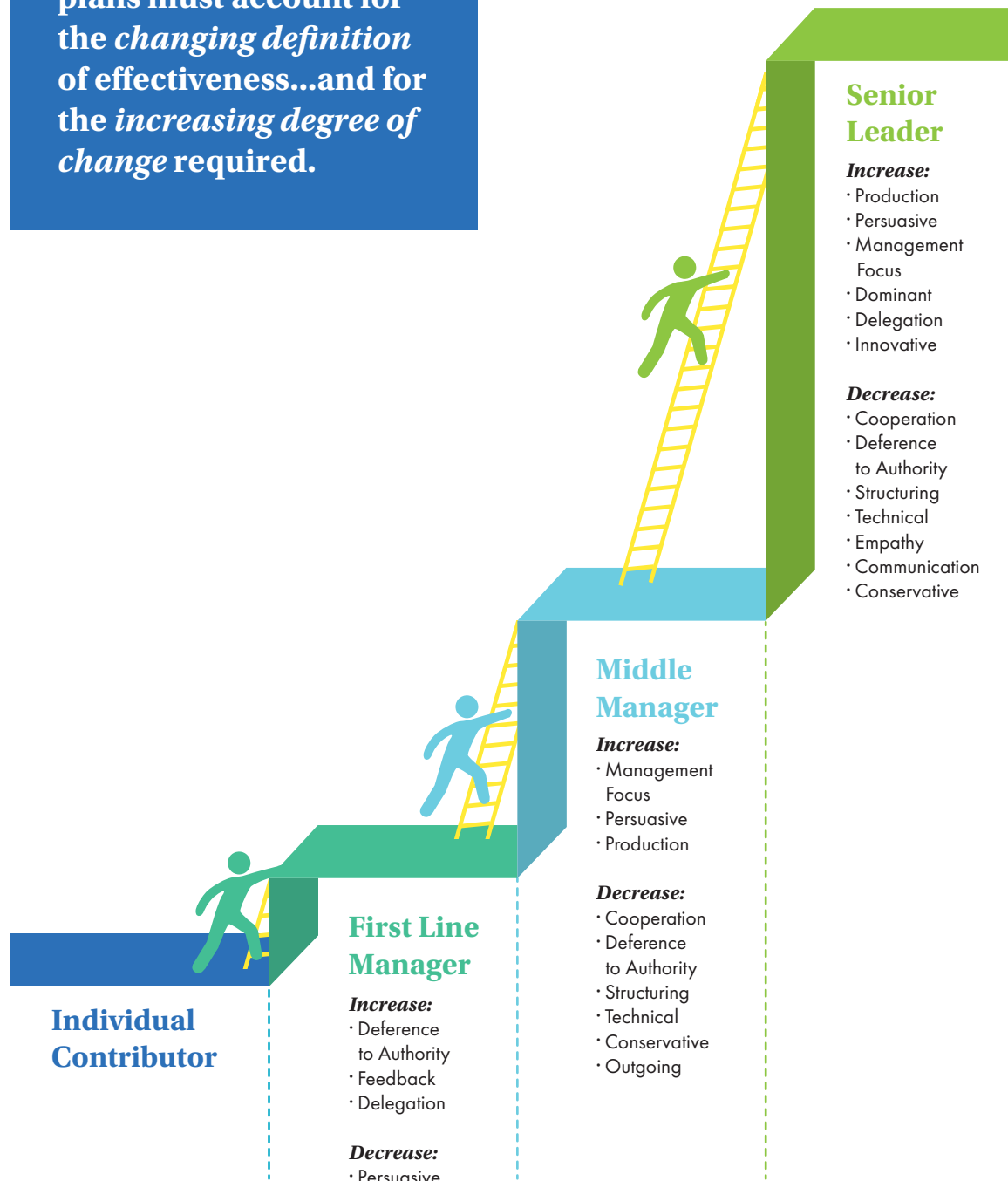
Four behavioral adjustments highlight the transition into first line manager. By the time leaders transition into senior level positions, behavioral adjustments involve as many as 13 different behaviors. As the distance between levels grows, the amount of intentionality toward development must increase as well. Expecting leaders to make the right adjustments on their own is practically impossible and any level. Coaching leaders through transitions is essential at any point but certainly more important as one moves up the ranks.

4. **GET CLARITY WITH ASSESSMENT:** Level-setting is essential in making use of research insights.

Leaders do not have a lot of time to dedicate to their own development. There is a need to prioritize action plans to ensure they are feasible and produce results. A clear understanding of current behavior patterns is absolutely essential for determining which specific shifts are important for a leader. This understanding can best be achieved through a 360 assessment that allows a leader to see both what others perceive and where they lack self-awareness of the behaviors they are projecting.

The Higher the Rank, the Bigger the Stretch

Your developmental plans must account for the *changing definition* of effectiveness...and for the *increasing degree of change* required.





About MRG

Based in Portland, Maine, MRG is a global leader in designing assessments and development programs that foster a deep self-awareness and impact people in profound and meaningful ways. The MRG suite of scientifically designed instruments, backed by more than three decades of research, includes solutions for Leadership, Motivation, Personal Development, Sales and Service.

MRG creates assessments that support unique leaders as they chart their personal paths to success and fulfillment.

The MRG Philosophy: Recognizing the unified self for nearly 40 years.

MRG believes that by recognizing the whole self, in all its complexity, you can support individuals as they channel their motivational energy, discover new opportunities for growth, and develop into the best version of themselves – personally and professionally.

The MRG Difference

SUPERIOR INSTRUMENT DESIGN. Unique questionnaire design blends forced-choice and anchored rating scale formats, resulting in a more accurate, objective instrument that is very difficult to manipulate

GLOBAL PLATFORM. Available in up to 18 languages with over 40 regional norms and a network of thousands of practitioners around the world

CONFIGURABILITY. Configure assessment results to align with your organizational competencies or development programs.

UNPARALLELED CUSTOMER SERVICE. MRG's experienced and accessible consulting and service teams support you in executing successful projects and engagements.

Get In Touch With MRG Today

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