

FAIR360 WORKFORCE SYSTEMS TOOLKIT SERIES | PART TWO

Talent Development Systems

Expanding Access, Capability and Internal Mobility

A Fair360 Workforce Systems Toolkit — Part Two of Four

Senior Leaders: See 'For Senior Leaders' in the Foundation section for your brief.

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What This Toolkit Is... and How to Use It

This is a practical guide to building a talent development **system**, not a development catalog. Most organizations have programs. Far fewer have built the connected infrastructure that helps employees understand where they can go, what they need to build, and whether the organization will actually support them in getting there.

What It Covers

Eight System Elements

Career clarity, skills architecture, experience allocation, mentoring, sponsorship, high-potential programs, ERGs, internal mobility and talent reviews. Each section includes what to do, who does it, common failure points and practical actions.

What It Does Not Do

Does not replace legal counsel, HR policy or vendor evaluation. Provides a framework and practical guidance that organizations adapt to their context, workforce and business needs.

Where It Fits in the Series

Part One: Recruitment, Hiring and Onboarding

Established how strong entry systems connect to equitable outcomes.

Part Two (This Toolkit)

Picks up at the development handoff – what happens to talent once it arrives.

Part Three: Leadership Development and Succession

The pipeline that succession depends on is built here.

Part Four: Inclusive Leadership in Practice

How leaders build trust, fairness and performance through everyday decisions.

The Data Case for Getting This Right

Fair360's benchmarking data across 150+ major employers shows that organizations strong across all five structured inclusion initiatives (mentorship, sponsorship, ERGs, high-potential programs and leadership engagement) produce dramatically better outcomes than those strong in zero to one.

44%

Lower Voluntary Turnover

Compared to organizations strong in zero to one initiatives

37%

Higher Promotion Rates

Overall promotion rates across the workforce

55%

More Equitable Advancement

More equitable advancement outcomes across the workforce

Management Attrition: The Benchmark Gap

Top 25 lowest-attrition companies in the 2025 dataset show management attrition rates as low as **0.28%** against a Technology industry benchmark of **3.5%**; thus, retaining managers at more than ten times the sector rate.

That gap is not compensation or flexibility alone. It is what happens when employees can see a future here.

The initiatives measured in this toolkit are not ancillary programs. They are the mechanisms through which those outcomes are produced.

The Eight-Element System at a Glance

A weakness in one element tends to undermine the others. A course without application does not reliably build capability; capability without visibility may not produce opportunity; visibility without fair decision-making may not produce movement.

Element	What Employees Need	What the Organization Must Provide	Key Action
Clarity	An understandable view of roles, skills and opportunities	Role profiles, career paths, criteria and honest information	Publish one role-family guide with entry paths and readiness gaps
Planning	A realistic development direction	Career conversations, priorities and follow-up	Separate one career conversation from performance review
Learning	Relevant knowledge and skills	Accessible content, practice and protected time	Connect every major learning offering to a work-based practice opportunity
Experience	Opportunities to apply and prove capability	Stretch work, rotations, projects and feedback	Review the last ten high-visibility assignments for allocation patterns
Relationships	Guidance, advocacy and context	Mentors, sponsors, networks and leader access	Define what sponsor advocacy means, and when it must happen
Visibility	Appropriate recognition of contribution and readiness	Fair exposure, talent discussions and evidence	Ask: who is performing well but not being discussed?
Mobility	A credible path into new work	Internal jobs, projects, transitions and manager support	Test whether employees would feel safe exploring an internal role
Measurement	Confidence that effort leads somewhere	Outcome data, accountability and system improvement	Connect program participation to mobility, retention and advancement data

Who Uses Which Parts: Quick-Reference by Audience

Note: Section references are by title. Use the Table of Contents to locate each section.

Your Role	Start Here	Core Sections
Managers	Manager's Role section, What Managers Can Say, Development Planning	Opportunity Architecture, Manager Rhythm, Career Conversations, Stretch Work, Talent Reviews
Talent Development and Learning Teams	Eight-Element System, Opportunity Architecture, Skills Architecture, Metrics	All sections! This is the primary audience for the operational framework
HR Business Partners	Opportunity Architecture, Talent Reviews, Internal Mobility, What Organizations Often Miss	Merit and Proving Ground, Manager Accountability, Talent Hoarding, From Data to Action
Senior Leaders	Senior Leader Brief, Discussion Guide	Merit and Proving Ground, Business Case, HiPo Programs, Talent Reviews, Bridge to Toolkit Three
Mentors and Sponsors	Mentoring section, Sponsorship section, What Managers Can Say	Distinction between guidance and advocacy, Consequential moments, Avoiding dependency
ERG and Employee-Network Leaders	ERGs as Development Infrastructure, Discussion Guide	What ERGs can and cannot do, Partnership with Talent Development, Measurement
Employees	Career Clarity, Development Planning, Growth When Promotion Is Scarce	Understanding opportunity architecture, Preparing for career conversations, Internal mobility
People Analytics and Technology Teams	Metrics That Matter, From Data to Corrective Action, AI-Generated Skills Profiles and Governance, AI Governance	Skills architecture, AI tools, Data-to-action table, System health metrics

Why Development Systems Fail: Common Patterns

Note: 'Go To' references are by section title. Use the Table of Contents to locate each section.

Development systems fail in predictable ways. The table below maps common failure patterns to the element of the system where the breakdown originates — so the fix can be targeted rather than generic.

What Went Wrong	System Element	Go To
Employees cannot find or understand available opportunities	Clarity / Visibility	Career Clarity and Navigation • How Opportunity Is Actually Allocated
Development plans exist but produce no action	Planning / Experience	Development Planning That Produces Action • The Manager's Role: Multiplier or Bottleneck
Learning is available but employees have no time to use it	Learning	Learning, Reskilling and AI Readiness • The Manager's Role: Multiplier or Bottleneck
High performers receive more work, not more development	Experience	The Real Development Currency: Critical Experience • What Organizations Often Miss: 13 Patterns
Mentoring is happening but mobility is not	Relationships / Visibility	Mentoring: Guidance, Navigation and Perspective • Sponsorship: Advocacy in Consequential Moments
Sponsorship exists on paper but advocacy never happens in consequential moments	Relationships	Sponsorship: Advocacy in Consequential Moments
HiPo programs reproduce familiar talent rather than identify emerging capability	Visibility / Mobility	High-Potential Programs • Talent Reviews: Where Development Becomes a Decision
ERGs are active but disconnected from formal development	Relationships / Mobility	ERGs as Development Infrastructure
Employees apply internally but receive no feedback when not selected	Mobility	Internal Mobility: Where Development Becomes Real • What Organizations Often Miss: 13 Patterns
Frontline or remote employees are excluded from programs by design	Access / Learning	Access Across the Full Workforce
Programs end and participants return to unchanged work	Mobility / Measurement	What Organizations Often Miss: 13 Patterns • Metrics That Matter
Managers block internal movement to protect their teams	Mobility	Talent Hoarding: The Hidden Mobility Killer • The Manager's Role: Multiplier or Bottleneck
Talent reviews surface the same names every cycle	Visibility / Mobility	Talent Reviews: Where Development Becomes a Decision • What Organizations Often Miss
Participation is measured but outcomes are not	Measurement	Metrics That Matter • From Data to Corrective Action

For Senior Leaders: What This Toolkit Is and What It Asks of You

Written for CHROs, CEOs, COOs and other senior leaders whose decisions determine whether any of it works. Specifically, where investment goes, which managers are accountable, and which capabilities the organization actually needs.

The Problem

- Most organizations have development programs, but few have a **system**
- Learning is rarely connected to work, experience to evidence, or relationships to access
- Employee aspiration is rarely connected to organizational need
- Gallup: **70% of the variance in team engagement** is attributable to the manager, which is a systems and accountability problem, not a training problem

Three Questions This Toolkit Will Help You Answer

Proving Ground

- Are qualified employees accessing the proving ground, or just the program?
- Merit should determine the outcome; system design determines who gets to compete

Capability Alignment

- Is development tied to what the business actually needs next?
- 63% of employers cite skills gaps as the largest barrier to business transformation

Manager Accountability

- Do managers know they are accountable for **building** talent, not just using it?
- A manager who limits visibility to retain talent creates a fragile team and a broken system

What This Toolkit Asks of You Specifically

1. Identify capability gaps

Name two or three capabilities the business needs in three years that it does not have enough of today.

2. Assign executive accountability

Designate someone specifically responsible for building those capabilities.

3. Sponsor one employee — actively

Not by introducing them to people. By advocating for them in a room where a consequential decision is being made.

4. Ask one hard question

What percentage of program participants are in a different role twelve months after completing development?

5. Assess whether you have a system or just programs

Ask three people: a frontline manager, a mid-level employee, and an HR business partner: 'Can you describe how development works here and where it has taken people?' If the answers are inconsistent, incomplete, or refer only to courses and programs, you have a catalog, not a system. Then scan the 'Why Development Systems Fail' section, identify one pattern that resonates, and follow it to the section that addresses it.



Questions People May Be Thinking, but Not Asking

Does This Lower Standards?

No. The goal is to define standards more clearly and evaluate evidence consistently. Clearer standards are higher standards.

Can We Invest More in High Potentials?

Yes. Based on business need, evidence, and readiness. Criteria should be transparent and consistently applied. Foundational development should remain broadly accessible.

Should Employees Know They Are High Potential?

Organizations differ. The decision should be intentional and consistent, supported by honest development practices, not a vague status that creates expectation without clarity.

What if the Manager Does Not Want to Lose Someone?

Plan the transition, build a replacement pipeline, and recognize the manager for developing talent. Do not solve a staffing problem by trapping the employee. The organization signals its values through which problem it chooses to solve.

Is Mentoring Enough?

No. Employees also need critical experience, sponsorship in consequential moments, visibility, and genuine mobility. Mentoring is one element of the system. It is valuable, but insufficient on its own.

Can Sponsorship Become Favoritism?

Yes. When it is opaque and disconnected from evidence. Structured sponsorship needs clear purpose, defined access, expected advocacy, governance, and outcome review. Informal sponsorship that goes unexamined is a primary driver of inequitable advancement.

What if There Is No Promotion Available?

Be honest. Offer meaningful development (role expansion, lateral moves, stretch assignments) but do not disguise indefinite delay as preparation. Employees who are parked eventually leave, taking institutional knowledge with them.

Should Development Happen During Work Hours?

If development matters to the organization, employees should not be expected to pursue all of it on personal time. The signal that learning is optional is often sent not by policy, but by manager behavior and workload.

Can AI Decide What Skills an Employee Has?

AI may provide useful information, but employees and managers must be able to review, correct, and challenge the result. A system making consequential career decisions from inferred skills without human review is not a development tool, but rather is an accountability gap.

What if Participants Complete Programs but Do Not Advance?

Review the system before blaming participants. Check opportunity availability, manager support, sponsor behavior, and internal mobility. Participants who develop and then leave to advance elsewhere are giving the organization a clear signal about where the system is failing.

The Fair360 Standard

This toolkit is intentionally titled **Talent Development Systems**... not Inclusive Talent Development Systems. Inclusion is not a specialized version of good talent management. It is a design requirement of good talent management.

A system that overlooks capable people, relies on hidden pathways, assigns career-building work through familiarity or leaves employees unable to understand how to grow is not merely less inclusive. It is a weaker talent system.

Fair360 benchmarks leadership engagement, mentorship, sponsorship, high-potential programs and ERGs using five years of workforce data from more than 150 major employers. **The system matters more than the inventory.**

Inclusion is not a substitute for merit. It is the discipline of ensuring that merit can be built, demonstrated and recognized.

The Objective

Identify capability accurately

Build the skills the business needs

Give qualified employees credible opportunities to demonstrate what they can do

Apply job-related standards consistently

Make development investment visible and usable

Improve internal movement

Strengthen retention and succession

Deploy talent where it creates the greatest value

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Merit Needs a Fair Proving Ground

Talent development should be merit-based. That principle is often stated as though merit identifies itself automatically. It does not. Merit is demonstrated through evidence: strong performance, sound judgment, relevant capability, learning agility, increasing responsibility, effective collaboration, business impact and readiness for more complex work. But employees do not generate that evidence in a vacuum. They generate it through access to clear expectations, useful feedback, relevant training, consequential assignments, cross-functional work, decision-making exposure, mentors and sponsors, internal networks and opportunities to recover from mistakes.

Talent is not innately concentrated in any one demographic. When opportunity is unevenly distributed, the organization does not get the best talent in the right roles, it gets the most advantaged talent. Those are not the same thing.

"No one has shown that talent varies innately by demographic. When representation is biased, money is lost."

— Luke Visconti, Chairman and Founder, Fair360

What an Effective Merit System Does

Defines the Standard

Employees should know which capabilities, results and experiences matter.

Creates a Credible Proving Ground

Qualified employees need meaningful opportunities to build and demonstrate those capabilities.

Evaluates Evidence Consistently

Decision-makers assess relevant performance and readiness rather than familiarity, social comfort or resemblance to prior leaders.

A Practical Fair360 Approach

01

Level the System

Make opportunities visible, criteria understandable and processes usable.

02

Diagnose Where Talent Stalls

Examine access, participation, assignments, movement and outcomes.

03

Repair the Process

Address the point where opportunity becomes uneven rather than reserving outcomes by protected class.

04

Measure Again

Determine whether the intervention improved capability, movement and workforce performance.

The Core Principle

Merit should determine the outcome. System design determines whether qualified people have a genuine opportunity to compete.

Organizations that state a commitment to merit without examining whether the proving ground is accessible are not protecting merit. They are protecting the appearance of it.



Why Talent Development Matters Now

Talent development has traditionally been discussed as an employee benefit, engagement practice or retention strategy. The current environment makes it something more: a business-continuity, change-readiness and workforce-confidence system. **This is not a talent program. It is a business imperative.**

The Macro Context

39%

Skills Disruption

Workers' existing skills expected to change or become outdated by 2030
(World Economic Forum)

63%

Largest Barrier

Employers identifying skills gaps as the largest barrier to business transformation

85%

Prioritizing Upskilling

Employers planning to prioritize upskilling; half expected to transition employees from declining roles into growing ones

LinkedIn 2025: Organizations with mature career development practices were more likely to report confidence in profitability, attraction and retention — and were further along in generative-AI adoption.

What Employees Hear When Development Is Missing

Uncertainty — When leaders say AI will transform the business but provide no credible learning path.

Adaptation is their personal burden — When reskilling is described as urgent but time is not protected.

Trust declines — When employees build new skills but cannot access roles that use them. This creates a disconnect between the employee and the organization.

The signal that development is optional is often sent not by policy but by manager behavior and workload allocation.

The Business Case: Build Capability, Do Not Repeatedly Buy It

Five Connected Value Drivers

Protects Hiring Investment

When employees leave because they cannot see a future, the organization loses institutional knowledge, customer context, team relationships, manager time and recruiting investment.

Reduces External Market Dependence

Internal development allows the organization to fill emerging roles faster, retain business knowledge, redeploy employees during change and build successor pools.

Improves Internal Mobility

LinkedIn analysis found associations with **23% more internal mobility**, **57% higher retention** and **7% healthier management pipelines** in organizations with strong learning cultures. Employees who set career goals engaged with learning at four times the rate of employees without such goals.

Improves Retention Without Vague Promises

Employees stay when they can see what growth means, what evidence is required, which opportunities exist and whether development leads somewhere real.

Supports Productivity and Competitiveness

WEF: the most common outcomes employers expected from training investment were greater productivity and competitiveness, followed by talent retention.

Fair360 Data: What Strong Development Systems Produce

Top 25 lowest management-attribution companies: rates from **0.28% to 2.81%** against industry benchmarks of **2.4% to 9.0%**.

This gap holds across Technology, Financial Services, Consumer Goods, Manufacturing, Energy and Healthcare — it is not an industry effect.

It is a talent system effect.

A Technology company at 0.28% against a 3.5% industry benchmark is retaining managers at more than ten times the sector rate.

From Onboarding Promise to Development Reality

The Recruitment, Hiring and Onboarding toolkit ends with a development handoff. This toolkit begins there. Too often, onboarding ends when the employee is able to complete the work independently. That is an operational milestone, not a development strategy.

By the End of the First Several Months, an Employee Should Be Able to Answer

- What does strong performance look like in my role?
- Which skills matter most? What am I already doing well?
- What opportunities exist? Who can help me learn?
- Which experiences would prepare me for more?
- How will my manager support me? When will we revisit the conversation?

The Employee Should Leave With

- Two or three priorities and a clear performance baseline
- At least one relevant experience to pursue and useful learning resources
- A feedback cadence, potential mentoring connections and a follow-up date
- Information about internal opportunities and clarity about who owns each action

 **Try This:** Add a formal development handoff to the 90- or 180-day onboarding process. Create one shared handoff template used by managers, onboarding and Talent Development. Track first-year career conversations, development-plan initiation, retention and employee confidence in growth opportunities.

The Development Handoff Conversation (Day 90-180)

"You have now had time to understand the role and the organization. I would like us to shift part of our conversation from immediate onboarding to your longer-term growth. Let's identify the capabilities, relationships and experiences that will help you contribute more and prepare for future opportunities."

This conversation is the bridge between Part One (Recruitment, Hiring and Onboarding) and the full development system described in this toolkit. It should be structured, documented and followed up.

How Opportunity Is Actually Allocated

Organizations often describe development as though employees select from a neutral menu. In practice, the most valuable opportunities are frequently allocated through ordinary management decisions: who is invited to the meeting, who presents the work, who fills in for a leader, who receives the difficult client, who owns the new technology, who is asked to solve an ambiguous problem.

A Common Pattern

A dependable employee becomes essential to the current operation. The manager assigns more of the same work. Another employee, less operationally central, is released for a cross-functional project. The first employee produces more. The second gains broader experience, visibility and relationships. Later, the second employee is considered more ready for advancement. The manager may believe the outcome reflects merit alone. The organization should also examine how work was allocated.

A Second Pattern: Attribution Bias

When a favored employee makes a mistake, it is often interpreted as situational (a tough circumstance, a learning moment, an exception). When a less favored employee makes the same mistake, it is interpreted as dispositional (a confirmation of a concern, a signal of limited readiness, a reason to withhold the next opportunity). The mistake is identical. The career consequence is not.

This is known as attribution bias, which is the tendency to explain the same behavior differently depending on our prior relationship with or disposition toward the person. It does not require intent to cause harm. It operates quietly inside ordinary management judgment, performance conversations and talent reviews.

Organizations that want to address it should examine not just what decisions were made, but how similar situations were interpreted across different employees. (For further reading, search: attribution bias in performance management.)

 **Try This:** Review the ten most career-building assignments made during the past year. Ask: Who was considered? Who selected the employee? Which criteria were used? Which employees repeatedly received opportunity? What support was provided? What happened afterward?

Opportunity architecture sits at the intersection of Experience and Visibility in the Eight-Element System — when allocation is opaque, both elements fail simultaneously.

Map the Opportunity Architecture: Four Types

Open Access

Employees may participate without nomination.

Application-Based

Employees apply against stated criteria.

Nomination-Based

A manager or leader controls entry.

Manager-Assigned

Opportunity is allocated through everyday work decisions, often the least visible and the most consequential.



Access Across the Full Workforce

Many development systems are designed around salaried employees with computer access, flexible schedules, proximity to leaders, English-language resources, and time outside work. That design excludes large parts of the workforce without saying so.

Frontline & Hourly Employees

- Learning during paid time, mobile-friendly content, and shared-device access
- Clear pathways into new roles, apprenticeships, and language access

Remote & Hybrid Employees

- Intentional visibility: virtual project leadership and transparent assignments
- Written decision context and equitable meeting roles

Employees With Disabilities

- Do not wait for a formal accommodation request
- Caption learning, provide accessible documents, and review platform usability proactively

Caregivers

- Predictable scheduling, multiple cohorts, and asynchronous learning options
- Do not treat availability outside core hours as a proxy for ambition

Employees Returning From Leave

- Updated context, reconnection, and a career conversation at re-entry; a mentor or potentially onboarding resources
- Protect against assumptions that leave reduced ambition or readiness

📌 Access is not a diversity initiative. It is a system design requirement. A program that is technically available but practically inaccessible is not a program, it is a gap.

Building a Skills Architecture Employees Can Use

Many organizations say they are becoming skills-based. Some respond by building taxonomies that employees and managers cannot navigate. A useful skills architecture does not begin with thousands of labels. It begins with the work.

For a Priority Role or Role Family, Define:

- The work outcomes and capabilities required
- Observable levels of proficiency (Foundational → Proficient → Advanced)
- Evidence that demonstrates the capability
- Ways to build it and roles or assignments where it can be used

Capability	Foundational Evidence	Proficient Evidence	Advanced Evidence	Development Options
Stakeholder management	Identifies stakeholders and communicates reliably	Navigates competing needs and gains alignment	Shapes enterprise decisions across complex groups	Project leadership, mentor observation, cross-functional assignment
Data interpretation	Reads standard reports accurately	Identifies patterns and recommends action	Connects multiple data sources to strategic decisions	Coursework, business problem, analyst partnership
AI fluency	Understands policy and basic use cases	Applies approved tools with human review	Redesigns workflows and evaluates risk	Practice lab, supervised implementation, governance project
People leadership	Sets expectations and gives feedback	Coaches performance and builds team capability	Leads through complexity and develops other leaders	Acting role, manager training, coaching, stretch team leadership

Recognize Adjacent and Transferable Skills

- Employees may possess capability developed through military service, community leadership, caregiving, volunteer work, ERG leadership, prior industries, technical projects or nontraditional career paths
- Evaluate whether the experience provides relevant evidence; do not accept every experience uncritically, but do not dismiss it by default

📄 **Try This:** Start with one critical role family. Create a practical map of five to eight capabilities, three proficiency levels, acceptable forms of evidence, development options and adjacent roles. Test it with employees and managers before scaling.

Career Clarity and Navigation

Employees cannot plan toward opportunities they cannot see. Career clarity requires enough transparency for employees to make informed decisions... not a guaranteed future.

What Transparency Requires

- **Roles and capabilities:** Which roles exist, what they contribute, and which skills matter
- **Entry and movement:** How people typically enter, which lateral moves are useful, and what experiences help
- **Advancement criteria:** What an expert path looks like, how advancement is assessed, and where opportunity is genuinely limited

Ladders and Lattices

Career Ladder

Upward movement within one discipline.

Career Lattice

Lateral moves, cross-functional roles, deeper expertise, temporary assignments, project leadership, geographic moves, and shifts between individual-contributor and management tracks.

Not every employee wants to manage. Not every form of growth requires a title change. Treating management as the only credible path risks losing excellent experts and creating weak managers.

Career Navigation Is a Skill

Employees may need to learn how to:

- **Know themselves:** Identify strengths and translate experience into a coherent career story
- **Seek feedback:** Ask useful questions, evaluate a role, and prepare for an internal interview
- **Build relationships:** Find mentors, work with sponsors, and develop visibility
- **Move strategically:** Make lateral moves intentionally, not reactively

Employees who navigate well are not necessarily the most capable, sometimes they simply understand the hidden process.

- ❏ **Try This:** Publish one role-family guide showing three possible entry paths, essential capabilities, common readiness gaps, two lateral moves, two advancement paths, one expert path, and one nontraditional transition example.

The Manager's Role: Multiplier or Bottleneck

Managers translate the development system into employee experience. Gallup's research attributes at least **70% of the variance in team engagement** to the manager or team leader. Today's employees increasingly expect managers to coach, clarify expectations and support growth — not merely administer work.

Core Manager Responsibilities

- Understand employee interests and give honest, specific feedback
- Identify relevant experiences and connect employees to others
- Support learning application and avoid blocking internal movement
- Revisit development regularly and advocate when evidence supports it
- **Never restrict an employee's visibility or internal movement to protect team continuity. This is talent hoarding, and it is a system failure, not a management strategy.**

Manager Accountability

Managers should be evaluated partly on whether they provide useful feedback, conduct development conversations, allocate stretch work thoughtfully, build team capability, support internal movement, retain employees appropriately, develop successors and release talent without retaliation.

- ✔ The best managers are talent incubators. These managers take pride in where the people who have passed through their teams have landed. Organizations should recognize and celebrate managers who develop and export strong talent, not just those who retain it.

A Practical Manager Rhythm

Monthly

Include one development question in a one-on-one: "What are you learning through the work right now?"

Quarterly

Review one development priority: "What progress have you made, and what do you need to keep making progress?"

Twice Each Year

Hold a career conversation separate from performance evaluation.

At Major Transitions

Revisit development after onboarding, promotion, reorganization, return from leave, major project completion, leadership change or significant role expansion.



Talent Hoarding: The Hidden Mobility Killer

Talent hoarding is not a management preference... it is a **system failure**. When strong employees are blocked from moving, the organization signals that individual career growth is less important than a manager's short-term convenience. That signal travels fast. The solution is not to lecture managers about enterprise thinking while leaving them with no replacement plan. The solution is to redesign the system so that developing and releasing talent becomes the path of least resistance.

A Practical Anti-Hoarding System

- Recognize managers who develop and export talent
- Build replacement pipelines and support transition planning
- Reduce avoidable vacancy delays
- Track blocked internal movement and escalate repeated patterns
- Make talent movement an enterprise success measure

Keeping someone trapped is not retention.

The Talent Incubator Identity

The antidote to talent hoarding is not compliance, it is **identity**. The best managers define themselves as talent incubators: people who take pride in the careers launched from their teams, the roles their former reports now hold and the organizational capability they have built.

Make it visible

Track where talent goes after leaving a manager's team. Recognize managers whose former reports advance, move into critical roles or lead other teams.

Make it status

"I developed that person" should be a source of pride, not a source of loss. Celebrate this identity publicly and tie it to how great managers are known.

What Managers Can Say

Opening a career conversation: "I would like to understand where you want to grow... not because I assume you need to leave your current role immediately, but because your development should be part of how we plan the work."

When the employee is unsure: "You do not need to have a five-year plan. Let's begin with the work that energizes you, the strengths you want to use more and the capabilities you want to build."

When promotion is not immediately available: "I do not want to promise a promotion that is not currently available. I can help you understand what readiness would require, identify experiences that would strengthen your position and make sure we revisit the conversation honestly."

When an employee applies internally: "Thank you for telling me. I support your interest in exploring the role. Let's discuss what you hope to gain, how I can help you prepare and how we would manage a transition if you are selected."

When the manager is worried about losing the employee: "I value your contribution to this team, and I also do not want our current staffing needs to limit your future. Let's plan responsibly for both."

When the employee is not selected: "I know this is disappointing. Let's separate this decision from your long-term potential, review the feedback carefully and identify what would strengthen your readiness for another opportunity."

Development Planning That Produces Action

Many development plans fail because they are too broad to guide action. Goals such as "improve strategic thinking," "develop executive presence" or "prepare for leadership" do not explain what the employee should do differently, what evidence would demonstrate progress or how the manager will help.

A Useful Plan Should Include

Direction What type of contribution, expertise or responsibility is the employee exploring?	Strength What capability should be used more fully?
Priority Gap What one or two capabilities or experiences need development?	Learning Action What knowledge or method should the employee learn?
Work-Based Experience Where will the employee practice?	Relationship Action Who can provide context, feedback, mentoring or advocacy?
Evidence What result or behavior will demonstrate growth?	Support and Review Date What will the manager or organization provide? When will progress be discussed?

The 70-20-10 Principle

70%

Experience

On-the-job practice and stretch assignments

20%

Relationships

Mentors, sponsors, feedback and peer learning

10%

Formal Learning

Courses, programs and structured content

The percentages should not be treated as scientific law. The useful principle: development requires learning, practice, feedback, relationships and reflection working together.

Try This: Limit each plan to two priorities, one formal learning action, one meaningful experience, one relationship action, one progress measure and one review date. A plan that fits on a single page is more likely to be used than one that lives in a system.

Learning, Reskilling and AI Readiness

Learning should begin with a capability need... not a course catalog. Before building or procuring content, ask: What work is changing? Which skills are becoming more important? Which employees are most affected? What will help employees practice? Which roles could employees transition into?

AI Upskilling Requires More Than Tool Training

Awareness

What AI is, where the organization permits its use, basic risks, data and privacy expectations, when human review is required

Application

Role-specific tools, prompting, verification, workflow redesign, responsible use

Technical Capability

Development, integration, evaluation, security, governance

Leadership Capability

Workforce impact, trust, communication, job redesign, accountability, change leadership

Address the Anxiety, Not Only the Skill

Employees may reasonably wonder: Is this training preparing me, or preparing the organization to eliminate my role?

Will new skills lead to opportunity? Will I be evaluated against tools I have not been given time to learn?

Leaders should communicate what they know, what remains uncertain and how employees will be supported.

Training without credible opportunity can increase anxiety rather than reduce it.

WEF: Growing Skills

- Analytical thinking remains the most widely cited core skill
- AI and big data, technological literacy, creative thinking, resilience, curiosity and lifelong learning are growing in importance
- Technical and human capabilities are becoming more (not less) interdependent

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AI-Generated Skills Profiles and Governance

AI tools are increasingly used to infer employee skills from job history, performance data, learning activity and work outputs. These tools can surface capability that managers have not recognized and identify development gaps at scale. They can also encode historical bias, misread nontraditional career paths and make consequential recommendations without adequate human review.

What AI Can Do

- Identify skill patterns across large employee populations
- Surface development gaps and learning recommendations
- Match employees to internal opportunities based on inferred capability
- Flag employees who may be ready for stretch assignments or new roles

What AI Cannot Do Alone

- Verify that inferred skills reflect actual capability
- Account for context, career interruptions or nontraditional experience
- Replace manager judgment, employee input or human review
- Guarantee that recommendations are free from historical bias

Governance Requirements

- Employees must be able to view, correct and challenge their AI-generated skill profile
- Managers must be able to override recommendations with documented rationale
- HR and People Analytics must audit outputs for demographic patterns
- No consequential career decision (promotion, selection, succession) should be made solely on AI-inferred data without human review and employee input
- Comply with NIST AI Risk Management Framework guidance on mapping, measurement and management of AI tools in workforce contexts
- Circle back with the AI platform after corrections are made to help it continue to learn. Do not make adjustments and forget to reload them into the system.

A system that makes career decisions from inferred skills without human review is not a development tool. It is an accountability gap.

The Real Development Currency: Critical Experience

Formal learning builds knowledge. Experience creates evidence. The assignments that often matter most, such as leading a high-visibility project, managing a difficult client, presenting to executives, acting in a larger role, launching a product, leading through a crisis, working across functions, implementing new technology, recovering a troubled initiative, affect development in four ways simultaneously: they build capability, demonstrate capability, increase visibility and create advocates.

Stretch Work Versus Extra Work

Extra Work

Adds volume. High performers receive more of the same work without authority, visibility or recognition. This is overuse, not development.

Stretch Work

Builds a defined capability. Specifies what the employee will learn, why selected, what authority they have, which support is available, how workload will be managed, what success looks like and what opportunity may follow.

Build a Critical-Experience Map

For important role families, identify the experiences that tend to build readiness. Examine who receives them, how selection occurs, which prerequisites are real, whether assignments can be segmented, what support is provided and whether the experience leads to movement.

Try This

Review the last ten high-visibility assignments. Document:

- Who was considered
- Who was chosen
- The evidence used
- Support provided
- The outcome
- What happened next

If the same names appear repeatedly, you have an opportunity allocation problem, not a talent shortage.

Mentoring: Guidance, Navigation and Perspective

Mentoring helps employees interpret the organization and build judgment. A mentor may help an employee understand unwritten norms, process feedback, explore options, build confidence, identify relationships, prepare for a transition and learn from someone else's experience.

Mentoring Is Not Sponsorship

A mentor may explain how advancement works. A sponsor advocates for the employee when advancement is discussed. Organizations that conflate the two often invest in mentoring and wonder why mobility has not improved.

Program Design Essentials

Define the Purpose

Specify whether the program supports onboarding, skill development, career navigation, leadership preparation, cross-functional exposure, transition or connection.

Set Expectations

Clarify frequency, duration, confidentiality, boundaries, preparation, goals and the rematching process.

Avoid Dependency

The mentor should help the employee build judgment, networks, confidence and career-navigation ability, not indefinite reliance on one person.

- ❑ **Try This:** Ask every mentoring pair to identify one goal, one experience, one relationship and one end-of-cycle outcome before the program begins. Measure whether participants entered a different role or took a meaningful stretch assignment within twelve months of program completion.

Fair360 Data: Mentoring Effectiveness

Top 25 companies on mentoring effectiveness in Fair360's 2025 dataset score a perfect **100** — consistently outperforming industry benchmarks across Consumer Goods and Manufacturing, Healthcare, Financial Services, Energy and Retail.

The Technology sector benchmark registers **near zero** on this metric, indicating that structured mentoring is either rare or unmeasured as a formal program across most of the industry.

Top Technology performers score **100** — making structured mentoring one of the clearest competitive differentiators available to technology organizations that choose to build it.



Sponsorship: Advocacy in Consequential Moments

Sponsorship is active advocacy. A sponsor uses organizational influence to recommend an employee, put a name forward in a talent discussion, create access to consequential work, defend readiness with evidence, increase visibility, help remove barriers and support advancement. **Mentors guide. Sponsors act.**

What Sponsorship Is Not

General encouragement, career advice, a ceremonial match, occasional praise, a promise of promotion, favoritism or advocacy without evidence. None of these move careers in the way that deliberate, evidence-based advocacy in a consequential moment does.

Consequential Moments

Sponsorship should reach the moments that actually determine advancement: talent reviews, promotion discussions, succession conversations, critical assignments, leadership exposure and job selection.

An organization can have strong sponsorship participation rates and low sponsorship impact if the advocacy never reaches the right rooms.

📌 **Try This:** Ask each sponsor: What consequential opportunity have you advocated for, what evidence did you use and what happened? If the answer involves introductions and praise rather than advocacy in promotion discussions or talent reviews, the program has scope, not sponsorship.

Fair360 Data: Sponsorship Effectiveness

Employees in stronger sponsorship environments advance at rates more than **nine percentage points above** the overall workforce baseline.

Where sponsorship is weakest, promotion-symmetry gaps — the gap between who gets promoted and their share of the relevant workforce — can be **nearly four times wider**.

Top 25 companies on sponsorship effectiveness score a perfect **100**; promotion symmetry scores range from **97.7 to 100** — in some cases outperforming industry benchmarks by nearly ten points.

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High-Potential Programs

High-potential programs should accelerate employees who demonstrate the capacity, aspiration and readiness to assume broader or more complex responsibility. They are also among the most vulnerable to opacity in any talent system.

Performance Is Not Potential

Performance reflects success in current work. Potential may include learning agility, judgment, adaptability, ability to handle complexity, leadership capacity, relevant future capability and aspiration. Organizations that conflate the two often build HiPo programs that accelerate current top performers into roles that require different capabilities than the ones they have demonstrated.

Program Design Guardrails

Define the Standard

Avoid unexamined labels such as "executive presence," "gravitas," "leadership material," "polished." Translate each into observable behavior and evidence.

Entry, Review and Exit

Clarify eligibility, nomination process, evidence required, calibration approach, review frequency, what employees are told about their status and the exit process.

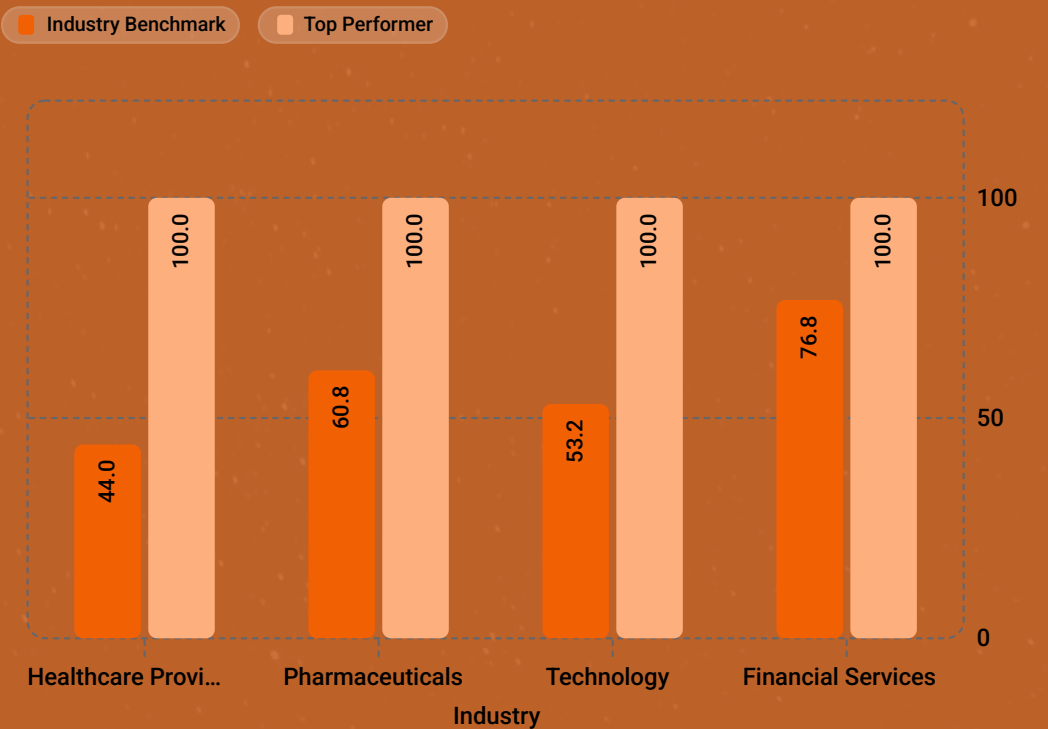
Preserve Broad Development

A smaller group may receive accelerated experiences based on transparent future-work needs. The broader workforce should still have access to career clarity, learning, mentoring, feedback and foundational leadership development.

Fair360 Data: HiPo Is the Most Variable Initiative

Top performers score a perfect **100**; the 25th-ranked company in the top tier scores **68.9** – a gap of more than 30 points within the top quartile alone.

Industry Benchmarks



Most sectors are nowhere near full implementation. Organizations that build rigorous, well-governed programs are not competing against a high bar. They are competing against a very low one.

ERGs as Development Infrastructure

ERGs can contribute to development through peer learning, career navigation, mentoring, leadership opportunities, skill-building, business projects, cross-functional relationships, leader access and community and trust. They should not become a substitute for the formal talent system or be expected to correct enterprise-wide promotion gaps.

A Strong Connection to Talent Development

ERG programming may support career workshops tied to real role pathways, mentoring connections, sponsor education, business projects, internal-opportunity awareness, leadership experience and insight into access barriers. ERG activities that are not linked to the formal development system may build community while producing limited career outcomes.

What to Avoid

- Treating attendance as development
- Using ERG leaders as unpaid talent staff
- Asking an ERG to correct enterprise-wide promotion gaps
- Promising career value without evidence
- Restricting employer-sponsored development by protected class (EEOC guidance: access to training, mentoring, sponsorship and networks must comply with Title VII)

📌 **Try This:** Hold a quarterly discussion among ERG leaders, Talent Development and HR focused on career questions members are raising, opportunity visibility gaps, program experience and appropriate organizational response. ERG leaders should provide insight or even help support, but not carry accountability for fixing the system.

Fair360 Data: ERG Effectiveness

Top 25 companies score between **89.0 and 96.6** out of 100.

Consumer Goods and Manufacturing: industry benchmark **42.9** vs. top companies **90–96.6** — a gap of roughly 50 points between leaders and the industry average.

Management Attrition Impact

5.6%

Strong ERG Environments

Management attrition rate

8.7%

Weaker ERG Environments

Management attrition rate

A retention and pipeline outcome, not just a belonging outcome.

Internal Mobility: Where Development Becomes Real

Employees judge the development system partly by whether people actually move. A development program that does not produce movement is either not building the right capability or not connected to the decision-making process that determines who moves. Often both.

Common Barriers

- Manager permission required before exploration
- Retaliation risk for applying
- Hidden openings; internal candidates held to a higher standard than external candidates
- No feedback after rejection
- Compensation rules that discourage lateral moves
- Talent hoarding, weak transition support, no frontline access and opaque skill requirements

Manager Notification Policy

Requiring immediate manager permission may suppress movement. A completely hidden process may create operational difficulty. Whatever the policy, it should be written, communicated and consistently applied.

 **Try This:** Ask employees anonymously: Would you feel safe telling your manager that you were exploring an internal role? If the answer is no, the organization has a mobility-culture problem that no job-posting platform will solve.

A Strong Mobility Standard

Employees should be able to:

- Find opportunities and understand requirements
- Explore safely without retaliation risk
- Receive fair consideration against consistent standards
- Prepare for internal interviews with support
- Receive useful feedback after rejection
- Move without stigma or penalty
- Transition successfully with organizational support
- Continue developing after movement



Growth When Promotion Is Scarce

Internal mobility is where development becomes real — but not every form of movement requires a new title. In flatter organizations, growth must be redefined without losing its meaning.

Flatter organizations cannot promise constant upward movement. That does not eliminate the need for growth, rather it makes the distinction between genuine development and reassuring delay more important.

Practical Alternatives to Promotion

- Role expansion, deeper expertise, lateral moves, cross-functional projects
- Temporary assignments, acting roles, skill credentials, client exposure
- Mentoring others, expert pathways and work redesign

These are real developmental experiences, not consolation prizes... but only if they are designed to build defined capability, offered with transparency about what they are and are not, and followed with honest conversation about timing and trajectory.

Preparation Versus Parking

Preparation

The employee understands the target, the gaps, the experience needed, the available path, the timing and when the conversation will be revisited.

Parking

The employee repeatedly completes more development, accepts more work, receives vague praise, hears "not yet," sees no transparent opportunity and watches others advance.

The organization should not describe indefinite delay as development.

"There is not currently an opening at the next level, and I do not want to imply that one is guaranteed. We can still identify work that expands your capability and position you for future opportunities. We should also be honest about timing and revisit whether this organization can provide the growth you are seeking."

Trust does not require false optimism. It requires candor.

Talent Reviews: Where Development Becomes a Decision

Employees often experience development as courses, conversations and assignments. The organization converts that development into career decisions in talent reviews, which are conversations that determine who is considered ready, who enters a pool, who receives a stretch role, who needs more experience, who becomes visible and who is discussed as a successor.

What Should Enter the Room

- Current performance, demonstrated capabilities, critical experiences, employee aspirations
- Feedback from relevant stakeholders, learning application, mobility, readiness for specific work, development gaps and support required
- What it should **not** consider: familiarity, personal comfort or resemblance to prior leaders in the role

Someone in the room should be accountable for asking: Who is performing well but not being discussed?

What Should Be Challenged

"Everyone knows she is strong" — requires evidence

"He is not visible enough" — requires a development action

"She lacks presence" — translate into observable behavior

"He is too valuable where he is" — not an assessment of readiness

"They need more seasoning" — name the specific experience required

Attribution bias at work — "He struggled on that project because the situation was difficult" vs. "She struggled on that project because she is not ready." If the same outcome is being interpreted differently depending on the employee, the review has a consistency problem, not a talent problem. *(For further reading, search: attribution bias in performance management.)*

A Practical Talent-Review Test

- What evidence supports it? Which opportunities produced that evidence? Did the employee have access to those opportunities?
- Are standards shifting among employees? Is missing evidence being mistaken for negative evidence?
- What specific experience would change the assessment? Who owns the next action and when will the employee be reconsidered?



What Organizations Often Miss: 13 Patterns

#	Pattern	Try This
1	Development Is Visible Only to Insiders — employees discover opportunity through relationships rather than systems	Publish one searchable opportunity inventory with entry requirements and timing
2	Manager Discretion Has No Guardrails — managers decide who is ready without common evidence or calibration	Require defined criteria and cross-manager calibration for selective opportunities
3	Career Conversations Occur Only During Performance Reviews — performance looks backward; development must also look forward	Separate one career conversation from the review process each year
4	Learning Time Exists Only on Paper — employees have access to content but no capacity to use it	Establish manager expectations for protected learning time and visible workload adjustment
5	High Performers Receive More Work, Not More Development — dependability becomes a reason to keep employees in place	Distinguish extra work from a developmental assignment by documenting the defined capability, selection reason, authority granted and intended follow-through
6	Mentoring Is Mistaken for Sponsorship — employees receive advice but no advocacy in the rooms where advancement decisions are made	Define sponsor actions explicitly, identify the consequential decision points where advocacy must occur and review outcomes
7	High-Potential Status Becomes Permanent — historical labels follow employees after the evidence changes	Reassess potential formally at least annually against current evidence and business needs
8	Frontline Employees Are Excluded by Design — programs require schedule control, computer access or unpaid time	Redesign delivery for operational reality before questioning employee interest
9	Remote Employees Learn but Remain Invisible — digital access to content does not guarantee exposure to leaders or stretch work	Plan leadership access and consequential work for remote employees intentionally — not as an afterthought
10	Internal Applicants Receive Generic Rejection — employees risk visibility and career capital to apply internally and receive nothing actionable	Provide specific, job-related feedback and a relevant development action to every internal applicant who reaches a meaningful stage
11	Managers Hoard Talent — the organization praises mobility while creating incentives that reward managers who keep their best people in place	Formally recognize managers who develop and export talent; address backfill delays systematically
12	Programs End Without a Destination — employees graduate from development programs and return to exactly the same work	Define post-program opportunities before enrollment begins
13	Participation Is Treated as Impact — attendance creates comforting dashboards that mask the absence of mobility or career movement	Review employee outcomes — role changes, lateral moves, promotions, expanded scope — six and twelve months after program participation

From Data to Corrective Action

Measurement should tell the organization what to do next... not just what happened. The table below connects common data patterns to the system question they raise and the corrective action that addresses the root cause.

Pattern	Likely System Question	Corrective Action
High enrollment, low completion	Is workload, scheduling or relevance the barrier?	Interview participants and managers; redesign timing, access and manager support
High completion, low application of learning	Is learning connected to real work?	Add practice assignments, manager follow-up and feedback
Strong mentoring satisfaction, no mobility	Is the program providing support but not access?	Clarify purpose; add experience and sponsor pathways where appropriate
HiPo retention is strong, pipeline remains narrow	Are the same employees repeatedly entering?	Review feeder pools, nominations and evidence standards
Low internal applications	Do employees trust the process?	Test awareness, confidentiality and manager behavior
High internal applications, low selection of internal candidates	Are internal candidates assessed differently?	Audit standards, interview practice and feedback quality
Stretch work concentrated in one function or manager	Is opportunity informally allocated?	Map critical experiences and review assignments quarterly
Frontline participation is low	Is the model usable during paid work?	Address schedule, device, language and manager permission
Employees gain skills but leave	Can they use the skills internally?	Connect learning to projects, jobs and internal movement
Program participants advance only under certain managers	Is manager sponsorship the real gate?	Examine manager behavior, calibration and opportunity allocation
Sponsorship participation is high, advocacy is low	Are sponsor expectations consequential?	Define required actions and review outcomes at decision points

Metrics That Matter

A strong development dashboard connects program activity to workforce outcomes. Participation data without outcome data is not measurement, it is tracking.

Visibility and Access

- Application and nomination rates by role, level and location
- Eligibility-to-participation conversion
- Frontline, remote and global participation rates

Experience

- Relevance of content to current work
- Match quality in mentoring and sponsorship
- Confidence in internal opportunity

Retention

- Participant versus nonparticipant retention
- Retention after internal movement
- Voluntary-turnover patterns by program participation

Advancement

- Promotion rate and velocity
- Promotion symmetry across demographic groups
- Movement six and twelve months after participation

Capability

- Skill growth by role family
- Work application of learning
- Manager assessment of readiness

Movement

- Stretch assignments by team and manager
- Internal fill rate and lateral moves
- Time to movement after program completion

System Health

- Manager development activity rates
- Post-program placement rates
- Employee trust in development system

Perception & Trust

- "Do I believe development here leads somewhere?" (employee confidence in the system)
- "Is opportunity allocated fairly?" (perceived equity of access)
- "Would I feel safe exploring an internal role?" (psychological safety around mobility)
- "Does my manager support my growth?" (manager trust as a development signal)
- "Do I understand how to advance here?" (career clarity confidence)

Perception metrics are leading indicators... they shift before retention and mobility data move. Capture through engagement surveys, stay interviews or pulse checks.

-  Protect privacy, use aggregate data and avoid simplistic conclusions where populations are small.

Talent Development Systems Audit

Use this checklist to evaluate your current system. It follows the eight-element framework and can be used as a self-assessment, team review or improvement planning tool.

Merit and Opportunity

- Are standards job-related and behaviorally defined?
- Can employees understand what readiness requires?
- Do qualified employees have credible proving opportunities?
- Are missing opportunities being confused with missing merit?
- Are decisions documented and explainable?
- Is access to the proving ground equitable or are qualified employees being evaluated on evidence they were never given the opportunity to generate?

Clarity and Navigation

- Can employees find available opportunities?
- Are eligibility and entry methods clear?
- Are nomination-only programs identified as such?
- Are role paths understandable?

Learning and Skills

- Are capabilities defined behaviorally?
- Can employees demonstrate them in multiple ways?
- Is learning connected to a practice opportunity?
- Are AI tools governed?
- Are skill profiles reviewable and correctable by employees?
- Are outcomes measured beyond completion rates?

Experience and Opportunity Allocation

- Is the opportunity architecture mapped?
- Are career-building assignments reviewed for allocation patterns?
- Are stretch and extra work clearly distinguished?
- Do developmental assignments specify learning intent, authority and follow-through?

Manager Practice

- Are career conversations separate from performance reviews?
- Is feedback specific and actionable?
- Are stretch assignments distributed intentionally?
- Do managers support internal movement?
- Are talent exporters recognized?
- Is hoarding tracked and addressed?

Mentoring and Sponsorship

- Are purposes clearly distinct and communicated?
- Are expectations set at the start?
- Are matches intentional rather than convenient?
- Is advocacy defined, including which moments require it?
- Are outcomes reviewed?
- Is dependency avoided?

High-Potential Programs

- Is potential defined with behavioral criteria?
- Are nominations calibrated across managers?
- Is evidence current rather than historical?
- Is status reviewed at least annually?
- Does the program produce differentiated experiences?
- Does broad development remain available to the wider workforce?

ERGs

- Are ERGs connected to formal development systems?
- Is participation open and voluntary?
- Are ERG leaders resourced for their role?
- Is programming tied to real career pathways?
- Is impact measured in career terms?

Internal Mobility

- Can employees explore opportunities safely?
- Is manager notification policy clear and consistent?
- Do internal candidates receive specific feedback?
- Are lateral moves valued in compensation and recognition?
- Is transition supported after movement?

Talent Reviews

- Is evidence required for every assessment?
- Are vague labels challenged?
- Are less-visible employees actively surfaced?
- Are missing experiences converted into named actions?
- Are standards consistent across managers?
- Is follow-up documented and tracked?

Outcomes

- Are employees building capabilities the business needs?
- Are internal fill rates improving?
- Are employees moving at meaningful rates?
- Are participants retaining longer?
- Are advancement patterns becoming more equitable?
- Do employees believe development leads somewhere?

A 90-Day System Improvement Plan

01

Days 1–30: Diagnose

- Inventory every development opportunity and classify by access type
- Map the onboarding-to-development handoff
- Review internal mobility data and barriers
- Interview employees across roles, levels and locations
- Audit stretch assignment allocation for the past year
- Review nomination patterns for selective programs
- Identify frontline, remote and global access barriers
- Inventory AI-enabled development tools
- Document current measurement approach
- Select one critical capability to map fully

02

Days 31–60: Redesign

- Build an opportunity map employees can actually use
- Create a practical career-conversation guide for managers
- Simplify the development-plan template to one page
- Define mentoring and sponsorship distinctly in writing
- Publish criteria for every selective program
- Map critical experiences for one role family
- Review and clarify manager-notification rules for internal mobility
- Design post-program follow-through for at least one existing program
- Build a metrics framework connecting participation to outcomes
- Train a pilot group of managers

03

Days 61–90: Pilot

- Select one business unit or role family
- Conduct development-handoff conversations with new employees
- Launch the opportunity map in the pilot group
- Use the manager career-conversation guide
- Allocate stretch work with explicit criteria and documentation
- Match mentors or sponsors with clear purpose
- Support internal applications and provide feedback to all applicants
- Gather employee feedback on access and clarity
- Review access and outcome data
- Refine before scaling

Discussion Guide

Use these questions in team meetings, manager training or system review sessions.

For Employees

- Can I explain how careers move here?
- Which opportunities do I know about only through relationships?
- Is my feedback specific enough to act on?
- Can I explore another role safely?
- What experience would most help me grow?
- Do I believe development leads somewhere?

For Managers

- Whose development receives most of my attention?
- Who gets my best assignments?
- Do I offer more work or meaningful growth?
- Have I discussed development with every person on my team?
- Would I release a strong performer?
- Which opportunity can I create now?

For Talent Development Teams

- Are we operating a system or a catalog?
- What happens after each program ends?
- Who remains outside the system?
- Which programs should stop?
- Where are managers the constraint?
- What capability is the business actually building?

For HR Business Partners

- Where does access depend on one manager?
- Which functions hoard talent?
- Are nominations consistent across managers?
- What mobility patterns appear in the data?
- What should leaders be asked to explain?
- Where does talent stall, and at what level?

For ERG Leaders

- What career questions remain unanswered for members?
- Where can the ERG provide insight into access barriers?
- Are we being asked to replace formal systems?
- Which partnership with Talent Development would create real value?
- How will we measure access, movement or career outcomes?

For Senior Leaders

- Which capabilities must we build internally over the next three years?
- Who receives consequential development and how is that decided?
- Where is merit being assessed without equal access to a proving ground?
- Are managers rewarded for developing talent or for keeping it?
- Is internal movement credible, and do employees believe it is?
- What do the outcomes say beyond the participation numbers?

Resources for Further Learning

External Resources

Fair360

fair360.com — Benchmarking and guidance on leadership engagement, mentoring, sponsorship, high-potential programs, ERGs, voluntary turnover, promotion velocity and promotion symmetry across 150+ major employers.

World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025

[weforum.org](https://www.weforum.org) — Workforce skill disruption, reskilling priorities, business transformation barriers and employer strategy.

LinkedIn Workplace Learning Reports (2024, 2025)

[linkedin.com/business/talent](https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent) — Career development, learning culture, internal mobility data and AI readiness.

Gallup

[gallup.com/workplace](https://www.gallup.com/workplace) — Manager capability, high-development cultures, feedback, employee growth and the relationship between manager behavior and team outcomes.

U.S. EEOC

[eeoc.gov](https://www.eeoc.gov) — Current guidance on nondiscrimination in training, mentoring, sponsorship, networks, assignments and promotions.

NIST AI Risk Management Framework

[nist.gov](https://www.nist.gov) — Governance, mapping, measurement and management practices for AI-enabled learning, skills and career tools.

Center for Creative Leadership

[ccl.org](https://www.ccl.org) — Experience-based development, feedback quality and leadership capability research.

Association for Talent Development (ATD)

[td.org](https://www.td.org) — Learning design, evaluation methodology and transfer of learning practices.

SHRM

[shrm.org](https://www.shrm.org) — HR policy, manager development, career development frameworks and workforce planning guidance.

Within the Fair360 Workforce Systems Toolkit Series

Part One — Recruitment, Hiring and Onboarding

Building fair, accessible and high-trust pathways from candidate to contributing employee.

Part Two — Talent Development Systems

Expanding access, capability and internal mobility. (This toolkit.)

Part Three — Leadership Development and Succession

Turning potential into readiness, advancement and stronger pipelines.

Part Four — Inclusive Leadership in Practice

How leaders build trust, fairness and performance through everyday decisions.

Next Steps

This Week

Identify one employee whose onboarding is complete but whose development has not formally begun. Hold the handoff conversation using the guide in this toolkit.

This Month

Inventory all development opportunities and classify each as open, application-based, nomination-based or manager-assigned. Identify where criteria or ownership are unclear (those gaps are where the system is most vulnerable to inconsistency).

This Quarter

Pilot a development handoff conversation, a manager career-conversation guide, a transparent opportunity map, a critical-assignment review, a post-program outcome measure and one role-family skills map. Measure access and outcomes, not just participation.

Next in the Series: Part Three — Leadership Development and Succession

Leadership readiness definitions; identifying potential without reproducing familiarity bias

Leadership competencies, assessment and nomination criteria

Leadership development cohorts; sponsorship for emerging leaders

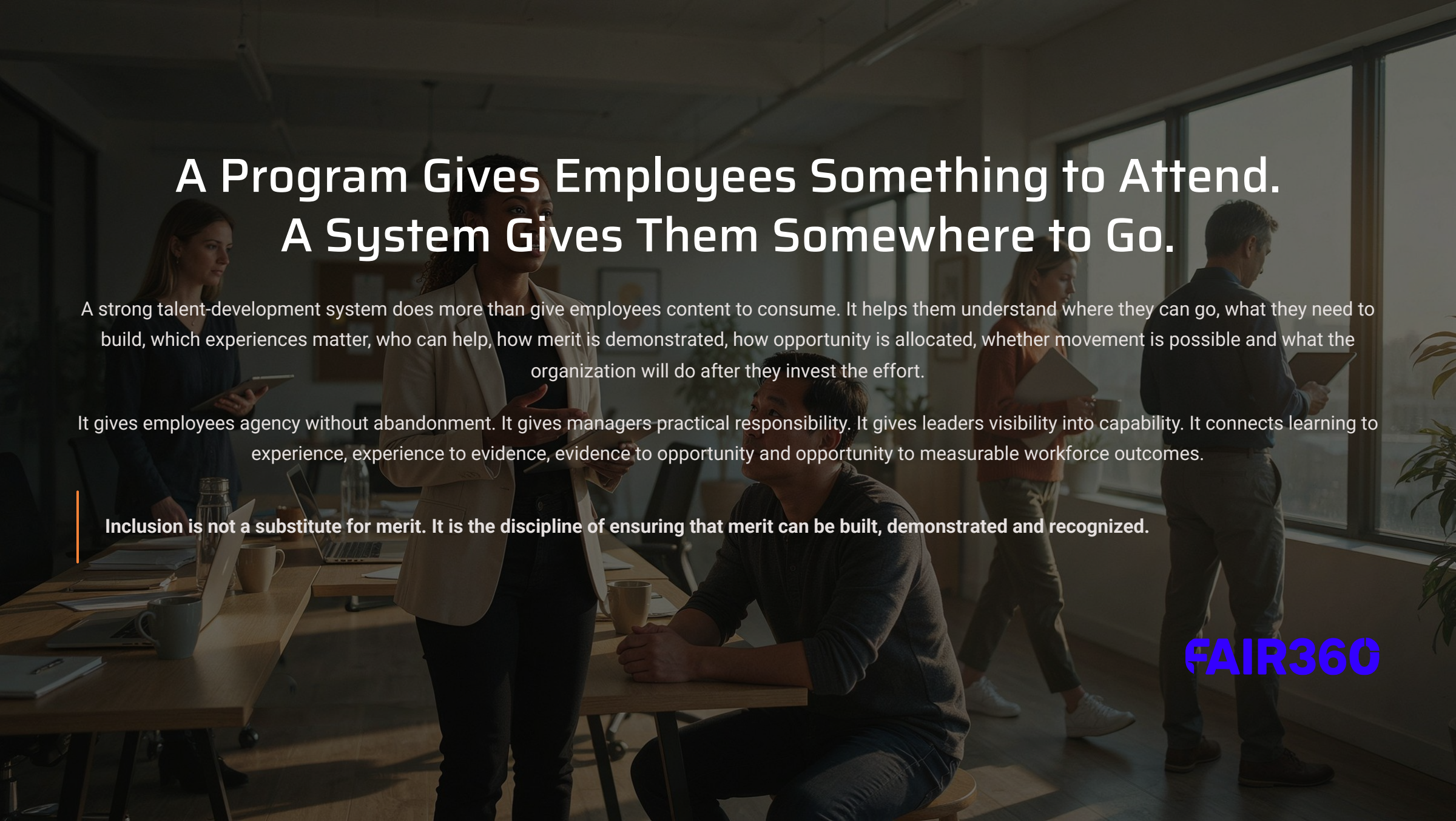
Succession planning, bench strength and the newly promoted leader transition

Promotion velocity and symmetry outcomes Fair360 benchmarks across 150+ major employers

Part Four — Inclusive Leadership in Practice: How leaders build trust, fairness and performance through everyday decisions.

Visit fair360.com to learn more about Fair360's benchmarking survey and workforce systems resources.





A Program Gives Employees Something to Attend. A System Gives Them Somewhere to Go.

A strong talent-development system does more than give employees content to consume. It helps them understand where they can go, what they need to build, which experiences matter, who can help, how merit is demonstrated, how opportunity is allocated, whether movement is possible and what the organization will do after they invest the effort.

It gives employees agency without abandonment. It gives managers practical responsibility. It gives leaders visibility into capability. It connects learning to experience, experience to evidence, evidence to opportunity and opportunity to measurable workforce outcomes.

Inclusion is not a substitute for merit. It is the discipline of ensuring that merit can be built, demonstrated and recognized.

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