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Eight Uncomfortable Truths About

DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT

Why most organisations are spending real money on development and producing very little of it — and what the evidence says about what actually works.

8

TRUTHS

PC

FRAMEWORK

2025

EDITION

WHY THIS PAPER EXISTS

The eight statements in this paper are drawn from 25 years of working with organisations, leaders, and high-performing individuals across every sector. They are not provocations. They are descriptions — precise accounts of patterns that repeat, at scale, in the majority of organisations investing in the development of their people.

Each one is followed by the thinking behind it: the research, the mechanism, and the specific failure mode it identifies. None of it requires a sophisticated development philosophy to apply. It requires the willingness to look at what the current investment is actually producing — and to act on what is found.

The Performance Capability framework — the Seven Stars, the Trisphereon, the CRR model — was built to address the problems these statements describe. That framework is available in full through the books, the programmes, and the development engagements outlined at the end of this paper.

But the paper stands alone as a diagnostic. Read it first. Apply it honestly to your current investment. The conversation about what to do about it can come later.

The investment is real. The forgetting is reliable. The cycle repeats with increasing sophistication in programme design and consistent underperformance in organisational outcome. Something has to change.

01

YOU ARE NOT SPENDING MONEY ON DEVELOPMENT.

You are spending money on forgetting.

The average organisation spends between 2% and 4% of payroll on learning and development. The average return on that investment, measured in actual behavioural change six months after the programme ends, is estimated at less than 10%.

That means more than 90% of the investment produces knowledge, satisfaction scores, and completion certificates. It does not produce capability. It does not produce changed behaviour in the conditions where it matters. It produces — in the most accurate description available — forgetting. Not immediately. Gradually, and then completely, as the programme's content recedes in the absence of the conditions required to embed it.

This is not a failure of the programmes. Most of the programmes work, in the sense that they transfer knowledge effectively in a controlled environment. The failure is architectural. The knowledge is delivered into a system that does not support its application, does not measure its transfer, and does not develop the management layer that is the single most powerful predictor of whether any development investment produces a return.

The investment is real. The forgetting is reliable. And the cycle repeats, year after year, with increasing sophistication in the programme design and consistent underperformance in the organisational outcome.

02

THE POST-EVENT SURVEY IS THE MOST EXPENSIVE LIE IN BUSINESS.

You are collecting data from the only people who cannot possibly know whether it is working.

The smile sheet — the end-of-programme satisfaction survey completed by participants as they leave the room — is the primary measurement instrument for the majority of organisational development investment.

This is extraordinary. The survey is completed by the people who have just received the programme, at the moment of maximum motivation and minimum pressure. They are rating their experience of the programme, not its impact on their performance. They are measuring the quality of the delivery, the relevance of the content, and whether they enjoyed the experience. They are not — cannot be — measuring whether the programme will change their behaviour in the conditions where it needs to change in six months' time.

The programme that scores 4.7 out of 5 and produces zero transfer is indistinguishable, in the measurement system, from the programme that scores 4.7 out of 5 and produces significant transfer. Because the measurement system cannot see the difference. It is not looking at the right variable, at the right time, in the right conditions.

The correct measurement asks one question: what specific, observable behaviour is different in this person or team six months from now that was not different before the programme? That question requires a different measurement system, a longer time horizon, and the willingness to find out whether the investment worked. Most organisations are not measuring this because they are not certain they want to know the answer.

03

YOUR CULTURE IS CANCELLING YOUR TRAINING BUDGET.

If the culture is misaligned, the culture wins. Always.

Culture communicates through every structural decision the organisation makes: who gets promoted, what behaviour is rewarded under pressure, what is tolerated when results are delivered, and what is penalised when the quarter is difficult. These signals are received continuously and accurately by every person in the organisation. They shape behaviour more powerfully than any programme, because they operate in the real conditions of real work, with real consequences attached.

When a programme develops behaviour that the culture does not support, the culture wins. Not dramatically — quietly. The person returns from the programme with genuine commitment. They apply the new behaviour in the conditions where it is safe to do so. They encounter the first moment where the culture signals clearly that the new behaviour is not what is actually rewarded here. The new behaviour is withdrawn. The old behaviour reasserts.

The most sophisticated programmes in the world fail at this point. Not because the programme was wrong. Because the culture is the more powerful shaper of behaviour, and the programme did not address it.

The organisations that produce genuine, sustained behavioural change address the culture as the primary variable — not the individuals within it. This is more expensive, slower, and more politically complex than running a programme. It is also the only approach that produces results that hold when the pressure returns.

04

YOUR BEST DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE IS ALREADY ON THE PAYROLL.

You have no idea how to use it.

The research on this is not ambiguous. The immediate manager is the single most powerful predictor of development outcome for the people they manage. Not the quality of the programme. Not the learning culture. Not the development budget. The manager — specifically, the behaviour of the manager in the weeks and months following any development intervention.

The manager who asks "what did you take from the programme and what are you applying?" produces measurably better transfer than the manager who says nothing. The manager who creates opportunities to practise the skill being developed produces better transfer still. The manager who actively coaches the person in the conditions where the development is required produces the highest transfer of all.

Most organisations know this, in the sense that it is present in the research they reference and the frameworks they endorse. Very few invest proportionally in developing the managers to do it. The training budget goes into the programmes. The management layer — the infrastructure through which every programme either lands or fails — receives a fraction of the investment, if any.

The most significant return available in organisational development is not a better programme. It is a management layer that develops its people in the flow of real work, without removing them from the work to do it. Most organisations have not built this. Most have not seriously tried.

05

YOU ARE RENTING CAPABILITY THAT YOU SHOULD BE BUILDING.

Rented capability goes back when the invoice stops.

Consulting, contracting, and outsourcing are legitimate strategic tools. They provide access to capability that is not available internally, at speed, without the overhead of permanent employment. They are appropriate in specific contexts and at specific stages of organisational development.

They become a liability when they substitute for the development of the same capability internally. When the organisation that needs strategic capability hires a consultant rather than developing a strategist. When the organisation that needs change capability hires a change management firm rather than building the change capability in its own leadership layer. When the same capability is rented, at increasing cost, cycle after cycle, because the internal capability to replace it was never built.

The invoice is the signal. Rented capability is present when the engagement is active and absent when it ends. The organisation returns to its previous capability level — or lower, because the internal capability that existed before the outsourcing was not maintained — and the next cycle of renting begins.

The organisations that compound over time are the ones that use external capability as a bridge, not a destination. They hire expertise to model what good looks like and to accelerate the development of internal capability. They measure success not by the quality of the external engagement but by the degree to which they no longer need it.

06

MOTIVATION IS A STATE. CAPABILITY IS A STRUCTURE.

You are buying the wrong one.

The motivational speaker, the inspirational off-site, the values workshop, the purpose-driven team day — these interventions produce a real and genuine effect. The state they create is valuable. The energy, the alignment, the sense of possibility and shared direction that follows a well-executed motivational intervention are real. They are also temporary.

Not because the people are not committed. Because motivation is a state — it fluctuates with conditions, depletes under pressure, and requires renewal. The intervention that produces a motivational state produces a result that decays at a rate determined by the conditions the person returns to. Usually faster than the next intervention cycle.

Capability is different. Capability is structural — it is built into the architecture of how the person processes information, makes decisions, and responds to specific conditions. It does not fluctuate with motivation. It does not deplete under pressure. When it is genuine capability, it is present in the highest-pressure conditions as reliably as in the most supportive ones.

The investment in motivation produces a temporary lift. The investment in capability produces a permanent change. Both have value. Most organisations are buying significantly more of the first than the evidence suggests they should.

07

YOU ARE DEVELOPING INDIVIDUALS OUT OF SYSTEMS DESIGNED TO PRODUCE DIFFERENT OUTCOMES.

The system is more powerful than the individual. Always.

This is the failure mode that the most sophisticated development investments produce most reliably. The organisation identifies high-potential individuals, invests significantly in their development, and returns them to a system that was built to produce a different set of outcomes than the development was designed to create.

The result is predictable. The individual, developed toward a new set of behaviours, encounters a system — incentives, cultural norms, management expectations, structural constraints — that rewards the old behaviours. The system is not hostile to the development. It is simply more powerful and more consistent in its influence than the development programme. The individual conforms to the system.

This is not a failure of the individual. It is a design failure. The development investment was targeted at the individual. The primary variable — the system that shapes behaviour more powerfully and continuously than any programme — was left unchanged.

The organisations that produce genuine, lasting behavioural change at scale address the system first. They redesign the incentives. They change what behaviour is rewarded and what is penalised. They develop the management layer that is the system's primary interface. And then they invest in individuals within a system that will support and sustain what the development produces.

08

THE ONLY METRIC THAT MATTERS IS TRANSFER.

You are measuring everything except that.

Transfer — the application of learning in the conditions for which it was designed — is the only output of development investment that produces organisational value. Knowledge that is not transferred to changed behaviour in real conditions does not move the performance of the organisation. It moves the knowledge level of the individual, temporarily, which is a different and significantly smaller thing.

The measurement of transfer requires three things that most development measurement systems do not have. It requires a specific, behavioural description of what transfer looks like — not "improved leadership capability" but "this specific observable behaviour, in this specific context, at this frequency." It requires a time horizon beyond the event — not satisfaction at the end of the day but observed behaviour change at three and six months. And it requires the willingness to find out whether the investment produced what it was designed to produce, including the willingness to act on the finding if it did not.

Most organisations are not measuring transfer because the measurement is more demanding than the current system allows, because the findings might be unwelcome, and because the absence of transfer measurement does not produce any visible consequence. The programmes continue. The budgets are approved. The satisfaction scores are high. And the capability of the organisation develops at a fraction of the rate that the investment should produce.

Transfer measurement is not complex. It is uncomfortable. That is the only reason it is rare.

WE ADDRESS THESE TRUTHS DIRECTLY

Performance Capability works with individuals, teams, and organisations on the specific problems these eight statements identify. The work is not motivational. It is structural — built around the identification and permanent change of the architecture producing the current results.

TR1 — INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT

The foundational level of the Performance Capability programme. Direct, architectural development of the specific pattern most costing the individual — identification, interruption, and permanent replacement.

TR2 — TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

For senior leaders and executives. Develops the accurate reality orientation and decision-making capability that the highest-pressure conditions require.

TR3 — ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY ARCHITECTURE

Building the systems, cultures, and development infrastructure that compounds capability without requiring the individual at the centre. The answer to statements 3, 7, and 8.

PERFORMANCE TRAINING

Applied framework delivery for teams. Not motivational. Structural. Designed to change what fires in the conditions that matter — at the team level.

CEO & SENIOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Direct engagement with the leadership layer that sets the ceiling on everything below it. The most leveraged investment in organisational performance available.

ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT

Full diagnostic and development of the capability architecture of the organisation. Built around the eight truths in this paper — and what addressing all of them actually produces.

BEGIN WITH THE DIAGNOSTIC

The free performance diagnostic identifies the specific pattern most costing you or your organisation — in five minutes. It is the beginning of the honest conversation this paper is asking for.

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The Psychology of Human Excellence. The book that underpins everything in this paper — and the framework that addresses it.

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