There is nothing worse than a missed opportunity, especially in today's high stakes environment. The 2012 annual PWC Global CEO Survey revealed that in the past year, 25 percent of CEOs had to cancel or delay a strategic initiative because of talent constraints.¹ To enable strategy execution this year, for the majority of CEOs, developing leadership and growing the talent pipeline is a personal priority.²

In fact, organizations budget on average more than $130 billion annually for formal corporate learning and development activities. And this investment is only expected to increase going forward.³ According to research by Bersin & Associates, in 2011 companies spent 9.5 percent more than in the previous year on corporate learning initiatives.

However, the unfortunate reality is that learning and development at many organizations fails to deliver the intended results. Research shows that less than 20 percent of all corporate learning and development programs have influence on job performance.⁴ When it comes to bottom-line impact, the results are even worse.

The Failures of Traditional Corporate Learning

The typical corporate learning program tends to follow a predictable pattern. It is usually positioned as a training event, unconnected to the corporate strategic agenda and lacking the proper leadership support. Participating employees, devoid of leader engagement, often find themselves in one of two clichéd categories: the resistant employee dragged to the training event, but would rather be at work or the employee with ulterior motives there for all the wrong reasons. The person who should attend a learning program is the intentional learner—someone honestly looking to apply training to the job—but this is rare. Additionally, most corporate training leverages traditional techniques that rely heavily on lectures, standard PowerPoint presentations, and case studies delivered by low-level trainers or ill-prepared internal speakers.
Once the program has ended, employees usually return to their job equipped with new knowledge and capabilities, but most often fail to apply the learning experience. The most cited reasons include: “I did not understand why it was important”; “I did not see how the program was related to my job”; “My boss did not set expectations or hold me accountable for on the job action;” and, most prominently, “It took me several days to dig out from emails that piled up while I was away – the training seems like a distant memory.” Job performance remains stagnant, strategy execution stalls and delivered business impact is negligible.

But this does not need to be the case. Learning and development, when done right, can be a source of strategic differentiation and competitive advantage. Based on more than 25 years of delivering high-impact learning initiatives at leading global corporations, and the findings of top authorities, we have established a framework to ensure highly effective and impactful learning that drives results.

**The Learning & Execution Journey: Foundation for Success**

The challenges inherent in deploying effective learning and development programs are numerous. Consequently, it is important to develop a well-thought-out Learning and Execution Journey that systematically addresses and overcomes the failures of traditional corporate learning programs. Through a holistic approach, Learning and Execution Journeys consistently drive job performance improvements, strategic priorities and business impact. Key components to success include:

1. Recognition that the development of leaders is not a one-time event, but achieved over time through various blended activities to prime, build and sustain capability
2. Linking the learning initiative to the company’s business objectives to effectively develop the capabilities that will drive execution of strategic priorities
3. Engaging the learner’s leader throughout the process to communicate the learning initiative to the learner, tie the learning to individual and company objectives, coach through the process, and manage accountability for behavior change and results back on the job
4. High-impact learning modalities including, business simulations, Engage Maps and other experiential learning approaches that maximize engagement and appeal to next-generation learners
5. A focus on continuous improvement and a results assurance process to drive return on the training investment
6. Scaling the learning so it is consistently deployed across the global enterprise while allowing for localization as needed

In comparison with traditional learning initiatives, the difference is profound. A one-day event is replaced by a holistic process engaging key leaders, who provide follow-up support and hold learners accountable for on-the-job application.

**The Journey at a Glance**

While each Learning and Execution Journey is unique, the flow generally involves a series of engaging, blended learning experiences tailored to the individual and company’s business needs. While front-line Learning and Execution
Journeys typically focus on building the foundational skills of leadership, performance management and coaching, mid-level journeys emphasize the capabilities needed to lead strategy execution.

The following is an example of a standard five-phase, six-month front-line leader journey. The process leverages leader involvement, best-in-class experiential learning programs, an online portal, pre/post work, feedback sessions and application workshops to drive on-the-job action.

1. **Preparation—Leader Engagement, Portal and Online Community:** It is mission critical that the leader of the learner is aligned to and involved in the Learning and Execution Journey, providing context, coaching and follow-up support. An implementation process utilizes best practices from research and experience to facilitate leader/learner engagement, build accountability and ensure business results. An online portal provides tools to support leader/learner conversations and allows the learner to access program materials and engage in a community of peers.

2. **Core Experiential Learning Program—Essentials of Business Leadership:** This dynamic two-day experiential learning program builds the basic managerial practices and tools needed to lead high-performance teams. A robust business simulation enables new managers to establish team goals that align with the organization’s strategy, delegate responsibility to optimize productivity, motivate teams to achieve goals, and analyze team and individual performance to provide effective feedback.

### Recommended Front-Line Leader Learning & Execution Journey

![Business Results](source: BTS)
3. **Sustain and Build the Experience—Online Leadership Challenges**: Following the core program, participants access Online Leadership Challenges to focus on delegation, coaching, performance management and other skills. Each module can be completed by individuals or small teams of learners. These highly interactive modules sustain the learning, bridge one experience to the next, and provide community for participants to share best practices.

4. **Deep Skill Development—Symphony: Asssessing, Diagnosing and Managing Performance**: Participants reconvene for a one-day experiential learning program designed to provide a common language and system-thinking approach to performance management. Through Symphony, managers build the capabilities to access, plan and manage individual and team performance.

5. **Ongoing Leader/Manager Meetings**: Post-program, participants meet with their leader to share action plans and receive ongoing coaching that ensures successful execution back on the job. Tools available on the portal, including the online community, support this process.

Learning and Execution Journeys are entirely flexible in design, incorporate modules on a variety of topics, and can include more phases to extend the implementation timeframe and effectively support the company’s strategic priorities.

One enthusiastic participant in the Learning and Execution Journey commented, “The layout of the course was outstanding. I’ve never been to a course put together that way and I’ve been to many management training courses.”

**Learning & Execution Journeys Drive Value at Leading Organizations**

Corporate learning and development can be a tremendous driver of strategic execution. Learning and Execution Journeys have proven highly successful in building leadership capability—and the business results are tremendous.

In measuring the impact of a Learning and Execution Journey, an independent third-party evaluator determined:

- More than 90 percent rated it on the high end of the training scale and 43 percent rated this training the best they had ever experienced
- Nearly 70 percent of 161 participants stated they had either already achieved results or expected to achieve results in the near term

In comparison with traditional corporate learning, the difference is profound. Relative to the impact of the traditional approach, a Learning and Execution Journey achieved a 350% increase in training effectiveness.

The third party evaluator summarized, “The before-training dialogues between the leader and learner and the sense of accountability following the training resulted in a 70 percent training application rate. This exceptionally high impact rate attests to the thoroughness and care that the leadership team took, including special steps to ensure the program was not just a one-time classroom event, but that it included impact-enhancing tools and actions and provided additional follow-up resources and support.”
To drive growth and sustain a competitive advantage, today’s leading organizations are strategically increasing investments in learning and development. To maximize impact, corporations can effectively link learning to performance and the bottom line by adopting Learning and Execution Journeys. Leveraging a holistic approach, high-impact experiential learning tools and leader involvement, Learning and Execution Journeys assure real results—overcoming the documented failure rate of traditional corporate learning programs.

**About BTS**

BTS focuses on the people side of strategy, working with leaders at all levels to help them make better decisions, convert those decisions to actions and deliver results. At our core, we believe people learn best by doing. For 30 years, we’ve been designing fun, powerful experiences™ that have profound and lasting impact on people and their careers. We inspire new ways of thinking, build critical capabilities and unleash business success. It’s strategy made personal.

For more information, please visit [www.bts.com](http://www.bts.com).

2. PWC, 15.