



The Hard Truth About Soft Skills: Leadership and Promotion at the US Food and Drug Administration

Issam Zineh, PharmD, MPH | Office of Clinical Pharmacology
Office of Translational Sciences | CDER | US FDA

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Soft Skills

- **Cluster of traits, personal habits, interpersonal agility, communication skills, attitude (e.g., friendliness and optimism) that characterize relationships with others***
- **Important part of individual contribution to success of an organization**
- **Screening or training can yield significant ROI for an organization**
- **Increasingly sought out by employers in addition to standard qualifications (hiring, promotion)**

Hard Truth #1: These are among the hardest skills to come by.

Hard Truth #2: Presence of soft skills not emphasized in the scientific/technical realm; notable absence is often justified away.

Hard Truth #3: Many organizations don't effectively invest in this area of staff development.

Outline

- **FDA's Office of Clinical Pharmacology: Organizational Snapshot**
- **The Importance of Competency Models**
- **Individualized Professional Development**
- **Takeaways**

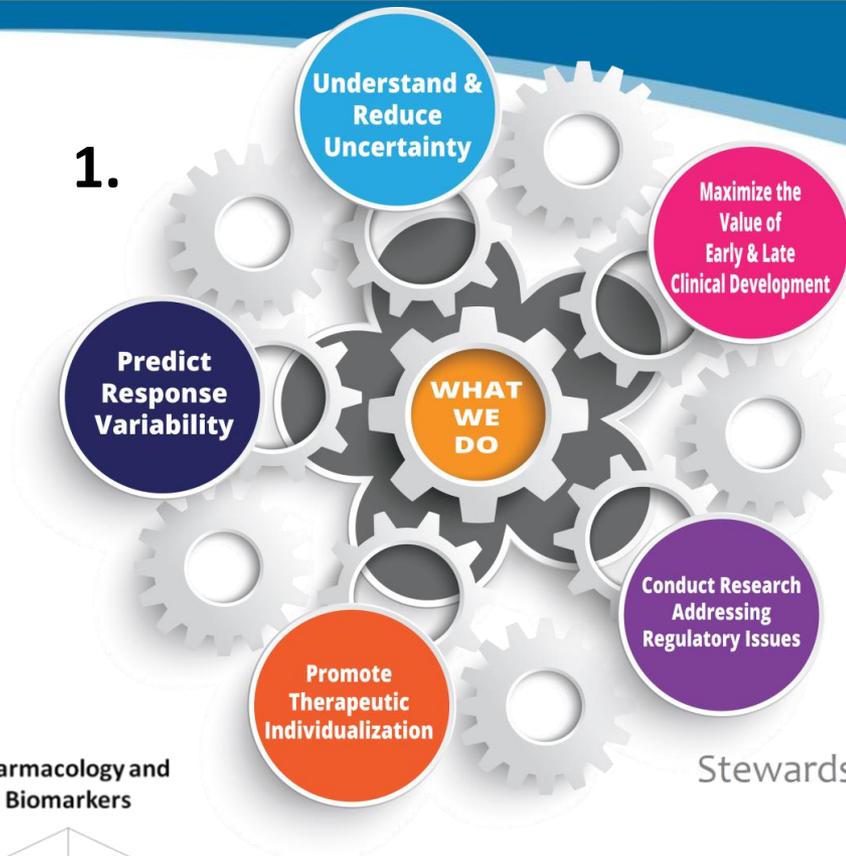
Acknowledgments:

- ✓ **Lauren Brum (FDA Office of Clinical Pharmacology)**
- ✓ **Joseph Grillo (FDA Office of Clinical Pharmacology)**
- ✓ **Kathy Hanson (FDA Division of Learning and Organizational Development)**

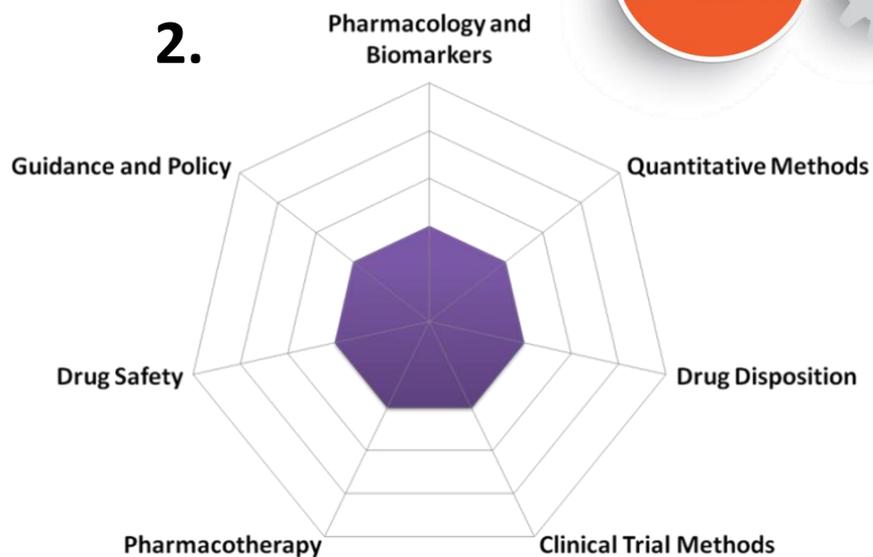
Resources:

<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/senior-executive-service/executive-core-qualifications/>

1.



2.



Stewardship

Connectedness

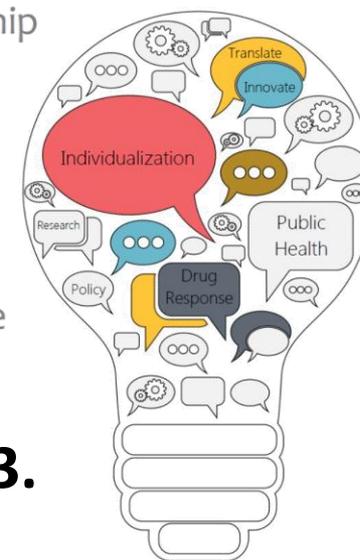
Leadership

Diversity

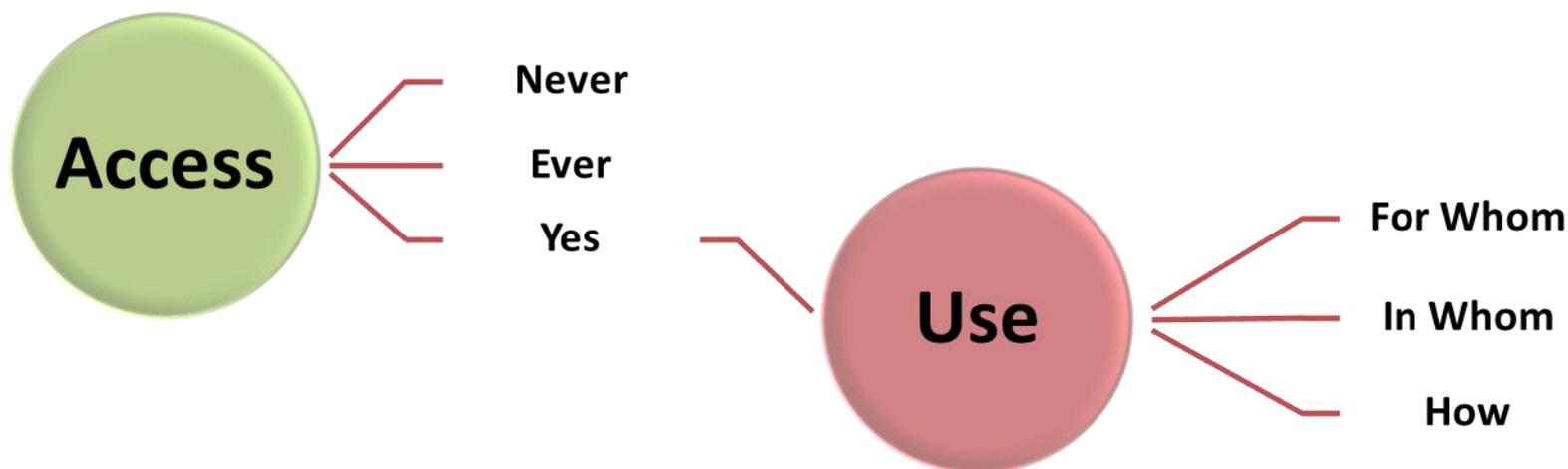
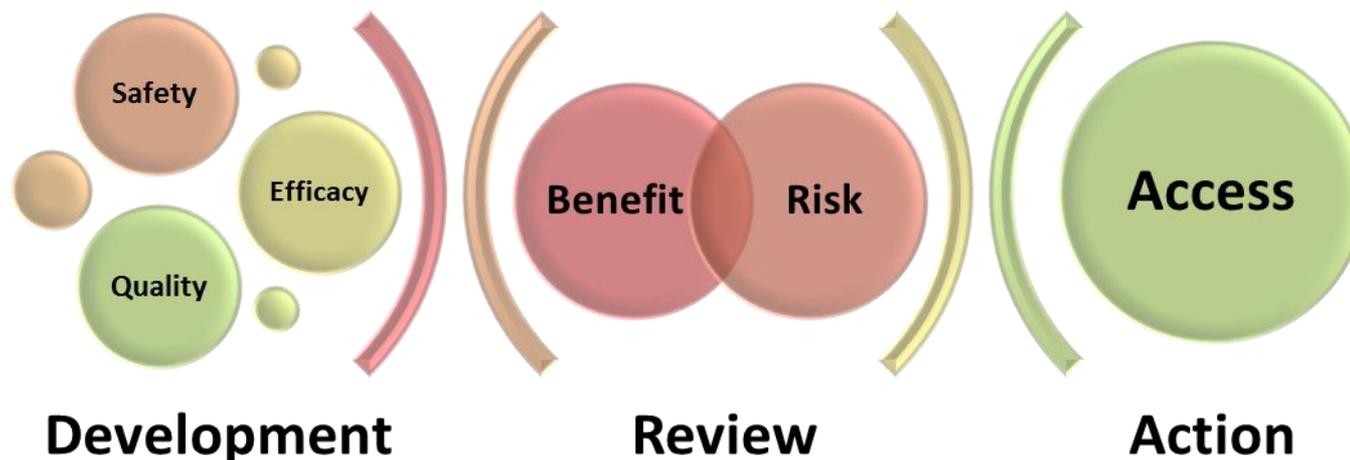
Excellence

Respect

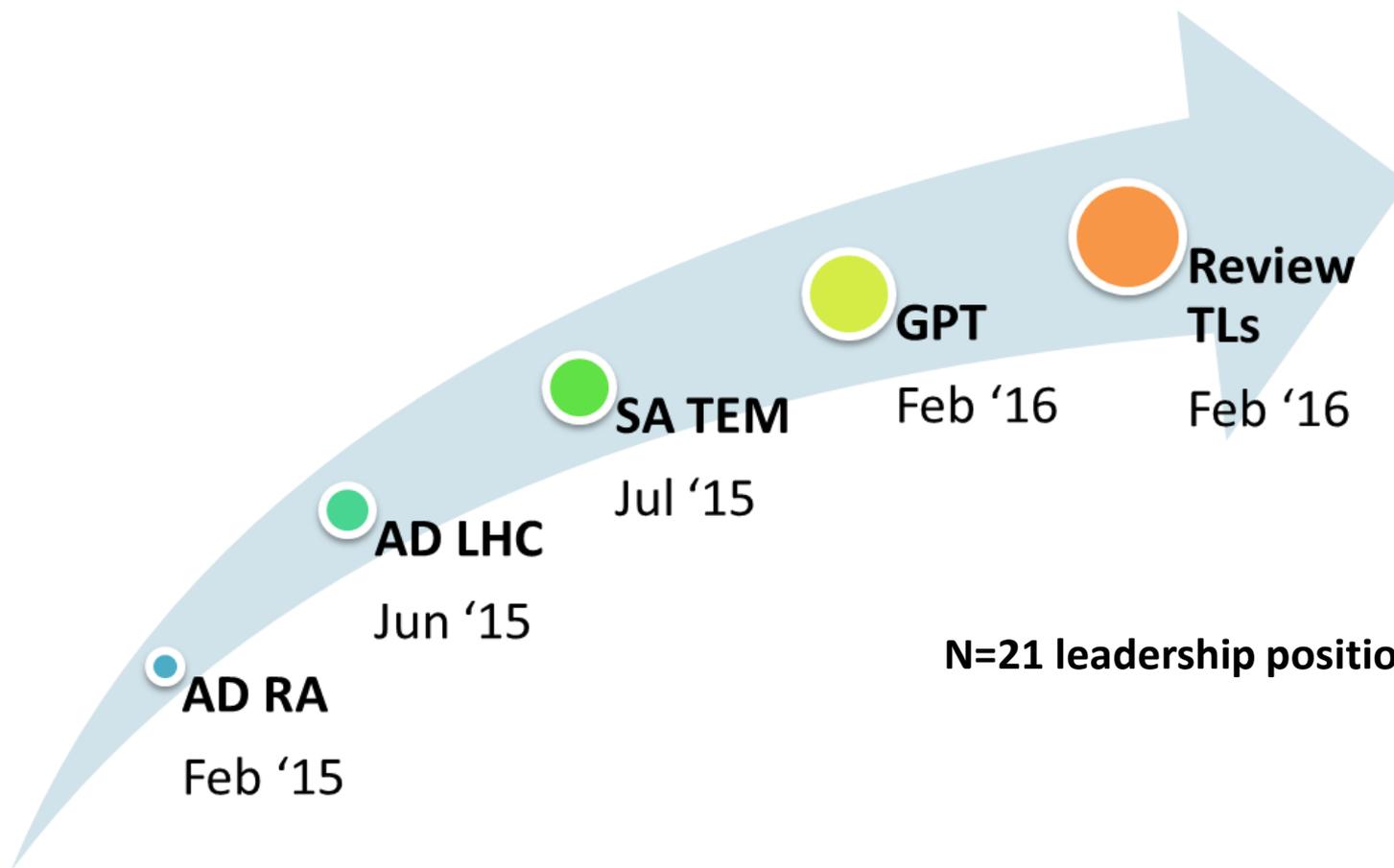
3.



Critical Path of Informed Decision Making



Recent Leadership Developments



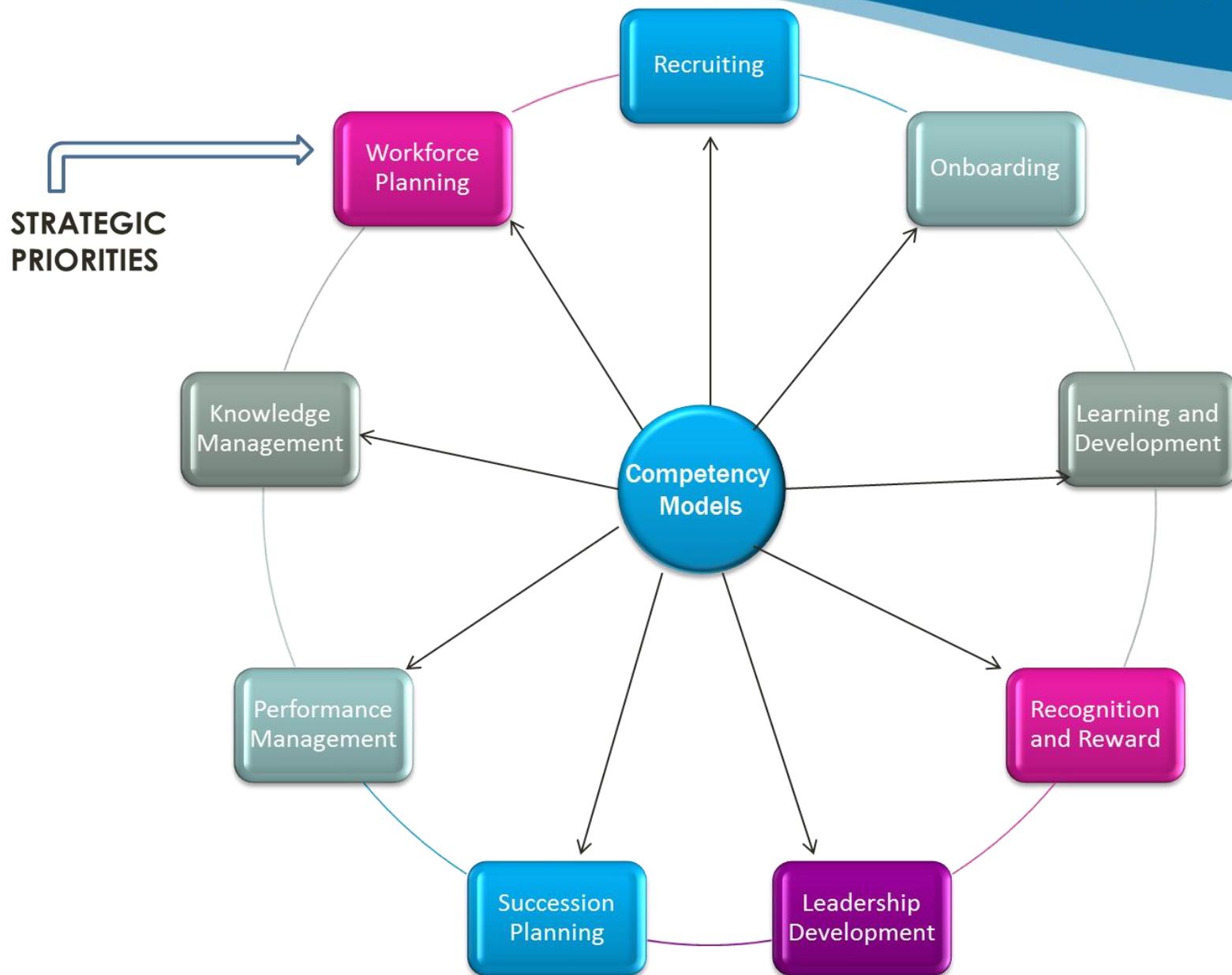
N=21 leadership positions in 1 year

Some Notable Observations

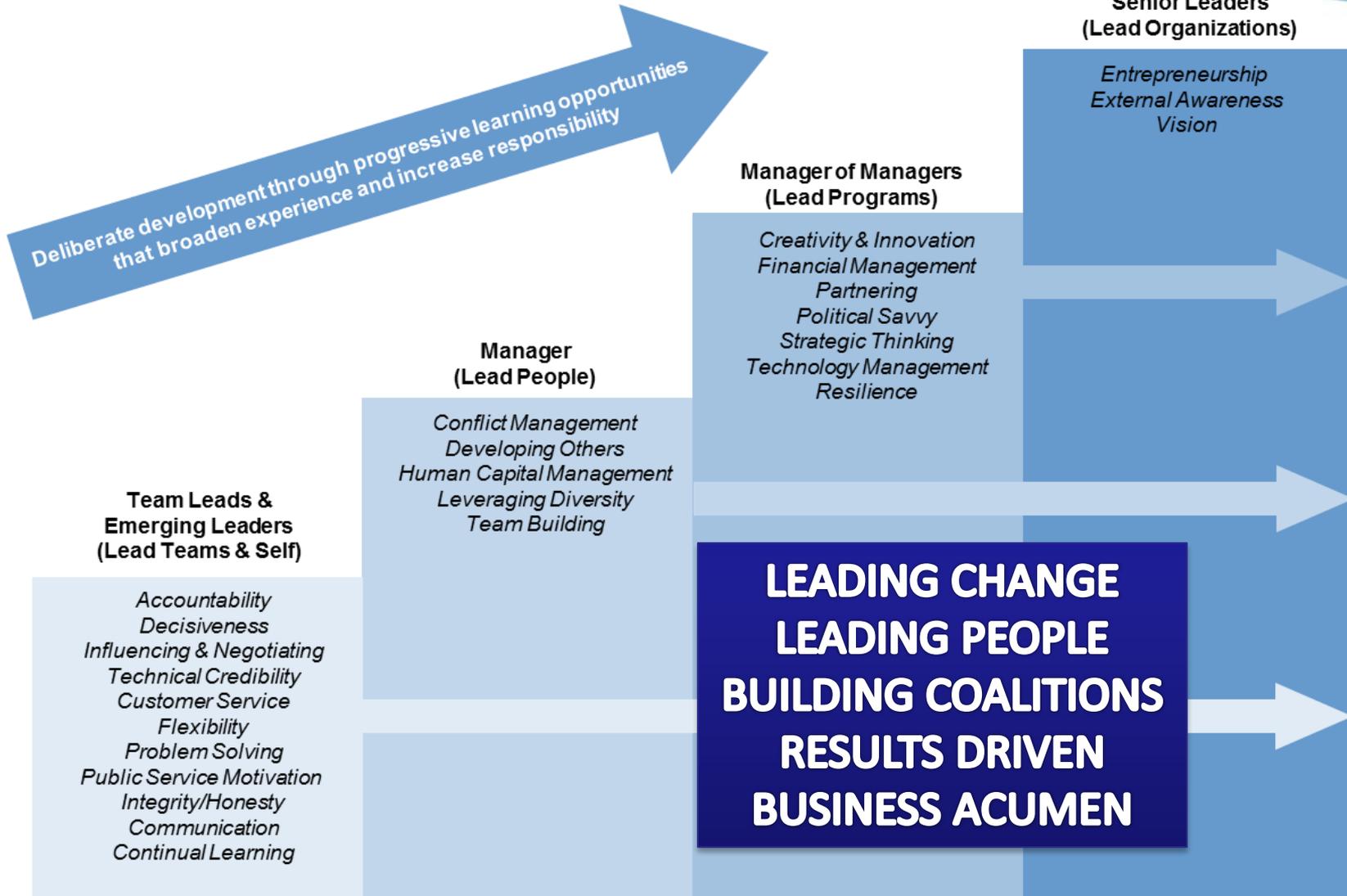
- **Common perception: positional leadership = bona fide leadership**
- **Four phenotypes**
 - Demonstrated leader
 - Emerging leader, self-aware
 - Emerging leader, newly awakened
 - Aspiring individual contributor
- **Established senior leaders must know which category individual staffers fall into and professionally develop accordingly; failure to do so:**
 - Underutilization
 - Inefficiency
 - Staff at-risk (morale, burnout, boredom, etc.)
- **Eventuality is no substitute for opportunity**

The Importance of Competency Models

An observable, measurable pattern of skills, knowledge, abilities, behaviors and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully (U.S. Office of Personnel Management)



Leadership Competency Model



What do We do with This?

- 1. Develop a competency profile for various leadership positions**
- 2. Distinguish between**
 - Price-of-Admission**
 - Competitive Edge**
 - Differentiator Competencies**
- 3. Use this profile for level setting, talent attraction/selection, and individualized professional development plans**
- 4. Focus on experiential learning opportunities that progressively broaden staff members' experiences and increase responsibility (vis-à-vis a wide "collection" of experiences/technical training)**
- 5. Communicate widely**

Steps 1 and 2:

Develop Competency Profile (OCP TL)

STRATEGIC SKILLS

Technical Learning^{*}; Learning on the Fly[†]; Problem Solving[†]

OPERATING SKILLS

Developing Direct Reports and Others[‡]; Directing Others^{*}; Managing and Measuring Work[†]

COURAGE

Conflict Management[‡]

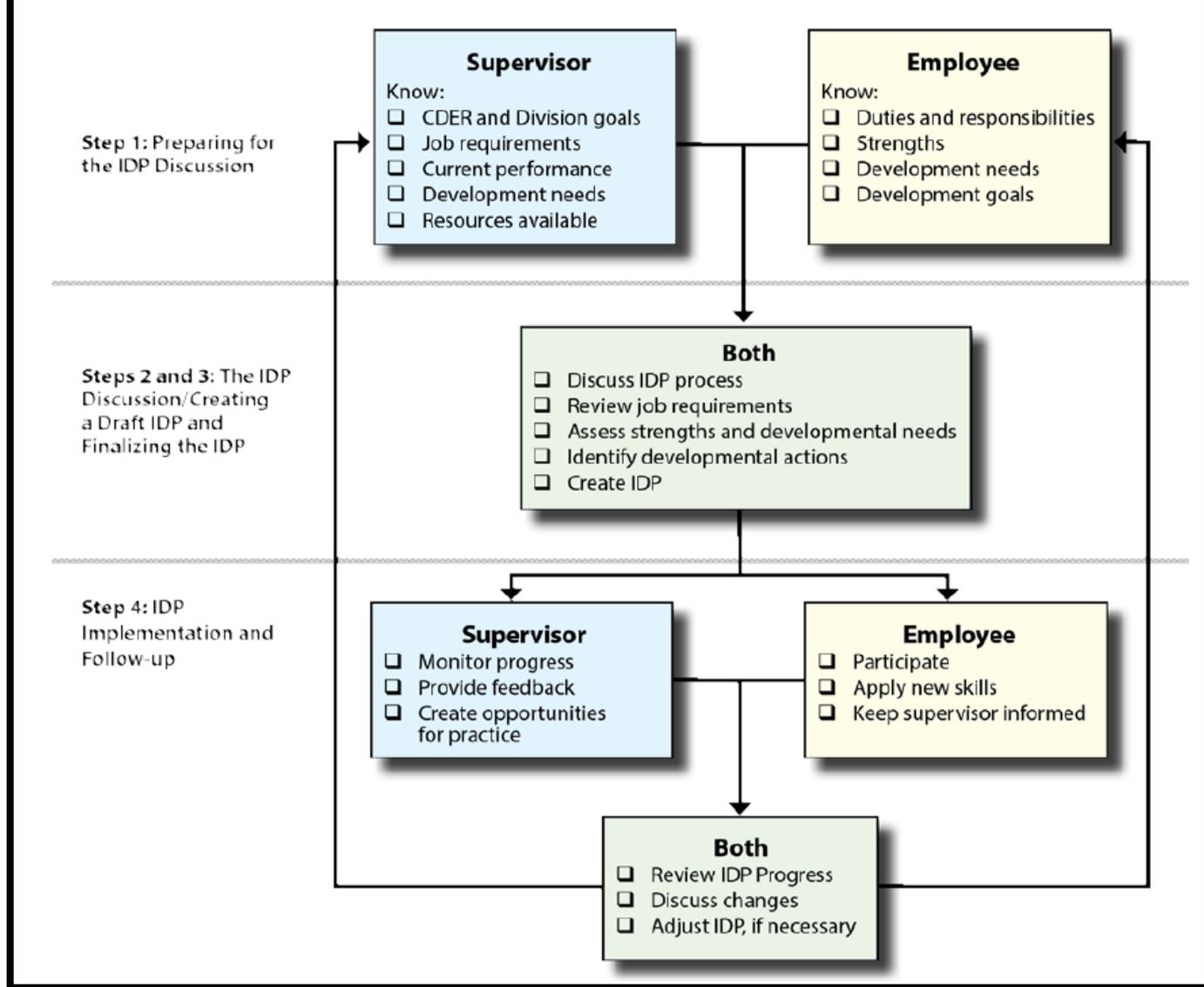
ORGANIZATIONAL POSITIONING SKILLS

Communicating Effectively^{*/†}

PERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Customer Focus^{*}; Negotiating[‡]; Building Effective Teams[‡]; Acting with Honor and Character^{*/†}

Individual Development Planning Process



A Note on IDPs

 Center for Drug Evaluation and Research		Individual Development Plan (IDP) Worksheet			Employee: _____ Supervisor: _____		Date: _____ Date: _____	
Goal	Developmental Action	Measure Of Success	Resources Required	Supervisor's Role	Dates	Strategic Goal		
<i>The knowledge/skill/ability or competency to be developed. This learning goal must be identified before the appropriate developmental action can be chosen.</i>	<i>The specific activities that the employee will engage in to achieve the learning goal.</i>	<i>The performance measure that will indicate successful completion of the developmental action.</i>	<i>The resources that are necessary to engage in the developmental action. Resources may include funds, work hours, other employees (e.g., subject matter expert), job aids, documentation, etc.</i>	<i>What the supervisor will do to support the employee during this process. This support will always include regular feedback.</i>	<i>The dates that the developmental action will begin and end.</i>	<i>The CDER strategic goal that the developmental action supports.</i>		

- **Not maximally effective in the absence of a framework (common vocabulary)**
- **Solely focusing on technical knowledge, skills, and abilities is a common pitfall**
- **It can be a challenge (and a chore) to consider strengths, developmental needs, and personal development goals (short- and long-term)**
- **A developmental plan without developmental assignments is a piece of paper (implementation and follow-up)**

Takeaways

- **Leadership/professional development should be**
 - **Socialized early**
 - **Done in partnership**
 - **A conscious daily exercise (practiced)**
- **Explicit competency models are critical**
 - **Recruitment**
 - **Retention**
 - **Development**
 - **Promotion**
- **A model-informed development plan can be composed of didactic training, situational coaching, and experiential opportunities**
- **If individuals wait for leadership opportunities to think about leadership, it might be too late (track record vs. potential)**
- **Leadership can manifest at all levels of the organization (not only positional) and should be equally valued**

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