# Is There an App for Leadership Development?

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Mobile apps will soon offer robust tools for leadership and managerial development. The possibilities are endless and important, especially when paired with traditional course development and coaching.

In January 2012, Deloitte and Forbes Insights published "Talent Edge 2020," a study of matters weighing on executives' minds. The respondents cited leadership as their most pressing talent concern. In 2011, in the midst of the recession, Duke's Corporate Education group found the same appetite for leader and manager development.

Quality is a concern, however. Many remain skeptical about the shift in leader development focus into performance and habits, and executives are looking for better ways to develop and support their managers and leaders. Many have begun to turn to mobile devices. Conferences such as Performance Support 2012 and mLearnCon, books by writers such as Clark Quinn and David Metcalf, and online resources such as Judy Brown's blog mLearnopedia pique interest and cause some to wonder if phones and tablets can boost leader and manager development. Are there apps with potential to build skills and encourage performance?
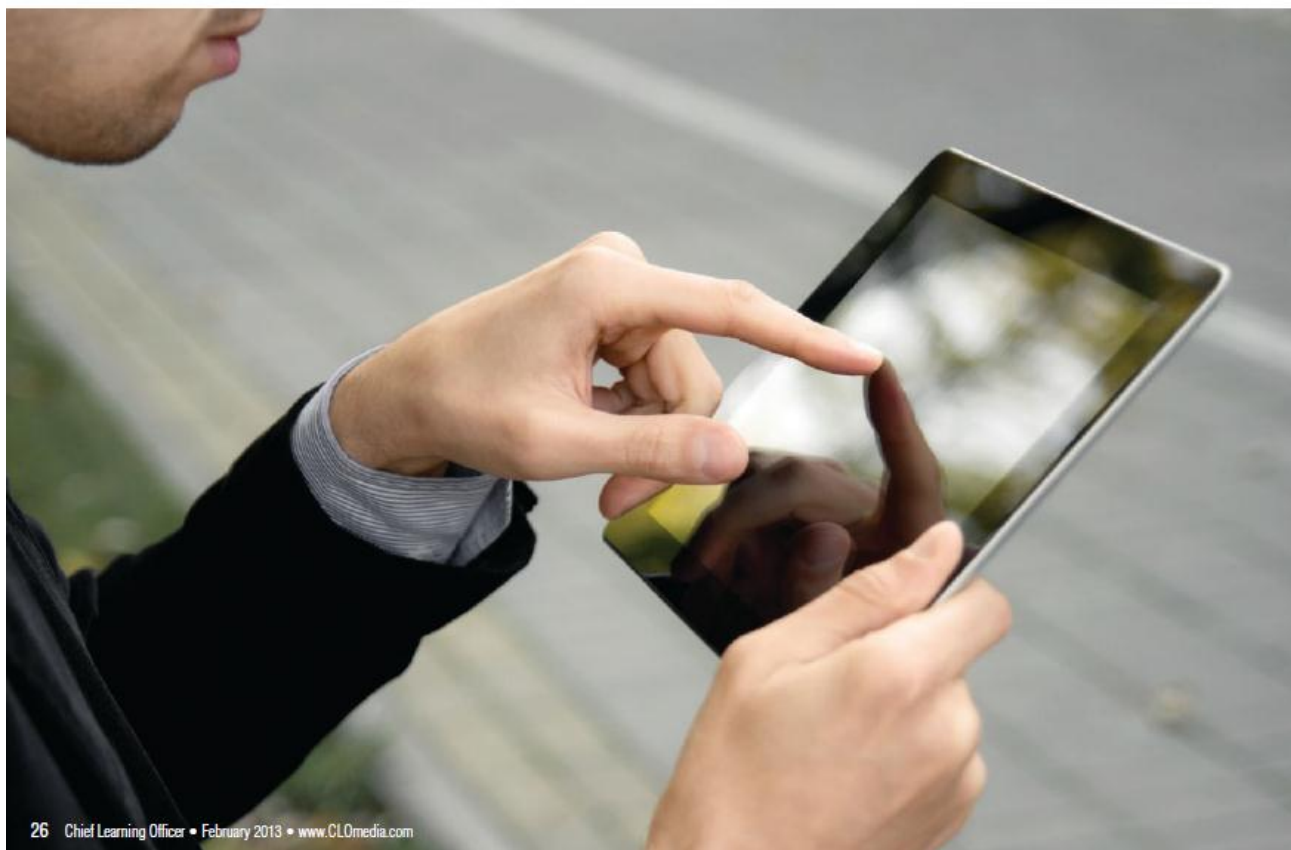
Mobile Possibilities

Mobile devices allow learning to happen in the midst of life and work through ready access to the LMS, apps, modules, podcasts, vodcasts and social media. A seller can review a new sales strategy by listening to podcasts that illustrate the approach. A service rep can use scarce, unscheduled moments to fulfill compliance requirements through scenario-based e-learning modules. A coach can Skype with an employee to review production numbers, and then brainstorm alternative ways to present data. A new employee can browse social networks for insight into how an organization really works.

Mobile devices also can help cope with budget pain. Rear Adm. Steve Mehling, the U.S. Coast Guard officer in charge of learning, wrote of financial benefits: "We do a little with mobile in the Coast Guard, but we'd certainly like to do a lot more. For example, we recently shifted to iPad-based instruction for most of our Leadership Development Center courses. This provides us the cost savings of not having to print course handouts and reference materials, and it provides students with quick access to other forms of research materials, both in class and during off hours."

Rather than despairing about the conferences and learning opportunities missed due to constrained finances, the learning organization can rely on a mobile professional development strategy that encourages colleagues to seek out high-value content and experiences online. For example, a small startup may not have the funds to send its designers to Adobe MAX, but it can easily learn how to leverage Adobe programs for mobile development by accessing free videos of sessions from the conference on Adobe TV — actually learning how to develop for mobile on a mobile device.

The possibilities for mobile learning aren't limited to conference content. Wondering where to put periods and commas when using quotations? Unsure how to edit the report a manager offers for review? Chances are, Grammar Girl has the answer. With a mobile app containing short podcasts, an online component with written content and short YouTube videos, Grammar Girl responds to questions with brief, searchable content and relevant examples.

Even educational institutions such as MIT Open-CourseWare and Kahn Academy provide free apps to deliver their content on mobile devices. Coursera, Udacity and edX, with various relationships to conventional universities, are now looking to deliver lessons globally through mobile technology.

Help Outside Scheduled Events

Performance support tools often can stand on their own, making contributions outside of learning interventions. The GPS is an example. It provides route guidance from a hamlet in Maine to one in upstate New York. Microsoft Word is another substitute for a learning investment. While composing, Word delivers contextual visual cues for errant spelling and grammar.

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Performance support is sometimes most appealing when paired with learning, however. Consider Lonely Planet's Audio Phrasebook. For example, the app activates Mandarin lessons learned in a short class prior to a trip to China. When necessary, the app reminds the traveler of basic transportation phrases.

Hours in management classes are often devoted to the importance of and processes for documenting employee behavior. The Employee Tracker Pro app provides tools with the potential to turn good intentions

How to Select the Right App

Some organizations will invest in creating their own learning apps. The following checklist can help an organization conduct a systemic review of existing apps to evaluate any gaps that need filling.

Question	Yes	No	Discussion
Think about what you hope to accomplish. Will the material help users think about it — and do it — in the nick of time?	☐	☐	Ideal answer: Yes Effective mobile support must be useful without going to school on the matter.
If there is text, consider how the text will present on the screen. Are there large paragraphs to read, many bullets to scroll?	☐	☐	Ideal answer: No When in doubt, leave it out.
Boil it down. Make sure the material is meaty. Provide nothing extraneous. Anything extra here?	☐	☐	Ideal answer: No The information on the screen should be just what is needed to handle the situation.
Can users find the information related to the task in three screens (or clicks) or fewer?	☐	☐	Ideal answer: Yes The less navigation required to get to relevant content, the better the design.
Think about movement and control. Do users control location through buttons, menus, scrolling, play/pause/stop, etc.?	☐	☐	Ideal answer: Yes Users should be able to control access to the content. They should also be able to pause at any time or navigate to content that is more relevant in the moment.
Are users required to type anything while going through the app/module?	☐	☐	Ideal answer: No Simple touch responses are the ideal method for user input. Typing words or numbers can be cumbersome on a mobile device and should be avoided when possible.
Consider the images used in the module. Are they tied to the content? Do they advance performance, reflection or connection?	☐	☐	Ideal answer: Yes Some images are necessary, others just take up space and distract from the task.
Review the specs. Is the app or module designed to run on many devices (iPhone, iPad, Droid, BlackBerry, etc.) or on the standard device provided by the organization?	☐	☐	Ideal answer: Yes If users will be accessing the content via their own mobile devices, test your content on all possible devices or on the required system.

formed in the classroom into workplace habits.

The book *Job Aids and Performance Support* by Allison Rossett and Lisa Schafer, the authors of this article, defines two types of performance support, based on when they help. Planner performance support provides guidance just before or after the task. It helps a user to reflect on the task at hand. For example, a smartphone might provide a checklist with a series of standards for a manager to consider as he prepares to deliver progressive discipline to a tardy employee. An auditor might turn to his device to examine a report before submitting it. Does it have all the necessary pieces and parts, and are those elements up to snuff?

Sidekick performance support differs because it supports the user during the task. It is in the middle of the matter. Nike's Sports Knowledge Underground program is sidekick support on the iPod Touch that enables retail sales associates to share product knowledge during conversations with customers.

A dramatic example of sidekick support delivered at the moment of need can be seen in the Medtronic Foundation's AED support system. The audio and visual components of the system are sidekick support that enables almost anyone to save a life.

What's Available?

There are apps available for leaders and managers on a variety of complex topics. For example, McGraw-Hill's Perfect Phrases for Managers tool and the Total Workplace Performance app offer much on the topic of feedback and communications. Perfect Phrases for Managers is marketed as a virtual management coach providing short phrases for managers to use in conversations. It has a search feature that allows users to locate solutions to the workplace scenarios they are tackling. It includes sample conversations that demonstrate how to use the phrases.

The beauty of apps is that most are accessed on the go in free moments, perhaps even during a conversation. The best ones work because they limit their ambitions. They don't target all of San Diego, for example. Instead they help visitors appreciate Balboa

Park, concentrating on the rose, cactus or Japanese gardens, art options, such as folk art at the Mingei Museum, and the flora and fauna at the San Diego Zoo.

An app cannot and should not promise to make someone a great leader in one fell swoop. It is better to go narrow, such as to help with framing goals in concrete terms or delivering tailored feedback.

User control is important. While Books24x7 offers attractive content, there is no way, besides the basic search function, to customize access to the videos. A search for "feedback" may turn up 20 videos.

Also important, many offerings are not yet fully optimized for mobile delivery or for use on several devices and operating systems. While large organizations can select and develop apps for a single, shared platform, small and medium-sized enterprises will rely on the various devices managers already possess.

In the near future mobile apps will offer valuable development for leaders and managers. Just as the Web has evolved from flat content (Web 1.0) to interactive, social, multimedia (Web 2.0) to tailored, anticipatory experiences (Web 3.0), mobile apps too will evolve. Leader and manager content will be reformulated to more closely hew to practical matters, supplying leaner, tastier morsels of development and support when and where needed. **CLO**

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