

# CASE STUDY: MasterCard



## How getAbstract Drives Corporate Learning at MasterCard

The faster companies learn, the more competitive they become. MasterCard is a corporate-learning pioneer, and getAbstract plays a central role in its learning strategy. Its award-winning leadership development program aims to increase the impact of strategic initiatives, build a strong pipeline of leaders and drive cultural change. MasterCard uses getAbstract to maximize the efficacy of its initiatives.



## Developing Leaders at MasterCard

The mission of MasterCard's Global Talent Management and Development team is to "transform employees' potential into performance, leverage their strengths, and help them develop the skills and abilities they need to drive the success of the company." MasterCard believes in leader-led development and tying talent management to the most critical business priorities. The organization's Leadership at All Levels philosophy, which emphasizes empowerment and personal accountability, has become ingrained throughout the company.

Since MasterCard introduced getAbstract internally in 2006, the credit card organization has embedded getAbstract summaries in virtually every learning initiative. The company has encouraged managers to use getAbstract in their regular team meetings as a way to keep employees focused on important topics and to build team spirit. MasterCard's quarterly

getAbstract Chat sessions, featuring its own executives, have been particularly successful. For each chat, the Global Talent Management and Development team and one executive pick a topic tightly aligned with the key business priorities for the year. The getAbstract Chats have four components:

### 1. getAbstract book summary

MasterCard asks every employee to read a selected getAbstract book summary, think about its concepts and reflect on how they can apply it to the company.

### 2. getAbstract Chat teleconference

One of the company's executives explains the relevance of the book and its business implications and discusses them with the employees.

### 3. Leadership Forum speaker series

MasterCard invites the book author to host a live global webcast for its employees.

### 4. Supplemental resources

To ensure that employees have the tools they need to apply what they have learned, MasterCard provides online tools, learning resources or relevant workshops.

The teleconference with the executive is at the heart of the program and is a powerful part: Leaders are role modeling that they continue to develop, which inspires people to take their own development seriously. The chat resembles a radio interview. It begins with the leader's personal leadership story, which humanizes the executive: "What is this person's formula? What strengths propelled him or her forward? What mistakes taught him or her important lessons?" The employees see the executive as something of a peer and as a person from whom they can learn. The executive then explains how two or three take-aways from the book were relevant to his or her leadership journey and shares an opinion on why the text is important for the company and for each employee's development.

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When executives are onstage, they at times “can’t help putting [on] their game face.” The teleconference format, by contrast, allows them to feel comfortable and chat informally, which the Global Talent Management and Development team encourages. Employees can call into the teleconference or listen to MasterCard radio, a live stream on their desktop. Without leaving their desks, they can participate in the Q&A session toward the end of the conference. Some listen as teams and discuss afterward.

## Case Study 1: Change Management

Because building its change-management capabilities and becoming more agile has become a critical competency for MasterCard (as for many other companies), the organization was looking for creative ways to bring to life for employees the ideas from John Kotter’s book *Leading Change*. MasterCard wanted people to think deliberately and creatively about how Kotter’s work applies to their everyday tasks as they lead key strategic projects. The company’s chief marketing officer hosted the getAbstract Chat. He provided some real examples of how he had seen the Kotter model play out in the organization and how it had led to much better results. MasterCard then invited Kotter to speak. He brought the model to life through numerous examples from his research. To keep the momentum going, MasterCard became an early adopter of Kotter’s Leading Bold Change workshops. By the time the employees participated in the workshops, they thoroughly understood Kotter’s concepts and could focus on the action-planning component.

## Case Study 2: Innovation

Frans Johansson’s book *The Medici Effect* is about innovating at the intersection of ideas, concepts and cultures and through the process of diversity. The getAbstract Chat was with the chief product officer, whose core responsibility is driving innovation. She addressed how specific ideas from the book apply to the work that MasterCard does every day. The author talk about how other companies had created original ideas using the Medici process energized MasterCard’s employees. The organization was an early adopter of the Medici Game, a highly interactive workshop that helps teams break out of the box and see the possibilities of innovating within their daily work. A lot of ideas have come out of these brainstorming sessions, and MasterCard has been able to feed them into structured processes to help implement the best ones.

## The Impact on MasterCard’s Learning Culture

Turning managers into coaches and showing employees the benefits of mentoring and sharing knowledge has made the organization stronger and more capable of achieving high

performance. The getAbstract Chats also significantly increased the use of getAbstract. MasterCard has an Internet-based portal within MasterCard University, where employees have access to a number of different resources. A big tab for getAbstract makes finding getAbstract summaries easy. MasterCard’s leaders continually drive traffic to the site to help people become aware of it. For example, the head of human resources sends a quarterly email to all managers that highlights developmental opportunities and points out an abstract of the quarter. Due to getAbstract’s versatility, there’s a relevant summary that gets the wheels turning for any topic. “Once people get to know the library, they’re off to the races because there’s something in there for everyone.” The summaries suit well to an individual’s development plan. People don’t have time to read entire books, but through getAbstract, they can get the essence of a book rapidly – and if the message resonates, they buy the book or go to the workshop. Which option they choose is irrelevant for MasterCard as long as they’re going deeper into the subject.

**“There’s something in the getAbstract library for everyone. You can connect it to someone’s individual development plan beautifully. Regardless of what [an employee is] working on, that library will have something in it to help him or her.”**

MasterCard puts a lot of energy into measuring the impact of its programs through a number of different survey methodologies. This involves learning from the data getAbstract provides about what people are reading, how they are reading it, where it’s coming from, and so on. MasterCard learns from its cohort programs, where its employees read many summaries together over a long period of time. This enables the organization to delve deeply into the psychology of how the summaries fit into its learning. For MasterCard, getAbstract “is a primary learning tool in a lot of instances, and it’s a complementary learning tool in almost every instance.”