

How to own your learning and development in a post-Covid-19 world



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Covid-19 is an opportunity to break the mould and recast leadership models, says new CEMS report. Start by taking control of your professional development, with these six tips from report contributor and Université Catholique Louvain Professor, Sunita Malhotra

In 2020, organisations around the world experienced an unprecedented shock. The Covid-19 crisis has reshaped markets, broken supply chains, dismantled business models and effected a global sea-change in the way that we do business, communicate and work, as well as in our attitudes to the work that we do.

A brand-new research report from CEMS, the Global Alliance in Management Education, examines the future of leadership in a post-Covid-19 world, outlining how this crisis has also presented business leaders and young professionals with a unique opportunity to stop, reflect and learn; to re-think the culture, operations, processes, frameworks, and the leadership that define us.

It finds that as a result of the pandemic there has been an accelerated shift from the rigid structure and systems that have long characterised organisations and models of leadership to something more flexible, open and agile – new models of leadership and management that are predicated on inclusivity, empathy, tolerance of failure and openness in communication.

The opportunity for business graduates

Within this 'new normal,' there is an opportunity for innovative, self-motivated next generation decisionmakers to lead change and to build the competencies, qualities and resilience to weather this storm while bracing for the next. The ability for business graduates to own their learning and development, always driving forward and evolving, is key to success.

So, as a business graduate, how can you own your learning and development in a post-Covid-19 world?



(1) Know yourself

The first thing I always ask my CEMS students to consider is purpose: what is important to them and why? To kickstart this process, the StandOut Strengths Assessment by Marcus Buckingham can help you assess what you have to offer the market and what gives you energy. Especially in Covid times, it is all too easy to settle for tasks which are convenient, but which slowly drain the life out of you. Once you get a good idea of who you are as a person and what motivates you to jump out of bed in the morning, you can identify your purpose and use this as a basis for development.

(2) Seek opportunities

Drawing on that purpose, decide what it is that you want to learn. If you don't know that, how can you own your development? From there, seek opportunities using the 70/20/10 rule – 70% of learning happens on the job, 20% through mentoring and 10% through training. In spite of the pandemic, this model is incredibly relevant – in fact maybe even more so – as practical experience will always give you more, even if it isn't face-to-face. If you have a job, take initiative and put yourself forward for a cross-company taskforce. If you are a jobseeker, offer your skills to companies while you search. Seek out a mentor, or consider putting yourself forward as one, as this will be a huge learning opportunity. When it comes to training, there are so many courses you can take for free, offered by educational institutions around the globe.

(3) Always learn something new

Young professionals, in my experience, are often swamped with so much information that they don't know where to start when it comes to learning. However, I would urge that any course you can put on your CV as a business graduate is in your own interest. I recently joined a Coursera course on 'happiness' from Yale and learned a number of things which I have since used with clients and students. Have you heard of Blinkist? Through this site you can read a 15-minute executive summary of pretty much every non-fiction book that exists! As a business graduate why not subscribe to this?

(4) Treat your career as an ecosystem

Career ladders are a thing of the past – even horizontal and diagonal ones! Instead, think of your career transversely, as a collection of experiences which you can add to. Once you know what you want to learn, what experience do you need to have to get you there? Seize chances within your company for learning, big or small, to build skills and experience outwards, rather than upwards. Ask your manager if you can take a sideways step into other departments or gain a new skill through a stretch assignment. This will put you in charge of your own development choices and mean that you can quickly flex during times of uncertainty.

(5) Build vulnerability and humanity

Vulnerability and the ability to be more caring, and empathetic (in other words, more 'human') are critical post-pandemic leadership qualities pinpointed in the new CEMS report. This involves deep understanding of how people function, their cultures and perspectives. A new generation of leaders will need to learn this more than ever, in order to open their minds to new approaches. Looking at role models who have these desired qualities can be incredibly helpful. For example, CEMS corporate partners all share values to contributing to a more open, sustainable and inclusive world. For me personally, the CEO of Novartis, Vas Narasimhan, is a fantastic example of a human-minded and inspirational leader.

(6) Make meaningful connections

People often roll their eyes at the concept of networking because they don't really know what it means. Successful networking means being clear on why you want to build a meaningful connection and that it is about long-term give-and-take, not just a one-sided relationship. With this in mind, maximise your Business School and workplace networks; connect with senior role models and approach them to mentor you; give your time and expertise to help colleagues through volunteer work or guest lectures; join webinars, chats, conferences and social events to connect with similar-minded people around the globe who might one day help you expand your career outwards and who you might be able to help. Importantly, be sure to reflect carefully on your experiences and use them as development opportunities.

These insights into how to own your learning and development as a business graduate can serve as the building blocks needed to construct a brighter, more meaningful post-pandemic future.

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