

**Sunita Malhotra**

People Insights

Share this content



Tags: Leadership, Skills

Four key skills for the next generation of leaders

The post pandemic working environment is likely to follow a hybrid model, which will require resilient and people-focused leaders. L&D teams will need to focus on four key areas of training to ensure they are properly equipped for the job.

11th Mar 2021



Covid-19 has reshaped leadership from the rigid systems that have long characterised organisations to something more flexible, open and agile – new models based on inclusivity, empathy, tolerance of failure and openness in communication. That is one of the main findings from a new CEMS Global Alliance report, which identifies key challenges facing leaders and leadership development at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

“Within these new ways of working there is a great opportunity to train innovative, self-motivated, compassionate decision-makers, who can lead change during this storm while bracing for the next

Major research conducted for the report found that for 87% of respondents, Covid-19 has profoundly affected business and teams in the following ways:

1. New markets: a shift from global to local
2. New ways of communicating: from face-to-face to digital
3. New ways of working: from fixed to flexible, office to anywhere
4. New attitudes towards work: from tried-and-tested, to agile and resilient

Effective leadership is critical

For these new ways of working to be positive, leadership must be effective. Across the board respondents spoke of a need to balance 'traditional' leadership qualities with more 'human' characteristics. While things like strategic vision and focus on results remained important, other qualities such as empathy, the ability to communicate and resilience, in particular were more highly valued than before.

Organisations and leaders must build psychological safety for their people to be their best selves and thrive under pressure. They must embrace a culture where learning from failure is seen equally as valuable as learning from success, where people are empowered to experiment, to try new approaches, to build new skills and to accept responsibility without blame.

The L&D response

Within these new ways of working there is a great opportunity to train innovative, self-motivated, compassionate decision-makers, who can lead change during this storm while bracing for the next. In order to do that, L&D professionals must:

1. Empower learners as co-creators in their development

The moment learners co-create their development it ignites curiosity and spurs them on to learn something new. Ultimately it is about creating a whole learning process, rather than just 'training', by asking what kinds of capabilities the organisation wants to build and then designing alongside your teams. When thinking about co-creation I ask my students to firstly consider purpose: what is important to them and why? Drawing on that purpose, they can decide what it is they want to learn and create.

In addition, encourage learners to proactively seek opportunities and never stop studying. For example, they could become a mentor or put themselves forward as one, or take additional free courses offered by educational institutions around the globe. Constantly question them - now you know what you want to learn, what experience do you need to get you there? Guide them towards opportunities within the company to build skills and experience outwards, rather than upwards.

2. Frame failure as a learning experience

Failure is often viewed negatively, however this perspective can kill an organisation. Encourage employees to consider how even the most daunting experience can help them grow, versus instilling fear of failure. Firstly define failure, then frame it in the context of learning and create the right culture, in which something not working out is a growth experience.

There are practical things you can do. Reward risk-taking and embed it into company processes, such as recruitment and performance management. Establish peer feedback as an institutional part of team meetings, where people bring struggles to the table. Put reverse mentoring schemes in place – a very practical way to help senior people learn whilst creating a safe learning environment for juniors. The more anecdotes you can provide for staff, whether at a meeting, in training sessions or during informal mentoring, the better. These stories should not only be about success, but also what didn't go according to plan and how this aided growth.

3. Integrate a growth mindset to develop the skill of introspection and reflection

A growth mindset is a belief that if you work hard and persevere you can grow. It implies innate curiosity: that you can grow when things don't work out, believe in yourself and always know there is more to learn. As an L&D professional you can help embed growth mindset by praising the process rather than intellect. For example, instead of saying 'you are so smart', say 'it is interesting how you did this, I'm intrigued by the process' – this encourages further curiosity and growth. Push learners to make an analysis from the start to end of any project as a habit, thinking about possible outcomes so that they can learn from each problem encountered.

4. Leverage digital and innovative methodologies to ensure learning remains engaged

There has never been a greater imperative to explore and invest in digitally empowered methodologies and techniques: blended, virtual, hybrid approaches and tools. For example, Accenture uses virtual learning boards, on which you can document your own learning/research and share it with others around the globe, including peers, as well as learn from others. [The Forgetting Curve](#) shows that people generally forget 75% of their learning within six days – you need to apply it quickly, or you will lose it – so teaching via this kind of technology is a great way to consolidate learning and share it with others.

While investment does need to be made in training on new technologies, L&D professionals also need to take ownership of their own development. When everything shifted to complete online overnight, I joined every tutorial I could find and experimented with a range of tools. If you have curiosity and growth mindset you will find innovative ways to leverage the technology at your fingertips. If on the other hand, you feel you are lacking in growth mindset, make sure you interrogate your own mind traps and resistance to change – what is stopping you from embracing new experiences? If you get to the root of that, you can start experimenting and enabling others.

