



EXPERT PERSPECTIVES ON

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



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INTRODUCTION

Leadership Development: Trends and Best Practices

Leadership development is one of the biggest segments in the [training market](#), which makes sense, considering that a pipeline of talented, skilled leaders can be one of the most important factors in an organization's success. Technologies change, and economies crash and rise, but no company will have sustained success without a pipeline of good leaders.

When thinking of the future of leadership development programs, some practices, including the use of classroom training and manager mentoring, will likely always be an important part of the mix. However, the way forward is to think of development almost on an individual level, using new market innovations to both adapt the training and sustain the training's impact to meet organizational and individual needs. Leveraging technology to deliver [digital coaching](#) is more prominent and, ultimately, we must be able to demonstrate impact through [measuring effectiveness of the programs](#).

This e-book explores the perspectives of leadership development experts: their insights into inclusive and adaptive leadership, measuring program impact, learning retention and application, and innovation. Using these tips and strategies in your organization will enable you to provide leadership development that engages learners and creates a solid pipeline throughout the business.

As always, I would love to hear your perspectives on this collection from TrainingIndustry.com's leadership training community.



Ken Taylor
President, Training Industry, Inc.

6 Truisms of Modern Leadership Development



Heide Abelli is the senior vice president of content product management at [Skillsoft](#).

Business is changing, and leadership development needs to change with it. If not, it risks becoming ineffective at preparing leaders for today's digital economy. In a survey of CEOs by Fortune magazine, only 7 percent said they believe their companies are building effective global leaders, while just 10 percent believe that their leadership development initiatives have a clear business impact. In a recent Skillsoft survey on the state of leadership development, only 21 percent of respondents agreed that employees in their organizations feel that managers effectively lead them.

One way to address this disconnect is to directly link leadership development with the new strategic imperatives of the digital economy. To prepare leaders for the future, we must start by teaching new leadership behaviors and competencies like [resilience](#), [leading change](#), cognitive flexibility, [agility](#) and [virtual leadership](#). As HR and L&D leaders look for ways to modernize their leadership programs for the digital economy, it is important to recognize six factors that distinguish leadership development today from that of the past.

1. Leadership Development Is Democratizing.

Ensuring sufficient reach across and deeply into the organization is important to the success of leadership development efforts. A recent study by McKinsey suggests that organizations with successful leadership development programs are six to seven times more likely “to pursue interventions covering the whole organization”; they design programs in the context of a broad, organization-wide leadership development strategy.

“Ensuring sufficient reach across and deeply into the organization is important to the success of leadership development efforts.”

Organizations are moving from siloed structures to flatter structures comprised of cross-functional teams. The result of this change is that more employees are assuming leadership responsibilities without formal “leader” titles, and as a result, organizations must strive to develop as many individuals as possible with new

leadership competencies. The good news is that many organizations realize the need to expand their leadership development more broadly and deeper into the organization. In Skillsoft's leadership survey, 61 percent of respondents said they believe that leadership development is likely to become more democratized in their organizations over the next three years. Fortunately, e-learning technology enables more cost-effective, faster, more flexible, larger-scale learning on digital platforms that can enable focused leadership development, prompting new and potential leaders to work on specific, targeted behaviors.

2. The Modern Leader's Critical Task is to Create and Empower the Team Context.

The essential job of today's leader is to create an environment of managed empowerment, not to drive detailed decision-making. He or she can do so by creating a context where there is commitment and collaboration, accelerated decision-making, shared purpose, experimentation, and an atmosphere of empowerment and trust.

3. The New C&C Is Not Like the Old One.

The focus of leadership today must be squarely based on the model of "connect and collaborate" rather than "command and control." Today's leaders don't dictate; they guide and influence. They serve as a conduit for diverse ideas and initiatives and champion collaboration. They coach rather than micromanage.

In his book "Music as Alchemy: Journeys with Great Conductors and their Orchestras," Tom Service writes, "The essential work of a conductor has never really been about the exercise of authority. Conducting is really about the creation of a culture of responsibility, of respect, of musical and social awareness, and of listening. Connecting is a metaphor, not for absolute power but for shared experience, for collaboration, for listening."

4. There's No "I" in "Team."

Yesterday's leaders were measured based on individual success – hence the old term "hero leader." Leaders' performance was defined by what they did as individuals and what they squeezed out of their followers. Today's leaders are evaluated based on their performance as leaders of "hero teams." In the role of a team coach or squadron commander, the leader's success is evaluated based on what the team, working together as a unit, achieves. Leaders increasingly manage agile teams, squads and tribes that innovate, so leadership in the current context is less about directing

reports and more about fostering and ensuring the ability of mission-driven team members to execute on strategy and innovation.

5. It's About Mindsets, Not Skillsets.

Historically, leadership development programs have been primarily concerned with skill-building and not necessarily with dynamic mindset-building. However, leadership is a construct that exists between people in complex and fluid relationships. Leadership development that takes this idea into account facilitates the creation of leadership mindsets. These mindsets are deeper, more nuanced mindsets that current and future leaders can leverage to better respond to the complexities of the ever-changing conditions in the business environment.

“Leadership is a construct that exists between people in complex and fluid relationships.”

A successful leadership development program builds mindsets around agility, customer-centricity, creativity, accountability, resiliency and other forward-thinking qualities. These skills and traits provide leaders with the capabilities for collaborative leadership in the uncertain, ambiguous and changing conditions they face today. Because leadership actions are inherently relational, establishing such mindsets naturally requires organizations to contextualize and teach leadership development in a relational manner.

6. The Modern Leader's Core Competency Is Ambidextrous Innovation.

In Skillsoft's leadership survey, over 60 percent of respondents cited leadership that results in greater innovation as a competency of growing importance for their organization. This statistic is hardly surprising. The modern business context is fast-paced, nonlinear, virtual, technology-enabled and ever-changing. In the Fortune CEO survey, 72 percent of CEOs cited the rapid pace of technological innovation as their greatest challenge. Customers' expectations continue to rise, which means that companies face significant pressures to release new products and services at an accelerated pace, demanding continuous innovation.

In the industrial era, the leader's core competency was centered on execution. Leaders today have to maintain continuity of the current organizational strategy through their leadership, but they also have to be good at continuously improving

and innovating. In fact, the post-industrial, digital-era leader's core competency is [innovation](#).

The balancing act that leaders must strike is a tall order. A company's adaptability requires leaders to maximize existing organizational capabilities but also innovate by developing new capabilities. I refer to this balancing act between optimizing the present and creating the future as "leader ambidexterity," or the ability of leaders to manage the existing business by overseeing incremental improvement to processes, products and services while also identifying and pursuing new opportunities through experimentation and innovation. Leaders drive innovation by spotting trends related to emerging technologies, identifying customer-driven opportunities, and then [ideating](#) using [design thinking](#) approaches to transform the business and release successful new products and services into the market.

As the pace of change increases in our digital economy, so does the price of lagging leadership development. No organization can afford to fail in preparing its leaders for the significant challenges they face today.

"As the pace of change increases in our digital economy,
so does the price of lagging leadership development."

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If Leading Inclusively Feels Uncomfortable, You're Doing it Right



Dr. Victoria Mattingly is a senior solutions designer at [Mind Gym](#) and an organizational psychologist who specializes in leveraging learning and development to help people in the workplace be better humans.

We all know how it feels to be excluded. Just think back to childhood days of not being invited to a party or having no place to sit in the cafeteria at lunch. Sometimes, we forget that exclusion is alive and well among working adults, too. There is no shortage of opportunities in the workplace for making others feel like they don't belong, whether it's leaving them out of a meeting, not introducing them to a client or overlooking them for a career-changing assignment.

What many of us can't relate to, however, is tackling exclusion head-on. As humans, we tend to avoid confrontation like the plague. Choosing to shrug it off may feel like no big deal in the moment, but persistent workplace exclusion is no joking matter. The resulting [poor performance](#), increased [stress](#) and [turnover](#) hurt us, our teams and our organizations. As leaders, we have the power and responsibility to create and foster the type of culture where everyone on our team can thrive.

But what does it mean to lead inclusively? Although there is no standard recipe for inclusion – it inevitably varies by culture and individual – one thing is for sure: If inclusive leadership feels easy, you're doing it wrong. It takes effort, and because it's worth it, leaders need to embrace the inevitable discomfort that comes with leading inclusively.

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How many opportunities for fostering inclusivity (e.g., attributing credit for a stolen idea or not amplifying the voices of silenced others) have you let pass by? We often choose inaction because we're afraid of saying the wrong thing, coming across as offensive or (dare I say it) being labeled as an overly-sensitive “[snowflake](#).” What's worse, though, is perpetuating a status quo that systematically disadvantages diverse team members.

So, what does it mean to lead inclusively?

Don't Fear the Unknown.

An unfortunate consequence of the #MeToo movement is that [many male leaders started](#) avoiding one-on-one time with female colleagues in fear of such meetings' being misconstrued as inappropriate workplace behavior. However, it becomes a barrier to career progression if women can't network with their colleagues or seek advice from a male manager.

Remember that there is no harm in openly offering support to people who are not in your "in-group." Whether or not they accept or decline, at least give them the opportunity to choose. Don't let preconceived notions prevent you from demonstrating your willingness to reach across differences. The gesture alone can go a long way toward building an inclusive culture.

"Don't let preconceived notions prevent you from demonstrating your willingness to reach across differences."

Lean into Uncomfortable Conversations.

People often avoid asking about things they don't understand, wanting to avoid a potentially awkward conversation. However, such interactions allow us to connect with others in a meaningful way. We achieve inclusivity when employees feel comfortable bringing their unique and authentic selves to work, and there's no better way of making someone feel like they belong than by learning more about them on a personal level. If they shared that they observe different holidays than you, ask them about their favorite ways to celebrate. If they're a music enthusiast, ask them for recommendations about new bands. And express genuine interest when they respond.

Asking Is Always Better than Assuming.

Humans are predisposed to making assumptions. Expecting things to be a certain way allows us to quickly understand an otherwise complex world. When it comes to people, though, it's important to deliberately dispel any assumptions we may hold. Learning new information about someone can have a major impact on the business, like when it comes to filling a pivotal role or retaining top talent.

Consider James, a star performer who left a company he loved because he wasn't offered a promotion. As it turned out, a less qualified candidate was given the position because James' boss incorrectly assumed that he wouldn't relocate –

a requirement for the new role – because he had children. We risk losing great people when we assume their preferences rather than asking them point-blank.

Courage Is Not an Option.

There's too much at stake to sit back and watch exclusion persist in the workplace. It takes courage to put yourself out there. But the rewards of building an [inclusive workplace](#) outweigh the fear of the unknown, the discomfort of approaching potentially awkward conversations and asking questions that might otherwise be easier to leave unsaid. Leading inclusively may be painful at times, but it's worth it.

“There's too much at stake to sit back and watch exclusion persist in the workplace.”

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Demonstrating the Impact of Coaching: How Technology Supports Measurement



Taryn Oesch is the award-winning managing editor for digital content at [Training Industry, Inc.](#)

According to a 2017 International Coach Federation (ICF) [survey](#), professional coaching is growing. Thirty-one percent of respondents said they'd participated in a business or life [coaching](#) relationship, and 66 percent said they were at least “somewhat” aware of the field. These numbers were up from 17 percent and 58 percent, respectively, [in 2014](#). Furthermore, in a [2016 survey](#) by The Conference Board, 69 percent of companies said “they expected to rely more on [internal coaches](#) in the coming years.”

Why Is Coaching Becoming More Popular?

“I believe that coaching is growing in popularity for two main reasons,” says Jamie Gelbtuch, founder of Cultural Mixology. First, people are becoming more knowledgeable and experienced thanks to technology but need support to turn that knowledge and experience into skills. Second, “workplaces are increasingly global, and even the most talented leaders encounter specific workplace challenges, obstacles that can seem insurmountable or blind spots that often grow out of great strengths ... Coaching helps people bridge these gaps and turn [conscious incompetencies into conscious competencies](#).”

Additionally, says Lisa Barrington, PCC, BCC, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, founder and principal of Barrington Coaching, “coaching is the most customized way to increase leadership and organizational effectiveness.” It’s also faster to implement than designing a custom training program, and results “often start to emerge within months.”

Coaching can improve individual and team performance, employee engagement, manager-employee relationships, and conflict management. Training Industry [research](#) has also found that it can make leadership development more equitable between the genders. It’s also a continuous development opportunity rather than a one-time training event, points out Thuy Sindell, Ph.D., founder and president of Skyline Group International. “It is done over time, which ensures opportunities to practice, get feedback and refine.”

Measuring Impact

As coaching becomes more popular as a development tool, organizations are investing more money – and, therefore, looking for a greater return. The Conference

Board survey found “an uptick in coaching rates, with more organizations paying upwards of \$600 per hour at the CEO and C-suite levels.” Researchers concluded that “evaluation represents the holy grail for organizations using coaching to develop their leaders and managers.”

Therefore, L&D leaders who are implementing coaching need to be prepared to demonstrate its impact. Last fall, Skyline Group [launched](#) a new coaching technology to help companies manage coaching programs and measure impact. “Right now,” Sindell says, “most organizations measure based on program evaluations, word of mouth, promotion and retention rates. There is no direct measurement of skill growth and impact.” This gap is what Skyline Group is trying to address.

“L&D leaders who are implementing coaching
need to be prepared to demonstrate its impact.”

Dr. Scott C. Whiteford, director of leadership development and analytics at Talent Plus, Inc., recommends establishing personalized impact metrics at the beginning of the coaching engagement. For example, he worked with a chief medical officer who wanted to increase patient satisfaction by 10 percent year over year, so their partnership “focused on how [he] could increase the engagement of his physicians, nurses and staff. By increasing their engagement, he would likely see an increase in patient satisfaction. In the end, he achieved the 10 percent increase year over year, and we considered the engagement a success.”

In addition to platforms like Skyline Group’s, organizations can use [360-degree assessments](#), employee retention and engagement, coachee retention and promotion, and productivity measures. Depending on your industry, you may have additional metrics that will be indicators of the impact of coaching. For example, Pamela DeCampi, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, executive vice president of value added services at Kirby Bates Associates, says that in a health care setting, quality and safety measures are important to track. She’s seen a 65 percent decrease in patient falls and “zero occurrences of infections in several indices” as a result of coaching.

In sales, says Mark Magnacca, co-founder and president of Allego, metrics might include number of deals closed, percent of quota reached, and performance on sales calls and in meetings. Again, technology can help. For example, reps at Allego’s client companies use its coaching platform to record themselves practicing various skills and then submit the video to their coaches for feedback.

“Each job role [requires] a personalized combination of experiences to ensure success,” wrote Training Industry leaders in the [2019 Training Industry Trends Report](#). Delivering the optimal blend of personalized learning experiences has historically been an inefficient approach to training. However, with the advent of new technologies, [even coaching](#) can be an efficient, scalable approach to personalized learning.

“With the advent of new technologies, even coaching can be an efficient, scalable approach to personalized learning.”

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Developing Leaders for a Dynamic Business Environment



Brigadier General (retired) George B. Forsythe, Ph.D., is a 1970 graduate of West Point, 35-year career Army officer and retired college president who is now a faculty member with [Thayer Leader Development Group](#).

The United States Army has been a people-centric organization; soldiers and units ultimately accomplish the mission. Over the course of its 243-year history, the Army has had to adapt to changes in warfare, technology, demographics and international affairs; however, one thing has remained paramount – leaders must possess the knowledge, skills and character to successfully to accomplish the mission. Therefore, leader development is an organizational imperative, and over the years, the Army has continuously adapted its leader development processes to ensure that leaders are prepared to face contemporary military threats and challenges. So, too, in business, adapting leadership programs to dynamic environments is necessary.

The Army's current model of leader development grew out of two important changes in its environment over the last half century – one domestic (VOLAR) and the other international (VUCA). VOLAR, the All-Volunteer Army, meant the Army could no longer rely on the draft to sustain personnel readiness, necessitating the empowerment of leaders to attract and retain self-disciplined and motivated soldiers. [VUCA](#), the acronym used to characterize the post-Cold War operational environment (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous), required the Army to prepare for a full spectrum of conflict, from low-intensity conflicts to nuclear war. Hence, the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to lead volunteers in a more complex environment required leaders who were innovative, comfortable operating with minimum guidance within the commander's intent and confident in taking prudent risks to accomplish the mission.

At West Point, and throughout the Army, a refined model of leader development emerged over several decades to prepare leaders for complex, uncertain and ambiguous missions. This process began by identifying the KSAs that are imperative for success in a VUCA environment at each organizational level. These KSAs became the focal point for leadership development.

The Army grows leaders through continuous, progressive and sequential training and on-the-job development. Training orients learners to job-related skills and leadership abilities and occurs in educational settings, where leaders prepare to move into new command and senior staff assignments. Development occurs within critical on-the-job experiences and stretch assignments that broaden leaders' understanding of the organization and operational environment while enhancing competencies

for higher-level leadership. Developmental opportunities begin by considering a leader's readiness to grow, then combine challenging assignments with support through teaching, [coaching](#) and [mentoring](#) so that leaders derive the full benefits of the experience. The art of leader development is finding the right balance between challenge and support that aligns with each individual leader's readiness for growth.

“The art of leader development is finding the right
balance between challenge and support.”

Growth-oriented experiences provide opportunities for leaders to think and act in new ways. Army leaders thrive on assessment and feedback from others as well as self-assessment to enhance their growth. Assessment and feedback are integral to all aspects of leader development, both during training and throughout on-the-job experiences.

Challenging experiences set the stage for self-reflection, even during fast-paced operational assignments, in order to derive the lessons of practice. Reflection is facilitated by others – the individual's leader or a teacher, coach or mentor – and can also be self-guided – for example, by keeping a journal to reflect on his or her experiences and growth. One tool for reflection is the after action review (AAR), which facilitates individual and team development after every activity. The AAR has become part of the Army's DNA; leaders do it after every operation, in training as well as in combat.

This model of leader development is standard operating procedure throughout the Army – at professional schools from West Point to the War College and in tactical units deployed around the world. Its results are seen each day in the performance of Army leaders in the most complex and dangerous circumstances.

What lessons of leader development in the Army are applicable in the corporate context? First, meaningful work is a catalyst for developing leaders within the context of mission success. Developmentally rich work experiences have challenge and novelty, and sometimes even failure, all of which test existing leadership skills and set the stage for meaningful growth. The challenging work, be it military operations or corporate responsibilities, requires leaders to operate outside their comfort zone and encounter new demands that create new understanding and abilities. Leaders are stretched in order to grow.

“Meaningful work is a catalyst for developing leaders within the context of mission success.”

Second, good leader development programs are continuous, progressive and aligned with the increasing complex demands of leadership as the learner assumes new responsibilities within the organization. Leaders are always growing to meet new responsibilities and face new challenges; they are never finished.

Third, leader development is a core competency of all leaders; it is not relegated to the HR and L&D staff. Leaders at all levels are responsible for developing their subordinate leaders, because they are in the best position to assess readiness and provide the right balance of training, stretch assignments and support to facilitate growth. HR professionals support leader development by promoting policies and procedures that aid leaders in growing other leaders.

When applying the Army’s leader development model to grow corporate leaders, a good starting point is assessment of potential participants’ developmental needs and readiness to grow. Then, the organization can tailor programs to train learners on new knowledge and skills, geared toward developmental needs and the organization’s requirements. This training should be reinforced with experiential “stretch” exercises designed to provide opportunities for participants to apply new knowledge and skills and test their leadership abilities. Then, follow these experiences with performance assessments by expert observers and self-assessment, as well as individual and team self-reflection. Provide participants with opportunities to connect their learning to their work settings and share their insights with others.

“Meaningful work is a catalyst for developing leaders within the context of mission success.”

Can the corporate world see the same results as the Army? Yes. To illustrate, American aerospace manufacturer Pratt and Whitney is leveraging this type of leader development program to support the development of top executives and senior managers. In a 2018 [article in Forbes](#), Pratt and Whitney president Bob Leduc noted that employees of supervisors who have gone through the program score eight points higher in job satisfaction than those who have not, and voluntary attrition has dropped more than three-fold since 2016.

An organization's ability to adapt to complex business environments requires employees, teams and leaders who understand how they contribute to the company's success and have the requisite skills and abilities to do so effectively. CEOs frequently extol the virtues of empowering leaders at all levels to act decisively within the overall mission, thus adding flexibility and responsiveness to their companies. This type of leadership enables organizations to recruit and retain talent and succeed in their VUCA environments.

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5 Skills to Develop in the Modern Leader



William Hall is president of [Simulation Studios](#), a company specializing in business simulations used for strategy acceleration and corporate training and development.

We live in a fast-paced world propelled by constant technology-driven transformation. Coupled with an acceleration of baby boomer retirement, executive leadership is under more pressure than ever to adapt to change. Leadership may be the most important skill in the corporate world, as well as the hardest to source. At the same time, the definition of leadership is clearly broadening. Digital technologies and modern business models have disrupted almost every aspect of business. Industry leaders need an entirely different set of skills and capabilities, which calls for a new definition of leadership. Below are five skills tomorrow's corporate leaders need.

1. Providing Vision and Empowering with Technology

Companies of the future need leaders who can interpret the big picture and navigate an uncharted business environment. Leaders need to envision the goal and set operating boundaries in a dynamic environment. Technology provides infinite possibilities for idea generation and sharing. Leaders must harness this power creatively.

“Technology provides infinite possibilities for idea generation and sharing. Leaders must harness this power creatively.”

Technology is a great enabler that allows everyone to realize his or her potential. One example is the adoption of digital collaboration tools. Unless modern leaders understand how workplace digital transformation and its associated multichannel modes function with various methods of communication, leadership can become more challenging.

2. Customer-orientation

Companies thrive on the economic power of consumers. Digital technology enables a direct-to-consumer model that has created more options. Modern companies need to orient themselves around customers and offer capabilities that make their

lives easier. As the business world becomes more competitive, a customer-centric business offers multiple strategic advantages.

For example, Apple maintains a balance between technology and personal service. Using technology, the company has developed an intimate but professional employee-consumer relationship. When people visit an Apple store, they feel comfortable and confident that their technological needs will be met. This balance didn't happen by accident. It was designed that way. With a customer-oriented and technology-integrated leadership approach, businesses know who their customers are, what they want, how to deliver it and how to maintain a personal relationship.

3. Flexibility and Speed

This one is important. The business landscape is constantly changing due to factors such as technology, rapidly changing customer demands and the speed of communication. Companies that adapt rapidly to marketplace change stay in the lead. Current technologies process vast amounts of information, and leaders are required to act in real time for effective decision-making.

For example, organizations can run managers and executives through business strategy [simulations](#) to help them become more strategically [agile](#). During the “gameplay,” the market is constantly changing by design. It has become critical to teach managers and leaders to flex. By empowering participants to compete head-to-head in a safe environment, organizations can help managers and executives become more comfortable with the changing demands of the market. This component is critical to modern leadership development.

“Organizations run managers and executives through business strategy simulations to help them become more strategically agile.”

4. Risk-Taking

Uncertainty in business has increased due to changing trends in technology, such as advances in mobile technology, [virtual reality and augmented reality](#). The ability to strategically identify and understand trends and scale is only possible if you can take risks. Unfortunately, risk-taking seems to be dwindling. Thanks to current quarterly reporting requirements and pressure to “beat the street,” risk tolerance seems to have fallen.

The risk with not taking risks is the elevation of a disruptive new entrant to the marketplace. Many big companies spend considerable time raising barriers to entry, but technology is consistently on a path to remove barriers to entry. Thus, it's up to the company to take risks and disrupt its own business in order to remain relevant. Doing so takes bold leadership.

5. Trend-Watching

In a dynamic business environment, it's critical that leaders identify and understand both economic and customer trends. Today's customer is adept and engages on diverse platforms. Leaders must consider this reality when formulating strategies. They have to apply the most relevant methods to study data and stay ahead of the competition. For example, Microsoft missed the mobile technology revolution. Its leaders didn't react to the changing marketplace, and now, Microsoft doesn't have a mobile solution.

Required leadership competencies are rapidly changing. It's essential for training and development managers to ensure they're teaching the right skills to tomorrow's leaders. Of course, traditional leadership behaviors are still important, but adding modern competencies is, too. It's time to develop leaders for the risk-based, technology-grounded leadership requirements of tomorrow.

“Traditional leadership behaviors are still important,
but adding modern competencies is, too.”

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Why Reshape Your Leadership Development Strategy?



Jan Rijken is director of the [CrossKnowledge](#) Learning Institute.

Organizations today face numerous challenges to operate efficiently and maintain a competitive advantage in times of change. Change requires new behaviors, new routines, new methods, new customers, new perspectives and new technology. It is up to leaders to provide the direction to help their teams navigate these challenges and adapt appropriately. Improving [alignment](#) between the achievement of business goals and leaders' skills starts with the creation of a business strategy, followed by a leadership strategy, followed by a leadership development strategy.

Leadership today is not delivering on board-level expectations. According to Brandon Hall's 2015 "State of Leadership Development" report, 71 percent organizations say their leaders are not ready to lead for the future, 25 percent say they have a ready successor identified for one out of 10 critical leadership positions, and 81 percent say that their company's leaders are not effective at developing leaders. In addition, research shows there are problems developing leaders in time (in role and for the role) and in a consistent and cost-effective way. There's a growing need for organizations to completely rethink how they develop their leaders.

How Leadership Development Can Deliver on Its Promise: Redefining the Strategy

It is important for L&D to develop a clearer understanding of how leaders in its organization [prefer to learn](#) and how they are learning now and then adapt its current leadership development strategy. Define the target audience, identify key KPIs, provide assessment capabilities, [and offer](#) personalized, just-in-time training based on required leadership skills. Classroom training is still the dominant method in leadership development, and adding online learning components to the mix makes it possible to develop leaders at all levels more quickly and flexibly. This approach can provide a crucial advantage for time-constrained leaders and organizations with geographically dispersed operations. [Blended](#) and modular learning [enable L&D to](#) respond to the specific needs of its target audience while reducing transaction time and costs. This greater flexibility makes it possible to personalize L&D activities and tailor them to the specific challenges facing leaders.

High-impact Leadership Development Strategy

L&D must collaborate with senior executives to define the ambitions and objectives for their leadership development initiatives. In parallel, research from Bersin by

Deloitte has found that leadership development program leaders need to become aware of the success criteria and barriers to high-impact leadership development in order to optimize their blended design for a future-proof leadership development plan. The outcome is a high-impact leadership development strategy that offers:

- A framework to develop leaders at all levels, without exception, with limited resources and budget
- A just-in-time approach that develops all critical and future leadership capabilities and ensures that they are embedded in daily work
- An opportunity to change the leadership development from a program- or event-based approach [to a systematic and holistic process](#) with personalized learning
- Global consistency of key leadership capabilities across countries, functions and levels
- Specific metrics/KPIs to improve business performance through learning

“L&D must collaborate with senior executives to define the ambitions and objectives for their leadership development initiatives.”

A re-shaped leadership development framework stands out because it makes a clear distinction among four leadership development solutions “columns,” offered in parallel to each relevant leadership level. To ensure that they add value at each level, there should be a strong link to the organizational performance cycle and assessments. The topics in the four distinct leadership development columns are identified through an annual [needs analysis](#) process and research on future leadership skills. They consist of:

1. **Organizational transformation programs:** Strategic [transformation](#) programs enable organizational strategy and are offered to each leadership level to help them prepare for change. Key characteristics include a link to organizational strategy, being offered to all leader levels, a top-down invitation, requiring an intensive and major investment, and using blended learning.
2. **Career programs:** Broad and long (six to 18 months) leadership development programs prepare selected leaders for their next role to help them prepare for tomorrow. Key characteristics include a link to talent strategy, being offered to progressing leaders by invitation, requiring a major investment and using blended learning.

3. **Performance modules:** Stand-alone and short (up to three days), topic-focused leadership modules upskill individual leaders based on their performance needs to help them prepare for today. Key characteristics include a link to the performance cycle, self-registration, requiring a limited investment, resulting a short time to competence and using blended learning.
4. **Digital Academy:** Short learning nuggets, available 24/7, help leaders at all levels handle immediate business issues so they can prepare for now. Key characteristics include a link to immediate issues, self-registration, being two to 15 minutes in duration, requiring a limited investment, scalability, resulting in a short time to performance and using digital learning.

The promise and opportunities are there to seize, but leadership development professionals must understand the current barriers to diversifying leadership development to realize its full potential. To what extent can leaders at all levels “own” their personal development? Are they ready for the new learning era? Is L&D able to achieve executive buy-in for this transition and the required investments in learning technology? Does L&D have the right skills and mindset to design, implement and manage blended learning? Can leaders at all levels be encouraged to adopt new ways of learning to develop them and their employees in a supportive learning climate? How should L&D market the new leadership development approach to all leaders?

These questions highlight the need to establish a structured L&D governance with senior leader sponsorship for the new leadership development strategy and to [invest in developing](#) L&D capabilities, roles (i.e., managing communities, supporting workplace learning, marketing and communication, and [data analytics](#)).

The Bottom Line

Organizations need to rethink how to develop their leaders at all levels in order to prepare them for organizational change, their next career step, improving today’s performance and solving immediate leadership issues. Re-shaping corporate leadership development strategy can deliver these ambitions, but it requires a transformation from today’s dominant “career-step,” face-to-face learning approach. This transformation, in turn, requires skills and courage from leadership development leaders and a clear vision of how to structure and offer a best-practice leadership

“Re-shaping corporate leadership development strategy
requires a transformation and a clear vision.”

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Leadership Development: It's Not What They Learn, but What They Use



Michael Leimbach, Ph.D., is vice president of global research and development for [Wilson Learning Worldwide](#).

Leadership development has taken on renewed importance for many organizations. After years of minimal investment, organizations are now faced with the looming retirement of [baby boomer](#) managers. According to research by Wilson Learning, nearly 60 percent of organizations say they lack sufficient bench strength to fill those spots, and only 40 percent say they have sufficient resources to [fill their existing gaps](#) in leadership.

Effective leadership skills can increase organizational performance – but only if the new leadership skills are put into practice. Unfortunately, traditional approaches to leadership development have a poor track record when it comes to transferring new skills to the job. As Robert Brinkerhoff wrote in his book “Telling Training’s Story,” numerous studies have shown that less than 30 percent of leadership skills are still in use six to 12 months after training.

So, how do we improve leadership development? The key is training that focuses less on teaching skills and more on supporting the use of those skills in the workplace. Over 30 years of experience has led us to five critical elements to help ensure that learners use and apply leadership development, resulting in a much greater return on investment.

“The key is training that focuses less on teaching skills and more on supporting the use of those skills in the workplace.”

1. Think Networks, Not Hierarchy.

Organizations used to be defined by rigid hierarchies, but most organizations today perform more like complex networks. Unfortunately, we still tend to define leadership development as hierarchies, cascading from curricula to programs to events to learning activities.

We need to [move away](#) from this linear design of learning to one with multiple paths that can create change, tailored to the individual needs of the learner. Such networks make use of multiple learning methods – structured and unstructured, facilitated and self-directed, and formal and less formal.

This approach also means that learning does not focus on just the learner. The learner's manager, peers, colleagues, coaches, senior executives and others form a network of people who create an environment to support, engage and commit to behavior change.

“The learner's manager, peers, colleagues, coaches, senior executives and others create a supportive environment.”

2. Flip the Learning.

In traditional learning programs, managers learn leadership skills and then are sent back to their work environment to practice. This approach is ineffective and results in less learning transfer. In [flipped learning](#), managers learn the skills within the work environment (for example, through e-learning or videos). Then, they go to a collaborative learning environment (a classroom or virtual classroom), where they practice, role-play, and discuss their successes and failures, all under the watch of their peers and a trained coach.

For most leadership development, learning the skills is the easy part; the behaviors and real-time decisions are more difficult. Flipping how practice is implemented ensures the hardest part of learning leadership skills (using them) is carried out in the most supportive environment and with guidance from trained facilitators.

3. Drip the Learning.

For many, leadership development is like drinking from a fire hose. In a one-week “boot camp,” we throw at learners everything they should know about leading people, and we expect them to learn and remember it all. It is no wonder that 70 to 80 percent of what leaders learn in training is forgotten in less than 12 months, according to Brinkerhoff.

“Drip irrigation” is a better metaphor than the fire hose. This approach means delivering learning continuously and slowly, allowing it to seep into the “roots” of the managers' behavior so they not only remember it but also incorporate it, changing their behavior more permanently.

Flip and [drip](#) work in tandem. By focusing on one skill at a time (drip) and addressing not only knowledge but also use (flip), you can create a learning environment that increases the amount of learning that managers sustain.

4. Engage the Manager's Manager.

People often say that nothing changes until the manager's behavior changes. I say that nothing changes until the manager's manager's behavior changes. Regardless of the level, from supervisor to the C-suite, the quickest way to prevent leadership development from having an impact is to ignore the role of the manager's manager.

“The quickest way to prevent leadership development from having an impact is to ignore the role of the manager's manager.”

Engaging the manager's manager occurs before, during and after the training:

- Gaining their agreement that the business challenges and leadership skills being addressed are the right ones
- Gaining their commitment to support the leadership development program
- Making sure they know the skills well and have the ability to coach to those skills
- Providing a way to track skill performance so they can anticipate problems

The manager's manager can be an effective mentor and coach – or the biggest barrier and saboteur to his or her development.

5. Pay Attention to the Return.

Throughout history, we see the story of the hero's journey – a person moved to action, who accomplishes a great feat and then returns home. Your leadership development participants are also on a journey and, like the hero's journey, the most difficult part is the return home. When learning heroes return from training to work, the changes they experience are often ignored. Their new skills are not recognized or valued, and they don't have the tools to support their use.

Failing to address the return has a significant impact on learning transfer. Learning professionals need to support participants' return to work by providing them with tools, reviews and reminders, and just-in-time support and by preparing others to play their part in ensuring the transfer of learning.

Support participants' return to work by providing them with tools, reviews and reminders, and just-in-time support.

“Support participants’ return to work by providing them with tools, reviews and reminders, and just-in-time support.”

Creating Learning that Goes to Work

It is not important how much leaders learn but how much leaders use. Acting on these five questions will ensure that leaders learn and use the critical skills your organization needs to thrive:

- Are you treating your learning like a network?
- Are you flipping the learning experience and providing support for application?
- Are you dripping learning to your leaders to maximize retention?
- Are you engaging the manager’s manager to support and champion the new skills?
- Are you supporting their return with tools, resources and reviews?

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Create Leadership Development that Lasts in 2019



Scott Bohannon is the chief executive officer of [AchieveForum](#). Listen to [The Leadership Round Table podcast](#) for more insights from Scott.

Happy New Year! Let me suggest a difficult New Year's resolution: At least half the learners in your leadership development programs will change their behaviors. According to [U.S. News and World Report](#), 80 percent of New Year's resolutions fail fast. I'd bet almost everyone will fail this one.

Most companies want to help their leaders develop critical skills. In the United States alone, according to Bersin by Deloitte's "Leadership Development Factbook 2012," companies spend \$14 billion each year trying to super-charge leader performance. Unfortunately, the results of these investments are abysmal. In Harvard Business Publishing's 2018 survey on "the state of leadership development," two-thirds of managers said they didn't improve after participating in leadership development programs. According to a 2009 [meta-analysis of 200 studies](#), one in three programs show no positive effect at all. This finding probably understates the reality, given selection bias and how low the researchers set the bar for success.

Why the High Failure Rate?

The core issue is the industry's assumption that understanding will lead to implementation. We tend to frame "sustainment" as a learning initiative rather than a behavior change initiative. This reality is reflected in the fact that most programs measure participation, emotional response and knowledge retention, none of which is a good indicator of whether people will change their behavior. To make matters worse, many times, success isn't measured at all. The [Harvard survey](#) found that only 24 percent of organizations are measuring the impact of their leadership development programs. As a result, the leadership development industry has a fairly shallow toolset when it comes to actually shifting leaders' behavior over time. We must create a more robust set of solutions than most development organizations currently offer.

"We tend to frame "sustainment" as a learning initiative rather than a behavior change initiative."

Won't this type of solution require more effort from already time-poor participants? Yes, and therein lies the challenge. We need to achieve lasting behavioral change

within a framework that is both cost-effective and manageable. Leadership development is, at its core, behavior change. We need leaders to develop and implement new behaviors – and do so consistently. Unfortunately, with current methods, leaders quickly revert to their old behaviors, if they ever change at all.

We clearly need more reinforcement of new concepts. However, companies often find effective reinforcement programs too expensive and that their people rarely use on-demand, video-based reinforcement. The reality is that failure can occur at any point during the instruction or sustainment phases:

Instruction:

- Clarity: People struggle with unclear descriptions of behaviors or are given too many behaviors and struggle to prioritize them.
- Retention: People forget what they are supposed to do.
- Understanding: Learners recall what they've learned, but they don't deeply understand it. It's superficial learning rather than the kind of learning that leads to behavior change.

Sustainment: Will, Skill and Hill

- Will: The person will not sustain their new behaviors if they don't have the desire to change. Of course, the challenge with will is that it lags over time, which means we have to find other levers to pull.
- Skill: It is hard to learn new behaviors, and learners may lack some of the skills they need to perform them.
- Hill: Most learners' day-to-day work environment reinforces their old behaviors.

A New Approach to Learning Sustainment

There is good news: Real behavior change is possible with a new approach to sustainment. According to our research, sustainment requires the following three pieces:

- Influencing learners to adopt the new behaviors
- Ensuring learners have the skills and information they need to adopt the new behaviors
- Changing systems, processes and techniques in the learners' work environment to support the new behaviors rather than the old ones

The team aspect of behavior change cannot be understated. Shifting the focus from individual behaviors to group behaviors greatly increases the likelihood of achieving behavior change. For example, leveraging peers for support, feedback and assistance

in implementing the new behaviors helps alleviate the burden of trying to change behavior alone. Better still, a team-based approach reduces the time imposed on learners and costs companies dramatically less.

“The team aspect of behavior change cannot be understated.”

What struggles have your organization encountered around sustainment, and what strategies have you found useful in countering them? Share with us on Twitter @trainingindustr and @AchieveForum.

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Are Your Leaders People-first or Process-first?



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In prior industrial eras, leaders were successful if they could execute on a clear, stable organizational strategy by translating it into a set of tasks that could be delegated, repeated and measured. In the [Fourth Industrial Revolution](#), business, consumers, technology and work are rapidly evolving. Leaders now need a new set of abilities and behaviors. The ones who can shift to a focus of tuning in; navigating and making sense of the changes around them; and responding to people, rather than predicting and controlling processes, are better positioned for success.

How do organizations who have been successful in the former paradigm maintain their size and growth while shifting to keep up with the changing technology, ideology and general business landscape? They have to empower their leaders to think and show up differently.

We need to be [more human than ever](#) in order to adapt our roles alongside swift technological advances, and our jobs [are more intensely focused on people](#) than process. Developing leaders' ability to tune in with empathy and respond with [curiosity](#) emerges from developing and exercising vulnerability: a state of not being in control, not knowing the answer, letting others see our limits and risking failure. This vulnerability opens up leaders to new learning; deepens empathy; and supports a culture where participation, risk-taking, and authentic connection can thrive. That's how companies succeed in today's world.

If we want leaders to be people-first, the architects of leadership development initiatives need to rethink the way they offer learning. The most successful leadership development initiatives include experiences in which vulnerability is inherent to the experience itself – not just a concept to discuss. Including unorthodox, [immersive and unfamiliar experiences](#) can challenge leaders to practice tuning in to their customers and teams and respond with new insights in a whole new way. Here are several approaches for your next initiative.

“If we want leaders to be people-first, we need
to rethink the way we offer learning.”

1. Directly Experience New Modalities and Methods.

Leaders need to embrace experiences that “stretch” them to learn to tune in to what is in front of them instead of relying on what they know. For example, leaders at a major automotive company needed to understand transportation of the future, but many had no first-hand experience with unusual transportation methods and what was working and not working.

In response to this need, the program “Mobilitypalooza” was born. Leaders set out on a scavenger hunt across large urban areas (including London, Shanghai and Detroit) with the condition that they use alternative methods of transportation for each leg: ride-sharing, rental scooters, buses, rental bikes and hoverboards. Upon returning, they shared the pain points they discovered, possible solutions and how they were touched by the reality of the future. The exercise required them to be open to discovery and experimentation, and they cultivated empathy as they saw the world through the eyes of their customers.

2. Engage and Listen to Hear What the Customer Really Wants.

To bolster a people-centered approach, leaders need to understand the user experience. In one leadership development program, this need was so central that manufacturing leaders invested an entire day with a customer and lived a day “in their shoes” to help them understand how they use their product.

Developing the ability to tune in to customers can be as simple as polling them to find out what they actually want. The key is that the leaders themselves take the time to interact with the end user and actually hear them, rather than acquiring this information through summary reports.

These experiences provide leaders with a rich and profound awareness of customer needs and experiences and challenge them to build the fundamental skills of inquiring, interviewing, observing and challenging their own assumptions.

3. Practice Communicating with Authenticity and Telling the Story of the Road Ahead.

Leaders who are learning to lead in this new era need to be able to make sense of their observations, insights, needs and challenges and then share a compelling vision of the road ahead – even when there are a lot of unknowns. Developing the fundamental communication skills of [listening](#), expressing empathy, [storytelling](#) and [coaching](#) can help leaders feel confident engaging their teams to follow them on the unmapped road ahead.

“Developing fundamental communication skills can help leaders feel confident engaging their teams to follow them.”

Automotive executives participated in an interactive workshop to practice [speaking authentically](#). They crafted a set of stories that offered their people a window into who they are, framed failure as opportunity, acknowledged the emotional impact and necessity of change, and painted a picture of what the future holds. Practicing new organizational messages with purpose and presence enabled them to prepare themselves for the inevitable moments when they would need to rally support, foster engagement, address discord or refocus a team after failure.

When the group of executives was polled months after the overall initiative to find out what new skills they were using, the overwhelmingly majority reported using communication and storytelling skills to help them navigate their day-to-day challenges in transforming the organization.

An Invitation to You

These approaches for developing a people-first leadership mindset highlight the importance of experimentation, reflection and practice alongside other people. Trying out new skills can be awkward, and change is universally hard – especially when it’s something as fundamental as embracing vulnerability in order to be more adaptive and connected. It is crucial to give your leaders time to practice in safe spaces with one another.

It is both exciting and daunting to be leading learning initiatives at a time when the path forward is rapidly changing. Expanding one’s capacity for vulnerability is powerful, because it encourages others to share their ideas, feedback and experiments and add to the dialogue. In that spirit, we invite you to be vulnerable and tell us how your organization is trying and succeeding – and how it is trying and failing. Tweet us @TrainingIndustr, @barbgamm and @elsapowel. As a collective community of learning leaders, we can accelerate our response and learn together.

“Expanding one’s capacity for vulnerability is powerful, because it encourages others to share and add to the dialogue.”

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How Do You Train Your Leaders to Embrace Innovation?



Shanker Pillai is a senior consultant at [BTS](#), where he helps leaders navigate the strategic and leadership challenges of innovation and digital disruption across a wide range of industries. He's currently focused on the Asia markets and works out of Singapore.

[The 2018 World Economic Forum](#) highlighted innovation among the most valued skills for the future. In today's rapidly changing environment, leaders need to know how to deal with disruption, create fresh ideas and stay competitive. This means that it is crucial for leaders to effectively manage [innovation](#).

Taking Leaders on a Journey

Innovation is the discipline of discovering and solving problems in new ways under conditions of uncertainty. To successfully establish a culture that allows for the birth of innovative ideas, products and processes, leaders need to learn certain behaviors and skills.

“To establish a culture that allows for the birth of innovative ideas, leaders need to learn certain skills.”

Changing habits and working in new ways require leaders to experience new concepts, live the new approach, [test out new behaviors and fail](#). Innovation journeys are a process that organizations can implement to help leaders learn how to do these things.

Designing a Journey to Create a Culture of Innovation

In an innovation journey, leaders learn how to determine the best response to rapid changes in their environment, explore new ways of overcoming challenges and learn how to build the future of their organization.

During this journey, leaders go through the four stages of the innovation cycle:

1. **Setting the intent:** reaching a consensus on the key performance indicators (KPIs) needed to measure the success of the journey
2. **Exploration and ideation:** exploring the unmet needs of their customers using [design thinking](#), ethnographic studies or other exploration techniques
3. **Refinement:** executing field experiments where leaders can apply classroom learning in real life

4. **Experimentation:** developing test cases to validate the assumptions underpinning their ideas

Through these stages, leaders identify the organization's innovation domains and ambitions, find new ways to solve customer pain points, and develop the processes and leadership skills to sustain the momentum back at work.

While the optimal design and duration of an innovation journey will vary based on the organization's needs, there are a few elements that successful journeys share:

- Innovation efforts are aligned with business goals.
- Observation and experimentation occur in the field.
- [Coaches](#) are present to engage participants throughout the journey.
- Leaders learn innovation leadership behaviors.

Bringing the New Culture to Life

Innovation journeys begin with the “prime phase,” where leaders define the problem that needs to be solved using innovation. In this stage, leaders form teams, create the structure of the journey and identify KPIs. After kicking off, participants come together in a live session and identify their critical assumptions, using design thinking to explore customers' needs. This phase often involves evaluating real customers so that teams can immediately validate their assumptions.

After clarifying assumptions, participants engage in field experiments to bring the classroom learning to life. They observe clients and collect data using shadowing and ethnographic interviews. Insights gained through the interviews are used to create customer journey graphs, helping to validate and refine ideas from the previous step.

In the second face-to-face module, participants combine their learnings to develop workable solutions, prototyping their ideas and focusing on results measurement. In addition, they practice innovation leadership behaviors that will allow them to keep running these projects back at work. Leaders will leave this part of the workshop with an initial [prototype](#), or a minimum viable product, for further testing.

Throughout the journey, innovation coaches play a key role by providing feedback to teams and ensuring participants gain the right insights and ask the right questions. Coaches assess whether the course of action needs to change and follow up with the teams until they can take their ideas forward on their own. Perhaps most importantly, coaches ensure that participants develop the leadership skills and behaviors they need to create a [culture of innovation](#) back at work.

“Coaches ensure that participants develop the leadership skills and behaviors they need to create a culture of innovation.”

Mindset Shifts

These types of innovation learning journeys allow leaders to fundamentally shift their mindsets, discover a newfound empathy for the customer and become more conscious of their own leadership behaviors. As a result, they are better equipped to serve the customer; re-evaluate existing products and services; and walk away with the confidence to take the innovation tools, processes, and mindset back to their teams.

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How to Build Leaders' Capacity for Storytelling



Jennifer Goddeau is a senior consulting partner for Partners in Leadership, a southern California-based provider of Accountability Training® and management consulting firm.

Gaining employee buy-in and adoption remains a significant roadblock in teams and organizations. It's no easy task to undertake a new initiative, whether rolling out an operational process or implementing new technology. Even small shifts may fail to take root due to an allegiance to the status quo and “how it's always been done” — an attitude that can create a pervasive resistance to change across a team or an organization.

Leaders seeking to drive a change in employee mindsets and organizational results often make a critical error: They ask or tell employees to act differently, often by compelling or coercing them to comply. In doing so, they ignore a fundamental facet of human behavior, as described in Roger Connors and Tom Smith's book “Change the Culture, Change the Game”: Behavior is informed by beliefs.

Anyone can command people to act a certain way and could find some success in the short term. For sustainable change to occur, however, leaders must do more than demand different behavior. They have to shift mindsets.

“Leaders must do more than demand different behavior.
They have to shift mindsets.”

The Art of Storytelling for Leaders

Develop your leaders' capacity to overcome resistance to change and drive employee engagement and buy-in by harnessing the [powerful tool of storytelling](#). Beliefs or mindsets can limit our thinking, forcing us to see the world a certain way. They are often what impede a leader's efforts to get people to think and act differently. Stories invite people to suspend their beliefs — about the world, about what is possible, and about themselves. Here is where the magic happens. It's when a person suspends his or her beliefs that real change can occur.

Leaders who tell stories also communicate a compelling vision around desired beliefs, behaviors and results. If they want to see a behavior demonstrated more often, sharing stories about people who exhibit the desired behavior provides a clear example. It also provides evidence that these behaviors are already taking place, encouraging others to adopt the new behaviors as well.

In essence, storytelling helps leaders change the way their teams think, which is a critical step in shifting the way employees act.

“Storytelling helps leaders change the way their teams think, which is a critical step in shifting the way employees act.”

Storytelling at Work

A young girl was visiting the Disneyland theme park with her mother when she threw her Belle doll in the air, and it landed in a fenced-off construction zone. Recognizing the girl's distress, several employees from security, merchandising and guest services worked together to retrieve the doll.

They discovered the doll in terrible condition. Its clothes had been ripped, and it was covered in mud. Even worse, they found out it was a discontinued model. They sent the doll to the costume design department to be spruced up. When the family returned to their hotel room at the end of the day, they were greeted with the newly outfitted doll and an invitation for tea with the “real” Belle.

For years, Disney has shared this story across the organization as an example of employee behavior that supports Disney's culture of delighting and creating happiness for each guest. That Disney embraces storytelling as a leadership and culture tool should come as no surprise; Walt Disney was a master storyteller. His legacy and the [thriving company culture he left behind](#) sprang from his vision, leadership and storytelling abilities — and the beliefs that became cultural cornerstones thanks to this cohesive narrative.

Within the company, Disney told stories that mobilized employees around his vision. This storytelling practice has fostered a [guest-centric corporate culture](#) imbued with creativity and innovation that has led to sustained success. He empowered employees to use their own stories to connect to the customer experience, making way for stories like the girl and her Belle doll to live on and work their magic in the organization.

Teaching Storytelling to Leaders

For stories to have the ultimate impact, it is critical that training and development leaders work with organizational leaders to develop their strategic storytelling skills. Teach leaders three fundamentals of storytelling to create alignment around desired behaviors, reinforce critical beliefs and drive your organizational culture forward.

1. Choose the right story, and make the connection.

Great stories have a beginning, middle and end, but for leaders to create a vision for their team, there's more. Not all stories are created equal, and some stories can create change that works against an organization. Therefore, it's critical for leaders to be intentional about the stories they tell.

Choose stories that clearly demonstrate and reinforce desired behaviors while linking back to organizational priorities and desired results. For example, if a desired result is to foster a culture of creative problem-solvers, look for examples within the organization, such as an employee who confidently voiced his or her opinion and drove the team toward an innovative solution.

It's also important to deeply engage employees with compelling stories that invite people to suspend their beliefs long enough to disrupt the status quo and create positive movement.

2. Be brief, and aim to go viral.

All it takes to deliver a powerful story is 45 seconds. Storytellers who drone on risk losing an audience's attention. After observing and testing this technique for almost 30 years, it is clear that a short, memorable story has a better chance of being retold by employees across an organization.

Keeping a story to 45 seconds is especially important considering evidence of declining attention spans; a recent [Microsoft study](#) suggests that humans may have attention spans as brief as eight seconds. This time limit should also be welcome news for busy leaders in your organization; anyone can spare 45 seconds.

Have leaders practice this storytelling technique, building from a punchy hook that captures attention and investment from the get-go. Within 45 seconds, the audience should comprehend the story, feel comfortable repeating the story and be clear on the point of the story. If the storyteller accomplishes these three Cs, the story has a better chance of being shared and working its magic across the organization.

3. Conclude with a clear connection that reinforces the desired behavior.

Once a story invites an audience to suspend any beliefs that were getting in the way, create real movement by concluding with a simple phrase that reinforces the desired behavior. You might say, "That's what innovation looks like to me," or "That's what good communication looks like to me."

Using the term “looks like” instead of “feels like” communicates that the desired behavior is already occurring in the organization. It encourages employees to observe and take note of similar instances in their day-to-day work.

The Lasting Impact of Storytelling

Effective storytelling helps leaders create a unified vision around desired beliefs and actions, driving adoption and buy-in for the results that matter most to your organization. Stories break through impediments to change; shape new, learning mindsets; and inspire employees to adopt new behaviors that drive desired results.

Develop a leader's ability to deliver effective stories that emphasize clarity and brevity. Once leaders have perfected their storytelling delivery, encourage them to share stories as often as they can. The more stories shared through the organization, the more effectively they reinforce behaviors critical to organizational success.

“The more stories shared through the organization, the more effectively they reinforce behaviors critical to success.”

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