

The background of the top half of the page is a teal-colored abstract pattern. It consists of a grid of small, glowing dots that form a series of parallel lines receding into the distance, creating a sense of depth and perspective. The dots are more prominent in the foreground and become smaller and more blurred as they recede.

hemsleyfraser

# **Successful Leadership Development in the Post-COVID World**

# Successful Leadership Development in the Post-COVID World

The pandemic has reshaped the world of work, creating new skills, challenges and threats. Leaders are now facing unprecedented uncertainty, and yet with change comes opportunity. Hemsley Fraser has been developing engaging learning experiences focused on leadership and skills leaders need to succeed in a post-pandemic world.

So, what is needed for leadership to succeed in the 'next normal'?



# Soft skills and leadership

Soft skills are often viewed in a different context compared to hard or technical skills. Some organizations assume that soft skills are harder to define, assess and develop. However, the pandemic has underlined the importance of soft skills and ensured they are now more critical than ever. Organizations have had to build resilience, learn to adapt quickly and with agility, and use initiative to stay flexible with changing employee and customer needs.

Indeed, the World Economic Forum found that 8 of the 10 top skills growing in importance are soft skills.

These are:

- Analytical thinking and innovation
- Active learning and learning strategies
- Complex problem solving
- Critical thinking and analysis
- Creativity, originality, and initiative
- Leadership and social influence
- Resilience, stress tolerance, and flexibility
- Reasoning, problem-solving, and ideation

Organizations must recognize the importance of these skills and focus on developing them. Agility allows organizations to be competitive in their industries, and resilience which, enables companies to handle change effectively. Soft skills are the foundation of a successful organization, and focusing on them will allow organizations to survive and thrive now and in the future.

# Virtual leadership development programs

Virtual learning was already being explored prior to the pandemic, but COVID-19 has accelerated its use and necessity. Yet, many organizations are still being challenged by executives who do not appreciate the value of virtual learning. Organizations must understand these key considerations and the best practices for providing virtual leadership programs.

Effective virtual learning programs need to punch through the noise of our digital lives. Many of us now spend 12 to 14 hours a day looking at screens, so virtual learning programs must take learners away from the monotony of digital working. Keep it short and concise – for time-pressed leaders, introduce learning programs offered in short chunks. Use clear communication and make the messaging strong; explain what's in it for the learners, emphasizing how the program will help them.

Understandably, leaders don't want to be trained or taught. Instead, they want to share knowledge with their peers and learn through common experiences. Effective virtual leadership development programs tend to be facilitative, not learning-based, and by using a blended curriculum, you can serve the needs of all different types of learners. But, if leaders aren't engaged with the learning, the program will fail to have an impact.

Virtual learning done correctly can be beneficial for employees across all levels. Not only is it more cost-effective, but it allows leaders the chance to work with people from across the globe, imparting additional diversity, inclusion, and belonging experiences. Virtual learning can be just as effective, if not more so, as face-to-face learning, but leaders and learners must be able to see the value. Get your stakeholders excited about the impact of virtual learning by getting them involved and showing the benefits.



# Skills and reskilling

The World Economic Forum found that 50 percent of employees will need to be reskilled by 2025. Organizations must consider how to create a virtual skilling and reskilling program, which aligns with company goals for maximum impact.

The pandemic has permanently changed our working world, creating new challenges and opportunities for organizations. With that, there must be recognition of the skills needed to overcome challenges

and seize opportunities. Learners must understand the importance of developing these skills, both in terms of how they will be impacted personally and the effect this can have on the wider goals of the organization. The most successful learning programs will be those where the business has a seat at the table. Engaging your stakeholders early on will create a much more effective learning program in the long term.

## Agile learning

The ability to be flexible and responsive is essential for succeeding in a post-COVID-19 world. Leaders need to adapt quickly, in tune with their organization's changing needs, and organizations must be ready to offer that support, quickly altering learning programs to fit new needs – as many have done throughout the last 12 months.

It's important to remember that successful learning programs don't happen in isolation – organizations must think holistically when it comes to learning. Our 'excite, engage, embed' model, for example, was built to ensure maximum transformational power. Organizations need to excite both the stakeholders about the value of the learning and the learners about the learning. Once a program starts, it needs to be engaging to achieve maximum impact. Learners must also understand the learning in context to enable them to embed new skills and behaviors into their work.

Pre-2020, it may have been assumed that the biggest driver for soft skill development would come from increased automation in the workplace. However, the events of the last year caused an acceleration in the need for new skills, as well as how these are developed. In order to build successful leadership development post-pandemic, organizations must focus not just on which skills to develop, but how these are cultivated.

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