

Future-fit leadership in a post-pandemic world

The social and economic crisis caused by the current COVID-19 pandemic is an extreme but relevant example of the types of challenges global leaders face today. Like any other crisis, the disruptive forces and major existence-threatening impacts were entirely unexpected. No matter where in the world or in which business, the crisis is having a dramatic impact on the world's workforce.

Traditionally, organisations have developed leaders to drive efficiency, business and operational excellence but this challenge has made organisations realise that they need to develop leaders who can effectively respond to constantly evolving threats and opportunities while charting a path to sustainable growth. Coupled with this is the unrelenting pace of technological change. This requires leaders to exhibit new age capabilities like digital mindset, virtual crisis handling, navigating change etc.

The other change that leaders are facing is of managing teams remotely, something that is likely to become a long-term reality. How can leaders effectively manage teams when visually monitoring work is difficult and non-verbal cues are hard to pick up in conversation and meetings. This has the potential to create a loss of comfort and trust in the minds of managers and team members.

The crisis is having an interesting economic impact thus far. Industry trends suggest that 50% of the world's CEOs are concerned about uncertain economic growth and in addition to the disruptive changes such as digitisation, demographic shifts, climate changes that are impacting how we work. Yet more than 85% of

them expect the global economy to improve within the next 12 months and register significant growth in 2022. The key trigger to achieve this business resilience would be managing change and strikingly, some of Willis Towers Watson recent research shows that only 25% of global firms admit that change management is a major strength of their leaders. Therefore, it is evidently clear that this phase has come about as a defining moment for leaders, as they steer their organisations through uncertain times and forge the 'new normal'.

Progressive organisations understand this delta difference and have already started re-engineering their leadership development programmes to enable '*future-fit*' leaders in leading in these new ways, and in so doing seize a once-in-a-generation opportunity to consciously evolve the very nature and impact of their role.

But are organisations re-engineering the right capabilities for their future leaders?

We have spoken with hundreds of CEOs since the pandemic first hit and there is a clear need to revisit the leadership frameworks such that they not only fulfil the aspects of known abilities but also the unknown. In this context, any redefinition of leadership frameworks should be conducted with data-based evidence and forecasts keeping 'future potential' as a primary factor.

Willis Towers Watson is conducting a pathbreaking research by looking at the critical leadership impact areas and then correlating them with both change filters as well as

practices and dimensions adopted by the world's most progressive organisations.

The first phase of this research suggests the following as the top styles' leaders need to adopt and develop through this phase:

- Be an enthusiast, create a shared sense of purpose, recover from setbacks and positively impact organisational commitment.
- Be a change agent, and drive organisational transformation and change.
- Be an inspirer and inspire individuals and teams to perform and grow, developing talent, coordinating resources and utilising potential.

The outcomes can serve as a scientific foundation for critical expectations and development considerations from leaders in these times. They are not in any particular order and can be adopted depending on the organisational phase of crisis response as well as business impact. The bottom line remains that leaders need to be flexible in their leadership style as they address the rapidly changing needs of their organisations and teams. Striking a delicate balance between quick decisions and a human-centric approach is being hailed as the best response by the most resilient leaders.

The heartening news is that the pandemic doesn't need to be seen as a threat but an opportunity – as the smartest leaders will eventually come to see COVID-19 as a case study for all the things they did right in the face of a global disruption.

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