TD: Talent Development

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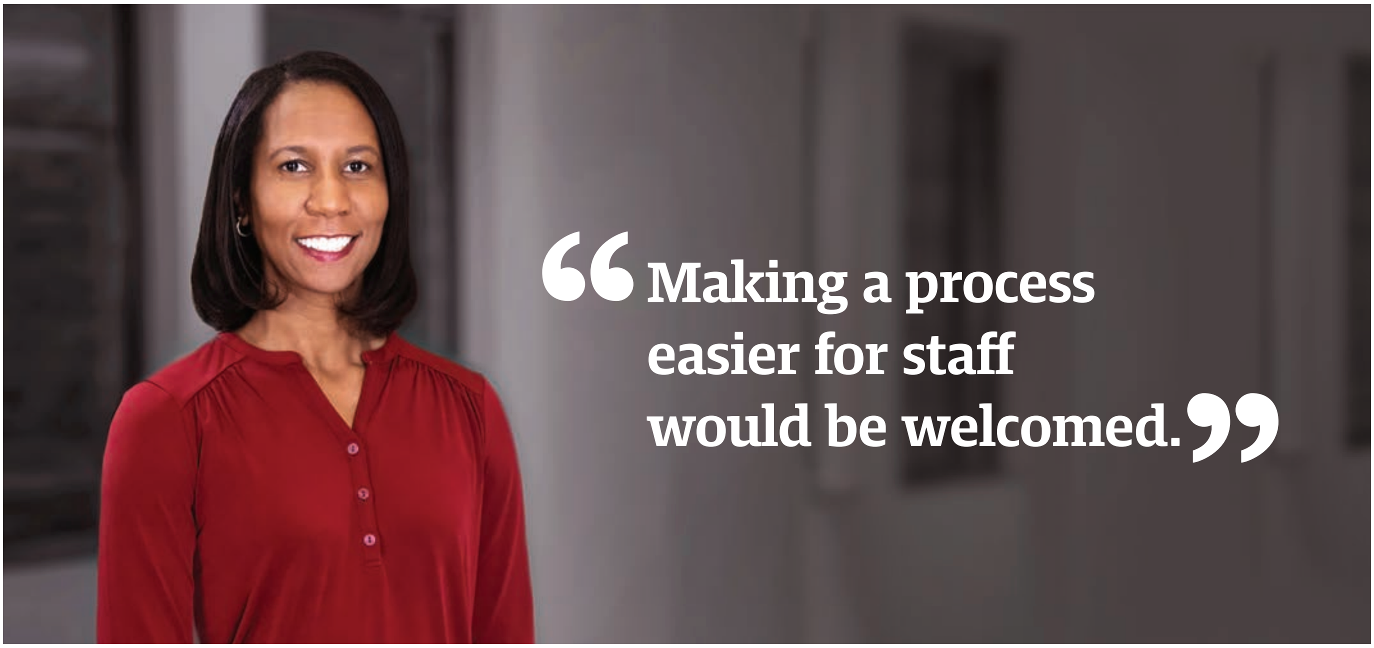

PHOTO | BEY BELLO

Revisit a Trusty Practice

Many managers have it tough right now: getting a handle of supervising a remote workforce, ensuring their direct reports aren’t overcome by too much anxiety or burnout, executing on newly developed organizational goals to ensure business continuity. Amid all that, however, it’s important that managers don’t overlook their employees’ professional development.

I’m sure all employees are grateful to simply have a job in this unstable economy, but that doesn’t mean that career conversations and discussions about development goals should be pushed aside. Even under normal circumstances, studies revealed that many employees felt their employers were shirking on staff development. Imagine what that may look like now, eight months into a pandemic that has turned many business practices on their head.

Perhaps it’s time to take a fresh look at individual development plans. David Hosmer, author of this month’s cover story, explains that IDPs aren’t a performance management tool but rather a plan that details “the expected skills, knowledge, or competencies an employee will need to develop over the next year.”

In his article, Hosmer presents reasons supervisors often avoid IDPs and details some modifications companies can make to reduce managers’ hesitancy toward them. “Avoiding IDPs is understandable in some cases … but managers’ responsibility is to ensure employees are equipped to fulfill their roles and flex with business needs,” Hosmer writes. He even provides a sample IDP template and facilitation questions managers can use during their development discussions with direct reports.

With all that’s going on related to the pandemic and its effects on the economy, work life, and home life, employers making a process easier for staff would be welcomed. Hosmer’s guidance offers a streamlined process talent development teams can implement and managers can execute to the benefit of the entire organization.

Vanessa St. Gerard
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IN PRACTICE

Don’t Leave Online Training Tool Selection to Chance

To effectively use e-learning tools, companies must understand the technology.

BY HANNAH STERNBERG

It may seem that the pandemic only hastened the inevitable: technology’s domination of the training field. But online learning isn’t a monolith; it comprises many different modalities, such as e-learning, webinars, and virtual instructor-led training. And data from ClickMeeting’s June 2020 report *Webinars and Video Conferencing in Times of the Pandemic* reveals a more subtle story.

According to the study, which compares March 2019 to March 2020, the use of webinars specifically for e-learning declined slightly from pre-pandemic rates, whereas the use of webinars for professional training increased. Use of webinars for employee onboarding and training also increased.

ClickMeeting reports a dramatic increase in the use of interactive tools, such as polls, Q&As, and calls to action. Those, coupled with big leaps in the use of presentation features and whiteboards, indicate a more highly produced, interactive webinar experience that stimulates audiences and encourages activity, instead of passive listening and watching. For trainers, that could mean that learners will emerge from pandemic work life with new, higher expectations for webinars’ ability to keep them personally engaged.

Companies can use webinars for learning, but they also must learn about the technology so that they use webinars effectively. The report states: “People who have never used webinar platforms before (or worse—any technology at all) need proper guidance—and incredibly fast. This is evidenced by the multiplied number of inquiries addressed to our Customer Success Team.”

Ambitious online training designers should keep that in mind. Although the world has abruptly adopted e-meeting technology en masse, that does not mean everyone automatically knows how to use it. Both designers and learners need a thorough understanding of the tools they’re using, or they risk derailing online events because of glitches or even “Zoombombing” by malicious visitors who seek to disrupt open online events.

Building those skills will have prolonged benefits. Most respondents reported that they were planning to maintain a higher level of webinar use in the future, even after the pandemic subsides and offices reopen. Online training is here to stay, and there’s no time like the present to make sure your organization is up to speed.

Hannah Sternberg is a production editor for ATD; hsternberg@td.org.

BONUS APP CONTENT

WEIGHING IN

If you had 10 minutes to teach the world anything, what would it be?

Followership. I’d teach that good followership is also good leadership. It’s OK to ask questions and get the *why* behind the action. I actually weave followership into my training sessions in small doses where I can.
—Adrianna Noteboom Mullins, Sioux City, Iowa

Resilience. It is absolutely key to initiating and managing change. Nothing is more important.
—B. Sarah Phelps, Castle Rock, Colorado

Believe in yourself and take risks to let yourself grow for both your personal and professional development.
—Victoria Komjathy, Buffalo, New York

How to become a better version of yourself. Remember, it isn’t about making yourself liked by others—it’s about becoming someone you truly love and adore, which will in turn attract the right people and opportunities into your life.
—Jolleen Ruby D’sa, Bangalore, India

I’d ask people to help me learn something that’s important to them and show them in the process that we can learn from anyone.
—Molly Cartwright, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Pandemic Next Steps: Focus on L&D

Companies need to prioritize training efforts to equip employees and leaders with necessary skills.

BY DERRICK THOMPSON

The talent development function plays an integral role in helping organizations navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, which is likely one of the most pivotal workplace transformations in modern history. John Bersin Academy's *The Big Reset Playbook: What's Working Now* report captures urgent next steps for business leaders during this unprecedented time of transition.

The report categorizes the pandemic's business and workforce impact into four phases: react, respond, return, and transform. Training and development need to be part of each phase—whether as new online learning

IMAGE | ADOBE STOCK

courses or training programs for employees in roles newly created as a result of the pandemic.

In the disruption's early stages, Bersin researchers initiated conversations with executives from more than 160 companies. Due to varying needs and interests, they formed four working groups that executives self-selected: culture and well-being, workplace transformation, leadership and learning, and return to workplace. The groups then identified 20 top priorities—including continuous real-time communication with workers, digital transformation at speed, and adapted talent practices—for companies navigating business during the crisis. Some of those priorities will rely on talent development professionals' expertise and involvement to implement.

Supporting and developing leaders was the number 3 priority, with managers most affected right now. Previous development programs cannot meet the needs of today's leaders, who must demonstrate trust, patience, and forgiveness while supervising and supporting a remote workforce. The report notes that many companies—including Verizon and Ford—are now focusing leadership development on trust, communication, empathy, and support.

Another top priority is maintaining productivity while adapting. Acknowledging the uptick in dispersed workforces and the many distractions that employees face, companies are developing training and support programs to help employees maintain focus and learn to effectively run meetings and manage remotely.

The level of involvement the talent development function has in this transformative period will depend on various factors, such as organization structure, size, and industry. What is clear, however, is that corporate learning programs are essential to workplace transformation.

Derrick Thompson is a writer/editor for ATD; dthompson@td.org.

OFF THE WIRE

The Future of Learning and Development Podcast

To hear industry insights and perspectives from L&D leaders at some of the world's leading organizations, tune in to *The Future of Learning and Development* podcast hosted by Ryan Jenkins, co-founder of Sync Learning Experiences. The caliber of guests featured on this podcast is top notch, and an intentional focus on innovation and the future of work helps keep listeners on the cutting edge of developments in the L&D industry.

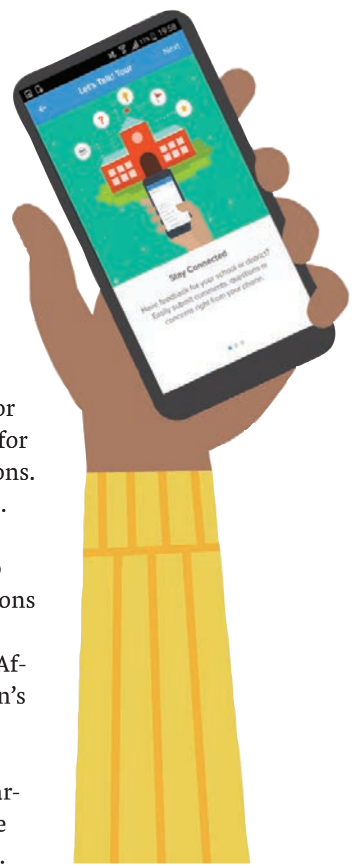
The pilot episode, "Make L&D Give Time Back," which was posted in late March, features Molly Nagler, PepsiCo's chief learning officer. She shares her perspective on what the future of work will look like and discusses some of the significant shifts that have taken place in L&D.

Fast forward to episode 10, "How the Brain Learns," which was released in late August and features Britt Andreatta, former chief learning officer at Lynda.com. She and Jenkins discuss the neuroscience involved in learning and explore the impact virtual learning technology is having on the industry.

Listen to those episodes and others via iTunes, Stitcher, or your favorite podcast service.

COOL TOOL

Let's Talk



It sounds easy enough: Ask a thought-provoking question and you'll set the right atmosphere for a psychologically safe group meeting that's conducive to collaboration and learning. Yet, as effortless as that can sound, many of us can attest to racking our brains or performing endless online searches to find inspiration for the right question to break the ice in our training sessions.

Next time you are feeling stuck, try the Let's Talk app. Use the tool to launch strangers into ice-breaking, tension-releasing, comfort-building banter. Available to Apple users, the $1 app provides more than 1,200 questions grouped into nine different categories, including small groups, business groups, and even dinner with friends. After selecting a category, you may also select the question's level of difficulty.

Whether for a weekly team meeting or a large-scale training event, icebreakers can have a great effect on participants' engagement level. And the questions available on Let's Talk can help you get the conversations started.

IMAGE | ADOBE STOCK

Now Hiring Training Supervisors

LinkedIn ranks trainers among the leading in-demand positions and among those with the fastest-growing demand.

BY DERRICK THOMPSON

The quick, sharp rise of unemployment in 2020 understandably sparked feelings of job insecurity among workers around the world. But despite fickle unemployment figures, there may be a silver lining for talent development practitioners.

The US unemployment rate skyrocketed from 3.8 percent in February 2020 to 14.4 percent by April. In fact, April's unemployment figures surpassed the peak unemployment rate recorded during the Great Recession. However, LinkedIn data adds context as to how those figures affect job prospects and career opportunities in L&D.

LinkedIn monitors the most in-demand jobs, in-demand remote jobs, and the skills employers are looking for. Months into the pandemic, the company's data shows that filling training positions remains among organizations' leading priorities.

In a June to July 2020 data comparison, training supervisor jobs had the fourth fastest-growing demand. LinkedIn determined that ranking by analyzing the biggest percentage growth in job posts from June to July.

Further, LinkedIn ranked training supervisor as one of the top 10 most in-demand jobs for August. Other positions included salesperson, registered nurse, software engineer, financial advisor, and project manager. To determine the most in-demand jobs, LinkedIn analyzed the number of job posts from the prior month.

LinkedIn likewise tracks the leading skills that companies are currently hiring for. In August, communication, business management, problem solving, data science, and data storage techniques were the top five.

While those rankings—as well as hiring and unemployment—are subject to fluctuate, the data suggests organizations will continue to rely on training leaders to help workers shore up their skills to meet the demands of the new working world.

Derrick Thompson is a writer/editor for ATD; dthompson@td.org.

#4

Training supervisor was ranked among the top five positions with the fastest-growing demand from June to July 2020.

IMAGE | ADOBE STOCK

INFOGRAPH

When Will the Meeting End?

One-hour meetings are no longer the norm. These were the five most common meeting lengths in the second quarter of 2020:

SOURCE: *STATE OF MEETINGS Q2, DOODLE,* AUGUST 2020

IMAGE | ADOBE STOCK

INNOVATIONS

Telepresence Technology May Enrich Learning Experiences

Imagine this: At your next training session, you are projected as a life-size hologram, leading learners thousands of miles away. The idea of telepresence is being talked about more and more in educational circles, and the next level of learning now may be closer than you think.

Juan Carlos Alfonzo León, a professor at the Tecnológico de Monterrey campus in Chiapas, Mexico, discusses the concept in the article "Telepresence: A Form of Digital Learning." He writes, "Telepresence refers to the technology that allows an individual to 'transport' from one physical space to another through a telecommunications network, managing to access and be in all places as if he were physically there but experiencing it through a virtual presence."

León points out that telepresence technologies can help create interactive and immersive learning experiences. Moreover, use of such technology will be instrumental in transforming the teaching-learning process "into a technological educational experience that transcends distance," he explains.

For those who remember when videoconferencing and other technology that we now take for granted seemed futuristic and like a far-off idea, signs point to telepresence as one way we will continue to evolve in the way we communicate and learn.

IMAGE | ADOBE STOCK

Train Employers to Lead an Age-Diverse Workforce

Organizations admit they lack the skills to guide and enhance multigenerational employees.

BY I. SHAUN GHOLSTON

What do a recent college graduate, a midlevel account supervisor, and a 61-year-old managing partner have in common? They all can thrive within the same organization using their distinct skill sets to move their workplace forward despite age differences.

According to AARP's *Global Insights on the Multigenerational Workforce* issue brief, older workers are staying in the workforce longer than in previous years and are playing significant roles in solidifying organizations' bottom lines. Despite the business benefits, those workers often face workplace discrimination because of their age, and employers find it hard to push protocols that endorse employees living, learning, and earning longer.

While some organizations emphasize staffing a diverse age demographic for such reasons as well-roundedness and good transfer of knowledge among employees, too many companies fall short of embracing older workers' needs. According to the survey, about four in five companies have a multigenerational workforce. Yet, only 42 percent of surveyed organizations educate management teams about how to lead multigenerational workforces, which indicates that more than half do not provide training in this

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area. According to AARP, that results in "millions of workers across the globe working in a multigenerational environment managed by someone without the training to maximize these teams."

What then, can talent development professionals do to help support a multigenerational workforce? Provide training.

AARP found that at least two-thirds of employers would do more to create and enhance an age-diverse workforce if appropriately trained to do so. With the majority of organizations acknowledging that skills gap, providing training is a significant step toward creating more inclusive organizational cultures.

The report offers recommendations for companies, some of which are within talent development's scope of responsibilities. One action item focuses on ensuring that diversity training for managers and staff address ageism. Another is to craft an age-diverse and inclusive talent strategy that develops all employees' critical digital and cognitive capabilities, social and emotional skills, and adaptability and resilience.

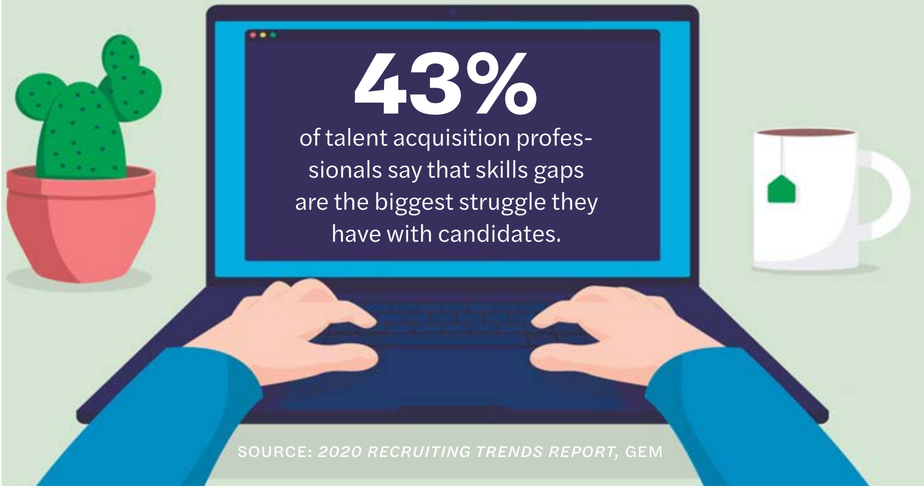
In addition to benefiting the bottom line, there are many cultural perks to employing a multigenerational workforce, and talent development professionals can be a conduit to ensuring the availability of training programs that employers admittedly need.

I. Shaun Gholston is a senior associate editor for ATD; sgholston@td.org.

78%
of organizations have a multigenerational workforce.

FAST FACT

Job Seekers Lack Necessary Skills



SOURCE: *2020 RECRUITING TRENDS REPORT*, GEM

PRACTICAL POINTERS

Maintain Your Career During Disruption

If we didn't know about workplace disruption prior to COVID-19—whether because of a merger and acquisition or a new CEO, for example—we certainly know about it now. But how do we show up for work when we're stressed and distracted with concerns?

In "Don't Let Disruption Derail Your Career," Tom E. Jones provides guidance and tools to help employees stay focused and maintain their career, maximize teamwork and problem-solving skills, and establish a personal support network. "Knowing how to balance and blend your efforts between maintaining the minimum results and attending to higher priorities is vital to your ability to achieve goals and objectives" during times of disruption, Jones writes.

Failure will happen during a crisis. View it as an opportunity to learn. Then, to determine how to resolve the problem, follow this four-step action guide:

Identify the cause. Clearly define what went wrong by gathering data on what, where, when, and how. Select the most likely cause and test assumptions.

Develop options. Determine who owns the problem, and define desired results. Prioritize a list of workable options, and pick the one most likely to work.

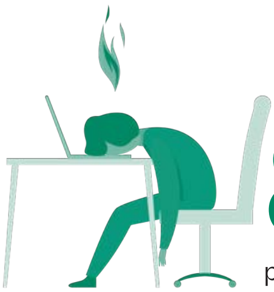
Implement a solution. Brainstorm possible threats or opposition to the plan, along with the severity of each and likelihood of it occurring.

Evaluate the result. Set timelines and establish incentives, both positive and negative, for compliance. Take action and follow up to see that the problem is resolved.

MORE ONLINE

These tips were adapted from the November 2020 issue of *TD at Work*. Learn more at td.org/TDatWork.

IMAGE | ADOBE STOCK



8 out of 10

professionals have suffered burnout.

Employers Play a Role in Curtailing Burnout

Employee burnout is costly, but companies can take steps to counteract it.

BY PATTY GAUL

According to *Burning the Candle: Strategies to Combat Workplace Burnout,* a 2020 Robert Walters Group Company report, almost 50 percent of managers believe their direct reports may be at risk of burnout, and 82 percent of respondents indicate they have suffered burnout in the past. The global recruitment consultancy polled founders, hiring managers, executives, and employees prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

According to Mayo Clinic, symptoms of burnout at work include lacking energy to be consistently productive, struggling to concentrate, feeling disillusioned about one's job, and being irritable or impatient with colleagues.

How do organizations address this loss to productivity and other negative feelings? The report identifies six major factors underlying burnout: workload management, employee control, reward and recognition, community culture, fairness, and a shared set of values. It also presents several tips for addressing those factors.

For example, are some employees available for work 24/7? They shouldn't be. "Discourage employees from adding their work email to their personal mobile devices so they aren't tempted to 'check in' during non-working hours," the report states. "Ensure you are protecting your employees' home-time by limiting work communication that occurs outside scheduled hours."

Additionally, it's important for employees to understand their goals and objectives and have regular conversations about them—90 percent of respondents agreed. Managers and leaders need to convey work task priorities so that employees can spend their time appropriately.

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Another major issue is employee control. All too often, the report points out, employees feel that companies did not appropriately convey during the hiring process all their job roles and responsibilities. Employers should ensure that job descriptions are clear and that they convey whether a role is likely to change.

Employees also want to understand that their contributions make a difference to organizational goals. Transparency and including employees in decisions can lead to increased job satisfaction.

More than half of employees are less likely to burn out if they feel their performance metrics are within their control, according to the report. To do so, employees need the tools and resources to do their jobs well.

Further, individuals want to be respected for who they are and feel they are part of a community. As such, companies are increasingly emphasizing—rightly so—diversity and inclusion, which should begin at the recruitment phase. Organizations can likewise offer social activities to help with bonding and should ensure that team communication platforms enable everyone to collaborate.

Finally, the report notes that employees are more likely to suffer from burnout if they don't connect with organizational values and mission. Therefore, regularly communicate the mission to employees and post it publicly on your organization's website and via other messaging vehicles.

Patty Gaul is a senior writer/editor for ATD; pgaul@td.org.

Performance Management Revamp Achieves Organizational Goals

Using familiar processes and being creative can move you and the business ahead.

BY JARED DOUGLAS

One of the biggest challenges for small training departments is operating as a strategic body. It is hard enough to meet the basic training requirements as a team of one or two, let alone focus on contributing to organizational goals at the same time. Doing both simultaneously isn't always possible. Yet, doing so is often the best way to be seen as a differentiator for the business.

I was a learning team of one in an ad agency for several years. Our chief talent officer set the goal for the organization to have the best managers in the industry. That was a big, bold goal to chase. After all, where do we even begin to build the best managers? And how would I make time for that on top of my normal responsibilities?

Rather than start from ground zero, I kicked off the project with work that was already in progress. Earlier that year, the organization had transitioned from a corporate university to an employee experience brand. So, rather than having a corporate university that dealt solely with training, for the first time the company gathered all employee-facing activities—from learning to benefits to the intranet—under one umbrella with the same brand. It was a fresh voice and presence within the company, and its successful launch energized employees.

I tapped into that energy to similarly evaluate what the current manager experience was. If the department understood that, we would have ideas on what to improve upon. Even better, we could then incorporate the solutions seamlessly with the new employee experience brand.

To do that, I decided to adapt the customer experience journey. A customer experience journey map outlines different touchpoints a customer has with a company, product, or service and evaluates the quality of that experience. While I had done some work in the area, I was by no means an expert. To upskill myself, I took an online course on the process of mapping a customer experience. My company already gave employees access to the course provider, so this was a zero-cost solution, and I could complete the course on my schedule.

Needs analysis. Armed with the basics, I began collecting data about the manager experience. I had two main sources of information: the HR team and current people managers. The HR team provided an overview of the current experience, which helped me identify four main touchpoints to evaluate: new-employee onboarding, giving feedback, performance management, and developing teams.

Training Department Benefits
Engaging in a new type of needs analysis—that of the manager experience—led to a performance management process redesign and a training department that was considered strategic.

Manager Benefits
Managers took ownership of the performance management process; the resulting system was transparent, with all details readily available.

Cultural Benefits
Aligning the manager experience to familiar systems made for a more natural fit for both managers and employees. It also led to higher response rates for performance reviews.

I then interviewed a cross-section of people managers—those who varied in experience, location, and department—to hear about their current experience on each of the touchpoints. While there were varying degrees of feedback, one key theme emerged: The performance management cycle wasn't providing value to managers or employees.

That was an incredibly important, and potentially challenging, revelation because my employer was obligated to follow the parent company's performance management process. The parent company had rolled out a new system the previous year, and we still felt the pain from the change. Luckily, we had a freedom-within-a-framework approach that enabled us to adapt the process to fit our needs. Therefore, although we had to complete all four phases of the performance cycle—self-review, manager review, performance conversation, and goal setting—how we completed them and the timeline for doing so was flexible within certain parameters.

SOLUTION

Creative application of existing processes and resources can lead to innovative, strategic solutions.

Change overload. The performance management process was a struggle on many fronts: It varied every year, so there was a great deal of change management fatigue; communication lacked transparency and details came piecemeal from HR; and managers didn't see value in it because the feedback they provided wasn't making a difference in direct reports' behavior or leading to appropriate promotions.

I presented my findings to the chief talent officer and heads of HR and OD. It was a poorly kept secret that the performance management system was ineffective, but presenting the data points effected change. The chief talent officer wanted to immediately move forward. I shared my findings in midsummer, and with the performance management review cycle beginning in September, there was no time to waste.

I enlisted a few HR stakeholders to help develop a plan that would shift ownership of performance management from HR to leaders and managers. We developed a communications and messaging plan for the new process that included emails, posters, and desk drops. I also crafted in-person workshops for each of the four performance phases—a combination of discussion, overview of the cycle, and practice opportunities. For example, the self-review workshop would start with a sample employee scenario and discussion around important aspects for employees to consider during that phase, followed by learners beginning their own review.

While I initially fed off the energy of the employee experience, the approval for an organizational priority further energized me. An idea I had (manager experience) was going to have a real, strategic impact on the business—quickly.

During the manager experience process, I used some of the most important skills talent development professionals need to be successful: questioning, listening, synthesizing information, and communicating information. Managers felt listened to, which was a small victory in its own right. Several people thanked me for taking the time to let them share their perspective.

The project was time-consuming, taking up nearly all my time for five weeks, but the dividends paid off. Because working toward the best managers in the industry was a strategic organizational goal, I could devote significant amounts of time to it.

The number of completed performance reviews increased under the new system. Crafting the solution in terms of the manager experience was helpful because it was in line with the organizational culture. Employees built experiences for clients—that was the service the company provided. That desire was reflected internally with employees themselves looking for experiences.

During the project, I learned several new skills and leveraged many existing resources (the online course, the HR and OD teams, and employees I interviewed). The biggest result was adding dimension to learning. The company viewed learning as only classroom based. The culture supported live workshops, which was wonderful—but live workshops are limiting (and aren't always possible).

RESULTS

$$$

Completing the work internally with existing resources easily saved the company $100,000.

This new process came at a time of flux for the company. Given we had launched the employee experience brand that year, the HR and OD teams were comfortable traveling into the unknown. It was an ideal time to try something new.

The project started as a way to incorporate organizational goals into the training department strategy, which it did, but it also had an almost reverse effect. Because of the findings, it shifted the HR and OD teams' strategies and focus for most of the year. In that way, it was a consolidation of organization and department goals, which enabled both teams to focus on what was truly important.

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Event Skills Refresh for the Virtual World

Several essential roles are needed to ensure your next virtual training event runs smoothly.

BY MICHAEL PACITTI

How many of your work-related events have quickly moved to some form of online or virtual experience during the past several months? Consider webinars, online conferences, training courses, leadership reviews, town halls, all-staff meetings, product demos, and panels—the list could go on. Let's also factor in the events in your personal life, such as schooling, music lessons, happy hours, and spiritual practices to name a few. How many of those events made a lasting impact and left you excited to attend the next one? I imagine the experience has been a bit of a mixed bag.

With large in-person gatherings canceled for the foreseeable future, talent development professionals have been pushed to rethink how they handle training events and determine the new skills they will need to make virtual events successful. Company events teams have been thrust into a new

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Event organizers' knowledge of the technology is vital to curating memorable moments.

environment at light speed and high demand—that is, of course, assuming your organization had an events team in the first place. Let's look at some key roles and skills associated with pulling off a virtual training event, whether it's a sales kickoff, a daylong compliance training program, or anything in between.

Event organizer

Like all the roles I will discuss, depending on how large or small the event is, the event organizer also may need to lead other people in this function. This role is responsible for the overall event experience. Core characteristics of the role or team are still the same: highly organized, good planning, attention to detail, community builder, and great interpersonal skills.

Because the pace of virtual events tends to be much faster than in the past, one of the top needed skills for event organizers is speed. TD departments are no longer dealing with events planned a year in advance. Events are having to make quick pivots to meet stakeholders' demands. Event organizers must be comfortable with keeping programs on track but doing so electronically. There will be no more standing stage left or right to keep the show moving. Preparing speakers and creating systems to ensure the schedule remains on time can be difficult for a virtual event. Therefore, being technically savvy and knowledgeable with how virtual event products work is now essential to event organizers' skill set. They need to be able to convey concepts about event design to the technical producer (to be discussed next) and understand what is possible, or not, to deliver the desired experience.

Numerous virtual meeting and hosting platforms exist, and the options and features are endless, so event organizers' knowledge of the technology is vital to curating memorable moments. While the event platform is important, it does not drive the total experience. It is up to event organizers to exploit the platform's features and be creative to keep attendees engaged.

Technical producers

For virtual events, the technical producer role has drastically changed. It is no longer about checking sound, lighting, and media for the big show. The TD team now must think about platform configuration. Is there enough bandwidth for attendees? What location will you be streaming to and from?

And security, security, security. I would be remiss not to mention cybersecurity and compliance. Most people have probably heard the stories all over the news of unwanted visitors appearing in the middle of virtual meetings and classrooms. Technical producers now have a more robust portfolio of services they have to offer, such as making sure they know bandwidth requirements and what equipment attendees must have to participate in the event. Will any integration with other technology be needed to make the event successful? Technical producers also must make sure technical and event support teams are fully prepared to deal with any tech glitches that come up during the live event.

Speakers and presenters

The rules for speakers and presenters apply to session facilitators, learning leaders, moderators, hosts, and panelists. Working a virtual event can be a different experience for them.

During live sessions, presenters have immediate audience response, and savvy ones use that to quickly shift gears as needed. In virtual events, that can be quite a challenge. Presenters also need to be familiar with the platform as well as the devices they are using to present. They are going from using a clicker to take the audience through the session content to having to lead a presentation from a fixed position in front of a camera.

Presenters must consider: Is the audio and webcam quality on their device good enough or appropriate to maintain event consistency? Can they be successful at creating visually appealing content that is more appropriate for a virtual event? It likewise is important for them to be conscious of the virtual environment by multitasking—monitoring the chat room to look at questions sent in from the audience or simply to see virtual audience reactions.

The TD team can assist with preparing subject matter experts and other presenters by offering a boot camp on transitioning from in-person to virtual presentations. The session can cover the technology's ins and outs and any tips or tricks that may be critical to the speaker's success.

Looking for and applying a layer of new skills is key to better engagement.

Event support

In the in-person event days, participants knew they could always head to the registration desk, help booth, or those happy folks wearing bright event shirts that read "Ask Me!" Speakers often have their own lounge or greenroom where they could escape to when in need of help.

What event hosts are finding is that more people have the ability to attend a virtual event, but keeping them tuned in and engaged to the event is a whole different ball game. A critical success factor for the TD team is going to be having event support staff roles.

The skills remain the same; support staff should have great interpersonal skills and the ability to get attendees' queries answered quickly. Technical aptitude is coming to the forefront here again as a vital skill. There is a huge aspect of tech support for virtual events and event support, so support staff must be well versed on the event platform technology's features.

More people have been exposed to platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams during the past few months, but attendees may not understand that when in large event mode on such platforms, things will work differently for them. Assigned roles within the platform can allow or disallow participants to use features they know and love. Event support staff must become creative in offering timely support, virtually, to knock down the common problems participants experience.

At a speaking engagement, I was in a virtual greenroom where I could converse with not only the event support staff but other speakers. The event support staff included a moderator role in the break room who offered insights on how the previous sessions were going, things that went over well, and the challenges attendees were experiencing throughout the virtual conference. Those details made for a great tee-up prior to my presentation. The greenroom moderator was doing it all—keeping up with the event, letting the event organizer know who showed up, telling the technical director a speaker had a last-minute format change with a video clip, answering speakers' questions, providing tips, and knowing the ins and outs of the event technology platform—to keep the event running smoothly and on time.

New format, new skills

We all are feeling a little burned out from this new virtual event reality that seems to be a constant both at work and play. Training events can sometimes feel more like dry webinars rather than fun programs with touchpoints of interaction. With large companies such as Microsoft and Facebook canceling big events until 2021, virtual events are the new normal.

Looking for and applying a layer of new skills is key to better engagement. The skills of budgeting, project management, and marketing are still critical, but simply taking a traditional in-person event and converting it to a virtual one is going to require a refreshed set of skills if you are looking to raise the level of audience engagement.

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Building Physician Leaders With a Dose of Business Acumen

Cigna's in-house leadership development program has boosted bench strength and extended the pipeline.

BY PAULA KENNEDY

Just as physicians must learn clinical expertise to practice medicine, they also must learn leadership disciplines and skills to lead a division or department. At Cigna—a global health services company with more than 180 million customer and patient relationships in 30-plus countries and jurisdictions—1,500 physicians are core to the company's mission, long-term business strategies, and operations.

Physician teams create personalized, innovative solutions by working together in close partnership with customers, providers, clients, and communities. Physician leaders bring a unique perspective to the mission because they can leverage their clinical expertise to achieve a competitive advantage by developing innovative solutions that provide a better experience for customers, clients, and healthcare providers. The company also has increasingly tapped physicians for business-focused roles.

Until several years ago, leadership development programs for these highly qualified clinicians were lacking at Cigna, leaving many of them without adequate preparation for new roles.

IMAGE | ADOBE STOCK

Cigna

Industry:
Healthcare

Workforce Size:
74,000

HQ Location:
Bloomfield, Connecticut

Founded:
1792

Determining the right solution

Based on talent reviews, manager discussions, and HR analytics, the leadership and organizational development teams formed a work group with senior clinical leaders to explore physicians as leaders and what would be necessary to build their capabilities to fill business-leader roles. Starting with a needs assessment and working through the company's existing competency framework, the work group team determined that the physician population needed to build and enhance eight of the 14 leadership competencies. Knowledge gaps included strategic and business acumen, executive presence, presentation skills, networking skills, managing complexities and uncertainties, emotional intelligence, and developing diverse talent and valuing differences.

Based on the needs assessment survey results, the work group proposed to Cigna executives the creation of the Physician Leadership Development Program (PLDP)—not only as a strategic and competitive response to market volatility and physician shortages but also to expand and increase the organization's leadership pipeline by capitalizing on physicians as an untapped resource for building bench strength. Survey results indicated that such a program also could have a positive impact on recruitment and retention.

Program components

The 18-month, nominative program engages 20 emerging physician leaders based on talent review discussions with managers and senior clinical leaders. A key ingredient is selecting a candidate with the right growth mindset. Additionally, participants must meet specific criteria, such as showing strong performance in current roles, aspiring to take on broader leadership roles, demonstrating courage and curiosity to challenge the status quo, and having the bandwidth to fully participate.

Although the first cohort completed educational components that physician associations offered, for subsequent cohorts, the program development team designed and facilitated all the learning in-house at a budget of less than $130,000.

Physician leaders come from across the company's national and global clinical lines. Program participants are usually in medical director roles; a few of the physicians still provide patient care. From the United Arab Emirates to California, physicians convene for six face-to-face learning experiences at different US Cigna offices.

In those settings, physicians get to see how the company's core values come to life in the communities it serves. Participants also broaden their leadership perspectives by listening to public officials and other community leaders, such as mayors, who speak about their leadership journeys. Leadership development master facilitators lead the six learning experiences, each of which runs 2.5 days. The curriculum includes role play, group discussion, project report-outs, teach-backs, reflection time, peer feedback, and evening networking events.

Each learning experience focuses on two of the eight leadership competencies and is themed to bring focus to the topics. A typical day may include discussing participants' CliftonStrengths results, articulating their personal brand, and participating in business simulations where they use their newly learned financial acumen skills.

To graduate from the program, participants must meet three requirements. The first is creating and piloting an enterprise project that supports one of Cigna's strategic imperatives. Physicians work in groups of four, called pods, coined after the term used in healthcare settings. Each pod works with a senior business mentor who provides guidance and direction. Given their wide network of relationships across the organization, mentors also connect pod members with individuals within those networks as needed. The enterprise project is a rigorous assignment that applies design thinking principles. Each pod also has a design thinking coach—a new addition to the 2020 curriculum that is bringing value to the quality of the project assignments and potential business outcomes.

In the program's later months, each pod presents its findings to a *Shark Tank*-like panel of senior clinical and business leaders. The winning pod then presents its project to the executive team to secure both financial and people resources. A few examples from this year's pod projects include improving the experience and efficiency of peer reviews, preventing patient weight regain after bariatric surgery, and optimizing the treatment of anxiety or depression in patients with chronic kidney disease and end-stage renal disease.

An external stretch assignment is the second graduation requirement. This opportunity helps the physician leaders flex and apply their leadership skills while putting Cigna's mission and values into action. This year, one physician leader will supervise the operations of building clinical services for a Hindu temple in Chicago, Illinois. In that capacity, he will credential staff, ensure appropriate medical guidelines are established, and promote quality of care through innovation.

Another physician leader is teaching in the cardiology fellowship training program at the Los Angeles County and University of Southern California

Medical Center. There, her goal is to create a larger internal medicine residency program. Completing stretch assignments is a true sign of the physicians' commitment to completing PLDP, especially given the COVID-19 environment and its impact on face-to-face meetings.

Teach-backs round out the graduation requirements. Working in pairs, physicians facilitate a teach-back on one aspect of the company's business (such as international market strategies and strategic initiatives) or on the IT global data analytics department's structure, strategies, and initiatives. The teach-backs strengthen physicians' enterprise knowledge while helping them build a new network of business leaders and professionals.

Sponsorship, alumni, and coaching

PLDP has three highly visible executive sponsors: two chief medical officers and the head of talent management strategy and operations. An advisory board comprising HR business partners and PLDP alumni provide governance for the program. In addition, alumni mentors and coaches are integral parts of the program.

Ever since PLDP launched in 2013, it has grown to be one of Cigna's premier leadership programs.

The program has 40 active alumni, 20 of whom are one-on-one mentors with the 2020 cohort. Additionally, five alumni serve as stretch assignment mentors who meet with their assigned participants to ensure progress occurs, especially under the pressures of living and working in a COVID-19 environment.

Coaches are not mandatory but are highly recommended, especially for physician leaders looking to further their self-development through the program's use of 360-degree and emotional intelligence assessments. Internal master facilitators facilitate the leadership assessment discussions, providing a more personal touch and a cost-effective resource.

Adjustments

The newest group of participants, the program's fourth cohort, began in early February 2020. The first session took place in Phoenix, Arizona, which offers a climate that's conducive for stretch breaks and walks outside. The pods began working with each other on day one and achieved great momentum in bonding and pod project creation.

Then COVID-19 hit. The program design and development team decided to keep the pace going and has led monthly virtual learning experiences since May. The team carefully curated and built the content for interaction and ensures that neuroscience best practices are in play. The virtual sessions use a reduced class size of 12 and have a two-hour limit. Even with the modifications, the program has maintained high engagement levels.

Results

For years, a global physician shortage has created multiple challenges for Cigna recruiters. Not only has there been a supply-and-demand issue but also longer and costlier recruitment cycles, culture demands for work-life balance, and a diversity deficit. After several years running PLDP, the company determined that rather than hiring external candidates that often results in high agency costs, it could save more than $1 million by promoting 10 physicians from within while providing education and business leader opportunities.

Ever since PLDP launched in 2013, it has grown to be one of Cigna's premier leadership programs. Sixty participants from three cohorts have graduated from the program thus far. The third cohort reached an unprecedented promotion rate of nearly 50 percent. The talent management leadership teams are proud of the program's 96 percent Net Promoter Score, and many physicians ask how they can get into the next program cohort.

PLDP's management engagement rate of 4.5 out of 5 is encouraging because the program design and development team has been intentional in securing managers' buy-in. Managers see the value in giving feedback and coaching to reinforce and support their employees' growth and development. Rounding out the program data on a 1–5 Likert scale are aggregate scores of 4.9 for job impact, 4.8 for courseware, and 4.7 for learning effectiveness.

Time after time, physician graduates remark about the growth of their networks as a result of participating in PLDP. Enduring connections abound. They report that their newfound confidence in enhancing their network is largely due to the building of their leadership character and their tenacious efforts to articulate their personal value proposition. Graduates also comment that their ability to influence and make tough decisions has made a difference in bringing in the right business results.

There is no question that PLDP has been successful in growing Cigna's bench strength and pipeline. But above everything else, the program thrives as physician leaders see this rigorous and robust learning experience as rounding out their core leadership capabilities, which enables them to lead new innovations and be champions of affordability, predictability, and simplified healthcare.

Paula Kennedy, CPTD, is a senior advisor in leadership development at Cigna; paula.kennedy@cigna.com.

Stem managers' reluctance to using individual development plans.

BY DAVID HOSMER

Give New Life to IDPs

Employers must not give up on individual development plans, especially now. Many studies emphasize the employee benefits of IDPs, but companies should also be mindful of the two main business reasons to use them: to guarantee employees have the skills necessary for today and to ensure the company's future sustainability and growth. By virtue of attending to the business' skill and knowledge needs, employers will also address what employees want—career development.

Why aren't managers developing employees?

Despite the proven importance of development, many managers still do not embrace IDPs—written plans that spell out the expected skills, knowledge, or competencies an employee will need to develop over the next year. Take, for example, this sample of research:

- Gartner reports that 70 percent of employees lack the skills needed for today, let alone for the future.
- A recent LinkedIn study found that 94 percent of employees would stay longer at their company if their employer invested in their career.
- Multiple reports indicate that businesses with strong employee development programs realize higher revenues and shareholder value.

The common reasons managers do not embrace IDPs varies.

Lack of confidence. According to a Gartner survey, 45 percent of managers do not feel confident in their ability to develop employee skills. Indeed, some do not have that ability. Managers also shy away from career discussions because of a misconception that they must have all the answers—for example, that a supervisor must know on the spot the best activities for an employee seeking to learn listening skills or who may serve as the best mentor for a direct report. Authentic managers can simply ask the employee for ideas or come back with suggestions.

Insufficient time and focus. Studies have found that managers lack time to coach their direct reports. And for those who do, Gartner reports that a meager 9 percent of a manager's time is spent in development discussions. Managers are experiencing an incessant pace of disruption, reorganizations, and shrinking resources. Some of that is due to impatience and lack of forethought.

I worked at a company in which leaders frequently restructured organization charts like a bad quarterly habit, spurred by a short-term revenue mentality. Instead of addressing inefficiencies and other OD issues, they performed quick-fix headcount removals. How can anyone focus on employee growth and development in such conditions?

Impractical expectations. Business-minded people under pressure want results now, but employees cannot hurry up and learn. That mindset involves a shortsighted lack of leadership, unrealistic expectations, and deficient appreciation for talent development.

Lack of understanding. There is confusion among employees and managers about the ideas of performance and development. Employees often perceive that there's a performance problem when they hear the words "development plan," and many supervisors believe coaching is only used for managing a performance problem.

In addition, some managers believe a promotion is a form of development, or they fear that in career discussions, employees will expect promotions or raises that they cannot fulfill. So, rather than managing expectations up front, supervisors do not initiate such conversations.

Other managers believe training is development. Their futile approach has been to say, "I'm going to send you to a class" while handing over an IDP form to an employee. Task completed. Box checked. Class not completed.

A complex process. The IDP process has become an arduous chore for managers. Companies have created badgering systems and processes in the attempt to enforce compliance with IDPs. Unfortunately, companies have lost sight of the IDP's original purpose. Processes have advanced from over-engineered paper forms to technical versions of the same. The IDP's goal has evolved to inputting detailed text into the correct field, obtaining approvals by deadline, then receiving the prized automated message of *Completed*.

Avoiding IDPs is understandable in some cases—they may involve frustrating, time-consuming, tedious processes and systems—but managers' responsibility is to ensure employees are equipped to fulfill their roles and flex with business needs. Not having enough time has turned out to be managers' veiled discomfort with, or a lack of appreciation for, IDPs.

Sample Individual Development Plan

Employee: ______________________ Position: ______________________

Department: ______________________ Manager/Coach: ______________________

Plan Start Date: ______________________

Career Aspiration: ____

Learning Objectives What I commit to learn (skills, knowledge, and competencies)	**Learning Actions** How I will learn (project, committee, assignment, other)	**Resources** What I need for successful learning (e.g., money, time, mentoring)	**Next Check-In Date** (List all dates)	**Progress Notes**
Objective #1:				
Objective #2:				
Objective #3:				

Proposed changes to the process

To develop an IDP, a manager and employee should create it together, typically simultaneously or immediately following the annual performance review. In some cases, plan development can take shape in the latter portion of a performance review form.

To help reluctant managers embrace IDPs, companies can make several adjustments.

Reposition IDPs. Position the plans as one of several talent strategies for business growth and sustainability. The criticality of individual development is more extreme than what employers may have realized on the surface. David Deming is professor of public policy, education, and economics at the Harvard Kennedy School. According to his research, continual evolving adoption of artificial intelligence will replace some jobs but will not replicate certain abilities that only humans possess (for now). For example, there will continue to be an increased need for soft skills, which are irreplaceable by automation.

What employers want are employees who are flexible, adaptable, and skilled at working in team settings. Employees must be empathetic, having the capacity to understand how others are motivated and being able to put themselves in others' place. Staff with strong social skills are more responsive to change and capable of trading tasks with a variety of co-workers. They are adaptable and flexible in a changing work environment, having the ability to take on different roles in different situations.

That does not dismiss the need for hard skills, but it shifts the emphasis. Deming's research is an eye-opener for more laser focus on learning how to learn. With digitalization, globalization, and new generations in the workforce, organizations must be more elastic, powered by agile employees, systems, and processes. The unpredicted impact on how companies do business during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic is confirmation of that reality.

Employees cannot settle into their comfort zones and resist the challenge of newness. Single-skill sets are no longer germane. Rather, a T-shaped strategy—a breadth and depth of skills—is more prudent. Employers should rethink job descriptions to reflect cross-training and rotations that promote a nimble culture and competitive advantage.

Managers should assess their organizations' skill and knowledge gaps first, then determine how to develop their team members' abilities to address those gaps.

Reframe development as a learning process. During onboarding, employers should convey continuous learning as philosophy in practice. Everyone in the company is responsible for promoting such a culture.

What makes someone employable today will not guarantee their employability in the future. Consider job descriptions that could foster limitations to what employees will and will not do. "That's not in my job description" is a phrase that leaders sometimes hear. Although "other duties as assigned" is still a relevant phrase, adding "Remain current with learning requirements" or similar language communicates an expectation of ongoing learning.

Not having enough time has turned out to be managers' veiled discomfort with, or a lack of appreciation for, IDPs.

Accountability. Managers are responsible for hiring, developing, and retaining talent. A team's performance is reflective of its members and ultimately its leader. Lack of time is not a valid reason for lack of accountability.

To make employee development a priority, managers should carve out the minutes and hours for it. I ask managers how long it takes for a 10-minute check-in with an employee to find out how things are going with a new project. Compare the answer to the length of time it would take to replace and retrain employees who seek careers elsewhere. Clarity of roles in the IDP process can place ownership on the employee to keep their plan alive while the manager supports that individual's learning success.

Update semantics and simplify the structure. People often perceive *development* as an amorphous term, so replace it with *learning*. As noted earlier, there is also confusion about the difference between *performance* and *development*. "We develop film, not humans," one manager told me. Simply put, development is learning and forward focused; performance reviews reflect. Thus, managers should de-couple performance and development planning discussions.

An IDP is a form, a component of the individual development process, which has become cluttered with the popular SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) goal format and other details. The structure of SMART goals resonates with managers because it guides them. How-

Four-Step IDP Process for Managers

Step 1: Prepare

- Understand the intention and desired outcomes of a career and learning discussion.
- Review organizational goals, priorities, and associated new skill requirements for your team.
- Send thoughtful questions to the employee before the career discussion.
- Adopt a positive mindset.
- Consider possible assignments, projects, committees, delegation, and mentor opportunities.
- Determine whether there are any anticipated challenges to the conversation—for example, a quiet employee, being unfamiliar with L&D, unsure of career aspirations, unrealistic expectations.
- Be prepared to position the discussion's purpose to manage expectations.

Step 2: Discuss

- Set the tone for a positive discussion.
- Explain that this is not about title, compensation changes, or performance; it is about supporting the employee's career and learning.
- Ask questions, with the employee doing most of the talking.
- Use probing, follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of the employee's career and learning interests.
- Offer ideas only after the employee has shared theirs.
- Discuss the concepts of the comfort zone (where most employees operate daily in terms of the skills, knowledge, and environment where they are most comfortable) and the learning zone (where employees take risks in new experiences to learn and grow) to provide context for learning on the job.
- Test your assumptions. Do not assume to know the employee's career aspirations, because they may change over time.
- Use the conversation's outcome to feed the learning plan.

Step 3: Write

- Encourage the employee to take notes. Use a learning plan template as a guide.
- Your note-taking also reinforces that what the employee is telling you is important and that you are listening.
- Clarify your and the employee's roles in maintaining the plan going forward.
- Request employee follow-up with a capture of the conversation in the form of a draft plan, and schedule a first check-in.

Step 4: Follow up

- Review the employee's draft plan to ensure you are both aligned.
- Express confidence and support for the employee.
- Keep learning alive with brief check-ins. They can be informal updates of at least 10 minutes to review progress on learning and address any obstacles.

Emphasis should not be on filling out a form but rather on having a deep, meaningful career discussion that aligns with employee and employer needs.

ever, it can have a reversal effect as they and their employees struggle to understand the difference between resources and development activities.

In addition, because learning is ongoing, pinpointing a learning goal's completion date can be difficult. To insist on arbitrary completion dates is absurd. How can learning in a perpetually changing business environment be deemed complete by a particular date? Instead, managers should identify a date for the next goal check-in to discuss progress (see sample IDP).

Engage in robust career and learning discussions. Having meaningful career conversations is the most important element of the individual development process. An employee and manager have a dual opportunity to make the most out of a career discussion. Both parties should come to the discussion prepared to engage in dialogue with a productive positive mindset (see Four-Step IDP Process for Managers).

Supervisors should review in advance the organizational imperatives, the skill needs for their teams, and potential learning options for the employee. They also should be prepared with several questions to encourage the employee's openness and input (see Career and Learning Discussion Facilitation Questions). They should think of ideas and perspectives during the discussion but allow plenty of dialogue space to collaborate on a plan. Likewise, employees should be prepared to discuss their career aspirations, strengths, areas of learning potential, and interests.

Managers should transcribe the discussion's outcomes into an IDP or another note-taking format to capture in writing the learning goals, next steps, and next check-in. They could then use the draft IDP as foundation for a concise plan born out of valuable dialogue with their direct reports.

Support managers. Nobody is born knowing how to have career and development conversations. Thus, the talent development team should plan well-designed workshops to provide managers with a forum for practicing career discussions and creating draft IDPs.

Managers should rest assured that they do not need to have all the answers. Thoughtful questions can facilitate

Career and Learning Discussion Facilitation Questions

Managers can use these facilitative questions to make the most of a career conversation with direct reports.

Starters and prompts

- What are your short- and long-term career goals?
- How does your work here fit in with your career aspirations?
- Tell me about a day at work that you would characterize as a great day. What made it a great day? What were you working on?
- What or who supports you in your best work?
- Do you know our division's or unit's goals and the company's goals for this year?
- How do you see yourself contributing? Do you feel you have the skills and knowledge for your part?
- What work skills and talents do you have that I may not know about?
- What skills and talents do you feel are not being tapped?
- What motivates you the most at work?
- Do you have a mentor?
- What kind of work or activities would be more motivating, interesting, or intriguing to you?
- What projects, committees, or other initiatives would be of interest to develop your career?
- What else do you want to learn?

Goals

- How could you learn those objectives?
- Which are most intriguing to you?
- Based on our discussion, what do you want to learn this year?
- What learning objectives are you willing to commit to?
- What experiences could help you progress toward your career goals?
- What do you need from me to support you in this project, committee, or assignment?

Progress

- When would you like to have our first progress check-in? It can be 10 minutes or more.
- How is your learning plan coming along?
- What's working and not working?
- Is anything getting in the way of your success?
- What's helping your success?

meaningful discussions with employees. The goal is to have discovery discussions that align employer and employee needs, not "We need to fill this form out."

Creative learning practices

Part of making IDPs relevant is an organization having a culture of learning, offering practical and rich learning experiences. Here are a few creative approaches companies have used to address business and employee needs:

- Google implemented Career Guru, which provides employees one-on-one coaching from seasoned Googlers globally. Coaching conversations range from innovation and leadership to presentation skills and team development.
- At Southwest Airlines, Days in The Field enables associates to discover new career paths by rotating through a department that interests them.
- Consulting firm Bridgespan ensures that every day is different for employees as they take on versatile roles, using varied skills to accomplish challenging tasks. That in turn cultivates an agile culture, ever ready for change.
- At eMarketer, continuous learning is embedded in its culture. Reading is essential to remain competitive as a go-to company for digital expertise. Thus, the CEO shares recommended books and business bestsellers for team inspiration.
- Every week, TripleLift holds a Tech Trek during which employees share with their colleagues projects they are working on. That provides a forum for employees to have constant access to new information and for teachers to become subject matter experts.
- HBO encourages employees to take educational field trips with their co-workers to learn about new technologies.

Learning's relevance in business is more imperative than ever, not only because employees want it but because it is necessary to match the ongoing transformation in global businesses. The process must be simple, creative, and experience-based, with high impact and always ready for another change. Companies should be vigilant about keeping the primary emphasis on employees and managers learning how to have a learning dialogue and less about re-engineering a form that has lost its way.

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Leadership Under Pressure

Three military leadership strategies can help managers of all industries lead during difficult times.

BY DAVID G. FIVECOAT

IMAGE | ADOBE STOCK

Leading under pressure is tough. From 2010 to 2011, I led a battalion of about 700 soldiers in combat in Afghanistan. Operating in a high mountain desert at 5,000 feet or higher in elevation, battling a robust insurgency, engaging with difficult Afghan leaders, working seven days a week, and having a challenging boss created an environment of constant pressure.

The current global pandemic has brought its own set of challenges with the threat of infection, managing remote teams, the oversight of new protocols, and limited ability to travel. For managers leading in these difficult times, three military leadership tools—the operations order, the back brief, and leader decision exercises—can aid in navigating the challenges.

The operations order

This technique is a standard format for conveying information for a military plan. As a tool US soldiers have used in every conflict since the Vietnam War, the operations order comprises five paragraphs or sections: situation, mission, execution, service and support (or admin and logistics), and command and control (think org chart and communications plan).

In Afghanistan, the battalion I led used the operations order to convey yearlong campaign plans as well as short-duration missions. Using the same format every time for a plan enabled everyone to know where to listen for the information they needed (if they were receiving it orally) or where to look for the information (if they had a written copy). More importantly, using the operations order format forced everyone to think through all the elements of the plan.

Heading into 2021, many companies are planning their operations for the new environment. Are you writing the plan down? Does the marketing department have a plan? Does the sales team have a plan? Is the IT department synchronized to support the plan? Does everyone use a similar format to ensure the plan is aligned and nested? Keeping the operations order to one to two pages provides your team members enough of a framework, ensures they read the document, and enables them to retain their agility.

Each of the operations order's paragraphs helps you think logically through the plan and enables your team to accomplish myriad tasks. Developing the situation paragraph will enable you to think through the environment you are operating in and ensures you and your team have a common understanding of it.

The mission paragraph or statement gives team members the who, what,

Sample Company Operations Order

Six-Month Plan, July 1–December 31, 2020

1. Situation:
- a. The market
- b. The customer
- c. The competition
- d. Coronavirus

2. Mission:

3. Execution:
- a. Leader's intent
  - Purpose
  - Key tasks
  - End state
- b. Major events by month
  - July
  - August
  - September
  - October
  - November
  - December
- c. Key tasks for different business sectors to accomplish
  - Operations
  - Marketing
  - Sales
  - HR
  - IT
  - Accounting and finance

4. Admin, Logistics, and Communications:
- a. Administrative issues and tasks
- b. Logistics to support the plan
- c. Communications
  - To the board
  - To the market
  - To the company

when, where, and why. That type of mission statement should be familiar to all businesses. But what really helps a team to handle the unexpected is the inclusion of your intent as three components:

- The purpose, or the *why*—think about a slightly broader purpose than the mission statement that enables people to make decisions in your absence.
- The key tasks that must be accomplished.
- The end state, or what success looks like—for corporate organizations, I find it helpful for the end state to be measurable and tied to a date in the future.

The 3rd Battalion, 187 Infantry's mission statement was "Task Force Iron conducts counterinsurgency operations in Paktika Province, Afghanistan, to secure the population in order to develop local government capacity and Afghan National Security Forces and decrease the influence of the Taliban." Our leader's intent follows.

- Purpose: Increase the safety and security of the Paktika Province.
- Key task: Conduct counterinsurgency operations in conjunction with our Afghan partners.
- End state: On December 31, violence decreased in the province 10 percent from the previous year.

A corporate mission for the fictional ACME Manufacturing during the early days of the coronavirus could be "ACME Manufacturing will make the best widgets in the market and organically grow 10 percent in 2020." And the leader's intent could look like this:

- Purpose: Keep the team safe and employed.
- Key tasks: Preserve cash and use money frugally—sales team must get orders (especially in the second quarter).
- End state: By December 30, 2020, ensure the company has met 75 percent of 2019 sales and production.

The operations order's execution paragraph indicates the tasks your direct reports must accomplish. It also provides a platform to consider major tasks to accomplish by month or quarter. The final paragraph—the administration, logistics, and communications section—combines the military's fourth and fifth paragraphs into one. For companies, it provides instructions or information on recurring administrative tasks, support requirements, and communications to the organization and outside it.

Military veterans in your company may be using a version of the operations order right now to organize their plans. Even if you aren't a veteran, it is easy to use a corporate operations order format to help you consider all the facets of your challenges, build a better plan for your team, and help your team execute at a higher level under pressure.

The back brief

Another military tool that is worthwhile to add to your leadership toolkit is the back brief. Quite simply, the back brief (or brief back) begins when a leader says the task, pitches the plan, or gives instructions to a person or the team. Then, the people or person receiving the task, plan, or instructions gives a summary of the instructions back to the leader.

The strategy gives managers the opportunity to determine whether their team members properly understood the task, plan, or instruction. In short, in a back brief, you say the plan or instructions, then your team says it back to you in their own words.

In Afghanistan, leaders used the back brief technique every time after presenting an operations order to a team. If we did a combined mission with the Afghan police and the Afghan Army, we had to do the back brief in three languages—Pashto for the police, Dari for the army, and English for the US soldiers. Talk about a lot of opportunities to not understand the plan.

Some advantages of using the back brief include:

- Both the leader and the team hear the plan twice.
- Everyone walks away with a similar understanding of the plan.
- The back brief eliminates the need for the team to have a meeting after the meeting to figure out what the leader really wants.
- It provides an opportunity to refine or correct problems with the plan.
- Team members pay more attention to the leader giving instructions because they know they will have to provide a summary back to the leader.

You can use a back brief in several ways:

- Have each person provide a summary of their portion of the plan.
- Have one person start the back brief and provide a summary of one part of the plan. Then ask another team member to pick up where the other stopped. Continue until your employees summarize each part of the plan.
- If time is short, select one person to provide a summary of the entire plan.
- If time is extremely short, ask open questions to team members who are responsible for the plan's critical aspects.

Because there is the chance that your direct reports will feel micromanaged or belittled when using the back brief, implement the strategy carefully. Consider these two strategies to avoid that pitfall when using the technique: First, model the practice whenever a direct report asks for assistance. For example, when your employee, Roberto, asks you to call Jennifer in sales because she is late turning in a report, use the back brief technique and say back to him, "So, Roberto, you need me to call Jennifer over in sales to get the report, correct?" The second way is to put the onus on yourself by saying to your direct report, "I don't think I'm communicating that well. Would you mind saying back what I just told you?"

Using the back brief will improve your communications, decrease miscommunications, and save you and your direct reports valuable time.

Leader decision exercises

In *The Talent Code,* Daniel Coyle explains that for individuals to develop a talent quickly, they need deep practice, ignition (or passion), and master coaching to reach the highest levels in a particular skill. One of the examples he cites is Brazil's ability to produce talented soccer players due to the country's love for futsal, a type of speed soccer played on a basketball court with only five or six players. Futsal gives Brazilian soccer players an edge, because its deep practice gives players more repetitions, demands precise handling of the soccer ball and sharp passing, and encourages improvisation.

But how does a company find its futsal to develop managers? One military technique that provides quick repetitions on decision making and critical thinking is the tactical decision exercise or the tactical decision game. Tactical decision exercises use a scenario that gives leaders the opportunity to develop a plan based on limited information and in a time-constrained environment. Think of them as a situational puzzle but one not as complicated as a business school case study. They require few resources and provide huge returns in developing managers.

For years, every month in *The Marine Corps Gazette* or *Armor Magazine,* the editors published a tactical decision exercise for readers to solve. Readers wrote their solution to the problem and mailed them in. The following month, the magazine published the best solutions. The technique was so popular that it migrated to police, security groups, firefighters, and others as a way to teach decision making.

A great way to train your team now—especially with social distancing—is to take the tactical decision exercise concept and change it into leader decision exercises. Use the exercises as part of a weekly meeting or as a dedicated leadership training event each quarter. They can encompass any scenario you and your team may encounter.

Sample Leader Decision Exercise

Situation: You run a chain of three restaurants that serve great burgers and craft beers to customers in one state. Your restaurants, each in its own city, have an outstanding team of 45 employees and three restaurant managers. Despite the crisis, your takeout and outdoor seating sales are going well. You have enough cash to make payroll and pay the loans for one month. Your state does not have a mandatory mask rule. State unemployment assistance is not available for the employees.

However, the number of coronavirus cases is surging in the state. After a particularly busy weekend, you show up to work on Monday morning and read emails that state:

- At Restaurant 1, the manager plus six out of 14 employees are in quarantine.
- At Restaurant 2, four out of 16 employees are in quarantine.
- At Restaurant 3, seven out of 15 employees are in quarantine.

What do you with your restaurant chain for the next two weeks?

Take 10 minutes and develop a plan that answers:

- What is your concept statement for the plan? (Try expressing it using who, what, when, where, and why.)
- What key tasks must be accomplished in support of the concept?
- How do you communicate the plan to your team?
- What is your communications strategy with your customers?
- What opportunity do you see in this crisis?

Here is a way to use a leader decision exercise with your team:

- Develop a scenario (see sample exercise).
- Give the scenario to your team via Zoom or Microsoft Teams by sharing your screen.
- After everyone reads the scenario and asks questions, allot 10 minutes for each person to develop a solution.
- Select an employee to talk through their solution with the team.
- Facilitate an after-action review of the solution, answering four questions: What was the plan? What happened? What is one thing I should sustain, in my role or at my level, the next time this occurs? What is one thing I should improve, in my role or at my level, the next time this occurs?

The sample exercise above details a leader decision exercise for an owner of a restaurant chain; you can easily change it to any number of different businesses—grocery stores, gas stations, agriculture co-ops, etc. The chain's owner could use the scenario with her three managers as a training activity to develop their response to a large number of employees having to quarantine.

Leader decision exercises are a way for you and your team to develop and improve decision-making and communications skills. The leadership repetitions will help your business or team operate at a higher level.

Tools for success

Leading during a crisis isn't easy. Every day is a challenge in the current environment. The US military uses simple but effective tools to help its leaders perform better. Adding one or all of them to your leadership portfolio can help you and your team execute at a higher level, under pressure, in the coming months.

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As the threat of another COVID-19 peak looms, healthcare organizations must ramp up efforts to improve employee engagement, curb burnout, and reimagine L&D initiatives.

TD Remedies for the Pandemic's Toll on Healthcare Workers

BY MEDHA HAVNURKAR

IMAGES | ADOBE STOCK

n March, the head of the World Health Organization said the world was in uncharted territory with a dangerous and rapidly spreading disease that has caused serious widespread outbreaks. Eight months later, those words still ring true. With the COVID-19 pandemic still active and flu season starting in the US, it is hard to predict the surge in healthcare demands that will result from two potentially debilitating viral illnesses. However, one thing is for sure: The healthcare industry and its already overwhelmed workforce will need to stay motivated more than ever and prepare for the worst.

State of healthcare workers

Healthcare organizations across the country responded rapidly to the COVID-19 surge by building staffing plans, closing all elective surgeries to increase capacity, adding more beds, redeploying staff, hiring temporary staff, and leveraging telehealth services. The spike in COVID patients drove staffing demands, forcing hospital leadership to immediately consider its workforce capabilities and quickly differentiate them. Three primary staff categories emerged: frontline clinical warriors (needed for the direct clinical care of COVID patients), frontline clinical partners (supporting the frontline clinical warriors), and the remaining staff as remote partners (providing support services from home or other off-site locations).

The pandemic—with its personal protective equipment (PPE) shortages, changing guidelines, and exhausting staffing demands—has made healthcare workplaces stress-filled pressure cookers. Across the world, the surge responses and stressful working conditions have pushed frontline workers past their limits—physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

In fact, in a March 2020 US Department of Health and Human Services Office pulse survey, hospital administrators expressed concerns that fear and uncertainty were taking an emotional toll on staff, both professionally and personally. Hospitals also reported that fear of being infected and uncertainties about family members' health and well-being were affecting morale and creating anxiety among hospital staff.

But as the number of COVID-19 cases declined and communities began to reopen and relax quarantines, healthcare organizations started the massive cleanup of their facilities and the restoration of all the elective services that they had put on hold to create additional bed capacity. While healthcare services are trying to get to a new norm, the workforce's health is far from the norm.

Addressing burnout and resiliency

The World Health Organization recently updated its definition of burnout as "syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed." Further, American Psychiatric Association experts recommend burnout be addressed through a systemic organizational response wherein both individual- and organization-focused solutions are implemented for effective response to burnout.

As such, one of the roles talent development professionals can take on is wellness ambassador, leading a variety of education and training initiatives that can synergistically support reduction in burnout, rebuild resiliency, and promote well-being.

Provide opt-out versus opt-in education and practical skills programs. Topics can include ways to mitigate stress and promote well-being through nutritional consultations, healthy cooking and eating, sleep and insomnia support, virtual fitness and exercise programs, mindfulness, meditation, yoga, positive psychology, cognitive-behavioral therapies, and spiritual support. A schedule of offerings that enables individuals to pick and choose from a host of well-being initiatives is an excellent strategy.

Conduct education sessions for leaders at all levels. Teach them how to recognize burnout among their staff and understand its drivers. Train leaders to serve as advocates for their employees when work policies and procedures prevent workers from focusing on their core functions.

Encourage intra- and interdepartmental peer-to-peer support groups, coaching, and mentoring opportunities. Provide virtual forums as well as physical venues for socially distanced forms of interactions.

Enlist other wellness ambassadors from executive ranks and influential team members. Create an organizational speakers bureau of wellness storytellers and experts to speak to staff about best practices. If executives are too busy to participate in person, create podcasts of interviews with them that employees across different shifts can listen to on demand. The podcasts can reveal the leaders' journeys to wellness and present the executives as role models for self-care to make it acceptable for all.

Safety and security also are part of well-being

As organizations begin to figure out the return to work for employees thrown into work-from-home situations and the return to pre-COVID clinical services for frontline workers and frontline partners, how organizations handle workplace safety and reduce risk of infection will be a challenging task.

In a recent issue of its *Quick Safety* newsletter, the Joint Commission, the largest US standards-setting and accrediting body in healthcare, discusses the psychosocial well-being of healthcare staff during crisis. It brings attention to workers' anger, anxiety, and fear from lack of PPE; fear of infection and transmission to loved ones; and physical strain and injury from prolonged use of PPE.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs indicates that safety and security are basic human needs, which COVID-19 has threatened. And fear about safety is a drain on productivity. Therefore, from an employee well-being and a business continuity standpoint, individual health and safety must be a prime area of focus for post-COVID workplaces. For employees to feel safe, they will need constant reassurance through policies, guidelines, enforcement, and provision of tools or equipment. For example, to build a culture of safety, TD professionals can partner with infection prevention and occupational health experts to offer ongoing training based on the latest evidence-based safety precautions recommended by national, regional, and state public health and safety organizations.

In addition, the TD team can design employee role-specific safety courses, curating expert learning resources that focus on pandemic-related workplace safety. Push such resources out to employees as recommended or required learning instead of expecting employees to discover them on their own.

If left unaddressed, the moral distress of employees working in different shifts, pressures of changing policies and guidelines, professional responsibilities incongruent to employee capabilities, and individuals' sheer exhaustion from long hours will undermine any abatement efforts.

Learn from experience and improve processes

Given their facilitation skills, TD professionals can coach organizational leaders in facilitating after-action reviews of the pandemic response. Doing so can become one of the TD function's greatest contributions in the rebuilding efforts. The art of listening and incorporating staff input and gleaning valuable learning through AARs will help in any potential surges in COVID cases.

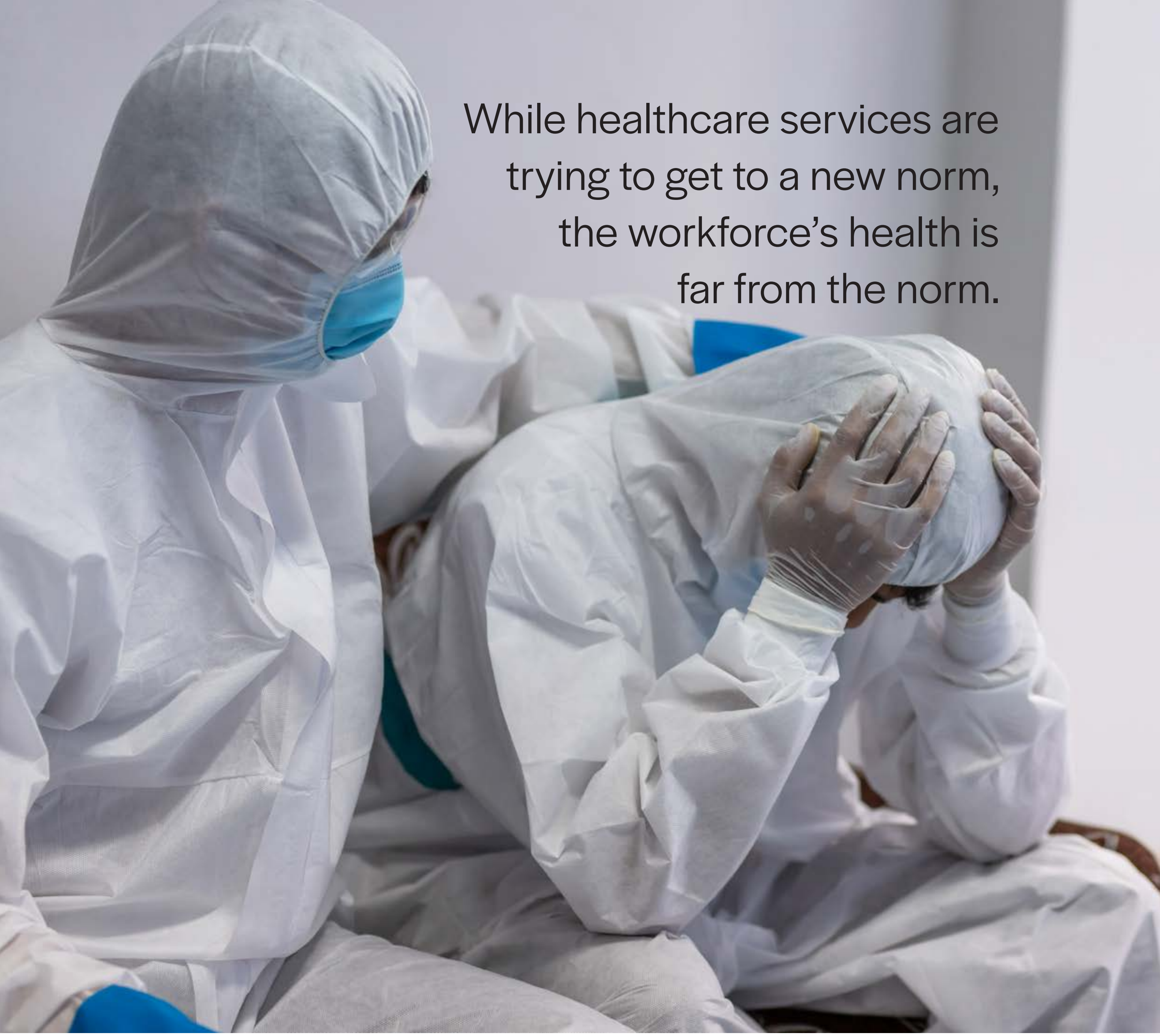
Borrowed from the military, an AAR is a structured process of reflecting upon actions taken prior to, during, and immediately after a crisis. It involves gathering input from people who were directly or indirectly involved in the crisis response and asking them a series of questions in an effort to glean lessons learned. An AAR uses questions like:

- What was supposed to occur (against any established standards or protocols)?
- What occurred?
- What went well?
- What did not go well?
- What can be done to improve the next time around?

The AAR should have a future-focused objective and be free of blame being assigned, allowing for accountability ownership. With TD-provided training, coaching during role-playing, and practice sessions, leaders across the organization can become prepared to conduct informal AARs within their teams.

All involved team members should be allowed to participate and share their insights. The AAR's goal is to immediately implement any changes that can result in making the processes better for staff. Further, the organization can collect and summarize observations from across all the teams in the form of a playbook for future crisis responses.

Such actions support employee engagement and resiliency building. They also foster an organizational culture that is supportive and focused on improving processes, listening to team members closest to the problems, and valuing their input. All those efforts contribute to improving employee morale and engagement.



While healthcare services are trying to get to a new norm, the workforce's health is far from the norm.

Coaching and compassion

Another way TD professionals can help leaders—especially those on the front line—is by offering mentoring and coaching programs to reignite trust building and compassionate leadership. Leaders have been among the employees working long hours and rapidly adapting to all the organizational demands; a mentor or coach can assist with boosting their engagement and working through work-related matters.

To build trust, leaders must demonstrate authentic communication that is open and honest. Employees need to know that in times of great uncertainty, leaders may not have all the answers but are there to support employees. Therefore, the TD function should prepare leaders to connect with every employee via frequent check-ins and to offer compassionate workplace coaching amid the chaos.

In addition, if organizations plan to adopt new workforce policies, a healthy dose of compassion is important during these trying times. A refresher on change management for all levels of leaders could help them understand their own and their team's experiences better.

Reimagine existing engagement initiatives

TD professionals must seek to empathetically understand employees' recent experiences and reorient themselves to their transformed healthcare organizations. While the buildings, offices, mission statements, and logos may not have changed, TD practitioners should look through the COVID-19 lens to assess how the different workforce segments were affected during the pandemic's peak and thereafter. Using their skills and knowledge of change management, the TD function should take a fresh look at the employee segments that engage in essential workflows and directly serve the organization's customers.

If there is one thing that the pandemic has taught healthcare organizations, it is that the frontline customer-facing jobs that deliver on the company's mission are critical to its survival and ongoing success. Questions TD practitioners should ask include:

- How does the organization identify the essential and critical roles?
- Does the organizational capability exist to identify those roles that are systemically based on the job codes, departments, and business units?
- Are the TD function and company leaders able to remap the organization's three employee segments—frontline warriors, frontline partners, and the remote workers—based on the COVID response and focus on their individual and group needs?
- Have there been significant changes in the organization in the form of employee furloughs, business shutdowns, mass retirements, quarantined employees, financial downturns, or service complaints covered in the media that may be affecting the workforce?

The TD function should then revisit and reimagine the organization's employee engagement and L&D initiatives through the lens of the new workforce segments to see how the existing programs serve those employee groups.

For example, if an employer is providing an employee engagement perk of LinkedIn Learning resources for staff to develop skills in any area of their interest, could it extend that offer to employees' spouses or partners who may have recently lost their job? Or could an employer open any other virtual training programs to employees' family members who have been furloughed or laid off?

TD professionals also should think through whether the current L&D programs are meeting employees' evolving needs. What new skills and competencies does each employee group need? Many of the remote staff have likely never worked from home before. What programs could the TD function customize to meet their needs? As TD professionals transform classroom training into blended online learning, they should consider a version for first-time remote workers who are adapting to virtual work.

Also revisit and consider the experiences of new hires who joined the company during the pandemic. Networking sessions for new hires and being welcomed by a senior leader have always been great ways to engage and boost a new hire's morale. Were any onboarding sessions paused or modified that need to be revisited? TD professionals can help with reconnecting with new hires to welcome and thank them for believing in the organization and to share the pride in what their colleagues have been able to do amid the pandemic. New-hire forums would serve as an excellent way to engage new staff and offer them hope and inspiration to build their careers within the organization.

Are there opportunities to re-engage incumbent team members who have gone through leadership changes or reorganization amid the crisis? The TD function can design engagement sessions to help those employees refocus on the mission, vision, values, and goals as they adapt to new ways of working.

A privileged calling

The pandemic's lasting impacts on healthcare workers are yet to be uncovered. Only time will reveal whether the frontline warriors will end up with a COVID-related post-traumatic stress disorder or whether the many frontline partners will show signs of secondary traumatic stress disorder. By implementing a host of individual and organizational initiatives that enable employees to choose from a cafeteria of options, TD professionals can best try to reduce the risk of such long-term impacts to employees and keep boosting staff engagement and morale.

TD professionals can successfully guide organizational leaders to instill hope and optimism and keep a healthy balance of employee engagement and productivity—especially in these pandemic times. Their knowledge, skills, and capabilities are uniquely poised to support the many demands of crises, change, and rebuilding. The healthcare profession's collective success lies in how organizations respond, partner, and leverage the TD function during these challenging times.

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Come Out Better on the OTHER

IMAGE | ADOBE STOCK

READY OR NOT,

the pandemic has pressed society to get creative—to find solutions, flatten the curve, figure out remote work while inventing learning pods for our kids and communities, search for a vaccine, manage our teams into new territory; the list doesn't end. Talent development professionals are uniquely positioned to help organizations in this time. Tasked with rolling out change, we are being called upon to find and convey the new normal, whatever that looks like in these unpredictable times.

How leading companies thrive after a recession

Laying the groundwork for creativity and innovation will be instrumental. A study published in the March 2010 issue of *Harvard Business Review* examined companies that went through a recession and found that 17 percent of companies in the study folded. About three-fourths survived the recession, and 9 percent thrived. What made that 9 percent different? How did they not only weather the storm but come out stronger and better? The study reveals that the 9 percent didn't focus on licking their wounds. Instead, they adopted an entrepreneurial mindset and used the recession to spark innovation.

SIDE

Creativity and innovation help organizations thrive post-upheaval.

BY BRITT ANDREATTA

So, while this pandemic is scary, devastating, and tragic, it is also an opportunity for us to step into innovation. I encourage all TD professionals to see the opportunities in the tragedy and realize we are in the role of supporting our organizations in being pandemic survivors and thrivers. We're going to need to help employees understand how to use creativity and innovation.

Creativity vs. innovation

To do that, let's start by looking at the difference between creativity and innovation. Both are needed to survive a recession and thrive. Creativity unleashes the mind's potential to conceive new ideas. It produces concepts that have never been thought of before. On the other hand, innovation is the work required to make an idea viable. It's also about introducing change into relatively stable systems. Innovation takes something that already exists and figures out: What do we do with this to move it forward?

Here are some other ways to describe creativity: It produces that aha moment, that flash of insight. Creativity comes up with an idea. You can also think of creativity as spending money to generate ideas.

On the innovation side, it's more a process that you move through, like design thinking. Innovation takes an idea and capitalizes on it, figuring out how to take it to market. The thought here is that a company is spending ideas to generate money. A business may have a lot of ideas, but the ones it takes to market will generally be fewer.

While an organization needs both creativity and innovation to survive hard times, by its nature, creativity comes first. It acts as a funnel to innovation and is a required first step. To further explore that notion, let's consider the brain science of creativity.

The science of an aha moment

When people are engaged in finding a creative solution, they are activating brain regions that fire off focus, imagination, and awareness of their environment. But what happens in the brain when all the effort suddenly gives way and the answer suddenly appears? That is called a moment of insight, or the aha moment. It often requires a change in perspective to achieve. And when that moment strikes, a person can literally feel the connection of the synapses happening, with a little burst of good feeling.

Drexel University neuroscientists John Kounious and Mark Beeman have captured images of the aha moment in action. Neural imaging shows that one-third of a second before that moment, there is a burst of gamma waves above the right ear—in the anterior temporal gyrus—as well as a rush of blood into that part of the brain. Gamma waves are the highest frequency brain waves and are affiliated with insight, peak focus, and expanded consciousness. A full second before that, there is a burst of alpha waves in the right occipital cortex, the part of the brain that is associated with relaxation, visualization, and creativity. It is also the part that controls vision.

Essentially, the brain suppresses a person's vision right before the aha moment occurs; scientists call it "brain blink." And what's great for

MAINTAIN FLEXIBILITY TO ENSURE AN INTENTIONAL REENTRY PROCESS IS AS POSITIVE AS POSSIBLE.

us in talent development and learning is that we can facilitate the brain blink.

Insight is unforgettable. Once someone has a moment of insight, it's permanent in the brain. That makes insight incredibly powerful, and those of us in learning design need to be pushing toward setting up learners to have their own aha moments. If we just tell people information and give them the answers, we are denying them that powerful moment.

Science-based methods to boost creativity

Here are five ways to use brain science to boost creativity in your organization.

Leverage intelligences. People have different ways to be creative. According to Howard Gardner's work, there are nine different intelligences, each with its own unique neural signature: spatial, intrapersonal, linguistic, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, existential, logical-mathematical, musical, and naturalist. Are you tapping into workers' range of intelligences? How is your company supporting each employee to do their best work?

Match roles and tasks. Maximize performance by matching roles with tasks people are good at. Although that may seem to be an obvious action, schools and workplaces often force folks into an area that is not their natural expression. Some people are naturally analytical, while others are more intuitive. It's important for people to learn and develop in other areas, but when you can align roles and tasks with natural strengths, morale and performance improve and projects go better and faster.

Facilitate aha moments. Scott Kaufmann, a researcher at Columbia University and co-author of *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind,* found that to boost creativity, individuals must prepare, incubate, illuminate, and verify. First, they prepare their brain by taking in information. A lot of it. They must study, think, and research a wide range of sources and push themselves out of their comfort zones. With this step, individuals load their library with possibilities from different subject areas, which sets up the brain to connect the dots and have those aha moments.

The next step is taking a break, whether that's going for a walk, daydreaming, going surfing, listening to water, or any other activity. Those activities are examples of the resting neocortex and are part of how someone induces insight. A mistake people often make is working so hard that they don't feel they have permission to take a break. Yet, that break is oftentimes when their best ideas happen.

THE BRAIN'S RESPONSE TO CREATIVE EFFORTS

Scott Kaufmann, a researcher at Columbia University and co-author of *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind,* found that three networks in the brain become very active when people are engaged in creative endeavors:

- The executive center—or prefrontal cortex and positive parietal—activates when someone puts focused attention on something such as trying to solve a problem or figure something out.
- Imagination—or medial temporal and post cingulate—activates when someone is dreaming of possibilities. They are musing and what-iffing, asking: What could this look like?
- Salience—or anterior insula and anterior cingulate—activates when a person's attention toggles back and forth between concentrating closely on something and being aware of their environment. Individuals can't purely focus all the time; this is a part of the brain that toggles that focus.

Third, people must revisit the problem while engaging in what scientists call sensory gating: reduce the sensory stimuli in the environment. The final step of the creativity process is verification, which is when people test that great new idea, tweaking as needed to make it the strongest it can be.

Leverage water for its calming effect. In *The Blue Mind,* Wallace Nichols's research reveals that individuals being in, on, under, or simply near water is powerful for them to reach a calm state. Water in nature activates the resting neocortex. Water in the shower engages sensory gating, which is why the shower so often generates great ideas.

People should get around water when they can, and companies should consider adding water features to the workplace. That may be difficult for many employers, so an alternative is suggesting individuals listen to white noise, watch videos of water (such as mountain streams), take a shower, buy a garden or tabletop fountain, or use virtual reality goggles to go to the ocean.

Use brain games. When individuals exercise their brain with play, performance improves. Neuroscientists have measured creative performance before and after individuals play word games and have seen a significant boost.

According to the whitepaper *In Search of SuperMind,* researchers found that, as a result of playing brain games, 80 percent of people in the study improved their performance in creative thinking, 63 percent generated more viable solutions to problems, 33 percent improved their brain's cognitive function, 26 percent increased their accuracy in problem solving, and 25 percent reduced their failed attempts to problem solving.

Support creativity through play, and use brain games with learners to get the ideas primed.

Innovation takes two paths

Now that you've learned how to generate ideas with creativity, it's time to work out which of the resulting ideas to test, apply, and take to market. Innovation has two paths: incremental and breakthrough. Companies need to engage in both.

Breakthrough is usually research and development. The company is asking employees to take risks and make mistakes, which frees them to think differently and try new things knowing they have permission to break some glass or do something outrageous.

Incremental involves improving or enhancing something the organization is already doing. It's asking: How can we make it 10 percent faster or 10 percent better? It's a slow process.

According to CB Insights' 2018 *State of Innovation* report, corporate strategists said they are interested in innovation and more often follow the incremental path. In fact, 78 percent of investment is allocated to continuous improvement rather than disruptive risks. Meanwhile, 35 percent of high-performing companies are first movers (they make bold moves and jump on opportunities to be first into a new market or space), and 60 percent of respondents said it takes a year or longer to create new products.

Further, McKinsey's 2010 Global Survey found that "Eighty-four percent of executives consider their future success very or extremely dependent on innovation." And IBM's 2010 Global CEO Study found that "A staggering number of CEOs described their organizations as data rich but insight poor. Many voiced frustration at not being able to transform available data into feasible action plans, let alone to detect emerging opportunities." It's clear that companies are overinvesting in the slow path.

Your organization needs both paths to innovation to thrive. Here are five ways to drive innovation across all your functions.

Invest in both risk-taking and incremental progress. Choosing to source solely within the company, rather than partnering to create new products and services, slows innovation. Shift some of those resources and processes to the breakthrough innovation path.

Have a clear process. Businesses need to strategically drive inspiration, ideation, and implementation. How are you giving employees in every function tools to innovate, get faster, get better? One useful tool to implement an innovation process is Jake Knapp's *Sprint: How to Solve Big Problems and Test New Ideas in Just Five Days* and its corollary TheSprintBook.com.

Expand sources. If your company is like most, you're probably over-relying on customers and employees as sources for innovation. Explore where your employer can partner with other sources, including nearby universities and academic departments doing scientific research. Local nonprofits are doing great work, and industry analysts are another source to tap into. Also look at local banks and venture capitalists. Think about assigning someone to oversee this initiative, crafting and shepherding the innovation process in your organization.

Focus on execution. The other side of innovation is solving the execution challenge. What is the difference between organizations that thrive and fail? Did Xerox stumble because no one there noticed Canon had introduced personal copiers? Did Kodak fall behind because it was oblivious to digital photography's rise? In each case, the ideas were there, but the follow-through lacked. The companies lost to their competitor because they failed to execute.

The Four Disciplines of Execution is a good resource. It's also a FranklinCovey learning solution, so you could get certified and roll it out in your organization or learn some of the principles and weave them into an initiative in progress. You can't go without an execution strategy and expect to thrive through big change.

Build the culture and climate. The *State of Innovation* report found that high-performing organizations are five times more likely to build a culture of innovation across all their business functions. To achieve the culture your organization wants, create a climate for it.

Climate refers to the actions, channels, and tools to support new idea development within an organization. Does your company have a climate that fosters innovation? It must have strategies in place, such as a design thinking process or an execution model.

When those resources and resulting actions become a daily part of the organization, a culture of innovation is in place. Then the culture starts to accelerate, and it exponentially grows, empowers, and reinforces itself.

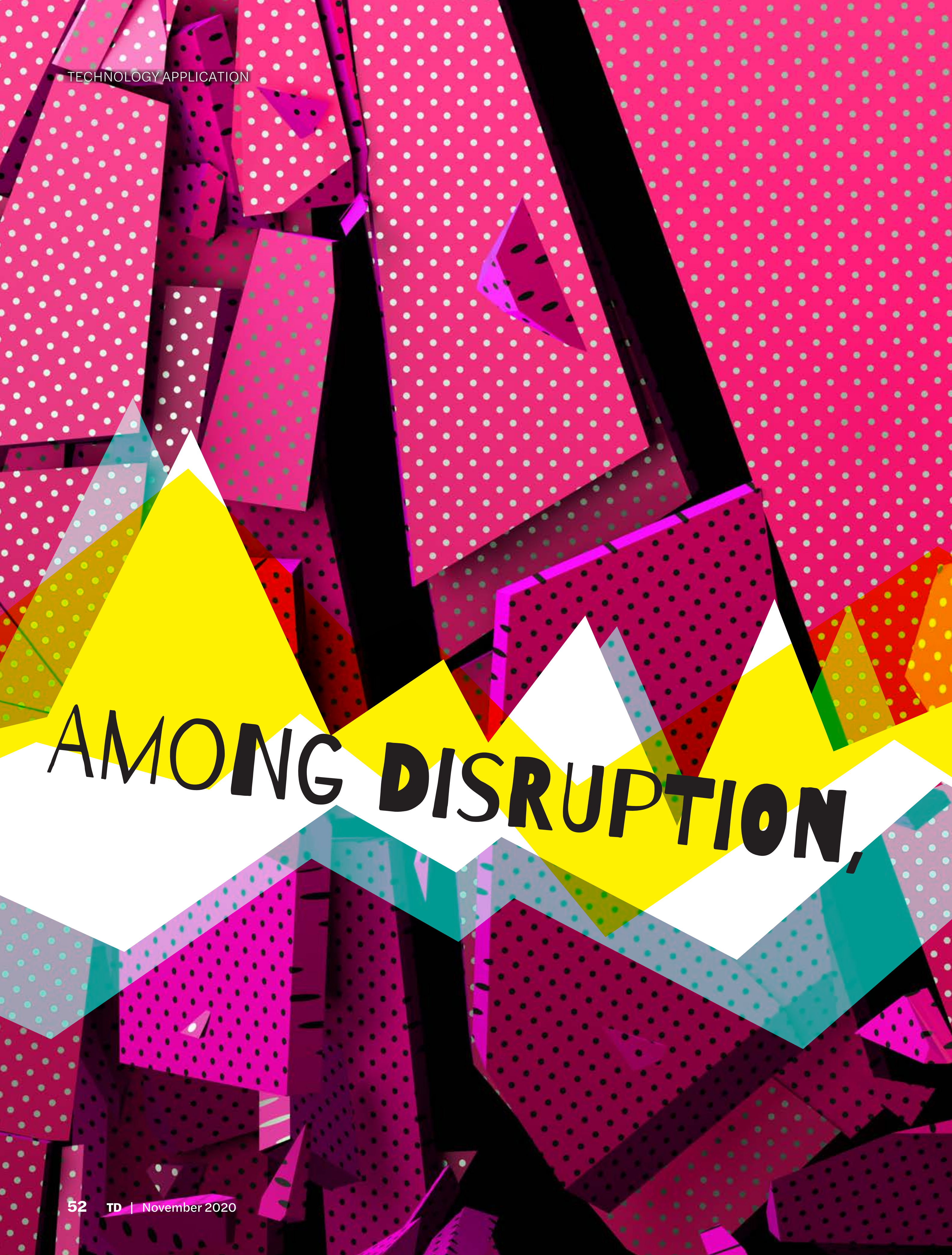
Shine a light to your organization

It's TD's time to shine. Your organization needs you, especially now.

At this crucial time, consider how you will support the TD team's or department's creativity and innovation to drive maximum impact in your organization. Design and deliver programs that boost both creativity and innovation. And importantly, influence your organization's investment in creativity and innovation by educating other leaders across the functions.

Britt Andreatta is CEO of 7th Mind Inc.; britt@brittandreatta.com.

WHILE AN ORGANIZATION NEEDS BOTH CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION TO SURVIVE HARD TIMES, BY ITS NATURE, CREATIVITY COMES FIRST.



AMONG DISRUPTION,

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Embrace these learning technology disruptors and trends.

BY JOHN SANGIMINO

IMAGES | ADOBE STOCK

IT'S BEEN A DISRUPTIVE YEAR.

There's a global pandemic, rising action against racial inequality, and related effects of both that may not be fully realized for years to come. Though some 2020 events are unique, disruption and the feelings of uncertainty it creates are perpetual. But in that disruption are new opportunities talent development professionals can use in support of learners.

In February, I presented on the topic of embracing learning technology disruptors and trends at the Association for Talent Development's TechKnowledge conference, and the concepts I shared then are even more important today. There's no definitive list of disruptors and trends that affect all organizations equally. However, as you consider the thought-starter list that follows, determine whether each area poses an opportunity for your organization and whether there are others you should also address with the presented frameworks.

Distributed Learning 2.0

The COVID-19 pandemic didn't introduce working and learning remotely, but it accelerated adoption faster and more broadly than expected. Fortunately, many people adapted quickly—but efforts to digitize and virtualize en masse revealed industry-wide shortcomings in the ability to engage participants. *Fatigue* became a popular suffix for describing virtual experiences as learners who may otherwise spend hours engaged in online streaming, gaming, or social media struggled through valiant attempts to hold their interest. You may have responded temporarily to an unplanned catalyst, but long-term success depends on much more.

The need and appetite for digital and virtual learning has never been greater, and there are important decisions to make. Should digital and virtual solutions complement or supplement in-person experiences? Which design, development, and deployment capabilities should organizations provide in-house versus source externally? How should the scope of offerings flex to include connectivity, culture, and other elements that co-located experiences afford incidentally?

Even after travel and the ability to congregate in large numbers return, expectations about what learners can and should experience through distributed channels versus in person will have shifted. Now is a golden opportunity to learn from new approaches and behaviors and incorporate them going forward instead of reverting to old methods when co-location is easier.

Bespoke ecosystems

A comprehensive ecosystem road map and data management strategy are imperative for organizations seeking to maximize learning impact and retain employee trust. As part of that work, some companies recognize a need for greater flexibility and extensibility than their legacy learning management systems afford, so they are configuring their own ecosystems of specialized platforms to unleash the full potential of engagement and analytics.

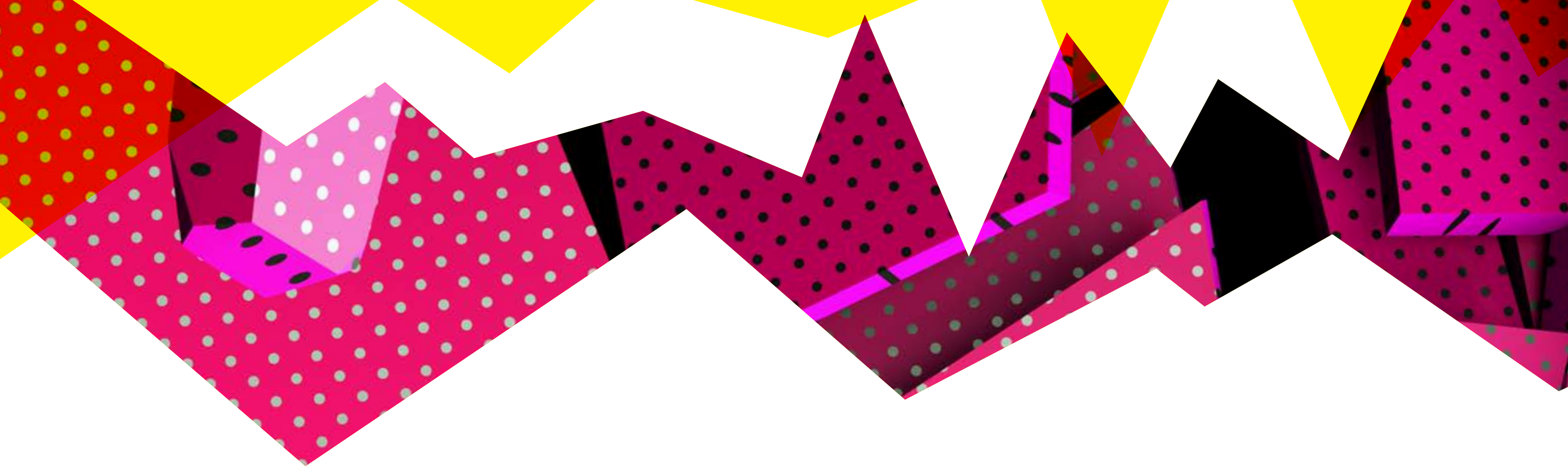
For example, learning experience platforms aggregate content from internal and external sources and offer user experiences more extensible than the average LMS. Learning record stores track and report wide ranges of activity and integrate with internal data warehouses to enable robust analytics and personalization. And learning content management systems handle object-level content and enable rapid asset development and maintenance.

The short-term pain of conversion may deter some organizations from developing their own ecosystems, but the long-term benefits are enough for others to embrace them. Integration with people systems, however, will require thoughtful attention to matters of personal data and privacy. How much individual performance data can and should you track to enable personalization? Will artificial intelligence bias make inappropriate or even offensive recommendations? How openly will people engage in "safe" learning when the company captures and uses their data in ways that aren't transparent? To be successful, the strategy and road map must account for both technology and people considerations.

Expertise management

In an increasingly complex and nuanced world, managing talent expertise has become an essential function to maximize performance and mitigate risk. It is traditionally associated with highly regulated fields, but organizations now recognize that capability ambiguity at any level can compromise performance and cascade risk across an enterprise.

Managing expertise requires a framework for markers and technology to scale implementation. Expertise markers—such as affiliations, credentialed skills, and credentialed multiskill approaches—must include how employees demonstrate their capabilities, how companies define proficiency levels, and how employers should or should not use different markers when deploying talent. Additionally, technology needs to provide



opportunities to demonstrate capabilities, track and update proficiencies, and integrate credentialing across all systems where talent data drives value.

It's impractical to define and manage expertise for every possible action that people can perform, so organizations need to prioritize what's most critical, define the mix of learning and on-the-job performance required for evidence of proficiency, and determine who's qualified to evaluate candidates and oversee the system. Unless you expect the future to be less complex with fewer risks than the present, a rigorous expertise management capability is imperative.

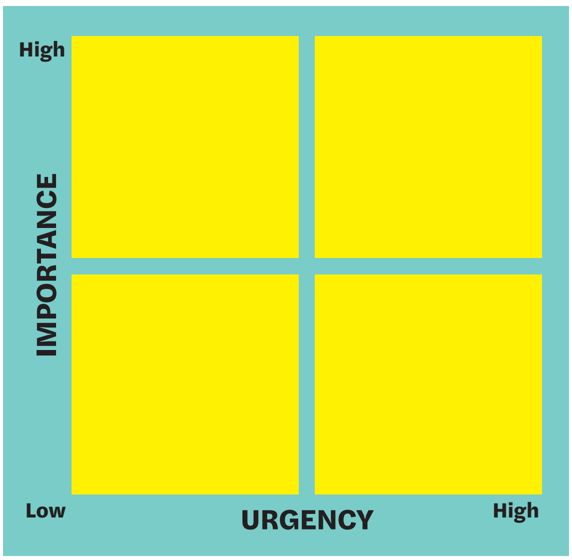
Automation conundrum

Automation pervades everyone's lives in ways seen and unseen, presenting challenges and opportunities apparent and subtle. Companies are piloting autonomous vehicle transportation and drone package deliveries that will likely become mainstream, social robots dispense medication and provide comfort support, and advanced surgical technologies enable individual doctors to perform complex procedures. It's an amazing time to be alive, but beyond learning how to use new technologies, we must mitigate the unintended consequences that some introduce.

For example, aspiring surgeons assist on a set number of procedures in their training, often performing a percentage of the operation themselves. Assistive technologies enable lead surgeons to do more independently, leaving medical students to do less. Extend that circumstance over multiple fields and roles, and an intriguing problem emerges: How do healthcare workers benefit from learn-by-doing when technology is increasingly performing the *doing?*

Automation also frees time for other things, and TD professionals want to capitalize on that. But when you're in a ride share again (which will be an autonomous vehicle someday), notice how you spend the time. Do you check email, browse social media, play an online game, or engage in digital learning? It will always be difficult competing for engagement against consumer-grade alternatives, which is why our attention to learning relevance and value must be even sharper than it is today.

Figure 1. Prioritization Matrix



Integrated learning

One reason people may not choose digital learning in the previous scenario is it doesn't integrate well with their lives. Adults want targeted help when needed, and legacy learning is often packaged densely in formats that are difficult to access. Advanced connectivity, smart device expansion, and artificial intelligence can change that—if we rise to the experience design opportunity.

High-band 5G networks transmit more data with less latency and make mission-critical Internet of Things possible. Smart devices have expanded well beyond the iPhone and iPad (which are now 13 and nine years old, respectively), including voice-controlled intelligent assistants and wearables such as smart watches and rings. Those devices can enable hands-free interaction and monitor human performance, such as biometric data. Intelligent systems can determine where people are; what they're doing (or likely doing); and what kind of support they may need based on personal past performance, others' performance, or data on current performance that's monitored in real time.

There always will be some need to offer learning in classes, courses, and programs, but organizations that create innovative ways to support people in real-world moments of need will have a strategic advantage over their peers.

Immersive learning

While intelligent, on-demand learning is optimal for supporting people in real situations, there's still a need for development prior to engaging real challenges. As expectations for learner experience increase, technologies improve, and disruptions cause organizations to rethink how they operate in uncertain conditions, the case for immersive learning becomes stronger.

Some companies have embraced digital twins—that is, virtual models of products, systems, or organizations that are simulated under different conditions to examine performance and optimize for different results. For example, city governments can build digital replicas of transportation systems to test how they can execute infrastructure projects safely and efficiently. Here the artificial boundaries between operations and learning blur.

Additionally, virtual reality has reached an important milestone with commercially available all-in-one head-mounted displays that enable six-degrees-of-freedom movement with inside-out positional tracking, eliminating the need for tethering to a computer. The effort required to engage VR has become a lot easier. Commercially available business simulation authoring tools have also advanced to the point that TD practitioners can develop low to moderate fidelity business simulations without the need for extensive development teams.

The technologies you have to work with are becoming stronger and more usable, and external forces continue providing more use cases to address. Immersive learning is ready for wide adoption. Are you prepared to use it?

Innovation labs

Research and innovation aren't limited to Silicon Valley startups, but the idea of launching an innovation lab may sound difficult. It shouldn't, however. Every organization is in a perpetual state of experimentation—including your learning organization. And formalizing an innovation lab is one way to test new ideas and shine a spotlight on the TD function's value.

Start small with just one or two ideas to test. Also think through goals and priorities, experiment timeframes, resourcing, impact measurement, and how you'll communicate results. Solicit ideas and volunteers, and don't be discouraged if funding isn't available right away. At the end of the quarter or year, you'll learn a lot, have interesting things to share, and likely have gained some attention.

Gradually add experiments until you're testing learning opportunities across every strategic area of your company or until capacity reaches its upper limit. Prioritize experiments that best serve the larger organization's goals, and make sure to share the results with project teams and leaders. Even if you start small and expand slowly, you're shaping your organization's future, which is difficult to argue against as a strategic endeavor.

Prioritizing where to focus

Regardless of whether many or few of the areas outlined above are relevant for your company, it's important to have a perspective on what's most pertinent and then prioritize those items for action. One framework to consider using is the importance versus urgency matrix (see Figure 1).

Determine importance by how significant or valuable an item is to achieving your strategic goals, and determine urgency by how significantly the item will affect your organization in the near term versus long term. In addition to yourself, ask others in the organization to individually plot each item on the matrix, and then discuss and debate as a group. Reach alignment on a shared view of priorities around which to focus action—most likely, it will be items that rank high on both dimensions.

Taking action to embrace

By definition, disruptions and trends involve change, which some organizations manage better than others. In both research and practice, McKinsey has found that transformations are most successful when they focus on four key actions to change mindsets and behavior. Collectively labeled the influence model, organizations can apply the following actions to embrace disruptions and trends.

Foster understanding and conviction. Craft a compelling change story that inspires others to embrace new ways of thinking and acting. Be careful of clichéd themes like "We struggled here, but we're going to fix things" or "We're already good at this, and now we're going to be great." People care more about how the change will affect and benefit them, their team, the organization, and society at large. Incorporate those elements into the story, and have several versions, because one version likely won't resonate with every population you need to inspire.

Reinforce with formal mechanisms. Ensure that related structures, processes, and systems are aligned with and support the change. Allocate budget and resources to priorities, and set clear scope

BEYOND LEARNING HOW TO USE NEW TECHNOLOGIES, WE MUST MITIGATE THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES THAT SOME INTRODUCE.

and quality expectations in project charters. Address legacy mechanisms that may disincentivize target behavior, and ensure that efforts are formally evaluated against success criteria.

Develop talent and skills. Assess gaps between current and desired skills, and provide learning to address them. Separate marketing from learning, and focus the latter on skill development with ample opportunity to practice and receive feedback. Implement a long-term mix of individual and peer learning experiences with budget and resources for regular maintenance so offerings are viable throughout the entire life cycle of need.

Role-model. Identify influencers with the greatest impact and channels with the widest reach, and employ both to reinforce beliefs and actions that drive the change. Infuse naturally occurring touchpoints, such as performance reviews and status meetings, with examples of desired behavior. Spotlight groups and individuals across the organization who support the change, and highlight actions that yield tangible results.

What a difference a year makes

A year ago, no one predicted how differently the world would look today, and some organizations have embraced changes better than others. Whether you're navigating events that shock the world or just trying to shape the future in your own corner of it, having a perspective on relevant disruptions and trends—plus frameworks for addressing them—will increase your likelihood for success.

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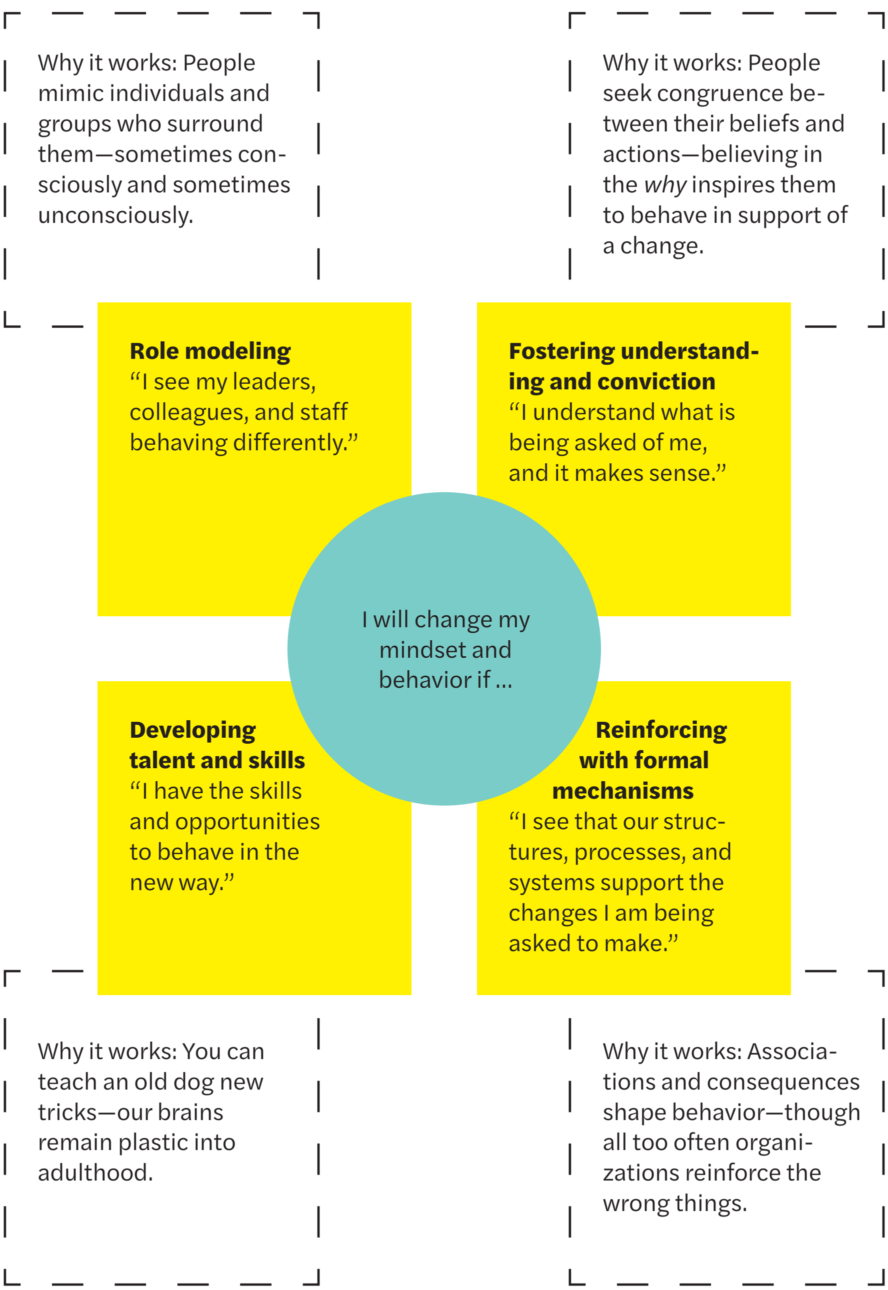
Figure 2. The Influence Model

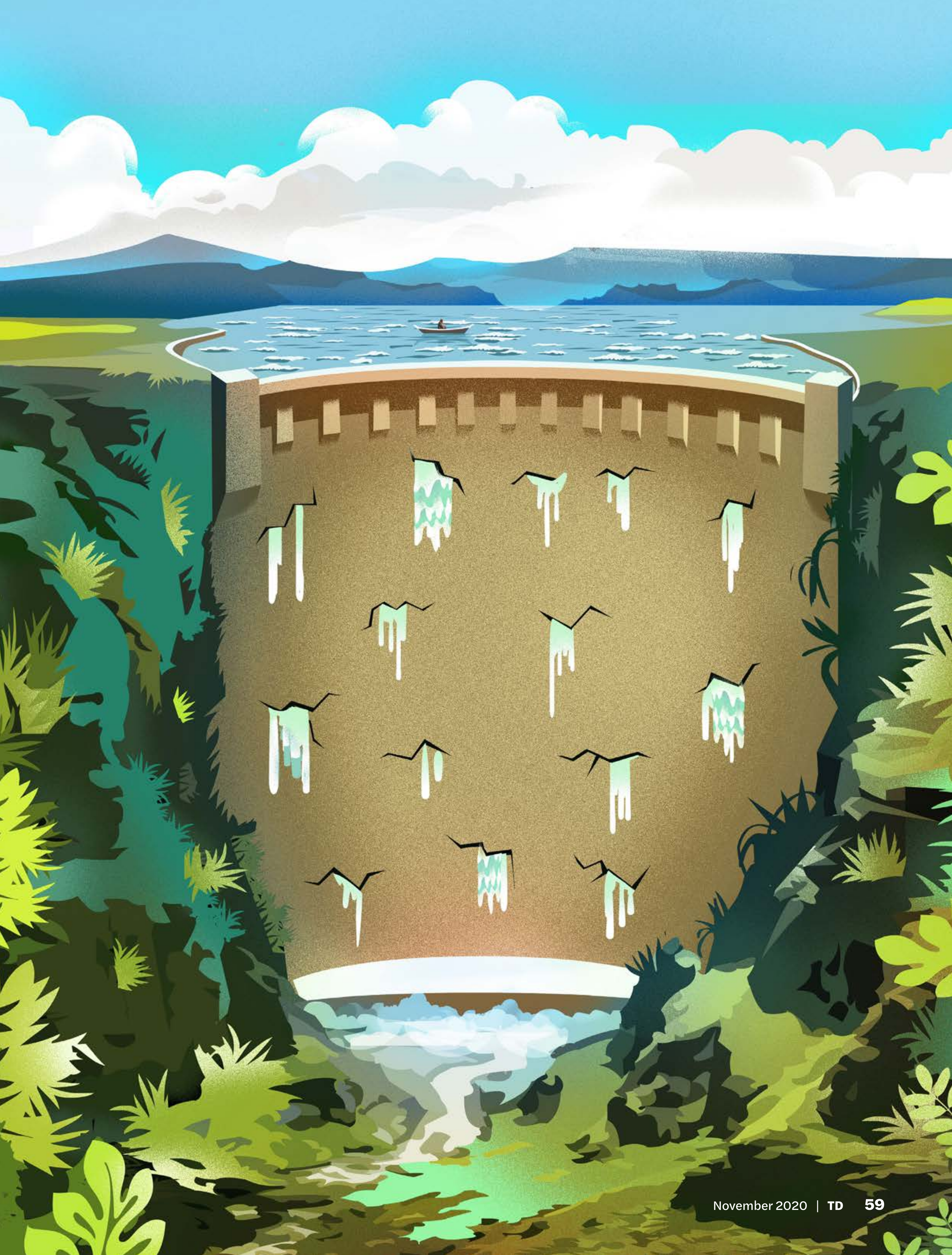


The Substantial Effect of Microaggressions

Build stronger, more trusting, and inclusive work relationships by eliminating your exclusionary language and behaviors.

BY MITCHELL R. CAMPBELL

ILLUSTRATION | RAUL ARIAS



A female executive is asked to take notes in a strategy session. A black employee is praised for their "articulate" presentation at a board meeting. A gay interviewee is asked about what his wife does when the interviewer notices his wedding ring. Those are all examples of microaggressions—comments and behaviors that have the effect of excluding or derogating members of marginalized social groups.

Microaggressions are usually subtle and unintentional, but they can still have a significant impact on the individuals they target. Over time, they can erode trust and make a workplace unwelcoming or even hostile. However, making small changes in your behavior can all but eliminate the microaggressions you may accidentally commit, promoting belonging and inclusion among your co-workers, direct reports, and learners.

Why should you trust me? I am a research scientist in the field of psychology studying how to use psychological tools to get people to behave in more inclusive, less discriminatory ways. Conducting this research has required me to do extensive background research on intergroup relations, both by consulting the research literature and by obtaining more information about people's experiences through focus groups and surveys. What I present in this article combines those sources of information to provide a better idea of what microaggressions are, how they affect their targets, and what you can do to prevent them.

Why is it important?

Despite their name, microaggressions can have a large impact on targeted individuals for two reasons. First, members of marginalized social groups are motivated to detect bias in their environment; they want to avoid individuals or situations that may be hostile toward members of their group.

If a white woman working at a job where the majority of her co-workers are also white women hears a rude or demeaning comment about her, it is easier for her to shrug it off compared to, say, a Hispanic man, who may not see anyone else who looks like him in the workplace. That is because it is clear to the white woman that people like her belong in her workplace, something that cannot be said of the Hispanic man.

Second, experiences of bias accumulate over time. No single experience that someone has occurs in a vacuum; it is influenced by the experiences that individual has had in the past. If you see an older person respond to a comment about their age with anger or frustration, you may wonder why they are responding so strongly to such a seemingly small incident. While you are seeing the situation in isolation, the target is experiencing it as yet another incident on top of the many they have already experienced.

Both those reasons help address the common sentiment that reactions to microaggressions are overblown. As observers, though, it is difficult for individuals to truly understand the perspective of the target of the microaggression, including the target's past experiences. If you were in their shoes, you would likely have a similar reaction. Indeed, according to "Racial Microaggressions in the Workplace: A Critical Race Analysis of the Experiences of African American Educators" and *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestations, Dynamics, and Impact,* research has shown that experiencing microaggressions leads individuals from marginalized groups to have a lower sense of belonging, poorer mental and physical health, hampered well-being, and decreased job satisfaction.

The connection between experiencing microaggressions and those negative life outcomes highlights how important it is for each of us to be conscious of our use of microaggressions in the workplace. Your actions, even if unintentional, can make your direct reports, co-workers, and learners feel unwelcome and disrespected. They can undermine the relationships you build with managers, clients, partners, and others. In turn, these interpersonal consequences can erode trust in the workplace and worsen organizational climate.

By employing a few simple tactics that will prevent microaggressions from occurring, you will be able to build better, more trusting work relationships that can contribute to your later success.

What's in a name?

As I have just described, microaggressions are seldom micro from the target's perspective. At the same time, they are seldom aggressive on the perpetrator's part; they are usually unintentional and not meant to cause harm. Authors Tiffany Jana and Michael Baran propose an alternative term, which they use as the title of their book: *Subtle Acts of Exclusion.* As they point out, this is more than just a debate about jargon. The terminology individuals use affects how they think about the concept.

The term *subtle acts of exclusion* addresses the problems with the term *microaggression*—the former focuses on the quality of the incidents (*subtle*) rather than the size (*micro*) and their impact (*exclusion*) rather than their intention (*aggression*). Because the new term focuses on behavior (*acts*), it is also more useful for thinking about how you can go about addressing these incidents. For consistency, I will continue to use *microaggressions* in this article, but consider switching to the new term in your workplace, especially if you are talking to someone who is confused about what microaggressions are.

What can I do about them?

Microaggressions are common in business settings and can have profound impacts on members of marginalized social groups. Though these acts are usually inadvertent, you can adopt simple strategies that will prevent the large majority of microaggressions you may otherwise commit. By reducing your own use of microaggressions, you will contribute to building a more welcoming, inclusive workplace—which will have a positive effect on the bottom line. Doing so requires developing a toolkit for recognizing and responding to bias.

In the following paragraphs, I will provide a starter kit to get you going. The offered suggestions come from multiple lines of psychological research and the scientific understanding of the experiences and mindset of individuals belonging to marginalized groups.

Because microaggressions are usually unintentional, people often incorrectly assume that they are impossible to prevent. The core reason people who commit microaggressions do not recognize them, though, is that they do not even think to look for microaggressions in themselves. You may usually assume your language and behaviors are objective and unbiased, when in reality you have been shaped by your experiences.

Despite their name, microaggressions can have a large impact.

Bias exists in society, so it is natural that some of that bias has seeped into individuals over time. One obvious example of that is idioms. People seldom think to question those turns of phrase, but they often have troubling origins. The term *peanut gallery,* for example, was the original name for what is now called the nosebleed seats in a theater, which were often the only seats where black people were allowed to sit. In addition, though your likelihood of hearing the phrase "That's retarded" is much lower now than it was even a decade ago, a phrase that is similarly denigrating to people with disabilities is still in widespread use: "That's so lame."

Many of the most common microaggressions fit into just a handful of types (see sidebar). Though the types may seem to be different at face value, they share one core uniting idea: All in some way make an assumption about how an individual compares to a social group they are a member of (that is to say, a stereotype). Sometimes, such comments reveal a hidden negative stereotype about a group even when phrased positively. For example, saying to a Muslim person "You're a credit to your religion" makes it clear the speaker's impression of Muslim people generally is negative.

Members of marginalized social groups often highly value their marginalized identity despite wanting to be seen and recognized as individuals. Comments that downplay someone's identity or make assumptions about their membership in a group can rub them the wrong way. For example, saying "I don't see color" can make a person of color feel like their identity is not valued. And saying "I don't think someone who started in community college is the right fit for us" may hurt another individual on the hiring committee who started in community college themselves.

The solutions to these common microaggressions are straightforward.

Identify and remove biased phrases and idioms from your speech. This requires running a couple Google searches (start with "offensive terms") and listening to individuals from different social backgrounds. All the phrases and terms have replacements with identical meanings that will not make people feel excluded—for example, saying "ripped off" instead of "gypped."

Communicate with people as individuals, not as representatives of a given social group. There is no need to invoke someone's group membership to give them a compliment or constructive criticism. For example, instead of saying "You gay men have such good fashion sense," just say "You have such good fashion sense." And instead of saying "I understand women have difficulty with this concept," say "You seem to be having difficulty with this concept."

By making that shift, you make the people you are talking with feel valued as individuals rather than simply members of a stereotyped group. Ask yourself whether your motivation to say something to someone is based on a strong conviction about that individual or is more about how that individual compares to a group they are part of.

Use inclusive language. This means using terminology that people with different identities can relate to. There are many great resources online, but some changes do not require any research. For example, use the phrases "esteemed colleagues" or "honored guests" instead of "ladies and gentlemen," "partner" instead of "husband" or "wife," and "you all" or "you folks" instead of "you guys." Such changes may seem tiny and inconsequential, but research—specifically "Inclusive Language Use in Multicultural Business Organizations: The Effect on Creativity and Performance"—shows that they have an outsized impact on individuals who would otherwise be excluded.

Normalize casual discussions on these topics. Many microaggressions go unchallenged simply because people do not want to rock the boat or face retaliation. Ask your colleagues to tell you about their backgrounds, and tell them to let you know if you say something that offends them. Also either ask them for suggestions about ways you can make your own language more inclusive

Common Types of Microaggressions

- **Alien in one's land:** ascribing foreignness to people from different racial backgrounds (for example, asking an Asian person where they are *really* from)
- **Ascribing intelligence:** making assumptions about someone's skills based on their membership in a social group ("Wow, you're great at math for a woman.")
- **Color blindness:** downplaying the importance of one's social identities ("I don't see race," "I don't care whether you're white, black, brown, green, or purple.")
- **Myth of meritocracy:** denying the obstacles that members of marginalized groups face ("Our company is a level playing field.")
- **Contrasting with a group:** saying someone is different from other members of their group in an attempt to compliment them, revealing a negative stereotype ("You're so articulate for a black person.")
- **Comparing with a group:** saying someone is the same as other members of their group in an attempt to compliment them, removing their sense of personal identity ("You Hispanic people are so hardworking.")
- **Stereotype enforcement:** asking someone to change their behavior to conform to your expectations of them (for example, telling a woman she is being irrational and telling her to calm down, when a man exhibiting the same behavior would not be sanctioned)
- **Ambient exclusion:** relegating individuals to tasks that are stereotypical of their groups (for example, asking a woman to take notes at a meeting)

The Three-Part Apology

Responding with grace to being confronted is made easy by following these steps:

1. Apologize, making sure not to place the blame on the target. For example, say "I'm sorry I made you feel that way" instead of "I'm sorry you feel that way."
2. Acknowledge the impact your statement had on others. You can use this as an opportunity to reassert your true values ("I really want to support everyone, but my actions made you feel excluded").
3. Adjust your language to better communicate the idea you were trying to express. Ask the person who confronted you if they are willing to explain the issue to you or point you to a resource that can (but do not expect this from them; you can also research it yourself later).

and ideas for specific terms to use as alternatives or conduct research on your own.

Confronting microaggressions can be intimidating if it is not normalized. By making these conversations commonplace, it makes it easier for people to bring up issues as they arise, providing an opportunity for a course correction.

Of course, if you tell people to let you know if you say something that offends them, they will likely tell you. I study diversity, equity, and inclusion for a living, and I still mess up. We all make mistakes. We must respond to being confronted with grace—this shows more care for the target of our actions and enables us to learn from them and bring our behavior in line with our values.

In such situations, a great guideline to use is the three-part apology (see sidebar). The key takeaway here is to not be defensive. Often when someone is confronted, their natural instinct is to view the confrontation as an attack or assume the person confronting them is insinuating that they are racist, sexist, ableist, etc. Remember, you and the person confronting you have the same goals; you are on the same team. Both of you want to make your workplace more inclusive and welcoming, and your opponent is offensive language and behavior. You both need to work cooperatively as a team to be able to tackle that opponent.

Being confronted also presents an opportunity to learn something new. I have found that thinking about the situation as a team effort and opportunity to learn and taking a moment to breathe after being confronted makes these interactions much more productive, and everyone is much more likely to leave feeling validated (including me as the person being confronted).

What have we learned?

Microaggressions are common in the workplace and have a substantial impact on members of marginalized social groups. We could instead use the term *subtle acts of exclusion,* because microaggressions are neither micro in their impact on their targets, nor are they aggressive on the part of the perpetrator in the large majority of cases.

You can reduce your use of microaggressions by learning to recognize and respond to them. Many of the tools are simple and easy to implement, including removing offensive language from your lexicon, communicating with people as individuals, and using inclusive language.

By doing that work, you can be an active contributor to making your company more welcoming and inclusive. That improves business outcomes, yes, but more importantly makes your organization a more enjoyable and interesting place to work.

Prejudice and discrimination can seem like massive, unsolvable problems, but the main way such problems perpetuate is through individual interpersonal behavior. Even the small effort you apply to making your behavior more inclusive can set into motion numerous positive feedback loops, which lead to more inclusive behaviors and a greater sense of belonging in others. In this way, each of your individual actions can compound to make your workplace a more welcoming and equitable one.

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New Leader, New Team

Thrive in your new talent development leadership position.

BY ZAHI ABDEIN

Today's work environment increasingly demands more talent development leaders than ever to lead TD organizations, teams, and even projects. As a TD professional, you may consequently find yourself promoted and flipped at an unprecedented pace, which is creating tense work environments undermined by complexity and uncertainty. That hurts TD leaders as well as their teams.

Although you may be competent, ambitious, and highly driven, employers often ask TD professionals to accept new roles with little information—and expect them to produce results immediately. As a consequence, it can be a struggle to create the necessary healthy work environment even when top-down support is in place.

Budding leadership

The problem is that most new leaders lack the confidence, knowledge, and experience in dealing with new teams. While some are fortunate enough to have mentors who guide them to success, others are not so lucky. Employers often are expecting TD professionals to step seamlessly into a high-functioning role, maintain or improve upon their predecessors' productivity, and work with other teams comprising different abilities and which may be experiencing their own issues.

How can you better deal with such challenges and move your nascent leadership role forward? The natural trigger for many new managers is to resort to immediate displays of authority when facing interpersonal challenges. Yet, taking that route usually backfires, building resentment among direct reports who may recently have been colleagues—a situation from which there is no way to come back.

Instead, you can respect people for who they are and create an environment for them to excel. Put people at the forefront of what you do, and you will get the best from them. That, in turn, will help to create success in your own career.

Make the transition smooth

To develop your new management skills and at the same time create a strong, productive, and highly engaged team that will build confidence in all parties, read on.

5 Steps for Managing Your First Team

1 Share with your direct reports who you are and how you got there. Stories build trust and create connections with people.

Understand that new leadership will be a stressful change. People's sympathetic nervous system responds to stress in two ways: fight or flight. That causes individuals to react to change with resistance. To mitigate resistance in a new role as a leader, manage that change.

Start with learning about change management theories, models, and approaches. For example, brush up on Everett Rogers's model around adoption of new innovations, which explains how a person's willingness and ability to adapt to innovation and change depends on their awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. Karl Albrecht's change response cycle shows the personal change response cycle as threat, problem, solution, and habit. Rick Maurer's three levels of resistance outline how to understand and mitigate the effects of employee resistance to change. Finally, John Kotter takes a more strategic approach in his comprehensive eight-step change process, which he introduced in his 1995 book *Leading Change*.

Each of those theories and models considers the psychological and emotional toll change has on individuals and can help you to deal with change. To manage it effectively, you must be able to understand the impact not only on yourself but also on each of your direct reports and the organization as a whole.

Get to know the team before starting the new role. Look for information about your new direct reports from all possible sources and get to know their values, likes, and dislikes. You can gather data about each employee from the company's HR database (be sure to do so in an ethical manner), their LinkedIn profiles and other social media sites, or by simply asking their previous manager. The best source of data is the direct reports themselves. Ask them for an informal meeting over coffee or tea. Accepting people for their unique selves with no prejudgments or prejudices will help them, and it also will help you succeed in your new role.

Consider your own leadership vision, and be able to articulate it to your team.

Use your character and competence to build trust and confidence. Whether you are an outsider entering the company for the role or an insider promoted or moving into a new team, reputation matters. While it was important when you were an individual contributor, it's even more critical to remember that, as a leader, you must ensure that you have a reputation for being of good character and someone who is able to build competence.

Define a clear direction and a vision. Obtain a realistic view of what is going

2

Expect resistance, and appreciate that the time needed to accept change will vary from one person to another.

3

Identify networks, and find out who the influencers are. Without sacrificing equity, use influencers to create trust and a healthy work environment.

Modeling Behaviors for Your New Team

Leaders must be role models in dealing with their teams, new or otherwise. Remember not the golden rule but the platinum rule: Treat your direct reports the way they want to be treated. Respect them for who they are, and create an environment for them to excel.

Fast-track your team leadership by:

- Acknowledging that your new role is a change that needs to be managed
- Knowing your team and managing your relationship with team members early on
- Building trust and confidence in your abilities
- Engaging everyone
- Having a clear vision for the team
- Communicating early and often
- Demonstrating confident vulnerability
- Handling resistance and knowing the reason behind it
- Identifying networks and influencers
- Rewarding early and often

Once you become a role model for creating an environment of trust and psychological safety, rest assured that your team will follow. Your direct reports will go into battles with you and win wars. And that will propel your career forward because it will become more widely known that you manage well.

Advertiser Index

Statement of Ownership

TD (Talent Development) (Publication number 2374-0663) (Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685, Title 39 U.S. Code.) Date of filing: September 21, 2020. Frequency of issue: monthly plus a 13th issue in the spring. Annual subscription price: $150 individual ($60 as part of membership); $331 institution. Publication and general business offices: 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Editor-in-Chief: Vanessa St. Gerard. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders: none. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of ASTD DBA Association for Talent Development has not changed during the preceding 12 months. During the preceding 12 months, the average number of copies printed for each issue was 29,953; the average number of copies distributed, 29,852. The figures for September 2020: 27,207 copies printed, 27,026 paid distribution, 105 free distribution, 27,131 total distribution.

on with the company and the team that needs leading. Also consider your own leadership vision, and be able to articulate it to your team.

Involve everyone early on in creating new strategies and initiatives. Taking time to solicit feedback from your new direct reports will give them confidence and demonstrate trust in them and their abilities. It will also take some pressures off you.

Communicate with the team immediately after acquiring the new responsibility. At the very least, this could mean sending each new team member an individualized email expressing excitement about working with them. That will facilitate building trust early on and will help you to identify key people who can assist with the transition.

Tell your story at your first team meeting. Something along the lines of the following can be a great template—but remember to be authentic: "I was hired for this role believing that I can take this team to the next level and produce greater results [vision and direction]. I may not be the smartest or the hardest working person here, and you know this business better than I do. So, I need you to be beside me to reach milestones never reached before [confident vulnerability]. I promise to give you 100 percent and to be fair to everyone. I will fight for you and support you with everything I have [building trust]. All I ask you for is your commitment and dedication to your work and this team." Yes, that may sound like a war speech from the Middle Ages, but it works.

Notice how often trust comes up. Trust is key to creating a healthy work environment where psychological safety exists. While the goal is to achieve your company's strategic objectives, that will be impossible without a fully functioning team for which you establish trust early and where it circulates freely.

Creating a team that is based around trust leads to high productivity and an array of individual and team rewards. But most importantly, perhaps, is that it engenders a sustainable environment of success. Do the job right, and team members will grow and develop professionally—even possibly going for a promotion themselves. Once a leader appropriately builds a team, its positive impact should outlast that leader, affecting the team in the long run and also each individual in their future positions. That will grow your reputation and make you feel better about how you helped others grow.

Put people first

Thanks to digitalization, globalization, and several other *-izations,* the business world is undergoing rapid evolution. The pace at which leadership in the TD industry flips is unlikely to slow down anytime soon. So, now more than ever, it is essential to acknowledge the new world order and create new systems that can keep up with the pace of change.

TD managers and leaders must embrace these new realities within their companies, and above all else, remember this: It's about the people—always has been, always will be. Doing so will mean you will be successful not only in your first TD management position but in all subsequent roles.

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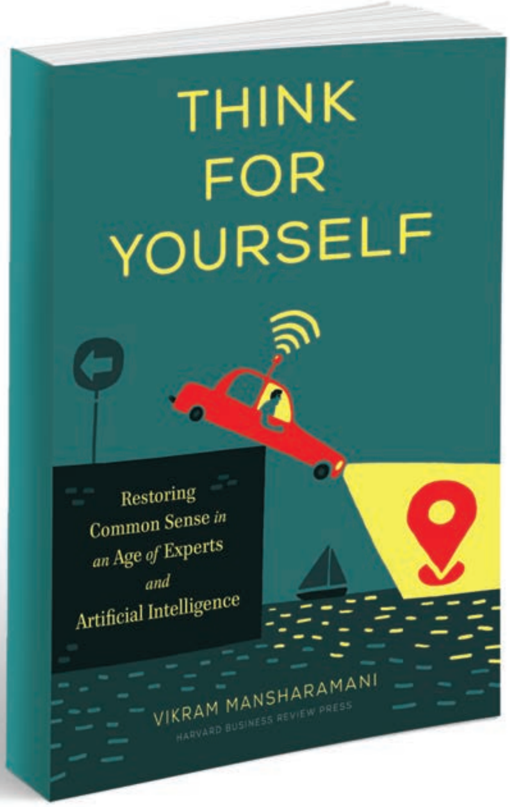
4

Reward appropriately and quickly. Identify behaviors that are favorable to the change, and show appreciation.

5

Ask for feedback. It is surprising how often people are willing to help and provide direction toward better results when allowed to do so.



Great Minds Think

Think for Yourself: Restoring Common Sense in an Age of Experts and Artificial Intelligence

By Vikram Mansharamani
Harvard Business Review Press, 304 pp., $30

REVIEWED BY LAURA LUBIN

Think for Yourself is dedicated to shifting perspectives around how individuals view rules, experts, and technology. Mansharamani argues that critical thinking has been atrophied by—if not outsourced to—red tape, siloed specializations, and artificial intelligence dependency. The repercussions include potential leaders losing their autonomy, increasing conditioning (think how Ivan Pavlov trained his dogs) for handing over that autonomy, and a distinct underappreciation for less common paths. All of that has the potential to stall and undermine broadening perspectives and the provision of solutions for real-world, right-now problems.

Structured into six parts, the book includes specific examples of when group think, closed-mindedness, and other barriers to critical thinking go awry. Mansharamani also provides insights on what it means to own your thoughts, take action on the decisions you arrive at on your own, and the importance of putting the contributions of experts and rules into context during the process while maintaining your autonomy and perspective.

It is an intriguing read. However, as the author admits, it is difficult to digest the fact that people should strongly question expertise, cautiously approach the technologies humans have grown accustomed to, and understand that rules are made to be broken. At the same time, Mansharamani raises some undeniable truths, such as that decision making should have an integrated approach that layers several different lenses as opposed to one narrow field of focus. Readers are left to find the balance between challenging threats to their autonomy and the possible blowback for taking risks.

For talent development professionals, this book is best leveraged when you have a difficult decision and the proposed solutions have been categorized as outside the norm. This book also can serve as a reminder to be unafraid to take risks when you are being called to act against instinct and embrace a solution counterintuitive to the problem at hand. Ultimately, *Think for Yourself* can be a guide through unchartered territory when technology, experts, and rules just aren't enough and it is up to you to be the voice of common sense.

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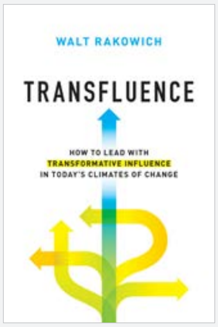
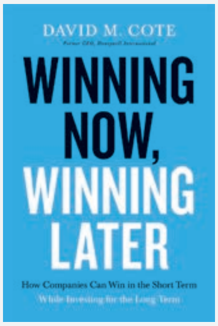




Transfluence: How to Lead With Transformative Influence in Today's Climates of Change
Walt Rakowich
Post Hill Press, 208 pp., $28

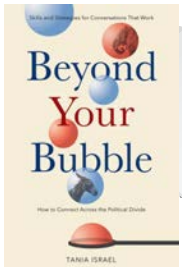
Fuse the words *transformative* and *influence* together and you get *transfluence*—an approach by which leaders can seize opportunities, embrace challenges, and make their organizations great. In this book, Rakowich covers the gamut of issues leaders face in times of change, such as how to instill confidence, values, and purpose in people during times of anxiety and uncertainty. He also discusses why trust and transparency are so important for the modern leader. Rakowich acknowledges that change isn't always comfortable or easy, but to successfully navigate through it requires leaders to be intentional about their influence on others.

Winning Now, Winning Later: How Companies Can Win in the Short Term While Investing in the Long Term
David M. Cote
HarperCollins Leadership, 288 pp., $28.99

Cote is the former CEO of Honeywell who is credited with turning the company around and helping it thrive through the Great Recession. Drawing from his experience at Honeywell, Cote shares guiding principles and strategic practices that can help leaders bring the best out of any organization, division, or team in good and not-so-good times. A key theme of the book is that leaders do not have to sacrifice long-term growth at the expense of short-term gains. Readers are sure to benefit from the author's perspectives and sage advice on leadership.

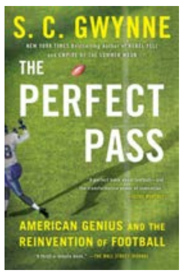
FROM OUR AUTHORS

What's on Your Bookshelf?



"Made of soap and water, bubbles are beautiful and fun and magical, but they are also fragile."

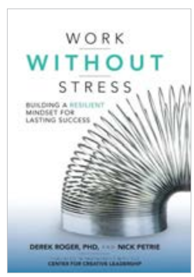
Beyond Your Bubble: How to Connect Across the Political Divide, Skills and Strategies for Conversations That Work
by Tania Israel
Not only is this book incredibly timely for healing some of the political divisiveness that has occurred in recent years, but you can apply the practices and principles to all kinds of difficult conversations. **—Britt Andreatta**



The Perfect Pass: American Genius and the Reinvention of Football
by S.C. Gwynne
Here is an extraordinarily well-written book about the innovative work of Hal Mumme and Mike Leach as they changed football from run-dominated offenses to pass-dominated offenses. **—David G. Fivecoat**

"Resilience is the ability to negotiate the rapids of life without becoming stressed."

Work Without Stress: Building a Resilient Mindset for Lasting Success **by Derek Roger and Nick Petrie**
This is not just another stress-management book. It gets at the heart of how we can change how we respond to stressful situations—putting us in control. It addresses self-imposed sources of stress and practical approaches to ameliorating them, such as rumination, stress by choice, and inhibiting emotion.
—David Hosmer



Break Up With Bad Breakout Sessions

Find out the steps facilitators can take to ensure online breakout success.

BY ELLEN A. ENSHER AND ELIZABETH HODOS

With remote work a necessity and online conferencing at an all-time high, we're all facing new hurdles in conducting online training and education. Virtual breakout rooms have become a go-to for escaping the tedium of the perennial shared-screen PowerPoint slides. While online breakout rooms are ideal for application-based exercises and collaborative work in small groups, they are quite different from group work in a face-to-face environment.

As a learning leader, when you are face-to-face with participants, you use your intuition and multitasking superpowers—simultaneously working with one group while also paying attention to the energy and engagement of other groups in the room. In short, you can hear, hover, and coach at once. However, in virtual breakouts, you lack that luxury.

What it is

Online breakouts take significant initial preparation and work to ensure they run smoothly. When participants enter online breakout rooms, you can waste time on introductions as well as on clarifying roles and assignments. Without the omniscient facilitator, the group's outcomes and discussions vary tremendously in their effectiveness.

How it works

In his classic model, psychology professor Bruce W. Tuckman outlines the developmental sequence of groups: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Given the challenges in the online space, recalibrate the forming stage where team members orient themselves to tasks and one another. For online breakout room success, add an additional stage of "pre-forming."

With an entirely online environment, participants may not know each other, and the opportunities for informal pre-class banter or bonding cannot happen as readily. Therefore, reallocate the time from the forming process by building it into your pretraining preparation. In doing so, you can help participants get the most from the breakout experience while making things easier for yourself.

Guidelines

Here are strategies to make the online experience effective and engaging.

Set the tone. Your training session's first 15 minutes are critical to setting the tone for safe collaboration and effectiveness prior to participants transitioning to breakout rooms. Accomplish that by introducing participants, establishing ground rules, and modeling a sample group assignment.

CHECKLIST

Participant Roles Required for Successful Breakouts

- Facilitator: Recaps the direction, checks for inclusion, and resolves conflict
- Notetaker: Uses the provided worksheet to outline group work

Conduct a breakout group warm-up. Once you've set the stage for collaboration and effectiveness, use a warm-up activity to get things started. Warm-ups give participants a chance to become acquainted prior to working together on assignments.

There is an infinite number of warm-up activities you can use, so be strategic about the type you select. Choosing warm-ups that support the session's overall learning objectives is a best practice.

The On Vacation activity, for example, enables participants to build on each other's ideas while simultaneously accelerating rapport. During the exercise, learners create a vacation together. The first participant selects the destination and says, "When I go on my vacation to [fill in the blank], I am going to [fill in the blank]." The next participant repeats exactly what the first said and adds to it. The process repeats until everyone has added to the vacation. Here's an example:

First person: "When I go to Toronto, I am going to stay in a hotel."

Second person: "When I go to Toronto, I am going to stay in a hotel, and I will go to the museum."

Third person: "When I go to Toronto, I am going to stay in a hotel, and I will go to the museum, and I will eat poutine."

Define roles and responsibilities. Decide each participant's role prior to the training session (see checklist below). That will save valuable time and energy in the breakout room. Provide an outline of the various roles with a number and assign them in alphabetical order. For instance, the facilitator role will have a number 1 and be assigned to Amy, who is first in the alphabet. That step goes a long way in ensuring the effectiveness of breakout experiences.

Create and provide a shared worksheet for each group. Participants should have clear guidelines and instructions to fill in the worksheet. By using a shared document, you will be able to monitor note-taking in real time and notice groups that are on track and those needing help.

Prepare a report-out guide. The guide should be easy for participants to follow and should include detailed instructions. Issue a three- to five-minute warning for the group's conversation to move toward summarizing and reporting out. The guide will help keep groups focused on the ultimate goals and bring consistency to group reports.

RESOURCES

Stein, J. n.d. "Using the Stages of Team Development." MIT Human Resources. hr.mit.edu/learning-topics/teams/articles/stages-development.

Tiersky, H., and H. Wisbach. 2020. *Impactful Online Meetings: How to Run Polished Virtual Working Sessions That are Engaging and Effective. Ontario: Spiral Press.*

Yuan, E. 2020. "How to Connect While Apart." TED Conference, July 6. ted.com/talks/eric_yuan_how_to_connect_while_apart.

Results

Using the above strategies not only makes the breakout experience more meaningful for learners but also can help you better manage several groups in an online setting. The process also aids in fostering an immediate experience of psychological safety and community, creating more inclusive conversations, and helping participants feel confident in making contributions to the group. Moreover, you can expect heightened listening, more equal distribution of contributions, and increased teamwork among participants.

With remote training being the norm, at least for the time being, it is important to set groups up for success. By using these tips in your online breakout rooms, you will see an increase in overall effectiveness and finally be able to break up with bad breakouts.

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Elizabeth Hodos is founder of HIL Training; ecthodos@gmail.com.

- Presenter: Reports the assignment to the larger group
- Timekeeper: Helps everyone stay on track and watches for distractions
- Apologist: Offers an alternative perspective and defends the lesser accepted idea

5 Steps to Improve Coaching Responses

Coaching is not about giving advice but responding with questions that help people find their own solutions. The next time someone asks you for advice, respond as a coach.

1

Pause before responding. Practice stopping for a moment after a request for advice, and then consider whether you should coach the person to find their own solution or give them your answer.

2

Probe for perspective. Ask the person what their view is on the issue.

3

Place importance on emotions. People with problems are not machines, hence the importance of recognizing emotions. Try asking: How do you feel about this problem?

4

Promote ownership and accountability. Encourage the person to own their part of the problem; ask: What's in your control to influence the outcome here?

5

Propel the coachee toward action. Finish your conversation with a tangible, concrete action—for example, ask: What's one small and safe step you can take to move forward toward solving this issue?

SOURCE: NIALL MCSHANE, AUTHOR, *RESPONSIVE AGILE COACHING: HOW TO ACCELERATE YOUR COACHING OUTCOMES WITH MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS*

IMAGE | ADOBE STOCK