

2018  
RESEARCH REPORT



# Tomorrow's Leaders Today

What Leaders Need  
Right Now, and in the Future,  
to Be Successful



*In late spring 2018, GP Strategies® reached out to leaders across the globe to find out what actions, skills, and mindset were most needed to be a successful leader. We wanted to understand what challenges were keeping people up at night and what most excited them about being a leader. And we wanted to know how they are preparing to be leaders in the future, particularly against the backdrop of digital transformation.*

*This report presents the results, shown in aggregate, of our global outreach. We've also included results by organizational success to help us better understand what very successful organizations might be doing differently with respect to leadership.*

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# Here's What Leaders Say They Need to Accomplish Objectives

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What exactly do leaders say they need, in the broadest sense, to accomplish results? Is it infrastructure, processes, or other resources that are on their wish list of critical support?

When we asked leaders what they needed from the organization to help them accomplish business and leadership objectives, more effective leaders as well as more and more effective communication and a clearer strategy were top of mind.

## Top Three Things Leaders Need to Accomplish Results:

• 1 •

More  
Effective  
Leaders

• 2 •

More and  
More Effective  
Communication

• 3 •

Clearer  
Strategy

The leaders we surveyed want to know where the organization is going, they want clear and effective messages, and they want to be confident that their leaders will effectively guide them to success.

But what do leaders of very successful organizations say they need that separates them from leaders in organizations that are just successful?

We asked leaders,  
***“How successful has your organization been in meeting its business objectives or organizational goals for the past 5 years?”***

We then looked at the results to better understand what set these organizations apart with respect to the skills, mindset, and support they valued.

**More effective leaders** as well as more and **more effective communication** emerged as consistent themes across all organizations we surveyed. However, what set successful organizations apart from those that are less successful was their emphasis on **strategy**. Without a clear strategy, leaders aren't sure where their leadership is headed. Very successful companies understand that a clear strategy helps them know where they are going, what success looks like, and how they are tracking to their goals. A structured plan helps them understand their strengths and weaknesses, their resources, the competitive landscape, and customer needs. An organization without a clear strategy is like a rudderless ship.

But what does a clear strategy look like in the context of a complex and ever-changing business environment? Clear strategy in a digital context is only clear momentarily before some massive amount of data or a new entrant into a market upends everything the leader had planned. Today's leaders need to:

- Be smart consumers of the data coming their way.
- Be able to filter out the noise and focus on what is most relevant to them.
- Be able to scan the environment and identify trends without being distracted by fads.
- Consider not just traditional competitors, but also nontraditional entrants that are putting a twist on the products and services they've historically delivered.
- Create their strategies knowing that they will likely revise them more regularly than in the past.

While it is undoubtedly frustrating to create a plan only to have it change, it is far better to have a plan and change it regularly than to not have a plan at all. Successful companies understand this.

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# TAKEAWAY

More effective leaders and more frequent communication are key needs, but strategy is a differentiator.

All organizations agreed that more effective leaders and more frequent communication are needs; however, what sets successful companies apart from those that are less successful is their emphasis on having a clear strategy.

Today's leaders need to create a strategy that is flexible enough to accommodate the changing demands dictated by market shifts.

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# Effective Communication Is Just One of the Actions Leaders Prize

We then drilled down to focus more specifically on leadership skills by asking our respondents, ***“What is the most valued LEADERSHIP action you need to be successful?”***

What we found was that leaders prioritized communicating effectively across all levels at the top of the list. Leaders chose communication as the highest priority among the options given. It came as no surprise that coaching and developing team members, developing and executing strategy, and building effective relationships with team members were also highly valued.

Leaders prize the ability to get their teams working well together to produce results. In order to produce those results, they recognize they need for the foundational skills of communication, relationship-building, and coaching. In addition to developing strategy, our leaders most rely on some of the most fundamental of human interactions.

## Most-Valued Leadership Actions Needed Today:

• 1 •

Communicating  
Effectively  
at All Levels

• 2 •

Coaching and  
Developing  
the Team

• 3 •

Developing  
and Executing  
Strategy

• 4 •

Building Effective  
Relationships with  
Team Members

## But how does communication change for leaders against the backdrop of this hyperconnected, digitally enabled data overloaded world?

Communicating effectively at all levels starts with a combination of listening and responding. Listening for today's leader is about more than sitting across the desk from an employee and giving them your full attention—it's about listening at scale. Listening at scale means that, in today's digital age, a leader can hear from hundreds, if not thousands, of people at once without ever being in front of them. They can receive data directly from employees and customers using social media and other outlets to get a real-time pulse on how people are feeling. Leaders need to be smart consumers of the data and filter it appropriately so they hear more than white noise. For today's leader, it's about more than reading the room; it's about reading the larger digitally charged environment.

Communication for today's leader against this backdrop is still also much about providing authentic communication, establishing relationships, and communicating in a way that inspires. Digital social leaders understand the power of sharing—both personally and on behalf of their company. When any leader shares more about themselves, they forge stronger relationships with the people they lead. Today's leaders leverage social platforms to establish one-to-one relationships in ways previously not available in a scalable way. No longer confined to visiting a showroom floor or a store, leaders can now interact with customers in a digital way. Leaders must find ways to share their vision and connect people to that vision. Through both words and imagery, a digital leader has the opportunity to paint a picture of where they want to take their company. They need to simplify that vision and be more transparent in their communication.

Both successful and very successful companies prioritized communicating effectively at all levels and coaching and developing the team.

Successful companies placed a higher priority on driving high team performance. For very successful companies, developing and executing strategy was a differentiator.

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# TAKEAWAY

Communicating, coaching, developing teams, and executing strategy are the most necessary leadership actions.

Communicating remains the most fundamentally necessary and valued leadership action followed by coaching and developing teams and executing strategy. Communicating in today's hyperconnected environment requires a savvier leader—one who understands how to listen and share through technology and in the digital spaces where customers and employees are showing up.

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# If You Want More Effective Leaders, Focus on Developing These Skills

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As leaders in leadership development, we were interested in knowing where to focus our efforts in providing greater learning and development support. We wanted to know if the skills that leaders valued were either the areas they felt competent in or opportunities for growth.

We asked leaders,

***“What leadership development topics could most improve your ability to achieve results for the organization?”***

What we found was that across all levels, leaders want help in the skill areas they most value – **communicating effectively, inspiring high performance, and coaching to improve performance.** Regardless of where they sit in the organization, leaders acknowledge that communication is fundamental to success. Both successful and less successful companies prioritized communication as a learning and development need.

## Why Focus on Communication?

Communication is foundational to all other leadership actions; delegating, leading through change, and influencing cannot happen without a strong base of trust and communication. Helping leaders at all levels communicate well will pay dividends in terms of supporting additional skills. Whether it is a frontline leader communicating team goals or a leader of leaders sharing organizational strategy, communication is king.



**COMMUNICATION** is the most important need of leaders in terms of greater learning and development support.

## Communicate for Results

Communication is a broad term, so understanding what leaders mean by this is important. It makes sense to “unpack” communication and think about the different ways that leaders need help. The leaders we heard from are grappling with communication across a broad spectrum of issues—from the practical to the visionary. For some, learning to communicate discipline or necessary change in a constructive manner is where they said they needed help. Still others struggle with having difficult conversations with employees around personnel issues or finding the right word for the reviews they write. Verbatim comments showed that challenging conversations are a real struggle for leaders trying to direct, and respond to, their employees.

## Communicate to Inspire

At the other end of the spectrum, leaders also look for the right ways to motivate and inspire their teams. They recognize the importance of having consistent messages in order to make sure employees understand where the organization is headed. And they know communicating well and managing messaging and brand are critical.

## Communication Against a Global, Remote, Digital Backdrop

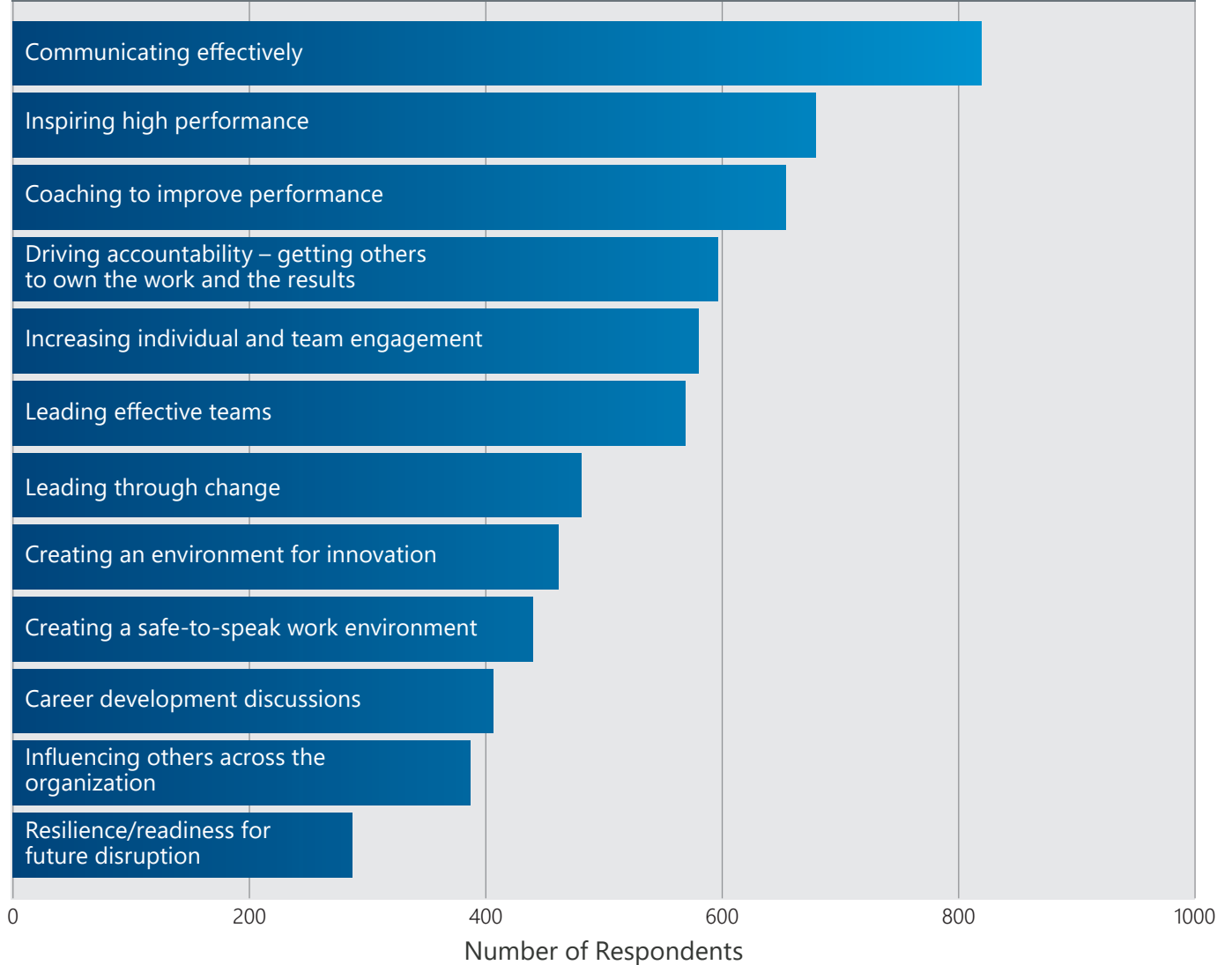
Preparing leaders to communicate against the backdrop of a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) world means factoring in changing workforce demographics such as virtual, global, multicultural, remote, and contracted or contingent workforces. Trust is the building block of strong leader-employee communication, but trust can feel more fragile when leaders and their employees are not face to face or are only temporarily part of the organization.

Likewise, the ability of leaders to sense the impact they are having on the individuals or teams that they are communicating with requires a level of emotional intelligence that can be hard to flex when employees are not in the same place—leaders can’t interpret body language and other clues about how a message is being received. And responding to a communication may not have the immediacy required if your employee doesn’t receive the message until they wake up in their own time zone the next day. Or the opposite may happen if the response happens rapidly via text or instant message, which is fraught with its own communication perils.

Finally, today’s leaders are being bombarded by communication and information through multiple sources simultaneously. Finding the clarity they need to focus on what messages they are receiving and what they are sending back may feel like a luxury. Regardless of the challenges, communicating, in all its formats, is too important to be ignored. Leaders recognize that it is pivotal to their success—they are sending a clear message that they need help, and it’s incumbent upon those that support them to make sure they are heard.



We asked, “What leadership development topics could most improve your ability to achieve results for the organization?”  
Leaders picked their top responses and ranked them by priority.



**Across all levels of the organization, leaders want greater support in the leadership development areas of communicating effectively and coaching to improve performance.**

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# TAKEAWAY

Leaders need the most help developing their communication skills.

Learning and development should align programs for leaders to improve communication skills; those skills must reflect the virtual, global, and remote nature of workforce dynamics. While the building blocks of communication are the same, there are implications for how leaders build trust, listen, and give feedback in light of shifting workplace structures and demographics.

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# Then We Asked Leaders to Put Themselves in Their Employees' Shoes

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We also asked our leaders to put themselves in the shoes of their employees, and consider what they thought motivated their employees and what their employees need from them.

## Leaders Understand Employees Are Motivated by More Than Money

We posed the question,  
***“What do you believe are the primary motivators for your employees?”***

Leaders chose from several options and ranked **personal financial benefit** as the number one motivator. However, financial motivation edged out **meaningful work** by a very small percentage. While our leaders believe a paycheck remains a key motivator of employees, meaningful work is almost equally as important.

### What Leaders Believe Their Employees Are Motivated By:

• 1 •

Personal  
Financial  
Benefit

• 2 •

Meaningful  
Work

• 3 •

Recognition  
for Work  
Well Done

Successful and very successful companies had similar thoughts with respect to what motivates their people, ranking personal financial benefit and meaningful work as the top employee motivators.

However, successful organizations differed in their ranking of creating new things as a primary motivator. On the other hand, very successful organizations ranked professional growth and development high on the list, emphasizing the future and broader career development and growth.

We also asked our leaders to put themselves in the shoes of their employees and consider what they thought their people **need** from them. Half of the leaders surveyed prioritized **clear direction** as a key need with **sufficient resources and tools** not far behind. Others felt **recognition for accomplishments** was a high priority. Leaders feel employees need the fundamentals—to know what they want them to do, to give them the tools to do it, and to recognize them when they are successful.

### What Leaders Say Their Employees Need From Them:

• 1 •

Clear  
Direction

• 2 •

Sufficient  
Resources  
and Tools

• 3 •

Recognition for  
Accomplishment

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# TAKEAWAY

Leaders believe meaningful work and challenging work motivate employees as much as financial benefit.

Leaders believe what their employees need most from them is clear direction, tools, and recognition.

Leaders know that employees are collecting a paycheck, but what they also believe is that meaningful work and challenging work are almost equally important to employees. All leaders believe their employees need clear direction and tools.

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# Leaders Foresee a Trio of Shifts That Will Impact Their Future Leadership

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Our research was conducted not only to help us understand what leaders need right now, but also to determine how they thought they needed to prepare to be future ready. Social media, new technologies, evolving workforce demographics, and artificial intelligence are just some of the trends impacting the world of work. With this backdrop of constant change, how does the role of leadership change and how do leaders keep up?

## Certain Shifts in the Workplace That Will Most Impact Them

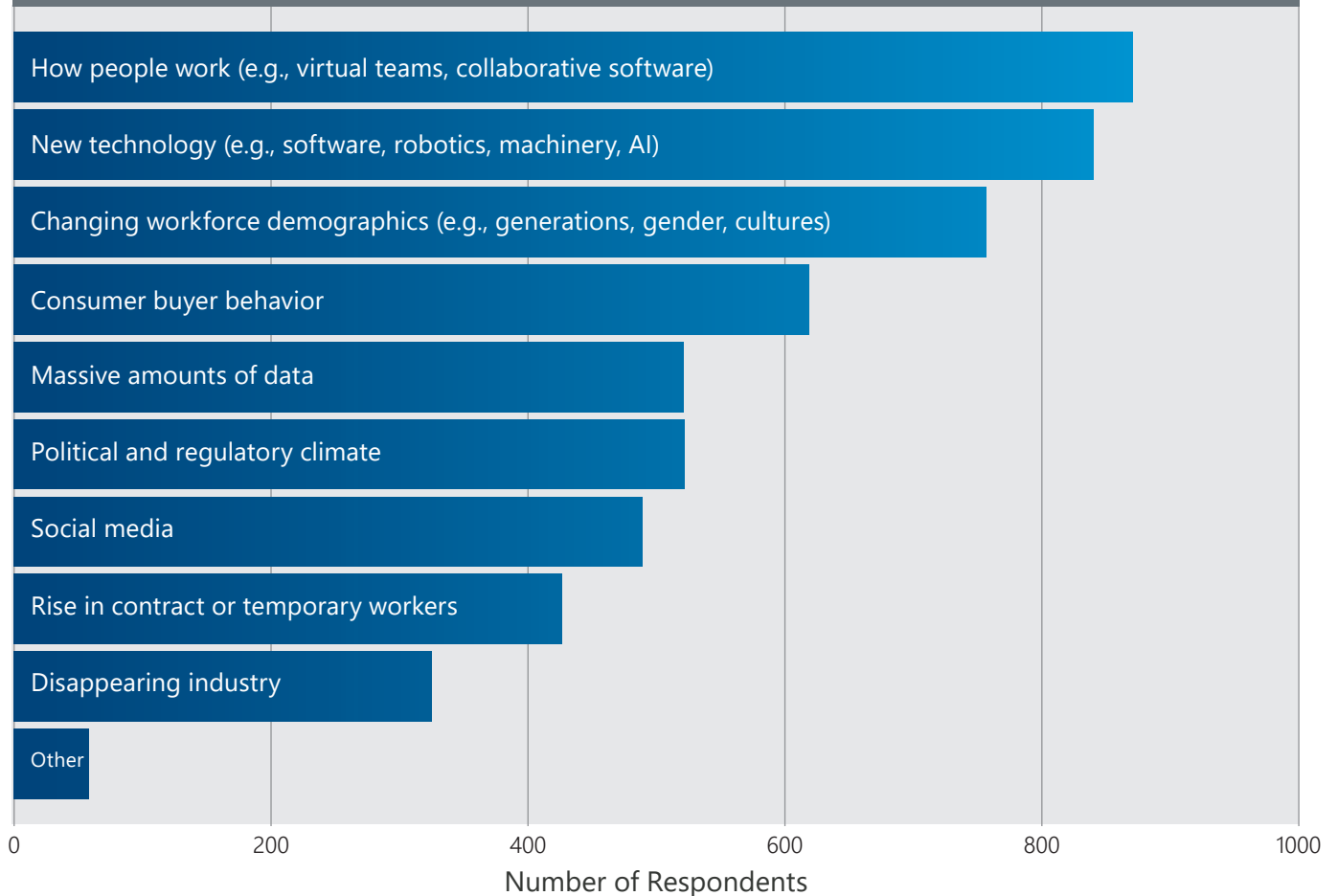
When we asked leaders what workplace shifts will most impact how they lead, they pointed to **how people work** (virtual teams, collaborative software); new technology; and changing workforce demographics. External factors such as massive amounts of data and political and regulatory issues were less frequently chosen. Leaders are taking an internal, people-centric view of the issues they believe will most impact how they lead. The top three issues outweighed all other factors in terms of leader prioritization by almost 2:1.







We asked, “What workplace shifts will most impact how you lead?”  
Leaders picked their top choices and then ranked them by priority.



## Top Workplace Shifts That Will Impact How Leaders Lead:

• 1 •

How  
People  
Work

• 2 •

New  
Technology

• 3 •

Changing  
Workforce  
Demographics

The leaders we surveyed were less concerned with social media or the regulatory climate and were more focused on the things that affect them day to day. We know that leaders are thinking about how to get their teams to collaborate and produce results, so it stands to reason that how people work, particularly in a virtual environment, is a workplace shift they anticipate will impact how they lead. Today’s leader is grappling with demographic changes that continue to influence the makeup of the individuals and teams they need to support. The impact of new technology, such as artificial intelligence, is part of the chatter of change leaders are at least aware of, if not embracing.

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# TAKEAWAY

Leaders believe how people work, new technology, and changing demographics will impact how they lead.

Leaders believe that workplace shifts such as how people work, new technology, and changing demographics will most impact how they lead. Larger political, regulatory, or economic factors were not as frequently chosen as high-priority factors.

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# Knowledge Breeds Success, and So Does a Supportive Culture

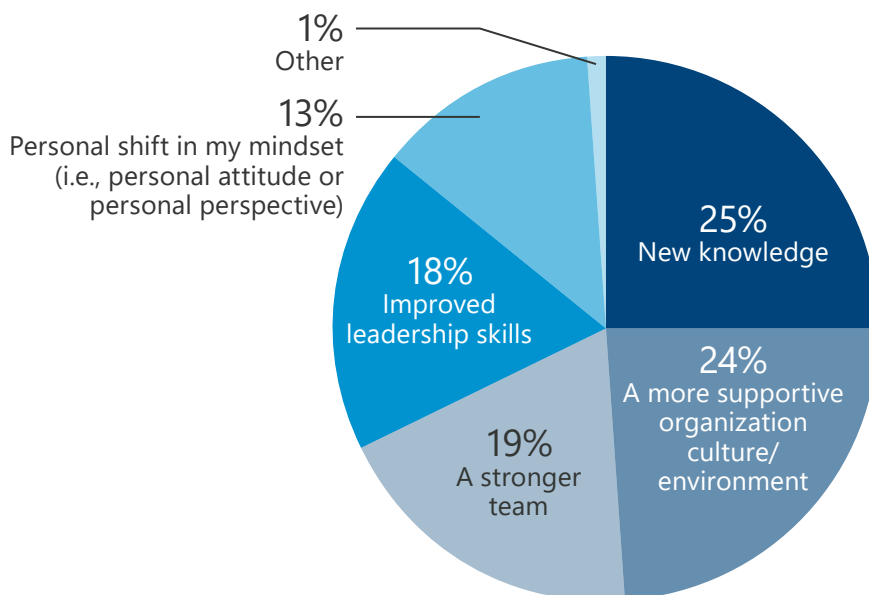
In light of these anticipated shifts, leaders believe that if they were packing a bag for the future, the three most important elements they need are **new knowledge**, a **more supportive organizational culture** or environment, and a **stronger team**. Across all levels, leaders agree on these priorities to help them become “future ready.”

With the rise of the intelligent enterprise, we believe leaders’ prioritization of new knowledge is an acknowledgment of the fact that leaders need to keep up. Product, customer, and industry knowledge are simply “must haves” to stay ahead of the competition. At the same time, it’s the near equal weighting of the supportive culture or environment that also caught our attention in this response. With a supportive culture, the leader’s job to attract, retain, and engage employees becomes infinitely easier. The leaders we surveyed are tuned in to this fact.

But leaders have always needed knowledge in order to be successful. What’s different about the world that heightens this for tomorrow’s leader? Yesterday’s leader could attend a course, get a report, hire a consultant, or perform extensive analysis to get the information or knowledge they needed. Today’s leader doesn’t have to go through those more time- and cost-consuming efforts to gain knowledge or information.



What do you, personally, need to become “future ready”?



Resources like Glassdoor can tell leaders what their employees are thinking. Twitter can provide insight into the public chatter about their company. Social media and online data can help them see what consumers say about their products or services. More so than **access** to new knowledge, we believe tomorrow's leader needs to know how to **process** this information, quickly, so they can use it in leadership decisions and actions. Leaders have access to big data—but being able to interpret, digest, and use that information to make better decisions is key. Tomorrow's leader needs to lead in an agile way.

To ensure future readiness, new knowledge and a supportive team were common priorities among the leaders of successful and very successful organizations. However, successful organizations have a higher weighting to the benefit of a supportive organization. Very successful leaders pointed to improved leadership skills as a key need.

Successful organizations prioritized a supportive organization; whereas, very successful organizations placed a higher priority on improved leadership skills.

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# TAKEAWAY

Leaders are focused on the knowledge they will need in the future.

New knowledge, a supportive environment, and a stronger team are what leaders personally need to be future ready.

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# A Mindset That Is Open and Adaptable

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Leadership skills are important to success.

But leadership is about more than skills.

It's about more than title and level.

Leadership is a state of mind—how an individual thinks about their role and the way they embody a leader's mindset.

And while our leaders didn't use the terms agile or growth mindset, that's exactly the type of attitude they were describing.

We asked leaders,

***"What type of mindset will be most critical for you to be successful as a leader in the future?"***

Adaptability ranked highest on their list followed by openness and discipline.

Type of Mindset a Leader Needs to Be Successful in the Future:

• **1** •

• **2** •

• **3** •

Adaptability

Openness

Discipline



**LEADERS**  
need to have  
a mindset of  
discipline but  
be adaptable  
and open in  
order to be  
successful in  
the future.

We live and work in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. Recognizing the need to be agile, make adjustments, bounce back from change, and be adaptable or resilient is necessary. **Adaptability** combined with **openness** means leaders are not only able to change, they anticipate change and are prepared to adjust to be successful. As the world moves rapidly and technology explodes daily, the way work gets done, adaptability, and openness are foundational.

At the same time, a **disciplined** mindset was not far behind and indicates leaders aren't looking to lead purely through instinct. Adaptability and openness aren't about throwing a thoughtful plan out the window and making rash decisions. Leaders need to have a thoughtful strategy or plan in place and be disciplined about following it. But in choosing adaptability and openness, they are acknowledging that new information and data are coming at them every day. Consumer buying behaviors and new technology shift and evolve. It's smart to have a disciplined mindset, yet not be so wedded to your approach that you can't adjust to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world.

What sets very successful companies apart from the others is the high value they place on discipline. While being flexible, adaptable, and open are important, ultimately, they understand the need to buckle down and be intentional about getting the work done. At the opposite end of the spectrum, unsuccessful companies ranked discipline second to last.





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# TAKEAWAY

Adaptability, openness, and discipline  
are the mindsets for the future.

In light of the increasing frequency of change and disruption, it's smart for leaders to have a mindset of adaptability and openness. At the same time, to get the job done, discipline, empowerment, and accountability must be part of the equation.

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# Leaders Don't Need a New Skillset – They Need to Apply Skills to New Contexts

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Clear and effective communication is not only a need today, but also the most critical leadership skill they need to be successful in the future.

Along with **collaboration** and **coaching**, leaders continued to emphasize **communication** as key today and critical as a skill for the future. With the influx of data marked by this digital era, it's not just what information comes in, but how it's interpreted and communicated that will make the difference. As social media influences consumer habits, being able to synthesize what is heard and use those channels effectively will depend on communication. Remote and virtual work teams require thoughtful communication to ensure work gets done regardless of who is doing it or where they are located. Generational shifts and a millennial workforce that demands regular feedback ensure communication skills will be in demand.

While digital transformation is changing the way business gets done, what leaders need and the skills required for them to be successful remain unchanged. They need to communicate, coach, and collaborate. The context in which they do it is changing, and the tools they can leverage are new. But **leadership** doesn't require an entirely new skillset—it requires foundational skills deployed against the backdrop of a very different business and social environment. And it must factor in new tools that leaders can use to be successful. The skills are the same, but they are set against a very different context, and that is what has the biggest impact on readying tomorrow's leader.

## Top Three Leadership Skills for the Future:

• 1 •

Communication

• 2 •

Collaboration

• 3 •

Coaching

If communication skills are the foundation of a leader's future home, collaboration and coaching create the ground floor. Without a strong foundation of trust and communication, leaders run the risk of directing or deciding instead of collaborating and coaching. Employees will be quick to see this, and despite leaders' good intentions, fail to inspire and empower their teams to the performance they seek.

As we looked at successful and very successful organizations, one notable difference in the data was the higher priority given by very successful organizations to developing high performing teams. Motivating and helping your employees perform is the leader's job. Very successful organizations recognize that it's not enough to look at leadership as a one-to-one effort, but that without the ability to drive a strong team effort, it will be nearly impossible to achieve success.

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# TAKEAWAY

Communication, collaboration, and coaching are critical to future leadership success.

When we asked about skills for the future, leaders prioritized the three C's of Communication, Collaboration, and Coaching.

Above all, leaders across all levels say communication is the most critical leadership skill they need to be successful in the future.

It's clear leaders know they are leading in a VUCA world. They need essential skills of communication, collaboration, and coaching, but these skills are being deployed in a digital context and with the benefit of new technology-based tools.

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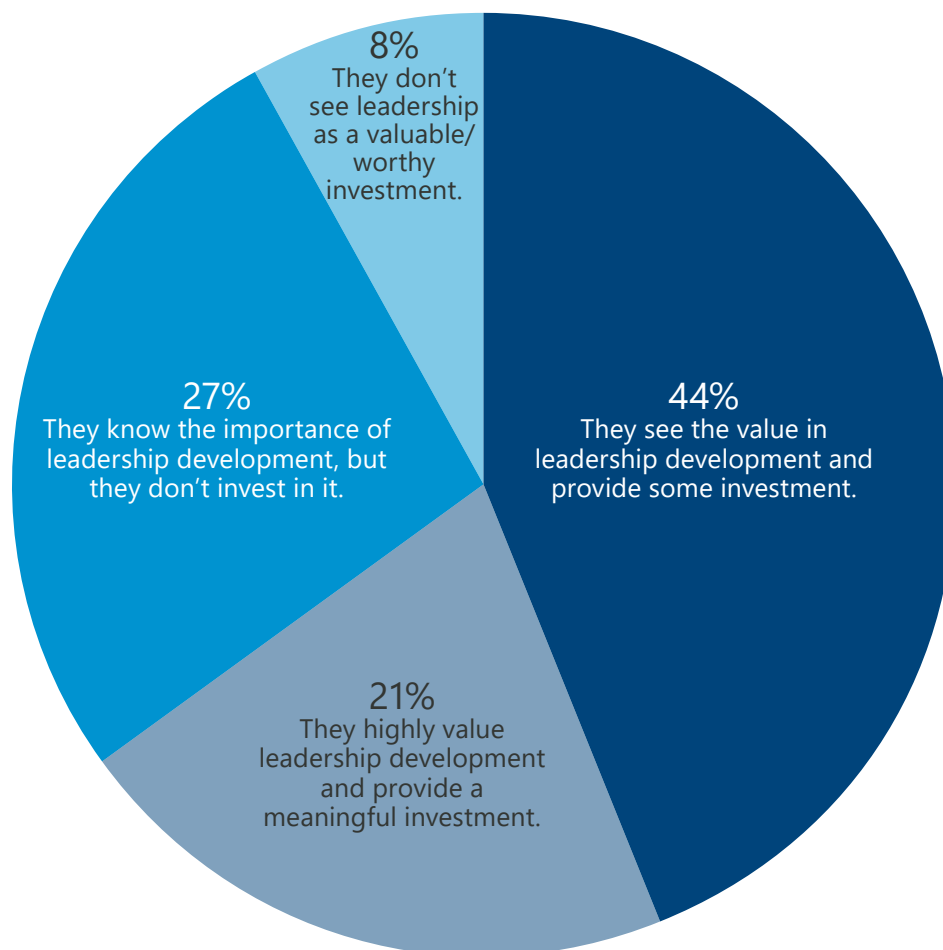
# Leadership Development Is a Valued Organizational Investment

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Finally, we queried our leaders to find out if companies are valuing leadership development and if they are backing up that sentiment with an investment in leadership development experiences. We also wanted to look at the connection between investment and reported organizational success.



How much do you believe your organization values leader development?





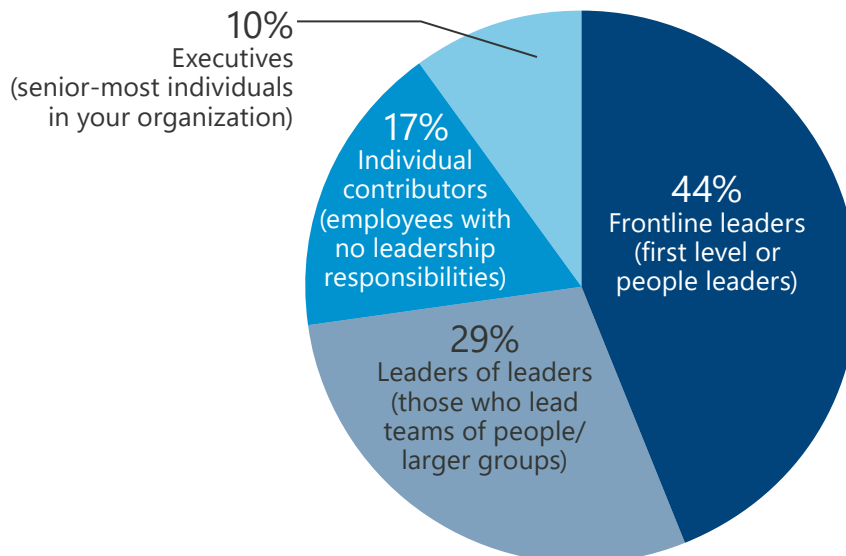
## Research shows that 65% of organizations value or highly value **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT** and make some investment or a meaningful investment.

The value of leadership development is well known in the organizations of the leaders we surveyed. In fact, 44% of leaders indicated their organization sees the value in leadership development and provides some investment. Another 21% say they highly value leadership development and make a meaningful investment. And 27% know the importance but fail to invest in it, and only 8% say their organization doesn't see leadership development as a worthy investment.

When companies do choose to invest in development opportunities, respondents indicated their investment is best spent readying frontline leaders and leaders of leaders. Of respondents, 44% said frontline leaders would benefit from training or professional development opportunities followed by 29% who felt leaders of leaders needed the support. Only 17% felt individual contributors would most benefit, and 10% felt executives needed additional support.



### Who in your organization would benefit from training/professional development in order to best increase business impact?



The level of leadership that could best benefit from an investment in development is frontline leaders at 44%, followed by leaders of leaders at 29%.

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# TAKEAWAY

Leadership development is highly valued and a source of organizational investment.

Sixty-five percent of organizations value or highly value leadership development and make a meaningful investment in it.

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# The More Organizations Invest in Development, the More They Meet Their Goals

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We also learned that organizations are backing up the value they say they provide with dollars.

In fact, 75% of leaders indicated their organization is making at least some investment in leadership development with more than half of those leaders indicating they are making a large or a very large investment.



Three-quarters of organizations are making at least some investment in leadership development, and 39% are making a very large investment.



Of those that provide some investment or a meaningful investment, 38% are reportedly successful in reaching their business goals.

On the flipside, those that don't make an investment in leadership development are reportedly only 19% successful in reaching their business goals.



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# TAKEAWAY

Organizations are investing in leadership development.

Of respondents, 75% are making an investment in leadership development.

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## Where to Invest?

**MENTORING:** Mentorship emerged as the most helpful resource with 31% of leaders indicating mentorship is extremely helpful and 39% indicating it is very helpful.

**COACHING:** When asked about what leadership development opportunities would be most personally helpful, on-the-job coaching, mentorship programs, and funding for continuing education rose to the top of the list. When we combine on-the-job coaching and executive coaching, coaching

as a category emerged as helpful support a leader can be given, with 35% indicating coaching of any kind is extremely helpful and 30% indicating it is very helpful.

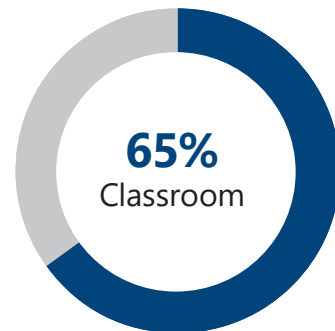
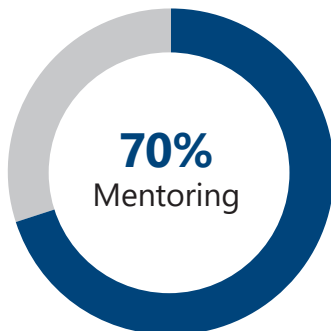
The message from leaders is being received loud and clear; guidance, in the form of a coach or a mentor, is a highly desirable, extremely valuable resource. For all the opportunities leaders have to self-navigate their development, what leaders really value is human interaction and support.

**CLASSROOM:** In addition to the support of a coach or a mentor, classroom training or funding for classroom leadership development continues to be valued by the leaders we surveyed. In fact, 33% indicated funding for continuing education was helpful or extremely helpful. Another 32% felt classroom training was helpful or extremely helpful.

**eLEARNING/SELF-PACED:** Just behind these high-touch, high-contact human interactions were eLearning/online training and self-paced learning as beneficial opportunities.



## Leaders Think the Most Helpful Resource Is More of the Following Developmental Opportunities:



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# TAKEAWAY

Learning and development with human interaction is highly valued.

Leaders want learning and development support that includes human interaction. In-person workshops or training, coaching, and mentoring are the development opportunities leaders say they most need to be successful.

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# Leaders Feel Motivated and Optimistic by Their Roles

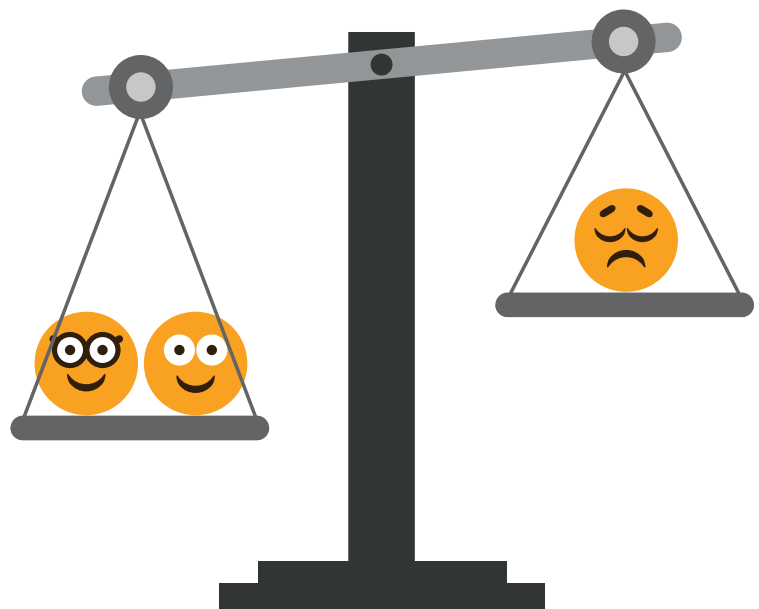
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Our survey asked several questions aimed at getting a comprehensive view of what leaders need today and what they think they will need in the future to be successful. And while we asked about the skills they need, we also wanted to get at something more elusive—what was in their head and their hearts. We asked about important leadership actions, and we asked them about their mindset. But at the risk of moving too far away from the behavioral and the cerebral, we also wanted to know how they were feeling about their role as leaders.

Leaders today feel overwhelmingly positive about their roles as leaders. Despite existing in a fast-paced and highly competitive environment, what we found in our leaders' hearts is a sense of motivation, optimism, excitement, and energy. A staggering 75% of leaders said **motivation** best describes how they feel about being a leader followed by **optimism** 68%, **excitement** 63%, and **energy** 60%.

More negative or ambivalent feelings such as anxious, stressed, tired, and fearful grouped together at the bottom of the list. Positive feelings outnumbered negative feelings by more than 2:1.

**POSITIVE** feelings about leadership outweighed negative feelings by 2:1.



## Here Is What's at the Root of All That Optimism

While this positive outlook encouraged us, we wanted to better understand the source of the optimism and analyzed the responses to further uncover what made leaders most enthusiastic. We posed the question, "As a leader, what opportunities are you most excited about? In other words, what leadership opportunities make you optimistic about the future?" Here's what we learned:

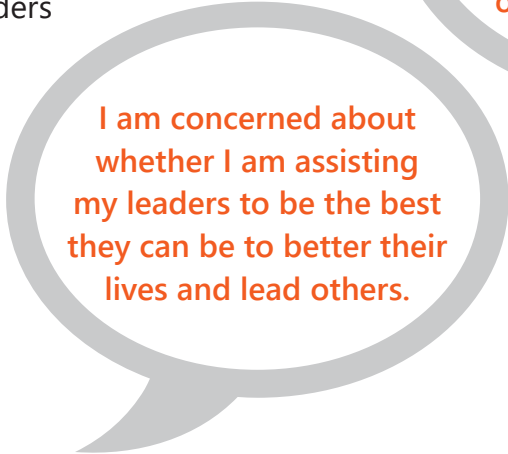
**Technology** and organizational **growth** and expansion were key themes associated with leader optimism. Frequent comments included the following: "I am excited that technology has made it possible to perform job functions in new, innovative, and more efficient ways." "I am excited about our business expanding. There will be more opportunities in the future."

But as leaders in the talent management space, we were perhaps most gratified to see the excitement expressed around employee development. Helping employees **develop** and **grow in their careers** and **supporting a new generation** of young leaders were commonly stated as the source of leader optimism. Leaders care about their role as leaders of people. Answers like, "I am excited about shaping the next team of leaders" and "I am excited about inspiring people and helping people do their best" were reasons our respondents are optimistic about the future.

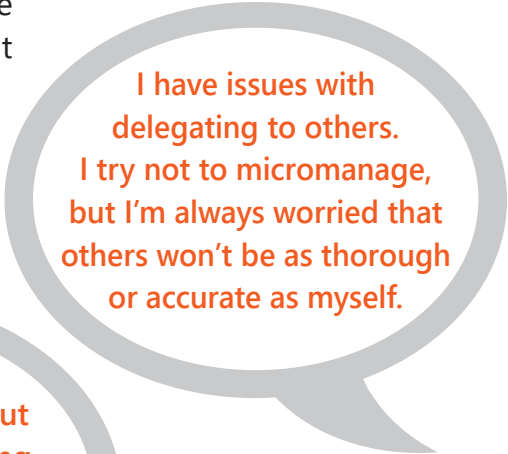
## The Responsibility to Develop Others Keeps Them Awake at Night

At the same time, leaders feel the weight associated with the responsibility of developing others. When we looked at what was keeping leaders up at night, it was again employee development that occupied their thoughts.

**Motivation, morale, retention,** and leading **happy and productive teams** are areas of concern for today's leaders. Leaders want to engage their team members and worry about how to be effective in this area.



I am concerned about whether I am assisting my leaders to be the best they can be to better their lives and lead others.



I have issues with delegating to others. I try not to micromanage, but I'm always worried that others won't be as thorough or accurate as myself.



Making the turn from being a team member to a leader of that team comes with growing pains. Individuals know how to get the work done when that work rests on their shoulders. It's when they need to get the work done through others that they struggle. It's no wonder, then, that getting the team to work together effectively and ensuring they reach their goals are on their minds.

Leaders are also concerned about the development of their employees and feel a responsibility to provide opportunities for growth. It is their greatest source of excitement and the root of their preoccupation. The stakes are high and leaders want to get it right.

While customers, competition, and resource constraints also occupied the mind space of the leaders we surveyed, it is the ability to deal with people issues that both excites, and challenges, leaders.

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# TAKEAWAY

Leaders are overwhelmingly optimistic about their roles.

Leaders are overwhelmingly optimistic about their role as a leader of people, with positive feelings about leaders outweighing negative by over 2:1. Their role leading and developing others is a great source of motivation and optimism. At the same time, they feel a great responsibility in doing right by the people they lead.

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# In Summary, Here's What Leaders Told Us



## What Leaders Need From Their Organizations

While all organizations agreed that more effective leaders and more frequent communication are needed, what sets successful companies apart from those that are less successful is their emphasis on having a clear strategy.



## Valued Leadership Actions Today

Communication remains the most fundamentally necessary and valued **leadership action** followed by coaching and developing teams and developing and executing strategy. An emphasis on strategy differentiates very successful companies.



## Where Learning & Development Can Help

Learning and development should align programs for leaders to improve communication skills, and those skills must reflect the virtual, global, and remote nature of workforce dynamics. While the building blocks of communication are the same, there are implications for how leaders build trust, listen, and give feedback in light of shifting workplace structures and demographics.



## What Employees Need

Leaders believe their employees need clear direction, sufficient resources and tools, and acknowledgment for their accomplishments.



## A Trio of Workplace Shifts

Leaders believe that workplace shifts such as how people work, new technology, and changing demographics will most impact how they lead.



## Requirements to Be Future Ready

New knowledge, a supportive environment, and a stronger team are what leaders personally need to be future ready.



## Mindsets for Tomorrow

In light of the increasing frequency of change and disruption, it's smart for leaders to have a mindset of adaptability or openness. At the same time, to get the job done, discipline, empowerment, and accountability must be part of the equation.





### **Skills for Tomorrow**

When we asked about skills for the future, leaders prioritized the 3 C's of Communication, Collaboration, and Coaching. Above all, 65% of leaders across all levels say communication is the most critical leadership skill they need to be successful in the future.



### **The Value of Leadership Development**

Of organizations, 65% value or highly value leadership development and make a meaningful investment in it. And 44% say frontline leadership would benefit from training or professional development opportunities; 29% said leaders of leaders most needed support.



### **Highest Impact Experiences**

Leaders want learning and development support that requires human interaction. In-person workshops or training, coaching, and mentoring are the development opportunities leaders say they most need to be successful.



### **An Investment in Leadership Development**

Of organizations, 75% make an investment in leadership development, and 38% of organizations provide some investment, or a meaningful investment, in leadership development.



### **An Optimistic View**

Leaders are overwhelmingly optimistic about their role as a leader of people with positive feelings about leaders outweighing negative by over 2:1. Their role leading and developing others is a great source of motivation and positivity. At the same time, they feel a great responsibility in doing right by the people they lead.

Today's leader needs to achieve business objectives through the talent on their team. They know that communicating well, getting people to work together, and supporting their development are the skills that are critical to their success. Tomorrow's leader shares a similar focus and a need for the same skills. However, against the backdrop of evolving technology, changing demographics, and global landscape, the context in which these skills are being used is very different. The fundamentals of leadership haven't changed, but the environment is constantly changing—and that is what has the greatest implications for leadership development.

For more information on this report or insights on Leadership Development, contact us: [info@gpstrategies.com](mailto:info@gpstrategies.com) or 1.888.843.4784

*This report was conducted in the spring of 2018 and is based on responses collected from approximately 1,500 leaders, across multiple industries, from global, international, and national organizations.*

## ABOUT GP STRATEGIES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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