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THE LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE: MOVING TO A TRUST-BASED WORK CULTURE

Anne Lebel joined Capgemini as Group chief human resources officer in July 2020. She has held key leadership and talent management roles across industries, geographies, and cultures. She started her career in consulting prior to moving to human resources where she spent the last 23 years in the pharmaceutical and biotech industry, and then in financial services, first with Allianz, as the global head of human resources for Allianz global corporate and specialty. More recently, Anne served as chief human resources and corporate culture officer for Natixis, the French bank. With over 20 years of experience in human resources, Anne has a strong track record in talent development and change management.

The acceleration of technological innovation combined with the continuous increase in productivity have disrupted corporate cultures and the organization of work. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional management methods and practices were being massively shaken up and revisited as companies started questioning their ways of working, their organizational purpose, and the quality of management interactions. At the same time, employees began demanding more individual growth, flexibility, and impact in their roles.

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply disrupted – in a very short time – the way leaders and employees organize work, behave, and connect within and outside the workplace. At the onset of the pandemic, leaders had to quickly manage the transition to remote work while preserving quality of delivery, productivity, and employee engagement.

In this context, leadership is undergoing a paradigm shift. The role of leaders has become even more critical and has moved to be more human centric, focusing on team dynamics and emotional connection, as well as employees' safety and well-being. In that sense, the pandemic has laid bare the need for stronger and more authentic human leadership.

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As we permanently shift toward hybrid working models, how do we ensure that leaders and managers are equipped to make these new ways of working sustainable for the long term?

We have learned from this long-lasting crisis how crucial human and emotional connections are at work, and how important the role of leaders and managers is. Although many of us can be just as productive in a virtual setting, we have started to feel the weight of the absence of physical connection on employees' morale and well-being; and we have experienced the difficulty of creating a sense of belonging and purpose for new employees recruited virtually. To make hybrid working a sustainable and fulfilling people experience, our understanding of leadership must be redefined.

Build and lead a new trust-based work culture. Great leaders bring people together. One of the ways they do this is through building a strong culture that is aligned with their organizations' values, goals, and purpose. The challenge is how can culture be consistent for all employees no matter if they come together in the office or online?

Today's digital era demands organizations be agile, collaborative, innovative, continuously learning, entrepreneurial, and customer oriented. Leaders must figure out ways to embrace these cultural elements in the new working environment so they can ultimately build a trusted work culture. Effective leadership in a hybrid environment, therefore, requires building trust differently with teams and colleagues. In a virtual environment, trust is developed by empowering team members to take ownership of their ideas and their work and enabling flexibility.

Encourage ownership in employee decision making. At the same time, leaders and managers must empower employees and ensure they are motivated and engaged. Our future of work research showed that 71% of employees prefer more decision-making autonomy.[1] Leaders therefore need to find a balance between encouraging ownership and providing support. They must encourage their teams to experiment, to test and learn, and to take risks. Early findings from our upcoming new leadership skills research found that "having a closed mind towards feedback and divergent viewpoints" is among the top behaviors that employees want leaders to let go of.[2] To that end, leaders should build a culture of feedback where employees feel safe when giving and receiving it, and where they can learn from their leaders and peers.

> "**Effective leadership in a hybrid environment requires building trust differently with teams and colleagues.**"

Lead with empathy and emotional intelligence. Employees seek reassurance and encouragement especially in a time of crisis. Yet, our research on emotional intelligence (EI) found that only 32% of organizations conduct training for middle management on EI.[3] Leaders must be taught EI skills and learn how to model this behavior for their teams. For example, proactively checking in not only on work subjects but personal well-being at regular touchpoints shows the employee that they empathize with their individual situation. Good leadership will also require the ability to create an inclusive team where, regardless of their work location, all employees feel heard and seen. Developing and implementing new and different managerial rituals that work well in a remote environment can be a strong enabler of employee well-being and team cohesion. For example, virtual team-building activities can help to develop trust or digital communities of like-minded employee groups can foster informal connection and create a sense of belonging.

Ensure greater communication and transparency. With remote working, physical and non-verbal cues are often missed so managers must rely heavily on explicit and intentional communication. Therefore, leaders should strive to communicate frequently and transparently. And the good news is that

1 Capgemini Research Institute, "The future of work: from remote to hybrid," December 2020.
2 Capgemini Research Institute, New leadership skills survey, May 2021.
3 Capgemini Research Institute, "Emotional intelligence: The essential skillset for the age of AI," 2020.

the efforts leaders have made in this regard are resonating. According to our early findings from our upcoming new leadership skills research, we found that 63% of employees agree that during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders were constantly communicating online in an effort to imbibe culture across the organization and 50% agreed leaders shared positive messages to maintain employee morale.[4]

Invest in developing agile and authentic leaders. Things will keep changing, so how are we continuously adapting to evolving expectations and situations and coming up with new thinking? With the COVID-19 pandemic, new leadership attributes have arisen, bringing emotional intelligence and care at the core of what is expected from leaders. Leading in a hybrid world demands attention, listening, empathy, purpose, and a strong ability to adjust and balance different leadership attributes. As leaders drive culture, this is a call to clarify expectations towards leadership and further invest in leadership growth, especially through coaching, mentoring, and peer-to-peer learning. And these aspects are critical for leaders at all levels of leadership, from junior managers to C-suite executives. For example, at Capgemini in 2020, we invested significantly in further developing our managers as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We launched a program to train our middle managers on these new managerial practices and behaviors. One year after its initial launch, the program has been implemented in 42 countries with over 10,000 certified managers.

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What we have been through and are still going through has deeply transformed the way we lead, work, and connect with others. Leadership and managerial practices have changed and broadened and the hybrid way of working requires more authentic human leadership.

4 Capgemini Research Institute, New leadership skills survey, May 2021.