

OLD RULES *vs.* NEW RULES *of Leadership Development*

The Nature of Work Has Changed, Have You?

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INTRODUCTION

Change is a big deal now. We've explored the 2017 Top Trends in Human Capital Management in our blog, but what are we keeping up?

Deloitte's research report for HR and OD professionals each year summarizes an ongoing trend in organizational development. 2017's theme was exponential change; the accelerated pace of technology, or the "digital revolution," brings challenges for leaders and organizations alike.

Though humans can quickly adapt to challenges like the digital revolution, business and public policy are slower to adapt. HR plays the role of encouraging business to keep pace with its leaders and empower leaders to adapt. The trends of 2017 focus heavily on the future: how learning and employee experience are impacted by the changing state of the organization and the world.

Since the early 2000s, we've heard the urgent idea that "things are changing and we better get good at it!" Yet evidence does not indicate that we, as leaders, are changing fast enough. HR professionals have a unique, strategic position from which to see and act on many of these future-facing dynamics.

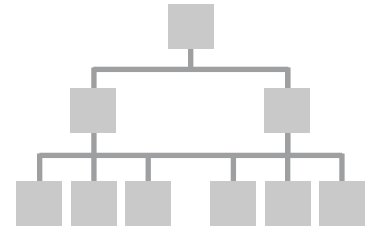
Rather than reacting to these changes, we can take a leadership role by using a systems approach to naming, crafting, and influencing the trajectory of our organizations. In all aspects of our work, our value-add is in being more systemic—instead of episodic and piecemeal—in our solutions. Given the rapidly changing society and organizations we are tasked with leading, let's unpack some of the new and old rules of leadership.



SYSTEMS ARE BEING REDESIGNED FOR NEW TECHNOLOGY AND WAYS OF THINKING

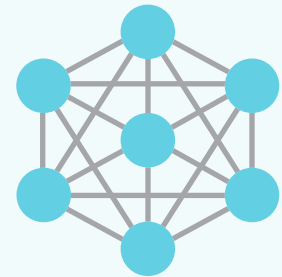
OLD RULE

Old leadership theories looked at the organization as a hierarchical system. The top-down chain of command made each part controllable and predictable. Each link in the chain was expected to follow commands and policies from the top leaders. Overall, the priority was maintaining the system, forcing change to be incremental and slow.



NEW RULE

Now, organizations are attempting to design their systems for adaptation, agility, and self-direction. Decision-making is done where the work happens instead of higher up the chain of command. Change is continuous and often disruptive. The focus is on supporting employees as they adapt and re-design strategies on the fly as conditions change.



So, what does this mean for you? Shift from the antiquated “getting it right” strategy toward growing people around you. Surround leaders with people who are developing and can think and behave with flexibility, adaptability, and high agility to experience more success. Think digitally and understand digitization to allow managers and leaders to adapt to a new workplace.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

- 1. Focus on connectivity across boundaries:** Connect people and ideas while also removing barriers to collaboration and innovation.
- 2. Simplify, simplify, simplify:** Remove the bureaucratic chaff from the system to allow people to get to the valuable work we are paying them to do.
- 3. Push decision-making and control to the people doing the work:** Focus on new systems, processes, and organizational structures that will enable collaboration, productivity, and improved decisions.

LEARNING IS ONGOING AND CONTINUAL

OLD RULE

Previously, the learning process was linear: people went to school and got a degree, then received training specific to their career. Employees found one specialty and based their career around that area of knowledge.



NEW RULE

As we now know, learning and development are continual processes. Skills and knowledge are short-lived and valuable for lesser periods of time. Employees must engage in continuous learning and development reflective of the new demands of their roles. Professionals must develop systems for just-in-time learning available when and where people need it.



So, what does this mean for you? Growing and developing people must occur in near-real time. Learning and development professionals must support continuous learning at all levels, whether digital or face-to-face. Observe what emerging future leaders are doing and create systems that are inherently ‘growth-based’ to ensure what you and other employees need to know is not stuck in the past.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

- 1. Get away from episodic learning events:** The learning retention is poor and without reinforcement it may not be applied on the job.
- 2. Create processes to support ongoing individual and team-level reflection:** Give people time to learn from on-the-job experiences and empower them to do so.
- 3. Focus on true coaching culture:** Coaching is not just a manager’s task, it’s a simple way to grow and improve ourselves.

POTENTIAL HIRES AREN'T JUST LOOKING AT YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION

OLD RULE

Previous leadership and hiring rules dictated that potential employees needed to match their skills to the position. The most important consideration in the hiring process was the work itself. Managers doing the hiring looked for employees that could fill the position's requirements and vetted applicants accordingly.



NEW RULE

The job seekers of today, however, are focused on the culture and actions of leaders within an organization. Social media is a window into the organization, allowing potential employees to decide whether the company is a holistic fit of culture, skills, compensation, development opportunities, and more.



So, what does this mean for you? Understand that every interaction counts. See and utilize managers and other employees as cultural creators and ambassadors. Take advantage of sites such as Glassdoor and other social media opportunities to spread and maintain positive intentions and transparent messaging.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

- 1. Train people to see themselves as cultural ambassadors:** Employees who recognize and own their part in an organization's culture are willing to share their positive impressions with others.
- 2. Design "cradle-to-grave" processes with a consistent look and feel:** Make sure employees are immersed in your culture starting on day one.
- 3. Reward employees who bring in new teammates:** Every team member is a de facto head hunter in today's organization, so recognize when employees spread good culture.

FORMAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS MAKE WAY FOR REGULAR CONVERSATIONS

OLD RULE

Once-a-year reviews and surveys that focus only on fixing problems are a thing of the past. Assessments that focus only on tangible work produced are no longer the most effective and only performance metrics. Old top-down, power over performance management approaches are dying out because the new workforce wants better.



NEW RULE

Today's emerging leaders and employees are looking for a well-rounded, holistic relationship with their employer and team leader that provides growth, development, wellness, and flexibility. Now employees want frequent performance-centric conversations that grow and develop skills, commitment, and confidence. A skilled leader will create a truly collaborative two-way relationship with a colleague that encourages self-reflection and empowerment.



So, what does this mean for you? Keep in mind Daniel Pink's lessons from his book "Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us": people in the modern workplace are motivated by autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Leaders and their staff need to be supported to develop in these three ways to optimize their contribution. This happens through regular performance conversations that "drive" development.

WHAT TO DO
ABOUT IT

- 1. Train leaders at all levels to have regular, meaningful conversations:** Leaders should focus on long-term, career-focused coaching conversations, plus substantive performance-based coaching conversations.
- 2. Evaluate leaders on their coaching conversations:** Look at the frequency and quality of the support and coaching they are giving others as a measure of their leadership skills.
- 3. Redesign feedback mechanisms:** Employees must be able to share their perspective on supervisors and the coaching relationships they have.

LEADERSHIP IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

OLD RULE

Leadership development was once static and traditional. Senior leaders sitting in a classroom setting received instruction that focused little on connections to their day-to-day needs. There was little or no connection to competencies or behaviors that could be assessed to ensure the training was helpful. Risk-taking behaviors were not supported.



NEW RULE

Now, leadership is for each and every employee. Developing a leader early on, before promotions or problems, gives the opportunity for emerging leaders to view their potential with the company. Curriculum should involve digital, virtual, and rapid-change agility; development must be tied to competencies and behaviors that are evidence-based and proven.



So, what does this mean for you? Design development processes and implement them from the cradle to the grave. Give robust feedback, training, coaching, and action learning experiences. Allow leaders to see success and areas for improvement.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

- 1. Train line staff in basic leadership:** These behaviors and skills are important for each employee, not just those who are in current leadership roles.
- 2. Focus on the long-term outlook:** Employees who see they have a future with the company through training and development are more likely to be satisfied and less likely to leave.
- 3. Ensure opportunities are fully representative of an employee's abilities:** Robust 360-degree feedback that allows participants to see successes is just as important as showing areas of improvement.

CONCLUSION

What's important here is that we are in dire need of organizations and leaders to get a lot more creative and not just manage the business, but truly lead in ways that meet the complexity and rapid change we are faced with as a society. Linear, sequential, transactional approaches to leading and managing are simply not sufficient any more. Nor are leadership mindsets focusing exclusively on "getting it right" sufficient. Managers need to shift from maintaining the status quo and fixing problems to anticipating change and steering a course through the proverbial white water rapids of organizational life.

One thing that stands out as a common thread is that leadership is fundamentally about relationships. As we engage in optimizing our organizations for the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world, we need to refine and hone our skills in developing strong, collaborative, trusting relationships through our organizations at all levels. This takes a high degree of self-awareness and emotional skill. Perhaps most challenging is how we support empathetic relationships where we strive for both high quality and productivity while also honoring people's unique life circumstances. After all, we are not robots.

We may soon find much of our work being done by computers, but there is one thing tech cannot do: relate well to humans. This is now our task: developing people and processes to support highly influential, collaborative leaders who, in turn, co-create empowered, developmentally-focused work cultures.

“We don't just need more strong leaders, we need a different brand of leader.”

2017 Deloitte Human Capital Trends: Rewriting the Rules for the Digital Age, Deloitte University Press, 2017

SOURCES

1. 2017 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends: Rewriting the Rules for the Digital Age
2. Creating a Culture of Leadership and Learning: Leveraging Talent Management
3. Pink, Daniel H. Drive: the Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us. Riverhead Books, 2012.

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