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# GiLE Journal of Skills Development

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## Leadership Skills: What's Expected?

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### 1. Problem Statement

As organisations are transitioning into a post-Covid working world, there is a myriad of unanswered questions in many areas of the corporate world (Work Trend Index, 2022). How leaders and the workforce need to be upskilled to lead and work better in that 'new' environment seems to be one of them (Billing et al., 2021).

### 2. What 'New Skills' Do Leaders Need?

In my research, I have found that there is no conclusive data available yet, on whether the skillset of a leader post-pandemic is much different from that of a leader pre-pandemic. When looking at the Microsoft Work Trend Index Annual Report, or an extract from that report (Spataro, 2022), five trends are highlighted that leaders need to understand *to get hybrid right*. Three of them seem interesting in this context: (i) managing employee expectations in a hybrid working world, (ii) the shift in priorities for employees from work towards life, and (iii) how social capital is built differently in a hybrid world. These areas could be indicative of skills in need of development. Ferreira et al. (2021) concluded in their study that 'management', 'communication', and 'technology' are the top three areas of concern to look into for organisations. Ferreira et al.'s (2021) list is a bit of a *Deja-Vu* in my view. Those areas were already among the 'typical suspects' before the pandemic but can now be experienced, as I point out to my clients, through a **magnifying glass effect**: What did not work well before the pandemic will very likely be as, or even more, challenging in a hybrid work environment.

When conference delegates were asked about their memories of what were the challenges in 2019 and earlier, 'management' and 'technology/tools' were among the top themes mentioned. Leaders in a client's organisation, who were asked which areas they would like to develop skills in to improve leadership in a hybrid working world, came back with role definition and role understanding, and how to communicate and stay in touch with a hybrid workforce to maintain or elevate engagement levels. Much of the aforementioned could be summarised under Ferreira et al.'s (2021) headlines: communication, management, technology.

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### 3. In Need of a New Leadership Development Programme

Synthesising all of the above, a 3-4-month leadership development programme was designed to allow leaders to (i) experiment with technology in a safe environment, (ii) try out technology features that they had not yet used, (iii) work with a virtual collaboration platform that would allow engagement in synchronous and asynchronous ways that they had not yet experienced, and (iv) learn from peers while experimenting in the field with new leadership approaches and receive coaching on the way. Those were the main ingredients for this successful and fully remote new leadership development programme. The programme also invited reflections about role definitions and understanding, different leadership styles, their pros and cons, as well as the implications and adaptations necessary when leading a hybrid workforce.

### 4. Conclusion

Hybrid workplace scenarios do require different skills to take *centre position*, but those skills are not necessarily new skills. Seasoned as well as emergent leaders need the right mindset and the ability to adapt to different work environments and workers' needs. An openness to play and experiment is also required by organisations. Growth mindset is a buzzword here. Delany (2021) contributes with his research by emphasising that the three domains (i) Organisation, (ii) Line Manager, and (iii) the Remote Worker, each have dedicated responsibilities and contributions to make to help remote work succeed in the long run. According to Delany (2021), organisations need a "grown-up" approach (p. 7) to the topic of remote and hybrid work, otherwise, people will walk away. Line managers need to act as coaches, mentors, and guardians of the respective work culture, developing a "sixth sense" for when workers are "in flow" or "struggling" (p.5). Finally, remote or hybrid workers need to develop skills to be "decisive, action-oriented, and self-organising, allowing team members and leaders to trust each other with the fulfilment of their respective duties, especially for those new on the job or team" (p.5). This systemic view illustrates the different layers which need analysis and dedicated upskilling. Which skills need upskilling? That question does not have just one answer. Research has started to uncover patterns and trends. Yet, there is a lot more to discover and learn.

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## **Declaration Statements**

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author reports no conflict of interest.

### **Funding**

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Ethics Statement**

No dataset is associated with this article.

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