

ISSUE 01

THE *NEXT* NORMAL

TOPICS FOR LEADERS NAVIGATING THE FUTURE OF WORK

IN THIS ISSUE



Letter from
the Editor



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Teams Can Learn
from Design



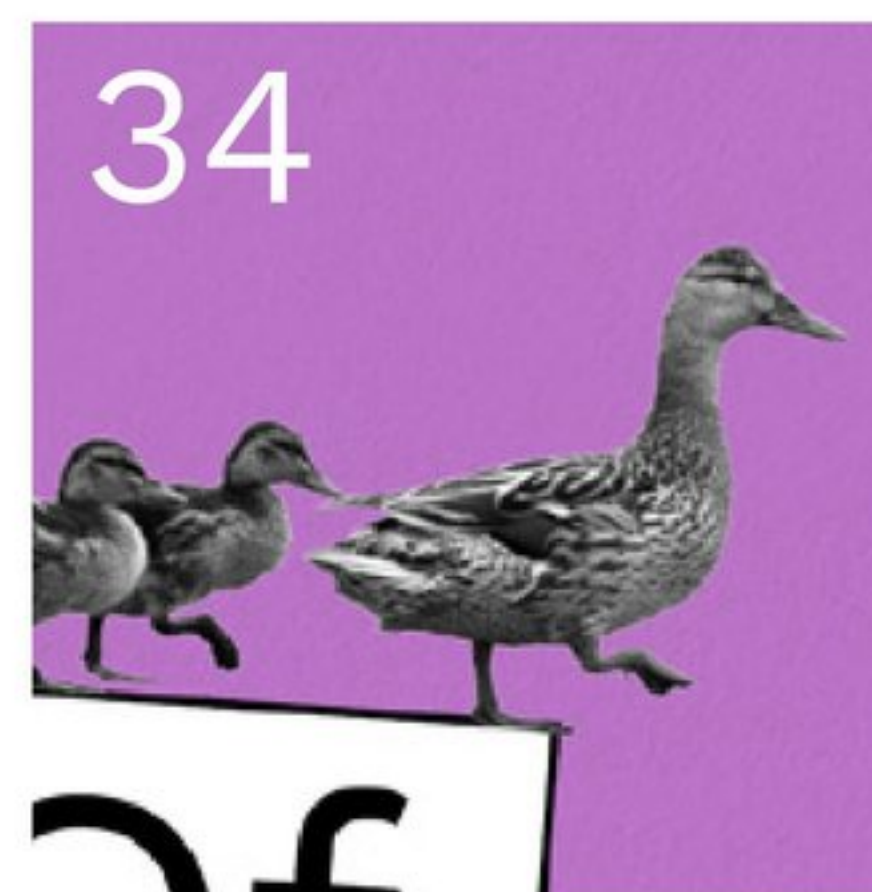
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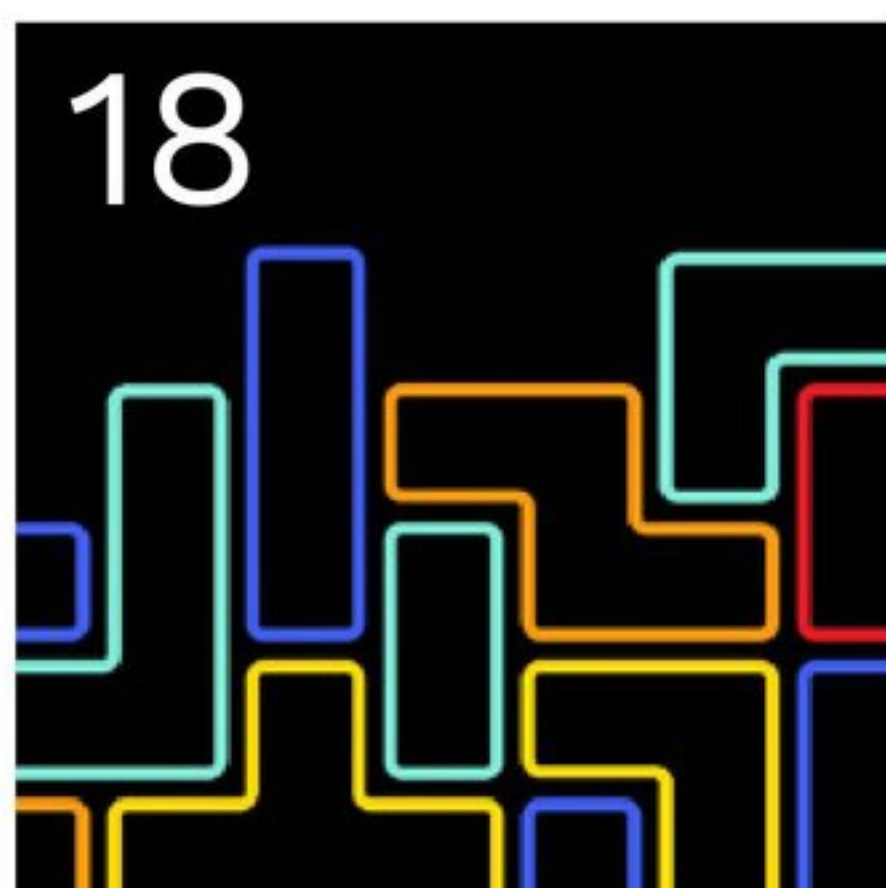
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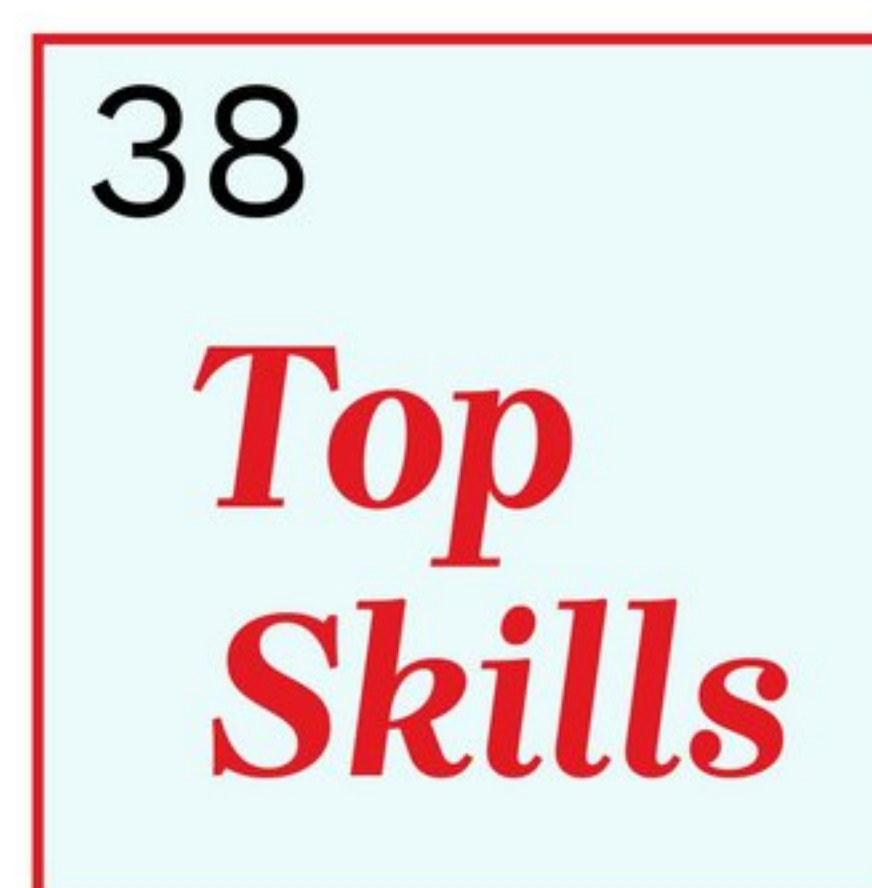
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Why and What's Next



What Type of
Leader Are You?



Winning
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for Product
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Leaders' Advice
for Now & Next

Dear Reader,

First things first, it must be said: we're living through truly surreal and historical times. For the past 18 months, we've powered on at work in a mostly virtual environment — from our couches, dining rooms, or spare offices with loved ones, kids, family members, and pets in tow — a testament to our incredible resilience and adaptability. Work and real-life have intersected — in a really unprecedented way — and we've managed to carry on, and in some ways, become more productive. Remote work has made us more accepting and aware of our humanity — and it is here to stay.

So, consider the present state of work. Nearly every business and industry has been thrown into the future and forced to innovate and collaborate in an entirely virtual environment — years of inherent routines and "rules" have been cast aside, and **everyone** has needed to reset and restart. Remarkably, companies haven't only survived in this climate — some have even thrived. So, while the pandemic truly

has been a test of survival on every level, this challenging time has fortified and innovated us in ways that will continue to propel us forward.

This moment is one of unanticipated celebration as it has fueled the ongoing acceleration of digital transformation for companies around the globe. Before the pandemic, leaders everywhere

began preparing for reskilling, talent recruitment, and future-proofing their business strategies at a "nice to have, should do" pace. Fast-forward to 2021, and we have new issues to contend with. From the return to offices to The Great Resignation to constantly zagging in response to breaking news, global travel updates, and the race to end the biggest pandemic of our lifetime — forget the "new normal." Leaders are far better off asking, "What's next?"

That's why for our first standards board digital magazine, we're not interested in the topic of returning to business as usual. We know there's no going backward, and there's no stability in maintaining any status quo. In this issue, we set out to explore "the **next** normal."

We sought out industry experts from across our standards boards to get their vital perspectives on what the future might hold, from the skills and trends all teams should be equipped with to the old standards of work all leaders ought to leave behind. From the evolving importance of culture and DEI to the changing of team dynamics, emerging new roles, and how to best lead employees through uncertainty across disciplines— we discovered that the future of work and leadership looks bright, no matter what is in store. This year also marks a milestone for General Assembly; it's our tenth anniversary. I can think of no more fitting

way to honor that than by embracing our core mission to help organizations achieve digital transformation through their talent by specializing in today's most in-demand skills at a time when they're needed most. As the world transitions from one normal to the next, GA is committed to helping leaders prepare for the newest wave of change.

From all of us at GA, we hope that the insights in this issue help you and your teams prepare for "the next normal" and the future of work — in all possibilities.

All of my best,



Ella Balagula

SVP, Enterprise at General Assembly



BEYOND BUZZWORDS

The Journey To Make Your Company Data-Driven

The big dilemma: Your company has many data and advanced machine learning systems in place, yet transformation remains elusive. In addition: Creating better customer experiences, streamlining internal operations, or improving go-to-market strategies using data feels like a pipe dream.

How do you change that?

Look no further than your company's culture, an asset greater than the data itself. Gartner predicts that by 2022, 90% of corporate strategies will explicitly mention information as a critical enterprise asset and analytics as an essential competency.

But obtaining buy-in from all senior decision-makers for the same set of business intelligence priorities — and then communicating the value of those initiatives to the wider organization — remains a challenge. And let's not forget engagement. Your employees should be excited about providing valuable input for the best results.



“For most executives, the work data teams do is intangible,” says Global Head of Advanced Analytics, BI, and Automation at Hilton and General Assembly Instructor Steven Longstreet. “But when they understand the potential outcomes and invest in data analytics,

value scales and problems can be solved across the organization.”

Change won’t come overnight, but there are some tangible steps you can take to inspire company-wide change.

GETTING STARTED

Tips for Spearheading Impactful Data Use Across the Organization

1. Establish a Data Analytics Center of Excellence

Hiring people with the right technical and strategic skills is essential, but creating a culture where analytics projects are understood and celebrated — where business leaders come together to cross-functionally support their development — is of equal importance.

Get everyone aligned on the long game. To truly enact change, the entire enterprise needs to develop a data strategy, and change needs to come from

the very top; otherwise, individual data efforts will compete with one another. At large companies that are not historically data-driven, chief digital officers will have to partner with chief financial officers and chief executive officers to invest in analytics and its associated resourcing — a worthy and imperative endeavor, even if it doesn’t increase profits in the short term.

“C-suite leaders can’t view data transformation as a ‘nice to have’ that can be easily discarded,” former Senior Vice President of Research and

Development Technology at NielsenIQ Kevin Lyons says. “That’s the surest way for data transformation to not happen.”

Once there’s buy-in at the highest level, senior leaders should establish a data analytics center of excellence, which includes leaders from major business units in all regions, data, and technology teams. This group ensures alignment for key projects and metrics for success, communication between the right people, and ultimately faster problem-solving. The data analytics center of excellence should meet regularly to discuss mission-critical data priorities and their associated revenue costs, timelines, progress, and blockers. They’ll meet to show proofs of concept, share learnings, and implement proper governance.

“If you’re just getting started, it’s important to think big, but start small — strategically and tactically,” Lyons says. “You have to have a big vision that will transform the company in some significant way and be able to sell it to senior leads, but you also have to show value in three to six months, even if the product isn’t perfect.”

2. Encourage Cross-Functional Collaboration & Skills-Building

Transformation is not an autonomous endeavor — forget about doing it alone.

Analytics can’t survive or thrive if the department operates separately from the rest of a business. Structure teams so they are required to work with different groups for key inputs — and make collaboration a key performance indicator for annual performance reviews to incentivize that behavior.

“Breaking down these barriers will help drive data literacy for the rest of the organization and help everyone understand what it can do,” Longstreet says.

Offer ways to enrich data use and experimentation across teams and departments, encouraging employees to expand their skill sets and stretch into emerging areas. **In the long term, seek to partner data teams with departments they might not otherwise collaborate closely with, such as Creative, Events, or Social Media teams, to come up with innovative new use cases.**

As the company upskills, create formalized career paths into the data organization. Incentivize workers from all levels to be constant learners by utilizing [our corporate programs](#).

“Falling behind in one’s knowledge is for many data scientists their single biggest fear, and things change so quickly that if you don’t really work at it, you’ll find yourself way behind,” Lyons says.

3. Continually Communicate Data Success Stories

On a regular basis, the data team should be empowered to share with the wider organization what they're working on and how it will make a difference. In an ideal world, Longstreet says that data leads or related product teams would share success stories to keep the entire company informed of wins and potential synergies.

"At Hilton, we've invested in hiring people with great communication skills to translate what we do into common business parlance," he says.

Data organizations should be able to effectively communicate wins, both big and small. For example, releasing a feature improvement to your online eCommerce website may seem like a small win, but it could make a notable difference. What's more, investing in data solutions can often result in solutions to problems not yet identified. Inventive leaders can develop the ability to use current data initiatives in innovative, unforeseen ways down the line. Being able to effectively tell these stories widely — and explain tangible outcomes — helps everyone understand the importance of investing in data initiatives.

Being able to effectively tell these stories widely — and explain tangible outcomes — helps everyone understand the importance of investing in data initiatives.

While the promise of data is great, developing a culture of data curiosity and fluency takes time, so be patient. Data leaders should lead by example and promote this shift by listening closely to their teams and employees from many departments.

"We need to listen and let people have a voice," Longstreet says. "I like to hire contrarian people because I don't like to be in meetings where I'm the only one with an opinion. I like to be challenged — that's how we grow."

Embarking on a digital transformation journey is like having one giant dinner party with every department and individual at the table, bringing their specialties and POVs for a rich menu with buy-in, flavor, and a dash of contrast for a transformative culture. **X**



"I like to hire contrarian people because I don't like to be in meetings where I'm the only one with an opinion. I like to be challenged — that's how we grow."

Google Stole the Cookies From the Jar:



Why & What's Next

In January 2020, Google published a blog post announcing that Chrome would phase out support for third-party cookies in the browser within two years, starting with trials on conversion measurement and personalization by the end of 2020.

Of course, that sent marketers everywhere into a state of alarm — and rightfully so since most consumer marketing strategies hinge on the use of third-party cookies.

However, there is good news: Google announced they're delaying the deprecation of third-party cookies until 2023, allowing marketers a collective sigh of relief and more time to create the right alternative ecosystem to optimally reach customers and cultivate their loyalty. The not-so-great news: Marketers may choose to take this time to procrastinate, forgoing key strategic pivots and opportunities — and they shouldn't.

Third-party cookie data, which allows marketers to track users across websites and apps for improved targeting and deeper personalization, has fueled years of performance-driven advertising and marketing strategies. The deprecation will force marketers to substantially shift their media mix, planning, and measurement strategies. Marketers will have to redirect their funds — either embracing walled gardens with Google, Facebook, or Amazon — or, in many cases, reinventing the way they reach customers altogether.

How did this all come about? Well, ultimately, customers want — and deserve — a more personalized experience. Two out of five Americans believe that digital marketers are too aggressive in following them on every device or browser. This means your brand could be alienating 40% of your audience at this very moment, according to a report from Deloitte Digital.

Technology conglomerates have come under fire for allegedly violating antitrust laws and as they seek new business models that force marketers to rely on their full suite of solutions.

“The change is largely happening as an end goal to drive greater privacy on behalf of consumers and the belief that the user experience is not what it should be,” says President and CEO of 4A's Marla Kaplowitz. “We're going back to a contextual experience because we're not going to have the detailed information we had in the past.”

The cookie-less shift will force marketers to get creative in how they collect first-party data from consumers. They'll also have to rely more heavily on second-party publisher data, which is rooted in audience insights marketers want, to understand user behaviors and preferences better.

“Where we're going as an industry is transparency,” CEO of Media Consultancy at Magnolia Media Partners Seth Rogin says. “It levels the playing field for brands and consumers by forcing a consented value exchange.”

So how should marketers prepare for the end of cookies, especially now that they've got the extra time? We spoke to a few marketing experts to find out how they're getting ahead of the change and distilled five key strategies.

One important call-out, **time is of the essence**. These strategies take time to create, perfect, and instill — if implemented correctly, due to testing, refinement, and stakeholder collaboration and approval. In truth, Google's extension is “just enough” time vs. extra. As a result, this extension is less a sigh of relief and more a cause for active celebration — and planning.

5 New & Improved Strategies

Rethink your data collection strategy.

Work smarter, not harder. Bottom line, you don't want to adopt walled garden solutions that will have to aggregate customer data through a centralized first-party system, including purchase history, email addresses, website interaction history, and CRM history.

“If you're not taking serious steps in terms of gathering first-party data, you're going to be in real trouble,” says Former Chief Marketing Officer of Global Brands at Walgreens Boots Alliance Kristof Neirynck. “Your audience might shrink at first, but you'll be able to activate them with a company like Live Ramp, which uses universal IDs that don't contain identifiers and respect user privacy.”

To maintain customer trust, marketers will have to be more thoughtful about how much and what kinds of data they request from customers. All the information you collect must have a purpose and be actionable. You also don't want to ask for too much information; for B2B marketers who gate e-books, requiring users to fill out eight or nine fields is often too laborious and won't compel users to download the content. Put simply: give users a good reason for greater personalization in exchange for a better interactive experience with your brand.

“The opt-in model is already happening in Europe, and it's been working. We also have a responsibility to educate consumers about how we'll use their data for more relevant experiences in plain language,” Kaplowitz says.

Denmark-based nonprofit ThinkDoTank developed a guide to data ethics in 2018, which is widely applicable today and offers a questionnaire for leaders to reconsider data collection processes and utilization practices.

“If you're not taking serious steps in terms of gathering first-party data, you're going to be in real trouble...”

Take stock of your current MarTech stack.

Once you've thought through your data strategy, make sure you have the right tools in place.

"At a minimum, you should have basic website personalization, a customer data platform (CDP) or data management platform (DMP) to store first-party data and build audiences for precision media, and a customer relationship management (CRM) tool for managing customer interactions," Neiryneck says.

Once those tools are in place and you've got a sufficient data set, marketers can "begin behavioral and preference segmenting for deeper website personalization, and then impose frequency capping and media suppression after they've purchased to ensure you're adding value to customers' lives and not bombarding them," he said.

While your retargeting campaigns will suffer without third-party cookies, having richer first-party data and an engine to analyze will help you create better contextual experiences and determine how to improve your website experience. For example, you can track relevant keywords to see which drive the best results or follow users' onsite activity.

When brands optimize these digital experiences, consumers are more likely to respond positively and spend more. According to a report from Accenture, 3 in 5 people are more likely to make a purchase when a retailer recommends options for them based on their past purchases or preferences.

Really make content the king.

In order to get, you must offer customers compelling reasons to give. Find ways to create a value exchange to collect the right customer data — exclusive content can entice users to provide information.

"Your content doesn't need to be a one-way street — you can enable users to play a game, a video, or some other interactive content to ask them for their preferences, for example," Rogin says, "As an industry, we have to be upfront about it.

We all want to be entertained. In the same way that we're willing to pay for a movie ticket and popcorn at the theater for a quality movie, we'd exchange value online if the terms are clearly stated and fair," he says.

Analyzing chatbot conversation history and conducting surveys or focus groups where you provide promotional offers — in exchange for information — can help you gather information at scale.

There's an opportunity to build second-party data relationships, either by dropping a container on the partner's website or by exchanging files, in the same way that credit card companies and airlines collaborate on branded cards for extended miles. Transparency with these second-party relationships and how customers' data is being used is a must. Utilize contextual targeting with publishers and leverage their audience data to scale your reach.

Develop new skills internally, and anticipate innovation.

Have resources set aside for employee education and experimentation with new tech. **You'll want to consider moving critical media buying, optimization, and analytics functions in-house for cost efficiency and consistency in strategy.**

"People with strong data fluency, the ability to craft data-backed brand strategies, and compelling content creation will do well in this new world," Neiryneck says.

According to The Economist Group, 74% of marketing executives believe that marketing faces a major talent shortage — and small wonder: On CM1, only 3% of all assessment-takers are all-rounders — aka, individuals who scored in the top 20% across all five of our marketing topics. Here's where the relevant training comes into play — and how we can help. Our comprehensive [digital marketing and data analytics programs](#) can help leaders prepare teams for what's to come.

Test and learn.

It's a marathon, not a sprint — so have patience. It will take a while to determine tried-and-true content and personalization strategies that resonate with users.

Use this time to be experimental and implement multi-variant testing on your website to see what sticks. Understand that there will be some trial and error, but you've got time to refine before cookies go away completely — use it wisely, as we all know one thing is for certain: time flies.

Ultimately, Rogin sees the end of cookies as a big long-term opportunity for brands to get smart about how they reach consumers and gain their loyalty for life.

"Marketers should be excited because we're all consumers at the end of the day, and we're getting rights of our own again. Brands that show they respect their consumers will be brands that retain those consumers. This isn't a crisis; it's a chance to get it right," Rogin says.

As with many cycles of change, when one thing ends, bigger — and better — things can begin. **X**





「WINNING STRATEGIES」

「FOR」

「PRODUCT MANAGERS」

Have you ever thought of the product managers in your business as being on the CEO track? Well, you should. Product managers are emerging as one of the most critical roles at companies today, making them hugely integral to any business's success.

Thanks to their ability to leverage reams of data and transform it into actionable insight, along with their deft management of stakeholders' needs and tangible outcomes, a product manager's holistic leadership ability is parallel to that of a CEO. In fact, the product manager's skill set is so vital that the role is emerging as the training ground skill for future tech CEOs. In innovative companies, product managers already serve as the mini-CEOs of their products, overseeing multiple inputs and teams while analyzing a variety of datasets to get a product developed.

A 2020 [McKinsey report on reskilling talent](#) found that nearly one-quarter of companies surveyed cite product management-related skills as the greatest gap they need to fill in order to succeed in the future.

From leading new products to implementing new business strategies, a skilled product manager activates a company's data, which can result in better bottom-line outcomes such as improved customer experiences, smoother operations, and new business opportunities.

We spoke to top product executives to understand how the profession is evolving and what foundational strategies help them drive businesses forward in inventive new ways.

1 Determine strong, specific KPIs that reflect the realities of the data.

It takes a team effort across a company to get the most relevant data points. To ensure you're solving the right problems, you'll need to foster alignment with key stakeholders from the start to define unified KPIs.

"There's a temptation to apply universal KPIs to everything that you work on," says Vice President of Product at Boxed Andrea Chesleigh. "In my case, in eCommerce, conversion tends to be a holy grail metric that gets applied almost everywhere. Unfortunately, while that is a north star, it's too broad of a KPI to be a truly effective success criteria by itself."

In other words, it's best to get very specific about what the individual

product feature that you're working on will solve. For instance, if you're building a feature that addresses product discoverability on an eCommerce site, the goal of the feature is to make sure you get the customer to the right product. Here, an actionable KPI is likely Product Detail Page (PDP) views, with the hypothesis that a customer more easily found the product they're interested in and clicked into that product's PDP.

The most pertinent question product leaders should ask their teams is, "Are you solving the right problem, for right now, or are you overbuilding your product and not solving it?" Chesleigh says.

Focusing on strong and specific KPIs can lead to meaningful product decisions—and taking the time to layer in specificity can help product managers reach their objectives efficiently while working seamlessly across an organization.

2 To stay agile, communicate frequently and transparently to keep product development in the right direction.

For product leaders, the need for strong communication and transparency cannot be stressed enough. Too often, under pressure to work quickly, product managers can fall into the trap of getting bogged down by irrelevant data because they aren't able to clearly define what they need — and what they're hoping to achieve — to stakeholders across the organization.

Taking the time to clearly communicate can shave weeks or even months off a project that gets diverted by having to wade through weak or superfluous data. It's one of the areas where experts see the biggest mishaps happen, even among seasoned product management teams.

"At the end of the day, if you don't have alignment or direction for how to utilize data, it's easy to get trapped in political fights about how much data to reference before making decisions," former head of product at Algolia, Louis Lecat says. "It's a mistake to focus too much on data. Remember product management 101:

There's a balance between staying agile and measuring along the way."

For example, say you'll conduct a set number of customer interviews about a specific feature before moving on, or that you'll beta test a new feature for a set number of weeks to get a sufficient sample size, Lecat says. Carefully select which A/B testing variables are most important, and isolate one at a time to determine what's working and what's not.

One way to be clear from the start: Consider drafting, sharing, and updating a comprehensive brief on the problem you're solving, including what benchmarks you'll be referencing or how data will be collected, what the process will be, strong and specific KPIs along the way, and how leveraging the collection might benefit other teams and disciplines for greater collaboration. This can provide a north star for all teams to refer back to as they advance along the project. Plus, transparency creates a common language that everyone can use, helping facilitate stronger communication while managing expectations.

And don't skimp on communication after the project wraps. Encourage your team to make post-launch analysis non-negotiable. While it's easy to forgo this crucial step to prioritize jumping into new projects, sharing learnings can have resounding effects on how agile and efficient your team operates with others long into the future.

3 Make learning and compassion a priority across your product management team.

“There are always new tools and methodologies, so if you want to remain a strong product manager, you have to have a learning mindset and keep your curiosity,” Lecat says. The best product managers stay humble and open to learning new things while encouraging that same sensibility in their teams. They’re also mindful of their own blind spots.

Remain objective, always. When teams are asked to build similar products or come up with several iterations, it’s easy to jump into the work with leading hypotheses. Ask your team to keep you honest by speaking up if bias inadvertently creeps up — and do the same for your team.

With so much evolving technology and more products being developed than ever before, prioritizing accountability and compassion is the key to fostering a high-performing product management team.

Since product managers are being coined as integral leaders within businesses, there is a soft skill that they should always be cognizant of — vulnerability.

“Being a vulnerable leader shouldn’t be new, but it kind of is! I used to never allow my personal life to seep through to work. But, once I started opening up and letting my team see me as a human being, I received really positive feedback,” Chesleigh says.

The role of product management has never been more vital — or more fast-paced — as companies continue to invest heavily in product development. The best product leaders take the time to organize and communicate at every step of the way, from architecting specific KPIs that are clear to the entire organization to relay what’s needed — and why — to stakeholders along the way.

Finally, the product leaders of the future are those who understand that they’re in an industry that is constantly changing and adapting to new technologies at speed. They are the company leaders — and as mentioned, likely future CEOs — who prioritize lifelong learning and empathy for the development of their teams and for the success of their organizations. [x](#)

「The best product leaders take the time to organize and communicate at every step of the way, from architecting specific KPIs that are clear to the entire organization to relay what’s needed — and why — to stakeholders along the way.」



The pandemic demanded a digital fluency that was not just about thriving — it was about surviving. As we all know, it was ruthless to slow-adapting industries and professions.

Pre-pandemic, the remote world was a "nice to have" vs. a "need to know," and in record-speed time, all industries and professionals were forced to not only be remote but remote-proficient. This was especially challenging for industries such as UX design, where the crux of their work and success was largely dependent on in-person research and product-defining relationships with internal stakeholders.

But if we've learned one thing throughout COVID-19, it's that humans are resilient. If design can adapt —and rather brilliantly — many businesses and sectors can, too. Unexpectedly, our remote/digital-centric world has put long-dismissed soft skills like creative problem-solving, curiosity, and vulnerability at the forefront. These skills, coupled with a willingness to immerse in grey areas, are quickly becoming far more vital than any hard technological skill. During the pandemic, consumers relied solely on digital products, so the need for intuitive products was more critical than ever, which leads us to the nuances of UX design. Design teams had to quickly problem-solve to successfully meet the interactive needs of their customers. So, how did they fair?

We spoke with top design leaders on how the last eighteen months of remote work have impacted their day-to-day processes, technologies, and teams. Read on below to learn about some of the innovative and surprising workarounds discovered. These learnings don't just apply to design, but given the industry's specific challenges,

it's a marquee example to highlight. Any digital-focused company can benefit from these workarounds — take them with you as you build future-ready teams.

Communication is radically improving as we adapt to new ways of working.

One thing that changed as a result of the pandemic? Communication — especially while conducting research. For years, a combination of remote and in-person studies was used for user research and gathering feedback, but when the pandemic hit, all in-person studies went away, which became problematic practically overnight — especially for UX design.

"Ethnographic research such as contextual inquiry can be much more challenging when done remotely because you inevitably lose some context," Willy Lai, chief design officer at Hagggleland, says. "In person, you can point to something and literally be on the same page in the same space in the same time zone."

For instance, when Lai worked on QuickBooks financial software at intuit, it was helpful for him to see business owners' processes with physical receipts in the bookkeeping process. When Lai worked on the Milk Music mobile app at Samsung, it was helpful for him to see how users operated music on their mobile devices when they were on the go, whether riding a bicycle, jogging, or driving a car. These are

discoveries that wouldn't have necessarily been captured had the research been virtual. But when the pandemic hit, design teams didn't have an option: they had to adjust and find new ways of communicating to get to the kinds of insights they were used to arriving at in person.

So, what are some of these new and improved ways of working?

Cathy Wang, director at Every Day Brand New Consulting, believes this switch to remote work significantly improved designers' communication skills and their research. Suddenly, designers were forced to be incredibly specific in discovery stages and when receiving feedback on their designs, which has resounding effects for the future of the industry.

"Remote research forces us to be even smarter about how we observe, be more curious and less heads-down in how we approach design," she says. And this applies to industries across the board — specificity and detailed observation are extremely important when delivering remote feedback.

A new crop of collaboration tools is sparking innovations and more creativity.

As the pandemic stretched from weeks to months, designers and collaborative teams discovered and experimented with a dizzying number of new technologies and collaboration tools.

Design teams worked together on cloud-based services such as [Miro boards](#), [InVision](#), and [Mural](#), which allow users to leave feedback, edit, drag, and drop elements in real-time. The long-term benefits of this kind of collaboration continue to reverberate across the industry. All roles that interacted with UX designers also became proficient with the above

cloud-based services, making the universal, proficient use of them a key denominator in seamless cross-functional collaboration.

For instance, archiving work has become easy, far more accessible, and more diligently done than before the pandemic with these tools. "It used to be that you created a physical war room and would have to dismantle it when the project was over," Martin Lange, senior director of Kidney Care™ experience at CVS, says. "Virtual collaboration allows you to have a permanent war room."

Now, teams anywhere can easily see how projects have evolved and take specific learnings and apply them to new initiatives without engaging in any redundant design work. It's also sparking more profound connections and engagement with design tasks. "It allows you to follow a person's thought, rather than a pre-set or linear narrative of questions you had planned," Lange says. "That's been a great success and made the design process more interactive."

We're all developing our "soft skills" to navigate new ways of working.

For teams everywhere, soft skills are emerging as a top priority as they adapt to and invent new methods of collaboration.

At the top of the list? Creative problem-solving. "Taking information from a culture and your environment and being able to develop original ideas for how to make the product better, or ask better questions, will always be needed," says Sang Valte, UX director at Jellyfish. This has always been important, but in a remote world, it is paramount.

A [survey by PwC of more than 1,200 business leaders](#) in 79 countries corroborates Valte's sentiment, with 87% ranking human skills — leadership, empathy, creativity, and curiosity — as the most

Remote Collaboration Tools

VIDEO CONFERENCING PLATFORMS

- ✓ Google Meet
- ✓ Microsoft Teams
- ✓ Zoom

COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS

- ✓ Basecamp
- ✓ Microsoft Teams
- ✓ Slack

DIGITAL ASSET MANAGERS

- ✓ Adobe Experience Manager
- ✓ Aprimo
- ✓ Bynder

PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLATFORMS

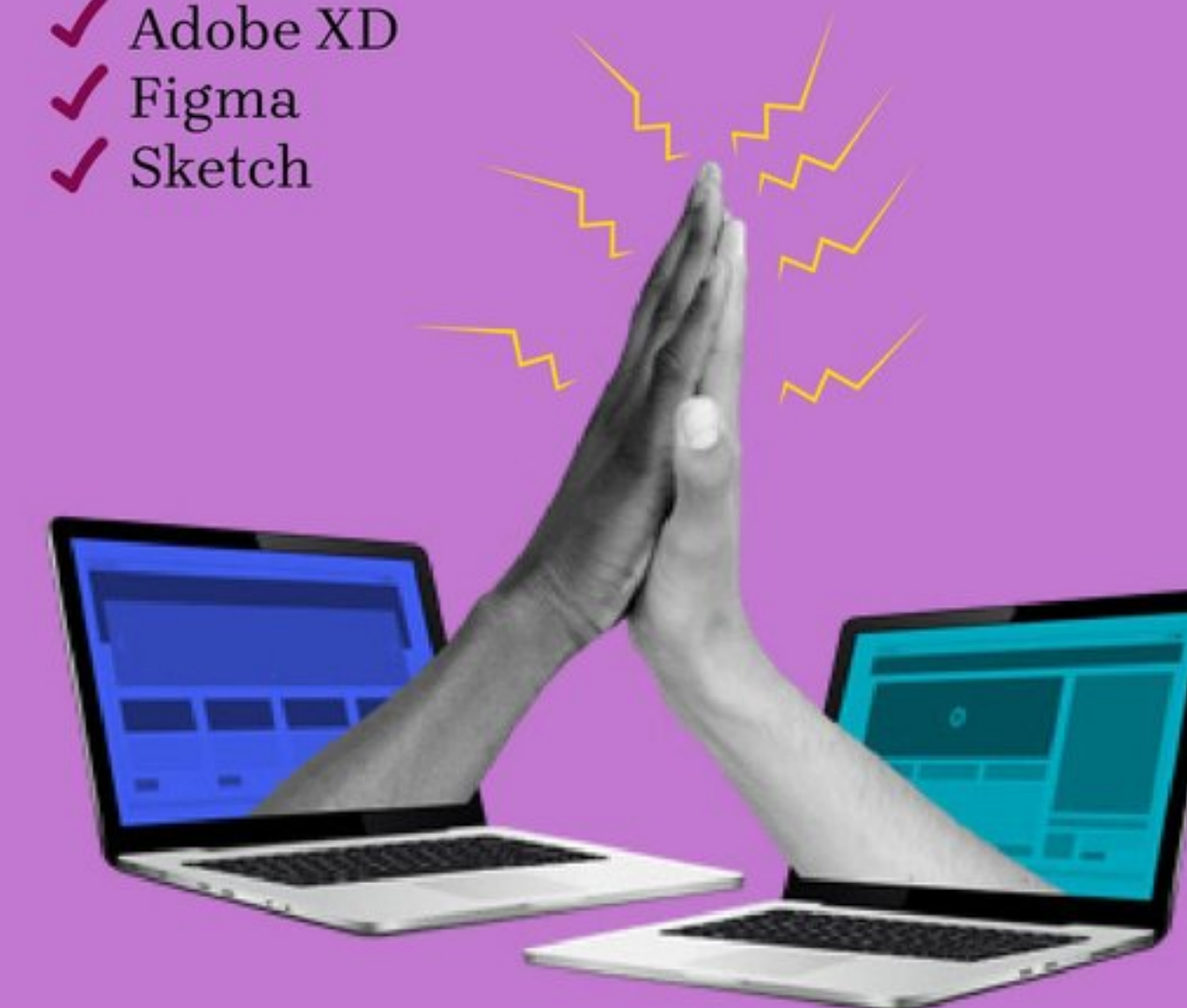
- ✓ Asana
- ✓ Monday
- ✓ Trello

CREATIVE COLLABORATION TOOLS

- ✓ InVision
- ✓ Miro
- ✓ Mural

CREATIVE PROTOTYPING TOOLS

- ✓ Adobe XD
- ✓ Figma
- ✓ Sketch



critical to the future of their organizations. Lange adds that the most successful designers are channeling their curiosity to better understand the macro-level forces at play that affect their work. He predicts the most sought-after designers will be those most curious about the future of their businesses and industries.

"There's a high degree of complexity around us. If you work in healthcare, for example, you have to learn about the HIPAA regulations that will affect the end product, and if you're new to your field, you have to be comfortable asking a lot of questions," Lange says.

While the pandemic continues to pose a challenge for many teams, the silver lining is that many industries are being catapulted into the future with resonant benefits.

New innovations have allowed traditional design teams to work together seamlessly and as never before in far more inclusive ways — a breakthrough moment that speaks to all teams everywhere.

We are all becoming incredibly agile with improved communication, real-time collaboration, greater documentation, and knowledge-sharing than we could have imagined only 18 months ago. The new remote normal is both encouraging and demanding leadership skills like adaptability, specificity, efficiency, and resiliency that will best prepare for the future, no matter what it holds.

"Solving problems is what we do. Resilience is in our DNA," says Sang Valte, UX director at Jellyfish. "I truly feel the world has skipped 10 years ahead." ✕



THE FUTURE & IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSIVE COMPANY CULTURES

While people continue to adapt to fully remote, in-person, or hybrid work, today's leaders have a new, more crucial cultural mandate to create an inclusive and equitable work environment for all employees.

The Great Resignation has more workers leaving their jobs than at any other time in the last 20 years, so a positive, inclusive, and action-oriented company culture is quickly becoming an imperative for employees and employers alike. Yet, employees and leaders are not aligned when it comes to assessing how positive their company culture really is. A recent Accenture study found that 68% of leaders felt they created an empowering team culture, while only 36% of employees agreed with them. Performative sound bites simply aren't enough — and aren't convincing to today's workers. Increasingly, employees are encouraging their employers to

move beyond press releases and pledges to take measurable action on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) commitments — especially after global social justice movements exposed stark inequalities this last year.

Setting tangible benchmarks and being accountable for change is not only the right thing to do; it's now mission-critical for the future of businesses everywhere. In a recent McKinsey study, one-third of companies that improved DEI efforts over the past five years are now financially outperforming their industry peers.

So how can leaders make their company culture — truly — more inclusive than ever? We spoke to leaders from various industries and disciplines to gather their wisdom on how to cultivate a more positive and inclusive culture.

1. DEI approaches truly require holistic change.

Sweeping organizational changes can feel insurmountable, but don't let that stop you from taking small, consistent steps that will go far toward sustainable change. Develop tactical short- and long-term plans, but don't delay actions that can be implemented swiftly and immediately.

For leaders at advertising trade association 4A's, this meant gathering 300 industry leaders for a four-day working session to co-create a blueprint across independent agencies, holding companies, and the industry at large for the next two, five, and 10 years. The manifesto they developed, which is publicly available, covers five core areas: **recruiting, retention, learning and development, reporting and measurement, and building and sustaining** a team.

"Systemic challenges have existed for decades and will take time to dismantle and unlearn to create new approaches and ways of working across all areas," Marla Kaplowitz, president and CEO of the 4A's, says. "Just own it, and stop pretending this is something that changes overnight. The more transparent you are, the better."

For both the long- and short-term, set quantifiable DEI benchmarks, share them widely with the rest of your organization, and hold yourself accountable for making progress. Exemplary DEI benchmarks: achieving 100 percent participation in mandatory training on unconscious bias; ensuring all vendors your company works with are diverse; upgrading technologies with better accessibility for remote workers, and creating training programs

for people to pivot their careers for better internal mobility.

You can also incorporate diversity KPIs and education into everyone's performance plans, so it's tied to annual bonuses, which is what Walgreens Boots Alliance did. "If you want to be successful with DEI, you need to inspire action with incentives," Kristof Neirynck, chief marketing officer of global brands at Walgreens Boots Alliance, says.



2. Implement formalized mentorship and networking programs so that people can connect with colleagues and forge supportive professional relationships.

McKinsey estimates that women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable than men's jobs due to the pandemic, and 39 percent of all jobs held by Black Americans — compared with 34 percent by White Americans — are now threatened by reductions in hours or pay, temporary furloughs, or permanent layoffs. Setting up your talent for success can come in many forms, such as 1:1 career coaching opportunities, adequate mental health resources, employee resource groups, and generous parental leave and paid caregiver support.

Promoting inclusivity at a company often means helping employees connect more meaningfully with colleagues. Peer programs and networking initiatives

help employees grow their professional networks, learn about new roles and opportunities, and expand their skills.

Martin Lange, senior director of Kidney Care™ experience at CVS Health, recommends virtual "lunch clubs" where employees are paired for 30-minutes with other people from across the company, without any agenda beyond getting to know each other.

Tools such as Lunchclub, Cafecito, and FikaTime automatically pair people at random to make scheduling easier and create virtual and inclusive "watercooler" moments that remote workers would otherwise miss out on.

"Systemic challenges have existed for decades and will take time to dismantle and unlearn to create new approaches and ways of working across all areas..."

3. When it comes to developing a culture of belonging, leaders need to act as role models.

Be vulnerable, honest, and committed to learning. *Say this to yourself on repeat.*

"Most people avoid hard questions, strive to be comfortable, and try to ignore racism, but you need to move to a learning zone where you seek to

ask questions, recognize your privileges, and really educate yourself," says Kristof Neirynck, former chief marketing officer of global brands at Walgreens Boots Alliance. That can feel really uncomfortable — or even downright counterintuitive.

At No7, a Walgreens brand, employees attend mandatory meetings with guests from outside the company to discuss a range of social issues, such as how to be a better ally, bystander intervention strategies, and recognizing and addressing microaggressions.

“I don’t always get cultural nuances right, but I admit that and am committed to learning. I feel it’s important to show that vulnerability as a leader,” Neirynd says.

It shouldn’t fall on the shoulders of employees of color to advocate for themselves, which is why hiring outside

4. Create an environment that invites respectful discussions and diverse engagement approaches.

“Candor with compassion works, as opposed to candor without empathy, which never works,” says Kevin Lyons, a data science and technology executive. “Empathize with people’s problems and really make them your own. People can pick up on inauthenticity.”

Find unique ways to make people feel comfortable sharing their opinions in meetings, so it’s not just the loudest voices in the room that have the floor. Steven Longstreet, global head of advanced analytics, BI, and automation at Hilton, says his team has experimented with [Meetings Done Right](#) Inclusion cards ensuring everyone has a voice. These cards are designed with distributed teams in mind and help facilitate more productive meetings by assigning everyone a participatory role in a discussion.

DEI experts to lead trainings is key. “Shattering the glass ceiling is extra work that I shouldn’t have to do,” says Cathy Wang, design director of Every Brand New Day Consulting.

Holding everyone to equal standards at work is crucial to advancing DEI principles. Being aware when employees are taking on additional responsibilities should be properly recognized — especially when this work is to make things more equal.

At the same time, leaders should be cognizant of cultural differences when it comes to eliciting team members’ opinions and feedback. “I am from northeast India. In my culture, we’re taught that expressing your mind directly is not celebrated, but in other cultures, it is,” Sang Valte, UX director at Jellyfish, says. “Similarly, Japanese culture is very hierarchical; you don’t speak your mind in a meeting with senior leaders, but you might when you’re out for drinks after, so leaders have to be aware of these cultural differences.”

Paying attention to your own expectation biases of how and when team members engage is key — it’s important to foster a safe space for respectful discussions, where diverse communications styles are welcome.

5. Make DEI a deliberate part of your overall processes.

The population has become increasingly heterogeneous, [according to Deloitte](#): Millennials, now representing 30 percent of the population, are the most diverse generational cohort in U.S. history, with roughly 44 percent consisting of ethnic and racial minorities. Tasks that include design, UX, and product development need to serve all people of varying disabilities and gender identities as well, and the only way to do that is to incorporate diverse perspectives from a range of people and experiences.

“When you think about design, creativity, and innovation, you stand to greatly benefit when you have a diverse team of people from different backgrounds because it leads to out-of-the-box thinking,” says Willy Lai, chief design officer at Hagggleland.

Customer research, for instance, now needs to capture a much broader set of perspectives than ever before. “You always have to ask yourself, ‘Who am I solving for, and what are their pain points?’” says Andrea Chesleigh, VP of product at Boxed.

For Neirynd’s organization, and specifically for No7 and the other beauty brands, inclusivity in the product process meant creating a formalized “Skin School” series, where beauty advisors are taught extensively about the different needs between skin tones and how to properly apply makeup in ways that accentuate everyone’s best — and diverse — features. They also audited the brand’s advertising for the diversity of people in images and have clear targets for how they want to improve. It’s a nonstarter: “Your brand has to represent the diverse consumers that you serve,” Neirynd says.

Creating a strong company culture of inclusivity that sticks is no small feat — the lack of in-person cues like body language, etc., does not make inclusive conversations any more comfortable or easier, so mindsets must shift. Inclusivity is a company-wide effort that requires deep introspection and holistic changes of perspectives and processes.

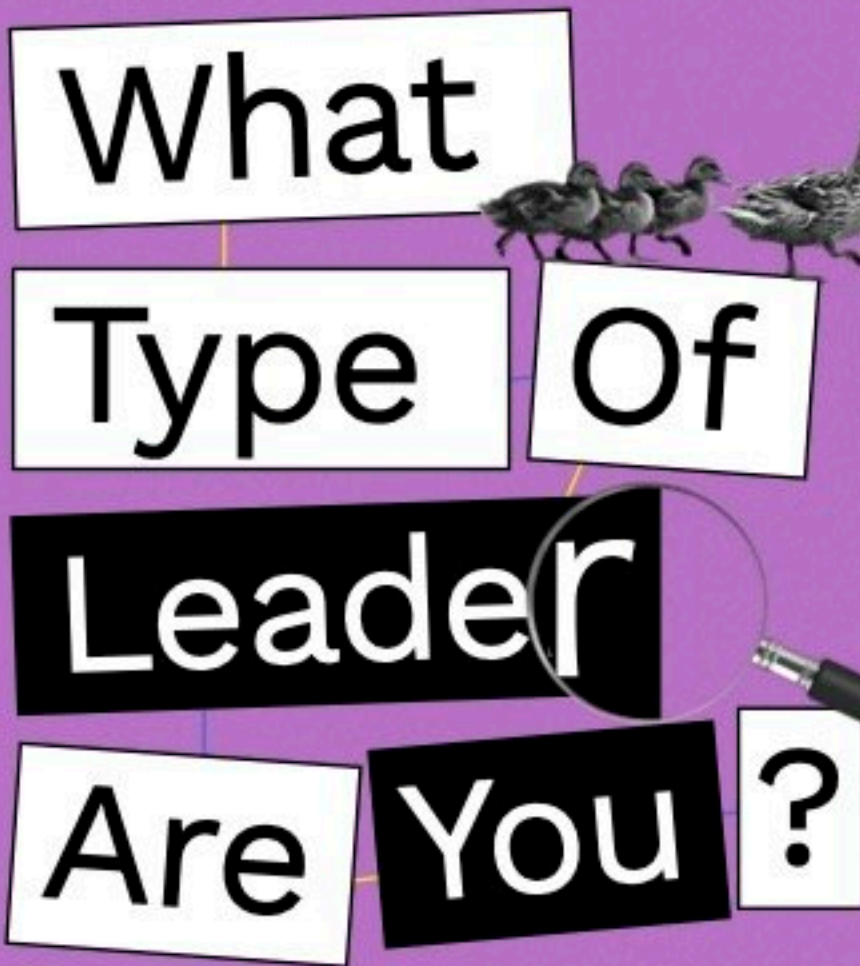
By setting short and long-term goals, taking incremental steps, and measuring your success along the way,

leaders can ensure equal development and advancement opportunities for employees of all levels.

It takes more than a village — it takes a unified, collaborative, and global community willing to level set and reset the status quo of inclusive practices in the world of work.

That is authentic — and sustainable — DEI progress. ✕

What Type Of Leader Are You?



It's estimated that by 2025, 50% of all employees will need **reskilling** in areas that are core to their job. Learning more about your leadership style can help you assess how to best move your team forward into the future.

The following questions imagine various scenarios where upskilling or reskilling might propel a team to success. Answer each question based on personal behavior.

1/5

Your company announces that it will adopt a new specialization, and your team will be working on it. How do you react?

- You've already cleared the schedule for two weeks of targeted team training and have canceled unrelated cross-team meetings.
- You ask the team to follow the specialization thought leaders on social media and develop a few "What If" scenarios to get your team thinking.
- You feel this is a good time to revert to basics. You pull together a core skills training session to build a strong foundation.
- You read the subject line of the announcement email, but you're too busy to read! You and your team will figure it out once it affects you.

2/5

You have a new superstar hire with an impeccable background. What's your onboarding approach?

- You've already reserved a conference room for a week-long onboarding. The team will meet the hire when she knows the remits of the role, her responsibilities, and how everything works.
- You have the hire present cutting-edge strategies, approaches, services, and on-the-pulse trends. You ask, "How do we move the needle?" and host a team-wide brainstorm.
- You already know she's great — she completed her pre-hire exercise with skillful mastery. Still, you set her up with training on the core skills she'll need.
- Throw her on an assignment — you're too busy to hand-hold, and she'll figure it out! The quicker she gets to work, the quicker she'll learn — and make the company money!

3/5

Yikes. Someone on your team made a big error, and your boss is worried they have a competence problem. How do you react?

- You can't set up a block of training fast enough. You remind your employee that it's always best to brush up on things before diving in.
- You send your employee a list of social media accounts, industry trades, relevant articles, and icons to follow. You believe you have to be immersed in the public knowledge of your field to move it forward.
- Back to basics, stat. You pull together a series of readings, workshops, and exercises based on mastering the core skills at hand.
- Everyone makes mistakes. Judging from how your boss reacted, you're confident this employee learned a valuable lesson. Stumbles are the greatest teachers of all.

4/5

A new project is in, and no one on the team has enough experience to tackle it confidently. What do you do?

- Request a formal training and/or put it together yourself, drawing on internal and external resources. You don't want anyone to work on it until they fully understand.
- You can hardly contain your excitement — you've already added a new skill to your LinkedIn profile. You and your team are fervently exploring and sharing links to relevant tweets and IG accounts.
- You spend a day researching foundational texts and discussions to assess the skill needed on the team. It also couldn't hurt to brush up on another team communication training.
- You tell your team to dive into the project and feel their way through it. You know issues will come up, but say, "Just figure it out," as you head to your next meeting.

5/5

An employee asks for your advice in pursuing a certificate in an emerging and niche area. How do you react?

- You're ecstatic!* You love it when your team takes the initiative to learn. You advise them to do proper research to verify the niche area has a future.
- "Phew!"* — you have a thought-leader in-house. You encourage the employee to pursue it without hesitation and ask that they present their learnings on a biweekly basis.
- Trepidation:* You advise the employee that there are stronger certificates they could pursue that will pay off or strengthen their current skill set. Learning new things is good, but basic skills are **best**.
- Annoyance:* Is your employee not busy enough?! You tell them to go for it if they insist, but you wish they'd focus more on immediate work.

The moment has arrived — what type of leader are you?

Tally up your score to find the corresponding leadership persona that reflects your upskilling and future-proofing approach.

Every type of leader displayed has inherent strengths and weaknesses with room to know and grow — or slow down and assess. We always encourage you to keep your eyes on the sustainable trends that are here to stay, like **data, foundational programming languages**, and overall **best digital marketing and UX practices** that have proven global results.

Mostly A's

Total Team Transformer

More training is your motto. If a new initiative comes along, you are already programming a slate of onboardings to get everyone versed. You are a stickler for efficiency and preparation — you don't want anyone to waste an unnecessary minute struggling to figure something out that they could already know. Bottom line, your team needs skills, knowledge, and unwavering love for continuing education. You're wary of emerging trends until there's enough information for deep and thorough training, but you're up for any challenge.

Bottom Line: You are future-proofing by being a total team transformer; however, less rigidity will help your team better adjust to unexpected pivots.

Mostly Bs

Trend-Obsessed Team Lead

You read every industry trade, follow every thought leader, and constantly send new updates. You hold meetings where you talk about NFTs, blockchain, cryptocurrency, the metaverse, and TikTok. You're already onto the next thing, and you want your team to be, too. How? You're following emerging hashtags, new software launches, Elon Musk's social media channels...

Bottom Line: You are already future-proofing without prompt, but building a more measured approach encourages sustainable results and team output.

Mostly Cs

Classical Coach

At your core, you believe in the fundamentals. Technologies change, fads come and go; the next new things do not make you jump. From foundational communications approaches to classic strategic frameworks and core tech skills, you firmly believe that your team is ready for everything if they deeply know the basics. You prefer proven methods and are likely to reference case studies from HBR, quotes from business titans, and passages from classical philosophers for motivation.

Bottom Line: You are future-proofing by reinforcing critical foundational skills that will always translate. Being more accepting of innovation and change will allow your team to reach critical business goals faster.

Mostly D's

On-The-Fly Operator

As a leader, you subscribe to the learn-as-you-go philosophy; if a skill needs to be learned, your team will hit the ground running. You believe in working smarter, not harder — you don't want to exert any unnecessary energy unless you're 100% certain that the knowledge will be used. "Figure it out" is your motto because you believe doing is the best way of learning. You lead with a spontaneous, entrepreneurial spirit.

Bottom Line: You're future-proofing your team by teaching them flexibility and the fine art of reactionary pivots — however, planning and structure will go a long way toward outcomes.

LEADERS' ADVICE *for Now & Next*

The world has quickly changed and will continue to shift, so all leaders need to focus on both hard and soft skills for holistic, sustainable success. We asked a handful of our standards board members, leaders in their fields, to reflect on the last 10 years of innovation while preparing for the next.

“The first thing that comes to mind is data data data and math math math because it's the starting point to understanding your customers, marketing, and business economics. The ability to ingest data, extra insights, and identify opportunities on behalf of the customer is foundational to building a career in marketing.”

Meg Sloan
Chief Marketing Officer, One

“Look at core skills. I think about UX design space as a composition of a lot of specialty skills — user research, content, interaction design, visual design, prototyping. Look at the composition that reflects skill sets and match those to the business needs. Where we fall short is where we focus on hiring.”

Willy Lai
Chief Design Officer, Haggelund

“People should be investing in skills that help to ensure that AI and Data Science projects can be successfully implemented in production, providing value in a measurable way. They need to be able to correctly and efficiently translate business needs into technical and analytical requirements, and they must better understand how to operationalize the outcomes of their analyses in a production environment.”

Kevin Lyons
Former Senior Vice President of Technology, NielsonIQ

Top Hard Skills

- MACHINE LEARNING & AI
- AGILE METHODOLOGIES
- SQL
- PYTHON
- CLOUD
- HTML & CSS
- DATA-DRIVEN MARKETING
- PROTOTYPING

“The pandemic moved us 10 years forward, but things will only accelerate. As a business, you need to lean into hot skills: data, MarTech, segmentation, analytics, and content skills.”

Kristof Neirynck
Chief Marketing Officer of Global Brands, No7 Beauty Company & Healthcare Futures

Top Soft Skills

- 1. BUILDING DIVERSE TEAMS
- 2. CUSTOMER-CENTRICITY
- 3. DATA-DRIVEN MINDSET
- 4. GROWTH/LEARNING MINDSET
- 5. SELF MANAGEMENT
- 6. COMMUNICATION
- 7. EMPATHY
- 8. RESILIENCY

“Things are changing fast – leaders have to be interested in continual learning for themselves and their teams.”

Seth Rogin
CEO of Media Consultancy, Magnolia Media Partners

“Resiliency is always going to be key — things are not slowing down. We need leaders who can deal with the crises in a very fast-paced way, who are really decisive, curious, and staying ahead of what's next. Also, people who are going to put DEI at the center, and put people first.”

Marla Kaplowitz
CEO, 4A's

“The number one skill is to constantly learn and question yourself. Don't rest on what you've learned. If you want to be a good PM and remain a good PM, you need to stay ahead by having a learning mindset and curiosity.”

Louis Lecat
Former Head of Product, Agolia

“It is critical to be able to simplify context, make quick decisions based on data, and be able to change courses quickly when new information arises. Everyone needs to have a fundamental understanding of how technology shapes our world today while not forgetting the human irrationalities in decision-making (e.g., behavioral economics).”

Martin Lange
Senior Director, Kidney Care™ Experience, CVS

“There are still important things only humans can do — like empathy, forming perceptions, and building relationships. It's more about shifting skills to shape experiences with an emotional touch.”

Cathy Wang
Director, Every Day Brand New Consulting

A *SPECIAL* THANKS

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