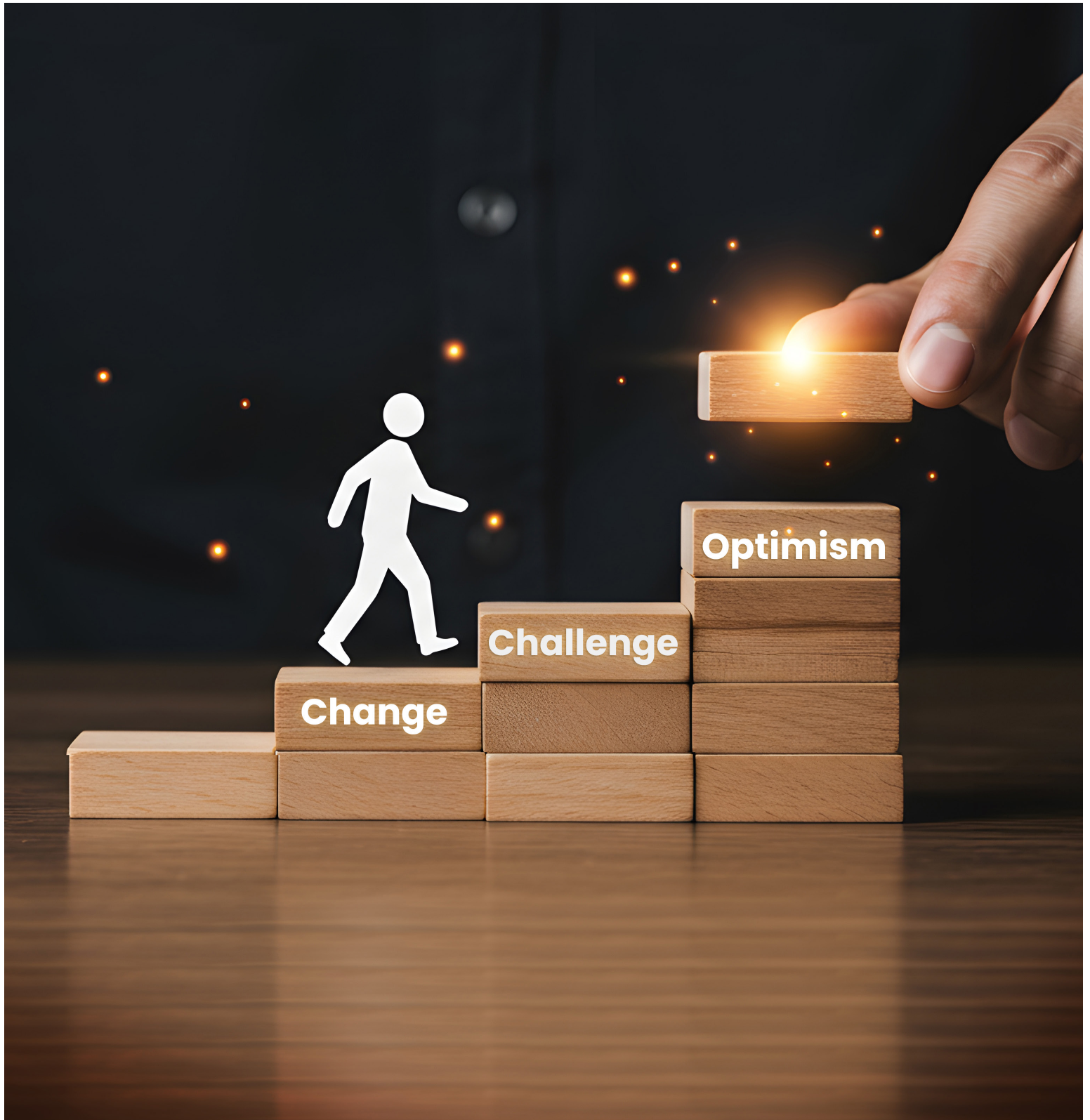




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Editorial

Welcome!

The Fall 2025 Edition of Phoenix Scholar delves into the pressing theme of “Developing Dynamic Workforce Talent from Within,” emphasizing the critical need for organizations to nurture their internal talent.

While employees demonstrate a keen desire for career advancement and skill development, a substantial disconnect persists between what employers offer and how employees perceive these opportunities. Notably, although 62% of employers claim to provide avenues for internal mobility, only 36% of workers share this view, revealing a concerning gap in communication and expectations.

In light of this, the articles featured in this edition examine this vital theme. Readers will encounter innovative practices, theoretical frameworks, and research findings designed to enhance workforce development. Among the topics explored are strategies for clarifying growth opportunities, the significance of continuous skill enhancement, and the implementation of mentorship programs. Additionally, contributions that analyze leadership, education, and even healthcare within the context of workforce development are included. I trust you will find valuable, actionable insights that can effectively address talent stagnation, foster employee optimism, and cultivate an environment of continuous learning within organizations. In conclusion, employees who perceive management as genuinely invested in their well-being as whole individuals, rather than simply viewing them in the context of their job functions, tend to exhibit higher levels of productivity, job satisfaction,

and overall fulfillment in their roles. This holistic approach to employee engagement not only enhances individual performance but also contributes positively to organizational outcomes.

Sincerely,

Mark L. McCaslin

Mark McCaslin, Ph.D.

Editor-in-Chief

Center for Leadership and Entrepreneurial Research





Empowering Self-Concepts for Self-Leadership: Developing Dynamic Workforce Talent from Within

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“It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change.”

Leon C. Megginson

When the quarterly engagement survey results were published as a “word cloud”, Maya saw that “overworked” and “unclear” dominated the “word cloud” responses from her team. With her recent promotion to team leader, she was determined to improve her team’s engagement, the next day she brought in donuts and held a team meeting. She asked the team “What’s one thing we can fix together?” John suggested a shared project tracker, and Sarah offered to lead a quick skill-share session. By Friday, the tracker was live, and the atmosphere buzzed with energy. Three months later the engagement survey results “word cloud” highlighted “collaboration” and “empowered.” Maya learned that employee engagement was not about grand gestures, but simple, shared solutions.

(Story generated with Gemini, Advanced AI, 2025)

Today’s Workforce

A Gallup Survey from December 2024 found that U.S. employee engagement dropped to a ten-year

low, with only 31% of workers engaged. Key factors include unclear expectations from leaders (46%), lack of personal care at work (39%), and insufficient encouragement in development (30%). This report

highlights the crucial need for a dynamic workforce amidst rapid workplace changes (Gallup, 2024).

A February 2025 McKinsey & Company article, “A New Operating Model for People Management: More Personal, More Tech, More Human,” highlights the need for leadership transformation. Transformational leaders should focus on enhancing the employee experience through tailored coaching, support, training, and development (McKinsey & Company, 2025).

A Harvard Business Review blog by Morris (2025) suggests five questions for leaders to improve team decision-making:

- What would happen if we did nothing?
- What could make us regret the decision?
- What alternative did we overlook?
- How will we know if this was the right decision?
- Is this decision reversible?

Similar to Toyota’s Five Whys Method (Sultanov, 2021), these questions involve leaders and teams in decisions, boosting long-term growth and success.

An October 2025 McKinsey & Company article titled “Go, teams: When teams get healthier, the whole organization benefits”. The McKinsey team emphasized why dynamic workplaces of today needs dynamic employees. Challenging the conventional top-down leadership structures, the article points out why, in today’s workplaces, companies need value-creating agile “project teams and networks of teams”. The authors explain why team effectiveness is less art more science and the realities are that “every role needs fit-for-purpose talent, not necessarily “top-talent.”

In the Spring, 2024 Phoenix Scholar Cardwell stated that workplaces in the 4th Industrial Revolution will demand workers to be ready for modern technologies. As the demand for AI, creative ideas, and increased data-driven decision making continues to expand, employees will be required to be more proactive, creative, data driven, and adaptable as new technologies, in the workplace, lead to new jobs, job titles, and responsibilities.

Evidence of this need is found in a March 2025 Economic Times report on Amazon’s adoption of a new workplace structure. The plan involves reducing middle management and empowering workers. According to the report, Gen Z workers are

embracing the flatter organizational structure, the plan to have fewer bosses, with more autonomy, and more workplace flexibility. Meta, Google, and other organizations are also adopting similar organizational structures.

Modern leaders, today, must adapt to new workforce dynamics. These articles highlighted the need for engagement and empowerment for a dynamic workforce. With Millennials, Gen Z, and Gen Alpha in the workforce, traditional leadership is less effective. These workers heavily use the internet, posing challenges for engagement. Leaders who understand technology’s impact on society and workplaces will provide development opportunities and empower teams for self-leadership.

Empowering Self-Concepts for Self-Leadership

Charles C. Manz introduced “self-leadership” in his 1986 book, *Self-Leadership: Toward an Expanded Theory of Self-Influence Processes in Organizations*. He also co-authored *Self-leadership: The Definitive Guide to Personal Excellence* (2017, 2020). Although dictionaries lack a definition, Neck et al. (2020) describe self-leadership as individuals influencing themselves, even under controlled situations.

As a philosopher specializing in leadership and learning, I study self-leadership. My work expands the dialogue beyond the term “self-leadership” to understand the foundational self-concepts that contribute to the practice of self-leadership. While there are over one hundred self-concepts or self-agencies, from my philosophical perspective, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-determination, self-discipline, and self-care constitute the most robust foundations for self-leadership. These self-concepts are illustrated in the mind map (next page), followed by short scenarios a leader could use to empower their teams.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) is our belief in our capacity to achieve a goal.

To develop a dynamic workforce, leaders should know each team member’s perceived belief in their capabilities. One team activity, to uncover perceptual beliefs, could be a vision board workshop, followed by private talks to find job alignment with organizational



FIGURE 1 | Mind Map

Note: Mind map generated using Canva.com illustrates five foundational self-concepts for self-leadership.

goals. A team activity like this can empower the leader with insights into individual team members' personal ambitions. Here is a scenario of what this could look like.

Maya's team gathered with magazines and glue to create vision boards reflecting career goals and company alignment. Laughter accompanied the cutting and pasting of images, representing ambitions ranging from promotions to skill development. Shared visions highlighted a desire for growth and collaboration, fostering open dialogue and team unity. The finished boards displayed in the office served as daily reminders of individual and collective aspirations, turning abstract goals into tangible commitments that all could support.

(Story generated with Gemini, Advanced AI, 2025)

Armed with increased understanding of team members' goals and beliefs in their capacity to reach personal goals, the team leader can identify job tasks that align with the team members' goals. This can be empowering for the team and the leader.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation, Bandura (1991), involves three sub-functions. (1) The function of behavior. Self-regulation can make us masters of our personal time. Specifically, our clock and our calendar. (2) the function of cause and effect with goal setting. This involves creating specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives. Effective self-regulation includes the ability to break down larger goals into manageable steps, allowing for continuous progress

and motivation. With self-regulation we monitor our performance and adjust as needed for the situation. (3) Using emotional intelligence, we manage life by recognizing our strengths, weaknesses, and emotions. We control our responses and focus on what we can influence.

Helping a team to empower self-regulation may require the leader to offer creative schedules, or job tasks - based on workplace needs. The primary goal is for the team members to demonstrate emotional intelligence for time, schedules, goals, and activity management. When the team's goal is to master or improve self-regulation, they become more productive. Here is one scenario of what this could look like.

Think of your workload as a complex knot," Maya said in her team coaching session. "Self-regulation means untangling it, one thread at a time." She pointed to the whiteboard. "First, prioritize your tasks with an optimal schedule. Next, set clear, achievable goals for effective time management. When stressed, pause, and breathe—acknowledge the emotion without letting it control you. This is emotional intelligence." She smiled. "Help colleagues empathetically without losing sight of your own goals. Self-regulation is balancing activities and responses with mindfulness. The better you regulate your life, the better it will be. This week, we will practice self-regulation and celebrate our successes.

(Story generated with Gemini, Advanced AI, 2025)

Self-Determination

At its core, self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985) is about autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is the drive to be self-directed and to make one's own choices. Competence involves the ability to effectively execute those decisions and achieve desired outcomes. Relatedness refers to social connections and support, which can enhance an individual's motivation and perseverance. Together, these elements create a foundation for self-determination that empowers individuals to overcome obstacles (Gagne et al. 2018). This self-concept is rooted in the belief that individuals have the power to influence their own outcomes through the decisions they make and the actions they take. Here is one scenario of what empowering self-determination could look like:

We've hit a snag with the client's feedback," Maya,

the manager, began. “Instead of dictating a fix, I want us to tackle this together. You each have unique strengths. **Autonomy:** I trust you to explore solutions independently. **Competence:** Leverage your expertise, learn from each other. If you need resources, ask. **Relatedness:** We are a team. Let us share ideas, support each other, and build on each other’s work. This challenge is not a roadblock, it is a chance to demonstrate our collective ability. Let’s focus on solutions and trust in your individual abilities to overcome this obstacle.

(Story generated with Gemini, Advanced AI, 2025)

When people are self-determined to manage themselves appropriately, they are likely to find more motivation in whatever task they wish to conduct (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Self-Discipline

Self-discipline (Walter, 2020) is crucial on the journey toward sustainable habit formation.

Developing self-discipline requires intentional practice and commitment for behavior changes. Individuals can begin by setting small, manageable goals that lead to larger objectives. To cultivate sustainable habits, individuals must establish a clear understanding of their self-discipline. This involves introspection and reflection on personal values, strengths, and goals. Here is one scenario of what empowering self-discipline could look like

During the quarterly training, Maya, the team leader, challenges the team to improve their adherence to deadlines. “Team, we are starting Project Phoenix. It is designed to help us manage our time better and deliver work consistently. We will work together to develop self-discipline.”

She displays a slide titled “Self-Discipline: Sustainable Habits.”

“Self-discipline is not about being rigid. It involves intentional practice. We will begin with small steps. Each of you will choose one daily task to focus on this week. This could be clearing your inbox by 10 am or working on one key task for 30 minutes without interruption.”

She distributed worksheets with prompts: “My Values,” “My Strengths,” “My Goal.”

“This exercise aims to help us understand the motivations behind our actions. Reflect on your

values, strengths, and how these small habits align with your larger goals. Knowing your purpose will strengthen your resolve.

Additionally, learn to say no to distractions that do not support your daily goal. We will have daily check-ins to support each other. Remember, this is a long-term process.”

(Story generated with Gemini, Advanced AI, 2025)

The power of “no” is a key factor when empowering self-discipline.

Self-Care

The World Health Organization (WHO) clarifies self-care as the ability to practice and maintain “good health routines, prevent disease, cope with illnesses and disabilities with or without support.”

Self-care, despite being listed last, self-care is crucial for empowering self-leadership. Good health routines include environmental and personal hygiene, good nutrition, frequent exercise, cultural beliefs, income management, and self-medication as required for individual good health. Preventing disease involves smart decision making. Coping with illness and disabilities without support requires following prescribed care practices.

Self-care requires self-efficacy or belief in one’s own capacity to follow good health routines. Self-care is dependent on self-regulated activities, routines, and emotional intelligence. Self-care is driven with self-determination for independence or autonomy, commitment to competence, and relatedness to social networks. Self-care depends on self-discipline by engaging the power to say no to what could be harmful or a distraction and to say yes to what is beneficial for good health. Here is one scenario to encourage self-care in the workplace.

As deadlines loomed, tension filled the air. Maya, the team leader, paused and reflected on her team. “Remember,” she said gently, “our best work comes from rested minds.” She pointed to the coffee cups. “Let’s all take a 30 min break. Walk, read, breathe. Recharge. It is not just about meeting targets but sustaining our self-care. A burnt-out team delivers poor results. Your well-being is our priority. Let’s accomplish this together, healthily.”

(Story generated with Gemini, Advanced AI, 2025)

Self-care demonstrates empowered self-leadership. Self-care impacts every facet of human life. A dynamic workforce prioritizes self-care.

Summary

As explained in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977) the concept of agency involves ownership and control over internal thoughts and external actions. Therefore, self is a cognitive concept that encompasses beliefs, regulation, discipline, determination, and care (Bandura, 1977). This is what guides self-leadership. The self-concept scenarios, in this discourse, are offered to provide practical applications for team leaders to encourage self-leadership when the goal is to develop a dynamic workforce suitable for today's dynamic workplace.

Author Comments

According to the American Philosophical Association (2025), a philosopher explores fundamental questions about existence and epistemology. I am Dr. Jan Cardwell, specializing in the philosophy of leadership and learning. I study behaviors through observations of learners, leaders, and entrepreneurs. While not a psychologist, I use psychological terms to define human behaviors. This commentary summarizes my upcoming manuscript: "Self-Concepts for Self-Leadership: A Workbook to Work on Ourselves" (Cardwell, 2025).

Author Bio

Dr. Janice (Jan) Cardwell has four decades of leadership experience across industry sectors. As CEO of Conceivers Leadership and Learning Group, her passion is helping leaders thrive. She offers two signature programs for entrepreneurs, leaders, and educators. The first is "Navigating Leadership and Learning in the AI Era©" (where she is known as "AI-Janice"), and the second is "Self-Concepts for Self-Leadership©." She is current Chair of the Board for the National Entrepreneur Association, a college professor, and former Vice President/Director of the University of Phoenix-Detroit Campus (2006 to 2020). She holds a PhD in Education and an MBA in Global Management. She is a true scholar-practitioner-leader, always exploring "What If and What Else" possibilities.

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A Comparative Analysis of the Use of LEAN and Door-to-Needle Times in Stroke Centers

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of LEAN methodologies on door-to-needle (DTN) times in acute stroke centers. Data from 44 centers in the American Heart Association's Get with the Guidelines registry were analyzed, comparing 23 LEAN-utilizing centers with 21 non-LEAN centers. Independent sample t tests revealed that centers employing LEAN achieved significantly better mean DTN percentages (90.61%) compared to those not using LEAN (78.95%), $t(32.37) = 1.98$, $p = .028$, with a moderate effect size ($g = 0.611$). While post hoc chi-square analyses of ranked data were nonsignificant, the findings suggested that LEAN methodologies are associated with improved timely delivery of thrombolytic medication for acute stroke patients, potentially leading to better outcomes. Further research with larger samples is warranted.

Introduction

Organizational leaders, such as nursing directors and managers, are not consistently trained in formal

change methodologies such as LEAN; however, door-to-needle time efficiency is essential to achieve the best outcomes for acute stroke patients (Gomez, 2018). The national benchmark for door-to-needle

infusion time is 60 minutes or less (Holodinsky et al., 2018). Patients who do not receive timely acute stroke intervention may suffer lifelong disability or paralysis (Kettner et al., 2019). The door-to-needle time refers to the time from when a patient arrives at a hospital or stroke care center until the tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) infusion is started intravenously (Man et al., 2020). This time is captured by every hospital and stroke care center that administers tPA to acute stroke patients.

Implementing change in acute stroke care delivery is often challenging for various reasons, including staff resistance due to deep-rooted practices, skepticism toward new procedures, and fear of error because patients' lives are at stake (Østervang et al., 2019). LEAN methodologies could be used to improve processes and thus hasten throughput; however, challenges related to organizational culture or a deviation from the patient-centered focus can undermine success (Wu et al., 2019). For example, some hospitals have stripped patients of clothing in public areas to expedite CT scanning, sacrificing dignity in the pursuit of lower DTN times (Rannikko et al., 2019). LEAN provides a structured process improvement framework and is increasingly applied in healthcare to enhance patient outcomes (McCarthy, 2020).

Background

The LEAN methodology was originally developed to reduce waste and improve quality in supply chain and materials management within the automobile industry (Laureani & Antony, 2018). Closely aligned with Six Sigma, which Toyota introduced in the 1970s to enhance efficiency in car manufacturing, LEAN emphasizes process improvement (Laureani & Antony, 2018). Six Sigma employs the define, measure, analyze, implement, and control (DMAIC) framework, while LEAN applies the rapid-cycle plan, do, study, act (PDSA) model (Powell et al., 2016). Although both approaches are used in healthcare, LEAN is applied more frequently because it supports the rapid changes often required in clinical environments (Boronat et al., 2018). For instance, a LEAN initiative at a children's hospital in Akron, Ohio, successfully reduced the number of unplanned extubations (Powell et al., 2016). LEAN serves as a quality improvement process that systematically reviews operations and, in its simplest

form, adds value by minimizing waste (Kaswan et al., 2020). It has been effectively applied in healthcare to streamline processes. For example, a urology clinic improved patient throughput and outcomes, and another hospital enhanced the efficiency of nurse handoff reports (Alnajem et al., 2019; Pearce, 2015). Despite these benefits, some studies have highlighted limitations. LEAN implementation often fails when organizations are unprepared for significant change (Herrington et al., 2015). Pre-LEAN planning and strong leadership support are critical for success, and managers must ensure that organizational infrastructure can sustain process improvements (Herrington et al., 2015).

The history of stroke further illustrates the importance of efficient care. Apoplexy, now understood as stroke, was first described by Hippocrates over 2,400 years ago (Hoffmann et al., 2012). While stroke itself is not directly inherited, risk factors such as diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol often run in families (Mayo & Scott, 2011). There are two general types of strokes: hemorrhagic and occlusive (Askim et al., 2013). This study focused on occlusive strokes, which, although they share similar symptoms with hemorrhagic strokes, require different interventions (DeMers et al., 2012). In both cases, the principle "time is brain" applies, as irreversible brain damage can occur within 4 to 6 minutes without oxygenated blood flow (Gomez, 2018). Many stroke survivors experience lifelong disabilities (Mayo & Scott, 2011).

Historically, acute stroke management centered on assessing disability and creating care plans to maximize quality of life (Askim et al., 2013). With few immediate interventions available, many patients required long-term rehabilitative care (DeMers et al., 2012). Before the approval of tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) in 1995, patients often faced permanent brain damage and were reliant on supportive care (Manchikanti et al., 2011). The introduction of thrombolytic therapy revolutionized acute stroke treatment, allowing physicians to dissolve blockages and restore blood flow (Manchikanti et al., 2011).

Implementing change in hospitals and stroke centers, however, remains complex. Errors can have fatal consequences, making healthcare

providers—physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and registered nurses—understandably cautious and skeptical about altering established practices. Convincing caregivers that changes serve patients’ best interests is difficult and usually requires education on new techniques, evidence-based approaches, and emerging scientific methods. Engaging both professional and family caregivers in decision-making is essential. Early intervention is critical, as irreversible brain damage occurs within minutes without proper blood circulation (Gomez, 2018).

Method

A dataset of 44 acute stroke centers that submit information to the American Heart Association’s (AHA) Get with the Guidelines registry was selected for comparative analysis. Of these centers, 23 reported using LEAN methodologies, while 21 did not. The registry provides door-to-needle (DTN) percentages, defined as the proportion of patients who received tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) within the 60-minute national benchmark. For example, if 10 patients required tPA at a given hospital and 8 received it within 60 minutes, the hospital’s success rate would be 80%. In addition, an administrator from each participating center completed a survey to confirm whether LEAN change methodologies were implemented at their site.

The data were analyzed using a one-tailed independent samples t-test. The independent variable was LEAN utilization (yes or no), and the dependent variable was the reported DTN percentages for each of the 44 stroke centers.

Quality measures are clearly defined by the AHA and used by hospitals for data abstraction and submission to the Get with the Guidelines registry. A random audit conducted by Xian et al. (2012) confirmed the validity and reliability of submitted data, reporting 96% accuracy. The University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board provided oversight of the study.

Results

The mean door-to-needle (DTN) percentage for the 23 centers using LEAN methodologies was 90.61 (SD = 14.16), whereas the mean for the 21 centers not using LEAN was 78.95 (SD = 23.35). A one-tailed

independent samples *t*-test conducted in SPSS indicated that centers using LEAN had a significantly higher mean DTN percentage than those not using LEAN, $t(32.37) = 1.98, p = .028$.

The Shapiro–Wilk test showed that the DTN percentages were not normally distributed, $W = .748, p < .001$; however, the *t* test is considered robust to violations of normality (Hays, 1998). Levene’s test for equality of variances was also significant, $F(1, 42) = 7.98, p = .007$, so the separate variance approach with adjusted degrees of freedom was used. Because the groups were unequal in size, Hedges’ *g* was calculated as the effect size (Stangroom, 2022). The result, $g = 0.611$, indicated a moderate effect size (Heckert, 2022).

For post hoc analyses, the DTN data were ranked into quartiles. A chi-square test of the ranked data was not significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 44) = 3.92, p = .271$. Although the first quartile scores appeared the most divergent (see Figure 1), this difference was also nonsignificant, $\chi^2(1, N = 44) = 2.73, p = .099$. Replication with a larger sample may strengthen the t-test findings and could produce significant chi-square results. The descriptive statistics for the 44 participating stroke centers are shown in Table 1.

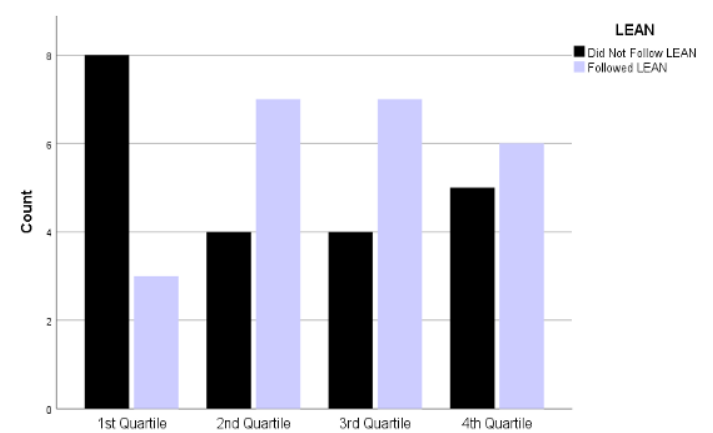


FIGURE 1 | Number Within each Quartile (Count) of the Percent Meeting Benchmark of the Door-to Needle Time of Participating Hospitals by LEAN

Group	<i>n</i>	M	SD
LEAN	23	90.61	14.16
Non-LEAN	21	78.95	23.35

TABLE 1 | Descriptive Statistics of the Percent Meeting Benchmark of the Door-to Needle Time of the Participating Hospitals

Note: M= mean; SD= Standard Deviation

Discussion

In this study, stroke centers that used LEAN had significantly higher mean door-to-needle times than those that did not, indicating greater success in meeting the national benchmark. Although some results were statistically nonsignificant, the findings hold important implications for stroke centers considering the adoption of LEAN methodologies.

Similar evidence has been reported in other healthcare settings. For example, Kam et al. (2021) demonstrated that applying LEAN/Six Sigma in a complex ophthalmology clinic improved patient wait times and overall quality of care. In that study, the root causes of throughput delays were identified, clinic schedules were adjusted, dedicated postoperative clinics were established, and new procedures for capturing patient data were introduced. Time studies before and after the intervention showed a 9% increase in patient throughput, a statistically significant change ($p = .016$), achieved without additional resources.

Likewise, Kelendar et al. (2020) identified waste in a primary care facility where patients had to attend multiple visits for glucose monitoring. By implementing LEAN strategies and redesigning the patient flow, the clinic reduced visits for uncomplicated diabetic patients from four to one. This change eliminated unnecessary steps, freed appointment slots, and improved access for other patients—all without requiring additional resources.

In contrast, other studies have shown that LEAN fails when initiatives are introduced in organizations that have not been properly prepared or trained in LEAN methodologies (Vaishnavi & Suresh, 2020). Managers should focus on the execution of LEAN initiatives and ensure that proper infrastructure exists to sustain quality improvement initiatives before introducing change (Vaishnavi & Suresh, 2020).

Conclusion

Although all acute stroke care centers record and analyze their door-to-needle times, organizational leaders may not recognize that their processes, and consequently patient outcomes, could be improved (Vaishnavi & Suresh, 2020). This challenge is compounded by the fact that leaders such as nursing directors and managers are not consistently trained in

LEAN methodologies. Establishing a well-defined process for patient throughput enhances both the rate and timeliness with which acute stroke patients receive the thrombolytic agent that dissolves blockages and restores vital blood flow to the brain. By adopting LEAN methodologies, stroke centers can reduce door-to-needle times and thereby improve patient outcomes.

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Leadership and Management Succession Planning

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Abstract

Succession Planning and Development is nothing new. However, an organization's productivity and retention effectiveness are highly dependent on implementing a meaningful succession plan and evaluating its effectiveness. Whether business-centered or public agencies, organizations exist in an extremely competitive environment in this age of fast-moving initiatives and employee job-searching. Technology is rapidly impacting the workforce, making quality staffing difficult to sustain. To bolster a productive and satisfied workforce, leaders and managers must be educated, empowered, and mentored in the requisite skills and experience. The concept of succession development is also referred to as talent management, which is how the plan develops future leaders and managers to fill a talent pool ready for promotional placement at any moment. Preparing talented staff to fill leader vacancies in advance is much more beneficial to the organization than reacting to a short-notice vacancy need and not being ready to fill that vacancy quickly and effectively.

Introduction

Succession development and talent management must coexist in an effective and productive organization; organizations are products of their leadership and management staff and reflect either a high-performance or a non-performing unit or somewhere in the gray murkiness. This paper provides research evidence from the literature to emphasize that organizations must take responsibility for their future effectiveness by committing to leadership succession planning. A meaningful succession development plan (SDP) can empower any organization's staff to be vested in their future career progression by developing leadership and management skills within their own

workforce to fill essential vacancies.

Lastly, I will present a Practice Report of my self-designed succession plan from one of my former organizations, where I was a deputy director for human resource services in a state department of corrections. A well-designed fundamental succession development plan for a public agency can also work for private companies because the basic elements of the plan do not differentiate between the type of organization where it is applied.

Literature Review

According to Profit.co (2025), any organization's succession planning and development goals are to

create, construct, and nurture a talent preparation climate, not just fill vacant positions. They stress that units must identify and develop internal candidates to eventually fill key positions, minimize the risk of hiring mistakes, and give employees a clear path to future organizational career opportunities. Profit.co (2025) was accurate in their summation that potential leaders and managers must be carefully identified and selected based on performance, supervisory recommendations, and commitment to organizational mission goals. Several other studies underscored Profit.co's (2025) conclusions that careful assessment and identification of future leader candidates are key elements of succession planning and development. Natarajan et al. (2024) stated that succession planning is essential to identifying and developing qualified candidates for future leadership positions. Phillips (2020) also stated that succession planning is a strategy for the "purposeful identification and development of succession candidates to establish leadership continuity" (p.1). Othman et al. (2022) also reiterated these studies by finding that identifying replacement leadership candidates is critical in succession planning.

Profit.co (2025) provided a wealth of benchmark data to build and implement an organic succession development plan. As initiated above, a key part of the plan is assigning selected candidates to identified job positions and measuring the effectiveness of their succession development model by applying unique Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The KPIs proposed by Profit.co (2025) were designed to provide a system of metrics so the organization can evaluate the progress of its succession development plan against organizational continuity goals. Profit.co's (2025) KPIs include:

- Internal Leadership Succession Rate (benchmark >50%)
- Employee Retention Rate Post-Succession (benchmark > Pre-Succession)
- Time-to-Competency (shorter times suggest success)
- 360-Degree Feedback Scores (high score suggests success)
- Successor Readiness Index (a measure of skills, attitude, and performance)

Muadinohamba and Maseke (2024) conducted a study to measure key managers' attitudes, values,

experiences, and beliefs against KPIs. The researchers stated that KPIs play a significant role in succession planning. They concluded that KPIs should include evaluating candidate motivation, identifying potential candidates, assessing candidates against specific essential competencies, tracking continuity longevity, building a structured process, and making succession a top organizational priority. KPIs must be routinely and regularly reviewed against current and future organizational leadership and management goals, future mission requirements, and productivity expectations for whatever productive purposes the organization exists (Profit.co, 2025).

Natarajan et al. (2024) conducted a study on the impact of talent management on talent retention and succession development. They concluded that there is, in fact, a strong, positive correlation between talent retention and succession planning (independent variables) and talent management (dependent variable). They employed a snowball sampling method to distribute 500 surveys. Of those 500 surveys, they received 341 for a 68% return rate, representing a significant sample of the survey population. The authors used snowball sampling, which employs non-probability sampling where participants recruit other known participants to enlarge the sample population. This sampling technique is used when researching populations that are hard to reach or have specific study experiences. This sampling method is usually applied in qualitative research studies where traditional methods might be impractical.

Another study conducted by Phillips (2020) was initiated to stop the confusion between succession planning and other leadership and management techniques. Examples of other techniques are dialogic and acquisitive typologies that relate more to action and experience than a theory-centered succession development plan. The dialogic technique includes developing leadership skills of coaching/mentoring, managing change and conflict, working within the organizational culture and identity to grow the workforce, mastering customer service attitudes, addressing ethical standards, developing the learning organization, and building team building skills (Turner et al., 2018). In addition, the acquisitive development typology involves individual skills that relate directly to professional and organizational goals. These skills include those of the dialogic typology plus community-focused initiatives, critical thinking, specific leadership competencies, decision-

making, emotional intelligence, entrepreneurial, innovative, creative thinking, communications skills, management functions, high-performance measures in performance evaluation, political insight, problem-solving, strategic planning, and trustworthiness. Traditionally, and contrary to contemporary research according to research, organizations developed leadership using theoretical constructs from the literature in addition to external formal education and training applications. Turner et al. (2018) emphasized that leadership development without real-world practice is ineffective. They state that action (“act-of-doing”) over time, given the right experiences, is critical to successful leadership development. Organizations reacted to immediate essential position vacancies by hiring without a preparatory work plan for potential internal candidate development. The study illustrated that proactively developing internal staff for future position openings was preferred and healthier for organizations by working to ensure success toward the organization’s mission.

The Phillips (2020) study used the methodological research approach, and the data was subjected to concept analysis to produce its findings. The study’s analysis produced five attributes related to effective succession planning:

1. Organizational support;
2. Organizational culture of internal development;
3. Individual (candidate) attitude;
4. Individual (candidate) commitment; and
5. All necessary resources.

The study pointed out that in accompaniment with the above five points, necessary functions for internal talent management must include identifying potential candidates and identifying required competencies. Phillips (2020) points out that in the formal academic arena of higher education, the framework of succession development limits the identification and development of leadership candidates due to the philosophical viewpoint of many universities. In addition, the concept of shared governance also inhibits effective succession planning; shared governance is predicated on what is best for the institution and utilizes many stakeholders, including faculty. Somewhere in this shared governance process, the individual as a potential leader is lost to the larger needs of the institution. This is not necessarily a bad indicator, but one not focused on individual leadership

skills needed to manage at the executive level.

However, findings from the study’s analysis proved that succession planning and development produced the evidence-based metrics of increased retention, improved recruitment, increased competencies performance, and a healthier work environment.

Another study pointed out that failure to develop a talent management plan can threaten organizational performance (Othman et al., 2022). The study concluded that a plan for continuity of leadership is essential to meet future high-level talent demands. The study’s conclusions identified systematic critical processes to prepare future internal leaders. The research employed a multiple case study using seven organizational participants across three government-linked agencies. All seven organizations implemented six basic succession planning processes: succession planning initiatives, identification of critical positions, identification of candidates, evaluation and selection of candidates, training and development of candidates, and evaluation of succession development at completion. Othman et al. (2022) concluded that of these six overall processes, two were significant and critical to succession planning: 1) identification of candidates and 2) training and development of those candidates. All seven participating organizations identified these two processes as critical to the effective implementation of succession development.

Another study by Jindal and Shaikh (2021) reinforces the findings of the studies presented in this paper, underscoring the benefit of an internal talent management/succession plan for any organization. The study highlighted how the independent variables of talent identification and development affect the dependent variable of talent retention. The study’s model emphasized the impact of these independent variables using structural equation modeling on talent identification and development on retention outcomes. The findings of the analysis reflect the Othman et al. (2022) study in the prior paragraph. Talent identification and talent development are proving to be the empirical processes that underpin and nurture organizational talent retention. This research made a strong statement to support the theory of internal succession development on talent management and leadership consistency. Phillips (2020) stated that a critical consequence of not building an effective succession development plan is the problem of high turnover and reduced retention, especially of talented potential leaders. These employees readily seek other

employers who will provide them with the career path they desire for their future. However, the author also underscores that an effective succession plan includes quality candidate identification and development (training, on-the-job experience, mentoring, and evaluation) as measured in succession development planning implementation outcomes.

The final element of this paper on succession development is an article posted on the International City and County Association (ICMA) website relevant to succession planning and management. The key conclusions from this article (Ibarra, 2023) again follow the studies already identified above. An effective organizational succession/talent management plan must include the following steps, at minimum:

1. Identify future mission needs;
2. Determine critical Leadership and Management positions;
3. Assemble accurate job descriptions of those positions;
4. Identify and evaluate potential candidates;
5. Gather supervisor and management recommendations; and
6. Build a talent management training and development plan.

Additionally, this article brought the benefits of developing an effective talent management/succession development plan to organizational executive-level attention because the plan works and, simply stated, makes the organization stronger (Ibarra, 2023). The following is a summary version of those benefits:

- Succession planning proactively retains its top performers.
- Succession planning discerns between high performers at one level who may or may not be high performers at the next level; high performance does not equate to automatic potential.
- Organizations must move forward from traditional replacement hiring practices into the mindset of succession planning to identify job position needs before vacancies occur.
- Ensuring that succession candidates fit the organization's present and future mission, goals, and objectives.
- Succession planning sustains the continuity of

quality operations with minimal interruptions.

- Succession plans create a standard list of critical job qualifications and competencies that future leaders and managers must possess.

Succession planning sends a message to the organization that it takes care of its own through structured employee career planning and management support, leading to improved morale, commitment to the organization, and retention.

Lastly, according to Maslan (2025), identifying strong internal talent management planning candidates is crucial to any organization's succession development plan. The author states that even high performers cannot excel without a structured plan to ensure their own and the organization's success. As stated in this paper, that support includes the necessary resources committed and provided to the candidate to "support" their journey. Specific job rotation experiences are planned and assigned so the candidate receives a well-rounded exposure to the organization's leadership and management responsibilities and expectations. Maslan (2025) states that reviewing candidates' past performance evaluations can be instrumental in finding those with desirable qualities for future leadership. In my many years of military and public administration service, my leadership colleagues had a saying that held much truth: "Promote someone based on demonstrated potential, not just on past achievements." Past achievements are not a 100% assurance of personal qualities, primarily because many people achieve notable results and get recognized based on those under them or someone else's work. The author states in conclusion that you must also conduct personal interviews with identified candidates and find out how passionate they are to grow, lead, and further the organization's effectiveness.

Practice Report

The following is a simplified illustration of a Succession Development Plan (SDP) that I built and proposed for a state department where I was a former deputy director for human resource services (Figure 1, next page). The same principles I applied to that plan can work for any organization that identifies and applies organizational-specific needs. One can see that my plan from 20 years ago reflects the scholarly principles explained in this paper. Below is a simplified diagram of my original plan:

Having provided my simplified succession development plan above, I also noted some key thoughts in my organizational notes that I used when building and proposing my succession development plan. These are thoughts that I considered essential to the process, thoughts that are supported by current research:

- Develop and retain internal talent to grow the organization and not lose talent to other organizations (see Ibarra, 2023);
- Identify key critical leadership and management positions where internal talent will be identified to fill (see Maslan, 2025);
- Identify succession development plan potential candidates (see Othman et al., 2022);
- Review candidates' past performance, supervisor recommendations, and innovative ideas, then conduct personal interviews to evaluate their passion for career growth (Maslan, 2025; Profit.co., 2025);
- Research and establish key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure candidate performance and progress (Profit.co., 2025);
- Hire key leadership and management positions from a balanced mixture of outside recruitment and internal talent management (Ibarra, 2023);
- Include job experience through job rotations of selected positions with monitoring and evaluation of candidate performance (Turner et al., 2018); and
- Establish and sustain a leadership/management talent pool and review for currency and updates semi-annually (Jindal & Shaikh, 2021).

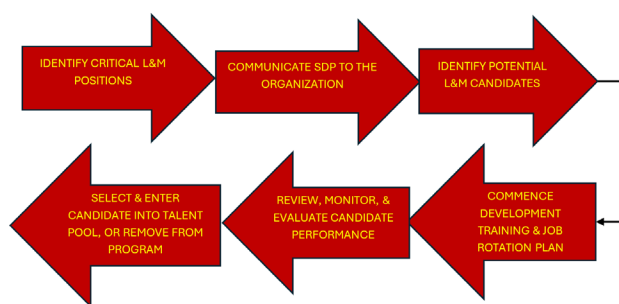


FIGURE 1 | Sowers Succession Development Plan Simplified

Recommendations

Confident conclusions can be made from the documented review of the scholarly studies in this Practice Report on the construction, implementation, and benefits of an effective succession development plan (SDP). The number of studies explained in this paper to underscore an organization's commitment to succession development planning all reach similar conclusions. One can list many detailed steps to constructing a workable and meaningful SDP, but there are seven steps. Those seven steps include identifying critical positions, building a development plan, communicating the plan to the organization, identifying SDP candidates, commencing the candidate's development, monitoring and evaluating their progress, and either selecting them for the talent pool or dismissing them from consideration. Not only were these steps found in journal studies, studies that include Jindal and Shaikh (2021), Othman et al. (2022), Natarajan et al. (2024), and Phillips (2020), but they reflect and reinforce the outcomes of my own succession development plan that I built for one of my former organizations. This is not just ironic or coincidental but evidence of the strength of the social science progress in developing employees to meet personal and organizational personnel talent needs. As stated in the evidence, organizations are much more effective when planning for their future needs by developing internal talent rather than reaction hiring only when vacancies occur, often on very short notice.

Hasty decisions on filling key leadership and management positions can and do result in hiring errors that must be corrected later. The studies in this paper narrow down the conclusions that succession development/talent retention can reduce turnover risk and is a product of 1) identifying potential future leaders and 2) developing and training those future leader candidates. There are many more details, as have been noted here, to describe the whole SDP process. However, the above equation, 1) identification and 2) development of potential talent/leaders equals 3) increased talent retention, is the cornerstone of why succession development planning is essential in successful organizations.

About the Author

Jon Sowers, DPA, holds a Doctorate in Public Administration from Capella University in 2019 and

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Cognitive Bias, Emotion Regulation, and Leaders' Mental Health: Implications for Leadership

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Abstract

Societal shifts in the post-COVID-19 era have had profound implications for communities at large, posing significant challenges to leadership adaptability, mental health, and the sustainability of effective leadership in navigating an abrupt and unfamiliar new normal. Critical thinking has become essential in enabling national leaders to address urgent issues across diverse sectors in this evolving context. The present era calls for leadership that is informed, impartial, and grounded in objectivity. This theoretical essay examines how cognitive biases, emotional regulation, and the deterioration of leaders' mental health may influence decision-making in high-stakes and routine scenarios. Furthermore, it explores research-based recommendations to support leaders in responding effectively to these complex demands.

Introduction

The post-COVID-19 era showed the world strong signs of leadership crises (Lagowska et al., 2020; Riggio & Newstead, 2023), and stakeholder discontent is reflected in the data. The University of Phoenix

Career Institute (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025) surveyed U.S. workers and leaders, and the findings highlight a significant disconnect between leaders' and employees' perceptions of different parameters related to job satisfaction. For example, while employees feel unsupported, undervalued, or uncertain about their

career growth, leaders often perceive themselves as providing adequate guidance and opportunities. Hence, research should address these problems to bridge the disconnect between American workers and their leaders.

Strategic decision-making is essential during high-pressure leadership crises, such as the 2022 Trucker Convoy in Canada (Riggio & Newstead, 2023) or the January 6 riot at the United States Capitol. These events challenge leaders to uphold ethical standards while maintaining order, responding to rapidly changing circumstances, and applying sharp critical thinking. Effective communication, emotional intelligence, sound judgment, and the prioritization of mental health are all vital in shaping successful leadership outcomes.

This theoretical essay explored how cognitive biases, emotional regulation, and leaders' mental health may influence leadership decision-making in high-stakes and everyday situations. Grounded in emotion regulation (Goleman, 1995) and cognitive biases theory (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), the discussion presents evidence-based strategies to assist Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and leaders in closing the gap between effective leadership theory and practice.

Types of Cognitive Bias and Strategic Decision-Making

Tversky and Kahneman (1974) explained that while helpful, relying on mental shortcuts, known as heuristics, may sometimes lead to systematic errors. To illustrate the previous assertion, Tversky and Kahneman compared the misjudgment of an object's distance based on visibility to how people may misjudge probabilities and outcomes based on information limitations. In other words, judgment and decision-making under conditions of uncertainty may produce flawed results (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

According to Acciarini et al. (2021), bias is defined in the literature as “an irrational belief that influences the ability to make a specific decision based on facts and evidence” (p. 640).

The literature on cognitive bias is extensive, and different classifications of biases exist. Das and Teng (1999) classified cognitive biases into four types: (a) prior hypothesis focusing on limited targets, (b) exposure to limited alternatives, (c) insensitivity

to outcome probability, and (d) the illusion of manageability.

Prior hypothesis bias refers to the tendency of individuals to rely on their preexisting beliefs when making decisions, often disregarding new or contradictory information. This bias results in a selective focus on evidence that supports one's initial assumptions, limiting objective evaluation of available data (Das & Teng, 1999).

Exposure to limited alternatives bias emerges when decision-makers consider only a narrow set of options, often due to a constrained perspective or limited information. As a result, they may overlook potentially better solutions or fail to fully explore the range of available choices (Das & Teng, 1999).

Insensitivity to outcome probabilities is a bias where individuals fail to accurately assess the likelihood of different outcomes. Instead of rational judgments based on statistical probabilities, people may rely on intuition, emotions, or past experiences, leading to skewed risk assessments and potentially flawed decisions (Das & Teng, 1999).

Finally, the **illusion of manageability bias** involves overestimating one's ability to control or influence uncertain outcomes. This misplaced confidence can drive individuals to take unwarranted risks under the false belief that they can effectively manage unpredictable variables (Das & Teng, 1999).

Emotional Regulation, Dysregulation, and Decision-Making

Emotions play a complex role in shaping human behavior and decision-making. When effectively regulated, emotions can enhance sensory perception, improve judgment, guide individuals toward optimal choices, and promote socially appropriate behaviors (Gross, 2015). However, emotions can become detrimental when expressed with inappropriate intensity, duration, frequency, or type relative to the context. They may contribute to maladaptive cognitive and behavioral biases (Gross, 2015).

Research has increasingly focused on discrete emotions (e.g., anger, happiness, and sadness) due to their influence on decision-making and cognitive functioning (Angie et al., 2011). Life events typically trigger these emotional responses and

can significantly shape how individuals process information and behave (Angie et al., 2011). For example, emotional states such as anger have been linked to riskier decision-making, possibly because they can distort information processing (Gambetti & Giusberti, 2009; Szasz et al., 2016).

Emotion regulation involves actively directing or modifying emotional behaviors to attain a desired emotional state (Tamir, 2020). Gross et al. (2011) asserted that emotion regulation occurs when individuals activate goals to influence or modify emotions. Emotion regulation and emotional intelligence are intertwined and impact how a person regulates emotions (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). The ability to keep emotions in check has been at the heart of many research studies (Gross, 2015; Isaacowitz, 2022) and has been linked to good leadership (Chiang et al., 2021; Gross, 2015; Haver et al., 2013). Lopes et al. (2025) explained that emotion regulation is not just the act of controlling one's emotions but also exerting control over the feelings of others.

Leaders can exhibit various types of dysregulations based on the situation (Torrence & Connelly, 2019). Dysregulation is the inability to control emotional responses effectively (Cleveland Clinic, 2023). Dysregulation, which includes emotional dysregulation, behavioral dysregulation, cognitive dysregulation, and physiological dysregulation, can manifest in anxiety, depression, anger, or even physical symptoms like increased heart rate and tension (Cleveland Clinic, 2023; Los Angeles Outpatient Center, 2024; Sherrell, 2024). Emotional dysregulation not only affects the psychological well-being of an individual, but it could also have a biological impact linked to chronic stress and heightened emotional responses (Cleveland Clinic, 2023).

Leadership and Mental Health

Torrence and Connelly (2019) noted that in the professional setting, leaders may be forced to intentionally modify their emotional expressions or responses to ensure they exercise the appropriate influence over their team and performance. Leaders must be conscious of their reactions to ensure they exhibit the most suitable emotional response in every situation (Torrence & Connelly, 2019).

Leaders across all industries face pressure and

criticism that can significantly impact their mental health and regulatory capacities (American Psychological Association, 2022; Pontefract, 2023). Mental health challenges often manifest in the workplace as increased stress, burnout, and impaired decision-making (Chen et al., 2022; Cloutier & Barling, 2023; Nasir, 2024). In 2022, an estimated 43.3% of adults reported experiencing some form of mental illness, 29.4% among those aged 26-49, and 13.9% among individuals aged 50 and older (National Institute of Mental Health, 2024). These concerns have drawn the attention of the World Health Organization, which has issued formal recommendations to promote mental well-being in the workplace (Cloutier & Barling, 2023). When coping mechanisms fall short, chronic stress can lead to various forms of dysregulation, including emotional, behavioral, and cognitive disruptions (Ballarotto et al., 2024). Persistent stress can particularly result in emotional dysregulation and the diminished ability to manage emotional responses appropriately. The latter may hinder leadership performance and mental health (Torrence & Connelly, 2019).

Recommendation for Effective Leadership in a High-Stakes Post-COVID-19 Era

Cognitive bias is a threat to effective decision-making. Therefore, leaders should be alert and manage these biases (Acciarini et al., 2021). Berthet (2022) recommended becoming literate or better informed and harnessing leaders' overconfidence. Additionally, it is crucial to develop an awareness of how personal experiences, emotions, assumptions, and social pressures can unconsciously influence leaders' judgments. Furthermore, seeking diverse perspectives, engaging in critical reflection, and using structured decision-making processes are vital in mitigating biases.

“Humility involves (a) an accurate or moderate view of one's strengths and weaknesses, as well as being (b) interpersonally other-oriented rather than self-focused, marked by the ability to restrain egotism...” (Huizinga, 2016, pp. 34-35). Humility could be a potent antidote against overconfidence and, thus, cognitive biases. Humble leaders understand their limitations and are more prone to seek the counsel of stakeholders under challenging situations.

Leaders from all organizations need to learn sound methods of decision-making. Consequently, partnerships with professionals and researchers to search for and be trained in the best decision-making models are pivotal investments for the organization. These collaborations enhance the quality of decisions and build a culture of continuous learning and strategic thinking.

Effective leaders take proactive steps to manage stress to maintain sound decision-making (American Psychological Association, 2022; Nasir, 2024). The practice of emotional regulation is essential for sustaining mental health and effective leadership (McGarvie, 2025). Emotional regulation plays a vital role in supporting mental well-being, and it is recommended as a priority when developing mindfulness programs (McGarvie, 2025). These programs can strengthen emotional regulation skills among leaders, thereby enhancing personal well-being and contributing to organizational success (Catanese, 2024).

Leaders must manage themselves and their workloads thoughtfully. They should not hesitate to say no when necessary (Brower, 2023). Taking on excessive responsibilities may lead to elevated stress levels, which in turn can negatively affect mental health and contribute to emotional dysregulation (Brower, 2023). Further research is required to understand a leader's lived experience with emotional regulation and mental health (Cloutier & Barling, 2023).

Strategies to manage emotions can transform adverse reactions into positive interactions. There are various approaches to be considered when handling responses to situations, and one effective approach is for leaders to adopt mindfulness practices. Mindfulness involves being aware of the present moment while maintaining a nonjudgmental attitude (Pruessner et al., 2024). It has emerged as a promising method for addressing mental health issues related to emotion regulation (Pruessner et al., 2024). Techniques such as mindfulness-based stress reduction and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy have shown promise in treating anxiety disorders and preventing relapses (Pruessner et al., 2024).

Emotional intelligence, which helps regulate emotions, is linked to better health outcomes for leaders (Köppe et al., 2019). It is the foundation for leaders to foster a positive work environment, build strong relationships, and respond effectively to challenging situations

(Singh et al., 2024). Training in emotional intelligence has a significant role in helping leaders regulate their emotions (Opatha & Takahashi, 2024). By developing emotional intelligence competencies, such as self-regulation and empathy, leaders enhance their ability to make rational decisions (Singh et al., 2024).

Conclusion

In an increasingly complex and high-stakes post-COVID world, leadership requires more than technical expertise; it demands self-awareness, emotional regulation, and the ability to recognize and counter cognitive biases. Leaders who invest in their mental health, engage in mindfulness practices, and seek diverse perspectives are better equipped to navigate uncertainty with clarity and resilience. Emotional intelligence and humility are essential in fostering trust and more balanced decisions that bridge the gap between leaders and their teams. Ultimately, effective leadership is grounded in continuous reflection and evidence-informed decision-making.

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How Authentic Leaders Confront Fear and Build Trust During Workplace Crisis

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Abstract

The problem is that leaders who fail to manage their fears while leading often resort to shortcuts that may command attention but lack genuine influence, which can have detrimental effects on the organization and individuals in leadership roles. In today's volatile and complex organizational environments, fear remains an underexplored yet influential factor in leadership practice. When mismanaged, fear can lead to destructive behaviors such as micromanagement, intimidation, and manipulation, which erode psychological safety and hinder employee well-being, innovation, and trust. This theoretical essay explores the relationship between fear, leadership behavior, and psychological safety, emphasizing the critical role of authentic leadership in transforming fear into a constructive force. Authentic leaders grounded in transparency, self-awareness, and integrity are uniquely positioned to navigate fear ethically while fostering psychologically safe and high-performing work environments. Authentic leadership offers a framework for navigating fear constructively through courage, perseverance, and resilience, traits essential for ethical decision-making and relational trust. When guided by self-awareness, fear can catalyze growth, creativity, and connection. However, when misused

through micromanagement or intimidation, it erodes psychological safety and damages organizational trust. Cultivating authenticity enables leaders to acknowledge fear without being driven by it, promoting emotional regulation and stronger interpersonal relationships. When authenticity is practiced consistently, it fosters a culture of psychological safety, where individuals feel valued, empowered to speak openly, and supported in taking thoughtful risks. These are conditions essential for innovation and organizational effectiveness.

Introduction

Fear-based leadership significantly diminishes employee morale, creativity, engagement, and overall organizational performance. Leaders who operate from a position of fear often cultivate toxic work environments, leaving employees demotivated, risk-averse, and hesitant to contribute innovative ideas (Syed et al., 2021). Additionally, fear can destabilize leadership effectiveness, as leaders driven by fear tend to make reactive decisions rather than strategic, forward-thinking ones, ultimately diminishing their effectiveness and weakening organizational resilience (Dye, 2016). Moreover, a culture of fear within an organization can erode trust between leaders and followers, as employees may perceive the leaders as authoritarian, creating a wedge that hinders collaboration and open communication (Joiner, 2019). As trust deteriorates, employees do not feel psychologically safe and become increasingly hesitant to share ideas, fearing retribution or negative consequences, further limiting their willingness to engage or contribute to organizational innovation (Rasool et al., 2021).

The absence of psychological safety subverts employee empowerment, as individuals feel unsupported and undervalued, leading to reduced productivity, low morale, and higher turnover rates (McCausland, 2023; Webster et al., 2016). In contrast, fostering a culture grounded in psychological safety, transparency, and authentic leadership can be essential for overcoming the damaging effects of fear. Authentic leaders demonstrate transparency, empathy, and ethical decision-making, cultivating work cultures where employees feel safe to voice their ideas without fear of retribution (Iqbal et al., 2019).

Leadership and Fear

Theories on leadership typically focus on strategic planning, proactive communication, team development and style, and other theoretical perspectives. However, while often overlooked, the

topic of fear and leadership is a crucial area requiring more attention. Leaders are expected to regulate their emotions to maintain their professional demeanors, and this is an implicit theme in the literature on leadership. The role of fear in shaping a leader's emotional responses and decision-making processes has received little attention because fear is often seen as incompatible with the perception of leaders. Nevertheless, the scarcity of information and studies on leadership and fear is a gap that has not been the primary focus of most leadership research. However, in an era characterized by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA) events, the consequences of overlooking fear can have a profound effect on the “affect” of leaders and how they lead organizations, and they may resort to shortcuts, enforcing compliance rather than cultivating authentic influence (Dye, 2016).

Leadership behaviors influence organizational culture and are the cornerstone of work environments that support psychological safety, innovation, and employee satisfaction (McKinsey & Company, 2021). A leader's attitude toward fear and their subsequent behavior might adversely or beneficially influence these entities. When followers view leaders positively, they develop trust, which can enhance their performance and commitment. (Peng & Lin, 2017). However, when they perceive leaders negatively, the opposite is also true. Consequently, when leaders use fear to guide followers, such behavior erodes organizational trust and limits the leader's effectiveness. Some leaders may avoid addressing critical issues, while others respond impulsively, resulting in instability and dysfunction within their teams.

Additionally, leaders may manifest their fears by stopping the flow of communication for fear of communicating the wrong thing, being unsure who to trust, lashing out in anger, micromanaging, or being unwilling to receive feedback (Faraci, 2023). Fear-based leadership may result in short-term motivation, but over time, it demotivates employees, leading to confusion, exhaustion, and decreased team cohesion.

The problem is that leaders who fail to manage their fears while leading often resort to shortcuts that may command attention but lack genuine influence, which can have detrimental effects on the organization and individuals in leadership roles (Dye, 2016; Hubbart, 2023). Despite extensive research on leadership and fear, a significant gap remains in scholarly literature regarding how leaders experience, navigate, and manage fear. Research on leadership and fear now in publication mostly looks at how leaders use fear as a management tool or how subordinates view fear-driven leadership. An increasing amount of gray literature has highlighted how leaders handle and control their fears while in charge, yet scholarly research on this topic remains limited.

The purpose of this theoretical essay is to explore the concepts of fear, leadership behavior, and psychological safety, emphasizing the critical role of authentic leadership in transforming fear into a constructive force. The subsequent discussion will distinguish between fear and anxiety and discuss the duality of fear in leadership, emphasizing how this emotion influences decision-making, organizational behavior, and leadership outcomes. Understanding the interaction between fear and leadership offers insight into why some leaders respond to perceived threats with control or micromanagement while others demonstrate courage and compassion to foster psychologically safe environments.

What Is Fear

Fear is an unconscious emotional response to a perceived threat that may cause personal harm or disrupt a stable environment. It activates the fight-or-flight response and, if poorly managed by organizational leaders, can lead to shortcuts such as manipulation, micromanagement, arrogance, or unethical behavior (Syed et al., 2021; Webster et al., 2016). Knowing what fear is and developing the ability to navigate it effectively requires courage and confidence. Fear is a complex emotion with multiple components, and individual perceptions may vary. In some cases, it can trigger an uncontrollable impulse to assert power in response to perceived threats.

Fear and anxiety are sometimes mistakenly seen as synonymous; although they are interconnected, they represent distinct psychological responses. Fear is an unpleasant, often intense emotion triggered

by the anticipation or awareness of an immediate danger (Pynnönen & Takala, 2015). It is typically an immediate response to a specific threat, activating the body's fight-or-flight mechanism, but it is generally short-lived and subsides once the perceived danger is removed (LeWine, 2024). Anxiety, on the other hand, is a protracted state of worry or uneasiness that is frequently focused on ambiguity or possible threats rather than an imminent threat. Even when no real threat exists, it is persistent and focused on the future. Though it does not always have a clear physical cause, anxiety is thought to be a typical reaction to stress and is linked to behavioral, cognitive, and physical changes (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Moreover, anxiety can immobilize individuals, leading to indecision and inaction, particularly when the fear of making the wrong choice results in perceived detrimental consequences (National Institutes of Health, 2025). This state of paralysis may cause individuals to avoid decision-making altogether, metaphorically “burying their heads in the sand” as a coping mechanism. While fear is typically linked to a specific, tangible source, anxiety is more generalized and often stems from uncertainty or perceived risks.

Since fear is an emotion, leaders incapable of positively managing their emotions risk creating work environments characterized by intimidation and micromanagement. As a result, employees may become dissatisfied with their jobs, leading to disengagement and decreased productivity (Burrell et al., 2018; Rasool et al., 2021). This type of leadership behavior can create a hostile work environment and erode trust within the organization. To foster a more positive and supportive workplace, leaders should abandon fear-based leadership and confront their fears, embracing courage, transparent communication, and compassion to cultivate trustworthy relationships and psychologically safe cultures.

The Duality of Fear in Leadership

A critical aspect of understanding fear in leadership is recognizing its duality, which has the potential to either drive dominance and control or serve as a source of motivation and resilience. Leaders who do not manage their emotions effectively in response to fear may resort to micromanagement, intimidation, and manipulation to maintain control. This maladaptive leadership style fosters toxic work

environments where employees become disengaged, dissatisfied, and unproductive (Hubbart, 2023; Webster et al., 2016). However, fear can also serve as a driving force for personal and professional growth when leaders view fear as a signal to adapt, improve, and lead authentically; then, they develop greater resilience and inspire employees to do the same. Fear at moderate levels can push individuals to enhance their skills, refine decision-making, and remain proactive in anticipating challenges. Embracing fear as an inherent aspect of leadership, rather than something to suppress or avoid, leaders cultivate perseverance, encourage calculated risk-taking, and drive continuous innovation (Faraci, 2023; Mann, 2023).

Fear is a powerful and precarious emotion that leaders must consciously address, as it can be wielded constructively or destructively depending on the situation and the leader's disposition. It can prompt individuals to either confront challenges or retreat from perceived threats. When a leader chooses to fight, it must be a deliberate and positive action to advance the organization's best interests. Rather than opting for flight and deflecting their fears onto employees through avoidance, micromanagement, or intimidation, an effective leader confronts uncertainty with strategic decision-making, resilience, and a commitment to organizational success (Hubbart, 2023). This approach includes building trusting relationships with employees, fostering open communication, and empowering teams to collaborate toward achieving organizational goals.

Recognizing fear's influence is essential, as a leader's response can profoundly shape organizational culture, employee behavior, and performance outcomes (Solansky et al., 2022). Leaders who fail to regulate their emotions may resort to manipulative or controlling tactics, creating cultures characterized by distress, low trust, and diminished psychological safety (Howe et al., 2021; Rasool et al., 2021). These behaviors often manifest as bullying, micromanagement, emotional volatility, and actions that harm employee well-being, suppress innovation, and contribute to absenteeism and turnover (Faraci, 2023; McCausland, 2023). In contrast, leaders who approach fear with emotional regulation and ethical intent can transform it into a catalyst for growth, creativity, and relational trust. Cultivating authenticity, transparency, and empathy, leaders foster environments where individuals feel safe to take

risks, share ideas, and thrive amid uncertainty.

Ultimately, the impact of fear in leadership hinges on a leader's capacity for self-reflection, emotional regulation, and ethical leadership (Solansky et al., 2022). When managed constructively, fear becomes a source of strength; when misused, it becomes a tool of control that undermines both the leader and the organization (Faraci, 2023). This distinction is critical because how leaders manage fear directly influences the degree of psychological safety experienced by employees. Psychological safety, the shared belief that individuals can speak up, take risks, and express ideas without fear of punishment or ridicule, is essential for supporting innovation, collaboration, and organizational learning (McCausland, 2023). Without it, fear becomes pervasive, eroding trust and suppressing the diverse perspectives and contributions essential for organizational growth and innovation (Rasool et al., 2021).

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is especially crucial in workplaces where fear-based leadership fosters insecurity and distrust. A psychologically secure workplace fosters transparency, allowing individuals to articulate their ideas, embrace risks, and own errors without fearing ridicule or retribution. When individuals feel psychologically safe, they willingly contribute innovative ideas, collaborate effectively, and solve problems without hesitation (McCausland, 2023). However, in environments lacking psychological safety, fear becomes a dominant force, where they face criticism, rejection, or retaliation, preventing them from speaking up. These factors suppress creativity, obstruct communication, and contribute to disengagement and burnout by inhibiting employees from voicing concerns or challenging the status quo. Without psychological safety, fear can erode trust, lower morale, and create a culture of silence that stifles organizational growth (Guo et al., 2018).

Fear can be significantly reduced when leaders actively listen, value diverse perspectives, and respond to concerns with empathy and respect, behaviors that are foundational to authentic leadership. Authentic leadership is deeply connected to psychological safety, emphasizing transparency, integrity, and self-awareness in guiding teams. Authentic leaders lead by example, demonstrating consistency between

their values and actions while fostering genuine relationships with their employees (Gardner et al., 2021). These leaders are open about challenges, admitting vulnerabilities, and encouraging honest conversations, creating an environment where employees feel valued and heard. This approach helps to counteract fear, as employees trust that their leaders will not punish them for mistakes or differing opinions (Henriksen & Lundby, 2021; Kennedy, 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2020).

How Authentic Leaders Manage Their Fears

The term authentic is based on the concept of being true to oneself and is closely associated with how individuals portray themselves to others (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gigol, 2020). It was also defined using the qualities of “genuineness, truth, and reality,” which in the past was “used to mean natural, honest, simple, and sustainable,” existentially relating to a person being true themselves and avoiding losing the “real self” in public through “role-playing” (Yuan et al., 2014, pp. 341-343). The concept of authenticity was expanded to authentic leadership with four behavior principles: self-reflection (self-awareness), relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspectives. Authentic leaders are perceived as optimistic and possess high moral character because they are conscious of how their thoughts and behaviors impact followers. (Martinuzzi & Engelbrecht, 2013). These leaders are also morally committed to doing what is right and good for the organization, viewing organizational values as being more prominent than individual goals, thereby creating environments promoting trust (Jiang & Lou, 2018). This leadership approach enhances followers’ confidence and trust in their leaders.

When leaders consistently demonstrate integrity, moral conviction, and ethical behavior in their words and behaviors, followers perceive them as authentic. As a result, they develop trust in these leaders and believe in their genuine concern for their well-being, which encourages collective commitment to organizational goals (Hsieh & Wang, 2015; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2015). These qualities reinforce the notion that authentic leaders can navigate their fears in the workplace with courage and a steadfast commitment to their moral principles.

Authentic leaders recognize fear as an inherent aspect of leadership, especially when facing uncertainty, critical decisions, or resistance to change. Rather than allowing fear to dictate behavior, they manage it through introspection, resilience, and strategic reasoning (Henriksen & Lundby, 2021). Self-reflection, a key component of self-awareness, enables authentic leaders to examine emotions, understand the sources of concern, and acknowledge personal vulnerabilities (Zhu et al., 2016). Instead of repressing or masking fear, they view it as a catalyst for personal and professional growth. Embracing vulnerability while maintaining composure allows authentic leaders to build trust and avoid displacing fear in others (Henriksen & Lundby, 2021). Grounded in core values, these leaders inspire confidence and foster a shared sense of purpose, even when navigating difficult decisions or external pressures. Authentic leaders also counteract fear by adopting a learning mindset, and instead of dreading failure, they reconceptualize problems as opportunities for development and creativity (Dahm & Greenbaum, 2019). Being true to themselves and transparent, they recognize unavoidable setbacks and utilize them as catalysts to strengthen decision-making and resilience. This proactive mindset reduces fear by shifting focus toward constructive solutions rather than reactive behaviors such as intimidation, humiliation, or micromanaging. Leaders displaying such behaviors adhere to shortcuts to face their fears, which is diametrically opposed to the values and behaviors of authentic leadership, ultimately hindering collaboration and the achievement of collective organizational goals.

Authentic leaders, rather than allowing fear to immobilize them, use it as a catalyst for learning, resilience, and leadership development. Their ability to confront fear sincerely advances their leadership journey and models constructive behavior for their teams, fostering trust, stability, and a psychologically safe work environment (Syed et al., 2021). Recognizing fear as an inherent aspect of leadership, especially during periods of uncertainty, resistance, or high-stakes decision-making, they engage in self-reflection and strategic thinking to manage emotional responses and remain grounded in core values (Goods, 2022). Instead of denying or projecting fear onto others, authentic leaders accept it as a natural element of leadership and use it as an opportunity for growth (Dye, 2016; Zhu, 2025). This posture, supported by a

learning-oriented mindset, enables them to reframe challenges as stepping stones to resilience and improved decision-making. In doing so, authentic leaders maintain trusting relationships with followers and promote a culture rooted in honesty, relational transparency, moral integrity, and optimism, all supporting psychological safety and long-term organizational success.

Conclusion

Fear is an inevitable challenge for leaders, particularly in today's VUCA business environment. While fear cannot be avoided, a leader's ability to manage it effectively reflects their character and integrity. As a distinct and powerful emotion separate from anxiety, fear must be addressed constructively. When addressing fear as they lead, leaders can use it positively or negatively depending on their dispositions, making it incumbent on them to have the courage to acknowledge it and, once acknowledged, determine the approach that best suits how to handle it positively. When leaders use fear as a weapon, their conduct becomes detrimental, causing psychological damage to their subordinates. This toxicity can manifest through intimidation, bullying, manipulation, and denying followers autonomy and the freedom to perform their jobs without micromanaging or demeaning them (Faraci, 2023; Mann, 2023). Using fear as a weapon or a constructive tool is contingent upon the leader's ownness. Establishing noxious environments that are not psychologically secure can erode trust within the organization and can result from fear-based leadership.

Authentic leadership provides a framework for constructively navigating fear through courage, perseverance, and resilience, traits essential for sound decision-making and ethical leadership (Solansky et al., 2022). Fear catalyzes growth, creativity, and relational trust when approached with self-awareness. In contrast, leaders who misuse fear through micromanagement or intimidation erode psychological safety and damage organizational trust. Cultivating authenticity allows leaders to acknowledge fear without succumbing to it, promoting emotional regulation and stronger interpersonal relationships (Zhu, 2025). Authentic leadership offers a framework for navigating fear constructively through courage, perseverance, and resilience, which are essential for ethical decision-making and relational trust (Solansky

et al., 2022). When guided by self-awareness, fear can catalyze growth, creativity, and connection. However, when misused through micromanagement or intimidation, it erodes psychological safety and damages organizational trust. Cultivating authenticity enables leaders to acknowledge fear without being driven by it, promoting emotional regulation and stronger interpersonal relationships (Zhu, 2025).

Through relational transparency and integrity, authentic leaders transform fear into an opportunity for personal and organizational development. Their actions model psychological safety, encourage empowerment, and foster environments rooted in stability and shared purpose. Embracing vulnerability and leading authentically, leaders build trust, enhance resilience, and create psychologically safe cultures where individuals can thrive.

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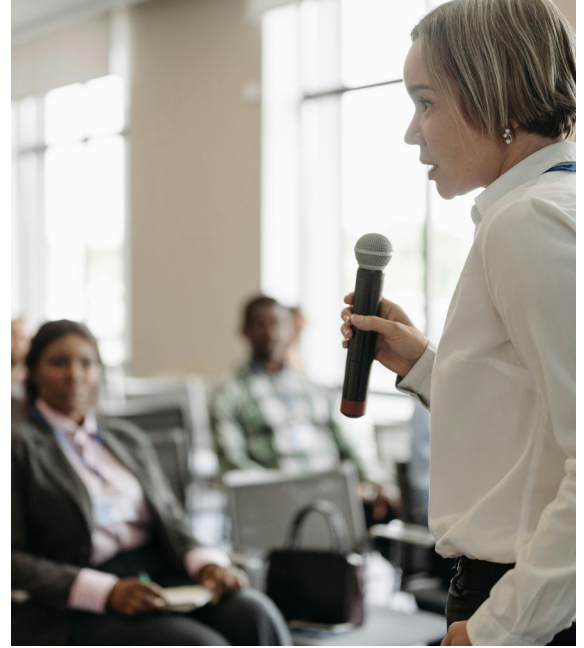
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Empowering Workforce Potential through Effective Leadership Education

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Abstract

This theoretical paper delves into the essential role of leadership education in empowering workforce potential through a holistic andragogical approach. Drawing on established leadership theories and research, it emphasizes the integration of both curricular and co-curricular contexts, specifically tailored for scholars, practitioners, and leaders. The paper highlights transformational leadership principles where leaders inspire followers to align with shared values and aspirations. It addresses the transformative capacities of leadership education, aiming to cultivate human potential beyond traditional knowledge transfer, and explores the intersection of knowledge, human potential, and experiential learning. Through a review of related scholarship, key concepts such as transformational and servant leadership are discussed. The notion of potentiating leadership, characterized by self-awareness and a focus on growth, is introduced, suggesting that effective leaders prioritize the development of their followers' potential. The paper ultimately posits that leadership rooted in understanding human potential is crucial for fostering meaningful engagement and growth within organizations.

Introduction

Leadership education is a comprehensive andragogical approach that fosters leadership learning, enhancing human potential, and building capacity. Rooted in established leadership theory and research, leadership education and its practices adopt a holistic perspective, highlighting the significance of both curricular and co-curricular contexts. This approach is tailor-made for the scholar/practitioner/leader. By embracing diverse learning environments, it strives to create inclusive opportunities for individuals to cultivate their leadership skills.

This approach encompasses related constructs

within leadership studies, training, and development. Additionally, leadership education acknowledges the transformational leadership principles inherent in empowering workforce potential. Burns (1978) defines transformational leadership as a process through which leaders inspire followers to achieve higher levels of motivation and morality. He characterizes leadership as the act of guiding followers toward goals that reflect the shared values, motivations, desires, and aspirations of both leaders and followers. Consequently, the reach of leadership education has the potential to profoundly influence the organizational fabric by facilitating workforce development.

This theoretical paper addresses the gap in understanding how human potential and knowledge are transformed through leadership education. A key challenge in this field is exploring and realizing its transformative capacities to build human potential. While traditional pedagogical approaches focus on the effective development and transfer of knowledge, leadership education uniquely aims to cultivate human potential. Thus, the task is to examine the intersection of knowledge and human potential through the lens of transformative and experiential learning.

Review of Related Scholarship

Leadership education addresses complex questions such as what makes an effective leader, how leadership is developed, and its purpose. Key concepts include transformational leadership, which elevates expectations and morality (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978), relational constructs (Rost, 1993), and servant leadership aimed at nurturing potential (Greenleaf, 1991). This paper explores leadership education to actualize human potential, influenced by metamotivational constructs that impact self-actualization (Maslow, 1971). It argues that leaders develop their associates and organizations and their potential, fostering transformative engagement in knowledge and human growth.

The Potential Leader

The concept of potentiating leadership, characterized by a potentiating temperament, offers a new way to lead focused on human potential. Potential leaders are self-aware and create space for growth in themselves and others through awareness, acceptance, sustained attention, and intention (McCaslin & Christensen, 2013). They are open to learning and engage in relationships with curiosity, asking, “What have you come to teach me?” They are expert listeners due to their deep curiosity and can pause their daily urgency to act mindfully. Understanding human evolution, potential leaders adapt to their environment and embrace the gifts of others, maintaining a positive vision for human potential based on a belief in the goodness of humanity. They approach life with an innocent perspective, recognizing that wisdom arises from wonder. These traits are essential for a potent Integral Leadership. This perspective reshapes leadership and teaching, viewing each person’s potential as sacred and transformative.

“What if we approached organizations as living entities filled with infinite constructive potential?” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 3). For instance, consider how a leader’s perspective might shift if they focus on their associates’ potential rather than their current state. Would this change in viewpoint affect leadership strategies? Leaders who prioritize the development of their followers’ potential also create a more meaningful impact. Such leaders see the inherent value in everyone, recognizing the seed of potential within them. While many can help actualize potential once identified, proper leadership education invites and nurtures that potential from the start.

Kegan and Lahey (1984) assert that effective leadership involves challenging and supporting individuals to grow, rather than merely confirming their existing realities. True leaders facilitate the development of those around them. Reaching our full potential goes beyond skill development and education; it requires self-discovery, understanding our meanings, and exploring our talents and passions. Leadership is rooted in the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2003), as leaders help others reach and understand their potential. The engagement of knowledge and human potential is essential when considering future leaders.

Experiential Learning and Leadership

Relating experiential learning as an integral construct to leadership can be quite informative for the potential leader. In examining the relationship between experiential learning and potentiating leadership, we might find that:

1. Experiential learning, by design, seeks to put knowledge and wisdom to work in the world. It bridges theory and practice that aids cultivating a sense of transdisciplinarity as a living dynamic existing within a community of practice. For the purposes of this paper a community of practice is defined as the joint enterprise within a collection of human potentials (an organization, school, or community) that creates a sense of accountability and engagement to the collective’s body of knowledge (Dixon, 2001).
2. Experiential learning naturally engages as a transformative, developmental, and innovative process.
3. Experiential learning illuminates interrelationships currently at work within the community of practice.

4. Experiential learning as a tool for potential leaders accentuates their ability to model good practices.
5. Within the community of practice, experiential learning reveals the deep-seated connections between inspiration, innovation, and implementation. By design, experiential learning seeks to put knowledge and wisdom to work in the world.

Experiential learning, coupled with a greater understanding of leading and teaching to human potential, provides a creative and engaging way to live, learn, and lead within the organization.

The opportunity now exists to identify the importance of weaving these experiential learning elements with transformative learning, as they work well together when considering human potential.

Transformative Learning and Leadership

Transformative learning is rooted in the idea that learners can reflect on their thinking and develop new perspectives that influence their actions (Cranton, 1996). Mezirow (1997) described it as using past interpretations to create new understanding that guides future actions. O'Sullivan et al. (2002) further defined transformative learning as a profound shift in thought, feeling, and action that alters our existence, impacting self-awareness, relationships, power dynamics, body awareness, and visions for social justice. For potential leaders, transformative learning can be viewed as an action-based inquiry that fully engages lifelong learning.

Teaching to Potential

Stimulating learning through thoughtful/thought-provoking inquiry, potentiating contributions as well as participation—an intervention of the highest sort—a purposeful interdependent activity serving to catalyze principled response and responsibility is what we call catalytic teaching; it is the enlivening force of teaching to human potential (McCaslin & Scott, 2012). It would be fair to ask at this point, “What does teaching and learning have to do with leading and leadership?” To clarify this connection, I would position teaching to potential as an educational force that would complement the evolving nature of leadership studies. Teaching and learning add considerable reach to the nature of leadership in terms of its designed aim of revealing and actualizing unrealized potential within

the learning dynamic. This approach to teaching and learning serves as a bridging dynamism as the potential leader locates, catalyzes, and then seeks to actualize all potentials within a given learning organization, including his or her own. This fits well in the potential leader's (the learning leader's) tool bag.

Potentiating Leadership

Potentiating is a double-edged construct. The potential leader not only “listens in” but also keeps an ear to the organization's human potential. Human potentials are “dispositional properties constituting the ‘hidden side’ of the personhood” (Norton, 1976, p. xii). Hidden in plain sight for those who know where to look and what to look for. As such, potential leaders build relationships as they search for human potential. Tapping the source of this renewable human resource, even marginally, can show gains in almost all indicators of success within an organization (McCaslin, 2001). In addition to the primacy given towards actualizing another's potential, another phenomenon is also at work. This is the reciprocating nature of potentiation. As we potentiate, we are potentiated, as we lift, we are lifted, and when something evolves, everything around it evolves (Coelho, 1988).

Potentiating leadership differs in focus from transformational leadership (Bass, 1990) yet builds on it in the culture which “occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group” (p. 21). Transformational leadership is building commitment to organizational objectives and empowering associates to accomplish those objectives. The result of transformational leadership is enhanced follower performance (Yukl, 2002). The transformational leader seeks to transform the organization; however, there is also a tacit promise to followers that they also will be transformed in some way, perhaps to be more like the leader. Transformational leaders tend to focus more on organizational objectives and their characteristics include the ability to create a vision, use charisma, share inspiration, and generate intellectual stimulation.

Bass (1997) defined authentic transformational leadership as follows: “Leaders are truly transformational when they increase awareness of what is right, good, important, and beautiful, when

they help to elevate followers' needs for achievement and self-actualization, when they foster in followers higher moral maturity, and when they move followers to go beyond their self-interests for the good of their group, organization, or society" (p. 3). The authenticity of transformational leadership lies in elevating the followers to greater potential.

Potentiating leadership's authenticity and transformative power emerges from and lies within the leader's own experience within the metamotivational domain. Their desire is more than helping others; they want to change, to improve, and to be led. It is more than assessing associates' motives, satisfying their needs, and valuing them (Northouse, 2001). The authenticity and maturity a potentiating leader brings to the relationship does more than help followers feel valued; it creates an environment where followers discover their own potential and become more self-actualized through the potentiating relationship. Further, the organization itself is positively potentiated, as is the leader.

According to Bass (1990) transformational leaders go beyond exchanging contractual agreements for desired performance by actively engaging followers' personal value systems and providing ideological explanations that link followers' identities to the collective identity of their organization, thereby increasing followers' intrinsic motivation (rather than just providing extrinsic motivation) to perform their job; articulating an important vision and mission for the organization. Thus, increasing followers' understanding of the importance and values associated with desired outcomes and raising the performance expectations of followers, so increasing their willingness to transcend their self-interests for the sake of the collective entity.

Discussion

What if, as we consider the transformative engagement of knowledge and human potential, we could simultaneously improve the quality and focus of adult learning and leadership effectiveness? Transformative and experiential learning generate active learning processes (Luckner & Nadler, 199; O'Sullivan, 2002). Through these active learning processes, individuals construct knowledge, acquire skills, and enhance values from direct experience. A primary objective of both transformative and experiential learning is to instill within the individual learner a sense of

ownership and responsibility as well as develop confidence, through critical reflection, in their own potential.

The purpose of leadership education is to engage knowledge (wisdom) and human potential transformatively. The conjunction "and" highlights the tenets of transformative and experiential learning. Transformational leadership (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978; Rost, 1993) provides a rich ground for these principles. As Rost (1993) noted, our learning can elevate the nature of leadership, revealing untapped potential within our learning communities. Knowledge and wisdom often emerge at the intersections of disciplines. This paper focuses on the intersection of knowledge/wisdom and human potential/capacity, promising a more integrated approach to leadership education.

Considering the Potential Leader

There is an important relationship at work concerning the nature of leadership and the notion of the leader serving in a teaching and learning role – a potentiating role. In exploring this relationship, leadership reveals a deeper purpose for leading, learning, and teaching. Namely, it is aimed at actualizing the potential of those we would lead, teach, parent, care for, and/or engage within our communities while simultaneously realizing our own gifts of potential (McCaslin & Christensen, 2013; McCaslin, 2008). For the leadership educator, this ultimately means becoming the potential leader (leader of human potential) and introduces the notion of the leadership of human potential.

At the intersection of transformative learning and human potential, the potential leader utilizes diverse approaches to align leadership studies with current challenges and new opportunities. Potentiating leadership highlights the interconnections within this transdisciplinary space, encouraging leaders to engage in continuous learning to achieve shared goals in their community of practice. Additionally, it aims to build bridges between practical, theoretical, and personal aspects of leadership.

Unrealized human potential presents a significant challenge for learning organizations, often resulting in increased conflict and dissatisfaction. To address this, we need to nurture learning leaders and adopt a potentiating leadership approach. By focusing on our current capabilities and their possibilities, we can harness individual and collective strengths for

effective problem-solving. This shift fosters creativity, innovation, and well-being, transforming challenges into enriching experiences. Ultimately, unlocking this potential can help tackle personal, societal, and ecological issues through innovative educational and leadership efforts.

Acts of Potentiation

The acts of potentiation include five integrated practices and form the foundation for potentiating leadership. Beginning with the practice of deep understanding, the potential leader seeks to develop empathetic considerations. Practicing critical reflection encourages inspired learning. Practicing maturity, through awareness, insight, and discernment, illuminates a landscape full of possibilities. The practice of empowerment seeks to cultivate mutuality and interdependence. Authenticity as a practice would, by design, embody our original greatness. The notion of cultivation invites the potential leader to become a community builder. Finally, the practice of building synergic relationships invites all to that place towards becoming well-being. The acts of potentiation harmonize quite easily with experiential learning and, further still, as an essential construct at work within the learning organization.

A Call for Focused Research

“Though innate potential excellences cannot be empirically demonstrated, it is a priori certain that their universality would significantly enhance the manifestation of personal excellences (Norton, 1976, p. xii). The challenge for leadership lies in the fact that human potential, as a dispositional property, can only be inferred retrospectively (p. xii). While such potentials are ultimately powerful, they start off weak and require nurturing and strong leadership. Therefore, fostering this potential within leadership education is a worthwhile goal.”

This calls for advancement in leadership education, emphasizing the need for research at the intersection of transformative learning and human potential. Key questions include: What tools do leaders use to help others realize their potential? What is the development process for a potentiating leader? How can we cultivate leaders who leverage interpersonal skills to inspire others? Is everyone capable of becoming a leader?

This brings us back to the initial questions of this

paper: What is the transformative nature of leadership education at the intersection of transformative/experiential learning and human potential? This prompts further inquiries: What makes an effective leader? —transforms into: What tools do leaders use to help others realize their potential? What do great leaders do? —shifts to: How do we create leaders who utilize interpersonal skills and relationship dynamics? How do we develop leadership? —evolves into: What is the process of developing a potentiating leader? What is the purpose of leadership? —changes to: What should leadership’s purpose be under optimal conditions with the best intentions?

Further research should establish a foundation for the science of potentiating leadership and develop hypotheses to explain observed anomalies (Kuhn, 1970). Key questions include whether self-actualized adults have an inherent purpose related to leadership, if actualization and adult development are prerequisites for potentiating leaders, and whether potentiation can occur at any developmental level. Additionally, we must consider which paradigms of influence and leadership should be revised or replaced. The goal of advancing potentiating leadership is to engage those already involved in leadership science and human development, identifying the means to transform and renew leaders.

About the Author

Dr. McCaslin has provided leadership within the University of Phoenix network since the inception of the Research and Scholarship Enterprise (RSE), which first began in 2013, having started the Center for Leadership and Entrepreneurial Research (CLER), and then promoted to the role of Dean of the RSE for several years. He now serves dual roles within the university and is the Associate Chair for CLER.

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Bridging the Divide: Understanding the Relationship Between Generation Gaps and Talent Stagnation in the Workforce

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Abstract

Generational differences in the workplace, spanning Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, significantly impact organizational dynamics, collaboration, and employee engagement. Variations in work ethics, communication styles, technology proficiency, and career development expectations among these cohorts often lead to misunderstandings, diminished teamwork, and talent stagnation. This paper examines how contrasting generational perspectives—such as Baby Boomers’ hierarchical and loyalty-driven approach, Generation X’s independence and flexibility preference, Millennials’ collaborative and purpose-driven ethos, and Generation Z’s entrepreneurial and digitally fluent mindset—contribute to workplace misalignment. Additionally, disparities in communication norms, from traditional formal interactions favored by older generations to informal digital exchanges preferred by younger employees, further complicate cross-generational collaboration. Organizations face challenges in technology adoption, leadership succession, and limited career advancement opportunities, disproportionately affecting employee morale and retention. This paper recommends targeted strategies to address these disparities, including cross-generational mentorship programs, flexible work policies accommodating diverse work-life balance priorities, inclusive career development initiatives, and comprehensive technology training to bridge digital proficiency gaps. Effective leadership succession planning and intentional knowledge transfer are also emphasized as critical to organizational continuity and growth. Ultimately, organizations that proactively embrace generational variation through fostering mutual understanding and leveraging distinct generational strengths will enhance innovation, adaptability, and long-term success.

Introduction

Generational disparities in the workplace emerge due to variations in values, work ethics, communication preferences, and technological proficiency among employees from distinct age cohorts, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation

Z (Becton, et al., 2014; Meriac et al., 2010). These differences can give rise to misunderstandings, diminished collaboration, and misaligned expectations, which, in turn, may contribute to talent stagnation (Calk & Patrick, 2017). Talent stagnation occurs when employees perceive their skills as underutilized, encounter limited opportunities

for career advancement, or experience ineffective leadership succession planning (Appelbaum et al., 2022). Consequently, this stagnation can lead to employee disengagement and impede organizational growth (Howard Hermes Consulting, 2023).

Recent studies highlight the significance of addressing generational gaps to prevent talent stagnation. A Deloitte (2023) report on “Global Human Capital Trends” emphasized that organizations failing to bridge generational divides risk losing top talent and stifling innovation. Bryan Hancock (2023) of McKinsey & Company reported on workplace dynamics, underscoring how generational differences, particularly in technology adoption and work-life balance priorities, can create barriers to career progression and knowledge transfer. Brown et al. (2017) report on the “Workforce of the Future” revealed that Millennials and Gen Z employees prioritize continuous learning and career development, and organizations that neglect these expectations face higher turnover rates and talent stagnation.

Addressing generational gaps is not just about mitigating conflicts but also about leveraging the unique strengths of each generation to foster a dynamic, inclusive, and forward-thinking workforce. By understanding and addressing these gaps, organizations can unlock the full potential of their talent pool and drive sustained success.

Work Ethics Across Generations

Work ethics across generations reflect the evolving priorities, values, and societal norms that shape how individuals approach their professional lives. Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are often characterized by their loyalty, dedication to hard work, and respect for hierarchical structures (Twenge et al., 2010). Raised in a post-war era, they value stability and long-term commitment to their employers, often equating hard work with success and job security. Their work ethic is rooted in a top-down organizational culture, where respect for authority and adherence to established norms are paramount. Additionally, studies suggest that this generation’s dedication to their careers often came at the expense of work-life balance, as they placed a higher emphasis on professional achievements over personal time (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). These values have shaped their

approach to work, making them a generation that values stability and traditional workplace structures.

In contrast, Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, introduced a shift toward independence, self-reliance, and a stronger emphasis on work-life balance (Rudolph et al., 2017). Having witnessed the economic uncertainties of the 1970s and 1980s, Gen Xers developed a pragmatic and adaptable approach to work (Rudolph et al., 2017). They value autonomy and are often seen as the bridge between traditional and modern work ethics. Their focus on balancing professional and personal responsibilities has influenced workplace expectations, paving the way for more flexible work arrangements. This generation’s skepticism of hierarchical structures and preference for self-directed work has contributed to a more decentralized and results-oriented workplace culture.

Millennials, born between 1980 and 1996, further transformed work ethics by emphasizing purpose-driven work, collaboration, and feedback (Gallup, 2016). Raised during the rise of technology and globalization, they prioritize meaningful work that aligns with their values and seek opportunities for personal and professional growth. Millennials thrive in collaborative environments, leveraging technology to enhance communication and teamwork. Their comfort with digital tools has driven innovation in the workplace, while their desire for frequent feedback reflects a need for continuous development and recognition. This generation’s focus on purpose and inclusivity has also pushed organizations to adopt more socially responsible practices.

Generation Z, born after 1997, brings an entrepreneurial mindset, a digital-first approach, and a strong focus on workplace differences (Deloitte, 2024). As true digital natives, they expect seamless integration of technology in the workplace and value flexibility, often favoring remote or hybrid work models. Their entrepreneurial spirit drives them to seek continuous learning and skill development, as they prioritize adaptability in an ever-changing job market. Gen Z’s commitment to workplace dynamics has also influenced organizational cultures, pushing companies to adopt more equitable and representative practices. However, these differing work ethics across generations can lead to misalignment and stagnation in the workplace. For instance, Baby Boomers’ emphasis on hierarchy may clash with Gen Z’s preference for flat organizational structures, while

Millennials' collaborative approach may conflict with Gen X's independent work style. Bridging these gaps requires organizations to foster intergenerational understanding and create inclusive environments that accommodate diverse work ethics.

Communication Styles

Communication styles across generations vary significantly, shaped by technological advancements, cultural shifts, and differing workplace norms. Traditional communication preferences, such as face-to-face meetings and formal written correspondence, are often favored by older generations like Baby Boomers, who value structure and professionalism (Rudolph et al., 2017). In contrast, younger generations, such as Millennials and Gen Z, lean toward digital communication channels like instant messaging and social media, which align with their tech-savvy, fast-paced lifestyles (Deloitte, 2024). These differing preferences can create challenges in cross-generational communication, as older generations may perceive digital communication as impersonal, while younger generations may view traditional methods as inefficient or outdated.

The level of formality in communication also varies across generations, influencing collaboration and innovation. Baby Boomers and some Gen Xers often prefer formal communication, including structured meetings and detailed emails, while Millennials and Gen Z tend to favor informal, concise exchanges through platforms like Slack or WhatsApp (Twenge et al., 2010). Additionally, feedback styles differ, with older generations often providing indirect, constructive feedback to maintain harmony, while younger generations expect direct, real-time feedback to foster growth and transparency (Gallup, 2016). These differences can lead to misinterpretations and hinder effective collaboration, particularly in diverse, multigenerational teams.

To bridge these gaps, organizations must adopt strategies that accommodate varying communication styles. Encouraging open dialogue about preferences, providing training on digital tools, and fostering a culture of mutual respect can enhance intergenerational understanding (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). For instance, blending formal and informal communication channels—such as combining email updates with instant messaging for quick queries—can

cater to diverse preferences. Additionally, promoting flexibility in feedback delivery, such as offering both written and verbal options, can ensure that all generations feel heard and valued. By embracing these strategies, organizations can leverage the strengths of each generation, fostering innovation and collaboration in the workplace.

Work-Life Balance Priorities

The concept of work-life balance has evolved significantly across generations, influenced by shifting societal values and technological advancements. While older generations, particularly Baby Boomers, were often characterized by a strong work ethic and dedication to their careers, sometimes at the expense of personal life, Millennials and Gen Z prioritize flexibility, mental health, and personal time (Kim & Song Lee, 2023). This shift in priorities presents challenges for organizations in terms of employee engagement and retention. Millennials and Gen Z are less likely to accept a rigid work structure and may seek out employers who offer flexible work arrangements, generous paid time off, and robust mental health support (Insights2Action, 2024). However, it's important to avoid generalizations, as individual preferences and circumstances within each generation vary significantly. Focusing on individual needs rather than generational stereotypes is crucial for creating a truly supportive work environment.

Technology has played a dual role in shaping work-life balance. While it enables remote work and flexible schedules, it also blurs the lines between work and personal life, leading to increased expectations of availability and potential burnout. Organizations must address this challenge by establishing clear boundaries and promoting healthy work habits. Creating a supportive work environment requires a multi-faceted approach, including offering flexible work arrangements where possible, promoting open communication about work-life balance needs, and providing resources such as mental health support and childcare assistance (University of Kansas, 2023). Ultimately, fostering a culture that values employee well-being alongside productivity is essential for attracting and retaining talent across generations. Further research focusing on specific industries and organizational cultures can provide more nuanced insights into the evolving dynamics of work-life balance.

Technology Gap

The increasing reliance on technology in the workplace has created a “technology gap” that separates individuals with varying levels of digital fluency. This gap is often evident across generations, with “digital natives” (Millennials and Gen Z) exhibiting a natural comfort with technology, while “digital immigrants” (older generations) may face challenges in adapting to new tools and platforms. This disparity can hinder productivity, as those less proficient in technology may struggle to keep pace with digitally driven workflows. Moreover, the technology gap can limit career advancement opportunities, particularly for older workers who may be perceived as lacking essential skills in a rapidly evolving digital landscape (World Economic Forum, 2025). This is not to say that older workers are incapable of learning; rather, the challenge lies in providing adequate support and training to bridge this gap.

Bridging the technology gap requires a multi-pronged approach. Organizations should invest in comprehensive training programs tailored to the specific needs of different generations. Mentorship programs pairing digitally fluent employees with those needing support can foster intergenerational learning and create a more inclusive work environment. Furthermore, designing user-friendly interfaces and providing ongoing technical support can ease the transition to new technologies for all employees, regardless of their digital background. Addressing the technology gap is not just about improving productivity; it’s about ensuring that all employees can thrive in a digitally driven world and contribute their valuable experience and expertise (Westerman et al., 2014). Further research exploring the specific technological challenges faced by different generations within various industries can inform the development of more targeted and effective interventions.

Leadership Succession Challenges

Leadership succession in contemporary organizations faces significant challenges due to generational shifts, particularly between Baby Boomers and Generation X leaders holding senior positions and Millennials and Generation Z employees actively seeking career advancement. One critical issue is the noticeable gap in mentorship and effective knowledge transfer,

causing disruptions in organizational continuity and potentially leading to talent stagnation. According to recent studies, insufficient attention to succession planning and mentorship exacerbates generational tensions, leading younger employees to experience disengagement and frustration, thus hindering organizational growth and innovation (Dennison, 2024).

Effective knowledge transfer and mentorship play pivotal roles in bridging generational divides, ensuring that tacit expertise and organizational wisdom are retained and shared with emerging leaders. Organizations that prioritize structured mentorship programs and intentional knowledge-sharing initiatives facilitate smoother leadership transitions and maintain operational stability (Hennelly & Schurman, 2023). Additionally, tailored leadership development programs specifically designed to address the unique expectations and aspirations of Millennials and Generation Z are crucial. Younger generations often value personalized career growth opportunities, continuous feedback, and meaningful work experiences; thus, leadership programs that incorporate these elements are more likely to retain and cultivate high-potential talent (Aguas, 2019).

To address these challenges, organizations must implement robust succession planning strategies that explicitly acknowledge and bridge generational differences. Recommended practices include formal mentorship structures, reverse mentoring—where younger employees mentor senior leaders on technological trends—and targeted leadership development initiatives aimed at younger cohorts. By embracing these strategies, organizations can foster a cohesive, inclusive, and forward-looking leadership pipeline that ensures sustained organizational success across generational divides (Chapman, 2023).

Limited Career Development Opportunities

Limited career development opportunities significantly impact employee morale and organizational growth, particularly due to generational differences in career aspirations and expectations. Baby Boomers and Generation X often prioritize stability, clear advancement paths, and recognition of expertise, whereas Millennials and Generation Z typically seek purpose-driven roles, continuous

learning opportunities, flexible career paths, and meaningful feedback (Mengying, 2023). Organizations frequently lack sufficient training and upskilling programs tailored to these distinct generational expectations, leading to disengagement, decreased productivity, and increased turnover (Manager & Alpaio, 2024).

Creating inclusive development programs is essential for addressing diverse learning styles and career paths. Organizations that recognize and accommodate generational differences through personalized training modules, flexible learning approaches (such as microlearning and digital platforms), and clearly defined career progression frameworks are more successful in retaining and motivating employees across all age groups (Businesswire, 2024). Additionally, mentorship and coaching serve as powerful tools for bridging generational gaps, facilitating knowledge transfer, and providing personalized support. Structured mentoring programs that pair senior employees with younger talent foster mutual understanding, enhance employee engagement, and effectively prepare emerging leaders for advanced responsibilities (Jones, 2023). Ultimately, investing in robust, inclusive career development strategies and mentorship programs not only boosts morale but also strengthens organizational resilience and adaptability in a rapidly evolving workplace environment.

Strategies to Bridge the Generation Gap

Bridging the generational gap within the workplace requires proactive strategies that address the diverse needs and expectations of different cohorts. Fostering cross-generational mentorship programs can facilitate knowledge transfer and mutual understanding, leveraging the experience of older generations while empowering younger employees (Sokolowsky, 2015). Flexible work policies and accommodating varying work-life balance priorities can enhance employee engagement and retention across generations (Insights2Action, 2024). Investment in technology training and digital upskilling is crucial, ensuring all employees possess the necessary competencies to thrive in the evolving digital landscape (World Economic Forum, 2025). This is particularly relevant for older generations needing support adapting to new technologies.

Furthermore, redesigning leadership succession plans to incorporate younger generations ensures a smooth leadership transition and fosters a culture of inclusivity (Chapman, 2023). Creating inclusive career development programs that cater to the aspirations of all employees, regardless of age, is essential for attracting and retaining top talent (HRBrain.ai, 2024). These programs should offer vertical and lateral career progression opportunities, recognizing that career paths are no longer linear. By implementing these strategies, organizations can create a more harmonious and productive work environment that leverages the strengths of each generation.

Conclusion

This paper highlights how generational differences in work ethics, communication styles, technology adoption, and career expectations can lead to workplace misalignment and talent stagnation (Deloitte, 2023; Twenge et al., 2010). While Baby Boomers value hierarchy and loyalty, Millennials and Gen Z prioritize flexibility, digital fluency, and purpose-driven work (Gallup, 2016; Rudolph et al., 2017). These unaddressed disparities can hinder collaboration, innovation, and leadership succession (Chapman, 2023).

Organizations must proactively bridge generational gaps by implementing cross-generational mentorship, flexible work policies, and inclusive career development programs (HRBrain.ai, 2024; Sokolowsky, 2015). Investing in continuous learning and digital upskilling ensures all employees remain competitive (World Economic Forum, 2025). Companies can harness diverse strengths, enhance innovation, and build a resilient workforce by fostering intergenerational collaboration.

The long-term benefits are clear: organizations that embrace generational dynamics will improve retention, adaptability, and sustained growth (Deloitte, 2023). A call to action is urgent, and leaders must prioritize inclusive strategies to unlock the full potential of a multigenerational workforce.

About the Author

Dr. Kerstetter is a seasoned professional with a rich and diverse background spanning military service, corporate leadership, and academia. He honorably

served 22 years in the U.S. Navy before transitioning to the private sector, where he established himself as a respected IT professional and leader. Dr. Kerstetter has held significant roles in Fortune 100 companies, including JP Morgan Chase, AIG, Shell Oil, and Sprint, contributing to their technological advancements and strategic initiatives.

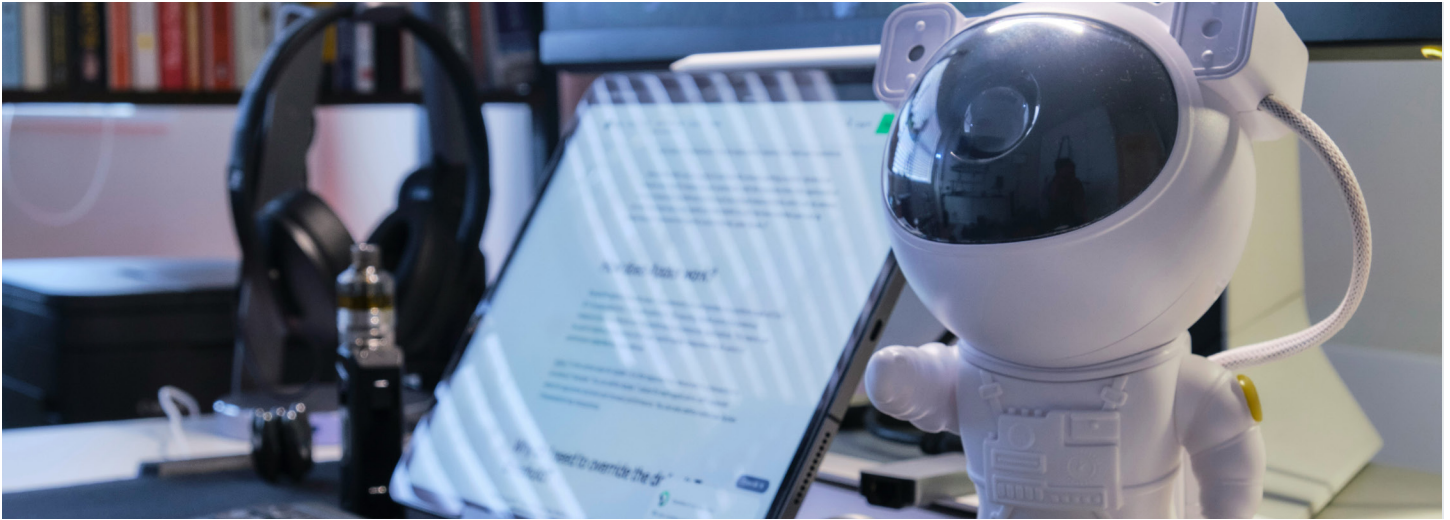
His academic journey reflects a commitment to lifelong learning and a deep understanding of the intersection between business and technology. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Information Systems and an MBA in Technology Management from the University of Phoenix. Furthering his expertise, Dr. Kerstetter completed his Ph.D. in Management with a specialization in Leadership and Organizational Change from Walden University.

In his current role as a college professor, Dr. Kerstetter is passionate about sharing his extensive real-world experience and academic insights with the next generation of leaders. Outside of his professional endeavors, he enjoys traveling with his wife and cherishes spending quality time with his ten grandchildren.

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From the Inside Out: A Theoretical Framework for Whole Person Development in an AI-Driven Workforce

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Abstract

As the workforce evolves amid the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), organizations must shift from outdated development models to intentional strategies that cultivate dynamic internal talent. This theoretical essay presents a framework rooted in Carl Jung's concept of synchronicity and Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory of self-efficacy for AI integration with learning and development processes. The proposed model uses a triangle symbolizing vision, spirituality, and physical well-being, with a heart at its center representing intention (thoughts and behaviors of the individual). This whole-person development model supports employee engagement, inspires personalized leadership and learning, and helps organizations build a culture of continuous learning that combats talent stagnation and promotes purposeful internal growth.

In an era of rapid technological advancement and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), the nature of work is undergoing a profound transformation that demands a mindset of lifelong learning (Bukartaite & Hooper, 2023; Malik et al., 2022). Success in this evolving

landscape depends on unlocking the latent potential within people (Chuang, 2024). While many companies recognize the importance of talent development, few embrace the deeper human dimensions that drive sustained growth – clarity of purpose, belief

in one's ability to succeed, and alignment between personal values and organizational vision. Too often, development is reduced to a checklist rather than a continuous, strategic process. This oversight impacts engagement, retention, and performance. Organizations must go beyond upskilling to reignite the human spirit at work to remain competitive. Enter AI-integrated workforce development.

Developing Dynamic Workforce Talent from Within

As AI continues to reshape the workforce, organizations face a growing imperative to develop internal talent dynamically and holistically (Chuang, 2024). Yet, a significant disconnect persists: while 62% of employers claim to offer internal mobility, only 36% of employees perceive such opportunities (University of Phoenix, 2024). This dissonance reveals a deeper challenge – a lack of shared vision and meaningful engagement between employees and organizational development systems (Gallup, 2024). To address this, a conceptual framework is proposed – grounded in Carl Jung's concept of synchronicity and Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Jung, 1952, 1960). These theories explain how meaningful alignment and belief systems foster engagement, vision, and action. This model advocates developing the whole person – mind, body, and spirit – to ignite purpose, overcome stagnation, and inspire lifelong learning using AI for personalized learning and leadership.

Theoretical Foundation

Meaningful alignment occurs when actions, values, and aspirations connect to a greater purpose and unlock powerful motivation for growth (Mayes, 2016). Rooted in Jung's synchronicity, this phenomenon of meaningful alignment emerges when internal intentions align with external events in profoundly significant ways. Such clarity creates fertile ground for learning and change. Bandura's self-efficacy theory explains how social learning – through modeling, mentorship, and shared experience – builds belief in one's capacity to succeed (Bandura, 1997). Observing others overcome obstacles inspires personal belief and action. This synergy fuels whole-person development – nurturing the mind through knowledge, the body

through discipline, and the spirit through inner conviction. At the heart of this process is synchronicity – not as mere coincidence, but as a framework for meaningful alignment, affirming that growth is purposeful and timely (Storr, 1983).

Jung's Synchronicity: Meaningful Alignment

Jung (1952) described synchronicity as an “acausal connecting principle,” where internal states align with external events in meaningful ways. In the workplace, this occurs when employees feel their roles align with a deeper sense of purpose, unlocking creativity, energy, and engagement. However, many workers report stress, loneliness, and a lack of career mobility (Gallup, 2024; University of Phoenix, 2024). These issues reflect more than unmet goals – they reveal a breakdown in belonging and belief in advancement.

Strategic AI integration, informed by Bandura's theory and a learning ratio of 70:20:10, offers a way forward (Bandura, 1986; Wasson & Kirschner, 2020). Self-efficacy develops through observing others, receiving feedback, and mastering experiences (Bandura, 1997). Employees gain confidence in small learning teams structured around 70% experiential learning, 20% social learning, and 10% formal instruction. For example, a mid-level employee leading a project (70%) receives insights from peers (20%) and accesses needed training (10%). Witnessing a peer rise to leadership through feedback and mentoring reinforces belief in upward mobility. This belief, built-in community, drives motivated action and renewed purpose.

Intentional learning design shifts workforce development from compliance-based training to holistic, human-centered transformation (Fenwick et al., 2024). Learning becomes tied to real work, shared growth, and the human need for purpose. Synchronicity becomes a compass for designing systems that tap into full human capacity. AI can personalize learning, helping employees connect their roles to a greater mission (Kochan et al., 2024; Migliore et al., 2019). The result is renewed self-belief and a culture of growth – not because employees were told to grow, but because they experienced it (Bukartaite & Hooper, 2023).

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory: Empowering Belief

Bandura (1997) emphasized that belief in one's ability is the foundation of motivated action. People

persist when they believe they can succeed, observe success in others, experience mastery, and receive reinforcement. In AI-integrated learning, self-efficacy enables initiative, resilience, and mobility (Kochan et al., 2024; Migliore, 2024). When organizations nurture belief through supportive culture and growth opportunities, they create ecosystems of empowerment. For example, frontline staff, a team leader, and an IT liaison work together in a healthcare team implementing a new patient scheduling system. With only 10% formal training, most development comes from hands-on problem-solving (70%) and peer collaboration (20%). The team leader, who was once in a similar role, models success. As peers observe this, receive support, and experience small wins, their confidence grows, and their perceived career mobility increases with their current employer (Dill et al., 2014). They begin taking the initiative, proving Bandura's theory in action. Self-efficacy fuels growth and transforms workplace culture.

Conceptual Framework: The Whole Person Triangle

To translate Jung and Bandura's theories into strategy, the Whole Person Triangle (Figure 1) represents an individual within a dynamic learning ecosystem shaped by servant leadership (Bandura, 1997; Mayes, 2016; Parris & Peachey, 2013). At the triangle's apex is vision – the star guiding one's personal leadership focus. Learning team experiences often spark “aha” moments, especially when hands-on projects are involved in developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Edwards, 2021). Through experience (70%), peer modeling (20%), and formal learning (10%), individuals discover how their work connects to something bigger. AI integration creates a personalized learning experience that responds to individual needs, improves self-efficacy, and assuages career insecurities (Burhan, 2024).

On the lower right, spiritual alignment reflects internal values and moral compass – not necessarily religious but rooted in meaning and integrity. In learning environments shaped by servant leadership, individuals clarify what matters, fostering well-being and belonging (Parris & Peachey, 2013). These decisions mirror Bandura's emphasis on social modeling – each value-based choice strengthens belief (Bandura, 1997).

The bottom left of the triangle represents vitality – the energy to perform work with enthusiasm and stamina (de Jonge & Peeters, 2019; Ryan & Frederick, 1997). Without vitality, even clear vision and strong values remain dormant. For example, a manufacturing team began each session with stretch breaks and walking meetings. The leader modeled healthy work-life habits, creating a culture that valued energy alongside productivity. As a result, the team saw better focus, fewer sick days, and improved collaboration. AI-integrated learning and development processes can support personalized health and wellness, including 3D virtual learning environments (Kochan et al., 2024; Migliore et al., 2019).

At the triangle's center lies the heart – the engine of behavior. Actions are consistent and purposeful when aligned with vision, values, and vitality. Conversely, when the heart is conflicted – when thoughts and behaviors contradict personal or organizational values – stagnation, disengagement, or burnout often follow (Festinger, 1957). Learning team behaviors often reflect this alignment. Surrounding the triangle is a servant leadership culture that models humility and care (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Leaders in this ecosystem nurture employees, reinforcing the triangle's core elements. Applied through small teams and AI-integrated learning, the model becomes a living system for self-efficacy, purpose, and synchronicity.

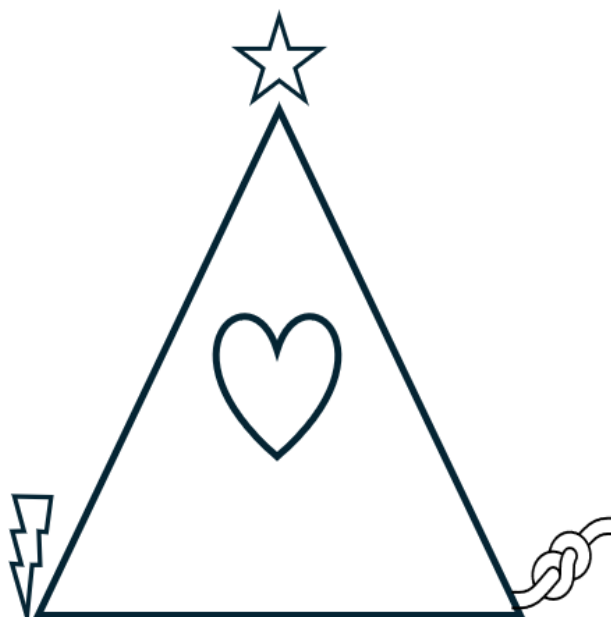


FIGURE 1 | Whole Person Triangle (WPT) Model

The Culture of Continuous Learning

Training and development are still often treated as a checklist. However, this mindset leaves organizations vulnerable in an AI-driven world where skills evolve quickly (Fenwick et al., 2024). Continuous learning is now essential for resilience and relevance, and learning must be intrinsically inspired to improve self-efficacy and meaningful experiences (Wasson & Kirschner, 2020; Xu et al., 2023). The Whole Person Triangle (WPT) offers a conducive framework to cultivate inside-out development in an AI-driven environment.

When individuals are energized, aligned with their values, and guided by a clear vision, they are ready for adaptive learning. This internal alignment transforms learning from a task into a lifelong habit (Bukartaite & Hooper, 2023). It helps individuals release outdated thinking and behaviors that hinder innovation. For example, consider this scenario: a customer service team undergoes digital transformation, and employees initially resist AI tools until they participate in a small learning team. Team members shift from fear to curiosity after beginning a walking routine, journaling values, and defining career goals. Confidence and mentoring followed. Anchored in purpose, such individuals learn to see change as an invitation—not a threat.

Application in the Workplace

To bring this framework to life, servant leaders must steward organizational systems and the human spirit (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Song et al., 2024). This approach goes beyond traditional training. Within small teams, leaders foster mentorship and align people with purpose-driven growth, which can build self-efficacy through consistent learning interactions and trust-filled relationships. For example, a team may begin with a vision workshop, where members define their “why” to strengthen motivation and alignment with the team’s mission. This foundation is supported by wellness practices like mindfulness check-ins, promoting energy and sustained engagement. Reflective tools like journaling and peer coaching deepen alignment. AI skill development is also integrated meaningfully, enhancing both productivity and service.

At the core is servant leadership – an approach that champions empathy, empowerment, and shared

responsibility (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Song et al., 2024). In such cultures, feedback is constructive, learning is expected, and leadership is distributed. The WPT model is scalable. It does not require massive investment but intentional alignment between development and purpose. Applied consistently, it fosters innovation, engagement, and retention by helping people become their best selves – not just for work but for life-long growth.

Conclusion

The future of workforce development is not just about reskilling but about reigniting the human spirit. People need to feel connected to purpose, capable of growth and called to lead. By integrating AI into learning and development processes and applying the concepts of Jung’s synchronicity and Bandura’s self-efficacy through the Whole Person Triangle, organizations can shift from checklist thinking to cultures of shared growth (Bandura, 1997; Fenwick et al., 2024; Mayes, 2016). This approach nurtures inner alignment for lasting performance and well-being. Here, energized, grounded, and vision-driven individuals evolve and lead.

Servant-led cultures are rooted in care and empowerment, where employees can become agents of transformation. Therefore, the human heart remains the most powerful catalyst for change in a world shaped by algorithms. The opportunity now is not just to prepare – but to lead from the inside out.

About the Author

Dr. LauraAnn Migliore holds a Ph.D. in Organization Management specializing in Human Resources and has over 35 years of cross-industry experience. She serves as a Dissertation Chair and doctoral faculty at the University of Phoenix, where she teaches, mentors, and guides doctoral students through complex research in higher education. Her expertise includes leadership development, HRM strategy, instructional design, and AI-integrated learning. Her research focuses on AI integration in leadership and learning, organizational leadership, cross-cultural dynamics, and mobile workforce innovation. She is committed to advancing excellence through applied research and transformational learning.

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Developing Dynamic Workforce Talent with Gen Z and Millennials

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Abstract

By 2025, Millennials and members of Generation Z will represent a significant proportion of the global workforce, reshaping workplace cultures, expectations, and talent development strategies. These generations consistently prioritize purpose-driven work, flexibility, continuous learning, and inclusive environments. At the same time, organizations face pressing challenges, including bridging generational differences, balancing flexibility with necessary structure, and addressing evolving understandings of purpose and mental well-being. Critical skills gaps also persist in both technical and interpersonal domains. Employers report high demand for expertise in data analytics, cloud computing, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and software development, alongside essential soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and leadership. To meet these needs, organizations must implement personalized learning pathways, mentorship programs, continuous feedback mechanisms, and advanced technology-driven solutions for professional development. Best practices from leading companies emphasize purpose-driven initiatives, flexible career trajectories, and tailored employee experiences. Organizations that invest proactively in these strategies are more likely to attract, retain, and empower emerging talent, thereby fostering innovation and sustaining long-term competitive advantage.

Introduction

By 2030, Generation Z and Millennials are projected to comprise 58% of the global workforce, reshaping workplace cultures, organizational priorities, and employee expectations (Zoho People, 2024). This demographic shift underscores the growing influence of these generations, who prioritize purpose-driven work, flexible arrangements, and continuous learning opportunities. Organizations that fail to adapt to these evolving expectations risk losing top talent to competitors that embrace and operationalize these values.

The contemporary workforce is being significantly reshaped by Gen Z (born 1997–2012) and Millennials (born 1981–1996), who bring distinct values, expectations, and skills to the workforce. These generations are driving shifts in workplace culture, technology adoption, and organizational priorities (Deloitte, 2023). Organizations must adapt by offering personalized learning, fostering inclusive cultures, and embracing flexibility. Businesses can build a resilient, innovative, and future-ready workforce by addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities presented by these generations.

By 2025, Gen Z and Millennials, comprising much of the global workforce and demanding purpose-driven work, flexibility, and continuous learning, will require organizations to evolve their talent development strategies to attract, retain, and empower these generations or face a competitive disadvantage in the talent market. Adapting to the Millennial and Gen Z workforce presents key challenges. Organizations face internal resistance to change and the complexity of bridging generational gaps. Implementing new talent strategies requires investment and careful measurement of impact. Maintaining consistency, adapting to technological advancements, and defining “purpose” are ongoing hurdles. Balancing flexibility with structure and addressing mental well-being adds further complexity. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for organizations to thrive in the evolving talent landscape.

Gen Z and Millennials in the Workplace: Values, Motivations, and Misconceptions

The modern workforce is increasingly shaped by

Generation Z (Gen Z) and Millennials, two cohorts with distinct characteristics, values, and work preferences. Understanding these generations is crucial for organizations aiming to attract, retain, and engage talent effectively.

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, came of age during the rise of the internet, the Great Recession, and rapid technological advancements, shaping their adaptability and desire for meaningful work (Dimock, 2019). Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is the first fully digital-native generation, growing up with smartphones and social media, influencing their pragmatic approach to career development and preference for financial stability (Dimock, 2019).

Values and Motivations in the Workplace

Work-Life Balance: Millennials prioritize flexibility and remote work, valuing experiences over material possessions (Deloitte, 2020). Gen Z values flexibility but emphasizes job security due to economic challenges witnessed during their formative years (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Purpose-Driven Work: Millennials seek careers aligned with personal values and societal impact, often drawn to corporate social responsibility (CSR). Gen Z similarly values purpose but places greater emphasis on variety in teams (Indeed, 2022).

Feedback and Recognition: Millennials prefer structured feedback and mentorship. Gen Z, accustomed to instant feedback, expects continuous performance evaluations and real-time acknowledgment (Seemiller & Grace, 2019).

Learning and Development: Millennials seek long-term growth within organizations, while Gen Z favors microlearning and skill-based training for agility in an evolving job market (Gallup, 2021).

Technological Fluency: While Millennials are proficient with technology, Gen Z is entirely digital-native and prefers collaborative digital tools, AI-driven solutions, and tech-integrated work environments (Twenge, 2017).

Debunking Myths

Myth - Millennials and Gen Z are Lazy: Both generations exhibit strong work ethics but define

productivity differently. Millennials embrace flexible schedules, while Gen Z prioritizes efficiency and automation (Deloitte, 2020).

Myth - They Lack Loyalty: Job-hopping is often due to stagnant career growth rather than a lack of commitment. Organizations offering career advancement and learning opportunities foster retention (Gallup, 2021).

Myth - Gen Z Struggles with Face-to-Face

Communication: Gen Z values in-person interactions for collaboration and mentorship, seeking workplaces that balance virtual and physical engagement (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Understanding these generations enables organizations to create inclusive, engaging work environments and leverage their strengths effectively.

Challenges in Developing Gen Z and Millennial Talent

The integration of Gen Z and Millennials into the workforce presents a dual-edged sword: while digitally adept and collaborative, these generations often lack specific skills crucial for thriving in the modern professional landscape. This skills gap necessitates targeted development initiatives focusing on both technical and interpersonal competencies. A significant deficit exists in critical “hard” skills. Although Gen Z and Millennials may possess digital fluency, developing proficiency in data analysis and interpretation remains crucial for deriving actionable insights in today’s increasingly data-driven world (Biro, 2015; Manager et al., 2024).

As cloud computing becomes ubiquitous across industries, expertise in cloud platforms and services is highly sought after (Luxner, 2023). The escalating frequency and sophistication of cyber threats underscore the critical need for robust cybersecurity skills (Doshi, 2022). The transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) across sectors necessitates a growing workforce capable of developing and implementing these technologies (XFactr.AI, 2024). The growing demand for software developers, with an emphasis on programming proficiency, is crucial for the digital economy. Fluency in languages like Python, Java, and JavaScript is essential, reflecting the widespread integration of software solutions across industries. This underscores the importance of investing in

programming education and training to cultivate a skilled workforce capable of driving innovation and economic growth (Zahidi, 2023).

Beyond technical skills, certain “soft” skills also require cultivation. While generally collaborative and communicative, these generations can benefit from enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Zahidi, 2023), as well as refined written and verbal communication skills, essential for effective teamwork and leadership (Biro, 2015; Manager, 2024). Effective time management, organizational skills, adaptability, resilience, and strong leadership and teamwork capabilities are also crucial for navigating the complexities and rapid changes characteristic of the modern workplace.

Research confirms that too few Gen Z workers are entering manufacturing to fill vacancies, and those who do often have low engagement and higher turnover compared to older workers (Freeman et al., 2024). While their job motivations—such as career growth, flexibility, meaningful work, and supportive leadership—align with those of other generations, compensation is less of a priority. Additionally, Gen Z is more aware of its job market options, given the ongoing low unemployment rates.

The future of work is being reshaped by the evolving preferences of Generation Z, alongside broader transformations in technology, ethics, and career longevity. As Gen Z enters the workforce, their demand for personalization, purpose, and flexibility challenges traditional organizational structures and engagement strategies (Betts et al., n.d.; Zahidi, 2023). To retain this generation, employers must address several critical challenges and adapt to their unique expectations.

First, the fusion of skills required for the future—digital proficiency, data analytics, business acumen, and creativity—necessitates robust training and development programs (Zahidi, 2023). Gen Z values continuous learning and career growth, yet many organizations struggle to provide clear, latticed career paths that align with their aspirations (Career Optimism Index, 2024; Harter, 2024). Second, the ethical implications of human-machine collaboration and the need for diverse talent sources require organizations to foster dynamic environments that embrace generational potentials (Parmelee, 2023). Mentorship programs leveraging the expertise of older generations (Gen X, Millennials, and Boomers) can bridge knowledge gaps and strengthen leadership

pipelines (Deloitte, n.d.). Third, the rise of internal marketplaces and flexible work formats highlights the importance of matching employees' skills with meaningful projects, ensuring engagement and job satisfaction (Frankl, 1985; McKinsey & Company, 2023). However, organizations must balance flexibility with structure to avoid disengagement (Harter, 2024). Lastly, the attractiveness of an industry and a company's reputation play a pivotal role in retention. Employers must proactively address these challenges by investing in leadership development and creating dynamic, purpose-driven workplaces (Parmelee, 2023; Zahidi, 2023). By aligning their strategies with the values and expectations of Gen Z, organizations can attract and retain the best talent, ensuring long-term success in an ever-evolving work landscape.

Strategies for Developing Dynamic Workforce Talent

The world continues to evolve at an ever-changing pace. Recognizing the increasing prominence of GenZ and Millennials in the workforce, organizations can benefit from proactively developing Gen Z and Millennial talent. Providing Gen Z and Millennial talent with opportunities for personalized learning development, mentorship, and feedback can contribute to a dynamic workforce that can adapt to an ever-changing environment.

One strategy in developing dynamic workforce talent is to provide personalized learning experiences. Fake and Dabbagh (2020) define personalized learning as providing learning opportunities that are tailored to the talent's needs, strengths, challenges, and goals. For example, if the goal for an engineer is to enter company leadership, then an organization can provide the engineer with personalized learning opportunities such as job shadowing a manager or leadership training to enable them to further develop their leadership skills.

Mentorship and feedback can help further develop a dynamic workforce. Job shadowing and mentorship can even help reduce the impact of adverse outcomes, such as burnout (Franco, 2015). Mentors can provide timely feedback for their employees that is tailored to each employee's needs. Providing feedback that enables talent to process and reflect on their work behaviors can positively impact their sense of

agency at work (Franco, 2018). In other words, it can positively impact an employee's sense of influence in their work environment, contributing to a dynamic and productive workforce. Dynamic workforce effectiveness depends on confident talent from different backgrounds addressing diverse challenges in an ever-changing environment.

Best Practices

The best practices from Google (Brown, 2023; Johnson, 2021; Smith, 2022), Deloitte (Deloitte, 2023; Jones, 2023; Williams, 2022), Salesforce (Davis, 2022; Miller, 2023; Taylor, 2021), and LinkedIn (Anderson, 2023; Harris, 2023; Patel, 2022) highlight several key lessons learned from successful talent development strategies aimed at Gen Z and Millennials. A central takeaway is the importance of continuous learning. Organizations that invest in providing employees with opportunities for growth and skill development foster a sense of engagement and loyalty. These employees feel valued when their employers prioritize personal and professional growth, increasing retention and job satisfaction.

Another critical lesson is that purpose-driven work significantly increases employee engagement. Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to remain with companies that align with their values, particularly those with a strong commitment to social impact. Companies like Salesforce that integrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) into their talent development strategies create a work environment that resonates with the values of younger employees, fostering deeper connections and a more motivated workforce.

The shift toward flexibility in the workplace also emerged as a crucial factor for attracting and retaining top talent. Hybrid work models, flexible career paths, and opportunities for mobility allow employees to feel empowered and balanced in their personal and professional lives. Companies like Unilever, which have embraced flexibility, provide an environment that adapts to the changing needs of younger workers, contributing to higher satisfaction and productivity.

Finally, the integration of technology in talent development has proven to be a powerful tool. Companies like LinkedIn leverage AI to personalize learning and career development, creating an efficient

and tailored experience for each employee. By using technology to offer personalized growth opportunities, companies can ensure that employees receive the support and feedback they need to thrive in a rapidly changing work environment.

Conclusion

The evolving landscape of the modern workplace necessitates a shift in talent development strategies, particularly as Gen Z and Millennials become its driving force (Deloitte, 2023; Zoho People, 2024). This paper has highlighted the distinct values and expectations of these generations, emphasizing their desire for purpose-driven work, flexible arrangements, continuous learning, and inclusive environments (Deloitte, 2023; Deloitte, 2020; Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Indeed, 2022). Organizations must recognize that traditional approaches to talent management are no longer sufficient. Attracting and retaining top talent from these cohorts requires a fundamental shift in mindset, moving away from standardized programs towards personalized learning experiences (Fake & Dabbagh, 2020), robust mentorship initiatives (Deloitte, n.d.), and regular feedback mechanisms (Franco, 2018). Furthermore, addressing the skills gaps, both technical and interpersonal (Biro, 2015; Manager, 2024; Luxner, 2023; Doshi, 2022; XFactr.AI, 2024; Zahidi, 2023), is crucial for empowering these generations to reach their full potential. Ignoring these evolving needs risks a competitive disadvantage in the talent market and a significant loss of innovative potential and future leadership (Betts et al., n.d; Freeman et al., 2024; Harter, 2024; Parmelee, 2023).

The call to action is clear: organizations must invest in developing the next generation of leaders now (Parmelee, 2023; Zahidi, 2023). This involves fostering a culture of continuous learning, providing opportunities for skill development in data analysis, cloud computing, cybersecurity, and AI, and cultivating essential soft skills such as critical thinking, communication, and adaptability. By embracing these strategies, organizations can cultivate a dynamic, resilient, and future-ready workforce capable of navigating the complexities of the 21st-century workplace and driving lasting success.

About the Authors

Dr. Simon is a distinguished author, educator, speaker, and empowerment strategist with over 15 years of leadership experience across government, finance, engineering, and technology sectors. She specializes in women's empowerment, leadership, and holistic health.. As a professor and consultant, she advances organizational development, employee engagement, and generational leadership. Dr. Simon holds a doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University and a master's in organizational management. She is certified in Business and Life Coaching, Lean Six Sigma, and Agile Scrum. Her work integrates personal branding, wellness, and strategic growth to help women lead empowered, purpose-driven careers.

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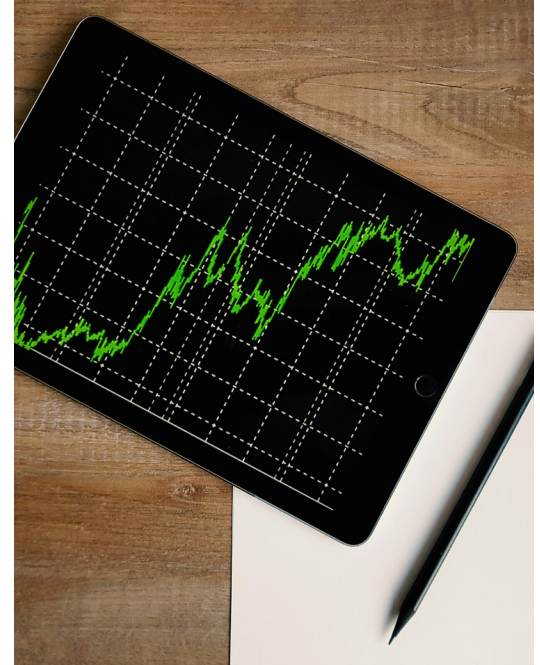
Retention and Professional Growth: A Dual Approach to Strengthening the Teaching Workforce

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Abstract

Teacher retention and professional development are important factors influencing teacher growth and development. The role of principals in developing a school culture that supports both teacher retention and career-long growth is critical. Research highlights that structured mentorship programs, targeted professional development, and shared decision-making processes contribute significantly to teacher satisfaction and professional growth. Effective leadership creates an environment where educators feel valued, supported, and motivated to refine their instructional practices. Furthermore, establishing policies that promote collaboration, trust, and professional learning advances teachers' sense of connectedness in their schools. As younger generations enter the teaching profession with shifting career expectations, school leaders must provide personalized growth opportunities to grow and keep the best teachers. By prioritizing mentorship, professional learning, and recognition, principals can not only reduce teacher attrition but also promote a thriving environment where both teachers and students can achieve maximum growth advancements.

Teacher Shortage: A Challenge in Education

Schools across the United States are facing a growing teacher shortage, with alarming attrition rates posing a significant challenge to public education (Love & Love, 2022). Research indicates that declining interest in the profession, rising student enrollment, efforts to reduce class sizes, and an increasing number of educators leaving the field have all contributed to this crisis (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). As a result, principals are struggling each year to recruit and retain qualified teachers, particularly as the number of

college graduates pursuing degrees in education has drastically decreased yearly.

However, effective support systems can make a critical difference. Studies show that early-career teachers are far less likely to leave the profession when comprehensive induction programs and mentorship opportunities are in place (Love & Love, 2022). Beyond structured support, leadership plays a critical role in teacher retention. Effective principals develop a collaborative school culture, value teachers' input, and create an environment where educators feel respected, engaged, and invested in their schools. When

school leaders actively support their teachers, both retention rates and overall job satisfaction improve, strengthening the stability of school communities (Hopper et al., 2022).

The United States is experiencing an unprecedented teacher attrition crisis, with nearly half of new educators leaving the profession within their first five years (NASSP, 2020). This ongoing turnover presents not only a financial burden for school districts—forcing them to repeatedly invest in recruitment and training—but also disrupts student learning, school climate, and overall academic achievement (Maready et al., 2021; Shuls & Flores, 2020). Addressing this challenge requires a deeper understanding of why teachers leave, which research attributes to factors such as low salaries, insufficient benefits, lack of administrative support, and inadequate working conditions (Tran & Smith, 2020). Additionally, shifts in workforce expectations among newer generations of teachers have reshaped retention patterns, making it critical for school leaders to adapt their teacher support and development strategies (Nguyen et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021).

While burnout and workplace dissatisfaction remain persistent concerns (Napoles, 2022), the question arises: Are administrative teams truly unsupportive, or are they unprepared to meet the evolving needs of today's educators (DeMatthews et al., 2022)? Understanding these challenges is essential for improving teacher retention, and the key lies in strengthening both leadership practices and professional development efforts. Supportive, visible, and engaged school leaders can significantly impact teacher retention by fostering environments where educators feel empowered and heard. Shared decision-making, mentorship, and collaborative planning not only enhance teachers' sense of "buy-in" but also contribute to their professional growth.

Teacher retention and professional development are interconnected. When educators have access to meaningful learning opportunities and strong leadership, they are more likely to remain in the profession and grow in their roles. A culture of collaboration and continuous development empowers teachers to refine their instructional practices while reinforcing their commitment to their schools. By prioritizing both retention and growth, school leaders can develop and grow a highly skilled teaching workforce that benefits all stakeholders.

The Role of School Climate in Teacher Retention and Professional Growth

School communities should strive to create an environment that is warm, welcoming, and conducive to both teacher and student success. A positive school climate has been identified as a primary factor in teacher retention, while a negative or unsupportive environment significantly contributes to teacher attrition (Scott et al., 2022; Perrone et al., 2019). Additionally, teachers are experiencing burnout due to emotional fatigue, particularly as they work with students facing critical life challenges (Farmer, 2020). Given that school climate and culture directly influence educators' decisions to stay or leave, educational leaders must prioritize fostering a supportive and engaging work environment (Perrone et al., 2019).

A positive school climate can be cultivated by ensuring that all staff members feel valued and supported, which can be accomplished through intentional leadership practices (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Visibility and approachability are key leadership traits that contribute to building trust, a crucial element in participative leadership and shared decision-making (Dunlap, 2019; Zohair et al., 2021). When teachers feel safe, respected, and included in school decisions, they are more likely to stay in their roles and engage in continuous professional growth (Anthony et al., 2019).

Miller et al. (2020) emphasized that school climate is also influenced by working conditions, including administrative support, class sizes, student behavioral challenges, and adequate planning time. Teachers' perceptions of their work environment shape their level of job satisfaction and commitment to the profession (Farmer, 2020). In an era where education is already struggling to maintain public trust and support, additional workplace challenges only exacerbate teacher turnover (Scott et al., 2022). High attrition rates disrupt long-term school improvement efforts, creating instability within schools and hindering professional development opportunities for educators (Sulit, 2020).

School culture and climate are critical in shaping both teacher retention and professional development. A strong, positive culture signals to students, staff,

families, and the community that the school values collaboration and growth (Owens, 2004; Peterson & Skiba, 2005; Jerald, 2006). Research highlights that the more effort leaders put into fostering a positive culture, the more connected and supported teachers feel. This sense of belonging not only encourages teachers to remain in the profession but also promotes a commitment to continuous learning and professional advancement. By investing in school climate, administrators can simultaneously improve teacher retention and create an environment where educators grow professionally.

The Role of Principals in Teacher Retention and Professional Growth

The level of involvement of a principal has a direct impact on both the satisfaction and professional growth of new teachers (Maready et al., 2021). School administrators must understand what types of support are most effective in improving teacher retention rates and fostering professional development (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). Research suggests that when teachers receive multiple layers of support during their induction process, they gain valuable insights from each of those layers, strengthening their professional foundation (Kurt, 2020). However, a significant gap remains between preservice teacher preparation programs and new teacher induction, making it imperative to provide comprehensive support systems (Resch & Schrittmesser, 2021). Hands-on support from principals not only helps novice teachers feel valued but also accelerates their professional learning and integration into the school community (Kurt, 2020).

Principals play a key role in teacher retention by engaging in shared decision-making, providing structured induction support, modeling high expectations, and maintaining visibility within the school (Redding & Henry, 2019; Stanley, 2021). While identifying school-level needs is not a challenge in education, implementing effective support systems remains a major obstacle (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Albert, 2020). Teacher turnover is not limited to early career educators; attrition rates are rising across all experience levels, creating a shortage of experienced mentors who are essential for supporting new teachers (Shuls & Flores, 2020; Redding & Nguyen, 2020). Alarmingly, in some schools, the most experienced educators have fewer than five years of teaching experience, highlighting the urgent need for retention

strategies that also promote professional development (Kim, 2019).

In high-need urban and rural areas, teacher attrition rates reach as high as 70-90%, making stability and professional growth difficult to sustain (Doran, 2020; Miller et al., 2020). Even in schools with experienced staff, implementing both direct and indirect support strategies is essential to ensuring a positive work environment (S. B. Holmes, 2021). Direct support, such as mentoring and targeted professional development, helps teachers refine their instructional practices, while indirect support, such as a shared vision and clear instructional expectations, fosters a culture of continuous improvement (Redding & Henry, 2019). However, the principal's physical presence and active engagement remain the most influential factors in shaping a supportive professional environment for early career teachers (Redding & Henry, 2019). By focusing on both teacher retention and professional development, school leaders can create an environment where educators feel valued, supported, and motivated to grow professionally.

Principal Support, Teacher Retention, and Professional Growth

Principals play a vital role in shaping an environment where teachers not only remain in the profession but also develop and refine their practices. Structured mentorship programs, targeted professional development, and shared decision-making processes serve as key drivers of both teacher retention and career-long learning. When school leaders prioritize these elements, they provide educators with the tools and confidence necessary to develop their instructional practices and take on leadership roles within their schools.

The principal's role in supporting mentorship and induction programs for beginning teachers has proven to be one of the most effective strategies for improving teacher retention (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Supports such as pairing new teachers with mentors in their content area, providing common planning time, and facilitating external collaborative opportunities all have a positive impact on early career teachers (Doran, 2020). Additionally, offering paid release time for mentors and mentees to meet and plan together can further strengthen the support system (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

Beyond mentorship, principals must establish policies and procedures that create an environment conducive to success (Whalen et al., 2019). School leaders who are visible, engaged, and willing to invest time and resources in their teachers cultivate a culture of support and trust (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Research has shown that early career educators' express gratitude toward administrators who foster an environment that allows them to succeed (Redding & Henry, 2019). One of the primary concerns for new teachers is building meaningful connections with students, staff, and families (Shuls & Flores, 2020). A leadership team that embraces a growth mindset cultivates a culture where teachers feel empowered to develop their skills, find fulfillment in their work, and contribute meaningfully to the school community (Scallon et al., 2021). Principals who intentionally recognize and appreciate their teachers' efforts further reinforce their sense of belonging and professional purpose (S. B. Holmes, 2021).

Many new teachers leave the profession because they feel unsupported and lack opportunities for growth (Whalen et al., 2019). Factors such as limited autonomy, unaddressed behavioral challenges, overwhelming mandates, and poor working conditions contribute to teacher attrition (Redding & Henry, 2019). While undergraduate teacher candidates enter their programs with enthusiasm and a passion for education, it is up to school leaders to sustain that motivation and commitment once they enter the workforce (Miller et al., 2020).

Support can come from multiple sources, but principal leadership and peer acceptance are two of the most influential factors in teacher retention (Will, 2020). Establishing a strong sense of community within the school among colleagues, students, and administration helps new teachers feel valued and integrated into their environment (McLeod, 2022). As younger generations enter the teaching profession, it is important to acknowledge their career expectations. Many new teachers view their first job as a steppingstone, seeking professional growth and leadership opportunities early in their careers (Moser & McKim, 2020). Principals who engage in hands-on leadership and provide teachers with a voice in decision-making can help new educators feel supported and invested in their roles (Loewus, 2021).

In conclusion, teacher retention is closely tied to the quality of a school's culture, climate, and leadership.

A positive school culture fosters collaboration, trust, and shared purpose, while a supportive climate ensures that teachers feel valued, respected, and equipped to succeed. Most importantly, effective school leadership serves as the foundation for creating conditions that motivate long-term commitment and professional advancement. School leaders play a critical role by actively supporting teachers through clear communication, meaningful professional development, and consistent recognition of their contributions. Retaining teachers is not just about keeping them in the classroom; it is about investing in their continuous growth and long-term success. By igniting a culture of learning, providing strong mentorship, and prioritizing professional development, school leaders can cultivate an environment where teachers thrive and remain committed to their schools.

About the Authors

Dr. Greg Harrison is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership in the Zucker Family School of Education at The Citadel Military College in Charleston, S.C. Recent publications include the following: *Secondary Teachers' Perceptions on How Administrators Affect the Induction Process for New Teachers: An Explanatory Case Study*, *Revolutionizing Alternative Education: The Collaborative Story of RISE Academy*, and *Developing a Virtual Learning Option for Students*. Prior to working with the Citadel, Dr. Harrison has over 23 years in k-12 education to include high school classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, and Executive Director at the district office!

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Improving the Organizational Workforce through Adaptive Leadership Styles, Emotional Intelligence, and Motivational Language

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Abstract

A company's workforce is an essential variable that companies must address to have consistency in the organization. Organizations have inconsistencies with their workforce, and addressing this need helps improve the company's structure and culture. The inconsistencies have led to employee retention, engagement, performance, and motivational issues. Consistency allows the company to accomplish objectives and develop its staff. Emotional intelligence, leadership styles, and motivational language are the tools that can help organizations improve job satisfaction and motivation while properly engaging their staff. Organizational leaders must create a strategy encompassing emotional intelligence, leadership styles, and motivational language to meet the needs of the businesses and their staff. Company leaders who understand these variables can create a positive culture that meets their staff's needs.

Introduction

A company's workforce is its lifeline. However, companies are not providing the necessary support for employees to excel in their environment (Lofthouse, 2016). Motivation, nurturing, and engagement are the types of support that companies must focus on to develop a culture that meets the needs of the staff

(Lofthouse, 2016). Companies that cannot provide the necessary support to their employees will have issues with retention, morale, and satisfaction. A more significant focus on the workforce support variable will help companies focus on their objectives and improve their talent pipeline. The talent pipeline is crucial for organizations to develop current and future leaders,

allowing the company to achieve its short- and long-term goals (Lofthouse, 2016).

The workforce helps the company accomplish its goals while remaining competitive in its market (Sudiarti & Saepudin, 2024). Also, the workforce allows the company to adapt to these changing times as markets continually evolve (Sudiarti & Saepudin, 2024). Company leaders need to motivate and engage their workers for the company to be successful in the short and long term. Company leaders who cannot meet their teams' needs will struggle with morale, retention, job satisfaction, and performance issues. Company leaders who address their workforce opportunities can solidify their staff while being better prepared for the future. Addressing the workforce opportunities allows the company leaders to provide support through nurturing, motivation, and engagement, which creates an inviting culture that allows the workers to contribute in a positive and stimulating environment. Companies that provide a positive and stimulating environment can focus on being competitive in their market while not having to continually replenish their talent (Sudiarti & Saepudin, 2024). Leadership, emotional intelligence, and motivational language will help to increase awareness of properly engaging and motivating associates while having positive results in their endeavors. Company leaders who create a strategy encompassing an adaptive leadership style, emotional intelligence, and motivational language will empower their workers and their environment, leading to improved results, consistency, and engagement.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a model that helps leaders understand their employees. Emotional intelligence has become a tool that leaders use with their teams. Emotional intelligence helps leaders correctly understand their employees' emotions and use reflective responses (Cooper & Davis, 2022). Emotional intelligence focuses on the individuals and the environment (Cooper & Davis, 2022). Emotional intelligence allows leaders to understand the emotional aspects of situations while being reflective in their analysis of them (Cooper & Davis, 2022). Leaders who understand their employees' emotional needs can better relate consistently and provide feedback that resonates with the employees. The relatability improves relationships, focusing on emotions and trust (Sharma et al., 2024). Leaders who

build relationships on emotions and trust can resonate with the employees, leading to improved results (Sharma et al., 2024).

Leaders who do not employ emotional intelligence may disconnect from their employees and work environment. The disconnect negatively affects morale, retention, and employee job satisfaction. Emotional intelligence also allows leaders to understand the organization and make decisions based on the influences of the environment (Sharma et al., 2024). Some influences are the type of work environment and the type of employees' personalities. Emotional intelligence allows leaders to learn the person's traits and environment while making decisions that improve all aspects of the company (Sharma et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence allows for proper reflection of emotions while accounting for variables in that environment. The reflection of the emotions and variables allows for better solutions to environmental opportunities. Emotional intelligence creates a positive environment that allows employees to excel and understand expectations (Munawar & Hadiaty, 2024). Emotional intelligence can benefit any leader by creating an atmosphere where the employees can aid the company in these changing times.

Leadership Styles

Company leaders use various leadership styles in the work setting. Leadership provides a competitive advantage that affects all facets of the organization. The leadership style is a variable that affects the employees and culture (Sudiarti & Saepudin, 2024). Studies have shown that leadership helps influence the employees and results (Lian & Tui, 2012). Certain leadership styles resonate with employees, while others negatively affect them. In various studies, leadership issues are associated with organizational problems (Cooper & Davis, 2022). Companies that do not use the correct leadership styles will struggle and continually revisit organizational issues. Leadership style creates a foundation that allows the company stability and consistency. The leadership styles also set the culture in that environment and convey the organization's standards. A better understanding of the available leadership styles allows company leaders to utilize the best approach for their environment. Transitional, transformative, democratic, authoritarian, and adaptive are types of leadership styles that company leaders employ.

Transactional and transformational leadership are some of the types of leadership styles that company leaders use in their work environment. In transactional leadership, employees follow instructions to receive rewards or punishment for their actions (Lian & Tui, 2012). Transactional leadership focuses on the organization's short-term needs and tries to accomplish those goals (Lian & Tui, 2012). Transactional leadership treats all interactions as transactions without focusing on the team's growth. Also, transactional leadership does not focus on the employee's long-term needs or development. Transactional does not meet all employees' needs and may actively discourage them based on their preferred work environment. Leaders benefit from transactional leadership when the environment is established and the goal is to improve operations (Maria Stock et al., 2017).

Transformational leadership focuses on the employee's motivations and uses those factors to empower the environment. Empowerment helps employees to develop more creative ideas while preparing them for advancement. Transformational leadership allows for a more democratic process that instills teamwork and a growth mindset. The growth mindset improves continuous improvement and allows the organization to improve each company facet. Leaders benefit from transformational leaders when the environment changes (Maria Stock et al., 2017). Transformational leadership is not suited for all employees, and company leaders must understand each employee's expectations for their work environment.

Studies that evaluated democratic and authoritarian leadership styles found differences in each type (Munawar & Hadiaty, 2024). Democratic focus is on the long term and creating a sense of belonging in the environment (Munawar & Hadiaty, 2024). Democratic leadership provides a culture that focuses on teamwork and openness (Cox, 2016). The democratic leadership gives employees a voice and provides an increased sense of accomplishment. Inversely, authoritarianism focuses on results and does not build the relationship aspect in the environment. Authoritarian leadership does not provide freedom or allow the employees to have a voice (Cox, 2016). Authoritarian leadership does not account for employees' opinions, which can cause a disconnect with the workforce.

The adaptive leadership style combines the known leadership styles and flexes between the styles to meet the needs of the business while properly engaging the employees. Adaptive leadership helps leaders flex their leadership style to connect with the employees while continually focusing on achieving results (Srimathi & Narashiman, 2021). Adaptive leadership allows the leader to be flexible while creating an environment that improves all facets. Adaptive leadership creates a structure that meets the needs of the employees and creates a culture so that all individuals can excel consistently. Leaders need to understand the various types of leadership to apply the type that best fits the environment and employee personality traits. Leaders who use a leadership style that resonates with their staff will have an environment that allows the employees to meet their needs while allowing the company to meet its goals consistently.

Motivational Language

Motivational verbiage has been of keen interest to companies because of its benefits to organizations (Matovic et al., 2023). Some benefits are trust, less vagueness in the environment, and efficiency (Samo et al., 2022). Trust increases the employees' dedication and allows a better understanding of the environment (Samo et al., 2022). Efficiency increases when the employees know how to perform well in the environment based on information provided by the company leader.

The language used by an organization's leaders helps consistently motivate the company's employees. Leaders who employ motivational language engage the employees and allow them to help the organization accomplish its goals (Zhao & Ali, 2025). Also, it allows employees to contribute at a higher level while allowing the company to advance more opportunities in their market. The motivational language allows the company leaders to positively influence the employees based on the environment (Zhao & Ali, 2025). Leaders will gain an emotional connection with the employees by using the correct motivational language with the employees (Zhao & Ali, 2025).

The correct motivational language depends on the verbiage that resonates with that individual. The language provides the foundation to increase employee engagement (Samo et al., 2022). The language needs to vary with employees; using different verbiage helps

to cater to the audience. A universal language will not reach all employees and cause a disconnect. Leaders must understand the needs of the employees and use motivational language that helps to inspire them in the work environment. The positive influence of motivational language enhances the employees' buy-in and leads to a better focus on company objectives. Also, the positive influences improve the mindset of the employees and enhance job satisfaction (Zhao & Ali, 2025). The improved mindset improves morale while cultivating retention. Motivational language is another important variable that helps company leaders to engage and motivate their employees.

Discussion

Leaders who use the impactful leadership style create a positive culture and allow for a deeper, meaningful relationship in the environment (Sokolic et al., 2024). Company leaders who use the correct leadership style can help improve the company environment and its employees. Leaders must create an environment that focuses on participation and effective communication (Georgescu, 2023). Participation and effective communication create an inviting culture that brings the best out of each employee. Employees have different needs and expectations, and an adaptive leadership style helps resonate with each employee and provides the needed support.

The adaptive leadership style encompasses all available leadership types and uses the type that best fits the audience. Adaptive leadership helps company leaders adjust their style in the current evolving times and provide employees with a more prosperous environment and experience (Sokolic et al., 2024). Adaptive leadership helps to have an emotional connection with the employees, which leads to a more meaningful relationship. The meaningful relationship creates an emotional connection while providing the employees with the support they need to grow and contribute to the company achieving its goals.

Company leaders who cannot use an adaptive leadership style will cause their employees stress, lower morale, and job satisfaction (Sokolic et al., 2024). Studies have shown a link between leadership, motivation, and job satisfaction (Sokolic et al., 2024). Leadership, motivation, and job satisfaction are linked and create a positive environment that benefits all. Company leaders who account for this variable

provide a work environment that allows the employees to be more creative while having more enjoyment (Sokolic et al., 2024). The leadership variable helps to create a structure that benefits the environment and employees. The structure brings stability and caters to each employee's personal needs.

Leaders need to understand emotional intelligence and its impact on employees. Emotional intelligence allows company leaders to understand their emotions, the environment, and employees' needs (Cooper & Davis, 2022). The proper reflection allows the company leaders to apply the correct leadership style while accounting for the essential variables in the environment. Company leaders need to take classes each year to review the impact of emotional intelligence and how to use it with their staff. Reviewing this material helps to understand the environment while using the leadership style that addresses concerns and allows the company to achieve its results. Emotional intelligence also allows leaders to develop their employees and provide the support they need to grow while contributing in a bigger capacity to the company. Some employees do not want to expand past their current capacity, and emotional intelligence allows leaders to engage those employees and create plans for all employees in that environment.

Motivational language helps the leaders reach each employee and provides the verbiage to help them excel in their environment. Each employee reacts to different verbiage, and choosing the correct language helps to improve job satisfaction while properly engaging them in the environment (Zhao & Ali, 2025). Leaders who can use motivational language will empower and support their employees in changing times. Motivational language is a powerful tool that improves the commitment to the project and the organization.

Companies that create strategies to address their workforce and provide them with support that benefits all parties. Companies must also provide emotional intelligence classes to review pertinent information and the importance of engaging and motivating employees. The emotional intelligence classes help leaders to understand employee traits and their environment. The emotional intelligence classes will enable the company leaders to use adaptive leadership styles and motivational language to engage employees. Engagement improves job satisfaction, motivation, and

retention. Emotional intelligence, leadership styles, and motivational language are interconnected and provide the structure to help the company grow, reach objectives, and develop its staff.

The strategy will empower companies to understand their employees better while providing the blueprint for consistency and happier employees. Focusing on emotional intelligence, leadership styles, and motivational language addresses the workforce and allows the company to focus on long-term success while continually developing the staff. The workforce needs to be a positive factor in the environment as the company market continually evolves. The workforce allows the company to pursue opportunities and use the staff's strengths to improve results.

About the Author

Gregory Peterson, DBA, earned a DBA in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix, College of Doctoral Studies, bringing 25 years of experience in Logistics, Warehouse Distribution Services, and Loss Prevention. Research interests are organizational principles and variables.

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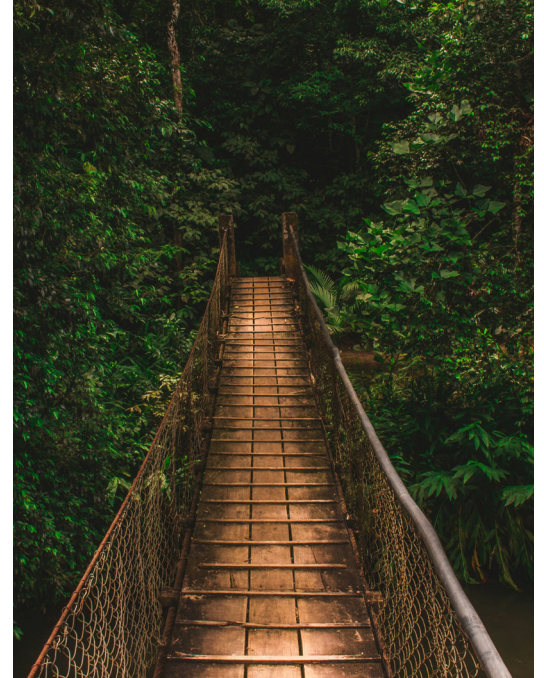
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Exploring the Challenges of Managing Remote Employees within Federal Agencies

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Abstract

The evolution of technology has redefined workforce talent development, particularly in organizations struggling to optimize communication technology to foster collaboration, engagement, and productivity. This has created a critical role for advanced communication technology in navigating the evolving landscape of developing dynamic workforce talent from within. This study explores how effective information communication technology (ICT) can optimize workforce performance, enhance collaboration, and foster innovation among teleworking employees. This research used a qualitative appreciative inquiry approach to identify five key strategies to improve telework efficiency: optimizing communication tools, overcoming management challenges, harnessing artificial intelligence for operational efficiency, overcoming barriers to technology adoption, and enhancing teleworking management. These findings offer scholar-practitioner leaders and policymakers actionable strategies and data-driven insights for bridging technology gaps to cultivate agile, high-performing, resilient remote teams and adaptable remote workforce talent development in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Keywords: Workforce Talent Development, Remote Work, Communication Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Appreciative Inquiry, Leadership Adaptability, Teleworking Efficiency, Digital Transformation.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed workplace dynamics, necessitating innovative approaches to how employees learn, collaborate, and innovate, including workforce talent development. Organizations face significant challenges in leveraging communication technology to manage dispersed teams effectively. Existing literature highlights the importance of advanced communication

tools in fostering engagement, productivity, and seamless collaboration in virtual workspaces (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020; Rusilowati et al., 2024). However, resistance to change, security concerns, and management hesitancy often delay the adoption of innovative solutions, and digital fatigue hinders optimal performance (Aghimien et al., 2022). Like many organizations, federal agencies increasingly rely on remote teams, requiring new approaches to talent optimization, leadership adaptation, and technology

integration. Despite the availability of advanced ICT tools, many federal agencies struggle to maximize workforce productivity, streamline communication, and overcome technological hesitancy.

As organizations transition toward hybrid and fully remote work models, leaders must develop internal workforce talent by leveraging the right technological tools. While technological advancements have made virtual work possible, federal agencies struggle to fully leverage digital tools to maximize workforce performance (Coccia & Watts, 2020). The shift to telework in federal agencies has presented opportunities and challenges in maintaining effective collaboration, productivity, and workforce engagement. Traditional leadership models are becoming obsolete as organizations shift toward hybrid and fully remote work environments (Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021). This article presents how information communication technology enhances workforce development, leadership adaptability, and team cohesion, as well as strategic recommendations for scholar-practitioner leaders in developing workforce talent through optimized remote communication tools, AI-driven efficiency models, continuous development programs, and leadership strategies tailored to virtual environments.

Problem Statement

Despite the availability of advanced communication tools, organizations like federal agencies that operate under rigid and hierarchical structures face barriers to effectively managing remote employees, which hinder digital adaptation (Haug et al., 2023) and developing workforce talent from within, limiting their ability to fully leverage innovations such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation for workforce development. The absence of AI-powered collaboration tools, fragmented communication platforms, and resistance to new technologies limits the ability of federal leaders to cultivate high-performing, agile workforces and track performance without micromanagement (Karl et al., 2022; Rathore et al., 2021). However, there is a limited understanding of how federal agencies can systematically adopt and integrate new communication technologies while addressing leadership challenges and workforce readiness.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative appreciative inquiry approach, which focuses on organizational strengths rather than weaknesses (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) to explore the effectiveness of information communication technology in federal agencies, identify the most efficient technological tools for remote workforce management, and propose strategies to enhance teleworking efficiency. Appreciative inquiry enables scholar-practitioner leaders to build on existing technological and managerial capabilities to enhance virtual team performance. The appreciative inquiry framework uses a 4-D model—Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. The Discovery phase identified strengths in current communication technology, the Dream phase explored ideal technological solutions envisioned by managers, the Design phase developed strategic implementation plans, and the Destiny phase generated recommendations for sustaining improvements.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The existing literature emphasizes that effective digital workforce transformation requires leadership strategies prioritizing employee engagement, trust-building, and adaptive learning environments. Studies highlight the need for managers to balance oversight with autonomy while fostering a culture of digital competency and innovation (Loia & Adinolfi, 2021; Ben-Sedrine et al., 2021). However, research also suggests that many organizations struggle to establish structured training programs that equip employees with the necessary skills to maximize the potential of advanced communication technologies (Rusilowati et al., 2024). This literature review explores key themes surrounding teleworking, communication technology, and leadership in remote environments, providing a conceptual foundation for understanding how scholar-practitioner leaders can drive effective technological adoption for organizational efficiency and productivity.

Technology Acceptance and Workforce Development

The Technology Acceptance and Use Model argues that organizational IT policies influence workforce

adoption of new technology more than individual user preferences (Tamilmani et al., 2021), especially in the regulatory and compliance-driven nature of technology implementation within structured environments such as federal agencies. In federal agencies, bureaucratic decision-making often delays the adoption of AI and cloud-based collaboration tools, negatively impacting workforce efficiency (Haug et al., 2023).

Performance Improvement Theory

The Performance Improvement Theory suggests that technological integration should focus on enhancing decision-making, communication, and operational effectiveness (Mong et al., 2021). This theory posits that performance outcomes rely on motivation, education, training, and leadership interventions, including technology integration. Leaders must ensure that employees have the necessary skills and resources to leverage technology for improved collaboration, employee engagement, and productivity (Ceci et al., 2021; Stich et al., 2018).

Transformational & Shared Leadership in Virtual Workspaces

Traditional leadership models do not translate well into remote environments (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021). Transformational leadership emphasizes digital adaptation, strategic talent development, and collaborative decision-making, while shared leadership fosters innovation by empowering employees with AI-driven decision-support tools (Ahuja et al., 2023).

Results and Findings

The results of this study provided significant insights into the challenges, successes, and opportunities for managing remote employees using thematic analysis and through the lens of appreciative inquiry—Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny phases. These findings contribute to a greater understanding of the effectiveness of communication technologies, the need for organizational adaptation, and the potential for technological innovation to enhance remote workforce management.

Optimizing Communication Technology

Managers and supervisors highlighted the benefits of current communication technologies in improving

collaboration, reducing delays, and maintaining workflow efficiency. Participants praised tools like Microsoft Teams and cloud-based project management platforms, emphasizing real-time document sharing, video conferencing, and instant messaging capabilities. However, despite these benefits, the need for better integration and customization to align with specific job functions was evident, mainly because of communication overload and tool fragmentation that could hinder productivity. This finding corresponds with the Discovery phase of AI, identifying what works well within the organization.

Overcoming Management Challenges

A recurring challenge in managing remote employees is maintaining engagement, trust, and oversight without micromanagement. The balance between oversight and trust remains a key challenge in remote team management, including clear communication strategies, virtual team-building activities, and transparent performance metrics to foster engagement and accountability. Managers also faced barriers in synchronizing work across multiple time zones, often resulting in delayed decision-making. These challenges align with the Dream phase of appreciative inquiry, where participants articulated an ideal vision for a more structured and seamless workforce management.

Harnessing Technology for Efficiency

Integrating AI and automation tools to improve remote work efficiency, particularly AI-driven solutions such as automated scheduling, predictive workflow analytics, and virtual collaboration spaces, was identified as crucial for enhancing communication, task allocation, and performance monitoring. Leaders could use AI-driven solutions to automate repetitive tasks, provide real-time analytics to streamline workflows, reduce inefficiencies, and improve decision-making. AI-powered insights can enhance productivity, optimize workflows, and reduce the administrative burden on remote employees, allowing them to focus on high-impact work and prioritize strategic decision-making. This finding corresponds with the Design phase of appreciative inquiry, where participants envisioned improvements to the existing communication infrastructure.

Barriers to Technology Adoption

Despite the potential benefits of new communication

technologies, federal agencies are still reluctant to adopt advanced ICT solutions due to security, cost, integration challenges, and policy constraints. Some managers reported that their agencies restricted AI-based communication tools due to data privacy and security risks. Others cited bureaucratic obstacles and resistance to change as barriers to upgrading technological infrastructure. This finding highlights the institutional and cultural constraints affecting digital transformation in the public sector.

Enhancing Teleworking Management

Improving remote workforce management requires structured telework policies, continuous training, and a balance between flexibility and accountability. Leaders emphasized that providing employees with comprehensive training on technology tools would enhance digital literacy and reduce inefficiencies. Additionally, managers suggested creating formalized virtual team-building activities to improve team cohesion, morale, and engagement. Continuous training and professional development are crucial for ensuring employees effectively use communication technologies. Organizations should prioritize structured on-boarding, hands-on training, and leadership development programs to build a resilient, tech-savvy workforce. This finding corresponds with the Destiny phase, where strategies for sustaining positive change were proposed.

Recommendations for Leadership

Based on the study's findings, practitioner leaders are offered several recommendations to improve remote workforce management and organizational technological integration.

1. **SPL to Evolve with Technological Advances:** Integrating AI-powered solutions with predictive capabilities to automate repetitive tasks, such as scheduling meetings, generating reports, and tracking project milestones to improve efficiency and productivity. Federal agencies should consolidate multiple communication tools into a centralized system that integrates instant messaging, video conferencing, project tracking, and file sharing to minimize redundancies and improve accessibility.
2. **Establish Transparent Productivity Metrics:** Implementing clear performance indicators that

focus on outcomes rather than hours worked to address the challenges of tracking productivity could help reduce micromanagement concerns while ensuring accountability.

3. **Investment in User-Friendly Technologies:** Invest in unified, user-friendly communication technologies platforms that seamlessly integrate messaging, video conferencing, and file sharing to enhance communication and collaboration. Leaders should explore AI-powered solutions that automate meeting scheduling, data tracking, and real-time performance analytics to streamline workflows and enhance productivity.
4. **Enhance Training and Digital Literacy:** Organizations should provide ongoing technical training to ensure employees effectively utilize available tools and optimize their digital work environment, mainly using basic functionalities, advanced features, and real-time task-tracking capabilities to improve efficiency and productivity.
5. **Practice Management Skills with Open Communication:** Open communication would encourage trust-building and interactive engagement, including regular check-ins, feedback loops, and asynchronous communication. Leaders should introduce structured virtual team-building activities and flexible work schedules to foster employee engagement and well-being.
6. **Conduct Pilot Testing Before Full-Scale Implementation:** Before adopting new communication technologies, organizations should conduct small-scale pilot programs to evaluate functionality, adoption challenges, and security risks, as well as to help build trust among the leadership hierarchy and mitigate the fear of disruption.

Recommendations for Future Research

The rapid evolution of communication technology and workforce management practices may limit the study's relevance over time. As communication tools and strategies evolve, the challenges and strategies identified in this research may shift. Hence,

future research should explore emerging trends in AI integration, remote team collaboration, and government digital transformation to provide periodic updates to capture new trends and developments using a longitudinal approach for deeper insights into these evolving trends. Additionally, future research using methodologies missing in the literature could provide tailored recommendations to address communication tool selection challenges unique to federal agencies. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute valuable insights to scholars, policymakers, and industry leaders navigating the evolving landscape of technology-enabled workforce management.

Implications for Scholar-Practitioner Leaders

Scholar-practitioner leaders are critical in bridging the gap between academic research and practical application in workforce development (Arteaga et al., 2024). The study holds profound implications for scholar-practitioner leaders, as it bridges academic research and practical leadership applications in workforce technology management. This study highlights that developing dynamic workforce talent requires a strategic fusion of digital infrastructure, AI-powered insights, and adaptive leadership models. For scholars, this research expands AI-driven workforce optimization theories that provide a foundation for future longitudinal studies on telework dynamics, including enhancement of academic literature on remote workforce management and AI-based solutions. This study offers practitioners actionable frameworks for leveraging AI, standardizing communication tools, and implementing evidence-based leadership development models to future-proof federal agency workforce talent. It equips managers with practical strategies to foster a productive telework culture. For the leaders, this study guides leaders in policy development and decision-making for remote workforce optimization. Implementing these strategies aligns with the Scholar-Practitioner-Leader (SPL) Model, emphasizing the value of integrating research-based knowledge with practical leadership solutions (Sanchez & Kresyman, 2019). Federal agency leaders who embrace these approaches would be better equipped to navigate the evolving digital workplace, optimize remote employee performance, and foster a culture of innovation in the public sector.

Conclusion

Developing dynamic workforce talent from within requires a strategic embrace of advanced communication technologies, AI-driven efficiencies, and leadership adaptability. This study highlights that federal agencies and other institutions should leverage existing strengths while fostering a culture of continuous digital learning and innovation. The future of collaboration, decision-making, and workforce management is undeniably digital, which lies in human-computer collaboration involving artificial intelligence, and leaders must act decisively to harness technology's full potential in developing dynamic talent from within (Alaiad et al., 2019; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). This study establishes that effective communication tools, AI-driven efficiencies, and strategic leadership are enhancements to remote work and are essential for productivity, engagement, and long-term organizational success. The findings underscore that optimizing communication technology, overcoming managerial challenges, and enhancing teleworking strategies are crucial for sustained productivity, team cohesion, and workforce agility in a remote environment. For scholar-practitioner leaders, the path forward involves championing digital transformation, integrating AI for operational efficiency, and fostering leadership models prioritizing engagement and trust. Organizations that invest in upskilling internal talent, streamlining technology use, and aligning leadership practices with evolving workforce needs will cultivate resilient, high-performing teams. By embracing innovation and developing talent from within, organizations can future-proof their workforce—turning digital challenges into opportunities for sustained growth, adaptability, and excellence in the modern workplace.

About the Author

Dr. Michael Obisanya is a licensed Professional Engineer (PE) and a certified Project Management Professional (PMP). He holds a master's degree in civil engineering and is a recent graduate of the University of Phoenix with a Doctorate in Management and Information Systems and Technology. With over 27 years of experience in engineering design, construction, and project management, he currently serves as a Project Manager with a federal agency. His

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Investigating the Connection Between Soft Skills and Employability in IT

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Abstract

The demand for valuable soft skills is steadily increasing in the ever-evolving landscape of information technology (IT). While technical skills remain a prerequisite, employers seek candidates who can demonstrate essential soft skills such as effective communication, critical thinking, time management, and problem-solving abilities. This paper delves into the shifting employability criteria in IT, which now necessitate a blend of technical and soft skills to bridge the widening employment gap. The paper also aims to identify the soft skills contributing to this gap, resources for skill development, and methods to effectively communicate and advocate for these skills to secure entry-level positions or career advancement within IT.

Introduction

The growing interest and adoption of IT in organizations is creating a concern for employers who need to fill openings with qualified candidates. Technical skills have been a focus of hiring managers to fill IT jobs. This practice has been beneficial to IT professionals with technical skills and qualifications. Still, it has led to employers competing for competent employees, exacerbating the staff shortage and generating turnover as IT professionals transition between employment prospects based on compensation and other benefits (Elmellas, 2023). To stay competitive in the global IT market, job candidates must master soft skills (Gopi Krishna et al., 2024).

Katz (1974) posited that soft skills comprise intra- and interpersonal relationships. Katz (1974) added that

“interpersonal relationships are attributed to the relationships an individual has with other members of society. Intrapersonal relationships are those that focus on the relationship with oneself” (Ibourk & El Aynaoui, 2023, p. 3). Teaching soft skills to technical students is not a novel concept. However, post-secondary institutions are increasingly developing soft skill-based programs and incorporating and measuring soft skills in the curriculum. For instance, in an IT project management course, students are encouraged to develop their teamwork and communication skills through group projects. In addition to certifications and academic credentials, job candidates must distinguish themselves from the competition in the competitive IT market by obtaining and showcasing soft skills. Teaching technical students and job candidates critical soft skills prepares them to work on an international platform.

Employers Prioritizing Soft Skills

Employers may not always agree with the specific skills IT employees and candidates should possess, but they agree with the importance of employees acquiring soft skills (Igonor & McCombs, 2019). Soft skills enable individuals to work and communicate effectively with others, solve problems, and exercise critical thinking, which are crucial in the IT field. Soft skills rely on the psychological and emotional balance of the individual. According to the Foundation and Stanford Research Center, 85% of job success depends on employees' emotional balance (National Soft Skills Association, 2024). Employers seeking new employees highly value soft skills, and employees concur. According to the Career Optimism Index, 74% of employees believe that developing new skills is necessary to stay ahead, 66% to advance, and 49% to stay current and continue in their current roles (University of Phoenix Career Institute, 2024). See Figure 1.



FIGURE 1 | Workers' Perceptions of the Value of Skills in the Workplace

Note: The figure describes workers' perceptions of the importance of upskilling to stay and advance in their careers (University of Phoenix Career Institute, 2024).

IT professionals must be adaptable, as technologies are constantly evolving. This is one reason employers seek candidates who adapt and adjust to rapid changes (An Ngo, 2024). Soft skills that employers value include work ethic, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and leadership skills (University of Phoenix Career Institute, 2024). Employers increasingly prioritize soft skills to hire candidates who can contribute positively to their companies' culture and drive long-term success.

When job candidates are selected for interviews, hiring managers are already aware of their technical skills after reviewing their resumes. For example, when a candidate has achieved an industry certification or possesses programming experience, human resources (HR) managers can recognize and understand those technical skills. For this reason, job candidates should be well-prepared to discuss their soft skills when asked by HR managers. A candidate could be asked to answer questions about emotional intelligence or explain their steps to solve a complex IT problem. Being prepared for such questions can significantly enhance a candidate's chances of success.

HR managers may also be looking at candidates' attitudes, level of integrity, reliability, and dependability (Mosca & Ball, 2023). Job candidates who arrive at an interview and are not ready to discuss their soft skills and how they can be applied in the workplace may be overlooked for the job. In India, 55.9% of IT candidates did not receive a job offer as they lacked adequate soft skills (Gopi Krishna et al., 2024). IT candidates who have attained soft skills before seeking employment or advancement have a better chance of standing out from other candidates.

Developing Essential Soft Skills

Job candidates can acquire and develop soft skills by enrolling in courses at post-secondary institutions. These institutions have integrated soft skills into their curricula, allowing students to apply these skills in the workplace immediately. Students also have the flexibility to complete courses either synchronously or asynchronously. Furthermore, IT students can use technologies to develop and refine skills like critical thinking and problem-solving (Riegel & Kozen, 2016). Employers highly value the ability to collaborate and innovate. Students can develop these skills by working with other students in discussion groups, participating in pen pal platforms, and innovating with various technologies (Riegel & Kozen, 2016). Upon completing courses, students can earn badges, also known as micro-credentials, that certify and validate the soft skills they have acquired.

Championing Soft Skills

Once job candidates have acquired their soft skills, they must take proactive steps to showcase and promote those abilities to potential IT employers. One effective way to do this is through social media platforms like LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a social

networking career platform where soft skills can be effectively showcased to potential employers. Digital badging is another powerful tool to promote soft skills. It gives employers a clear view of candidates' verified skills relevant to job openings. For example, a job candidate can complete an ethical hacking course to earn a threat detection or penetration testing badge. The badge(s) can be shared on social media platforms, added to resumes, and shared during interviews, enhancing the candidate's profile and increasing their chances of securing a job.

Complementarity Skills

Once job candidates have acquired their soft skills, they must take proactive steps to showcase and promote those abilities to potential IT employers. One effective way to do this is through social media platforms like LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a social networking career platform where soft skills can be effectively showcased to potential employers. Digital badging is another powerful tool to promote soft skills. It gives employers a clear view of candidates' verified skills relevant to job openings. For example, a job candidate can complete an ethical hacking course to earn a threat detection or penetration testing badge. The badge(s) can be shared on social media platforms, added to resumes, and shared during interviews, enhancing the candidate's profile and increasing their chances of securing a job.

Measuring Soft Skills

Soft skills can be challenging to measure and assess as no standard benchmarks are accepted globally (Devedzic et al., 2018). Nonetheless, efforts have been made to create metrics to assist with assessing soft skills. Deming (2017) developed a psychological model known as the Big 5 to measure these competencies. In the Big 5 model, Deming (2017) explained that individuals can be tested and evaluated to score their ability to think abstractly, demonstrate self-discipline, manage emotions, and place the needs of customers and stakeholders before their own.

Job candidates can self-assess their soft skills. For instance, if a soft skill is solving complex problems, the individual can evaluate their approach to the complex problems and the solutions they offer to address them (Ibourk & El Aynaoui, 2023). If the soft skill is flexibility, the individual can evaluate how flexible and adaptable they are when changes occur in the workplace. An example of this would be how quickly

the individual adapted to a technological change and if their habits changed negatively (Ibourk & El Aynaoui, 2023). Soft skills are intended to prepare candidates to adapt and succeed in a field where change is fast-paced and inevitable.

Conclusion

In conclusion, complementary skills are essential for job candidates entering the IT sector. Employers in IT are increasingly prioritizing candidates who possess both soft and technical skills, as this combination adds significant value to the organization, enhances employee retention, and addresses job vacancies. The practice of hiring solely based on technical expertise is becoming obsolete. To remain competitive in the global market, IT organizations require employees with strong soft skills. Job candidates should pursue opportunities to develop these skills through post-secondary education and personal experiences and demonstrate them via micro-credentials, career platforms, and interviews.

About the Author

Dr. Graff serves as the Associate Dean for the IT programs at the University of Phoenix. In this capacity, he supervises academic functions, establishes program policies, procedures, and standards, and guides the development and implementation of the College's strategic plan and goals. He is a member of Epsilon Pi Tau and a trustee for the UOPX Delta Sigma Chapter. He sponsors the University of Phoenix Women in Cybersecurity (WiCyS) student chapter. During his tenure with the College, the University received the EC-Council Academia Partner of the Year award in 2024. Graff received his Doctor of Education and completed a dissertation on the perceptions of risks to student privacy from cybersecurity threats and attacks. He has been with the University since 2002.

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From Battlefield to Boardroom: Leveraging Military Healthcare Leadership for Workforce Talent Development

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Abstract

By encouraging flexibility, crisis management, and organized leadership development, military healthcare leadership offers a strong foundation for workforce talent development. The framework for civilian workforce development examined in this paper is military healthcare leadership, with particular attention paid to skill development, talent stagnation, and military-to-corporate migrations. This research highlights obstacles and effective practices for integrating military-trained professionals into leadership roles by examining career trajectories from the military to the civilian sector. Drawing on five primary sources, such as studies on leadership empowerment, human resource management, and military medicine, the study emphasizes the value of mission-oriented decision-making, multidisciplinary collaboration, and organized training in improving organizational performance. Companies and educators may use military leadership concepts to create a workforce that is resilient and productive. The discussion of workforce development, leadership flexibility, and the changing needs of the contemporary labor market is enhanced by these observations.

Keywords: military healthcare leadership, workforce development, career transition, reskilling, leadership adaptability, organizational performance

Professionals can negotiate high-stakes situations with accuracy, resiliency, and thoughtful decision-making because of the special abilities that military healthcare leadership cultivates. The military medical services' demanding training prepares professionals to lead successfully under duress by emphasizing flexibility, crisis management, and multidisciplinary teamwork.

These skills are applicable outside of the military and provide insightful information for developing the civilian workforce, especially in the areas of talent management and leadership. The military healthcare industry's mission-driven leadership, systematic training methodology, and dedication to ongoing development offer a potent foundation for boosting

employee productivity, encouraging creativity, and resolving leadership issues in a variety of work settings.

Military Healthcare Leadership as a Model for Workforce Development

Military healthcare leadership guarantees effectiveness in both operational and medical settings through a methodical and strategic approach. For handling complicated healthcare issues, this leadership approach is based on the principles of discipline, quick decision-making, and well-coordinated collaboration. Military medical leadership, in contrast to typical healthcare systems, necessitates that professionals be able to perform well in high-risk and unexpected circumstances while still providing the best possible treatment for patients (Raeeszadeh et al., 2022). A practical framework for workforce development is military healthcare leadership, which combines clinical competence with logistical and operational planning. Military medicine's multidisciplinary approach encourages a collaborative leadership style in which medical specialists collaborate with commanding commanders and support staff to guarantee smooth healthcare delivery (Raeeszadeh et al., 2022). In addition to improving patient outcomes, this organized coordination develops leadership skills by forcing people to adjust to quickly shifting circumstances while still being productive.

The demanding decision-making process in military healthcare fosters efficiency and resilience, equipping staff to handle emergencies precisely. Military medical personnel frequently have to make quick decisions in harsh circumstances when waiting might have serious repercussions. The need for quick but well-informed decisions encourages the growth of problem-solving and strategic thinking abilities that are useful outside of combat zones (Defence Medical Services, 2021). Moreover, military healthcare leadership functions in a multi-tiered system that strikes a balance between the necessity for autonomy at various care levels and hierarchical authority. Frontline medical staff may take decisive action under defined guidelines under this paradigm, which also permits centralized control (Defence Medical Services, 2021). Due to the military healthcare model, which provides a structured yet adaptable framework for operational performance,

skilled professionals can make important choices quickly.

There are several parallels between corporate leadership development programs and military healthcare leadership training, especially when it comes to mission-driven decision-making and organized skill learning. The essential capabilities of both systems are operational flexibility, team cooperation, and leadership under duress. Military medical professionals are guaranteed ongoing education, mentoring, and crisis simulation exposure through organized training, which is similar to leadership training methods used in high-performance corporate settings (Buijs & Olsthoorn, 2023; Teixeira et al., 2024). Furthermore, the necessity of integrated leadership for accomplishing strategic goals is underscored by the multidisciplinary approach in military healthcare, where cooperation among doctors, logisticians, and commanding officers is crucial. Applying military leadership techniques to civilian workforce development improves agility and efficiency. These techniques include crisis management training, organized mentoring, and adaptive decision-making.

Bridging Military and Civilian Career Advancement

For service people entering the workforce, cultural and institutional disparities between military and civilian occupations present difficulties. While civilian companies frequently place a higher value on adaptability, teamwork, and decentralized leadership, military organizations place more emphasis on hierarchy, defined positions, and mission-driven operations. Although military organizations' regimented structure guarantees efficiency, it may restrict flexibility when transitioning into civilian professions that call for collaboration and shared decision-making. This adjustment can also be made more difficult by cultural differences in the workplace, such as the military's direct communication style vs the company world's collaborative approach (Sachdev & Dixit, 2023). It is vital to comprehend these differences in order to design career integration routes that are more seamless.

Another major challenge for veterans is transferring leadership abilities they have gained in the military to civilian employment markets. Employers may

be unaware of the operational monitoring, crisis management, and strategic planning skills that military commanders acquire while serving. Furthermore, although many civilian organizations function through consensus-building procedures, the military's decision-making autonomy adheres to a structured line of command (Sachdev & Dixit, 2023). Veterans may find it challenging to match civilian employment requirements with their expertise due to these disparities. Programs that assist in closing the gap between military leadership skills and civilian labor demands must be organized in order to close this gap.

Corporate training initiatives and mentoring are essential for smoothing this transition and guaranteeing long-term success. Employers may use veterans' leadership and problem-solving skills to their advantage by implementing customized onboarding programs that teach them about industry-specific procedures. By acknowledging military experience as a significant advantage in executive positions, employers might further improve their hiring procedures. Veterans' abilities to lead people, handle emergencies, and carry out strategic plans have helped many companies successfully incorporate them into leadership roles (Sachdev & Dixit, 2023). In addition to helping veterans, these initiatives help create a workforce that is more focused and disciplined.

Reskilling and Upskilling: Lessons from Military Healthcare Training

Military healthcare training places a strong emphasis on lifelong learning and flexibility to guarantee that medical staff can react appropriately in stressful situations. Members of the armed forces get intense training that changes in response to new medical advancements, operational requirements, and combat circumstances. The military's methodical approach to professional development guarantees that medical personnel consistently improve their proficiency in emergency response, medical logistics, and trauma treatment. Since employees must function in erratic circumstances while retaining effectiveness in the face of severe circumstances, adaptability is a fundamental notion (Teixeira et al., 2024). This focus on lifelong learning offers a solid framework for developing

the civilian workforce, especially in fields that need flexibility and quick skill acquisition.

A key element of military medical education is simulation-based training, which gives staff members authentic crisis management experiences. Military healthcare personnel learn how to make decisions under duress, coordinate across disciplines, and handle emergencies using sophisticated simulations (Defence Medical Services, 2021). Medical professionals may hone their reactions to high-stakes events before they are encountered in reality due to these training activities that mimic real-world circumstances. This experiential learning method works exceptionally well for fostering leadership abilities that prioritize prompt decision-making and fast thinking (Teixeira et al., 2024). Similar training approaches may be used in the corporate sector to improve leadership development. These may include realistic crisis management simulations that equip experts to make decisions under duress.

Operational planning, medical logistics management, advanced trauma training, and other capabilities are all part of military healthcare reskilling programs. In military medicine, the cross-functional cooperation method guarantees that experts from many fields work together harmoniously to achieve mission accomplishment (Teixeira et al., 2024). Coordination at this level improves worker agility and develops cross-industry problem-solving abilities. Military upskilling techniques may be applied to civilian workforce development programs through the use of multidisciplinary training, organized mentoring, and real-time problem-solving exercises (Buijs & Olsthoorn, 2023). Programs for corporate leadership that emulate military training best practices, such as mission-driven development and scenario-based learning, may produce resilient, flexible professionals who can tackle complex problems.

The Role of Leadership in Combating Talent Stagnation

Employees with no opportunity for professional advancement are stagnated in talent, which raises attrition rates, lowers productivity, and deters motivation. Worker disengagement and performance decline are common problems for companies that do not offer career growth and ongoing learning possibilities. Conversely, military leadership

structures prioritize ongoing growth through planned mentorship, training, and skill-building initiatives that guarantee staff members stay flexible and able to take on more responsibility (Buijs & Olsthoorn, 2023). Leaders at all levels must hone their skills and broaden their knowledge to handle changing difficulties, which is fostered by the military paradigm (Teixeira et al., 2024). This strategy preserves a culture of performance-driven growth and lifelong learning, which increases staff engagement and avoids stagnation.

The military's mission command structure is essential for empowering staff members since it promotes leadership at all levels. Instead of strict top-down management techniques, mission command gives people the power to decide within a predetermined strategy framework, encouraging a sense of accountability and ownership (Teixeira et al., 2024). Employees can gain flexibility and decision-making skills with this leadership paradigm, eventually preparing them to take on increasingly challenging tasks. Military commanders place a strong emphasis on initiative and competence, which results in a workforce that is more proactive than reactive (Teixeira et al., 2024). Civilian organizations may adopt similar ideas through decentralized decision-making frameworks, in which staff members are granted autonomy while supporting the organization's overarching goals.

The military's performance-based promotion schemes, which promote operational success, skill development, and leadership qualities above tenure alone, help avoid talent stagnation. By preventing complacency and fostering a competitive work atmosphere, this method ensures that people are consistently inspired to advance and assume leadership roles (Buijs & Olsthoorn, 2023). In contrast to conventional seniority-based promotions, this strategy encourages a culture in which initiative, creativity, and problem-solving are important factors in career advancement. Civilian sectors may include leadership development programs inspired by the military by implementing competency-based progression criteria, mentorship-driven career routes, and organized leadership training (Teixeira et al., 2024). Organizations may develop a dynamic and engaged staff and increase long-term productivity and retention by promoting proactive decision-making, providing opportunities for ongoing professional development, and rewarding merit-based accomplishments.

Actionable Recommendations for Employers and Educators

Employers may incorporate military healthcare leadership into the growth of the civilian workforce by implementing planned transition programs that match industry-specific demands with military knowledge. Since military-trained professionals perform well under duress, companies should develop skill translation frameworks that assist veterans in using their crisis management, leadership, and strategic decision-making skills in corporate situations. Providing veterans access to professional development courses and networking opportunities can help them succeed in new fields and build long-term careers (Buijs & Olsthoorn, 2023). Mentorship programs are crucial for helping veterans navigate career advancement and workplace cultural changes. By implementing these programs, companies may close the leadership gap between military and civilian leadership styles and develop a more flexible and goal-oriented workforce.

Military officer training paradigms, prioritizing crisis leadership, operational efficiency, and systematic problem-solving, might benefit corporate training programs. Professionals who complete military leadership programs can manage teams efficiently, make wise judgments under duress, and carry out mission-driven tactics. Incorporating practical simulations and real-world scenario training can improve personnel's capacity to react confidently and accurately in high-stakes scenarios (Defence Medical Services, 2021). Using these guidelines, companies may create leadership development programs that help staff members become more flexible and resilient. Students can be further prepared with valuable insights into strategic execution and disciplined decision-making through education-based tactics like incorporating case studies of military leadership into company and healthcare administration curricula.

Companies and legislators must improve recruiting procedures to acknowledge the importance of military leadership expertise in civilian employment markets. Establishing recruiting practices that explicitly consider military leadership qualities like collaboration, resilience, and problem-solving can assist firms in creating more robust leadership pipelines. Veteran skill adaptation to industry-specific demands can be further aided by developing

customized training programs that close the gap between military and civilian employment settings (Sachdev & Dixit, 2023). Government and business sector cooperation should be promoted via workforce inclusion policies to develop veteran employment programs that facilitate smooth transitions into leadership positions. Companies may develop a highly qualified and flexible workforce by utilizing military leadership skills and matching them with the needs of the civilian workforce. This will eventually help with long-term corporate success and employee retention.

Conclusion

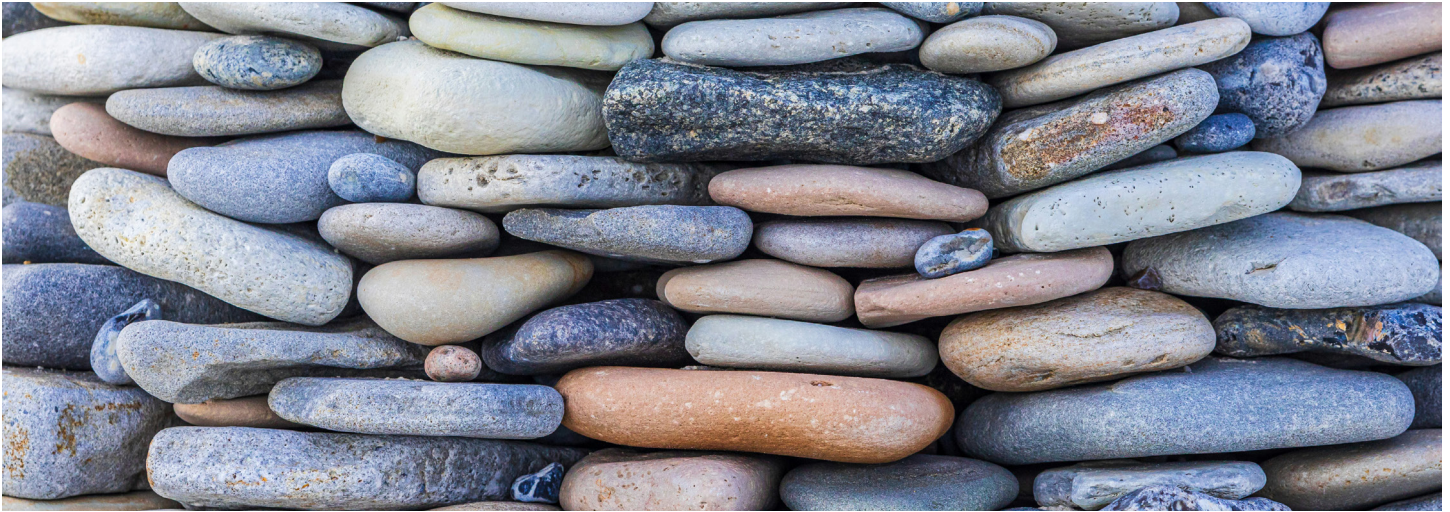
Military healthcare leadership offers a methodical and successful framework for developing worker talent, focusing on crisis management, flexibility, and ongoing skill improvement. Moving from military to civilian employment can be difficult because of the disparities in organizational culture, leadership styles, and skill translation. For this reason, coordinated transition programs are crucial. Military healthcare training may serve as an inspiration for reskilling and upskilling programs that provide workers with the skills they need to succeed in a variety of sectors. Employers who embrace military leadership concepts may develop a staff that is effective, resilient, and can function in demanding situations. Employers, policymakers, and academic institutions should collaborate to support recruitment initiatives, mentorship programs, and leadership development frameworks to help transfer military-trained professionals into civilian employment. Businesses and organizations may develop a more dynamic, competent, and future-ready staff that can handle the changing demands of contemporary industries by utilizing military leadership tactics.

About the Author

Dr. Cyndi Krupa is a passionate and innovative higher education leader with over 20 years of experience dedicated to advancing student success, organizational excellence, and inclusive learning environments. Her extensive academic journey includes degrees in Business, Social Sciences/Secondary Education, Instructional Technology, and a Doctorate in Higher Education Leadership and Curriculum & Instruction, each fueling her commitment to lifelong learning and academic excellence.

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Cultivating Institutional Trust

The 2025 Career Optimism Index® study paints a concerning portrait of a workforce beleaguered by unprecedented levels of burnout, diminishing autonomy, and a pervasive sense of discontent within the workplace. Despite these mounting challenges, employers persist in favoring external candidates over nurturing and investing in their teams, effectively neglecting the untapped potential in their current workforce. This short-sighted strategy results in the loss of employee morale and a reduction in organizational productivity.

The Phoenix Scholar™ Call for Papers

In addressing the [2025 Career Optimism Index® study](#), the Spring 2026 Edition of the **Phoenix Scholar™** seeks research papers, white papers, best practices, and book reviews that are aimed at cultivating institutional trust. The 2025 Career Optimism Index® study reveals that American workers face record-high burnout (51%) and a growing demand for skill development (86%). Meanwhile, AI emerges as a crucial tool, helping 79% of workers close skills gaps and 81% improve work-life balance, highlighting a pivotal opportunity for employers to restore career resilience.

For more information regarding the 2025 Career Optimism Index® study, visit the Research Hub and look under **Centers** for the Career Institute.

Look for more announcements on the **Call for Papers** for the 2026 Spring Edition of the **Phoenix Scholar™**. Have ideas or Questions? Please contact Dr. Rodney Luster (rodney.luster@phoenix.edu) or Dr. Mark McCaslin (mark.mccaslin@phoenix.edu).

In a time of record-low institutional trust and growing workplace grievances, American workers are facing a crisis of autonomy (2025 Career Optimism Index®).

About the Scholar

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