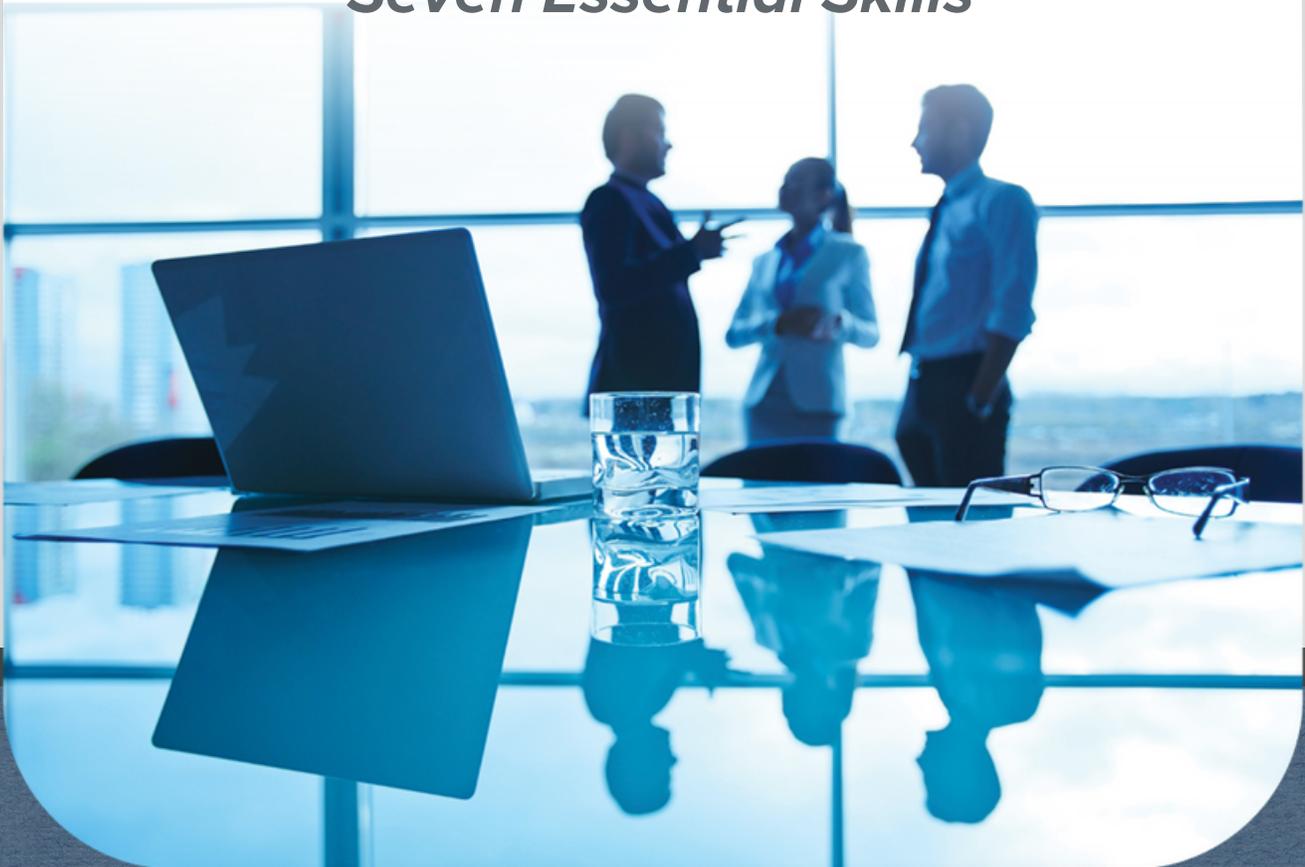




LOS ANGELES PACIFIC
UNIVERSITY

Leading the Changing Workplace

Seven Essential Skills



THOUGHT PAPER

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Leading the Changing Workplace

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The global pandemic and the increase of virtual work, along with global workplace tremors such as the Great Resignation, which caused many in the workforce to evaluate and rethink their jobs and careers, has caused increased workplace change more rapidly than at any time in our history. This means that leaders today must be more proactive and adaptive in addressing continuous change in order to keep their teams energized and their organizations growing. In reviewing the literature, there are many skills leaders will need to lead change in the workplace, with perhaps these seven being essential to growing with success in 2023.

#1

Embrace Flexibility



Embrace flexibility: One of the primary lessons of disruption, such as that caused by the pandemic, is that flexibility is essential. Leaders have always needed to respond quickly to changes in the business environment. However, in 2020 this ability was accelerated at a pace few leaders had experienced. Not only were leaders attempting to adapt in flight, but they were expected to adapt their leadership style to the changing needs of their confused employees. For many leaders, this caused the moving away from traditional top down leadership models towards a more collaborative, empowering, and outcomes driven approach. For example, leaders had to encourage their employees to take personal ownership of their work, be trusted, be held accountable, and make good decisions that positively impacted the team or company. The pandemic forced leaders to be flexible, and the future workplace will require leaders to embrace flexibility.

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#2

Invest in Technology



Invest in technology: Technology has always been a disruption, especially in the last 40 years. Any SWOT or change process will quickly identify the rapid development of technology as a factor for strategic thinking. The recent launch of ChatGPT by OpenAI is an excellent example, with the first million users taking five days and, within 90 days, over 100 million (the fastest growing web service in history). The pandemic has accelerated the pace of technological change for the organization's objectives and individual contributors in the workplace. Using products such as SLACK, ZOOM, and MS Teams is ubiquitous in our daily calendars. Leaders need to be prepared to understand, discern, and invest in new tools and technologies, specifically those that empower the workforce to be flexible

to stay ahead. This may include cloud based collaboration tools, virtual meeting platforms, and data analytics platforms. In addition, leaders must also be prepared to invest in the training and support of their employees in using these technologies, including identifying and addressing any potential security or privacy risks associated with their use.

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#3

Foster a Sense of Community



Foster a sense of community: Remote work can be isolating, and leaders need to find creative ways to maintain a sense of connection and community within their workforce. Many leaders have achieved success through regular virtual team meetings, virtual team building activities, virtual coffee or happy hours, or even virtual games (think Kahoot!). Using technology products that support channels or communities has become a standard form of community building with food places, hobbies, and other channels that enable those who are interested to be significant members of the community. For many leaders, this sense of community is challenging. How transparent, involved, and engaged does a leader become in these community activities while still retaining their expected role as the organizational leader?

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#4

Support Mental Health and Well-Being



Support mental health and well being: Perhaps the most significant toll on the workforce from the pandemic is that of the mental health and well being of many employees. Prior to the pandemic, mental wellness was limited to the odd work stress or burnout incident. During the pandemic, many workers have wrestled with the challenges of isolation, uncertainty, change, and significance, meaning they have had dedicated time to process with real and unsettling results. Leaders, more than ever, should be mindful of this seismic shift and identify intentional strategies to support the well being of their employees. This may include providing access to mental health resources, such as counseling services or employee assistance programs, or offering flexible work arrangements, such as

reduced hours or flexible schedules. A valuable and well received intervention has been well being days, where a day is set aside for employees to enjoy some self care. The mindset change for leaders is that well being doesn't just happen; it must be a significant and visible outcome of the leader's success.

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#5

Be Transparent and Communicate Effectively



Be transparent and communicate effectively: Transparency and effective communication have always been hallmarks of successful leadership, but they have risen to a new level of expectation among employees during the disruptions of the past three years. Leaders must be honest and open about the challenges and opportunities facing the company and the team. Employees expect to be treated as “adults,” and as followers of the leader they value honesty and transparency. The pandemic has highlighted many leadership characteristics, with authenticity and transparency being significant. For most leaders who are intentional in fostering and nurturing a sense of community, being “all in” is the gold standard. A multi generational workforce in a new era of work demands

authenticity. Leaders, therefore, must be proactive in communicating change and ensuring that the workforce has the context and information they need to be successful in their contribution to the impact of the organization. Leaders should also be sensitive and responsive to employee questions and concerns. Psychological Safety, a culture of transparency and emotional workplace safety (will I be fired if I speak up?), is an organizational norm that leaders should encourage and champion. As leaders, we often forget that communication is two way and that respectful, open, and honest feedback from employees should be encouraged.

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#6

Focus on Development and Growth



Focus on development and growth: The rapidly changing business environment means that leaders must be proactive in developing and nurturing the skills of their employees. With a mindset change of many workers from salary/job to meaning and purpose triggered by the lockdown, there is a growing demand for self and professional development. Coursera, a popular MOOC, registered over 20 million new learners in 2021. Leaders who encourage community and growth rely on a loyal community of employees. As important as remuneration and benefits are, professional growth opportunities are a high priority for many. This may include providing pathways for professional development, such as training and mentoring programs, internal master classes, leadership development programs, or

encouraging employees to pursue further education or certifications. Leaders must be prepared to invest in their employees and support their professional growth, even if it means taking a short term hit to their bottom line. It is an investment in the future and a key focus for leaders.

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In conclusion, leading a changing workforce in a post-COVID-19 world requires reskilling of new tools, and approaches. Leaders must be flexible, willing to embrace technology, champions in fostering a sense of community, empathetic supporters of mental health and well-being initiatives, able to communicate transparently and effectively, invested in the development and growth of their people, and encouragers of innovation. With the right leadership skills, it is possible to lead an organization through disruptive times cultivating a culture of purpose, meaning, and growth. As always, the leader's focus must be that of the people they are called to lead.

