Center for
Creative
Leadership

Future-Proof Your Organization With Leadership Development at Scale

By: Mary Abraham, Jeff Howard, Mike Smith

Content

Introduction

CHROs tasked with meeting long-term organizational goals need a solid plan to reach all of their talent, drive cohesive teams that pivot when teammates leave, and equip leaders to work cross-functionally to achieve business goals faster.

This calls for organization-wide collaboration, connection, and coordination rooted in common leadership language, vision, and behaviors. **Our 3-part plan does just that.**

New Challenges Require New Solutions

Change moves fast, and organizations can struggle to keep up. Mergers and acquisitions create new organizations, and managerial charts flatten, with fewer layers of administration in the middle causing people to be expected to do more with less.

Given ongoing post-pandemic concerns, global supply chain issues, political instability, rising energy costs, inflation woes, and a stock market that looks bleak, organizations must regularly be ready to pivot.

At the same time, it's becoming increasingly important to advance new ways of relating to each other in hybrid workplaces to ensure equal footing and effective collaboration between people in the office and people working remotely.

All of this has brought new challenges for organizations. At the same time, talent retention has become increasingly difficult. Employees are leaving their jobs for positions that pay better, are more aligned with their values, or offer more flexible work arrangements.

Furthermore, providing personal and professional development opportunities at work is no longer optional. In today's tight labor market, employees expect ample training and growth opportunities. Though HR teams understand this critical need, they can't always provide meaningful development in a scalable way that ensures access for all their talent.

These changes require organizations to reimagine their culture and its impact on employees. Today's challenges are complex and call for collaboration, connection, and coordination, rooted in a common leadership language, vision, and behaviors.

The optimal way to achieve these critical outcomes? By scaling development opportunities across the entire organization. In fact, there has never been a greater need for high-impact leadership development that's both expandable and equitable.

But how do you scale leadership development when staff levels are constantly shifting, resources are limited, and leaders struggle to keep up with day-to-day challenges?

Hybrid work environments require new ways of relating to each other

TO SCALE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, FOCUS ON THESE 3 STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES:

STEP 1
Plan Your Leadership Strategy

STEP 2
Provide Access to Relevant Content

STEP 3
Leverage Internal and External Talent

PLAN YOUR LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

Start with this question:

> ❝ **What problems and opportunities demand a leadership solution?"**

Organizations don't execute yearly goals without a sales or operations strategy. Likewise, you shouldn't implement them without a leadership plan of action. This is vital to future-proofing.

The key to scaling successfully is devising a leadership approach at the outset. Organizations that are most effective at creating new leadership capabilities across different functions are intentional, strategic, and focused on effectively linking talent development to business results.

Often, organizations find they can better focus on strategy when they partner with a leadership development provider that can help with the "heavy lifting" of planning and executing the changes.

HERE'S HOW ONE CONSUMER PRODUCTS ORGANIZATION SUCCEEDED

We recently partnered with an organization in the consumer products industry that was reorganizing its business. The goal of the reorganization: achieve a sustainable approach to producing the products people use daily. Their leaders quickly realized they needed to transform how they worked together in service of sustainability by changing systems and processes, as well as the ways their teams interacted and worked with each other across the enterprise.

The CEO and the executive team connected the dots between how their new goals and related strategies linked to their new leadership practices, behaviors, and mindsets — and realized a shift in their leadership culture was required. This context was the basis for an organization-wide leadership development initiative that focused on establishing a healthy, open, people-centric culture that would support their overall strategy and success.

When the pandemic started, they moved from prototyping the new leadership practices they defined in partnership with us to embedding the new beliefs and behaviors into the organization. But COVID-19 disrupted the ability of internal champions to conduct conversation circles in person, and they had to change their approach. Internal champions no longer had time to do anything other than keep their heads above water.

The executive team needed to decide whether evolving into a people-centric culture was still a priority, and, if so, they needed to find a way to resource the effort. Ultimately, talent remained the organization's priority. The executive team leaned on us to support them in rolling out scalable solutions to a broader audience so they could continue to evolve their leadership culture and support their new business strategy.

Strategic Recommendations for the Planning Stage

We have a few tips for leadership development scalability when future-proofing.

- **Think about the big picture.** Don't fall into the trap of focusing on leadership development that targets certain pockets of leaders or relies on only one learning modality. Doing this leads to inequity and lack of inclusiveness, which decreases the likelihood of achieving organizational goals.

- **View leadership as a lever.** It should be used to execute the business strategy and drive performance.

- **Think through how different levels of your organization are affected by culture shifts that require new goals and strategies.** What leadership practices and ways of working should be executed differently?

- **Consider whether everyone is ready for your plan.** Have you established the psychological safety and trust required for an organization-wide change? Be honest and have the appropriate conversations to determine the answer to this question.

- **Identify the drivers of your strategy.** These are key to positioning your organization to take advantage of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the marketplace. For example, a driver might mean becoming more global or driving increased innovation.

- **Next, focus on your leadership strategy implications.** For example, the leadership ramifications of becoming more global might entail developing new skills among front-line managers to effectively and strategically lead new globally dispersed hybrid teams.

PROVIDE ACCESS TO RELEVANT AND FLEXIBLE LEADERSHIP CONTENT

Scaling leadership development and future-proofing your organization requires a significant commitment across all levels. It's not a program, but rather a sweeping initiative that requires a whole-systems view. There must be clarity about the varying needs and investments at different levels.

Solely implementing training programs is not sufficient. Large-scale change requires creating the right architecture — a set of leadership solutions — to support your learning and development objectives.

It's equally important to align the content to support the overall leadership development process.

Connecting with your employees in their homes or offices is easier than ever, but they are likely stressed, depleted, and under-resourced. Simply providing access to hours of content that has not been carefully curated or aligned with their day-to-day reality won't benefit them or your organization.

HERE'S HOW ONE GOVERNMENT AGENCY SUCCEEDED

One of the largest federal government agencies partnered with us to license a library of leadership programs and products for its employees. Through quarterly updates provided by CCL, its content stays relevant and evergreen, always referencing the latest research and emerging best practices. In just one year, this partnership has enabled:

- Over 3,000 federal workers at the agency to participate in a world-class CCL leadership experience — including on leadership fundamentals, leading innovation and virtual teams, and development programs for front-line managers.

- About 1,000 took our online research-based program to build resilience, enabling the agency to support its wellness initiative and address widespread issues with pandemic stress and burnout.

The agency's senior leadership team received ongoing leadership development as well, guidance on effective and inclusive communication, and one senior executive per month has been attending Leadership at the Peak, our C-suite leadership training program.

The best part is that we partnered with the agency and trained its facilitators to run these programs, so its internal team is equipped to continue scaling the development on their own. They plan to use our leadership programs and solutions to impact more than 5,000 employees in the next year.

Strategic Recommendations for Providing Access to Relevant Leadership Content
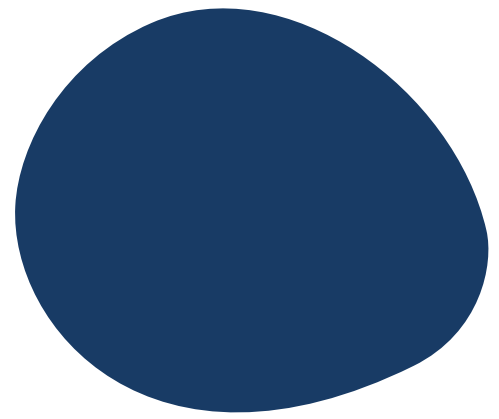
Here are some points to consider for your organization to create a scalable leadership architecture that supports future-proofing.

- **Don't overwhelm your employees with "stuff."** Deliver the right content at the right time, for the right reason. Focus on the skills, behaviors, and practices needed by individual leaders, and on the organizational leadership capabilities needed to support your specific needs and goals. A targeted focus will produce a greater impact.

- **Remember that people learn in a variety of ways.** It's critical to design a mix of learning modes that work for different people at various levels — from customized development over time to internally led skill-building workshops and self-directed digital delivery. No matter the delivery mode, it's vital to create a common leadership language around critical skills to achieve your organization's strategy.

- **Rely on technology.** Assess whether you have the right learning platform and operational support to reach your entire organization. Ensure that your learning technology has an intuitive interface and responsive design, supports collaboration, enables gamification, and provides comprehensive reporting capabilities.

- **Anchor the initiative in agreed-upon learning objectives at every level.** You can talk about the same topic of leadership development at each level, but make sure it's integrated with other topics above and below the level delivered.

- **Establish a variety of mechanisms to create accountability.** After any form of delivery, ensure participants walk the talk. For example, consider offering learning communities where individuals can share what they've learned and how they're applying it in their everyday work.

- **Contract with the right partner.** It's key to work with a future-focused partner — a partner capable of conducting cutting-edge research and translating it into relevant, timely programs and products that can be easily deployed within your organization. If you've established a relationship with the right leadership development partner, you'll be better positioned to address critical issues within your employee population the moment they arise.

LEVERAGE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TALENT

Although it's possible to have a clearly articulated leadership strategy, have the capability to deploy multiple delivery modalities, build a team of expert facilitators, and have the right content available in in-person and virtual formats, many organizations struggle in one or more of these areas.

If you're lacking any of these critical pieces, you likely need the support of an external partner. In today's complex market, many practitioners are in uncharted territory when it comes to scaling a development initiative. It involves readiness, both in terms of capacity and capability. Leaders often express concern that their internal resources may not be fully prepared for the challenge of championing an initiative and developing hundreds or even thousands of leaders in a short time.

Few organizations have an L&D team with the skills and the capacity to drive an initiative at scale. And capacity isn't just about people. You must also have the right technology and trained facilitators or moderators who can leverage that technology to enable learning across the organization.

At the same time, the role of HR and talent development professionals has become increasingly important, in functioning as strategic partners to the C-suite and also advocating for employees with rapidly evolving needs and expectations. It's a large but critically important role. Partnering with an external provider for assistance with strategy, research, and delivery frees up internal HR teams to keep their focus on providing this type of high-value enterprise support.

HERE'S HOW ONE GLOBAL ORGANIZATION SUCCEEDED

We recently partnered with a major corporate brand on a global, organization-wide leadership initiative. The curriculum provided a common language around leadership and enabled a certain amount of adaptability for cultural contexts.

We designed the curriculum and provided most of the content. At the same time, the client leveraged the capacity and capability of its internal training staff to deliver this curriculum to their offices all over the world.

When recent events caused extensive turnover in their internal training staff, we stepped in to deliver training as a stopgap measure while working with them to recruit and onboard new training staff, and to ensure confidence and competence in delivering the curriculum.

Strategic Recommendations to Leverage Internal and External Talent

Here are some practical tips on how you can think through this critical principle.

- **Mix outsourcing with insourcing.** Leverage your external partner for key groups (such as for senior executives, where deeper, more complex development is required), or ask your partner to step in if your internal capability doesn't match your delivery needs.

- **Identify your internal facilitation talent.** "Train the trainers" to be ambassadors and delivery staff in your organization. This training is an ideal opportunity to ensure alignment and review the tactics to be deployed.

- **Engage and integrate organizational leaders.** Use the skills and passion they've developed for their specific function to supplement the "trainers" from HR. This concept of leader-led development deeply ingrains the new skills into the business, supports the effort to scale, and at the same time offers invaluable insights.

- **Regularly connect your facilitators and organizational leaders.** Your internal and external facilitators and leaders must have the opportunity to share best practices, uncover challenges, and support each other.

What You Need From a Partner for Scale

HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO LOOK FOR WHEN CONSIDERING EXTERNAL PARTNERS:

EXPERIENCE

The partner you select to help you future-proof your organization should have deep, demonstrable experience in leadership and in your specific type of business challenge.

FIT

Ensure the partner fits well with your culture, your leadership team, and your values.

SCALE

Your chosen partner should be able to deploy resources widely and match well to your geographies.

INTERNAL SUPPORT

Find a partner to help you develop the internal capacity needed to deliver content at scale.

QUALITY

Your partner should demonstrate the consistent quality of their content and work with clients like you.

IMPACT

Validate the results the partner has produced for other similar organizations.

VALUE

While price is not always the most reliable measure, ensure the value you get meets your needs.

Conclusion

Imagine the impact that will result in your organization if you build a shared leadership vision, language, and behaviors, all linked directly to a critical organizational need. Scaling leadership development is the optimal way to create new capabilities and to communicate to every member of your organization that they are valued and supported.

Flexible development options can help you broaden access to learning for every member of your organization, across leader levels and through every stage of your leaders' career journeys.

And with the right partner, you can meet the increased demand for training and development, regardless of your L&D bandwidth.

The 3 key strategies outlined in this paper will help you more quickly achieve concrete results, future-proof your organization, and drive an inclusive culture of learning.

READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

CCL Passport™ provides unlimited access to research-backed, experiential learning content for every leader level, helping you customize and scale leadership development across your organization. Combining world-renowned programs, acclaimed learning journeys, and 50 years of pioneering research with unparalleled expert support, CCL Passport maximizes your investment, creates lasting change, and prepares your organization for the future.

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Authors

Mary Abraham is the Senior Director of Programs & Products at CCL. Mary utilizes her unique blend of skills in technology and business to propel CCL's digital products business, including the launching of CCL Passport™. Her team is responsible for CCL's portfolio of programs and products, bringing the highest quality, transformational experiences to clients. Mary also serves as a mentor for CCL's custom women's leadership programs.

Jeff Howard is the Vice President of Global Portfolio & Leadership Solutions at CCL. Over his 25-year career at CCL, he has brought his passion and experience to building new business lines, marketing, and product development and management. The team Jeff leads brings CCL's research, experience, and innovation to life for clients through an expansive suite of offerings that deliver powerful, measurable, and enduring results.

Mike Smith is a Director in CCL's Organizational Leadership Practice group. As the business development lead in the Practice, Mike builds partnerships with clients to align their leadership strategy and talent development solutions with their business strategy to drive organizational performance. Mike brings a diverse set of business and educational experience to CCL, including co-founding an entrepreneurial startup and leading functions in a Fortune 100 company.

Center for Creative Leadership

At the Center for Creative Leadership, our drive to create a ripple effect of positive change underpins everything we do. For 50+ years, we've pioneered leadership development solutions for leaders at every level, from community leaders to CEOs. Consistently ranked among the world's top global providers of executive education, our research-based programs and solutions inspire individuals in organizations across the world — including 2/3 of the Fortune 1000 — to ignite remarkable transformations.

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