



The Big Shift Required to Develop and Future Proof Talent

The **not so old normal**

Over the last 50 years the rationale used to invest in Talent Development has continuously shifted. In the 1950's leaders were concerned with stable and scalable hierarchies. In the 1980's it was management by objectives; control over what, freedom over how. In the 2000's, the focus shifted to culture and empowerment to boost employee motivation.

In each of these shifts the simple question **'what sort of talent do we need?'** was relatively straightforward to translate into training content, talent management processes and succession plans. This allowed organisations to provide relatively sound development and predictions of readiness for more senior roles within a given timeframe. Critically, top-talent were connected, visible and present. This approach led to the design of expensive development interventions and resulted in a **"mindset of scarcity"**. Expensive development programmes could not be offered to everyone. So, early identification and selection as talent for development purposes meant organisations began to self-limit the sometimes abundant talent at their disposal.

In addition, this exclusivity often caused other unintended consequences. For example, with talent now defined as "scarce", managers were motivated to become overprotective of their talent, often leading to a **"manager owner"** mindset where they resisted sharing their talent across the organisation. This then led to talent with reduced access to mentors, often only having one, their boss. This resulted in a patronage culture when it came to talent development. At a time when breath of experience was increasingly an important component of both development and growth opportunities, the managerial mindset of scarcity and proprietorial ownership acted against the interests of both the talent, and the organisation.

These 'narrowing' dynamics internal to organisations occurred at a time when Adult Development specialists now understand that an important characteristic of **"top talent"** is their ability to be mobile. This is not just geographic mobility, it is "range mobility"; This is their ability to think and operate as a generalist across many domains rather than deepening their knowledge as an expert in a single area.

A combination of traditional talent development instruments and overprotective hierarchical behaviours created scarcity across two dimensions – leading to reduced numbers of "ready now talent" with less range mobility.

Organisations' talent tended to focus solely on vertical movement as validation of their career progress and success. **Focusing on vertical progression comes at the expense of gaining lateral multi-domain experience and perspectives.** This creates a development gap as it prevents talent from developing the expansive conceptual thinking required to navigate the rapidly changing, wicked world demands of leadership today. This is a key reason many organisations still find it necessary to go to external talent pools when making key leadership appointments despite their expensive and expansive talent development investments. Finally, scarcity in supply, inflates the price Organisations have to pay for both talent and talent development creating a game of winners (a small number designated top talent) and losers (everyone else).

The not so new normal?

Prior to *COVID-19*, we had engaged with many organisations challenging their senior leaders and Talent Development professionals to reconsider the design principles they operated with when thinking about talent development. Over the last 2.5 years, the pandemic environment has accelerated this conversation. It is increasingly clear to clients that they are wrestling with a multiplicity of factors impacting the "War for Talent", and it's not just market and range "scarcity".

The accelerating pace of business, social and technological change make for a challenging work context for leaders; especially when it comes to managing the enduring crisis of pandemic disruption while also trying to focus on developing the next generation of leaders. Many characteristics of working life during the pandemic such as the dislocation from the office or the emergence of the "low touch economy" where digital engagement tools replace face-to-face contact look like they are here to stay, even if moderated to hybrid forms of working.

Already proving something of an enigma to leaders, millennials' response to pandemic, wage stagnation and the rising cost of living have led to the emergence of what American Psychologist Anthony Klotz terms the "Great Resignation". The past 'stickiness of talent' that many organisations relied upon to fill their talent pipelines can no longer be relied upon.

The new forces affecting how organisations approach talent development are many and disparate. For instance, along with almost 50% of the workforce being millennials, our increased longevity is expanding the multi-generational workforce, pushing out retirement timelines and directly affecting long held conventions like traditional career paths.

At the same time, social change is rapidly transforming lives; changing consumer behaviours, gender politics or massive shifts in the geo-political landscape, all of which represent a multiplicity of opportunities, vulnerabilities and threats.



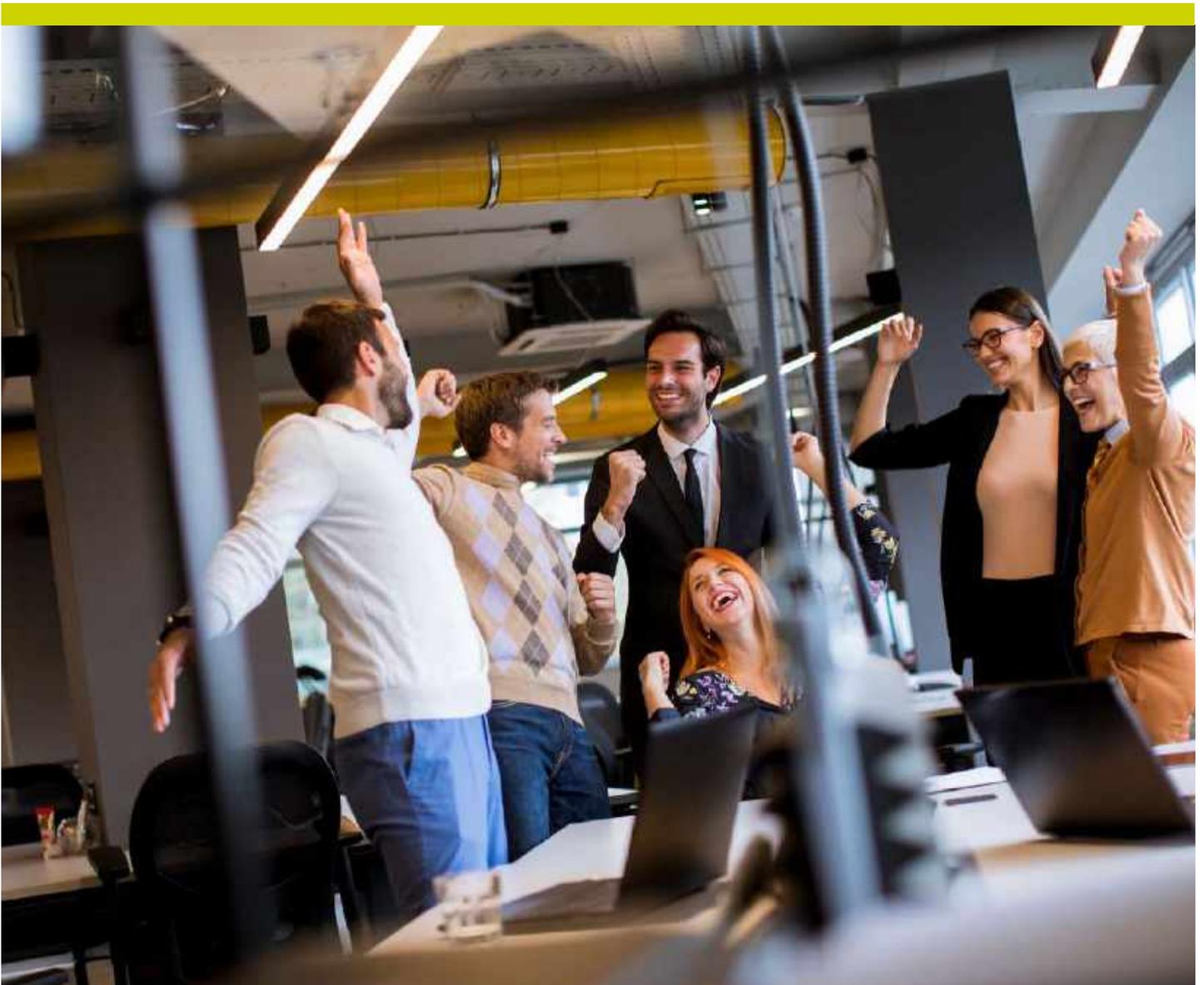
Perhaps most importantly, these shifts fundamentally challenge what it means to lead an organisation. In this volatile and complex environment, what was once thought of as fair, transparent and inclusive, is fundamentally shifting too.

With these societal and business contexts ever changing, can you really say the way you developed your talent in the past is still fit for the future? CEO's and other C-suite leaders are now thinking about their leaderships' readiness to support these changes. In our view, organisations need to overcome the stubborn and narrowing nature of traditional talent development instruments and approaches and start dealing with today's realities.

This '**new world**' demands a revised interpretation between the organisational requirements and the personal needs of talent. The organisation's most essential requirement?

The development of adaptive mindsets and capabilities with the range to not be overwhelmed by the expanse of today's challenges. It is clear to our clients that as well as the necessary IQ and EQ required to be an effective leader, another important capability is emerging – our capacity to adapt (AQ). And Talent's most essential need? Being afforded the time and support to develop and grow adaptively in an increasingly volatile and complex environment.

Today, the most successful organisations delegate not just tasks, but also the thinking to their talent. Delegating thinking to them means offering them more unique developmental experiences such as working on adaptive challenges that are aligned to the business's ambition and purpose.



Adaptive Leadership

To meet the challenges of talent development in a volatile and complex environment, firstly, we need to decommission scarce mindsets, job titles and traditional competency-based development and think more about the adult development and learning experiences for a broader set of talent.

Secondly, we need to recognise Leadership is a participation sport, but it is no longer performed with internal audiences alone, the ability to move into other domains of thinking and being is critical to a leader's success for the future. This requires the ability to think about and solve adaptive challenges.

To start, we recommend **four steps**:



1

STEP 1.

Take a **"strategy back"** approach to defining business-critical roles. Try move away from simply defining leadership roles for a certain size of P&L, head count, or other traditional metrics. Look closer at the context within which your business is operating and the imperatives of your strategy. Ask yourself what leadership mindset and capabilities are required to deliver it.



2

STEP 2.

Create profiles of what success looks like in the different domains of your business for today and for the future (because it's coming fast). Identify the gap analysis in terms of leadership mindsets and capabilities.



3

STEP 3.

Provide your talent with a thoughtful mix of talent development, deployment and redeployment. Most importantly, ensure that your development efforts allow you to identify and determine your talent's ability to:

- Address the complex and adaptive challenges and problems that confront your business.
- Expand the scope and scale of their thinking to apply solutions that affect many; and,
- Apply solutions to problems today and that have taken account of changes coming.



4

STEP 4.

Finally, value and be willing to learn and be engaged with their development.

Who are we?

We are **Harmonics OD**; a team of behavioural consultants and change management specialists, we have worked with organisations of all sizes for more than 25 years. Across many sectors, we work with C-suite executives in sourcing, identifying, assessing, selecting and developing key people for critical positions leadership roles.

Closing the Skills Gap: Regional Skills Projects |
 World Economic Forum (weforum.org)

About Neville Bourke

Neville Bourke leads the Harmonics Organisation Design and Leadership Division and has spent 25 years developing effective People and Talent Strategies, leading Change initiatives, and facilitating Organisation Transformations across industry sectors. He is an **Organisation Change & Leadership specialist** who excels at developing people strategies and converting them into impactful plans. He has worked for organisations such as Bank of Ireland, Boston Scientific Corporation and Mitsubishi Chemical Corporation.

His corporate roles have included responsibility for Talent & Leadership Development, Compensation & Benefits, Pensions and Recruitment. He has also led the design and implementation of people, culture & capability elements of a diverse range of transformations in response to digital & technology disruption and organisational scaling / integration.



Neville holds a primary degree in Business Studies (Human Resources), a Graduate Diploma in Safety, Health & Welfare at Work (both University of Limerick), and an M.Sc. (Mgmt) in Organisational Behaviour (Trinity College Dublin).

Neville is an Occupational Psychometric Tester through the British Psychological Society (BPS). He is currently undertaking a Masters in Executive Coaching through Ashridge Executive Education at Hult International Business School. He was awarded the Charles Harvey Award for Academic Excellence (TCD, 2003).

Other Services from Harmonics



Organisation Change

We design & implement solutions for organisations to get ready for the future.



Executive Coaching

We have the right coach for the business challenges your organisation is facing.



Outplacement Services

We manage both large scale restructuring and on-off senior executive exits.