3Rs OF LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE
IN THE NEXT NORMAL

Uncertain. Unknown. Unpredictable. Besides mirroring the dynamic nature of a crisis, these adjectives are reflective of the "**next normal**" - an unprecedented new era that is ever-changing and riddled with ambiguity. As such, **resilience as a leadership competency** is more important now than ever. This refers to the ability of a leader to manage, recover, learn, and grow from chronic or crisis adversity. This series will share stories of leaders from diverse backgrounds and industries on how they have responded in times of uncertainty, managed recovery, and reinvented for the future. This issue of this series explores how leaders may reinvent from crises or adversities by **being aware of emerging attitudes towards work**.

RESPONDING
NAVIGATE THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

RECOVERING
LEARN AND EMERGE STRONGER

REINVENTING
PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

EMERGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK

It is important to explore the shifts driven by the evolving nature of work as we gradually ease into the next normal. In order to remain relevant and to build a resilient team, one has to consider the ways in which the emerging and younger generation of employees are rewiring the existing workforce with their generational attributes, values and preferences.

Heading into 2020, Netflix was on the rise — excellently positioned with a massive head-start over other streaming platforms (e.g., Disney+ and HBO Max). This allowed it to thrive despite the pandemic (acquiring 28.7 million new subscribers in the first three quarters of 2020 alone), and emerge at the forefront of entertainment and streaming services. Part of Netflix's success is due to its ability to harness new technology and stay ahead of trends, a strategy that contributes to an organisation's resilience in the face of crises or adversities. The ability to recognise digital trends and evolving consumer demands has been characteristic of Netflix since its inception and growth.

Netflix's bold co-founders, Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph, started the rental DVD subscription business in 1998, amidst VHS dominating the market. This was a game-changing move that caught the massive swing towards DVD movies.

In 2006, Netflix sensed a switch in consumer demands towards the internet, as traditional TV networks were gradually being replaced. Recognising the significance of this shift, Netflix became one of the first companies to use internet technology to drive nearly its entire business model, launching the model we know today.

In line with current consumer trends, Netflix started increasing its online library to include new and old videos, movies, documentaries and films, allowing consumers to enjoy flexibility over viewing choices.

Additionally, to stay abreast with digital technology, Netflix has continuously improved its platforms, which are equipped with an AI-powered algorithm that in turns creates personalised (and "usually incredibly accurate") recommendations for each user.

While situational factors, such as the COVID-19 lockdown conditions, did contribute to higher demands for online streaming services, Netflix's influence was already formidable during pre-pandemic times due to its strategic foresight. This reinforces the importance of continually reinventing oneself by examining trends and integrating them with organisational processes.

It goes without saying that the post-pandemic-stricken world has experienced and undergone great changes. Besides the accelerated rate of digital transformation, one can also expect the recovering workforce to hold **altered expectations and attitudes towards working**. Particularly, it is important to be attuned to the next generation of employees and leaders, the millennials and Gen Zs, who are gradually forming the largest faction of the workforce. Leaders have to be aware of such dynamic shifts in order to understand and integrate them. For example, 'work-life balance' is giving way to 'work-life integration' as the boundaries between professional and personal life are constantly blurring. The workplace of the future entails autonomy, flexibility, and collaboration, and goes beyond the mere adoption of technologies and new working methods. Rather, it is an ongoing transformation process with leaders working actively with employees to extract and amplify the best of what the emerging work culture and mindset have to offer.

📊 KEY EMERGING ATTITUDES

1) Desire to Learn and Invest in Transferrable Skills

- Massive disruptions within industries as a result of the pandemic has driven and further reinforced ambitions of **a life and career that can withstand continuous reinventions and pivots.**
- This is aligned with an **eagerness towards continuous learning**, a sentiment common among millennials as reflected in a PWC Survey: [2]
  - "Millennials expect to keep on learning as they enter the workplace and spend a high proportion of their time gaining new experiences and absorbing new information."
- Investing in **transferrable skills** and continually working to **reduce the capability gap** is a means which may serve the needs of the workforce, functions and adaptability of the organisation, through times of changes. This could further reinforce the resilience of individuals and teams.

2) Freedom to Choose What Balance Looks Like

- Desire for work-life balance is not a new phenomenon, however, **the ability to choose what the balance looks like**, is one that is gaining traction.
- Enforced flexible working arrangements has allowed organisations and employees to experience a more **personal and flexible working arrangement** - while also revealing its benefits to productivity and satisfaction.
- This movement is emerging alongside the proclivity of younger employees to pursue both professional and personal goals, and **enjoy flexibility and freedom to arrange their time.**
- This has seen a growing inclination towards **work-life integration** - which purports the replacement of rigid boundaries between work and life, with fluidity and flexibility.

3) Passionate about Corporate Citizenism

- The rise in social and political activism around the globe points to the notion that **people are increasingly driven by social causes and concerned about issues larger than themselves.**
- Translating this to the work context, not only are employees looking for employers that are aligned with their personal values, but also those that demonstrate it with action.
- Ensuring an alignment could have trickle down effects beyond attraction, to also boost **engagement and retention.**
  - By 2025, Millennials*—a generation serious about corporate social responsibility—will make up 75% of the workforce (Deloitte millennial survey).

4) Value Community at Work and Transparent Communication

- Social distancing measures have reinforced the importance of **social connections at work** — many have found comfort and encouragement when surrounded by their colleagues and team mates.
- **Communication on a personal and social level has become more important and deliberate** as people move apart to connect virtually. This intention to connect should not be forsaken in the recovery period.
  - This mirrors the concept of "humanised employment"—which connotes caring meaningfully about the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of each employee and supporting them both personally and professionally.
  - This is also in line with a generational shift in perception and openness to supporting mental health challenges.
- In times of uncertainty and rapid changes, many employees have validated the **importance of clear and transparent communication**, which is becoming a norm and expectation in the recovery process.
- This is also aligned to the peculiar nature of millennials who **"want continuous feedback and guidance"** as described by Dr. Jason Wingard, Dean Emeritus and Professor at Columbia University.

5) Value Digital Literacy and Existing in a Technological Ecosystem

- Organisations and teams are **increasingly reliant on technological platforms and devices** to conduct work, more so in the past year. This has placed greater emphasis on the need for the workforce to be more digitally literate. **Up-skilling and up-keeping the integration** of technology despite returning to the workplace, could propel recovery and success in the new normal.
- The emerging workforce is also likely to have an **expectation of working in a technological ecosystem** that includes social networking and instant messaging. These social tools will enable the workforce to instantly connect, engage, and collaborate with cohorts and managers in ways that are natural to them, leading to better productivity.

*Researchers and popular media use the early 1980s as starting birth years and the mid-1990s to early 2000s as ending birth years, with 1981 to 1996 being a widely-accepted defining range for the generation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

#1: Promote Dialogue with Employees

- **Open, effective, and frequent communication** is a pre-requisite to understanding employees' mindsets or needs, which is crucial in motivating and retaining them.
- Employees, especially millennials, value **regular feedback** on where they stand and how they are performing in relation to their goals. Whether it is regular one-to-one meetings or quarterly appraisals, having continued dialogue and feedback provides the perception of progression and allows for improvements or adjustments.
- In phases of recovery characterised by uncertainty and insecurity, **listening to and possibly empathising with** the opinions of employees are bound to enhance this recovery process.

#2: Reconsider Performance Measures

- Being the first one in the office and the last one to leave is no longer a measure of commitment and performance. In a post-pandemic world, employees are measured on the **value of their work** and their **quality of work** rather than on the individual tasks or the number of hours worked.
- With the changing definition of a workplace and the shift towards more flexible working arrangements, leaders must provide clear, outcome-driven expectations and reinforce organisational priorities so that employees can deliver on goals successfully.

#3: Continue to Embrace Digital Integration

- In this unprecedented environment, embracing digital technologies and reimagining the workplace are powerful options for recovery. It is not about where employees work, but **how they work that matters** — the key to successful transformation lies in empowering employees with technology and resources to facilitate teamwork and collaboration.
- It is important to put the people, and not just technology, at the heart of the digital transformation. Employees need to adopt a digital mindset and embrace the notion that digital tools requires a change in the way they work. To get buy-in from employees, leaders must **convey a clear vision for change** and **identify champions of change** who can lead by example.

#4: Value Differences in the Workplace

- As a result of wider generational gaps at the workplace, differences in work values and communication styles of each generation are becoming increasingly pronounced. Instead of viewing it as a challenge, leaders can **leverage on generational diversity to create a competitive advantage.**
- For example, organisations can consider **reverse mentoring**, where millennial employees can lend their digital expertise to senior employees in return for invaluable lessons on strategy and leadership. Such a practice facilitates a mutually supportive environment that brings out the best in a diverse workforce.

Sources

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Authors: Nicole Yeo and Brenda Toh
Supervised by: Dr. Majeed Khader and Eunice Tan

Nicole Yeo is a psychologist and Brenda Toh is a research analyst at the Home Team Behavioural Sciences Centre. Please feel free to contact them at Nicole_YEO@mha.gov.sg and Brenda_TOH@mha.gov.sg.