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Preparing Managers to Lead in a Complex, Changing Workplace

BY JESSICA SWENSON | NOVEMBER 03, 2025

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With tightening budgets and growing organizational demands, today's managers must continuously vacillate between the human aspects of leadership and operational metrics, structure, and productivity. Shifting too far in one direction can make it harder to access the other, causing burnout and impacting the level of support your team receives.

“Balancing those two is basically where the art comes in. I think both of them are required, and a lot of what leadership is about is trying to figure out the balance between the two,” said Abhay Gangadharan, global head of workforce architecture and director, future of work at [Google](#). The key, he says, is self-awareness. Notice when you're operating in one mode or the other, check in with your teams, and adjust to meet their needs.

Moderated by Subadhra Sriram, founder of [Workforce Observer](#), panelists at [From Day One's San Francisco conference](#) discussed how leadership development can prepare managers to better handle increasing volumes of responsibility, stress, and change.

To understand your organization's development needs, Juliet Saxe, partner at [RHR International](#), recommends using assessment tools to recognize where managers and management cohorts need more support. “We've used assessment as the basis for a lot of what we do, and that creates the jumping point to create programming for leaders at all levels, to help them evolve depending on their support needs.”

Classroom Training Opportunities

Renu Sharma, [HP](#)'s head of learning and skill development, says that by upskilling managers in fundamental leadership as well as functional and technical skills, the company is helping to mitigate the effects of change fatigue on its managers. HP invests in a blended program consisting of boot camp-style training in technical and human skills, cohort-based learning to enable peer-to-peer connections, and AI-driven coaching and role-playing.



Panelists spoke on the topic, "Managers Are Overwhelmed. How Leadership Development Can Help Them"

Productivity gained from technical upskilling in AI helps leaders to focus on meaningful work and strategic thinking, Sharma says. HP also “designed a manager leadership boot camp so that they can focus on human skills like leading change and navigating uncertainty,” she said.

Managers need to shift into skills-first leadership to support broader changes in organizational talent management, says Shaily Rampal, VP of HR and global head of organizational effectiveness for [HCLTech](#). By evaluating what skills are needed to meet both current and future strategic goals, “managers can play a very important role in identifying and bridging these skill gaps by giving continuous coaching to their teams.” Self-reflection and continuous growth are also vital for the managers themselves.

Beyond traditional leadership and management topics, resilience and mind-body stress management techniques have a place in these development programs. “I’ve seen folks sitting in boardrooms with their hands under the table trying to do sitting relaxation and steadiness exercises just because the stress is so high,” said Saxe. “You’d be surprised how these techniques and frameworks can be really helpful, even in a business situation.”

Gangadharan suggests looking for ways to cultivate antifragility by anticipating and learning from pressure. “Change is not going away,” he said. “The question is, how are we going to adapt to that in the future? You need to create some slack for yourself in order to adapt to change.”

Outside the Classroom

Organizational tools complement classroom training by supporting managers' needs in real time. Program managers are standard roles already embedded in tech, says Gangadharan; they help bring clarity and ensure on-time, on-budget project delivery. He says that AI tools will enhance these roles through increased efficiency. He has used AI for meeting agendas and note-taking to be more present and empathetic during meetings.

Sharma discussed HP's use of AI to provide personalized, scalable leadership coaching on a smaller budget. "It gets to understand you as a leader and can provide more personalized feedback," she said. "As we make AI public coaching available to a larger audience, that's a great tool to have in our managers' hands without having to spend large budgets."

Tina Gilbert, VP of employer offering at [Management Leadership for Tomorrow](#) (MTL), encourages leaders to understand what they need as they search for and scale AI solutions. "Don't just plug in to a coaching AI because it's the thing to do; make sure you're understanding what the root causes are that you're trying to address, and that you're trying to overcome. And then second, what is the motivation for your managers to leverage those tools?" Leaders should find ways to engage directly with their teams, peers, and mentors, and then use tools to reinforce their in-person experiences, she says.

Another effective tool used by many companies is mentorship programming. HCLTech has a global mentoring program that offers one-on-one mentoring and peer mentoring circles to over 42,000 participants, Rampal shared, which helps managers maintain support networks after specific leadership development programs have ended.

Sustaining Culture

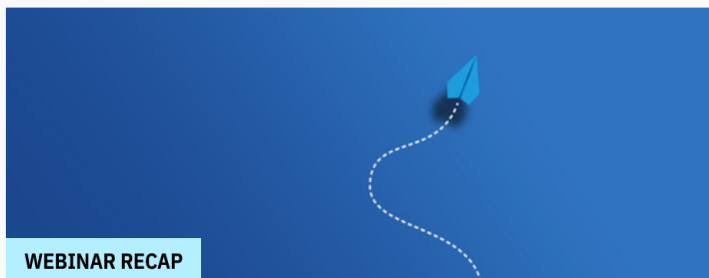
How can organizations ensure a sustainable culture while their leaders evolve? "Leaders go first," said Sharma. "I think a critical part of culture is that the senior leader teams are role modeling for everyone else." Having a senior leadership team discuss and prioritize its commitment to continuous learning demonstrates its importance for the company's other people managers.

Gilbert believes that the balance between leadership influence and the experience of entry-level staff creates an organization's culture and impacts managers the most. "It's the manager in that middle position of understanding all of that lived experience from those who report to them, but then trying to manage that with the expectations of those they report to."

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