Center for
Creative
Leadership®

Scaling Leadership Development for Maximum Impact in Uncertain Times

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Introduction

We are living through interesting times. The uncertainty and disruption imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic are so extensive that they will far outlast the pandemic itself. The pandemic upended our mobility, forcing many of us to change everything about how we live our lives. We've been pushed to think and work in new ways when things we once assumed to be stable – like childcare, schools, and even our jobs – suddenly shifted, not to mention the loss of loved ones and friends, the stress on relationships, and the fatigue and isolation.

In addition to the personal costs, the pandemic has brought about new challenges for organizations. Retention of talent has become increasingly difficult, as employees have left jobs in record numbers for positions that are better paid, more aligned with their values, or more flexible. In some cases, employees have dropped out of the workforce altogether. Companies are merging into new organizations. Org charts are flattening, with fewer layers of management in the middle. Advancing equity and diversity is becoming increasingly important. And hybrid work environments require new ways of relating to each other to ensure those in the office and those working remotely are on equal footing.

These changes are requiring organizations to reimagine their culture and its impact on employees. There has never been a greater need for diverse talent to come together, work cohesively, pivot when teammates leave, and work with other teams to achieve business goals in a condensed period of time. This chaotic environment calls for collaboration, connection, and coordination that are rooted in common leadership language, vision, and behaviors. **The optimal way to achieve this is by making access to high-impact leadership development more scalable and equitable throughout organizations.**

But how do you scale leadership development when staff is constantly shifting and leaders are struggling just to keep up with the day-to-day challenges of their work and personal lives? HR and L&D professionals need tools and solutions that allow them to access research-backed content and deliver transformational development experiences across the enterprise. A strong leadership development partner can stay on top of the latest research and trends, anticipate your needs, and help you pivot quickly to scale large organizational changes in the timeframe you need.

Whether you work with a partner or rely solely on internal resources, the key to successfully scaling leadership development is devising a strategy at the outset. Once the strategy is secured, it's imperative to have the processes and the talent in place to support the initiative and to be able to execute rapidly.

When scaling leadership development, it's essential to focus on these 3 principles:

SCALING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

PLAN
Your Leadership Strategy

PROVIDE
Access to Relevant Content

LEVERAGE
Internal and External Talent

PRINCIPLE 1

PLAN Your Leadership Strategy

What business problems and opportunities demand a leadership solution? Achieving optimal leadership development scalability starts with this question. Organizations don't go to market without a sales or operations strategy. Likewise, there should be hesitancy about going to market without a leadership strategy. Often, organizations find they can better focus on strategy when they partner with a leadership development organization that can help with the "heavy lifting" of planning and executing the changes.

Story of Success

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL)® recently partnered with a company in the consumer products industry that was in the process of reorganizing their business. The goal of the reorganization was to achieve a sustainable approach to producing the products people use in their daily lives. The company's leaders quickly realized they needed to transform the way they worked together in service of sustainability and changing systems and processes, as well as ways of interacting and working with each other across the enterprise. The CEO and the executive team connected the dots between how the company's new goals and related strategies linked to their new leadership **practices, behaviors, mindsets, and required shift in their leadership culture.** This context was the basis for an enterprise-wide leadership development initiative that focused on establishing a healthy, people-centric culture that supports their business strategy and success.

When the pandemic started, the organization was moving from prototyping the new leadership practices they defined in partnership with CCL to embedding the new beliefs and behaviors into the organization. When COVID disrupted the ability for internal champions to conduct conversation circles in person, the organization had to change its 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, to find a way to resource it.

Ultimately, **talent remained the organization's priority**, and the executive team leaned on CCL 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.

Plan Your Leadership Strategy: Recommendations

If you have never thought about the correlation between strategy and leadership development scalability, then consider the following tips:

- **Think about the big picture.** Don't fall into the trap of focusing on leadership development that targets certain pockets of leaders or one modality of learning. This leads to inequity and lack of inclusiveness that decrease 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 the organization are impacted by a COVID-inspired culture shift requiring new goals and strategies.** What leadership practices and ways of working should be executed differently as a result of a new culture and strategy?

- **Ask if the organization 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 the strategy.** Drivers are the key choices about how to position the 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.

- **From the key drivers, focus on the leadership strategy implications.** For example, the leadership implications for becoming more global might entail developing new skills to effectively and strategically lead globally dispersed hybrid teams.

PRINCIPLE 2

PROVIDE Access to Relevant & Flexible Leadership Content

Scaling leadership development requires significant commitment across the organization. It's not a program, but rather a sweeping initiative that requires a whole systems view. **The organization must have clarity about the varying needs and investments at different levels.** Solely implementing training programs is not sufficient. Large-scale change requires that you create 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. One silver lining of the pandemic is that connecting with your employees from their homes or offices is easier than ever. The downside is that your employees are likely stressed, depleted, and under-resourced. Simply providing access to hours of content that has not been carefully curated or aligned with your employee's day-to-day reality won't benefit them, or your organization.

Story of Success

In the midst of the pandemic, when it became clear that employees' stress was compounded by simultaneously caring for children, managing homeschool, and assisting elderly family members, burnout seemed inevitable. One government agency partnered with CCL to address this debilitating, organization-wide issue. The organization had already licensed an evergreen library of programs and products from CCL that received quarterly updates. The L&D team found just what they needed in the CCL Library, at the exact time they needed it, to address a critical issue impacting productivity. They chose a 4-week, online, asynchronous journey focused on providing the mindset, skillset, and toolset to "burn bright" rather than burn out – giving their employees the tools and techniques to be more resilient and bring their best selves to work. **They were able to reach over 500 employees during the initial months of the rollout** without too much strain on learners' time (1 hour a week) and were able to segment into small enough groups to allow for collaboration. CCL worked with the client on a specific strategy to recruit cohorts that included employees from across functions, leader levels, generations, and social identities to foster an open environment of sharing with colleagues they normally wouldn't interact with.

Provide Access to Relevant & Flexible Leadership Content: Recommendations

Here are some points to consider so your organization can create a leadership architecture that supports scaling:

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

- **Remember that people learn in different ways.** It's critical to design a mix of learning modes that work for different people at different 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 the critical skills for successfully achieving your organization's strategy.

- **Rely on technology.** Assess whether your organization has 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, making sure that 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 partner that is future-focused – capable of conducting cutting-edge research and turning it into programs and products that can be easily deployed. 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.
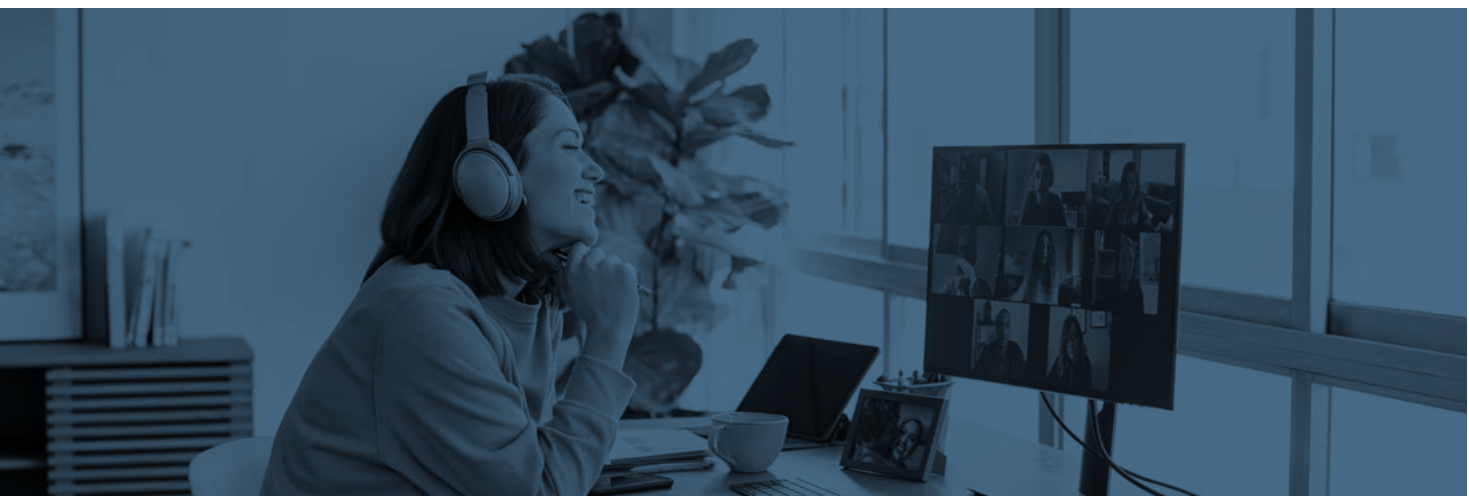
PRINCIPLE 3

LEVERAGE Internal and External Talent

While it's possible to have a clearly articulated leadership strategy, the capability to deploy multiple delivery modalities, a team of expert facilitators, and the right content available for face-to-face or virtual formats, many organizations struggle in one or more areas. If you're lacking any one of these critical pieces, you likely need the support of an external partner.

In today's complex market, many practitioners consider scaling a development initiative to be uncharted territory. 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 dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of leaders in a short timeframe. Since the onset of the pandemic, **the role of HR and talent and development professionals has expanded** – and become increasingly important – as they must function as strategic partners to the C-suite and advocates for employees with rapidly evolving needs and expectations.

Today, employees expect personal development opportunities at their places of work – it's no longer optional, but rather table stakes for employers to provide these avenues. Though HR teams understand this critical need, they don't always have the tools to provide meaningful leadership development in a way that's scalable – to ensure equitable access to all talent – and customizable – to align with organizational KPIs.

Story of Success

CCL recently partnered with a major corporate brand on a global, enterprise-wide leadership initiative. The curriculum provided a common language around leadership but also enabled a certain amount of adaptability for cultural context. CCL designed the curriculum and provided most of the content, while the client leveraged the capacity and capability of its internal training staff to deliver this curriculum to their businesses all over the world. When recent events caused many of their internal training staff to turn over, CCL stepped in to deliver as a stopgap measure, while working with the client to recruit, onboard, and ensure confidence and competence in delivery of the curriculum.

Leverage Internal and External Talent:
Recommendations

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

- **Mix outsourcing with insourcing.** Leverage your partner for certain key groups such as senior executives where deeper, more complex development is required and to step in if internal capability can't match delivery need.

- **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 business leaders.** Use the skills and passion they've developed for their specific function to supplement the "trainers" from Human Resources. This concept of "Leader-Led Development" helps deeply ingrain the new skills into the business and supports the effort to scale, while at the same time offering invaluable insights.

- **Regularly connect your facilitators and business leaders.** It's important that your internal and external facilitators and business leaders have the opportunity to share best practices, uncover challenges, and support each other.

Choosing a Partner for Scale

- **Experience:** The partner should have deep, demonstrable experience 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 that will help develop the internal capacity needed to deliver content at scale.

- **Quality:** Partner firms should demonstrate the consistent quality of their content and their work with clients like you.

- **Impact:** Validate the results the partner has produced with other, similar clients.

- **Value:** While price is not always the most reliable measure, ensure the value you're getting meets your needs.

Conclusion

Imagine the impact that will result in your organization if you have shared leadership vision, language, and behaviors linked directly to a critical business need. **Scaling leadership development is the optimal way to create new capabilities across the enterprise**, 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 their 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 principles outlined in this paper will help you to more quickly achieve concrete business results and drive an inclusive culture of learning with scalable solutions.

Ready to Take the Next Step?

CCL Passport™ is an integrated licensing package that supports HR and learning and development leaders in making access to high-impact leadership development more scalable and equitable throughout their organization. Take advantage of our world-renowned programs, award-winning learning journeys, and 5 decades of pioneering research to maximize your investment, create sustainable change, and see real results.

Learn more at ccl.org/passport
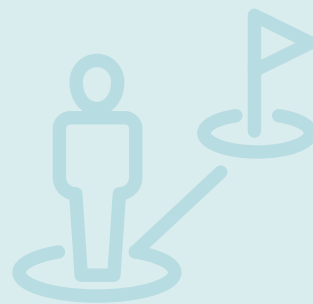
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