

## ARTICLE REVIEW

### REINVENTING YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

Your organization's future depends on getting this right

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Harvard Business Review: January - February 2022

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#### Overview

As key to the success of the organization, leadership has been studied extensively and has been a popular topic of research for decades. Researchers have offered different views of leaders, such as ones with visionary or charismatic character, later with team building or participatory skills, and more recently via a Leadership Team rather than individual leaders for a changing or goal-based organization.

In the current highly unpredictable and highly disruptive world, accelerated by the global pandemic and digitization, the demand for effective leadership is even more needed for continued success and to cope up with the unpredictable future. This article comes at just the right time to offer a solution to business organizations.

Written by three prominent consultants in strategy management who are executives at PwC, a leading consulting business operating in 156 countries and providing consultancy services in assurance, tax and advisory services (<https://www.pwc.com>). Paul Leinwand is the global managing director for capabilities-driven strategy and growth at

PwC. He has co-authored three strategy books, the most recent titled *Beyond Digital* (2022) was co-authored with Mahadeva Matt Mani, a principal with PwC and adviser to executives as a Global Leader in Strategy and Leadership.

Published in the Harvard Business Review, a top ten leading magazine in business, packed with interesting articles celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in this Jan-Mar 2022 issue, this article is definitely worth your attention.

This article focuses on the idea that in this increasingly complex world, what companies need is not merely digitization but new forms of competitive advantage and transformation skills for the future. Obviously, the target audience is business firms of all types, CEOs and executives. The insights are drawn from research at 12 prominent global firms, resulting in four seemingly contradictory skills that leaders must have, to effectively execute 4 leadership roles:

- (1) Identify the leadership roles needed to transform your company for the future
- (2) Assemble the right people
- (3) Focus your leadership team for driving the company's

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- transformation
- (4) Take ownership of your leadership team's behavior.

## Review

Just as the title *Reinventing Your Leadership Team* suggests: to strive to build a competitive advantage in a digitized world, they found from their research what employees in business organizations want their top leaders to be is changing, able to reimagine the company's place in the world, and transform it.

Transform here refers to fundamental change, and not only in the top level, but through leading the change collectively, through 'collective leadership'.

Prior to breakdown discussions in the 4 sections, it is interesting to view a bar graph displaying six *paradoxical expectations of leaders* drawn from research. These 6 paradox qualities are: strategic executor, tech-savvy humanists, high-integrity politician, humble-heroes, globally minded localist, and traditional innovator. Just to give one example, a strategic executor is a leader with bold, ambitious ideas, as well as one who can put ideas into practice. Each of the 6 paradoxical pairs are equally interesting, with only half of employees by average saying their leaders are good at both sides of the paradox.

In the four sections of the article, the authors convincingly show how to build a leadership team to meet this challenge based on their research:

### (1) Identify the leadership role you need

CEOs in recent years have created nontraditional leaders in their company. In recent years, this has led to new titles, e.g. chief innovation officer, chief sustainability officer, chief behavioral officer, and so forth, noting that the more the top team roles are aligned with the outcomes, the better. For a company to remain relevant, it needs distinct capabilities. What positions do you need on your top team to make that happen?

### (2) Assemble your team thoughtfully

After identifying the roles your team needs, think of who will best fit these needs. As it may be unlikely to find leaders with paradoxical skills in each role, collectively a company should have them all covered. Moreover, instead of "where to fit this new candidate in?", you should ask "how will we fit with this person?"

One powerful message in this section is that the suggestion is not for a colorful diversity of leadership team for an annual report. Rather, "*look for people with varied experiences, who have worked within different ecosystems...*"

### (3) Focus your team on driving transformation

The key idea in this section is: for the top team ("the C-suit") to focus on transformation, they must be very deliberate in setting their agenda to lead the company rather than being driven by others. As leadership teams must do both: running day-to-day business and leading for the future, they must both perform and transform. Moreover, the role of the leadership team is not merely making big decisions. To ensure that their decisions are successfully implemented, they must be willing to do some dirty work. Thus, another paradoxical role.

### (4) Taking ownership of your leadership team's behavior.

The authors point out that many companies experience rivalry in their top ranks. This hinders transformation. To overcome it, the goal is to have everyone in the C-suit aligned in an understanding of why your company must change for what unique place in the world. A most interesting point suggested here for building collaboration is to get pairs of executives to work together on solving companywide issues, and this requires trust. In doing this, they join forces and merge their strengths while able to see beyond.

In their conclusion, transformation cannot be achieved by the top team alone. The new leadership role is to build leadership throughout the organization. "*Most importantly, make sure your leadership team*

*truly leads...define a bold agenda and launch the ambitious initiatives that your future relies on.”*

## **Conclusion**

This is an interesting and thought-provoking article that offers a new conception of leadership – the paradoxical roles of the executives -- whilst addressing transformation of the organization to live up to the challenges in today’s complexities in running business.

Basing and backing up their argument with research of 12 successful business firms around the world, the article is convincing, well-structured and easy to follow. It is suitable for leaders and CEOs in big business firms as well as entrepreneurs and emerging business leaders. As this is a rather brief article, I would recommend interested readers to also read their book: ***Beyond Digital: How Great Leaders Transform Their Organizations and Shape the Future***, by Paul Leinwand and Mahadeva Matt Mani (Harvard Business Review Press, 2021), where you will enjoy exploring and learning from the experiences of 12 companies, sharing their mistakes and successes.

Lastly, I would also recommend vivid readers on leadership to also read another article in the same issue of HBR: ***How to Quit When You Lead a Team***, by Peter Fennah, Brenda Steinberg, and Michael D. Watkins. This is an excellent article to guide you in how to plan your exit gracefully.