accenture

Human Resilience
What your people need now

The heart of the matter

Not so very long ago, at the 2020 World Economic Forum, Accenture, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum's Global Shaper and Young Global Leader Community, introduced a point of view, Seeking New Leadership on what it means to lead and navigate the decade ahead responsibly. It involves everything from mission and purpose, to technology and innovation, to emotion and intuition.

Responsible Leadership has taken on an even deeper meaning, as our workforces and our customers find themselves in an unfamiliar, fast-moving global environment. COVID-19 has changed the way we live and work already, with far-reaching impact. Leading with compassion and caring for our workforces and communities is more essential than ever.

Virtually all companies are still determining how we change the way we work, short- and long-term. But speed is of the essence, as our workforces and communities try to function and perform, while struggling to cope with what is happening in their daily lives.

We are helping CHROs, CEOs and boards navigate the leadership challenges in this new reality. Here, we share a few brief insights from Accenture workforce research spanning 15,600+ global workers in 10 countries and 15 industries.[1]

Our study highlights what workers need from leaders in three basic areas: physical, mental and relational.[2] These needs apply at all times, but they are magnified in crisis. Leaders who rise to the challenge will help their people develop human resilience—the ability to adapt and engage through difficult times.

The time to act is now.
This report outlines the practical steps you should take to get started.

The crux of it: Trust

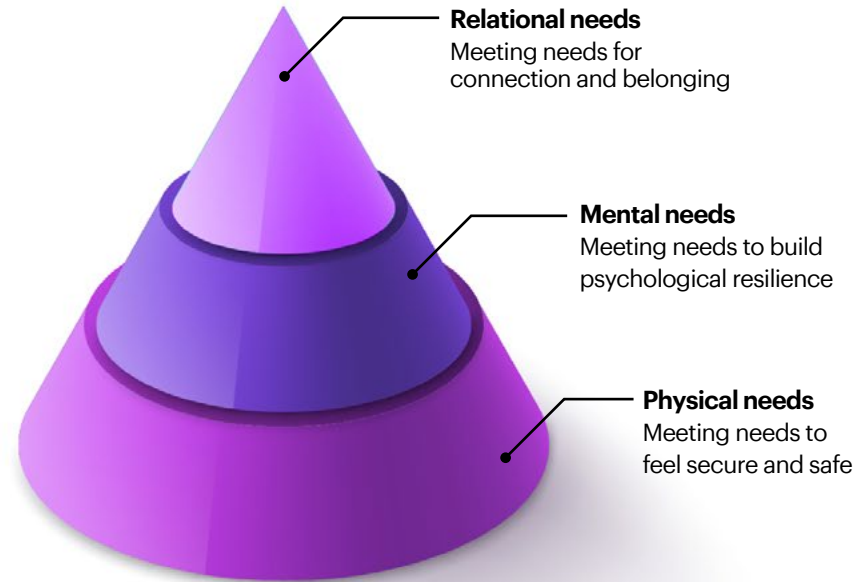Workers shared two overarching needs that take precedence over all else:

A leadership team that is focused on compassion and the care of its people.

Confidence in their company's capabilities to navigate the future.

Distilled to one essential message: Your workforce is looking to trust you. And it will trust if it believes leadership cares for each individual, their community and humanity as a whole.

But beyond caring, leaders must show they have a plan. You don't have to know everything, but you do need to be transparent about what is driving decisions.[3] A leadership team that looks ahead proactively, and responds rather than reacts, goes a long way toward helping people in volatile times.[4]

The ability for leaders to address people's physical, mental and relational needs is the foundation of trust. While all of these needs have equal importance, there is an order in which they make the biggest difference.

Relational needs
Meeting needs for connection and belonging

Mental needs
Meeting needs to build psychological resilience

Physical needs
Meeting needs to feel secure and safe

Think of it as similar to Maslow's hierarchy.[5] If employees are worried about physical needs like safety and food supply, they will have a hard time focusing on productivity or a new way of working.

The basics: Physical needs

Meeting people's needs to feel secure and safe

Workers in our study said:

Empower me to take responsibility for my health and well-being.

Provide a working environment where I feel safe.

At a time when many usual freedoms are being restricted, people need help feeling they are empowered to do what is necessary to keep themselves and their families safe and well.

Each organization will have its own nuances. In a company with people mainly in physical locations, concerns might include no-contact service and wearing protective equipment. Everyone might be worried about employment and a paycheck during the crisis. Asking early and often what people need or are concerned about will help your leadership team to determine your best actions.

It comes down to feeling safe while working, the most basic of human needs. And beyond safety, to leaders supporting their teams' well-being.

The next level: Mental needs

Meeting people's needs to build psychological resilience

Workers in our study said:

Give me permission to work differently so I can achieve the productivity that helps my mental health.

Communicate early and often the information I need to do my job, so I can respond to change with resilience.

In this new reality we're all living through, teams need flexibility and permission to work differently. Consecutive hours of uninterrupted work may not be feasible, as many people deal with disrupted elder care and childcare, difficulties securing essential supplies at home, and potential healthcare issues. Managers have to evolve work rules for more flexibility, based on emotional intelligence and people's individual needs. Educating managers on this sooner rather than later can help empower their teams to adapt.

Consistent, transparent and clear communication from leadership at all levels is essential to supporting productivity and mental health. In a vacuum, employees will create their own versions of the story, which can cause fear and confusion. And these are times for leaders to gain hearts, minds and engagement.

Top of the pyramid:
Relationship needs

Meeting people's needs for connection and belonging

Workers in our study said:

Show me my connection to our larger mission and purpose, to give me a sense of mission and belonging.

Provide me with the tools and ways of working that will help me co-create our new reality.

These days, many people join companies because they share values and a larger purpose. In times of crisis, those values and that purpose need to shine through brighter than ever. Why? Because they are the basis for workers' sense of connection and of belonging to something bigger than themselves.

As citizens of the world realize their shared humanity in new ways during this pandemic, your people will look for the same. And as companies emphasize concern not just for their own people, but also for the community, and humanity as a whole, workers are provided a stable connection to something bigger than the turbulence they're experiencing.

As a new reality is playing out in the broader world, people want to understand their new work experience. Instead of letting this happen organically, be proactive. Ask people to co-create with you a workplace reality that better fits the new world we're in. Leaders who can practice followership, elevating their most digitally savvy workers to lead the way, engender trust and truly modern leadership.

Meeting people's needs now:
The pragmatist's guide

Every organization's workforce, culture and resources are different, so there is no one approach that will work for every company. Leadership in this new reality calls for shared principles and actions: ones that elevate people and recognizes their needs. We have already seen organizations in specific industries taking the lead on this, including:

- In the **airline industry**, CEOs forgoing pay in order to keep their workers employed
- In the **technology sector**, offering proactive stipends to offset the costs of working remotely for people
- In **financial services**, putting money back into their operations and people by pausing stock buybacks throughout the second quarter
- In **retail**, offering free therapy to minimize the stress on workers during these trying times
- In **hospitality**, expanding healthcare coverage beyond the company's current policies[6]

Accenture recommends taking 10 actions to help your people address the now and prepare for the next.

Practice leadership now

Gather the troops. Develop a multidisciplinary C-suite "plan and act" center.

Relieve people from unnecessary work and activities.

Responsible leadership is an imitable formula. Use it.

Elevate your most visible leaders based on compassion and caring.

Hierarchy be damned.

Integrate your company's purpose and values into every communication and initiative.

Tell a story. Don't spew data.

Rally leaders around consistent communication.

You were always going to need remote workforce capabilities for at least a portion of your workforce. Now's the time.

Don't allow the crisis of the now to stop you from moving toward the next.

Gather the troops. Develop a multidisciplinary C-suite "plan and act" center.

But before you plan and act, be sure your leadership knows listening and responding to their people is just as important. Gather feedback from all areas of the organization and all types of workers—from the frontline, to your most skilled freelancers to senior management.

Actions to take immediately include:

- Set and communicate policies (e.g. travel, remote working, paid time off) that will help guide employees on immediate or near-term needs

- Invest in programs to alleviate the physical and mental impact on people (e.g. financial support, child/elder care, etc.)

- Support home office setup

- Provide guidance on hiring and managing different groups, from the frontline to contract workers

Relieve people from unnecessary work and activities.

This is crucial for your own sanity and that of your workforce. At a time when people are worried about their basic needs and their paycheck, focusing resources on what will best help the company and its people weather this crisis just makes sense.

Actions to take immediately include:

- To provide a clear view on what needs to pause and continue, scenario test to ensure you are informed on the potential impact to workers and business continuity

- Be clear that you are removing friction deliberately because you care about your people and their well-being

- But for your essential priorities, team people up based on skill, rather than function. This is a chance for digital natives to take the lead in remote working initiatives

Responsible leadership is an imitable formula. Use it.

Educate and coach leaders on five key elements: stakeholder inclusion, emotion and intuition, mission and purpose, technology and innovation, and intellect and insight. Recognize those who practice responsible leadership, and think about their role not just in the now, but in the future.

Actions to take immediately include:

- Educate your leaders on the five elements of responsible leadership so they can use this frame to help guide their words and actions

- Ensure all COVID-19 response meetings address the five elements

- Walk the talk: for instance, when the time is right, sponsor virtual community days of service

Elevate your most visible leaders based on compassion and caring.

People will remember the faces and voices you empower to lead the charge during this time.[7] Be sure those voices are not only wise, but compassionate and caring. Bringing a sense of calm to the chaos will go a long way toward moving employees to a healthier, more productive place.

Actions to quickly follow include:

- Select your most compassionate, caring executives to lead the charge. Give others different tasks, but don't make them the face of change

- Direct leaders to change the daily tone:

  - Start every call with a human moment

  - From a sole focus on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to a focus on forward momentum

  - There should be no fear of being reprimanded for putting family before productivity

  - Welcome a human touch: it's OK if the dog is barking or the baby is in the lap

Hierarchy be damned.

If you aren't used to working in cross-functional, agile teams, now is the time to begin. You are looking for the right outcomes—for the customer and larger society—and you don't get to outcomes via functional silos. Choose teams based on their skills rather than their functional expertise.[8] You'll be amazed at the competence and problem solving that rises to the top when you use this lens.

Actions to take immediately include:

- Empower frontline people to serve customers in a way that works

- Train managers in participatory management

- Set up COVID-19 response knowledge-sharing forums and crowdsourcing events

- Be less formal: use chats in meetings or dedicated 1:1s to discuss the COVID-19 crisis and reduce uncertainty

Integrate your company's purpose and values into every communication and initiative.

It's more important than ever. Shared purpose and values are what will give people the sense of belonging that they so desperately need right now. As quarantines and social distancing play out, people need a sense of connection.

Actions to quickly follow include:

- Reconnect every person, customer, supplier and stakeholder with purpose and values, making them central to all internal and external communication

- Use language that is positive, empathetic and emotionally supportive

- Avoid statements that could be interpreted as internal public relations. Stay authentic and on message, focused on shared values

- Use employee sentiment analysis to shape more meaningful communications, keeping in mind the importance of using employee data wisely to build trust[9]

- Engage corporate social responsibility leaders in the journey
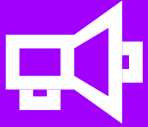
Tell a story. Don't spew data.

Many companies are data rich and can provide your people with metrics and predictions. But what people want as human beings is the larger story, the insights. People are wired to find meaning and respond best to stories and analogies during times of great stress and ambiguity.[10] They want to know a wise, calm, confident leadership team is in place. And they're figuring things out, so we'll all get through this together.

Actions to quickly follow include:

- Don't barrage people with email, meetings, directives and reports

- Streamline the number of leaders engaged in business performance and business continuity

- Use videos that tell stories about how leaders and colleagues are coping

- Promote the use of in-house social media tools; make sure leaders are present and share human stories

Rally leaders around consistent communication.

Establish strong communication governance, guiding principles and tone. Leaders throughout the organization need to hit the same notes to role model your organization's values and culture, aligning on simple, clear messages.[11] And communications provide the transparency that leads to employee trust. To keep firing on all cylinders, you need that trust. Answer questions and don't allow a communication vacuum—that's where fear and the rumor mill find an entry point. Answer all questions, even if the answer is, "Good question. We don't know. We'll find out."

Actions to quickly follow include:

- Establish communication governance and guiding principles

- Give leaders and managers guidance and coaching on finding the right tone

- Hold daily, short briefings to convey key messages and gather feedback

- Use digital tools to reach a wide array of people in an agile, modern way

You were always going to need remote workforce capabilities for at least a portion of your workforce. Now's the time.

Crisis is never the best time to set up new ways of doing things, but this pandemic gives many companies no choice. Pre-pandemic, our Accenture workforce research showed less than one-third of all workers were able to make full use of their technology to effectively do their job.[12] Now is the time to accelerate human+machine collaboration and support people as they transition to digital ways of working.

This is the ultimate test of agility and will move your culture toward the fast learning and fast failing that distinguishes many of the most successful companies in the world.

Actions to take now and in the future include:

- Train managers how to lead a remote workforce

- Invest in remote work capabilities for the immediate and longer term

- Allow your best digital workers to help those who are new to remote working through virtual training, chats or reverse mentoring

- Use social network analytics to understand how effectively people are collaborating as they work remotely

Don't allow the crisis of the now to stop you from moving toward the next.

Reserve two hours per day for work focused on getting your organization and your workforce ready for the future. It will feel like you're ignoring the urgent, but two hours wisely spent, will help move your organization beyond the urgent and prepare for the future.

Actions to take now and in the future include:

- Ask for input on how to create positive change and innovation out of this challenging time

- Use an online tool to capture innovation and creative ideas

- Analyze people's feedback in real time to shape actions that will have the greatest impact

We'll leave you with this message.

If ever there was a time to show up as our very best human selves and leaders, it's now.

We know this is overwhelming. We encourage you to prioritize your own well-being, so you are better able to help others throughout your company. And then bring empathy, compassion and wisdom to those you lead. In addition to the usual crisis management actions and planning, that's all any of us can do.

We are here to help.

How can Accenture help?

RIGHT NOW

• You've probably already launched a "plan and act" center. Consistently monitor, through feedback, that your actions are taking care of the physical, mental and relationship needs you can address

• Plan ahead for workforce changes. AI-based scenario modeling can help

• Stop non-essential work. Use freed capacity to focus on business and human resilience

• Put responsible leadership into practice

• Put the right leaders—your most compassionate and caring–out front

• Flatten the "hierarchy." If not literally then figuratively

NOW

• Organize communications, tying everything to your company's shared purpose and values

• Focus on human stories and share them broadly to help people feel connected

• Change tone away from day-to-day management toward emphasizing people, compassion and caring

NOW AND NEXT

• Now is the time to dive into remote working. Handle immediate need but plan with an eye toward the future

• Make sure the "urgent" doesn't preclude what's important in the long term. Give yourself time to think future forward

• Out of difficult times comes an astonishing amount of innovation and creativity. Begin to harness it. It brings hope

Contact Us

Eva Sage-Gavin

Senior managing director
Global lead, Talent &
Organization/Human
Potential

Barbara Spitzer

Managing director
Talent & Organization/
Human Potential, People
Experience lead

Gaston Carrion

Managing director
Talent & Organization/
Human Potential,
Asia Pacific lead

Patricia Feliciano

Managing director
Talent & Organization/
Human Potential,
Latin America lead

Tim Good

Managing director
Talent & Organization/
Human Potential,
Europe lead

Yaarit Silverstone

Senior managing director
Talent & Organization/
Human Potential, North
America lead

Contact us for more information at **humanresilience@accenture.com**

Notes and references

[1] The Accenture Research was built on a survey of 15,665 workers across skill levels and generations from a range of large and small companies: 30 percent were management workers. Surveys covered 10 countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Spain, Singapore, United Kingdom, Unites States) and 15 industries (Aerospace & Defense, Banking, Communications, Consumer Goods & Services, Energy (Oil and Gas), Freight and Logistics, Health, Insurance, Media, Public Sector, Retail, Technology (High Tech), Travel, U.S. Federal Government, Utilities). These were carried out between October and November 2019.

[2] Using survey data from the 15,665 workers we ran a stepwise regression analysis on the different talent and leadership practices organizations could take to positively increase a worker's health across three dimensions: physical, mental and relational. All recommended leadership actions are those that were found to have a statistically significant ($p < .01$) impact on the worker health dimensions. In total over 20 practices were tested. The ones presented in this report are the ones that met the minimum statistical threshold of the regression model.

[3] https://hbr.org/podcast/2020/03/managing-the-stress-and-uncertainty-of-coronavirus

[4] Bhaduri (2019), "Leveraging culture and leadership in crisis management", European Journal of Training and Development Vol. 43 No. 5/6, pp. 534-549

[5] www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201205/our-hierarchy-needs

[6] www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2020/03/17/50-ways-companies-are-giving-back-during-the-corona-pandemic/#3eb125264723

[7] McCarthy, A. & Sheehan, M. (2014). Uncertainty and ongoing economic turbulence: Implications for HRD. Advances in developing human resources, 16(1), 3-12.

[8] McChrystal, S. A., Collins, T., Silverman, D., & Fussell, C. (2015). Team of teams: New rules of engagement for a complex world

[9] Accenture, "Decoding Organizational DNA", 2019

[10] Luthans, F., Vogelgesang, G.R., Lester, P.B. (2006). Developing the psychological capital of resiliency. Management Department Faculty Publications

[11] https://hbr.org/2020/03/communicating-through-the-coronavirus-crisis

[12] Accenture workforce survey, 2019

About Accenture

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions—underpinned by the world's largest delivery network— Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With 509,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives.

Visit us at **www.accenture.com**

About Accenture Research

Accenture Research shapes trends and creates data driven insights about the most pressing issues global organizations face. Combining the power of innovative research techniques with a deep understanding of our clients' industries, our team of 300 researchers and analysts spans 20 countries and publishes hundreds of reports, articles and points of view every year. Our thought-provoking research—supported by proprietary data and partnerships with leading organizations, such as MIT and Harvard— guides our innovations and allows us to transform theories and fresh ideas into real-world solutions for our clients.

For more information, visit **www.accenture.com/research**