



Developing Skills in a Hybrid Workplace

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The American Management Association & the Management Centre Europe recently completed research with hundreds of managers that has revealed the key skills needed to help them and their teams succeed in a changing work environment.

COVID-19 no longer dominates the headlines, people have returned to live events, and everyone is back in the office. The first two statements are true, but the third is not. According to a March 2022 Gallup Inc. poll, “The Future of Hybrid Work: 5 Key Questions Answered with Data,” before the pandemic, only 8% of employees with remote-capable jobs worked from home exclusively. That number jumped to 70% by May 2020. By 2022, most of these remote-capable employees were still working from home, at least part of the time, with 42% working a hybrid schedule and 39% working fully remotely.

Don't expect a huge decrease in those numbers anytime soon. AMA/MCE says employers are calling for workers to show up in person at least a few days a week, with six in 10 employees with remote-capable jobs wanting a hybrid work arrangement, according to a Gallup poll in February 2023. For managers, this hybrid arrangement has created new challenges. In fact, while most employees are very happy with hybrid work, this is not true of managers. An August 2022 analysis by Gallup's Jim Clifton and Chad Holliday of another company study found that managers were “more miserable at work than their employees” because they were never taught how to manage a much less attached worker.

“It's not enough to only provide a regular schedule of mandatory compliance training and industry specific skills,” AMA/MCE experts say.

“Managers and individual employees also need adaptable, technology-focused, resilience-building, and key people skills that help them succeed in their changing work environments and with new responsibilities. For managers especially, they need skills to support their teams across all work environments.”

To determine how resilience, conflict resolution, collaboration, critical thinking, and other skills play a role in positive, modern workplace outcomes, AMA/MCE asked a nationwide audience of managers about the skills they believe they and their employees need to move forward successfully in a remote or hybrid work situation.

PERSONAL NEEDS OF LEADERS

Breaking down the numbers, AMA/MCE found that 23% of the people polled work remotely and 39% are hybrid, working in the office and remotely. Most important, of the 62% of respondents who are responsible for direct reports, more than half of the managers polled stated that they had to manage their direct reports differently, depending on whether they work remotely or in person. Sixty-six percent believe that there are skills which are more critical for remote employees than for those who are in the office, and 50% believe that the skills required to do their jobs successfully have changed since before the pandemic.

What exactly are those skills that managers say they need more of since the pandemic? Among them are



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communication, with 67% stating that the requirement has grown. Others are virtual presentation, at 66%; adaptability and resilience, at 65%; technology, also at 65%; motivation, at 52%; and emotional intelligence, with 51% agreeing the need has become larger.

“Communication can be more difficult virtually because you can’t see the nonverbal elements and adjust as needed,” AMA/MCE experts say. “New communication skills will teach employees how to build connections that foster trust and rapport and better engage with audiences in person and across any digital divide.”

AMA/MCE experts state that virtual presentations can elicit jarring challenges, even for the most seasoned speakers, adding, “New presentation skills can help employees take command with style and professionalism regardless of glitchy internet connections.”

And the need for technology skills “makes sense,” AMA/MCE experts say, as technology “is the gateway to a successful remote work experience, not to mention the fact that it’s always evolving.”

Some managers say the relevancy of certain other skills for themselves has not changed since before COVID. They remain important now and do not need to be increased. These essential skills are performance review, with 75% saying it does not need to be expanded; analytical skills at 68%; project management at 66%; conflict resolution at 62%; critical thinking and decision making at 61%; strategic planning at 57%; diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging at 56%; and networking at 53%.

WHAT SKILLS DO TEAMS NEED?

In looking at skills that are more important for their teams since the pandemic, 70% of managers stressed communication, and 68%, adaptability and resilience. Technology was seen as more important by 64% of managers, and 62% cited the increased importance of virtual presentation skills. Productivity/time management and collaboration were cited in this year’s survey as important team skills by 61% and 60%, respectively. The importance of motivation increased to 61% of managers polled, and 53% said there was a growing need for emotional intelligence.

In looking at the relevancy of certain other skills for their teams, many managers said the need for these skills has not changed, and the numbers were similar to that of the relevancy of these skills for themselves. For performance review, 77% of managers thought the importance of this skill was the same as before the pandemic and there was no need to expand it. Analytical skills were at 65%; conflict resolution at 64%; strategic planning at 63%; critical thinking and decision making at 62%; project management at 61%; diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging at 60%; and networking at 53%.

AMA/MCE experts say that managers stating they and their teams need more of certain skills could be a balancing issue rather than an efficiency one.



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“Perhaps respondents see their remote counterparts’ inability to disconnect as work and home spaces intertwine,” AMA/MCE says. “The rise in demand for time management skills could represent the need for teams to be able to shut down at the end of the workday, even if they aren’t technically leaving the workspace.”

AMA/MCE notes that adaptability and resilience skills rose slightly for team needs as well. “These skills certainly apply to an evolving workplace as turnover, new clients, changing business priorities, learning new technology, and other adjustments can happen regularly,” these experts say. “However, a lack of resilience means one may not handle stress well, which could lead to harmful health consequences that impact life outside the office too.

Coping with stress in positive ways brings many health benefits in terms of longevity, lower depression, and greater satisfaction, according to a 2017 article from Harvard Health Publishing, “Ramp Up Your Resilience.”



66% of managers said that for themselves, the need for virtual presentation skills has grown since the pandemic.

Another interesting takeaway from the team skills statistics, AMA/MCE states, is the increasing need for collaboration skills without the increasing need for networking skills. “If one has the ability to network remotely, don’t they have the ability to collaborate all the same?” AMA/MCE experts say. “It seems these could go hand in hand, as similar hurdles exist for both skills in remote work environments. That said, if professionals are more satisfied in their remote/hybrid environments, they simply may not want to network.”

Whether employees work remotely or not, now is the time for managers to assess employees’ skill needs to ensure they have the tools and resources to perform their best. “By prioritizing new skills, organizations can solidify their support for current employees and often improve retention,” according to AMA/MCE. “Employers also can use this effort to tangibly demonstrate a commitment to flexible work environments in their recruiting process. This collective skill building initiative can pay off in the long run with an engaged, thriving workforce that remains committed to the organization and ultimately delivers on its goals.”

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51% of managers agreed there is a need for more emotional intelligence skills for themselves.

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