

# How to Develop an Enterprise Mindset

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The pandemic has been a crisis that doesn't fit neatly into a clear problem to be solved. It has been a rapidly unfolding, spiralling, ambiguous and enormously complex situation with multiple unknowns and no tried-and-true process that can be applied to manage it.

Long before the pandemic, organizations were already in the midst of transforming. Enabled by rapidly advancing digital technology, organizations across all industries were becoming more connected and networked, accelerating the transition from product and service providers to purveyors of complex, integrated solutions demanding a high level of coordination and communication. The pandemic merely accelerated shifts in how organizations collaborate and communicate in an increasingly connected, virtual world. But, at the same time, it has put a glaring spotlight on the urgency to develop an enterprise leadership mindset.

Although how we do work today has fundamentally changed and will continue to do so in the future, there is a strong human tendency to view the present through old glasses. Mindset – that intangible collection of deeply held beliefs that helps you make sense of the world and influences how you think, feel and act – often lags reality. And that presents a risk for organizations and their leaders.

Even as we prepare to turn the corner on the pandemic, many leaders continue to operate with an old mindset when it comes to how they see their leadership role and how they measure success. More than ever, organizations will need leaders who operate both individually and as a collective team at an enterprise level, focused on the business versus the function, seeing connections across silos, using inquiry rather than expertise to solve issues, applying disciplined collaboration to drive innovation, and engaging others around purpose and mission, not just performance and deliverables.

Yes, leaders need new skills to lead in a hybrid work-from-home world, but capability development through increased leadership training alone will not suffice. Mindset shift will also be key, but what is the best way to make it happen?

## Towards a new way of thinking

Most leaders bring a problem-solving mindset, viewing problems as puzzles that can be solved through expertise, critical thinking and effort. Organizations place a high value on it and reward their leaders for getting tasks done. But it also reinforces silo-thinking and a focus on operational efficiency, failing to provide a solid foundation for the kind of collaborative approach that the future of work demands.

In his book, *The Unfinished Leader*, David Dotlich describes the three C's – a desire for control, consistency and closure – that comprises the mindset of many leaders in how they approach their work. And, in most cases, that mindset works well when dealing with puzzle-like problems. But instead of a puzzle to be solved, the pandemic presented leaders with a rolling series of unending paradoxes replete with contradictions: People have to work remotely; people can only be productive in the office. Vaccines will get us back to the office; vaccines won't end this. Leaders learned quickly that COVID-19 presented obstacles that were unsolvable in the usual way. It was a complex and often ambiguous set of challenges that defied clear solutions. Instead, these were ongoing tensions that needed to be managed. It was the perfect laboratory to accelerate enterprise thinking.

As we enter the post-pandemic reality, more than ever, organizations will need to stimulate enterprise mindsets, especially among high potential leaders who are the future of the organization. Leaders equipped with an enterprise mindset work more naturally as a collective team and are better equipped to tackle issues that impact the organization as a whole, not just their narrow functional priorities. They are more capable of setting the broader context for their teams, encouraging strategic thinking and investing in the team's success rather than leading from their own expertise. And, perhaps most importantly, organizations that invest in building an enterprise mindset in their high potential leaders are changing how leaders work with other leaders and how they add value, enabling them to become more connected and influential at a critical stage in their careers.

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## Accelerating change

How do you go about changing mindset? The experience of the pandemic provides important clues. We identified three key accelerants that were consistently at play for leaders who successfully developed an enterprise mindset during the crisis – a significant, organization-wide challenge for which there was no clear answer, a supportive peer environment to experiment and work through the experience together, and the space and capacity for deeper transformation to occur. These three elements created the conditions for mindset change.

The executive team of one organization we have recently worked with sought to do just that. They had identified a cohort of high potential leaders and were looking for a meaningful way to develop their enterprise leadership mindset, while fostering cohesion and connection within the group. We helped the organization to bring together the three elements that would catalyze the transformation: a business paradox that defied a clear solution, a supportive peer environment, and the space to allow deeper personal change to happen.

In thinking about a tangible business challenge, the executive team found the perfect opportunity. Faced with a need to revisit their work-from-home policies in light of the pandemic, which would fundamentally shape how

## The three ingredients for accelerating mindset change



Significant, organization-wide challenge for which there is no clear answer



Supportive peer environment to experiment and work through the experience together



Space and capacity for deeper transformation to occur

work would get done in the future, the executive team was divided on the best path forward. This was the perfect opportunity to create a broader change in mindset for a select group of rising leaders. Tasking them with taking on this complex business issue ultimately would serve as the vehicle to build their enterprise thinking mindset.

## Working within a paradox

Experiences transform you. That is the nature of deep change. The journey itself is where the deeper learning happens leading to mindset change.

The organization we worked with brought together a cohort of directors and senior managers from diverse areas of the business to provide recommendations on changes to work-from-home policies that affected every part of the organization including health and safety, compensation, and technology. Each participant, an expert in their own function, had never worked on a collaborative task of this nature with their colleagues, and none could apply their expertise to a challenge with which they were all unfamiliar. To succeed, they would need to rely on each other to collect data, analyze it, develop recommendations and present the best path forward to their executive team.

Although each participant had some experience that would prove to be useful to some aspects of the task, none had the expertise necessary to provide a complete solution. Many aspects of the problem were well outside their comfort zones, and for most, it would prove to be one of the most challenging tasks they would undertake in their careers to date. With these conditions in place, it was in managing the tensions of the initiative, rather than in arriving at a singular solution, that the conditions for transformation were established. The learning would be in the process, not the outcome.

## It takes a community to raise an enterprise leader

A mindset shift requires a safe environment in which to make sense of the experience: to reflect on the changes that are happening, openly grapple with uncertainty and challenge, and put a spotlight on subtle shifts that are

easy to miss but have significant implications. We helped the organization implement such a support system through individual coaching and group learning.

Through individual coaching, the participants identified their development goals, reflected on their progress, and received feedback. At regular intervals throughout the project, the group also came together for facilitated sessions, each with a specific focus that introduced enterprise leadership concepts and tools to assist the team in their work. These included, for example, a group decision-making framework, understanding differences between “wicked” and “tame” problems and how to manage each, building a strategic influence approach, communicating with an executive team, and leading change.

During group sessions, participants were given the opportunity not only to discuss their progress on the task but also to reflect on the process itself and how they were beginning to see themselves differently as leaders. One team member reflected on becoming more aware of how difficult it had been to give up control and allow other members to take the lead. The group setting also provided individuals with some additional mirrors that reflected back a different version of how they saw themselves as leaders. Participants received real-time feedback on how their behavior impacted other members of the group, all within a safe, facilitated environment that allowed each individual to take risks as well as receive and provide support for other members.

## Mindset shift takes time

A mindset shift cannot be engineered. You cannot flip a switch to make it happen or induce it to occur through the sheer power of will. Mindsets form over a lifetime, and they require time to change. The process was designed to take place over a 6-month period, with individual coaching, group work and facilitated sessions spaced throughout this time. One participant reflected on subtle changes she had started to observe in her leadership of her own team – speaking less, listening more and helping others connect the dots between their work and how it supported the strategy of the business.

## The impact of an enterprise mindset

When high potential leaders shift to an enterprise mindset, they change how they see themselves, the true value of their leadership to their team and organization, and how work needs to get done. This shift in perspective gives them a new yardstick for measuring their own contribution and their success – shifting from their contribution and value as being an expert manager to an enabler invested in the success of others. The new mindset opens up many new opportunities to grow and to add value as a member of an enterprise leadership team. Value comes to be defined through connection with others and impact on the business as a whole.

And when the mindset shifts to enterprise thinking, this interconnectedness becomes more second nature. Leaders start to develop stronger bonds with each other. They learn to count on each other and to give support more often, instead of focusing solely on their own function and responsibilities. One of the participants we worked with also highlighted the empathy she developed through working on this project – she got a glimpse

into the kinds of challenges the executive team tackles and how difficult the decisions are with which they must grapple, something that she might not have otherwise appreciated.

Ultimately, enterprise mindset translates into significant benefits for the entire organization. It is the natural next step in the development of upcoming leaders and enables them to work together as a collective in ways that are more effective and impactful. And when leaders are able to approach their work from an enterprise mindset, the organization gains an invaluable resource to tackle and manage the complex challenges that are waiting around the corner.

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Are you looking for ways to develop an enterprise mindset in your organization? We can support you with a structured program that accelerates this change. [Contact us](#) to talk about how we can help.

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