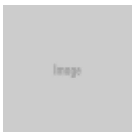
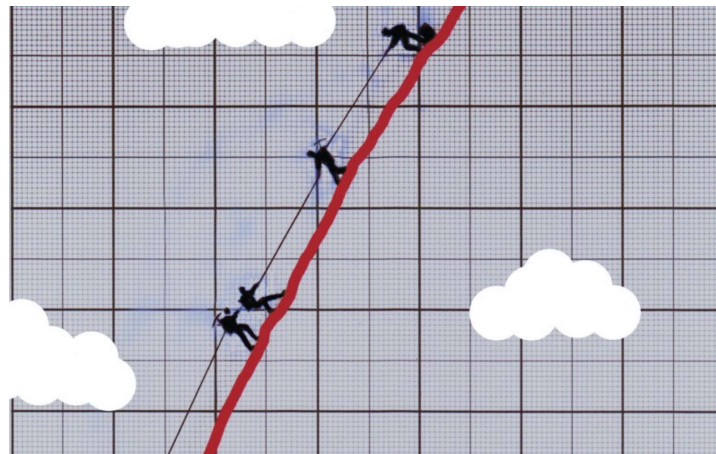




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Develop Real-Time Leadership During Crises

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Challenging times are prime opportunities to use current experiences to grow leadership qualities in emerging leaders.

Time is scarce, and focus is difficult. Crisis conditions demand new approaches to leadership development. Leaders must accelerate and incorporate into disrupted work routines opportunities to build new capabilities.



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We call that *real-time leadership development*. By seizing this opportunity for real-time leadership development, you can enhance decision making, build trust, and accelerate adoption of new behaviors and ways of thinking.

Development defined

Real-time leadership development consists of quick, powerful experiences that you create by accelerating learning and performance during crises. The goals remain the same as traditional leadership development: Build new behaviors, develop a deeper understanding of the business, and enhance strategic execution capabilities.

Although the learning processes—growth need, action, feedback, and reflection—in real-time leadership are fundamentally the same whether or not a crisis is happening, in crisis conditions the process is more dynamic, situationally focused, and leverages an individual's learning capability to capitalize on inherent developmental opportunities.

To transition from traditional to real-time leadership development, focus on three objectives:

- Acquire core competencies and behaviors through available experiences.
- Ensure attitudes and perspectives are aligned with business culture, immediate needs, and strategic intentions.
- Maximize opportunities for immediate feedback, self-reflection, and learning support.

Then use these five steps to establish real-time leadership development.

Shift from leadership to learnership

The best leaders have a growth mindset, and they are excellent learners. They are confident and willing to undertake new learning opportunities, are able to maximize resources to



Those capacities are especially important during crisis conditions—the best leaders will use their learning savvy and confidence to execute under pressure and learn as they go. Real-time leadership helps emerging leaders develop.

Instead of traditional leadership programs, think experiences. Combine the power of everyday experiences and real-time learning tools to help emerging leaders gain new capabilities, capture fresh insights about themselves, solve business challenges, and quickly determine the viability of their decisions.

During a crisis, countless experiences can provide rich learning opportunities, such as prioritization activities, novel problem solving, urgent decision making, daily communication, and trust building, to name a few.

Additionally, to reinforce learning from experiences while focusing on the crisis at hand, real-time leadership relies on the supervisor's strong involvement and a learning coach's expertise. Although it is possible for the supervisor to also be the learning coach, we recommend a separate learning coach to ensure essential focus on both the crisis and associated learning. Together, they provide support, expertise, and focus so the learning opportunity is not lost on the intensity of the crisis.

You can maximize the outcomes of these crisis-related learning experiences in four steps. First, have the emerging leader conduct a brief self-assessment to define their growth and interest areas.

The assessment should include questions such as: What are my strengths? Where do I need support? What does the situation require? What can I leverage from my background and experience to quickly address immediate business needs?

The answers then become the learning plan. Because time is critical, a verbal agreement on the plan between the emerging leader and supervisor is sufficient.

However, they should document the agreement to ensure discipline and accountability. A learning coach is invaluable to the emerging leader and supervisor in identifying critical



Second, incorporate time for the emerging leader to process the experiences regularly. Best done daily, that time will capture new learning and avoid the individual simply moving on to the next crisis activity.

The best learning opportunities include activities that entail both self-reflection and engaging with others. Experiences that foster new ways of thinking and stretch participants' creativity are crucial, as are opportunities to define problems using rapid-cycle tests of concept to determine ideal solutions and make real-time modifications.

Third, ongoing interaction with others is essential for maximum learning. The learning coach enhances interactions by helping supervisors develop learning facilitation capability, reviewing developmental outcomes, and providing coaching to both the supervisor and emerging leader.

The coach should also bring supervisors together for brief virtual sessions to share lessons learned and provide support. This establishes a crisis response sounding board that supports exponentially more learning opportunities.

Finally, because the stakes are high, crises are not times to focus on an individual's weaknesses. Rather, it is important that they receive guidance to leverage their peers' knowledge and experience at every opportunity. During crises, almost every interaction can be an opportunity for emerging leaders to develop new knowledge, understanding, and insights. Regular peer group dialogues to solve business challenges are invaluable.

The dialogues may occur naturally during crisis response updates and post-crisis response debriefs, but it's important that emerging leaders experience firsthand and understand the rationale for decisions. So long as group conversations happen—even quickly and in the moment—real-time learning will occur.

Identify and document business and learning outcomes

Assessing the impact of learning is especially important in real-time leadership. Participants should meet with their supervisors regularly to learn about corporate challenges that may



The learning coach is a vital resource in this process and should engage with emerging leaders regularly—ideally weekly, even if for just a few minutes. These questions enhance mindfulness and build capabilities by providing immediate feedback, reflection, and insights:

- What challenges did you encounter?
- What worked, and what did not?
- What did you learn?
- What can we do differently for better results?

It is also important that you obtain feedback regarding the effectiveness of the experiences. Focus on how participants describe their growth and lessons learned as well as note emerging topics and areas of opportunity.

The feedback creates the base for upcoming experiences. It also helps C-suite executives understand in real time how leaders are experiencing the crisis.

Additionally, regularly assess whether the experiences are benefiting the company. Ask questions such as:

- Regarding the crisis issue at hand, are we making the appropriate progress?
- From a leadership development perspective, is learning taking place? (Note: If an individual is operating in a high-action and low-feedback or low-reflection environment, effective learning likely will not take place.)
- Is the learning relevant and value-added? Both the supervisor and emerging leader should answer this question.
- Is the learning aligned with the company's goals for future success? What evidence demonstrates that this is occurring?



Unless managed well, leadership development during a crisis will focus only on immediate challenges and reinforce reactive behavior that limits learning and growth. To sustain leaders into the future, real-time leadership requires a strategic perspective.

Leadership development must consider the company's culture and agreed-upon essential leadership skills. To ensure individuals are future-focused and learning from the immediate crisis, take time to affirm emerging leaders' key competencies and desired characteristics.

And to ensure emerging leaders look beyond their own departments, cross-functional engagement is important for both systemic business solutions and leadership development. Time with executives—such as one-on-one meetings, small-group meetings, or even opportunities to attend and participate in executive team meetings—may help new leaders prioritize issues, solve problems, make decisions, reinforce company culture, and develop their systems thinking.

Those opportunities will help them learn, develop, and contribute. They are ideal situations to reinforce business goals and reaffirm the emerging leaders' contributions and value to the organization, which are important motivators during tough times.

Other real-time experiences include cross-departmental assignments, departmental committees, and high-impact assignments. Yet, rather than simply doing, it's important to ensure learning is occurring.

Providing coaching and support to executives as they set expectations, define roles, and mentor emerging leaders increases value to each individual and the company overall. It also ensures the mentoring doesn't get lost in the intensity of the crisis.

Ask questions to seek clarity and increase learning

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Knowing how to create conditions that build engagement and stimulate learning is essential for leaders but often defaults to directive

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identify novel solutions and empower team members to act. It is a fine balance between inquiry and courage of decision making, which requires practice and critical thinking.

Clarity of language and intent during a crisis is a necessity. In real-time leadership, challenge

learners to consider how their actions and language could affect outcomes, especially during stressful times. For example, their simple passing question may unintentionally drive people in a direction that takes up valuable time and resources with no clear outcome.

Emerging leaders should use relevant questions as a learning tool. Distinguish between inquiry—where questions are posed using a neutral position—and advocacy, where dialogue exposes an opinion or assumption.

When using inquiry and advocacy, emerging leaders should understand the intention of the exchange and monitor their behaviors to achieve the best outcomes. In short: Leverage experience and curiosity for hypothesis, but avoid uninformed biases.

Learning to define a problem begins with critical questions and requires breadth of perspective. Leaders must step away from the intensity of the moment and use critical thinking to surface unfounded conclusions that can be counterproductive during a crisis.

They should consider how their beliefs and assumptions may influence their assessment of the situation, asking questions such as:

- What have we faced similar to this in the past?
- What is different in this situation?
- How do past experiences inform our options and possible actions?
- How will our decisions contribute to achieving organizational goals?



building decision capability in others.

With real-time leadership development, learners build trust and key leadership skills in their teams by assessing factors such as stakeholder involvement and buy-in; negotiations and influence; communication; and decision urgency, importance, and quality.

Leverage the power of community

Building community is vital in real-time leadership development. The best learning communities provide a safe space to work through tough decisions. They remind leaders they are not alone, and they provide a space of relief from the constant pressure of leading and supporting others.

Communities stimulate thinking and acting differently. Members must be able to give and receive feedback, and it is essential that emerging leaders refine those skills.

To encourage them to take advantage of all that a community offers, pair each participant with a thought partner colleague and encourage regular interaction. That can vary throughout the crisis and be as simple as a reminder to check in with a certain colleague on a topic where they may have a strength or insight or to send a quick message soliciting input. That opens the opportunity for the emerging leader to try new ideas and discuss challenges.

Short (15–25 minutes) weekly or biweekly virtual community sessions that the learning coach coordinates and develops in partnership with the supervisors are effective. Focusing on a specific challenge or important topic provides a way for community members to learn from each other and sustain community support.

Launching your real-time leadership development

Competent and confident leaders are more essential than ever. Offering opportunities to develop leaders during high-stress times requires creating experiences that align leaders' learning needs with the compelling requirements of sustaining a business under incredible



The benefits of taking a real-time approach to leadership development are profound. It ensures every engaged leader learns. It also enables organizations to respond most effectively to a crisis by doing so quickly while benefiting from the unique learning opportunities presented.

Real-time leadership development strengthens a culture of learning and performance, builds strategic capacity, reinforces a growth mindset, and prepares leaders for the future. Ultimately, it helps achieve better results for both short-term crisis response and long-term, sustainable personal and organizational growth.

Read more from [CTDO magazine](#): Essential talent development content for C-suite leaders.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon J. Confessore

Sharon Confessore, PhD, is an experienced talent development professional known for inspiring others to leverage learning, change management, and leadership development strategies to achieve results, especially during organizational transformations.

Confessore has served in executive positions in two national healthcare organizations. As chief learning officer, she implemented a corporate-wide learning organization and established policies and practices to maximize return on investment. She also created real-time leadership experiences at all levels of the organization and led multiple change interventions.

Confessore is an associate at C-Suite 3, a professional services firm that partners with healthcare systems to achieve best results, where she focuses on leadership development and resilience. She is a frequent speaker, coach, and consultant, focusing on people-focused solutions that create value, maximize investment, and build sustainable benefit for individuals and their organizations.

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Timothy J. Tobin is a learning and leadership development professional with over 25 years of experience. He is committed to helping people and organizations achieve their greatest potential. Throughout his career, he has been directly responsible for the development of thousands of leaders from C-level to first time leaders across multiple industries. He is the author of *Your Leadership Story: Use Your Story to Energize, Inspire, and Motivate* (Berrett Koehler).

Tim is Vice President, Franchisee Onboarding and Learning, at Choice Hotels International. Previously, he was vice president for global learning and leadership development at Marriott International. Tim has also held senior learning and leadership development roles in multiple professional services organizations both as a consultant and internally as a department head. He has stood up and elevated multiple corporate universities.

Tim has led outstanding teams throughout his career. Programs developed under his leadership have won multiple awards including Chief Learning Officer awards for Global Leadership Development and Innovative Learning, Bersin & Associates awards for Leadership Development Strategy Excellence, Enabling High Impact Learning, Learning and Talent Initiative Excellence, and Operational Excellence, and the Helios HR Apollo award for outstanding employee development programs. In 2017, Tim was recognized for Outstanding Services to the Learning Industry by the Global Council on Corporate Universities.

Tim received an Ed.D. in Human Resources Development from George Washington University, an M.A. in Organizational Management from University of Phoenix, and a B.A. in Psychology from University of Delaware. He also maintains both a SHRM-SCP and SPHR certifications. He has been an adjunct professor spanning over 20 years at several universities including University of Maryland, Catholic University, Trinity University and George Washington University. He has also been a member of several academic and professional advisory boards.

Tim is a frequent invited speaker and panelist and has presented his work at numerous regional, national and international conferences. His writing has been published in diverse outlets such as Harvard Business Review Blog, The International Journal of Strategic Business Alliances, Drucker Forum, SmartCEO Magazine, Leadership Excellence, Organization Management Journal, and Social Psychology and Education, among other academic and popular press outlets.

On a personal note, Tim has completed numerous endurance athletic events including a 4.4-mile open water swim, multiple century bike rides, over a dozen marathons, and more than five ironman triathlons.

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