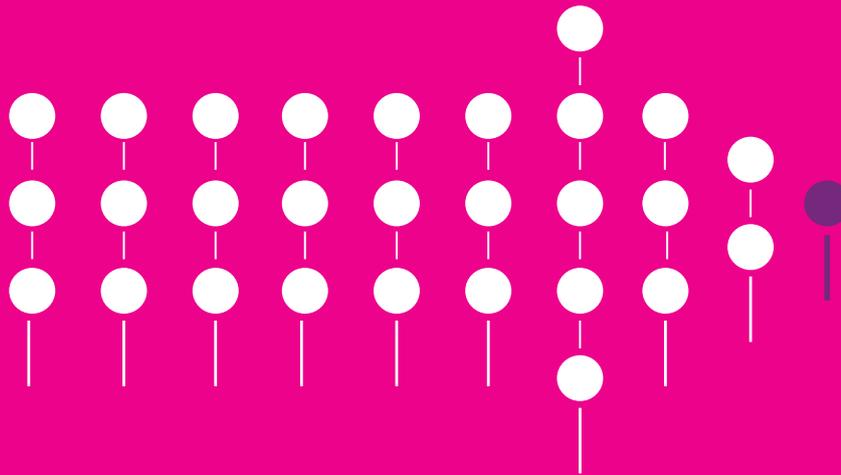


Leadership Development challenges; The latest insight



One year on from the launch of its leadership development thought leadership series, Buzzacott's HR Consultancy has been revisiting the challenges you told it you were facing to see how things have changed or remained the same.

The 2017 follow up survey, sent to HR Directors across the UK, aimed to reveal the rapidity of changes and developments in the leadership space.

In the last annual report (2016), just over 50% of respondents reported that their greatest current leadership challenge was ensuring that their teams have the appropriate skills to do their job well and anticipated that in the next 5-10 years the leadership challenge would revolve around the skills and experience of current/future leaders. One year on from the first survey and it would appear that some of the ground has shifted. 33% cited managing team performance as constituting their greatest challenge, with only 25% referring to ensuring the appropriate skills of the team and a further 25% mentioning building corporate performance.

When looking ahead to the challenges of the next 5-10 years, respondents have not just affirmed their 2016 belief that it lies in the development of the skills and experience of current/future leaders but have actively reinforced this perspective. 50% of them endorsed this factor, an increase of just over 8% from the 41.98% of respondents who voted for this the previous year. It is not immediately apparent why there has been a significant shift in the demands of present leadership from team skills to team performance and whether, for instance, organisations believe that they have made sufficient inroads into skills training that they now need to focus on performance, or if the figures represent something less tangible. However, the statistics make for interesting reading.

The high percentage of answers to the question on developing skills and experience were significantly ahead of any of their alternatives in both surveys. In 2016 the closest answer (having a competitive edge to attract talent) scored 29.01% and in 2017 (building corporate performance) scored 25%. Further, in both surveys organisations preferred method of assessing the skills

certainly of future leaders was to review the business objectives and use that benchmark to identify the skills and experience required accordingly (72% in 2016 and 75% in 2017).

A resounding 66.67% of respondents identified having difficult conversations as representing the single biggest issue that leaders struggle with when it comes to managing their people.

Interestingly, the 2016 survey identified the two most important developmental areas for future leaders as being the development of a leadership style that supports overarching business strategy and communication (both ranked at 50%). While one might expect the former to score significantly, given the need for flexibility at the very least to match the leader with the current needs of the organisation and current economic times, it is, arguably, more surprising to learn of the prominence of the latter.

With many millennials on the brink stepping up to the leadership plate, communication will continue to be a critical skill that leaders must continue to develop, according to the individual comments contained in feedback received from the 2016 survey participants.

We anticipate that the need for leaders to improve communication will remain a timeless and constant factor within organisations

That so many respondents felt future leaders need to address their communication skills may very well be connected to how the relationship between current leaders and people management is viewed.

Managing performance and motivating their teams came in as poor runners up with 33.33% and 25% of the survey respectfully. Leaders of all generations are probably more comfortable recognising and handling performance and the need to motivate their teams; after all they represent the 'spinning plates' that leaders have constantly to watch and adjust if they are to succeed in their respective roles. When it comes to people management, the idea of investing in skills to be better able

to manage difficult conversations is gaining traction and slowly catching up.

To ensure future leaders are equipped with the skills they need to meet the future needs of the business, half of the 2017 respondents reported that they encouraged individual responsibility and ownership of development. This was followed by succession planning and integrating leadership development into business strategy (both scoring 41.67%).

While it is beyond the scope of the survey to have analysed this further, a study into the effectiveness of both approaches would make for interesting reading. Given the overwhelming demands and constraints of time already placed on leaders, it raises the immediate question as to whether leaders can truly be left to their own devices to take individual responsibility or if the more integrated approach would force them to make time for what is important personal development?

Our previous research findings can be found here:

Leadership Development Challenges

- Part 1. An overview of the past, present and the myths
- Part 2. Leadership: What it means for the people and organisation
- Part 3. The talent challenge: Attracting, retaining, progressing and perfecting.



How we can help

Buzzacott's HR Consultancy are focussed on working with the sector to draw insight about the everyday challenges it faces in order to share insight, best practice and support. Its leadership development thought leadership series sheds light on the common and unusual hurdles that the sector is facing providing peer-to-peer insight and best practice on how to tackle them. If you would like to hear about opportunities to be involved in our research or would like further guidance and advice tailored to your situation, please get in touch.

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