



NEW SKILLS FOR THE NEW WORKPLACE

Meeting Increased Job Demands While
Managing Change and Other Stressors

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American Management Association

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Introduction

Since March 2020, so much has changed in the workplace and the world at large. Many companies that never even considered “work from home” options had to quickly come up with and execute remote work plans for their entire staff. Masking up became second nature for many on-site workers in industries far beyond healthcare. And, with potential new coronavirus variants on the horizon and ongoing debates over health protocols, so much continues to change—often on a dime.

Despite all the changes, challenges, and uncertainties, business is slowly regaining a sense of normalcy. While focusing on moving forward, managers at all levels across industries face an immediate, critical priority: understanding how the workplace is different, now and for the foreseeable future, and determining what their people need to get back on track, deliver results, stay motivated, and thrive—on the job and beyond.

A globally recognized leader in professional development, American Management Association (AMA) recognizes how navigating the latest “new normal” for business is a work in progress and, as part of its mission, aims to provide timely insights and practical guidance to help managers and their teams. In July of 2021, AMA conducted a nationwide survey on the topic of *New Skills for the New Workplace*. Based on the responses of more than 500 AMA members and seminar participants, many workers in the post-pandemic workplace are expected to do more—and are struggling to keep up and continue to excel.



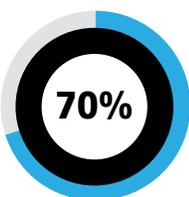
Increased Demands, New Responsibilities

While constant change is a widely acknowledged workplace reality, the health crisis and related havoc added to the pressure of staying agile and on top of rapidly advancing technology. The survey's results shed light on the increased demands and pressures being placed on employees. Along with calling attention to the urgent need to close skill gaps, the results also emphasize a priority for business leaders and managers: investing in their people's well-being.

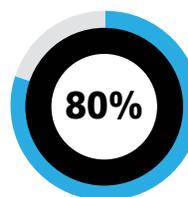
- **Nearly 70% of survey participants reported an increase in job responsibilities since the beginning of 2020. What's even more compelling, an overwhelming majority—nearly 80% of respondents—have found that the skills required to do their job effectively have changed in the past 2 years.**

Along with an increase in job responsibilities, 74% of respondents reported an increase in their workload compared to pre-Covid. Correspondingly, more than 50% of participants stated that their number of daily work hours has increased from their typical pre-Covid workday. A nine-hour workday is now standard for just over one-third of respondents, while another third routinely work ten hours or more per workday. These findings refute the common notion that remote workers, in addition to gaining back the time normally spent commuting, work fewer hours than in-office workers.

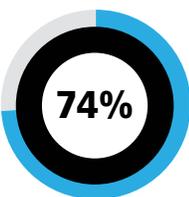
To provide further insight into specific skill gaps related to increased job responsibilities, participants were asked to rate the level of change in skill requirement—less, same, or more—that they have recently experienced across ten areas, ranging from analytical capabilities to innovative thinking, and from productivity to embracing and supporting diversity. Significantly, participants rated all ten areas as demanding more skills in today's workplace than ever before. **Two areas, each flagged by more than 70% of respondents as recently requiring more skills, emerged as in critical need of attention: *technology skills for working virtually* and *communicating across the organization*.**



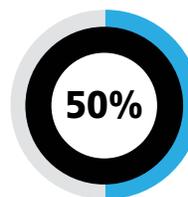
70% reported an increase in job responsibilities since the beginning of 2020.



80% have found that the skills required to do their job effectively have changed in the past two years.



74% reported an increase in their workload compared to before the pandemic.



50% stated that their daily work hours have increased from their typical pre-Covid workday.

Skills gaps related to technology and aggravated by the pandemic were also evident in the results, when participants were asked to rank the top three areas in which they most need to develop or improve. Here are four key findings to consider:

KEY FINDING 1:

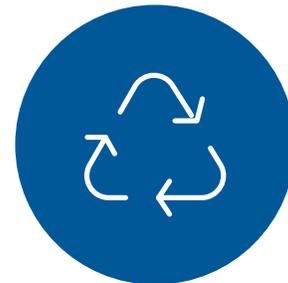
Strategizing for a hybrid workplace (development priority #1) is essential to maintaining effective teamwork and delivering results.



As significant numbers of workers will continue working remotely long-term, the hybrid workplace is the new normal. With hybrid teams, clear communication is critical but often challenging. For starters, members might be working from different time zones and on different schedules. To aggravate matters, Wi-Fi service and platform functions aren't always reliable, and even when they work flawlessly, many people find it difficult to concentrate and genuinely connect with colleagues and collaborators during virtual meetings.

KEY FINDING 2:

Change management (development priority #2) needs to be an ongoing, organization-wide priority for professional development.



Change, while inevitable and, in most cases, ultimately beneficial, is a significant stressor in and of itself. And the pandemic spurred sweeping change at a dizzying rate. According to a recent survey on the return to work conducted by The Conference Board, stress/burnout is the top well-being concern among workers today, particularly among women (who often juggle working from home with caring for children), individual contributors, and millennials. Increased job responsibilities and frustration resulting from lacking the skills to perform them only add to the prevalence of employee stress and the likelihood of burnout.

KEY FINDING 3:

Adaptability (development priority #3) is vital to success in the new workplace and our uncertain world.

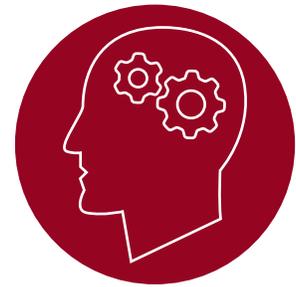


As automation, digitization, and globalization continue to evolve and disrupt work as usual—and as emerging variants of the coronavirus threaten to spread upheaval and anxiety—leaders, managers, and team members must quickly adapt to shifting priorities, demands, and pressures. To maintain the focus, productivity, and workflow fundamental to meeting goals and keeping a business running, adaptability is a required capability for every employee.

KEY FINDING 4:

Emotional intelligence (EI) (development priority #4) is more important than ever with a diverse and hybrid or remote workforce.

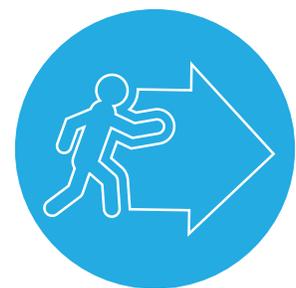
Today's workforce is not only increasingly remote but also more diverse—in terms of culture, ethnicity, race, age, and gender—than ever before. To get all kinds of people to work well together, despite sometimes extreme differences in perspectives and approaches, managers must develop keen social awareness and practice empathy. At the same time, managers need to be adept at managing their own emotions and recognizing their ingrained biases.



KEY FINDING 5:

Motivation (development priority #5) is essential in today's new work environment.

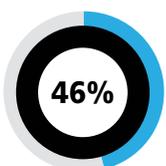
Managers must find a way to keep today's workforce motivated—whether through financial incentives or internal motivators, like recognition. In addition, self-motivation, the inner drive to keep pushing and striving to achieve goals, is an imperative skill for everyone, especially as more people work from home and alone, physically separated from co-workers.



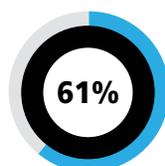
Implications of Findings

As the survey's results strongly indicate, developing new skills for the new workplace isn't simply optional for dedicated managers and driven individuals. It is a core requirement for ongoing professional success and personal well-being—as well as fundamental to the whole company's ability to stay productive and competitive moving ahead. According to "The Future of Jobs Report 2020" from the World Economic Forum, skill gaps will persist and remain high as in-demand skills across jobs change in the next five years. Senior executives, managers, and professionals need to prepare now to stay on top of developing the skills they'll need to keep their businesses thriving and careers advancing.

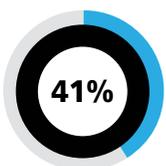
Yet, given the many areas where professionals and managers feel the pressing need to improve their skills, on what immediate concern should organizations focus? When asked to apply that question to their own company, **nearly 46% of respondents identified investing in employee development as the top priority** and **nearly 41% placed an emphasis on better communication to employees**. In a related question, **61% of respondents affirmed the need for new skills to improve collaboration among remote and on-site team members in their organization**. However, only 43%



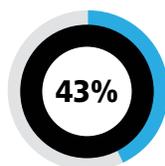
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Conclusion

The notion of “normal” business practices is continually in flux, due to the disruptive forces of technology, globalization, and the coronavirus. In touch with the fast-changing workplace and responsive to the needs of today’s professionals, AMA offers resources and tools to help individuals develop the skills crucial to doing their job. Whether they’re part of a traditional in-office, fully remote, or hybrid workforce, and regardless of their positional power, nearly everyone could benefit from strengthening their ability to communicate up, down, and across an organization. Learning how to become a better listener is also indispensable to effective communication, whether face-to-face or virtual. With greater workforce diversity, management and teamwork could only benefit from an emphasis on EI. And as more and more people have to get used to working alone from home or anywhere, developing strategies to keep yourself motivated is vital to personal well-being as well as career success. To reduce the stress of increased job responsibilities and ease the adjustment to frequently shifting workplace realities, ongoing professional development is essential for leaders, managers, and valuable contributors in all industries and at all levels.

Prepared by Mysia Haight