



Now. Bridge. Reboot. Thought Paper Series

Leading through the chasm and into the future economy

Bold leadership: Leading your organization in an increasingly digital world



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The world has changed — your world has changed — and the impact has been huge, especially for people in leadership roles. The biggest challenge is that there has never been a similar event during our lifetime — no leading practices, no rule book to follow — and everything is new and shifts from day to day.

The first wave was one of shock and learning and adjusting. And as a leader, you needed to do:

- Ensure your people were protected;
- Evaluate and drive adoption of new ways of working; and
- Communicate consistently, confidently, and reliably.

The next wave is about understanding the implications and impact and new plans for our organizations in the future.

As countries now work to continue to get the pandemic under control, and get global economies moving, we realize that almost every aspect of our lives has been impacted, from how we work and communicate, to consumer behavior and transactional processes, including supply chains. In this extraordinary new reality, the massive changes in behaviors and processes have put leaders in challenging positions. To move forward and navigate the waters ahead, leaders must focus on key priorities and actions that will enable them to execute multiple

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strategies and initiatives. They must lead with purpose and with a disciplined plan to move ahead — to take care of their people, their customers, and their communities. Leaders must take advantage of the new openness to improvisation, experimentation, and innovation. As we consider what the "next normal" might look like, it is not a time to stand still, but to learn how to adjust to a culture shift in thinking with flexibility, creativity, and speed.

About this paper

This paper is an outcome of the GFCC Now. Bridge. Reboot. conversation series (conversations.thegfcc.org), which featured business, research, policy and thought leaders from 30 countries in eight live dialogues on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis and the trends emerging for the future economy.

We invited the participants of this dialogues series to reflect on the challenges and issues associated with leadership during the current crisis and in the world that we are seeing emerge out of it.

Learn more about the GFCC Now. Bridge. Reboot. conversation series at conversations.thegfcc.org.

Watch the conversation

Lori Schmidt participated in the "Global innovation coalitions" conversation July 8. Watch the session on the [GFCC YouTube channel](#).

Digital transformation was at the top of the to-do list for many organizations and institutions before the pandemic. And now, we have seen statistics from around the globe indicating that organizations have digitally transformed more, for example, "three years of transformation in three months."¹ The crisis and disruption have made painfully visible systemic and organizational weaknesses. Entrenched systems that have supported our organizations for years no longer work. These flaws highlight the need to ensure that digital initiatives consider the complete range of dependencies and cross-functional mechanisms that integrate our systems, people, and processes across an organization or institution – or our nations.

What is key is to put digital strategy and planning around the factors of a suddenly, increasingly disruptive world – moving transformation to the forefront.

And the biggest component of all of this for leaders is a major culture shift in thinking, innovation, and creativity – which is a positive thing that this crisis has spurred on. How quickly we began to adapt to online tools, work-from-home processes, e-commerce, use of data analytics, and predictive modeling, etc. And how quickly consumers and practitioners adapted, too. The appetite for new approaches and ways of communicating and transacting is also rapidly increasing. Leaders are more eagerly embracing design thinking, which involves using systemic reasoning and intuition to address complex problems and explore ideal future states. Design thinking is important as it brings a design-centric approach and focuses first and foremost on end-users and end state. But it also helps make real-time sense of how suppliers, channel partners, and competitors are responding

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to the crisis, and how the ecosystem that includes them is evolving for the next normal.

A definition from *The Agile Elephant* emphasizes all the ways businesses and institutions may need to adjust their existing practices: it reads, "Digital transformation involves a change in leadership, different thinking, the encouragement of innovation and new business models, incorporating digitization of assets and an increased use of technology to improve the experience of your organization's employees, customers, suppliers, partners, and stakeholders."²

For many, the toughest leadership test is now as we are asking ourselves, "How do we bring our organizations and our countries back to economic growth and resiliency, when there are still so many unknowns?" And with digital transformation, leaders may be struggling with the leap to big technologies and applications, including new platforms, new business/

1 Afshar, V. (2020). *Accenture, accelerated: Three years of transformation in three months*. N.p.: ZDNet. Retrieved from <https://www.zdnet.com/article/accelenture-we-are-seeing-three-years-of-digital-transformation-in-three-months/>.

2 Terrar, D. (n.d.). *What is Digital Transformation?* N.p.: Agile Elephant. Retrieved from <http://www.theagileelephant.com/what-is-digital-transformation/#:~:text=Here%20is%20our%20definition%3A,social%2C%20mobile%20and%20emerging%20technologies>.

The Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils

The GFCC is a global multi-stakeholder membership organization that has universities, corporations, government agencies and private sector industry organizations and councils as members. Combining its members and fellows, the GFCC has a footprint in more than 30 countries. Leaders and organizations in our network strive to advance innovation, productivity and prosperity in their nations, regions and cities.

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economic models and the ever-increasing concern around cybersecurity – but the key to all as we lead forward is to:

1. **Assess** the immediate challenges, understand where you are in your digital maturity, and develop a detailed relaunch map that considers baseline relaunch scenarios and alternative scenarios – with a rapid response plan.
2. **Rethink** your organization with a start-up mindset, including rethinking your operational models to accelerate the digital shift.
3. Over the past few months of disruption, there have been ample opportunities to consider **nontraditional collaborations** with partners throughout the ecosystem in which you operate.
4. And most importantly, consider the competencies required to lead digital transformation and **build the competencies** for yourself and your teams that will be needed to lead the effort and execute well.

As leaders, we will be remembered for how we managed ourselves and led others throughout this crisis. The questions for us are: How will we lead our teams, our organizations, and institutions, our society? How will we connect, persevere, and progress? How will we emerge from this experience collectively stronger? Suppose we focus on our restart – on resilience – and above all accentuate the positive, encourage optimism, and help everyone to begin to restore confidence. In that case, we will begin to realize a brand-new future.

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