



Developing Skills for the **MODERN WORKPLACE**

Why Employees Need Different Skills in a
Post-Pandemic Workforce



Overview

Nothing disrupted the world of work like the COVID-19 pandemic. During the height of the pandemic, managers had to figure out how to cope in their new (often fully remote) reality. Whether they possessed the proper skills for remote team management or not, adapting to a new virtual workplace wasn't a choice—it was an immediate need that for many, occurred without any training. The same can be said for their direct reports. As time passed, while many employees returned to the office full time, the reality is that a significant percentage still work remotely or in a hybrid setting, changing the workplace dynamic.

It begs the question: Does working in a hybrid environment increase the need for specific skills?

As a globally recognized leader in professional development, Canadian Management Centre (CMC) and AMA Global understands how developing new skills and improving on key existing ones can make a major difference in career advancement. As part of its mission, CMC and AMA Global equips individuals and organizations to adapt to changing realities and prosper in a complex and competitive world.

CMC and AMA Global wanted to know more about specific skills for remote workers, including managers, so we conducted a nationwide survey about how workplace skill needs changed after the pandemic. Responses from 380 AMA Members and seminar participants clearly show that employees do have different skill needs, and many are being managed differently based on their modern workplace environment.



How Has the Workplace Evolved?

Before the pandemic, only 8% of employees with remote-capable jobs worked from home exclusively. That number jumped to 70% by May 2020.¹ By 2022, most of these remote-capable employees were still working from home—at least part of the time.²

With the pandemic in the rearview mirror, major companies continue to call for the return of their employees to in-person work at least a few days per week.³ Moving to a hybrid schedule creates a different dynamic. Supporting employees with skill development during these changes can help them respond more positively and productively as they move forward. This is especially true for managers, who in an August 2022 study said they were “more miserable at work than their employees” because they’ve never been taught how to manage a much less attached worker.⁴

Manager or not, how might resilience, conflict resolution, collaboration, critical thinking, and other skills play a role in positive, modern workplace outcomes? We asked a nationwide audience about the skills they need to move forward successfully.

1. Ben Wigert, “The Future of Hybrid Work: 5 Key Questions Answered With Data,” *Gallup, Inc.*, March, 22, 2022, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/390632/future-hybrid-work-key-questions-answered-data.aspx>.

2. Wigert, “Future of Hybrid Work.”

3. “Here’s a list of major companies requiring employees to return to the office,” *Business Insider*, last modified April, 24, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/companies-making-workers-employees-return-to-office-rto-wfh-hybrid-2023-1#:~:text=Since%20COVID%2D19%20restrictions%20eased,to%20increase%20in%20person%20collaboration.>

4. Jim Clifton and Chad Holliday, “The Old Workplace Is Gone. What’s a Board to Do?” *Gallup, Inc.*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/395627/old-workplace-gone-board.aspx>.



23% of respondents work remotely full time
39% work a hybrid schedule



Key Findings

- ▶ **50%** say the skills required to be a successful manager/supervisor have changed since before the pandemic.
- ▶ **66%** of respondents say some skills are more critical for their remote employees than for those who are in the office.
- ▶ **Of the 62%** of respondents who manage/supervise direct reports, more than half say they need to manage them differently based on whether they are remote or in person.

These numbers indicate that managers and individual employees have not been effectively equipped to succeed in remote and/or hybrid environments. Without proper training, the risk of stress, burnout, and other issues can grow into real threats for the organization. If managers start leaving, is there a suitable pipeline from which to replace them? Prioritizing skill development is the best way to help the workforce deal with current challenges and anticipate future needs.

Given that successful onboarding processes have proven to increase retention and productivity,⁵ organizations should consider implementing a remote/hybrid “onboarding” that aims to accomplish the same goals for existing employees transitioning to a new workplace environment. This flexible work environment isn’t likely to go away. The sooner organizations understand the new skill needs and create a plan to address them, the better it will be for both business and employees.

5. “11 Tips to Effectively Manage Remote Employees,” Indeed, https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/11-tips-to-effectively-manage-remote-employees?gclid=CjwKCAjwge2iBhBBEiw.AfXDBR4KXdb0Fe6JyFnIY1lhSzh0oaAX9EFTdR2g0XXKg3Y9LXLkjs92uXR0cF1kQAvD_BwE&aceid=&gclidsrc=aw.ds.



SKILLS FOR YOURSELF

Participants rated the importance of developing 17 skills and capabilities for themselves—need more, need the same, or need less—since before the pandemic.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE	RESPONDENTS
SKILLS IN HIGH DEMAND:	
Communication	67%
Virtual Presentation	66%
Adaptability and Resilience	65%
Technology	65%
Motivation	52%
Emotional Intelligence	51%
ESSENTIAL SKILLS:	
Participants rated the need for these skills as remaining the same.	
Performance Management	75%
Analytical Expertise	68%
Project Management	66%
Conflict Resolution	62%
Critical Thinking and Decision Making	61%
Strategic Planning	57%
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging	56%
Networking	53%



The rise of remote work following the pandemic—and the need to manage remote employees—is clearly evident with the response for skills that have risen in popularity. With virtual collaboration and online meetings being an integral part of our days, the need for communication, virtual presentation, and technology skills is more critical than ever. Adaptability and resilience are also in high demand.

- **Communication** can be more difficult virtually because you can't see the non-verbal elements and adjust as needed. New communication skills will teach employees how to build connections that foster trust and rapport and better engage with audiences in person and across any digital divide.
- **Virtual presentations** can elicit jarring challenges, even for the most seasoned speakers. New presentation skills can help employees take command with style and professionalism regardless of glitchy internet connections and delayed responses from muted participants.
- **Technology** is the gateway to a successful remote work experience, not to mention the fact that it's always evolving. The need for ongoing tech training makes perfect sense.
- **Adaptability and resilience** skills are invaluable in environments that are in a constant state of flux. These equip workers to modify their approaches to manage work effectively and better support their teams.

Respondents showed only a slight majority toward needing more skills in **motivation** and **emotional intelligence**. This could relate to the lack of visibility and access to leadership in hybrid settings. Remote work requires a different kind of focus with additional motivation that isn't present the same way it is when your desk is merely steps away from others.

Several skills stayed the same in terms of importance. Performance review, analytical capabilities, project management, conflict resolution, critical thinking and decision making, and other skills appear as important to maintain, but respondents say they don't need more of them to be a successful employee in the new environment (post-pandemic).



SKILLS FOR THE TEAM

We also asked individual respondents who manage others how skill development since the pandemic has changed for their team members.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE	RESPONDENTS
SKILLS IN HIGH DEMAND:	
Communication	70%
Adaptability and Resilience	68%
Technology	64%
Virtual Presentation	62%
Productivity/Time Management	61%
Motivation	61%
Collaboration	60%
Emotional Intelligence	53%
ESSENTIAL SKILLS:	Participants rated the need for these skills as remaining the same.
Performance Management	77%
Analytical Capabilities	65%
Conflict Resolution	64%
Strategic Planning	63%
Critical Thinking and Decision Making	62%
Project Management	61%
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging	60%
Networking	53%



61% of respondents say their team needs more motivation skills since the pandemic. This represents the largest increase from self to team, up by nearly 10 points.

Most of the skills in high demand for teams are the same as those that respondents identified for themselves. However, the need for **motivation skills** jumped 10 points higher for team members. Two other skills team members “need more of” that didn’t register as a majority for individual needs were **productivity/time management** at 61% and **collaboration** at 60%. The fact that respondents said team members need more of these particular skills could explain why they manage remote and in-person staff differently. They perceive a more flexible work environment as one that makes teams less productive and connected.

The irony is that 40% of workers said they’ve been more productive while working at home as opposed to working at the office.⁶ If managers want to improve the dynamic, they should consider team building and communication exercises to build trust, form stronger connections, and drive increased productivity.

On the other side of the coin, the need for more of these skills could be a balancing issue rather than an efficiency one. Perhaps respondents see their remote counterparts’ inability to disconnect as work and home spaces intertwine. The rise in demand for time management skills could represent the need for teams to be able to shut down at the end of the workday.

Adaptability and resilience skills rose slightly for team needs as well. These skills certainly apply to an evolving workplace as turnover, new clients, changing business priorities, learning new technology, and other adjustments become commonplace. A lack of resilience means one may not handle stress well, which could lead to harmful health consequences that impact life outside the office, too. Coping with stress in positive ways brings many health benefits in terms of longevity, lower depression, and greater job satisfaction.⁷

Another interesting takeaway from the team skills statistics is the increasing need for **collaboration skills** without the increasing need for **networking skills**. If one has the ability to network remotely, don’t they have the ability to collaborate? It seems these could go hand-in-hand, as similar hurdles exist for both skills in remote work environments. That said, if professionals are more satisfied in their remote/hybrid environments, they simply may not want to network.

6. Jack Flynn, “25 Trending Remote Work Statistics [2023]: Facts, Trends, and Projections,” Zippia, October 16, 2022, <https://www.zippia.com/advice/remote-work-statistics/#:~:text=26%25%20of%20U.S.%20employees%20work,U.S.%20companies%20are%20fully%20remote>.

7. “Ramp up your resilience!” Harvard Medical School, November 1, 2017, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/ramp-up-your-resiliency#:~:text=The%20benefits%20of%20resilience&text=It's%20associated%20with%20longevity%2C%20lower,stress%20well%20in%20difficult%20situations>.



Implications of Findings/Conclusions

While flexibility has increased, so has the need for specific skills to support the new ways of working. It's not enough to only provide mandatory compliance training and industry-specific skills. Managers and individual employees also need adaptable, technology-focused, resilience-building, and key people skills that help them succeed with new responsibilities in their changing work environments. For managers especially, they need skills to support their teams across all work environments.

Whether they work remotely or not, it's time to assess your employees' skill needs to ensure they have the tools and resources to perform their best. By prioritizing new skills, organizations can solidify their support for current employees and often improve retention. Employers can also use this effort to tangibly demonstrate a commitment to flexible work environments in their recruiting process. This collective skill-building initiative can pay off in the long run with an engaged, thriving workforce that remains committed to the organization and ultimately delivers on its goals.

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