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The Evolution of Leadership

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F. Frank Ghannadian, Ph.D.

Leadership styles have evolved over centuries, and numerous examples of leaders, both ancient and modern, are widely recognized. While human history has progressed, the central question remains whether the essence of leadership itself has fundamentally changed, or whether evolving circumstances have refined our leadership capabilities.

In the contemporary business world, notable figures such as Bill Gates of Microsoft, Jeff Bezos of Amazon, and Tim Cook of Apple are often admired for their leadership. In politics, we might consider monarchs, presidents, prime ministers, and other heads of state who effectively guide their nations or enterprises. Each person could compile a list of present-day leaders they admire for their leadership qualities.

Identifying prominent leaders from the past can sometimes seem more straightforward. Figures such as Julius Caesar of the Roman Empire, Alexander the Great of Greece, and, from American history, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and the Roosevelts have all left a clear and lasting mark. When we compare today's leaders with those of the past, we may ask: Are there timeless actions that define leadership? How would a leadership course today differ from one in ancient times?

Modern leaders navigate complex issues such as technology, the global economy, urbanization, and international relations—challenges vastly different from those faced by Caesar or Alexander. Yet, certain fundamental aspects of leadership may remain unchanged.

An illustrative example of ancient leadership is found in The Tale of Sinuhe; a story set some 3,000 to 4,000 years ago about an Egyptian physician to the Pharaoh. Sinuhe's narrative reveals universal human traits—fear, ambition, and a longing for home. He fled Egypt due to fear of violence and uncertainty yet sought recognition and a stable life near his homeland. His concerns about job security and his ambitions mirror those experienced today. This raises the question: if human nature has remained constant, has leadership truly changed?

Technological advancements have transformed society—from stone tablets to computers, from horse-drawn carriages to supersonic jets—but human dynamics endure. Academic sources suggest that modern leadership emphasizes collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, whereas ancient leadership often relied on hierarchical structures and autocratic decision-making. Modern leaders focus on empowering teams and fostering shared purpose, while ancient leaders typically exerted direct control and expected unquestioning obedience.

Comparing Julius Caesar and Bill Gates

1. Decision-Making

Ancient leaders often ruled with authority, making unilateral decisions when consensus was impractical. However, leaders who acted without regard for others risked overthrow or removal. In the modern era, while violence is largely absent from leadership transitions, persuasion, evidence and trust remain essential. Julius Caesar was

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decisive, strategic and an adept communicator. Similarly, Bill Gates pursued ambitious goals, pushing technological boundaries to achieve desired outcomes, albeit in a very different field.

2. Structure and Control

In ancient times, maintaining order and enforcing rules were paramount. Caesar, a charismatic and brilliant strategist, used structure to achieve his objectives. Gates likewise maintained a strong organizational vision but employed collaboration and innovation to reach his goals. So, while the style was different, the structure or control remained equally important.

3. Focus on People and Their Development

Ancient leaders often surrounded themselves with like-minded individuals and used charisma to inspire loyalty. Caesar was a good example of being a visionary reformer whose policies also aimed at improving the lives of ordinary Romans. Gates created a collaborative environment, enabling individuals to contribute meaningfully. In both eras, inspiring people to excel was a key leadership quality.

Modern Leadership Characteristics

• **Collaboration and Participation:** Today's leaders often employ formal mechanisms—boards, cabinets, or committees—to involve others in decision-making. Caesar used a similar, though less formal, approach when consulting his generals.

• **Adaptability:** Modern leaders embrace change and innovation, as Gates did in navigating shifting technological landscapes. Caesar likewise adapted strategies to varied terrains and situations in military campaigns.

• **Empowerment:** Modern leaders prioritize creating environments that value and develop individuals. Caesar, too, recognized contributions and praised his followers, fostering loyalty.

• **Emotional Intelligence:** Building relationships, understanding needs, and offering support are hallmarks of modern leadership. While ancient leaders may have relied more on intuition, the underlying interpersonal skills were present in both eras.

Feature	Ancient Leadership	Modern Leadership
Decision-Making	Top-down, autocratic	Collaborative, participatory
Authority	High, emphasized	Shared, empowering
Focus	Structure, control, hierarchy	Adaptability, empowerment, collaboration
Employee Development	Limited, focused on productivity	Significant, focused on growth and well-being
Communication	Directives, limited feedback	Open, transparent, two-way
Emotional Intelligence	Less emphasized	Highly valued

To summarize the key differences listed above, one can say it's just a style that has changed, but the essence of leadership is the same.

Conclusion

Leadership is defined by the impact one has on others rather than personal acclaim. Modern leaders face the same essential challenge as their ancient counterparts: balancing authority with empathy, making difficult decisions, and guiding their organizations toward shared goals. While the tools and environments have changed, the mission of inspiring and mobilizing people toward a common purpose remains constant.

Note: This article was edited using ChatGPT.

The Importance of Collaboration in Leadership and Life: A Conversation with Helen Wesley, President and Chief Executive Officer of Peoples Gas

By: Bella Galperin, Ph.D., Dana Professor of Management and Senior Associate Director of the TECO Energy Center for Leadership

Helen Wesley

On March 25, 2025, I had the pleasure to engage in a conversation with our keynote speaker for the TECO Energy Center for Leadership, Helen Wesley, the president and chief executive officer of Peoples Gas. Our conversation focused on the importance of collaboration in leadership and life.

Here is a summary of our scintillating conversation:

Bella Galperin: How do you personally define collaboration in a business or a leadership setting?

Helen Wesley: I wanted to begin by sharing why I chose to talk about collaboration in the first place. When we think about leadership, so many books and leader profiles tend to focus on the charismatic, rock star figure — the kind of leader who commands a room and appears to do it all on their own. But that's not the kind of leadership that has ever inspired me the most. I want to talk about the leaders I've always admired and wanted to work for. The ones who brought their teams into the problem-solving process, who truly valued diverse perspectives and who weren't afraid to take a little more time if it meant arriving at a better, more thoughtful outcome. To me, leading with a high priority on collaboration is what truly defines great leadership.

Bella Galperin: Can you please expand on how you define a leadership style that places a high priority on collaboration?

Helen Wesley:

I think collaborative leadership means truly prioritizing working with others — not just as a tactic, but as a core value. It involves giving people the space to explore ideas, make contributions and grow. It means making yourself and your business challenges more transparent so that others can bring their minds, experiences, and resources to the table. It's a form of partnership — one that encourages continuous learning and development, which in turn builds deeper commitment, loyalty and engagement. Importantly, collaboration doesn't mean everything must be decided by consensus, nor does it necessarily slow things down. It certainly isn't a sign of weakness or indecision. Rather, it's a strategic and inclusive approach to leadership that recognizes the power of shared insight and collective problem-solving.

Bella Galperin: Can you please expand on the importance of collaboration in the utility industry?

Helen Wesley: There is an importance of collaboration in large, regulated environments such as the utility industry. There are often high-stakes projects involving dozens of people working together to deliver a major outcome — often something that needs to be defended in front of regulators, customers and intervenors. In these situations, it's crucial to be able to see yourself and your business from the perspective of others. Collaboration across teams, and actively seeking feedback, helps reveal your blind spots, those areas where your thinking or approach may be weaker so you can strengthen your position and tell your story more effectively. Too often, business processes fail simply because teams don't collaborate; they stay siloed, focused only on their own piece of the puzzle. But when people come together, share insights and look at the bigger picture, they can create solutions that are stronger, more resilient and ultimately benefit the entire organization.

Bella Galperin, Ph.D.

One of the unique aspects of working in a regulated utility is that we are generally not in competition with one another. For the most part, each utility has its own defined service territory, to prevent overbuilding systems and ensure clear accountability for service delivery. Because we're usually not in competition, we have the rare opportunity to share problems, solutions and innovations openly. This spirit of collaboration allows us to collectively improve outcomes for customers across the board. It's especially evident during emergency response situations, when utility crews travel thousands of miles to support one another in restoring service after major storms or disasters. That willingness to step in and help, regardless of company or region, is one of the most rewarding and inspiring parts of the work we do.

Bella Galperin: I certainly see the importance of collaboration. How about situations when collaboration is not the best approach?

Helen Wesley: Of course, there are times when collaboration must be more focused or limited. In situations where speed is critical, such as responding quickly to a pipeline incident, it may be necessary to narrow involvement to only those with the essential skill sets needed for rapid decision-making and action. Similarly, in highly competitive or confidential scenarios, the risk of sensitive

The Importance of Collaboration in Leadership and Life

information leaking can be too high to open up the process broadly. In these cases, a more contained, agile approach is appropriate. But even then, the principles of collaboration — respect for others' expertise, open communication among key players, and shared accountability still apply. It's about knowing when to broaden the circle and when to strategically narrow it.

Despite these situations, let's take a moment to consider what might happen when we don't collaborate in the energy industry. The consequences could be significant. We may face brownouts, a temporary reduction in voltage in an electrical power supply system causing appliances to operate inefficiently and potentially fail, and reliability issues because systems aren't coordinated or optimized. We may end up with overbuilt generation and distribution infrastructure, spending far more than necessary, while failing to maximize what already exists. Some regions could have an excess of energy, while others may struggle to meet basic demand, leading to inefficiency across the grid. Emissions could remain higher than they need to be because opportunities to share clean resources go untapped. Without collaboration, even the culture of mutual aid could begin to erode, as organizations become more self-protective and less willing to help one another. And on top of that, regulators could be faced with fragmented, inconsistent approaches, which may cause them to become fatigued and rush decisions. The cost of isolation could be high, not just in dollars, but in missed opportunities, strained relationships, and unrealized progress. Thankfully, most of these situations don't happen because of the way the utility industry is structured, to enable and promote collaboration.

Bella Galperin: Moving on to the topic of leadership and collaboration. I heard that you once noted that as a leader, collaboration requires patience, shared goals and a win-win mindset and belief in the value of different thoughts and opinions. Can you please elaborate?

Helen Wesley: Yes, I believe all of that is true. I'd also add that effective collaboration also requires confidence to make yourself vulnerable to inquiry. You have to be willing to open up your thinking, your plans, and even your uncertainties to others, because the benefits of doing so are immense. I remember a specific moment that brought this home for me: it was 6 a.m. on the morning Hurricane Milton was set to hit. It was the second major storm in just a few weeks, and this one felt especially daunting. We were looking at the likelihood of widespread outages not just across our service territory, but also in the communities where many of our employees and leaders lived. We were preparing to help others while potentially being compromised ourselves.

I had been working with my team for days on our storm preparations, but that morning, I decided to do one final check to make sure we hadn't missed anything. I called two trusted leaders: one responsible for a group of utilities north of us, and the other with deep experience overseeing gas and electric operations in California. I asked them both to test drive our plan and share any insights or lessons from their own experiences. Within minutes, I had responses. One came from a woman who was on her 13th day of being on the road, visiting field crews who had been restoring power for weeks.

Each of them offered valuable perspectives, and while I took away specific ideas, what I gained most was the reassurance that we had done everything we possibly could to prepare. That gave me peace of mind—and it also modeled something important for my team. They saw that I was willing to be vulnerable, to ask for help and to put the right outcome for everyone above any need to appear like I had all the answers. That, to me, is the heart of collaborative leadership.

Bella Galperin: What does it take for a leader to practice collaborate leadership?

Helen Wesley: Like any leadership style, collaborative leadership takes years to cultivate,

practice and refine. I feel very strongly that it's a technical skill — just like any other — that requires intention and discipline to master. Winning through collaboration means being willing to lead from wherever you're needed: the front of the room, the side of the room, the back of the room or even from outside it entirely. It means sometimes being seemingly invisible and taking genuine joy in seeing others get credit for outcomes you quietly helped engineer. It means being patient — both in pursuing the outcomes you care about and in listening deeply to diverse perspectives, not just to check a box, but to truly understand. It requires curiosity and a willingness to question your own thinking. Many of these traits only come with time, success, and growing confidence. I know that I wasn't always this way. Even ten years ago, I wouldn't have led like this. But over time, I've learned that the most enduring results come from shared effort, not solo performance.

More importantly, though, we have to ask: what kind of culture are you operating in, and what does that culture truly value? If results are applauded without any regard for how they were achieved. If there's no concern for the damage done along the way, that's probably not a place where a collaborative leader will thrive. If talent development isn't a priority, or if mistakes are met with punishment rather than seen as opportunities to learn, collaboration will quickly give way to fear, silos, and self-preservation. For collaborative leadership to take root and succeed, the surrounding culture must support it. That means fostering a true learning culture that values growth, curiosity, resilience and shared success. Without that foundation, even the most committed collaborative leaders will struggle to gain traction.

Bella Galperin: How can a leader develop a more collaborative leadership style?

Helen Wesley: To lead collaboratively in a meaningful way, you have to start with clear structure and intention. First, define shared goals and ensure there is transparency around everyone's role in achieving them. People need to understand not just what the objective is, but how their contributions fit into the bigger picture. Mapping out the process is a critical next step. This often reveals just how many people are involved in getting a job done and helps surface potential bottlenecks or gaps. Then, take time to understand the "WIFMs"—the "What's In It For Me" drivers — because those are what truly motivate individuals. Knowing what matters most to your team members allows you to align the work with their priorities. Finally, conduct a stakeholder assessment. Who is on the team? What do they care about? And, how can their strengths be leveraged? This intentionality creates conditions where collaboration doesn't just happen. It becomes the default way of working.

Bella Galperin: Before we close, I would like to ask you to please share with us what is the key to success in collaboration?

Helen Wesley: At the heart of collaborative leadership is a win-win mindset. You have to believe that success isn't a zero-sum game, where one side wins and the other loses. Rather mutual benefit is possible and worth striving for. That perspective isn't everyone's natural inclination, but it's essential if true collaboration is going to take hold. Next, you need patience because getting to a win-win outcome takes time. Collaboration, especially at the front end of any process, is rarely fast. One of my favorite expressions is, "Together we go far," but it's important to remember the first part of that saying: "Alone we go fast." That tension is real, and you must be willing to invest the time upfront to gain the long-term rewards of working together.

Third, you must be genuinely committed to shared goals. That means wanting the same broad outcomes and being willing to compromise to achieve them. Often, business partners don't even fully know what's most important to them until they realize they can't have everything. That is, they're forced to make trade-offs. And compromise, frankly, isn't in everyone's vocabulary. Finally, I'll name this bias openly — you have to believe that diversity is an asset. Diversity of thought, of experience, of approach, and of execution style isn't just a numbers game. It matters because those differences lead to better solutions. "Two heads are better than one" only works if those two heads think differently. That's when the magic of collaboration truly shows up.

Bella Galperin: Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts on the importance of collaboration in leadership and life.

Helen Wesley: Thank you. It's my pleasure.

Helen Wesley has led Peoples Gas since December 2021, overseeing a diverse team responsible for the safe and reliable delivery of natural gas to over 500,000 homes and businesses across Florida. Prior to joining Peoples Gas, Wesley was CFO for ENMAX Corp., an electric utility, where she served as executive vice president of finance and information technology. She is a member of the Tampa Bay Partnership Board of Governors, serves on the board of directors for the Southern Gas Association, is a member of Florida CEOs Against Cancer, and is a member of the University of Tampa Board of Trustees. During her career she has spent many years working with universities in different contexts and is passionate about supporting the linkage between education and business.

Bella Galperin, Helen Wesley and Frank Ghannadian at the Spring 2025 Leadership Speaker Series.

Navigating Skills-Based Staffing

By: Donna Huska, Ph.D., Director, Talent Management and Diversity for Publix, Corporate Office

We see the nature of work rapidly changing with technological advances, shifting regulations and standards, increased competition for talent, and different expectations from the next generation of workers. The topic of how to navigate through these changes is important in academia and in business given our shared interest in cultivating adaptable talent to meet current and future needs.

A new approach, called skills-based staffing, is rising and quickly gaining momentum across organizations and in the Human Resources (HR) field. It is a strategy to identify and perpetuate talent, and it has the potential to promote agility and growth across industries. This article shares my view on what skills-based staffing is, how it can be beneficial, and what we can do to get the most out of it.

As an HR professional for 25+ years, I have observed many talent management trends. They often simply reinvigorate common best practices with a twist to spark renewed conversations, research and policies. Skills-based staffing is based on the longstanding practice of defining the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to be successful, then hiring or training to meet those needs. Its strength comes from its basis in well-established talent management principles. The twist — it's challenging traditional barriers and focusing on the fundamentals of talent.

The skills-based approach is most commonly described as a movement to replace formal requirements on job postings for college degrees and industry-specific work experience with the skills needed to be successful. However, rather than simply removing these credentials, I prefer the view that the skills-based approach is a means of highlighting the broader applications of talents we acquire formally and informally. It presents beneficial opportunities for employers, employees, and job seekers. This includes those with and without traditionally defined credentials, such as recent grads looking for their first job and seasoned workers looking for job enrichment or a career change.

For example, employers are realizing that people with an accounting background have many underlying talents that can be successfully applied to more than just accounting jobs. Conversely, other types of experiences and talents can provide skills needed to help an accounting team be more successful. Identifying and talking about the underlying talents broadens the candidate pool for employers and broadens the job search for workers. When looking into a changing and uncertain landscape of work, this can be a beautiful thing.

It's timely for organizations to redefine the talents needed in specific terms beyond traditional industry references and formal credentials, then staff and assign work based on those talents. For those of us who work or are looking for work, this is an opportunity to market ourselves for more prospects based not only on our official credentials, but also on our transferable talents. For academia, it's an opportunity to help students identify and develop the skills they can gain while pursuing their degree and how to highlight that can be applied successfully in the workplace.

For example, I introduced myself earlier as an HR professional. This is limiting because it puts my talents into a box, whatever box the audience or organization has for that particular label. For organizations that use the skills-based approach, it's more meaningful to introduce myself based on my most notable talents that are applicable in HR as well as other professional settings. In this spirit, next time I might introduce myself as a professional analyst, coach, and solutions architect – rather than just in terms alone of the industry or department in which I happen to work.

You might be thinking, "I already know what HR is. Why bother to list out the skills?" While this is true, the applications of traditional lines of business are changing rapidly as well. The skills-based approach focuses on the talents of the person more than on how they acquired them. For example, I chose to include "coach" in my updated introduction. While this is a part of my job, it's also a skill I've mastered through extracurricular activities. This approach

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is shifting from posting a job for an HR professional and focusing mainly on formal credentials to looking for candidates who demonstrate a particular mix of talents through the course of school, work, and life experiences. In short, a skills-based model has the potential to unsilo and remove limits from staffing practices.

Here is a quick overview of how it works. First, organizations conduct job analysis to define the key skills and level of mastery needed for each role or function to be successful. This becomes the desired talent profile. Second, they figure out who on their payroll and in their candidate pool has the needed talents and where they have gaps. This uses all the same means we already know to assess candidates (i.e., resumes, interviews, manager ratings, assessments), to create individualized talent profiles. Finally, they plan work assignments based on internal talent matches, or train and hire to fill talent gaps.

"But that's just simple hiring. We've always done that."

True. The difference and challenge is in detail. We're using more specific and granular talent definitions to help organizations identify and tap into what each person brings to the table and to provide employees with greater opportunity to determine and go after what they need to get where they want to go. These organizations are redefining the requirements on their job postings into more specific talent needs. For example, it's not enough to highlight "strong communication skills" on a job posting or resume. Rather, articulate technical versus persuasive writing skills or formal versus informal speaking skills — all in tangible terms. Let's call them micro-talents. By focusing on micro-talents, employers and employees can more efficiently invest in micro-learning to quickly
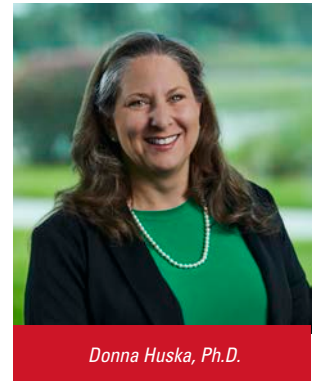
grow talent, fill gaps, and pursue goals. Employers get a more agile workforce to be cross-trained and assigned to projects throughout the organization, regardless of the specific job they hold. Employees get more personal and professional fulfillment through opportunities to pursue continuous development, alternative work assignments, and career paths.

"Ok, sounds great! How do I prepare for this? How do I use it to my benefit?"

Best practices for this strategy are still being developed and many organizations describe taking a learn-as-you-go approach. It's a current hot topic of discussion at conferences, industry articles, and among HR consultants. From that mix, I'll share what I expect and how I plan to prepare as an employer, employee, and academic advisor.

Define the details.

For employers, it starts with good, old-fashioned job analysis -- articulating work requirements in terms of the skills needed for success. This includes technical skills (i.e., coding), professional skills (i.e., project management and negotiation), and interpersonal skills (i.e., communication, teamwork, leadership) at the right level of detail to be meaningful and discernable. Consider starting as granular as you can and roll up and prioritize as needed for the intended uses.

Either way, the end should result in a meaningful talent language that is defined and measured consistently across the organization to support effective staffing strategies such as hiring, compensation, learning and development, job assignments, and career pathing.

Employees and educators have the challenge of knowing what skills organizations want – learn the talent language. Transparency and communication are key as organizations are rolling out new strategies. However, we can learn an organization's talent language simply by reading its job postings and other job-related materials. Schools and employers must continue to partner so that high schools, trades schools, and colleges understand business needs and provide curriculum and continuing education offerings accordingly.

Employees and job seekers should learn how to market themselves in terms of fundamental talents. Create a well-articulated personal talent profile for yourself based on your school, work, and life experiences. Make your own list, and ask your family, friends, and colleagues for input. With that, draft an alternate version of your LinkedIn profile or resume where you showcase your most noteworthy and marketable talents (in addition to your credentials) for the work you want to attract. A challenge we will face is potential differences in talent language across organizations, so having a customized resume or alternate versions can be helpful to align more closely to a target organization's particular language.

This task can be daunting for both employers and employees. The universal advice is to pace yourself, start small if needed, and prioritize.

Focus on concrete, transferable skills.

This approach is often described as talking about skills instead of formal credentials like education and job titles. I suggest talking about skills in addition to credentials – or better yet, skills developed as a result of the credentials.

Lists of skills are bound to be long, especially if you follow the advice to start as granular as you can. For example, we gain knowledge and technical skills from formal courses of study and work experience. While in school, we also develop other skills, such as time management, working under pressure, incorporating input from multiple key stakeholders (i.e., various professors, mentors, etc.). At work, we apply knowledge in a variety of practical settings, learn new technical skills, and how to adjust and adapt with changing priorities or guidelines. We also develop intuition about navigating organizational culture and collaborating with colleagues who bring diverse, sometimes unconventional, styles. Through personal activities, perhaps you like to hike and have become skilled at pacing yourself when facing a daunting challenge. Or, as a boater, you may have learned to be resourceful when your equipment fails.

When defining job requirements, employers need to focus on concrete talents that can be appropriately evaluated in the hiring process. Employers are already proficient at this for technical and job-specific skills. This approach is intended to go beyond that and help focus on finding and using untapped talent with transferable skills that might otherwise be hidden in plain sight. The accounting

employee, for example, who is particularly skilled at negotiation tactics due to a previous career might be particularly helpful on a contracting project over in the marketing department. Or that hiker, who might be a good addition to a team working on a long-term project with high stakes.

I expect that subject matter expertise should and will continue to be valued and marketable. Additionally, that may not always be as prioritized an asset as the workplace and the work itself continues to evolve.

Collaborate across lines.

The topic of developing a common talent language is important within an organization to support the ability for its employees to develop and to contribute cross-functionally. However, it presents significant challenges to educators and to job seekers if each employer uses its own language and defines transferable skills and their respective levels of proficiency differently than its peers. Of course, in the competition for talent employers may not want to openly share their specific talent profiles. While this is understandable, imagine if these profiles were constructed on a foundation of shared skill definitions.

In an April 2025 article, *Forbes* highlighted an intriguing collaboration of some of America's top employers (e.g., Bank of America, Walmart, Johnson & Johnson), called the Skills-First Workforce Initiative. It is led by a non-profit organization called Burning Glass Institute, and they've worked together to publish a career website that defines the skills needed for some of the most in-demand positions in their industries. I see this as a step in the right direction.

As we move forward, I hope to see more collaboration and participation among academia, business, and professional associations to generate a shared language of talent within industries for technical skills and across for transferable talents.

Overall, the skills-based staffing model has the potential to promote an agile, inclusive, and well-rounded workforce. By focusing on fundamental talents and working together on shared interests, we have a greater chance of discovering and growing untapped talent and preparing our workforce to meet the ever-changing current and future demands of work.

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