



# foHRsight 2020: unlocking human leadership through technology

future foHRward, in partnership with Microsoft Canada

## Welcome to the new, new world of work

We are living through a unique moment in history – up until March 2020, there was a lot of talk about the “Future of Work” or more recently the “New World of Work”; however, there was large variability with regards to what companies were doing about the significant changes, primarily caused by the exponential acceleration of technology. Although there had been significant acceleration of availability and performance of technology, productivity had not increased nearly at the same rate.

In March 2020, a global pandemic created the burning platform many companies were waiting for to implement new strategies to enable their people to be productive in a world evolving at breakneck speed, specifically in which many would be working remotely. This pandemic has uncovered significant cracks in many companies’ talent strategies – not only from a technology enablement perspective, but also from a leadership perspective. Having not worked in this way before – both in terms of remote work and also through a major crisis – the lack of knowledge and skills to adapt to rapidly changing context has been exposed.

For organizations to survive and then thrive in this increasingly complex environment, we believe that human leadership becomes more critical than ever before.

## What do we mean by human leadership?

Leadership has been around for hundreds of years, but the context and the manner in which people lead has changed in a world of continued disruption. Globalization, new technology and changing demographics have all combined to create a dynamic and complex ecosystem within which we need to lead.

Theories on leadership are plentiful. The bookshelves are full of the latest theory and perspective around leadership do’s and don’ts making it somewhat overwhelming for leaders – both new and experienced. The scrutiny on leaders is also increasing, as organizations demand high levels of performance and engagement, without always taking the time to equip leaders with the capabilities they need.

Human leadership provides a way to create value for the organization by taking a people-centric approach that can be accelerated by technology.

To explain what we mean by human leadership, we explore it from an organizational, team and individual leader perspective.

## Organizational Perspective

### *A higher purpose*

Organizations that demonstrate human leadership have a higher purpose – something aspirational, beyond financial targets, that provides meaning for its people. In his 2018 book, *The Purpose Revolution*, John Izzo defined organizational purpose as “an aspirational reason for being that is about making life better now and in the future for all stakeholders.”

For example, Patagonia, the designer adventure clothing manufacturer, “is in business to save the planet.” A bold and ambitious statement that is used as a rallying cry for the organization in shaping every action it takes.

### *Authentic values*

If purpose answers the ‘why,’ then values answer the ‘how.’ Consistency between the two is important. Organizations with human leadership have a well-articulated set of values that guide the right behaviours in the organization. These values differentiate the organization and are embedded in their symbolic practices and describe the desired culture.

### *Growth mindset*

To operate effectively in a volatile and uncertain world, a growth mindset, first coined by Carol Dweck in her book *Mindset*, is critical. With a growth mindset, an organization believes they can make progress by continually learning. This includes seeing potential in unlikely situations, being comfortable taking risks and making decisions without perfect information.

## Team Perspective

In the knowledge economy where skills are the new currency, effective human leadership determines how individuals possessing these skills come together to achieve the organization’s goals.

Research by Microsoft and IDEO identified five attributes for high-performing teams:

1. **Team purpose** - keeps teams focused, fulfilled and aligned on achieving their objectives
2. **Collective identity** - fosters a sense of belonging and helps team members work together as a unit
3. **Awareness and inclusion** - enables teams to navigate interpersonal dynamics and value everyone’s perspective
4. **Trust and vulnerability** - encourages interpersonal risk-taking in teams
5. **Constructive tension** - serves as a generative force for new ideas, driving better outcomes.

## Individual Leader Perspective

Individual leaders activate the unique potential of individuals to achieve the common purpose at a team and ultimately at an organizational level. Human leadership is about a set of characteristics that are prioritized to optimize individual and team performance in this new world of work. These include:

### *Courage*

Leaders who demonstrate human leadership remove obstacles, have candid conversations and make tough decisions for the benefit of the individual, team and organization. They are comfortable showing vulnerability and don’t expect to have all the answers. They are guided by the values of the organization and committed to achieving its purpose in good times and, more importantly, in difficult ones.

### *High emotional intelligence*

Leaders who demonstrate human leadership have high emotional intelligence so they are in check with their own emotions and the emotions of the people they are working with. Marc Brackett, founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, cautioned that “developing emotional intelligence is harder than learning traditional ‘hard’ skills – it’s life’s work.” If we can’t identify and name emotions such as these in ourselves and in others, we will continue to misunderstand one another’s intentions, perpetuating the lack of trust and wellbeing that exists in many teams today.



### *Empathy*

Leaders who demonstrate human leadership have a high degree of empathy, seeking to understand the situations of other people without judgment and to “meet them where they are” to accelerate their performance. The recent challenges we have all experienced have created a greater awareness of the importance of an empathetic approach to leadership.

## **The increasing importance of human leadership in the new world of work**

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There are a significant number of disruptors impacting the future of work. Research by The Brookfield Institute identified as many as 31 trends. When it comes to human leadership, we have identified three significant trends that make it more important now than ever.

### *1. Technology*

The introduction of new technologies will continue to significantly impact the tasks within the human domain. In 2018, the World Economic Forum stated that soft skills (sometimes called power or human leadership skills) including empathy, context sensing, collaboration, and creative thinking, will become increasingly valuable.

A human-centric approach that balances and integrates technology in the flow of work, with the delivery of power skills through human leadership, will be critical to boost productivity aligned with stakeholder expectations.

### *2. Changing expectations*

Employees, like customers, are demanding more than ever – expecting not only a paycheque and traditional benefits but also consumer-grade digital experiences, first-class leadership and conscious capitalism. Employees are not only watching, but also evaluating how companies address the challenges we face as a society, from returning to work post-pandemic to racial tensions. How companies respond will have a tremendous impact on their ability to attract and retain talent into the future.

### *3. Skills economy*

Talent continues to be a top concern for CEOs globally regardless of whether we are in a recession or coming out of a pandemic. Talent with “hot” skills will continue to be selective about the opportunities they are willing to consider. Human leaders need to think creatively to ensure they swiftly match the talent to the work and unlock untapped potential.

In response to these trends, there is an opportunity to shape a new world of work where there is a seamless integration of technology and humans. Technology augments humans by completing mundane, routine tasks, freeing them up to use their power skills to enable real break-throughs.

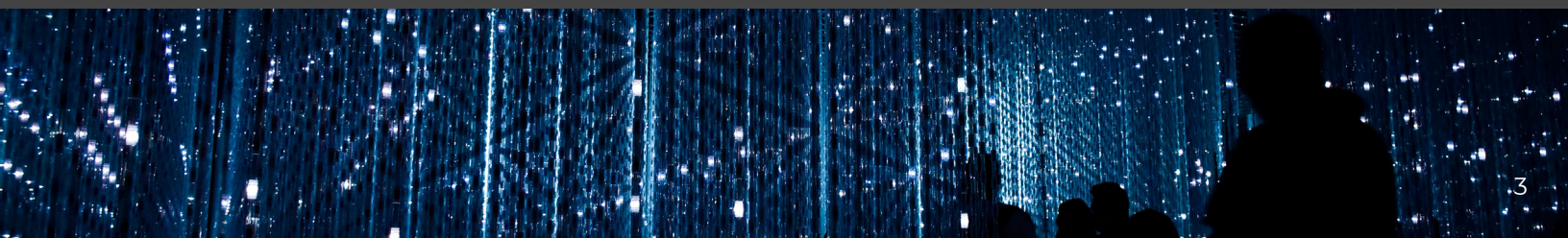
## **A key enabler of human leadership? Ironically, technology**

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We are fortunate to live in a time when technology is becoming more intelligent and can not only automate mundane and manual tasks, but if integrated properly into the flow of work, can also significantly augment human leadership.

**Here are five ways technology can help augment human leadership in this new world of work:**

1. Getting the right talent (and technology) with the right skills in the right seats at the right time
2. Creating a collaboration culture
3. Accelerating performance
4. Enabling and embracing continuous learning
5. Embedding wellbeing into everyday leadership



## 1. Getting the right talent (and technology) with the right skills in the right seats at the right time

Getting work done in this new world of work involves thinking differently about skills and roles in an ecosystem comprised of humans (full time, part time, temporary and permanent) and bots (Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotic Process Automation (RPA), etc.). In this skills-based (vs. role-based) economy, part of the challenge is understanding the skills available across the ecosystem and then getting the right talent (or technology) with the right skills in the right seats at the right time.

Leaders need to embrace a curation and coaching role, building and nurturing teams that have the skills and potential to excel.

Many leaders are utilizing the capabilities of collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams, including apps and templates, to connect the right people to the right opportunities. This multi-channel chat-based system makes the internal job posting process more efficient and transparent by pinning important sites such as vacancy boards in the system.

Other technology-based solutions (like workforce analytics, talent platforms and job matching algorithms) can help inventory and predict skill supply and demand in order to more accurately match skills to work across the worker ecosystem.

As a human leader in this new world of work, the nuance comes in building and developing the right team, by tapping into individuals' diverse potential, passions and purpose, not just skills and abilities.

## 2. Creating a collaboration culture

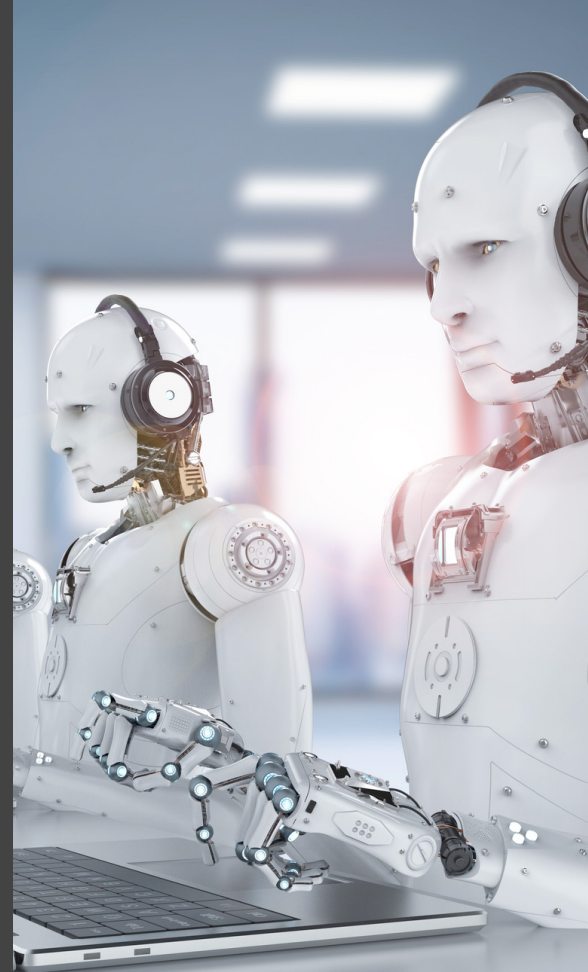
Often, organizations see a disconnect between their stated purpose and results. To deliver on company objectives, workers need to be coached, recognized and rewarded for performance and behaviours that are tied to the company's purpose.

Achieving this connection has become increasingly challenging to achieve in the new world of remote working but is still enabled through corporate culture, reinforced through human leadership and amplified by technology.

If they hadn't already, through this crisis, many organizations have accelerated the implementation of tools, like Microsoft Teams and Yammer. These tools enable a more collaborative culture in which leaders can connect with and coach teams in a more agile way.

Organizations are taking advantage of the ever increasing number of applications that can be integrated in Teams including Kahoot and Crescendo (to be launched in January 2021). This seamless use of technology has been proven to increase usage and impact making the investment in these tools even more worthwhile.

We have also seen that technology provides the platform for leaders to create more inclusive and diverse work environments. For example, leveraging the live captions and subtitles feature on Teams can help ensure employees who are hard of hearing or speak another language are included in meetings.



In summary, by participating in Teams, leaders have an opportunity to transparently share information and reinforce and celebrate teamwork real-time and in a more agile way that empowers teams to self-manage.

**The Ottawa Hospital** is just one example of a number of companies who introduced the Teams platform to facilitate more collaboration during the COVID-19 crisis. The hospital has increased its active users of the Teams platform from 3,000 to 10,000 enabling clinicians and other staff across their four sites and affiliated clinics to work together, even though apart, through the platform's video conferencing, secure instant messaging, group communications and document sharing.

**Saskatchewan Blue Cross** wanted to improve communication as part of a cultural transformation and leveraged Yammer for asynchronous announcements, welcoming new hires and delivering executive communications. They have similarly utilized Teams to increase collaboration by improving the access to team meeting records and process documents introducing an enhanced record keeping process at the same time. The increased efficiency that came from the project allowed employees to reclaim an average of 24 minutes per workday that can be focused on other more impactful tasks.

### 3. Accelerating performance

Human leaders are performance accelerators, not simply performance managers. This means removing barriers and mundane tasks so that team members can focus on more high-value activities. It also means "listening" more effectively by gathering meaningful data from which to glean insights and drive towards action. Thanks to technology, both of these leadership actions are now possible with speed and at scale.

AI is built into Microsoft 365's suite to enable employees to be more productive. This includes the capability to [design and build PowerPoint slides](#) as well as [reading emails and managing calendars](#) in Outlook. According to a [recent study from Forrester](#), M365 helped save 3 hours a week on average for employees through improved collaboration and information sharing. The solution also helped organizations realize a reduction in IT administration costs as well as a 40% reduction in security breaches.

In decades past, leaders would spend a significant amount of time overseeing and providing feedback on deliverables, reading and interpreting emails and managing their teams' capacity. AI capabilities, like the ones available through M365, automate these more time-consuming tasks and provide meaningful data (like productivity analyses) to allow more space and insights for higher value leadership.

Microsoft's [MyAnalytics](#) tool helps employees learn ways to work smarter by improving their focus, wellbeing, network and collaboration. The app enables users to:

- **Get personal insights while working:** Receive AI-powered suggestions in Outlook from MyAnalytics to help set aside focus time before the week fills up with meetings, stay on top of tasks and emails and follow up in a timely manner
- **Understand and improve work patterns:** Gain uninterrupted time to focus, disconnect and recharge, and network and collaborate effectively—with help from the MyAnalytics dashboard and weekly email digest

**Invest in Canada** used M365 to build a productivity infrastructure that supported remote work and collaboration within and outside the government. Though it's based in Ottawa, the Invest in Canada team is widely distributed to enable hands-on support for potential investors at both provincial and municipal levels. Rather than sending emails back and forth, agency personnel do much of their collaborative work through Teams, SharePoint and OneDrive, allowing them to easily edit files, share information more securely between themselves and external stakeholders, and manage conference calls.

#### 4. Enabling and embracing continuous learning

Everything we do, every interaction we have, is an opportunity to learn. Even before the pandemic, many companies were pulling back on traditional modes of learning (in-person, instructor led sessions taking employees away from their job for days on end) and even web-based training because they were not seeing enough ROI. If people don't apply the skills they acquire immediately after they learn them, they are lost. Again, thanks to technology, we are getting closer to creating seamless learning experiences in the flow of work. This is much more effective as it provides the skills and knowledge needed at the time of need and can be directly applied and therefore reinforced. Leveraging technology also enables organizations to capture real-time data not only in terms of course completion, but also in terms of effectiveness and applicability.

Many learning platforms can now be integrated in to Teams to provide this seamless, "in the flow" learning experience. For example, [The Josh Bersin Academy](#), a flexible and scalable digital platform that provides learning programs, resources and community to help build HR capability, can be "called" directly from Teams so that users do not need to log in to multiple systems, reducing time and user friction.

Building skills for the future is another serious conundrum in this new world of work. Upskilling, cross-skilling and reskilling are all words we hear as organizations find themselves lacking the skills they need to evolve their businesses at the requisite speed. AI, for example is becoming more commonplace in Canada's modern workplace and requires new skills that need to be developed among our workforce – to build, manage and work with it.

Microsoft offers programs like '[Microsoft Training Days](#)' – 130 free training events, reaching 12,000 Canadians across 10 cities, for technical professionals focusing on core cloud computing concepts, cloud migration, data, analytics and AI.

Over the course of Q3 2020, over 10 million learners (Microsoft's aim is 25 million by the end of the year) worldwide have gained new digital skills as part of [Microsoft, LinkedIn and GitHub's global skills initiative](#). By reskilling workers impacted by COVID-19, Microsoft will continue to promote career development in the digital economy to help build a diverse and successful workforce in Canada and around the world.

Across Canada, more than 315,000 learning paths were completed through [opportunity.linkedin.com](#). The most popular paths to date include:

- [Critical Human Leadership Skills](#) (includes courses like Developing Your Emotional Intelligence; Building Resilience; Communication Foundations; and more)
- [Software Developer](#)
- [Digital Transformation](#)
- [Customer Service Specialist](#)
- [Data Analyst](#)

This blend of technical skills and critical human leadership skills provides the foundation workers need to thrive in this new world of work.

#### 5. Embedding wellbeing into everyday leadership

Wellbeing in the workplace has become a hot topic for executives and HR teams in the new world of work, amplified more-so in these recent times. How we define the workplace has changed significantly in 2020 and wellbeing among teams is more important than ever.

For workers to be at their best every day, leaders need to provide an environment where they feel mentally, physically and financially safe. This requires a holistic approach to wellbeing that goes far beyond yoga classes and traditional health benefits packages. As wellbeing is such a deeply personal aspect to the employee experience, it requires hyper-personalization. Human leadership recognizes the need to balance one-on-one coaching and communication with scalable solutions that provide employees with access to the professionals and tools required to manage their unique needs.

Microsoft's myAnalytics Wellbeing edition tool provides individualized reports to users, on a weekly basis, that shed light on working styles and habits that contribute to positive (or not) wellbeing. Based on these nudges, employees are able to make changes that help them take ownership of their own wellbeing.

In addition, studies show that meditation can fight burnout and stress during the workday. The recent Workplace Index showed 7 in 10 people (70%) said meditation could help decrease their work-related stress. This number increased to 83% for those managing childcare or homeschooling. This is why, in addition to bringing curated meditation and mindfulness experiences with Headspace into Microsoft's virtual commute experience in Teams, they will also offer the ability to schedule ad hoc or recurring time for mindfulness breaks anytime.

The key is that one size does not fit all. It is critical to implement technology solutions that best address the problems that have the most impact on your culture. And keep in mind that adoption will be significantly impacted without careful consideration of worker experience (including mobile enablement, integration into workflow and single sign on) and a robust and thoughtful change management strategy.

## What does this mean for the organization?

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The significant benefits that can be garnered from integrating technology with a human approach to leadership are clear. There are a number of considerations to ensure these benefits are maximized.

### *It's about 'and' not 'or'*

Developing an additive mindset is crucial. This means being proactive in identifying the best opportunities for technology to enhance human leadership and to be relentless in finding ways for human leadership to enhance technology.

### *HR develops a digital employee experience*

The introduction of new virtual working practices has tested the capabilities of organizations that are still reliant on an analog environment and face to face contact. We know that necessity is the mother of invention and it's been impressive to watch HR teams pivot to create virtual programs. A critical step will be to assess the end to end employee experience and shift relevant elements on-line to create sustainable value.

### *HR and IT partner to architect new experiences*

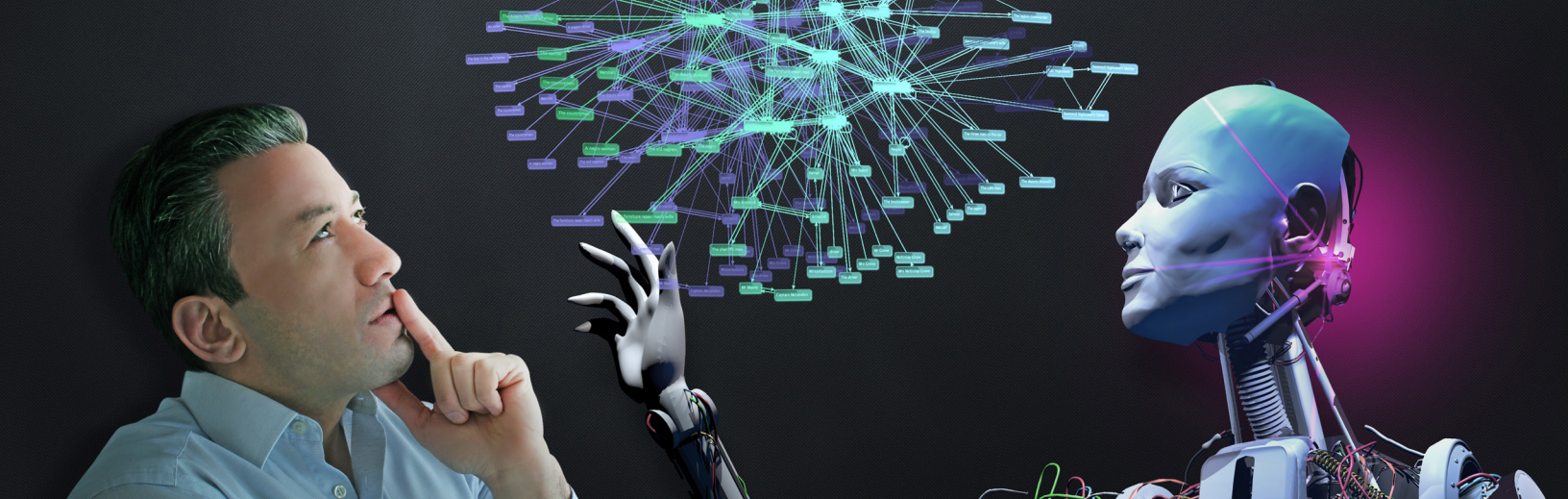
A close relationship between HR and IT teams will create opportunities to architect integrated digital solutions that meet people's needs. The success of the relationship will extend into the crucial implementation and adoption stages of any technology roadmap making the project a success for everyone.

### *Focus on building long term skills*

With a continued exponential disruption of skills, organizations need to develop the key skills required for a technology enabled future. This will include digital and cognitive skills.

### *Invest in change management capabilities*

Adopting new technology and solutions is easier for some organizations than others. Depending on the organization, employees can exhibit a wide range of workstyles so it's up to leaders to adopt a human leadership approach and ensure technology is being implemented in a way that's accommodating and empowering all employees. When implementing technology, organizations needs to be conscious of a variety of factors including employee expectations, preferences, technology habits and attitudes toward work.



## Unlocking human leadership through technology: Additional Resources

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We hope you found the insights from foHRsight 2020 helpful and we invite you to review the additional resources available in this report.

### *Resources*

[The Purpose Revolution, John Izzo](#)

[Growth Mindset, Carol Dweck](#)

[Dr. Marc Brackett, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#)

[Turn and Face the Strange: Changes impacting the future of employment in Canada, Brookfield Institute](#)

[The Future of Jobs Report 2018, World Economic Forum](#)

### *Microsoft Resources*

[Five attributes of successful teams](#)

[Unblocking collaboration: 4 tools and strategies to improve collaboration](#)

[The psychology of workplace collaboration](#)

[Drive innovation through inclusion](#)

[10 tips for managing your remote workdays](#)

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