

Pandemic presents a rare opportunity to redefine leadership

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New CEMS report sets out priorities for business leaders, educators and young professionals in a Post-Covid World



The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed deficiencies in the 20th century vision of leadership, giving a rare opportunity to question the status quo as revealed in the new [CEMS Guide to Leadership in a Post-Covid-19 World](#).

The report draws on in-depth insights from across the CEMS Global Alliance in Management Education (the consortium of leading students, business schools, alumni, companies and non-profits from across the world) to make the following recommendations for business leaders, educators and young professionals for 2021 and beyond:

- **Leaders must build the psychological safety for people to thrive under pressure.** This means safeguarding engagement, productivity and innovation.
- **Business educators must reframe learning.** This means building autonomy and resilience in learners, and staying ahead of the innovation wave, to ensure learning remains engaged and connected in the new normal.
- **Young professionals must take ownership to become their own best selves.** This means building self-knowledge, autonomy, an innovation mindset and resilience to unearth opportunities and expand networks.

Redefining business-as-usual

Recommendations were developed after in-depth consultation with the CEMS Global Alliance, including research among 1,711 CEMS Alumni and Corporate Partners, which found that for 87% of respondents, Covid-19 has profoundly affected their business and teams. A quarter believe these changes will be permanent. It also found that there has been a dramatic increase in the importance of resilience and empathy as leadership qualities and a correlating nosedive in the importance of traditional leadership authority and technical skills.

“These valuable insights from the collective global mindset of the CEMS community, can serve as the building blocks we need to construct our post-pandemic future successfully,” said Greg Whitwell, chair of the CEMS Global Alliance.

“It is clear that traditional approaches to learning in large lecture theatres and leadership based on staid and inflexible ideas

are dead. Leaders who respond to crises with creativity and agility, taking their customers and workforce along with them, are the ones who will thrive post-Covid-19.”

“We have seen from the experiences of our global community that Covid-19 has accelerated change in attitudes, expectations and mindsets; a shift from the rigid structure and systems that have long characterised organisations and models of leadership to something more flexible, open and agile – new models based on inclusivity, empathy, tolerance of failure and openness in communication. In short, we are seeing a shift to something that feels more human. And we are seeing it in real time.”

He added: “The pandemic has given leaders a rare opportunity to question the status quo, and to redefine the *business-as-usual* approach. It has laid bare deficiencies in the more traditional ways of thinking about leadership and about education, revealing a certain structural rigidity. As we consolidate our efforts to emerge from this crisis, it will be critical to review the valuable lessons it has offered and fully leverage the opportunity to rethink how we lead and how we educate our future leaders.”

Dr Beverly Shrand, director of the CEMS MIM programme at the UCT GSB, which will have its first intake of students in September 2021, believes business schools have a unique role to play in shaping the conversation going forward. “Covid-19 has revealed the fragility of our globalised society. Now, more than ever, we need to prepare future leaders for thinking systemically on a global scale.

“Business schools, along with our students, are having to grapple with the reality that the world – and the way people live, work and learn – has changed forever. We need to be prepared for bigger, more frequent global disruptions in the future because they are going to keep on happening.”

All materials for this project, including a copy of the report and a series of contributions from across the CEMS network are available [here](#).

About CEMS

CEMS is a Global Alliance of leading business schools, multinational companies and non-profits that together offer the CEMS Master in International Management (CEMS MIM). The CEMS MIM is a one-year, pre-experience programme that offers students the opportunity to be educated in a truly multicultural and boundless classroom. Students with a sound academic track record, who wish to embark on a career in management that spans the globe will find this to be the ideal postgraduate programme.

Students enrolled in the programme study for one semester at their home university, with study abroad in a different CEMS member school. In addition to completing a home degree, students complete a consulting project and an international internship. Upon graduation, students’ careers take a truly international path in a great variety of sectors and in many cases within multinational companies:

- 96% are employed or continuing their studies
- 92% are living outside of their home country
- 75% work for multinational companies

About the report

Recommendations from the report were drawn from research among 1,711 alumni and CEMS corporate partners from 70 countries. Respondents came from a very broad diversity of industries and sectors including consulting, technology, financial services and consumer goods.

Respondents were:

- 82% were managers
- 55% were senior executives
- 11% were C-suite, owners or board members
- 34 countries

In the second stage of the project, the findings were further explored through [panel discussions](#) and a [series of interviews](#) with leaders from CEMS corporate partners, business schools and students looking to join the job market in the near future.

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