SH!FT

"Redefining The New Normal"
With Resilience & Innovation

Message from Sapnesh Lalla

CEO, NIIT Ltd.

"

Despite all the upheaval caused by the pandemic, it is important to think about the present situation as an opportunity to prepare our talent for the future. To ensure success in a post-pandemic world, organizations will need a workforce that is resilient, agile and innovative. I do not expect high performance organizations to put their capability-building plans on hold. On the contrary, they need to push for building new competencies at a business-unit level or engage in a company-wide digital transformation.

This push for an upgrade in skills and capabilities is where I see a crucial role being played by the learning leaders. At this time, across the globe, every learning leader should focus on building competencies to help build from a workforce that not only takes charge but also meets the needs of the new normal. "

"
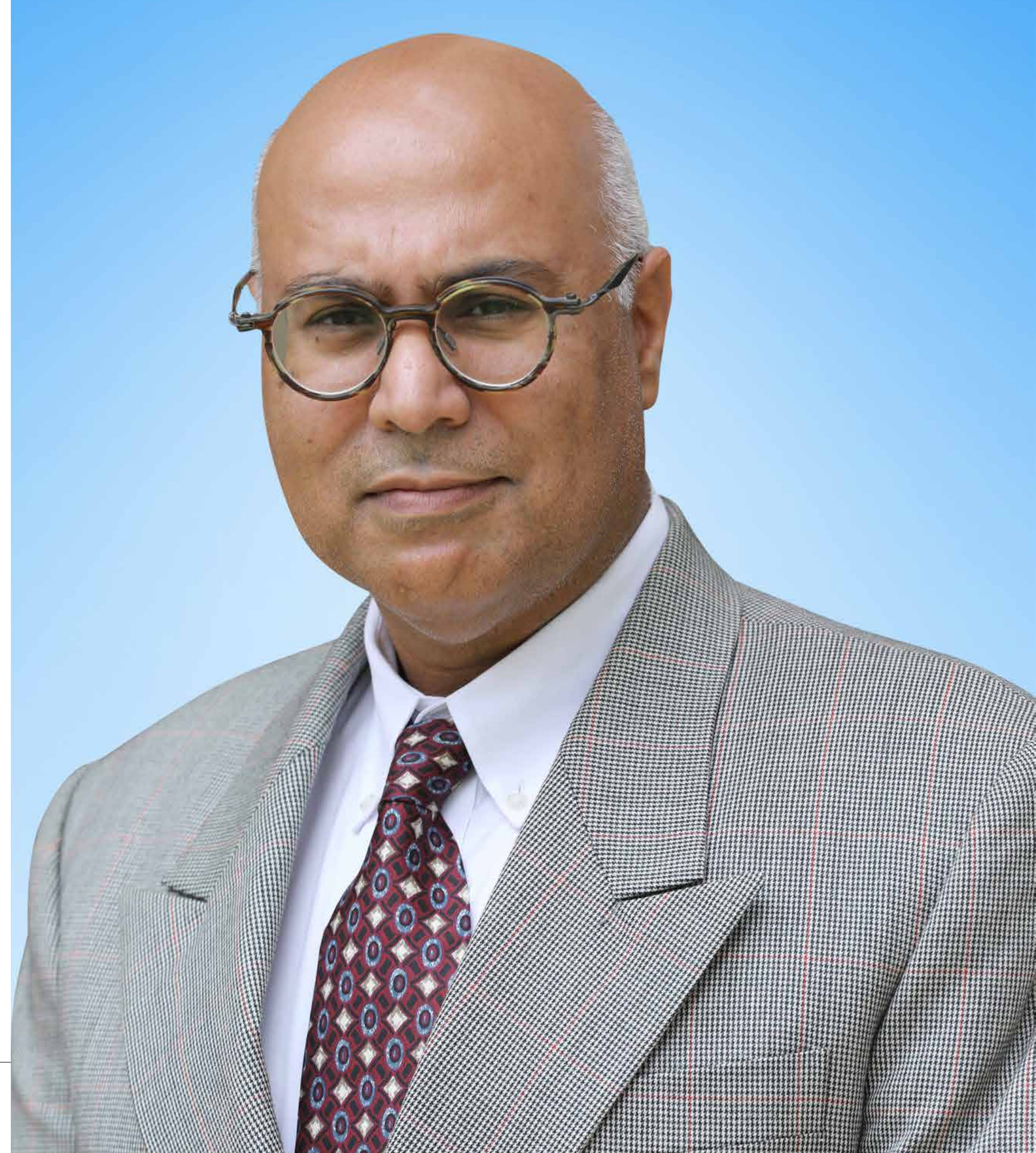
Message from Bimaljeet Singh Bhasin

President, Skills and Careers Business (India), NIIT Ltd

"

This unprecedented time has forced us to re-consider the most important question of today - what are the skills one requires for the future? It is clear that since we cannot predict outcomes with certainty, we must prepare our workforce for a set of possible outcomes. It is imperative that any organization that competes on the global stage must rethink the way it hires and develops talent.

Organizations that have been swept away by the tides of disruption were the ones that operated by the rules applicable to the old-world order. This is the time for us to think how we design learning, question ourselves on what we teach, and if we are indeed preparing the workforce for the future. This essentially means that we have to rethink and redefine the ways in which we have been looking at learning and the role of business leaders in developing future-ready talent.

It is no longer just about acquiring skills and knowledge. It is equally about how to learn and foster new ways of thinking. It is about developing competencies that are truly "Transformative". We believe that this approach will help individuals and enterprises shape our collective future.
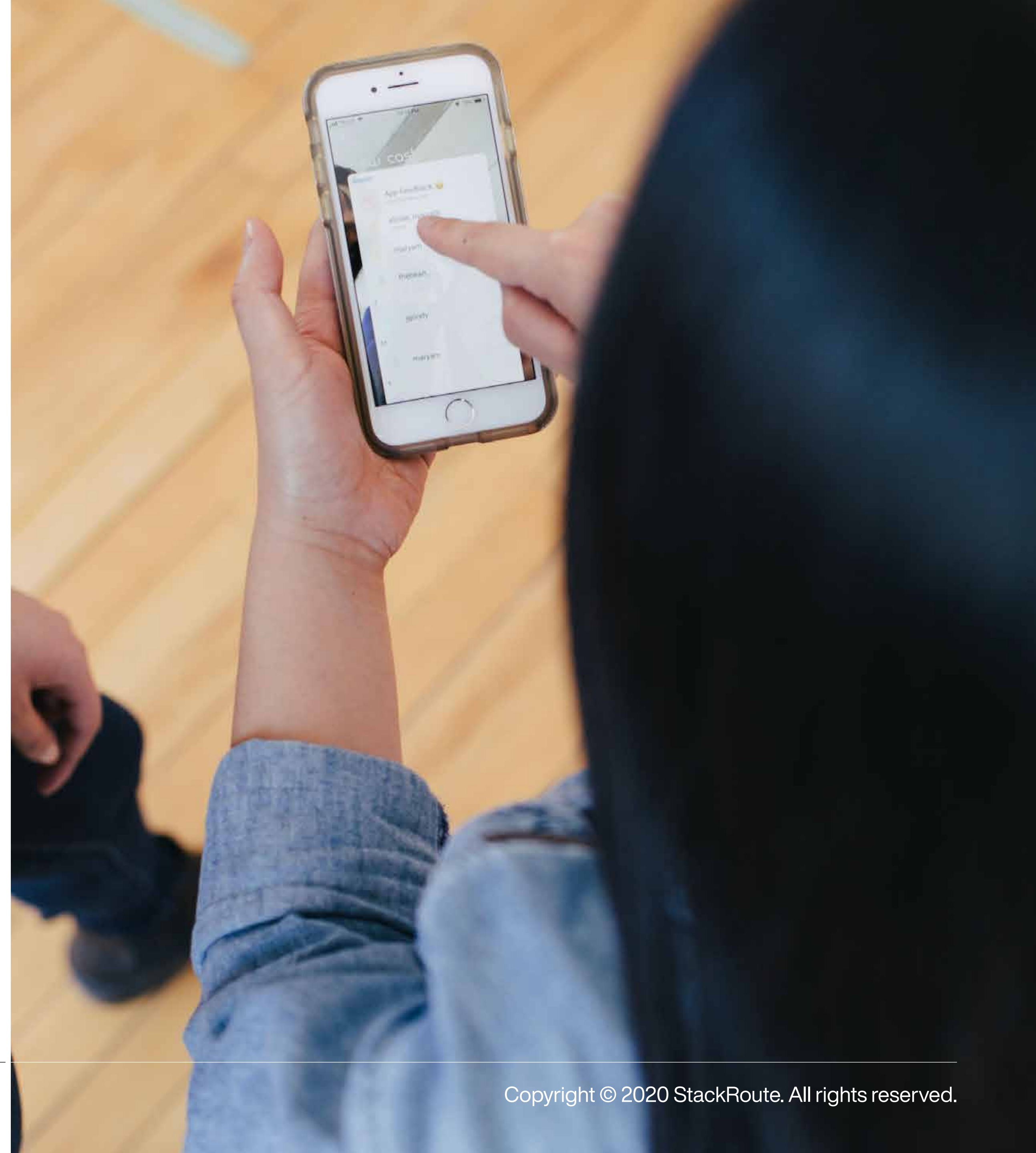
"

With adversity,
comes new opportunities.

———

Even as the global economy redefines the new normal, resilience and innovation will define success for the post-pandemic business world.

Business leaders now have a great opportunity to play a pivotal role in making a difference, to help organizations not only cope but also succeed in the long term.

The paper discusses the steps that will help make the shift to the new normal of learning.

- Sense the Opportunity
- Harness the Possibility
- Ideate the Approach
- Foster Focused-change
- Transform Learning

Organizations that survive black swan events and thrive in the face of adversity are certainly different from those who flourish only in normal circumstances.

It is about finding the competitive advantage amidst adversity. In the past, business and technology innovation led to growth. Today, innovation is a matter of survival.
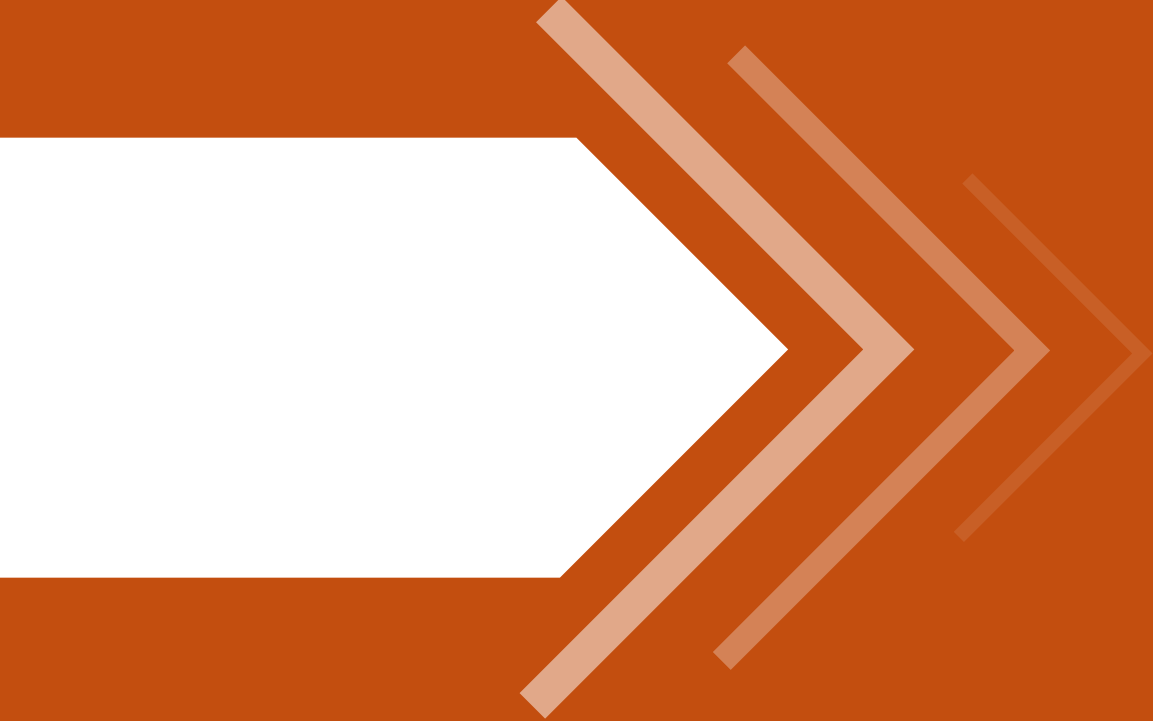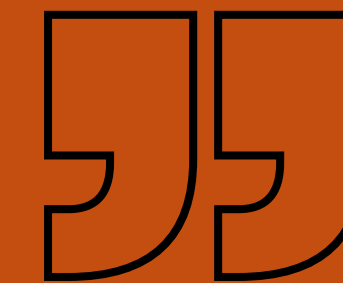
Strategies in classical models of competition will stand outdated in the present situation.

Economies of scale, lower costs, and higher quality merely provide organizations a license to operate. In this fast changing environment, a talented workforce with the ability to learn quickly hold the real competitive advantage.

In the cauldron of fast changing technological and commercial innovation, the industry expectations are "Master of all" and "hit the road running", however unreasonable they may seem.

- Ravi Ramaswamy
Senior Director,
Health Systems, Philips Innovation Campus

Sense the Opportunity

With adversity, comes new opportunities. This is the time to re-examine, redefine and reimagine how talent can be revitalized - "For tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today".

Harness the Possibility

Harness the possibility *towards an approach to repurpose the workforce; an approach that is designed to build capabilities and an approach that helps organizations shape their collective future.*

Ideate the Approach

Ideation is important to identify the competencies required of the workforce of tomorrow and see if the institutional capabilities are aligned to help support the goals.

Foster Focused-change

The change that is brought has to provide the learners with a compass that gives them the confidence to venture into new and unknown terrains, and leave the learners motivated for continuous learning.

Transform Learning

Provide an environment that can create seeds of change with the potential to have a transformative impact on each learner, encourage new ways of thinking and promote the potential to *co-create impactful solutions.*

01

Sense the
Opportunity

Sense the Opportunity

The pandemic has led to pandemonium in the world of business and commerce. Predictions about the new equilibrium are as many as there are political and business leaders.

We do not know the future. However, what we know is that our workforce has to be ready to contribute to the new future, as it unfolds tomorrow, whatever it could be.

We need to take a step back and recall that during every earlier crisis, it was innovation by ingenious brains that helped us emerge stronger than ever before.

We will do it now as well – by preparing the workforce for agility, innovation, and resilience. An **"agile"** workforce that discards the old ways of thinking and adapts new ones. An **"innovative"** workforce that creates opportunities from adversities – multiplying them as they are seized. A **"resilient"** workforce that can stay tough, stay prepared and continues to learn.

Old models of learning may not continue to provide outcomes in the post-pandemic world.

Keeping this uncertainty in mind, it is critical that we focus on building competencies for a new future that organizations sense. We have to start building organizational capability to make orbit-shifts.

By looking only at the immediate needs of skill-building and finding ready-talent, the risk remains that organizations may not be able to undergo major transformations or bring about radical innovations.

This is the time to re-examine, redefine and reimagine how talent can be revitalized as the American Civil Rights leader Malcolm X once said,
"For tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today".

Organizations are moving towards having their talent pool more fungible, goal-oriented and having employees own their development plans and careers. Companies are reviewing their existing models and are leaning towards becoming nimbler and agile. This pandemic has made everyone more mindful in watching their actions.

- Yasmeen Shaikh
Senior Director,
Human Resources, India
Member of the India Board, NextGen Healthcare, Inc

02

Harness the Possibility

The world's best organizations are those in which the leadership is able to instil a sense of intrinsic motivation amongst its employees.

An innovative workforce finds motivation if they are challenged in a high-impact environment where they feel they are continually building new skills and learning through their experiences.

While extrinsic motivation such as promotions, enhanced job roles, badges and awards have been around to ensure completion of planned initiatives, it is only when learners become self-driven that organizations transform.

It is imperative that learning is inherently satisfyinand provides the drive to perform work joyfully and contribute professionally.

Harness the Possibility

> *The key to transformation is enabling the inner drive in oneself. As an organization it is crucial to recognize and strengthen this drive amongst the promising talents.*

- Mohith Mohan
Divisional Vice-President,
Hudson's Bay

In the garden of learning, organizations tend to select the best of the seeds and have made good progress in adding the fertilizers – from e-learning systems, simulations and gamified environments.

Given the current crisis, it is for the organizations to provide the right soil for employees to build roots and grow themselves. It is the time to shift from "Organization-driven learning" to "Employee-motivated learning".

Harness the possibility by designing learning that is self-driven, yet aligned to various possible scenarios of the future, one that promotes agility, innovative thinking, and a resilient mindset.

Harness the possibility towards:

- *An approach to repurpose the workforce.*
- *An approach that is designed to build capabilities.*
- *An approach that helps organizations shape their collective future.*

> *While organizations play a key role by offering resources and support for employee success, 'adaptability' and 'ownership' of individuals will be key to the success of this transition to a post-pandemic world.*

- Yasmeen Shaikh
Senior Director
Human Resources, India
Member of the India Board, NextGen Healthcare, Inc

03

Ideate the
Approach

Ideate the Approach

Ideation is the perfect next stage to combine the understanding of the problem space with the imagination to generate solution concepts.

- Do existing competence frameworks provide the right fit to develop the capabilities of tomorrow?
- Do the present approaches to learning help the learners learn effectively and kindle their interest to move to the next level?
- Is the organizational environment supportive of a high-performer and does it continue to provide a challenging environment to learn and grow?

Learners learn effectively in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) where they have enough challenge to keep them engaged and curious, neither too easy to get them bored nor too challenging to get them frustrated.

It is both an art and science to design and offer learning that will address individual needs and unlock the potential of each learner.

Today's generation is used to the personalization offered by Netflix and Amazon – learning experiences should be no different.

The troika of diverse learning styles, varied individual needs, and competency goals needs to be balanced with the practical considerations of time and resources at hand.

The pandemic has forced organizations to re-think everything from first principles. Learning and development is one of the functions that already had a head start in digital first.

- Balaji Sankaran
VP and Global Head of Product Management,
[24]7.ai

As Albert Einstein said, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

Most existing competence frameworks and individual competencies seem narrow and non-differentiated across roles. These can be a misfit in the less predictable and complex environment of today.

Ideation will help question existing frameworks and common practices to reformulate and redefine existing beliefs, approaches and solutions.

Organizations require a slightly different set of institutional capabilities and individual competencies to build a workforce that is able to meet the needs of the future.
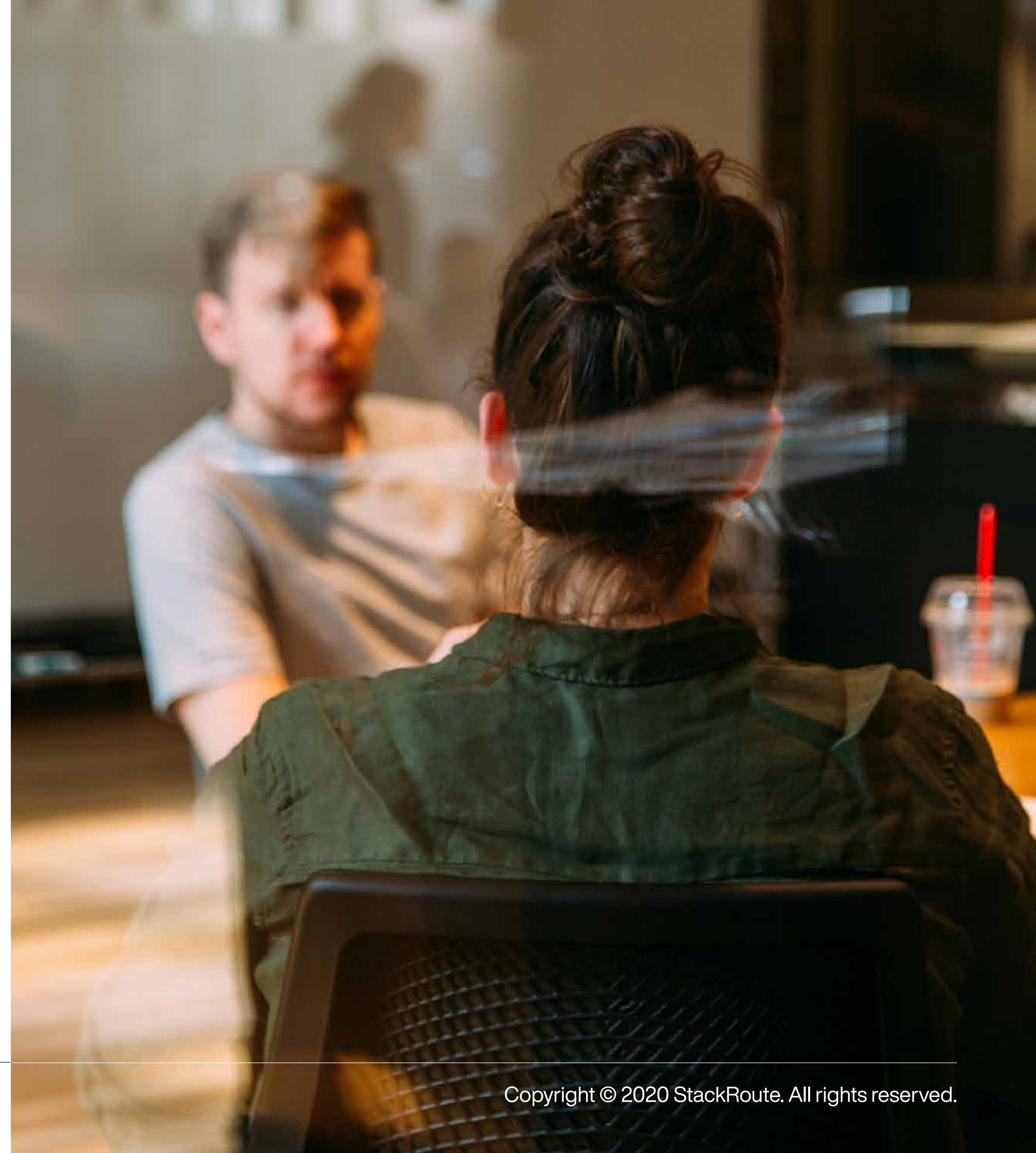
Institutional Capabilities refer to skills, processes, tools and systems used by an organization to drive meaningful results and individual capabilities refer to training, learning and skill development (McKinsey, 2014).

An organization's strategy, structure, systems, styles, skills, staff and shared values have to be in alignment with the initiative of capability-building. With no explicit connect to the company's strategic objectives, learning initiatives will not yield the expected outcomes.

A learning design that empowers individuals to be agile is bound to fail with bureaucratic structures. Systems have to support the learning initiatives in a way that the entire talent development life-cycle is connected with a robust architecture i.e. from hiring, on-boarding, performance management, rewards, recognition, career and succession planning.

Ideation will help to identify the institutional capabilities that are necessary to achieve organizational goals, and to examine if the existing workforce competencies align with the same. It should also include a thorough examination of existing strengths and weaknesses to remove any barriers to change.
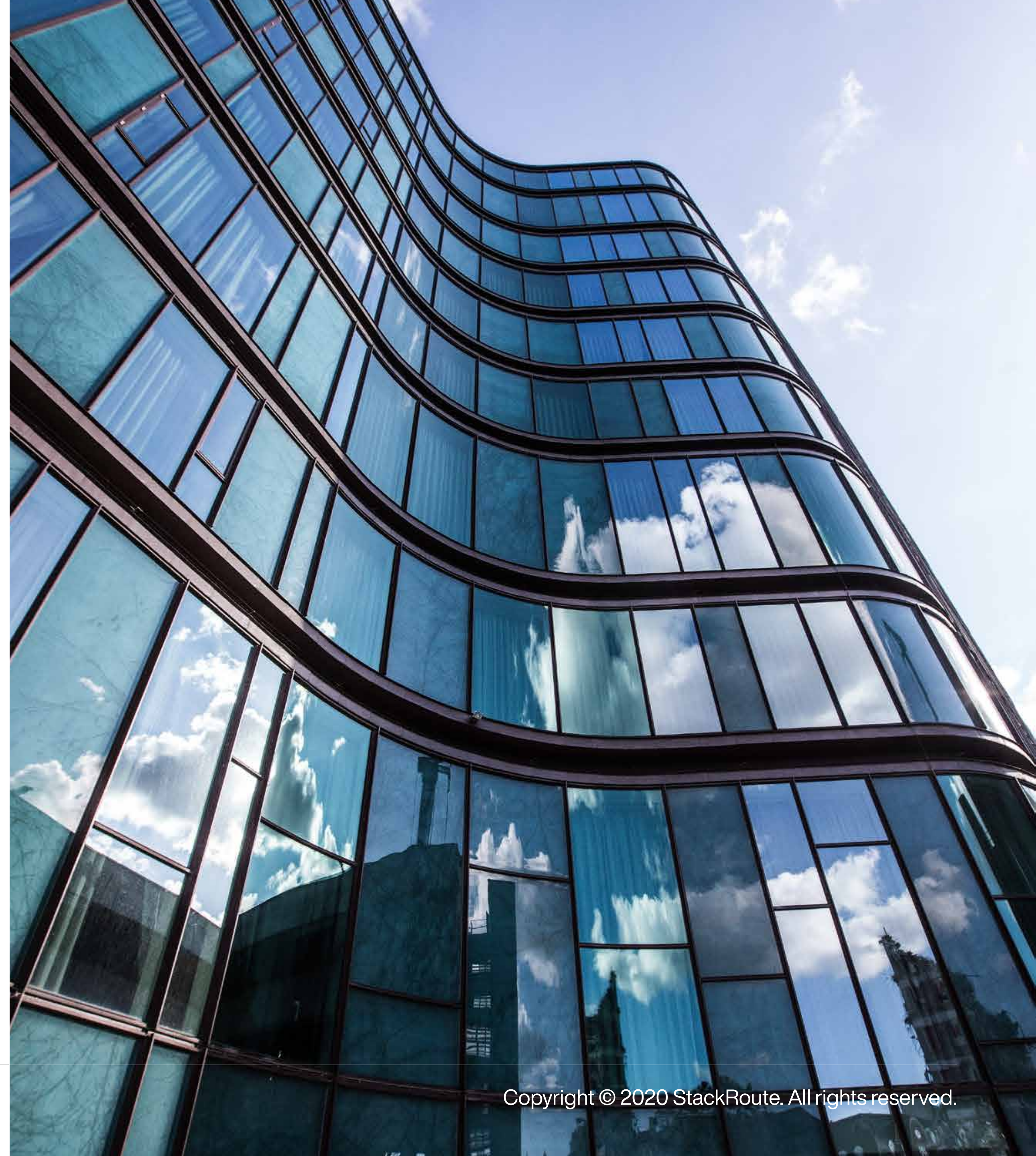
Organizations need a workforce that has the potential to understand, survive and thrive in the new dynamics of the environment and work.

We need a workforce that can anticipate the short term and the long term impact of decisions, apply knowledge in unknown, new and evolving circumstances, survive in harsh situations, create opportunities in any situation, integrate disciplines, embrace new ideas, welcome opposing arguments, develop perspectives, take a stand, create value and drive the change.

Individual Capabilities:

What are the competencies required to **upgrade** talent?

The pandemic has taught us the need to apply our knowledge in a wide variety of contexts - the social-space, the workspace, and the larger community. **Talent that is upgraded will have competencies that are no longer limited to just the workplace.**

04

Foster
Focused-change

Foster Focused-change

The focus of any learning should be to build an ability to continuously adapt and engage with others while retaining the core identity and values of oneself. Essentially, this goes beyond just adapting to technological innovations and knowing how to use them. It is about knowing how to learn and help build new ways of thinking.

With new ways of thinking, organizations will improve the overall capacity to learn from, respond to, and manage the feedback from dynamic changes in the ecosystems. Such abilities, especially critical in the post-pandemic world, are referred to as the "Transformative Competencies" (OECD, 2019). **These "Transformative Competencies" incorporate three constructs - "Create Value", "Reconcile Dilemmas" and "Take Responsibility".**
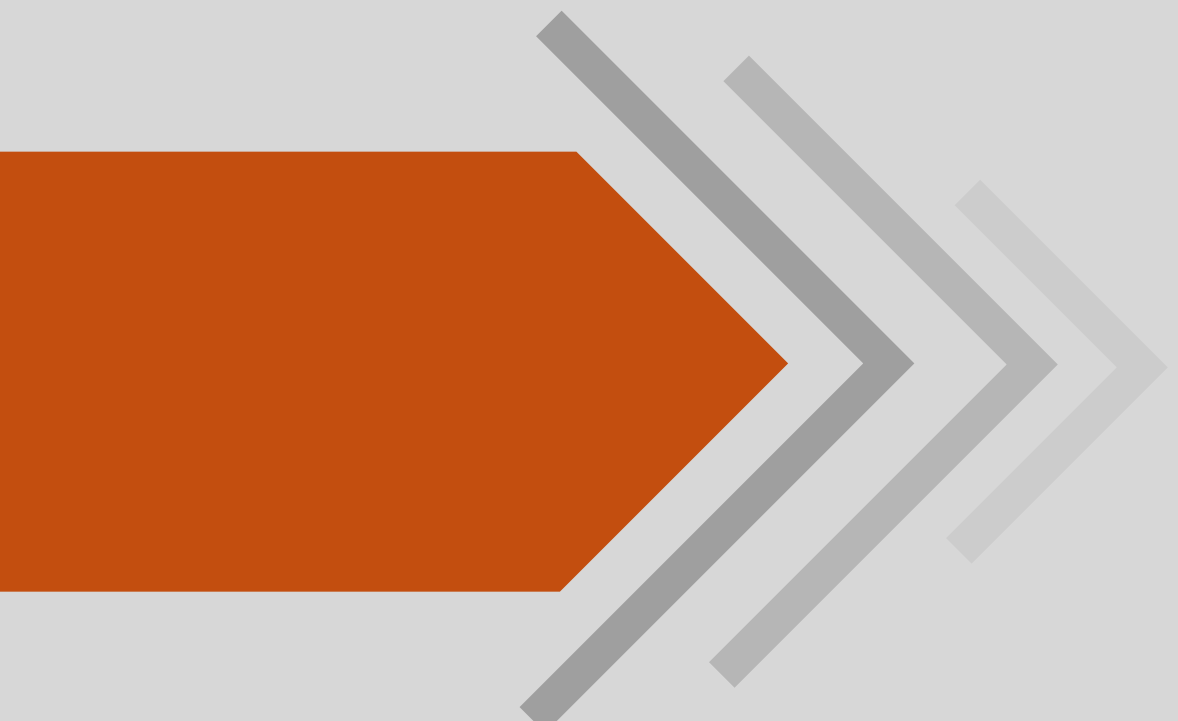
It calls for any learning intervention to act as the "compass" for the learners to learn to navigate by themselves through unfamiliar contexts, and find their direction in a meaningful way.

> *Such a compass will truly help build the ability in learners to direct their own learning. The learners can set goals for themselves, monitor progress, seek help of mentors when required and reflect on their own strengths and improvements.*

- Anil Santhapuri
Director, Learning and Development, CGI

How can organizations foster focused-change to bring about learning designs that focus on "building capabilities" and foster "transformative competencies" ?

Learning designs continue to focus on learning about today and the past.

- With the pace of technological advances, learning designs have to build the ability to innovate, take larger responsibility, create value and to make ethical judgement that will guide us towards a better future.

Learning approaches are mostly designed around learners listening passively to information. This also poses a challenge on assessments that are limited to information recall.

- We need forward-looking learning designs that will challenge the mental models of learners, force the learners to connect the learnings to their current work and also to possible opportunities relevant to the learning. This can help learners reflect on their own true potential.

- Learning designs can incorporate a wide range of methods within a broad structure. Cooperative learning, documented problem solving, learning by teaching, learning by theatre, and simulated project environments can be included along with lectures, group discussions, cases and role plays.

Learning transfer seems to be the missing link in training.

- We need to bring about change so that much of the learning can be converted to action. An organization that is keen on an agile, resilient and an innovative workforce should provide for application-oriented learning supported by mentorship to help the employee deliver in the post-crisis world.

Learning interventions that are fast-paced and crunched for time to practise could be counter-productive for the new knowledge to be synthesized and practised.

- Learning that is spaced out over time could help in long term retention as the new knowledge is given a chance to be rehearsed over a duration and revisited often. This also helps a learner "unlearn" the old ways and behaviours.

- Unlearning can happen only if the learning design accommodates for the new learning to "stick" by way of actions that allows it to be reinforced and applied. When the new learning becomes the new normal, the old practices and the ways of working would disappear gradually. Unlearning is an important skill that allows a learner to shed resistance to new ideas, to be ready to face opposing arguments and to take differences of opinion in a professional stride.

"Faculty-centred" learning designs focus on what faculty knows and how they convey the material.

- Designs that are learner-centred provide learning experiences by focusing on learner challenges and building suitable solutions by working through an iterative process.

- A three-phased approach that imparts knowledge and allows comprehension; immerses the learner in an environment conducive to experimenting; and encourages learner to introspect on oneself to allow learning interventions to become "learner-centred".
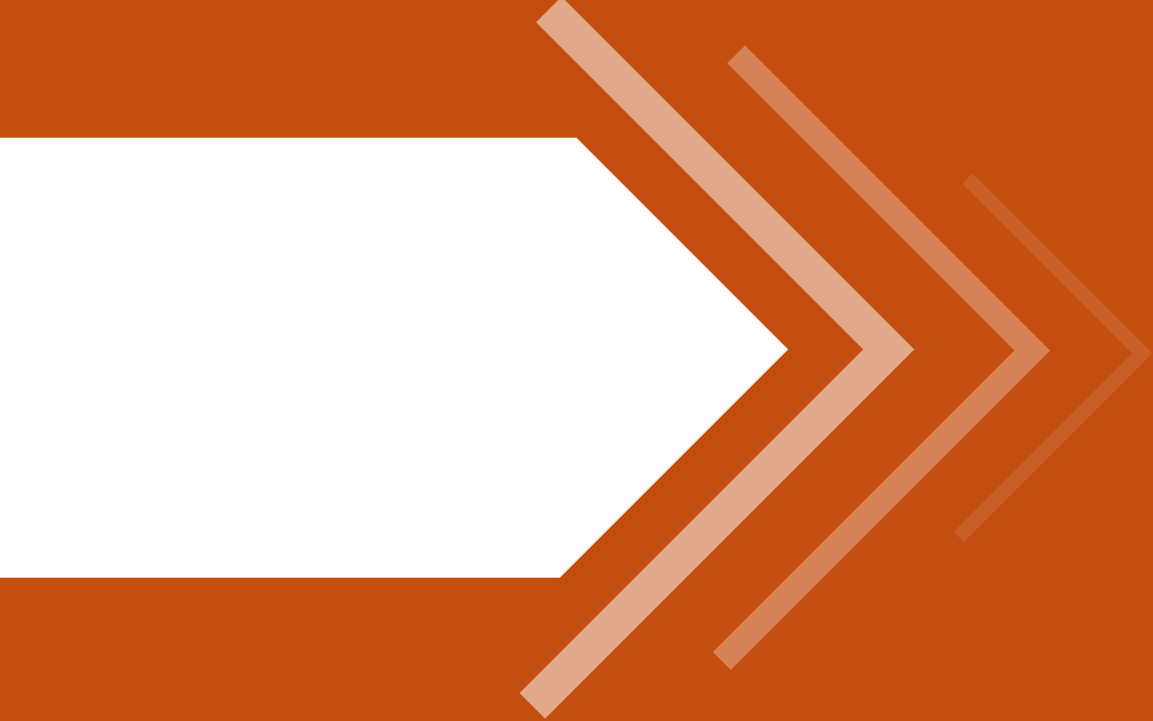
Foster focused-change to:

- Provide an exceptional learning experience, leaving the learners motivated to pursue further learning towards growth opportunities.

- Help learners to demonstrate a difference in the way they bring value to their work.

- Enable the learners with a learning compass - that gives them the confidence to venture into unknown terrains.

"We have always done it this way", a dangerous phrase that cements unlearning. Leaders will need to proactively weed out such signs which pose a threat to transformation and this has to be embedded in the culture.

- Mohith Mohan
Divisional Vice-President,
Hudson's Bay

05

Transform Learning

Transform Learning

The ability to understand the impact of the disruption and respond to the changes swiftly are crucial skills to build. Building such skills require an environment that allows **open flow of information, encourages experimentation, failure and risk-taking.**

We can transform learning with designs for the potential capabilities of the workforce as against the limits of the enterprise (Simon Terry, 2016).

To transform learning, we have to:

- *Provide an environment that can create seeds of change with the potential to have a transformative impact on each learner.*

- *Encourage new ways of thinking to face and solve problems in uncertain times and ambiguous situations.*

- *Promote the potential of each learner to co-create impactful solutions to complex problems.*

Designing an effective approach to learning is both challenging and complex, with varied needs and immediate demands from the business. This would require deliberate change of practices and processes, a shift in the mindset and an investment of time and effort. However, the paybacks are relatively high.

What is needed is the shift from the aim of minor upskill to major transformations in workforce, a shift in the mindset of employees that learning is their responsibility, a shift in the mindset of business leaders that the organization is the "catalyst" in the process.

The businesses should also demand more from the Learning and Development teams. Perhaps the biggest shift has to be in the roles of learning and development professionals. Their role is to go beyond fulfilling the immediate requirements of skill development. They must identify market trends, influence businesses and help build "transformative competencies".
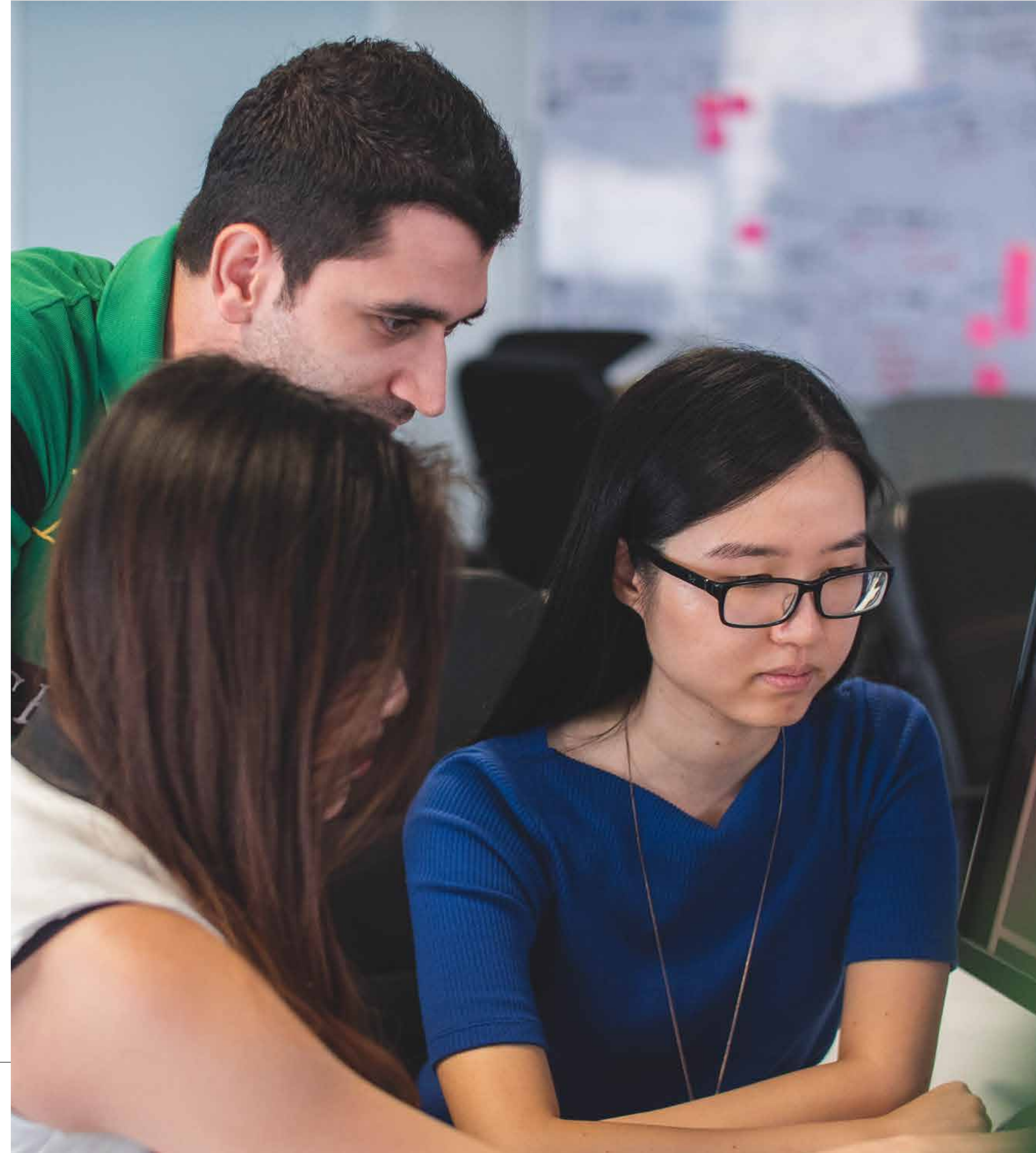
Empowering our workforce and creating a learner-centred approach will be one of the key shifts.

- Anup Malavia
Global Head, Learning and Organization,
Tata Technologies

The new normal for learning requires us to unlearn what we know and what we are comfortable with.

We need to make conscious and deliberate attempts for:

- A shift in focus from *skill-building* to *capability-building*

- A shift in mindset from *upskilling* to *upgrading* talent

- A shift of responsibility from *organization-mandated training to employee-motivated learning*

- A shift of learning design from *faculty-centred to learner-centred*

- A shift in learning delivery from *passive listening to participatory learning*

- A shift in content from '*one size fits all' to individualized and differentiated learning*

- A shift in evaluation methods from *assessment of learning to assessment for learning*

Having an innovative workforce that is agile, resilient, motivated and competent will differentiate between those enterprises that will succeed in the post pandemic world and the ones that will not.

Such a workforce will not wait for black swan events or disruptions in the market to come out with new ideas to stay afloat.

Organizations need to make these shifts if they have to grow. Very often we are told to think outside the box. I believe that we need to think within the box and innovate as the answers are well within the organization too.

- Alphonsa Mathai
GBS Learning and Knowledge Leader - CIC India,
IBM India Pvt Ltd.

Reimagine Learning
Revitalize Talent

References

1) McKinsey (2014). Building capabilities for performance. Available at:
   https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/dotcom/client_service/mckinsey%20capability%20building/pdfs/building_capabilities_f or_performance.ashx .

2) OECD (2019). "OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030." Accessed May 3, 2020.
   https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/aar-cycle/.

3) Simon Terry (2016). "Competency vs Capability Mindset: The Organisation." Simon Terry, 17 Aug. 2016,
   simonterry.com/2016/05/03/competency-vs-capability-mindset-the-organisation/.

4) Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Socio-cultural theory. Mind in society.

About the Authors

Dr. Vishnupriya Raghavan is the Head of Products and Solutions at StackRoute. She is responsible for the design, delivery and academic quality of programs on technical leadership.

Dr. Yogesh Kumar Bhatt is the Executive Vice President and Business Head at StackRoute. He is responsible for driving NIIT's IT business, with focus on Enterprises in India as well as through deep skilling programs in new tech areas for individuals.

The five 'action dimensions' put up for discussion by Dr. Raghavan and Dr. Bhatt in this paper can be used as a robust and holistic blueprint by organizations aiming at redefining their competitive advantage during this global crisis. My key take-away from this paper was the call to make a conscious and deliberate attempt to transform enterprise learning, moving from skill building to capability building. The level of detailing around these 'action dimensions' should help a seasoned practitioner develop an agile, resilient, motivated and competent workforce ready for the post-pandemic business landscape.

- Sachin Gaur

Global Head of Learning,
NBS and Corporate Functions,
Novartis

StackRoute is thankful for all the views from the leaders...

"

This paper very well captures the essence of what is needed to bring in the requisite skills to drive future growth and innovation, thereby ensuring business profitability and sustenance. Bygone are the days of "box-selling". It's all about solutions now, which again mandates the need for multi-disciplinary skills.

- Ravi Ramaswamy, Senior Director - Health Systems, Philips Innovation Campus

"

The paper is very well written and intrinsically presents the transformative journey that companies are going through in today's pandemic world. I can resonate with we are all experiencing across the IT industry. Particularly on sensing the opportunity, ideating the approach and fostering focused-change. Companies are moving towards having their talent pool more fungible and goal oriented and having employees own their development plans and careers. Companies are reviewing their existing models and are leaning towards becoming nimbler and agile. This pandemic has made everyone more mindful in watching their actions.

- Yasmeen Shaikh, Senior Director – Human Resources, India and Member of the India Board, NextGen Healthcare, Inc

"

The paper very well captures the shift of focus that is required for organizations to have talent-ready workforce. I agree that the shift has to be towards employee-motivated learning and it is important for organizations to ideate on an approach that will deliver the best results. The compass for learners will equip them with the changing skills that are required as the route changes. The barometer for learning being the application of the learning.

- Alphonsa Mathai, GBS Learning and Knowledge Leader - CIC India, IBM India Pvt Ltd.

StackRoute is thankful for all the views from the leaders...

"

The paper is an extremely articulate reflection of the learning ecosystem amidst chaos and is thought provoking. The aspect of "Harnessing the Possibility" is particularly true as the pandemic has catapulted organizations at least five to eight years ahead technically.

"

- Shreya Chaudhary, Talent Enablement Leader, Global. NetApp

"

The paper articulates a comprehensive message at the utmost need of the hour with regard to Learning and Development readiness for the future. The conscious and continuous effort on SHIFT will certainly redefine our New Normal.

"

- Agusty Rebekah, Regional Learning Delivery Specialist, Philips Healthcare India

"

This paper is a well analysed and a meaningful reflection of a purpose-driven approach to learning. The research-based content in this paper will serve as a barometer for organizations to assess their approach towards talents and their plans around equipping them to effectively navigate through current disruptions and the unknown ones in the future. I personally found this paper as a guide to establishing a dynamic roadmap that would emphasize the need for individuals, leaders and organizations to identify and recognize their north star. For a navigation without a compass would mean an exploration without a sense of purpose.

"

- Mohith Mohan, Divisional Vice-President, Hudson's Bay

StackRoute is thankful for all the views from the leaders...

"

Transformation in organizations is further accelerated by the new normal which is digital centric for every single function including those that traditionally relied on face-to-face collaboration. This paper lays out a clear framework using which organizations can structure their training processes to retain and retrain their workforce. If one were to re-look at learning with a fresh lens, it would be around the outcome-oriented, personalized and context-aware world that has been articulated in the paper.

"

- Balaji Sankaran, VP and Global Head of Product Management, [24]7.ai

"

The paper is scholarly and lucid. In a wicked messy situation that we are currently going through, while long term learning needs are hard to predict, harnessing near term opportunities is more relevant. Organizations can explore ways to facilitate collaborative learning methods that are more effective. Learning must improve predictability of performance and measuring effectiveness is critical. It is equally important to look at ways to manage anxiety and stress on a continuous basis.

"

- Sundara Nagarajan, Managing Director, Innovation Scaleup Advisors Private Limited

"

This paper discusses in sufficient detail how crises also can be looked at as opportunities by various organizations. It highlights the importance of being proactive, by sensing future opportunities and being innovative enough to prepare the organization and its workforce. It stresses on the importance of being Agile, not as a practice but as a mindset which is key for transformation and growth. Empowering our workforce and creating a learner-centered approach will be one of the key shifts.

"

- Anup Malavia, Global Head, Learning and Organization, Tata Technologies

About StackRoute

StackRoute® is an NIIT venture. Established in August 2015, StackRoute runs disruptive IT learning solutions that produce world-class Full Stack Developers & Tech Professionals with deep skills. We have evolved a mechanism of providing immersive experiences backed by mastery learning and individual mentoring that allows us to guarantee outcomes. As a digital transformation partner, StackRoute works with several large IT organizations, product engineering organizations and GICs.

contact@stackroute.in | www.stackroute.in