

CHRO Global Leadership Board

Model of a High-Impact Frontline Leader



Introduction

The role of leadership in any company is to drive business value creation aligned to its mission.

Therefore, the effectiveness of frontline leaders is essential to a company's sustainable performance. Growing the skills and mindsets of frontline leaders, as well as the support systems they need to be effective, is a crucial lever of business value creation.

However, leadership is a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. Leadership will appear differently depending on the stage a company is in, its strategy and its competitive environment. A model of the high-impact frontline leader should take the company mission and strategy to drive business value as its starting point, linking those to the success factors of effective leadership in the circumstances that apply. This playbook offers such a contextual guide to front-line leadership development.



About the board

Established in 2017, the [Gartner CHRO Global Leadership Board](#) is composed of more than 40 CHROs from many of the world's leading companies with expertise in HR, talent management and executive leadership. The board's purpose is to lead a collaborative effort among the most distinguished and trusted global CHROs, offering the global HR community valuable business guidance. This movement is based on the core belief that peer-to-peer, cross-industry collaboration is key to optimizing individual and organizational success.

The board's work influences and advances the HR community through the creation of best practices, tools and resources, uniquely grounded in world-class Gartner research and tested for relevance and impact with executive business leaders, to develop the next generation of HR leaders.

More information on the board can be found at gartner.com/en/human-resources/research/chro-global-leadership-board.

Contributing members

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- **Lynanne Kunkel**, Vail Resorts
- **Chris Scalia**, Hershey
- **Ashley Grove**, Vail Resorts

Contributors

- **Judith Weise**, Siemens
- **Abbe Luersman**, Otis
- **Nic Brassey**, Otis
- **Natalia Wallenberg**, Ahold Delhaize
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- **Daniela Seabrook**, Adecco Group
- **Julie Sexton**, Land O'Lakes
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- **Maye Alessandrini**, Softys
- **Jill Smart (Emeritus)**, Accenture
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- **Jessica Hergenreter**, Vail Resorts
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- **Paulo Pisano**, Booking Holdings
- **Ceree Eberly (Emeritus)**, Coca-Cola



Frontline leaders:

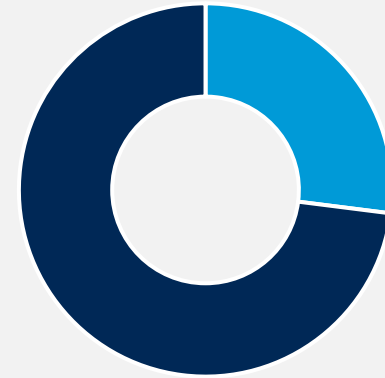
Leaders of individual contributors,
wherever they might be

- ✓ Lead the teams most accountable for customer experience and company value creation
- ✓ Execute organizational change
- ✓ Talent pipeline for future leaders
- ✓ Critical to diversity representation and attracting and developing future talent

We need to rethink frontline leaders' role and end-to-end experience



50% of frontline leaders at our organizations are at **risk of failure**.



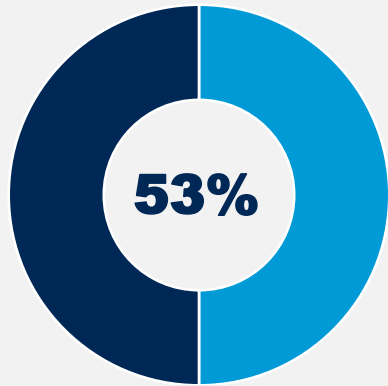
Only **27%** of HR leaders are satisfied with the effectiveness of frontline leaders.

Source: Gartner

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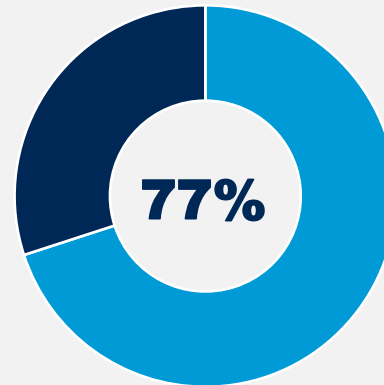
We need to rethink frontline leaders' role and end-to-end experience

Demands increasing



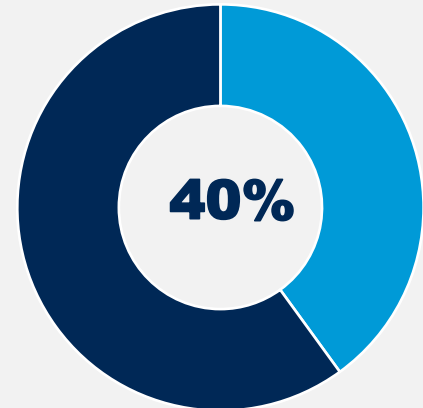
of leaders report an **increase in the number and complexity of tasks** since the pandemic.

New capability requirements



of leaders report an increase in expectations to **manage employee well-being**.

Technology fails to alleviate



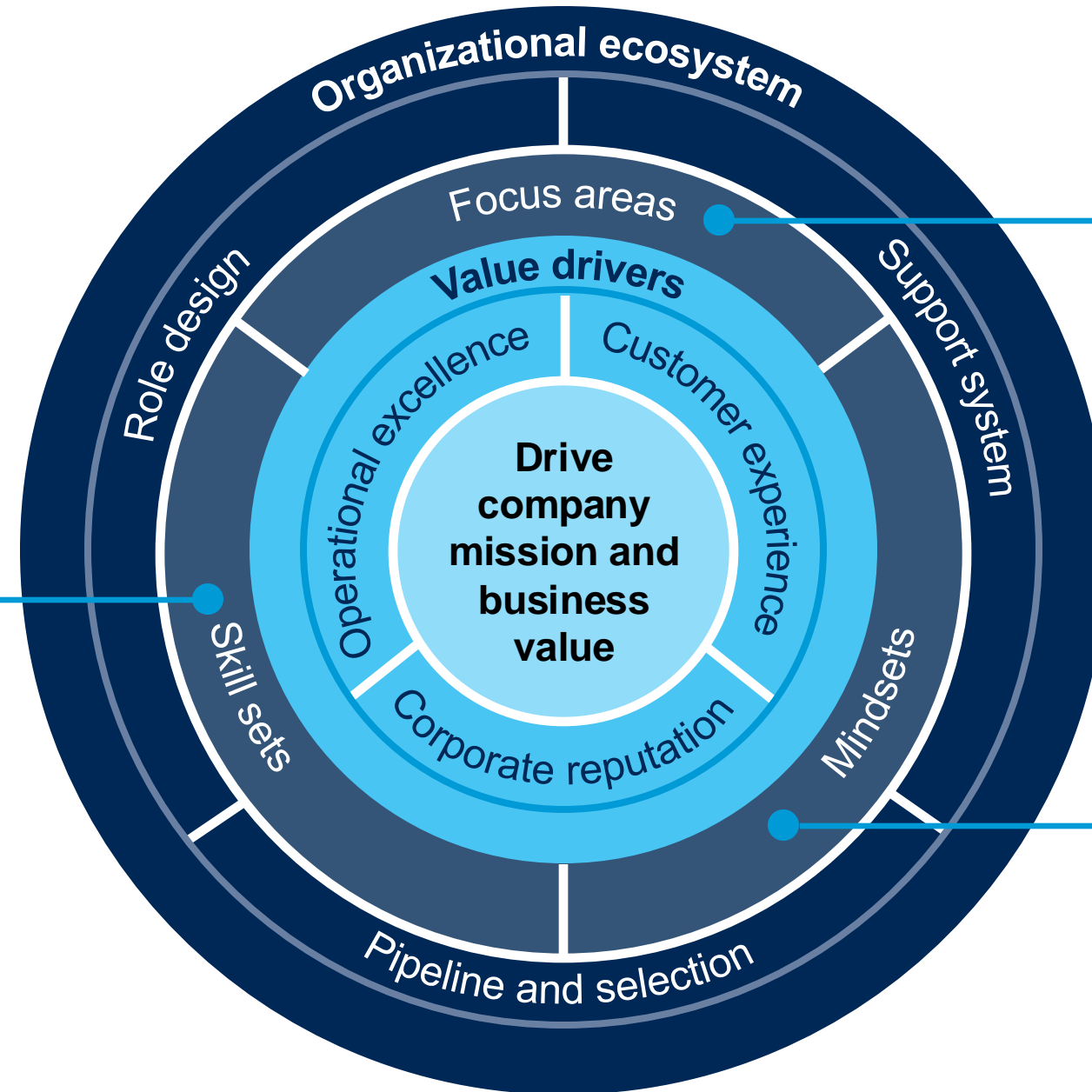
of HR leaders believe technology solutions **hinder rather than improve** the situation.

Source: Gartner

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Model of a high-impact frontline leader

- Problem solving and decision making
- Coaching and performance management
- Active listening, communicating and motivating
- Prioritization, delegation and time management



- Employee experience and culture
- Business planning
- Talent and team development
- Productivity and performance

- Emotional intelligence
- Skill building
- Adaptiveness
- Purpose orientation

Model of a high-impact frontline leader

The model of a high-impact frontline leader is intended to be both adaptable and aspirational. It recognizes that changing organizational dynamics and the wider business landscape prevent simultaneous prioritization of all areas.

Thus, organizations should start by **assessing from the inside out**, clearly articulating business priorities and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of frontline leaders. This should be followed by **designing outside in**, implementing and sustaining change in identified areas of need through leveraging critical **first steps** and **key moments**.

Throughout all stages, the core aims of driving the company mission and business value must remain central, guiding each step of implementation.



Assess inside out: Value drivers

Frontline leaders are often the primary drivers of business plan delivery, financial performance and overall business value creation. When the frontline leader's mandate isn't clearly linked to business value, value creation is left on the table. Start from the inside out — oriented to how the company drives value aligned to its mission — to ensure each layer of the model ladders to this outcome.

How deeply do frontline leaders understand and align with the company mission and priorities?

Customer experience

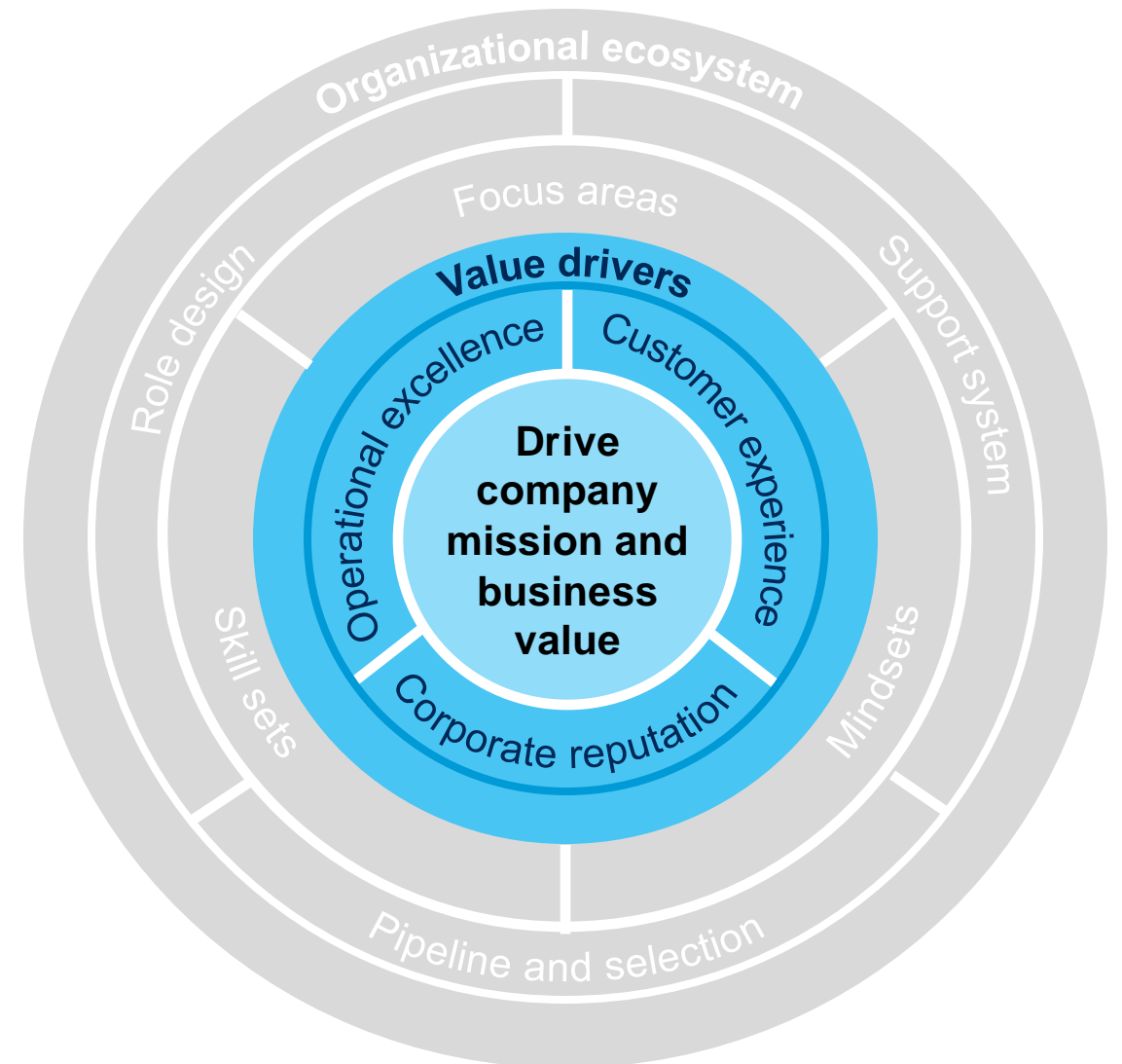
- How well is the frontline delivering the desired customer experience?
- What behaviors indicate frontline leaders clearly define and model the desired experience?

Corporate reputation

- How does frontline leadership reflect the company's mission and values?
- What impact does the frontline leader have on the corporate reputation among employees and customers?

Operational excellence

- How do frontline leaders drive quality, efficiency and continuous improvement to impact business value?
- How effectively are frontline leaders engaging and developing the frontline to achieve results?

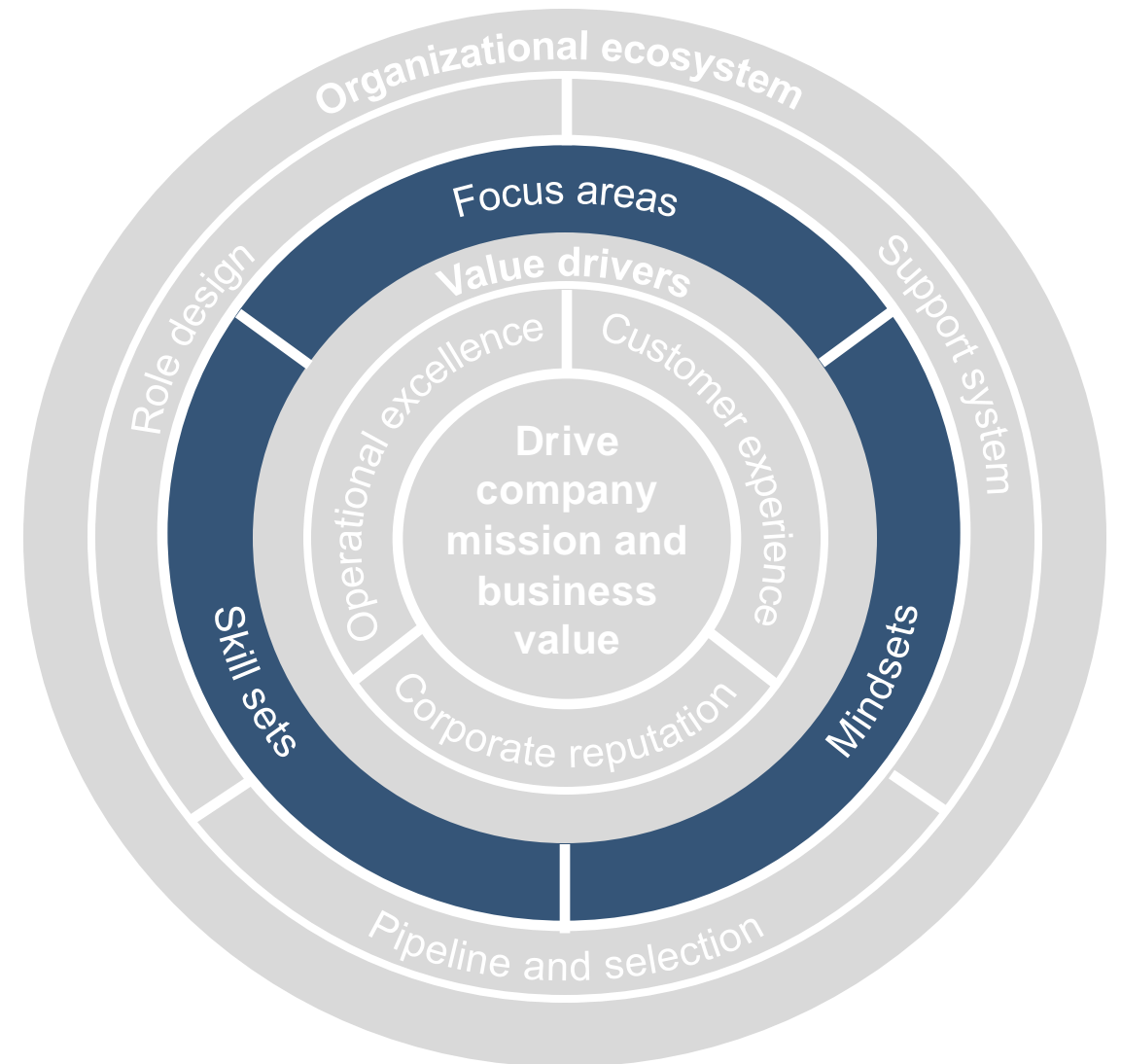


Assess inside out: Focus areas, mindsets and skill sets

What signals confirm that expectations are clear and linked to value drivers?

Warning signs:

- Frontline leaders spend most of their time on administrative and process tasks, detracting from their ability to engage with their teams effectively.
- Frontline leaders find the role unmanageable, struggling to fulfill all necessary responsibilities.
- Frontline leaders merely maintain operations, failing to innovate or enhance the team experience.
- There is a misalignment between performance management systems and value drivers.

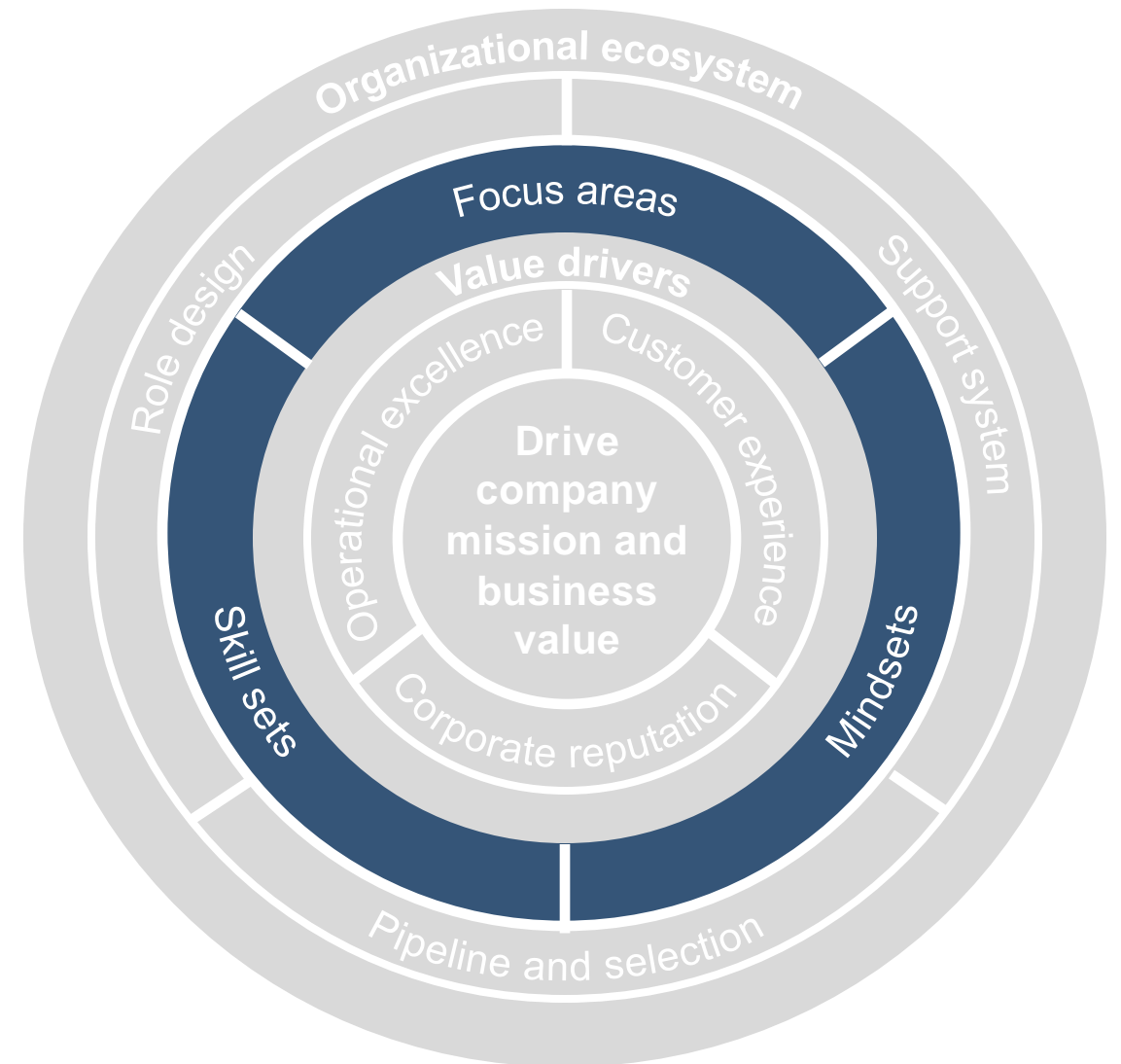


Assess inside out: Focus areas, mindsets and skill sets

How are capabilities enabling frontline leaders to achieve or exceed expectations?

Warning signs:

- Frontline leaders lack the capacity or tools for effective delegation and task management, resulting in excessive involvement in execution rather than leadership.
- Frontline leaders have insufficient knowledge of the business and priorities.
- The organization is overwhelmed by the perceived range of necessary skills, hindering the identification of essential competencies for frontline leaders' success.



Assess inside out: Organizational ecosystem

How are leaders enabled by the ecosystem?

Role design:

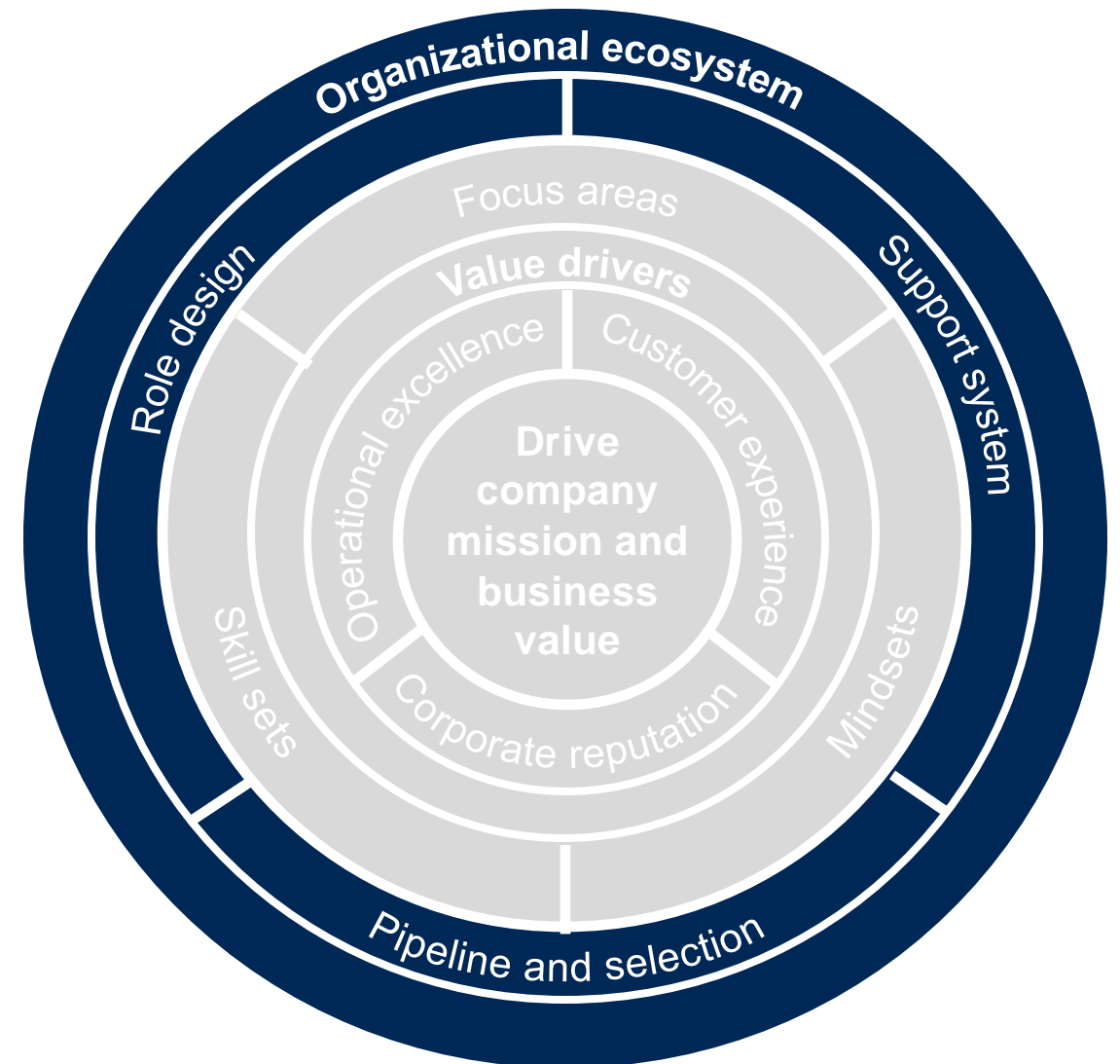
- ✓ Do frontline leader responsibilities enable them to spend time in areas clearly linked to key value drivers?
- ✓ Do performance management structures recognize, incentivize and reward success in key focus areas?
- ✓ Are the process and administrative responsibilities of frontline leaders minimized?

Pipeline and selection:

- ✓ Is there a clear understanding of the critical skills and mindsets essential for frontline leader success, and are these consistently used in talent selection, development and recognition ?
- ✓ Are potential future frontline leaders given opportunities to develop skill sets and mindsets outside of formal training?

Support system:

- ✓ What level of commitment do senior leaders make to support and empower frontline leaders?
- ✓ Does your organization foster the creation of frontline leader resources, including tools, training and peer networks?
- ✓ Are support opportunities clearly communicated to frontline leaders, and can they quickly access and utilize these resources?



The following are **case studies of companies** who have leveraged Gartner Frontline Leader insights to drive business value tied to their top priorities.



Design outside in: Organizational ecosystem

Role design



Aligning the role to value drivers at The Hershey Company

Issue

Frontline leaders spent their time on daily problem solving and managing process breakdowns instead of building relationships, coaching and equipping teams.

- ✓ This led to disengagement, low career satisfaction and attrition. All of these leave business value on the table.
- ✓ Only 50% of frontline leaders felt their workload was reasonable or their role engaging; 40% felt underutilized.

Action

Established clear standards, expecting leaders to:

- ✓ Energize their teams with continuous coaching that encourages autonomy.
- ✓ Ignite passion through individual connection, role significance and mutual recognition.
- ✓ Steer through change by prioritizing and role-modeling behaviors.

Insight: The role of the frontline leader needed to be redefined, with clearly articulated standards of leadership embedded into performance management.

Design outside in: Organizational ecosystem

Role design

Aligning the role to value drivers at The Hershey Company

Result

These standards manifest as competencies, against which performance is measured on a semiannual basis, including:

- ✓ Building autonomous teams
- ✓ Making data-driven decisions
- ✓ Recognizing and seizing opportunities to drive business value, especially by championing the customer
- ✓ Challenging the status quo by encouraging testing, learning and smart risk-taking
- ✓ Engaging in constructive debates around difficult situations, mistakes and learning

Leveraging the data gathered from performance management against these objectives allowed us to identify critical skill set gaps and create an interactive and dynamic development journey to augment those skills. Therefore, shifting frontline leaders' time spent from daily firefighting to building relationships, coaching and equipping their teams, to deliver business value for our customers.



First step

Clearly define focus areas

Frontline leaders often lack role clarity, which leads to misallocating their time. Organizations should delineate where frontline leaders need to focus, explain how these focuses fit into the broader business context, and identify the key mindsets and skill sets required for success in these areas.

Key opportunity

Eliminate unnecessary tasks

Leaders report spending double the desired amount of time on administrative tasks, significantly limiting their ability to engage with their teams. Regularly and aggressively identify and eliminate processes hindering frontline leaders' ability to execute core competencies to foster a more efficient and motivated workforce. Be wary of technological solutions that promise to automate processes but often create new administrative responsibilities.

Design outside in: Organizational ecosystem

Pipeline and selection

Developing future leaders at Otis

Issue

Transitioning from individual contributor to frontline leader demands new skill sets, capabilities and mindsets frequently distinct from those needed to succeed as individual contributors.

- ✓ New leaders struggle to find support and gain traction in the broader ecosystem, not knowing who or when to ask for help.
- ✓ The pace of change and team and individual rotations exacerbate the situation, making it hard to maintain a core of experienced, knowledgeable professionals.

Insight: Early identification of potential frontline leaders and the provision of high-quality, targeted development programs to accelerate readiness and promote at-level/in-role effectiveness are critical enablers of success.

Action

We are in the process of building an integrated, holistic development offering within the organization to improve line leader readiness and effectiveness at all levels, leveraging key elements of our performance management and development cycle.

These include:

- ✓ Targeted goal setting
- ✓ Regular feedback and performance appraisal
- ✓ Performance assessment and calibration
- ✓ Career development and succession planning
- ✓ Energizing their teams with continuous coaching that encourages autonomy

We are also utilizing coaching and mentoring relationships to acquire relevant skills, knowledge and experiences, and build and embed vital networks within and across the organization.



Design outside in: Organizational ecosystem

Pipeline and selection

Developing future leaders at Otis

Result

These coaching and mentoring arrangements support frontline leaders in transition and their ongoing development, helping them identify key points of contact to accelerate their growth.

- ✓ Through these programs and initiatives, frontline leaders are better prepared to engage their teams, provide necessary support and guidance, and ensure that activities and processes achieve customer needs and business objectives.

First step

Identify mindsets through behavior

Mindsets such as purpose orientation, emotional intelligence and adaptiveness manifest in behaviors. Therefore, it is vital to recognize and articulate specific behaviors that signal these mindsets to identify future leaders and incentivize the development of the necessary mindsets to succeed in their roles.

Key opportunity

Create developmental experiences

Leadership is often learned through experience, making it difficult to train. Additionally, the skill set of a high-impact leader is very different from that of an individual contributor, complicating the transition into leadership roles. Develop programs to identify potential frontline leaders and provide them with opportunities to assess their suitability and ease their transition into a leadership role.



Design outside in: Organizational ecosystem

Support system



Coaching for engagement at Ahold Delhaize

Issue

Frontline leaders have one of the greatest impacts on overall associate engagement. By better defining how leaders understand and can drive factors linked to engagement, leaders are better positioned to retain and motivate their workforce.

- ✓ Our areas of opportunity were to improve overall engagement, eNPS and intent to stay.

Action

To unlock this experience, we launched our **Coaching for Engagement** initiative, which emphasized intentional personal interactions and aimed at fostering a more collaborative and supportive work environment, contributing to a more motivated and cohesive team.

Guided by our learning approach, we emphasized a blend of self-paced and instructor-led training. The program integrated learning into daily work, equipping leaders with tools to be intentional in 1:1 interaction, apply their learning and track trends over time.

Through in-person facilitated sessions and online courses, leaders were trained on:

- ✓ Defining engagement and identifying its drivers
- ✓ Distinguishing between coaching and feedback and the techniques to deliver both effectively
- ✓ Applying these skills in daily interactions

Standard practice training aids were created to help leaders analyze data, promptly address opportunities and celebrate successes. We also introduced an electronic coaching observation tool for leaders to capture their observations, feedback and goals for associates.

Insight: Creating a differentiated associate experience is central to our mission of fostering motivated, cohesive teams.

Design outside in: Organizational ecosystem

Support system

Coaching for engagement at Ahold Delhaize

Result

These observations were integrated into a Power BI database, enabling leaders to monitor the frequency and quality of 1:1 interactions and revealing trends that helped the team track improvements in performance and engagement.

- ✓ This initiative cultivated a more energized and deeply engaged workforce and sparked an increase in productivity.

First step

Make the promise from senior leadership clear

The relationship between frontline leaders and higher management cannot be one-way. Clearly communicate to frontline leaders what organizational leadership will do to make their roles desirable, drive alignment and provide support. This should include, but not be limited to, clarity of expectations, effective training and tools to succeed, care for leader well-being and health, and communication of career paths and growth opportunities.

Key opportunity

Create peer networks

The move from being part of a team to leading one can be isolating. Frontline leaders often don't know who to ask for help or feel hesitant, worried that seeking assistance signals a lack of competence. Build robust networks of peers across the business to provide frontline leaders with necessary support, while enabling collaboration and impact across functions.



Design outside in: Organizational ecosystem

Leader mindsets and skill sets



Building skill sets and mindsets at Vail Resorts

Issue

Creating a differentiated guest experience is core to driving business growth and achieving the company mission. Frontline talent is the key to unlocking that experience.

- ✓ Most frontline leader roles are seasonal, creating the need to establish predictability and stability through clear, standard focus areas and enablers of these roles.

Insight: Achieving the long-range company growth plan requires developing mindsets and skill sets against the defined standard focus areas, with a particular emphasis on active listening, communicating, motivating, coaching and performance management.

Action

Launched **Frontline Leader Orientation** and a monthly preview of upcoming leader activities mapped to the focus areas across the business cycle, with skill-building sessions to enable effective action against those activities.

To ensure high-quality talent as an input, the organization:

- ✓ Implemented a digital hiring assessment tool to increase the quality of the talent pipeline for future frontline leaders
- ✓ Focused on engaging and retaining high-performing talent season-to-season
- ✓ Launched a differentiated development program in leadership, guest service and our business to address variability in the performance of frontline leaders and their teams due to seasonality and accelerate readiness of top frontline talent for frontline leader roles and reduce reliance on hiring external talent

Design outside in: Organizational ecosystem

Leader mindsets and skill sets

Building skill sets and mindsets at Vail Resorts

Result

High program satisfaction, engagement and season-to-season return rates for participants, with a dramatic acceleration of upward mobility and increased lateral movement between roles.

First step

Identify skill sets that make work manageable

Today's business landscape demands a vast, ever-growing constantly shifting skill set. However, the skills for success in a specific function don't always translate to effective leadership or make the frontline leaders' jobs more manageable. Focus on identifying and building the foundational skill sets that allow leaders to make work more manageable: building teams, delegating, and prioritizing and solving problems effectively.

Key opportunity

Go beyond training

While training is vital for development, skill gaps cannot be addressed by adding more training modules to frontline leaders' already burdensome responsibilities. Instead, create opportunities for leaders and potential leaders to develop skills through their work by offering stretch assignments and incentivizing them to apply desired skills in key focus areas.



Design outside in: Organizational ecosystem

Leader mindsets and skill sets



Processes to attract and retain talent at Adecco

Issue

Attracting, retaining, developing and assigning the right talent with the right competencies to clients' projects is crucial for a successful client experience, with frontline leaders playing a key role.

- ✓ Scarcity of tech talent and high expectations pose challenges in recruitment and retention.
- ✓ Most frontline leaders lack a unified approach to talent management, impacting how we attract, develop and retain talent, and drive positive experiences for business performance.

Insight: Establishing robust talent management processes, implementing consistent management rituals and training frontline leaders to reinforce core principles are essential.

Action

We focus on mindset and skill set development, particularly upskilling frontline leaders on management ritual fundamentals to ensure consistency.

This is accomplished through:

- ✓ Standardizing processes and management rituals across regions based on local best practices
- ✓ Reinforcing fundamental skills and blending different levels of seniority to encourage knowledge sharing
- ✓ Developing onboarding training for newcomers and newly promoted managers
- ✓ Establishing a career path that offers growth opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds and standardizing promotions through structured people reviews based on competency requirements and assessments supported by our workforce management platform
- ✓ Expanding our digital platform for unlimited access to technical content and experts

Design outside in: Organizational ecosystem

Leader mindsets and skill sets

Processes to attract and retain talent at Adecco

Result

While challenges remain in sustaining training momentum, achieving full coverage and maintaining sustainability across countries, our attrition rate has decreased for the first time in two years.

First step

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