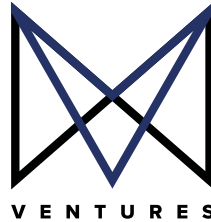




A New Kind of Leader

Managing talent and experience for a new world of work



Mount Vernon Ventures is a Transformation R&D Company, an integral part of The Mount Vernon School Organization, based in Atlanta, Georgia. Ventures has a team of industry-recognized experts and practitioners partnering with educators and leaders worldwide to strengthen brand identity, deepen organizational innovation, scale community impact, and build a transformative curriculum.

Mount Vernon Ventures publishes a quarterly Transformation R&D Report, analyzing impactful topics in education for leaders and professionals navigating a complex world. Exploring the drivers, signals, and trends affecting the education sector, we serve schools by conducting extensive research, synthesizing ideas, identifying their implications, amplifying their potential, and providing recommendations for any school to consider.

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Introduction

In the age of technological and societal acceleration, the ways in which we work, live, and learn are changing rapidly, and with that, so are workplace and workforce expectations. A 2023 NAIS survey revealed that the number one “hot issue” challenging independent schools specifically is “finding and retaining qualified staff as workplace expectations shift.”¹ The issue resonates deeply with many organizational leaders because their management and leadership skills, expectations, and competencies are shifting as well, which is why leaders frequently encounter articles and emails emphasizing common mistakes or essential shifts in contemporary, workplace culture. (“Top 4 Things Employers Get Wrong”, or “5 Essential Shifts for Workplace Culture”). Social media is filled with advice as well on what employees should demand and where managers fall short in today’s evolving work environment. While these lists offer insights, they do not take into account context, do not go beyond a quick “how-to”, or offer long-term solutions on how to navigate the complex and ever-changing landscape of leadership in the current workplace.

What a post-pandemic world characterized by elevated rates of burnout demands at this moment is a regenerative workplace that invests in employee health and wellbeing, which fosters a healthy environment and workplace culture, setting the conditions for organizational growth and abundance. Monitoring the health and growth of the organization, culture, and individual will require leaders to remap their processes and systems while

employing new tools to monitor and be responsive in real-time. However, without increased employee autonomy, leaders will not have the bandwidth to explore these emerging trends and work toward strategic goals, and develop new products, processes, and possibilities for their organizations. On top of that, there’s no one-size-fits-all solution or checklist to fully prepare leaders for unknown situations. Successfully leading requires integrating personal and organizational values with habits, systems, and mindsets—an art and science that enables leaders to navigate challenges and foster innovation as they continue to evolve.

A new kind of leader is needed, one that cannot be summarily described in a catchy list of insights or suggestions. What we need are leadership competencies that are transferable to multiple, novel contexts, not best practices based solely on what has worked in the past. The recent COVID-19 pandemic illustrates this all too dramatically in that it forced organizational leaders to demonstrate agility, grace, courage and regenerative capacity in the face of unknown, and ultimately unsolvable, challenges. In other words, what we learned from the global pandemic, and will continue to learn as new technologies and wicked problems emerge, is that there is no single prescription that will develop an organization and no simple recipe for building a healthy and successful team. We need research that points to trends that reveal which leadership competencies are consistently effective, which leadership competencies must evolve or iterate, and which are the competencies and skills that are



emerging as essential in the workplace of the future. And how will these competencies support our efforts to mitigate one of the most common challenges we face—namely, recruiting, retaining, and developing talented, happy employees and staff?

When identifying the core competencies of a new kind of leader, one could adopt a systems thinking approach to identify the “several predominant influences on the way systems are structured and what is driving leaders to consider change.” According to a recent NBOA study, the combination of persistent and emergent dilemmas require leaders to help their communities to reconcile a few intersecting forces and priorities.² We know that someone interested in change and innovation is constantly oscillating between the self and the

organization, the family and the team of employees, the values of the individual or organization and the systems that ensure those values are lived into and practiced. Agility, commitment to equity, and constant customization are key to building an organizational culture that sets the container for belonging and purpose.

All of this, of course, demands more than a simple checklist of leadership *do*'s and *don*'ts when it comes to building and nurturing workplace and workforce culture: it requires a specific set of competencies to ensure consistency and success when it comes to identifying and retaining organizational talent who improve and contribute to the mission and vision of the institution.