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# What are the New Expectations for Mid-Level Leaders?

*A Post-COVID look at how to build today's mid-level leadership*

# RBL research shows four key human capability areas drive business performance

RBL has comprehensive research in each of the four areas of human capability as well as ground-breaking findings connecting human capability investments to business performance.

[In this article](#), we share our latest findings in leadership, with a specific focus on mid-level leaders in the post-COVID era.

- Talent accelerator research in 450+ global companies
- 100s of interventions on talent upgrade and impact
- Best-selling books on talent



- Top companies for leadership: 500 companies
- Leadership Code (30,000 sample) and Leadership Brand (100 orgs)
- 10+ books defining leadership impact



- 1,200 global organizations: deep inventions in 100+ companies
- 10+ books redefining organizational logic

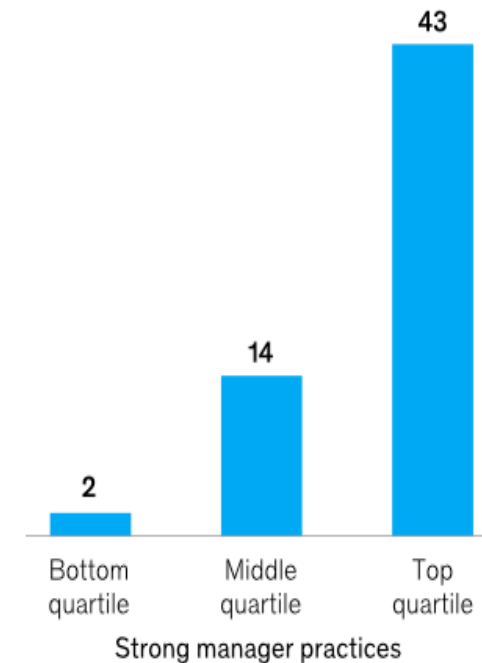


- 30 years/8 rounds of HR Competency Study with >120,000 respondents
- HR's impact on stakeholder value
- 10+ books defining HR effectiveness and impact

# Strong mid-level leadership capability contributes to business performance

*McKinsey research has found that organizations with better mid-level leaders realize from three to 21 times greater TSR over five years compared with those whose managers are in the other three quartiles.*

Change in total shareholder returns over 5 years by frequency of healthy manager practices, %



Source: "[Investing in middle managers pays off—literally](#)," June 26, 2023.

# For more than 20 years, RBL has been collecting data about leadership effectiveness at every level

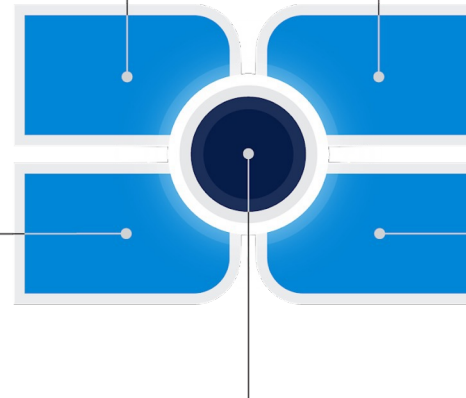
## RBL Leadership Code®

### Human Capital Developer

- Map the workforce
- Link firm and employee brand
- Help people manage their careers
- Find and develop next generation talent
- Encourage networks and relationships

### Talent Manager

- Communicate
- Create aligned direction
- Strengthen competency
- Resource to cope with demands
- Create a positive work environment



### Personal Proficiency

- Deliver results
- Practice clear thinking
- Know yourself
- Tolerate stress
- Demonstrate learning agility
- Tend to character and integrity
- Take care of yourself
- Have personal energy and passion

### Strategist

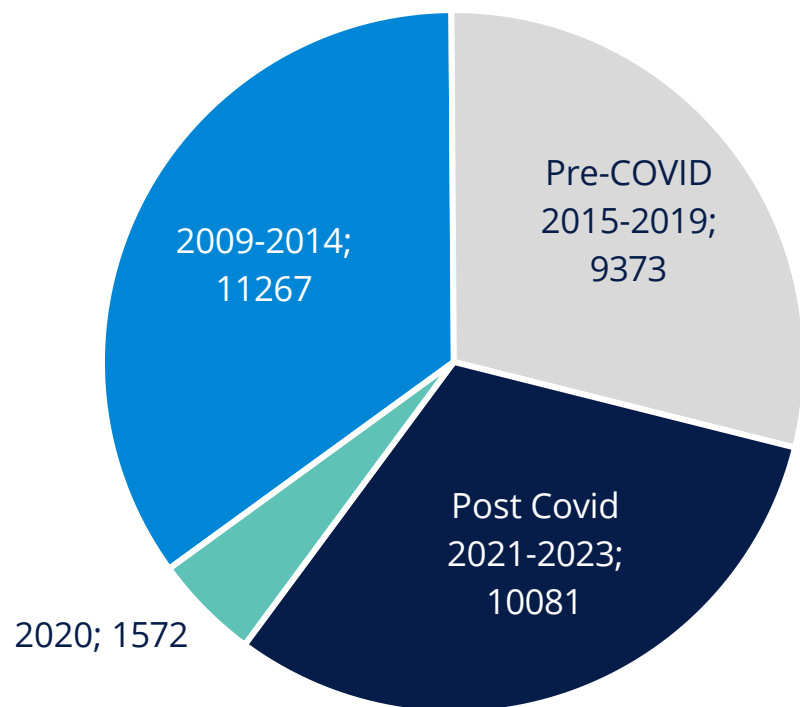
- Have point-of-view about the future
- Create a customer-centric view of strategy
- Engage organization in developing strategy
- Create strategic traction in the organization

### Executor

- Make change happen
- Follow a decision protocol
- Ensure accountability
- Build teams
- Ensure technical proficiency

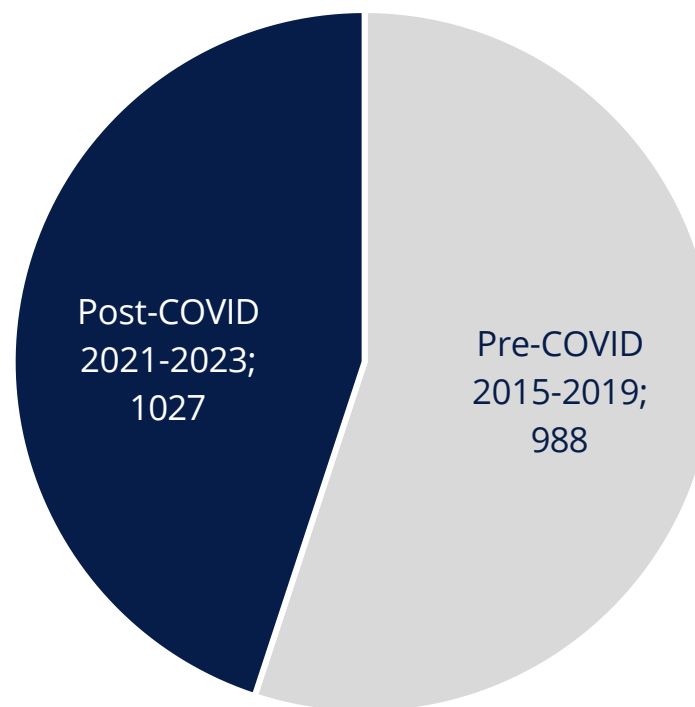
# This data gives us evidence-based answers about what today's mid-level leaders need to do to create that kind of value

RBL Leadership Code® 360 Assessment Database



Total raters = 32293

Pre- to Post-COVID study of Mid-Level Leaders



Total raters = 143065

## Analysis method

*Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between 67 RBL Leadership Code® behaviors and an organizational outcome criterion (average of four human-capability outcome measures) for mid-level leaders; all items were significant at  $p < 0.01$  level (two-tailed)*

# The data show that much of what mattered 5-10 years ago still matters today

1

## Bridge strategy and execution

Understand what work creates the most value for customers and investors.

2

## Ensure the right outcomes

Make sure your teams are getting the right things done and drive changes that keep the right things happening even when the “right things” have shifted.

# To create organizational value today, mid-level leaders need to *focus more on growing talent*

## 1. Look ahead to what talent and skills will be needed

- Anticipate what skills and competencies teams need to have.
- Prepare people for the critical roles that will create value for customers and investors in the future.

## 2. Connect key employees through common goals

- Use understanding of the strategic direction of the company and the needs of customers and investors to help team members find opportunities to develop the skills they need for the future.
- Help teams identify the right development areas to help them be prepared to achieve their goals *and* the organization's future needs.

## 3. Be more collaborative and empowering in guiding the work

- Establish clear alignment on outcomes
- Support and empower their teams to accomplish them with less emphasis on detailed oversight, constant communication, and rigidity of roles and purpose within teams.

# Here's what we found:



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Figure 1. Key Shifts in Mid-Level Leader Behaviors that Drive Organizational Value  
Pre-COVID (2015-2019) vs. Post-COVID (2021-2023)

	Less Important Now	Stayed Same	More Important Now
<b>Strategist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excels at generating commitment to future directions.</li> <li>Involves others in the organization in developing strategy in order to build commitment to our future direction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes and uses the organization's strengths for the benefit of customers and investors.</li> <li>Translates our strategy into a compelling and achievable story.</li> <li>Excels at describing strategic goals in ways that appeal to employee values and hopes for the future.</li> </ul>	
<b>Executor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitors work in progress and provides timely corrections.</li> <li>Ensures his/her team has a clear purpose and clear roles.</li> <li>Holds people accountable for accomplishing assigned tasks and rewards good performance appropriately.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes sure his/her team excels at delivering the required results.</li> <li>Manages the decision-making process so decisions are made in a timely manner.</li> <li>Makes needed changes happen.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishes clear accountabilities – who, what, by when, and with what resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Talent Manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensures people get the information they need to be productive and engaged.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly identifies the competencies required for success in his/her organization.</li> <li>Helps people align their individual goals with the work and goals of the organization.</li> <li>Makes sure people have the resources they need to perform and develop in their current jobs.</li> </ul>
<b>Human Capital Developer</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invests time in helping key employees develop and advance.</li> <li>Makes sure we are developing the future talent we will need for our most critical positions.</li> </ul>
<b>Personal Proficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistently looks for novel ways to solve new problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is consistently good at getting the right things done.</li> <li>Is skilled at seeing the broader implications – the bigger picture – in a mass of detail.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good at making tough decisions.</li> </ul>



# How well are you doing?

## Scorecard for the more important skills for today's mid-level leaders

<b>RBL Leadership Code® Domain</b>	<b>How well do I:</b>	<b>Score</b> 1=Need to improve 2=Doing ok 3=Doing great	<b>What could I do to improve?</b>
<b>Strategist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Focus my teams on creating value for customers and investors?</li> <li>■ Talk about where we are going (strategy) in a way that inspires and motivates my teams?</li> </ul>	<p>1 2 3</p> <p>1 2 3</p>	
<b>Executor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Consistently get the right things done?</li> <li>■ Establish clear accountability for decisions and deliverables?</li> </ul>	<p>1 2 3</p> <p>1 2 3</p>	
<b>Talent Manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Help people see the overlap in their work or career goals and the organization's needs?</li> <li>■ Make sure my teams have the resources they need to deliver and develop in their current roles?</li> </ul>	<p>1 2 3</p> <p>1 2 3</p>	
<b>Human Capital Developer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Help key employees advance?</li> <li>■ Develop the talent we will need for tomorrow's critical positions?</li> </ul>	<p>1 2 3</p> <p>1 2 3</p>	
<b>Personal Proficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Maintain an updated view of the big picture in a rapidly changing world?</li> <li>■ Quickly make good decisions, even in stressful, complex circumstances?</li> </ul>	<p>1 2 3</p> <p>1 2 3</p>	

# If you lead or support mid-level leaders

Senior leaders and HR professionals can help mid-level leaders build the leadership skills they need to deliver on customer and investor expectations by:

- 1. *Creating reflection and renewal space:*** Encourage (and help) them to find time for activities that renew and restore them so they can bring their best thinking to guiding the work of their teams.
- 2. *Model being a leader-coach:*** Prioritize spending 1:1 time with mid-level leaders. Share feedback, ask guiding questions, connect their career goals to opportunities to grow, and give them the support they need to grow.
- 3. *Invest in growing their talent development skills:*** Complement modeling being a leader-coach with specific skills-based training for mid-level leaders that enhances their ability to engage, coach, and grow their teams for today and for tomorrow.

Learn how you can build  
mid-level leaders who drive results.

Contact us at [leadership@rbl.net](mailto:leadership@rbl.net)

# building human capability that delivers stakeholder value.

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RBL conducts ground-breaking research and co-creates high impact solutions that link human capability interventions with business results.

We believe organizations inspire confidence as they build distinctive capabilities that delight customers and enhance key relationships. When organizations make and keep the right promises, customer experience improves, investor confidence increases, employees are invigorated, and society benefits.

We partner with business and HR leaders to build human capability that accelerates results for these stakeholders and enables them to succeed in their marketplace and ecosystems with digital and face-to-face solutions in *talent, leadership, organization capabilities*, and *HR*.