



Disappearing, Surviving or Thriving in a Post Covid-19 World?

The Leadership Challenge

*“It was the best of times, it was
the worst of times, it was the
age of wisdom, it was the age
of foolishness, it was the epoch
of belief, it was the epoch of
incredulity, it was the season
of light, it was the season of
darkness, it was the spring of
hope, it was the winter of
despair.”*

Charles Dickens

The Pandemic

This article summarises several of the key organisational changes we can anticipate as countries and companies respond to and recover from the pandemic.

These themes are then contrasted with a profile identified from a recent research programme; an analysis of a data-set for senior leaders from a range of industries and sectors. This highlights:

- current **strengths** and what is working well for leaders
- **gaps**; those leadership activities which are less evident
- **risks**; the counter-productive behaviours that constrain effectiveness

From this analysis we review the potential challenges for leaders as they come to terms with the shift in rhythm of different work patterns and the gap between now and organisational life in future.

And we outline the implications.

Even before coronavirus struck, the future of work looked uncertain: algorithms and artificial intelligence; shifting demographics and globalisation; the move to outsourcing and part-time work; the endless demand for new skills.

The pandemic, the panicked lockdown, nervous shutdown and jittery reopening of businesses have exacerbated those challenges.

Andrew Hill, Financial Times

As of late September 2020, it is unclear when and how organisations will move to a Covid-19 exit.

In the best case scenario, a few firms anticipate rapid virus containment with a fairly quick return to growth.

In the worse case, the virus will keep recurring, demanding further lockdowns and a long and slow recovery to economic growth.

Executive views vary, but pessimism seems more evident than optimism.

As such, the leadership agenda as we move from 2020 to 2021 will largely be on safety and protection, for most businesses as well for employees.

We can also expect there to be winners and losers over the next two years, as some organisations think beyond the immediacy of the current crisis to reshape their operating model for the longer-term.

- **what are the typical organisational responses to the pandemic?**
- **which specific challenges will leaders face as and when we emerge from the crisis?**
- **how well placed are our leaders to navigate through the crisis and move into any variation of the “Different Normal”?**
- **what are the practical implications?**

As organisations work out their changing future, the biggest issue won't be technological.

It will be one that has long defined success or failure in business: leadership.

What are the typical organisational responses to the pandemic?

Who by now has not read any variation of the article along the lines of “The Big Reset” to indicate the predicted shift in work practices and the impact on employees, leadership, H.R. and talent management?

Broadly, the content of the white papers, blogs and tweets can be summarised as falling into three categories:

1. Fix The Box

Our political system and free market capitalism is broken and we need to move to a new social paradigm. This is the appeal to rethink any number of institutions - political and financial, as well as those agencies providing services in health care, education, social care, transportation, etc.

Largely proposed by of those on the political left, this position is now gaining the support of those in the centre. It reflects the growing concern about widening social inequality, the lack of progress in moving the diversity and inclusion agenda forward, and the sense that the status and compensation levels for some occupations and work groups are out of kilter with their value to society¹. The pandemic has reinforced this previous disquiet.

There is much to be said for this argument. When billionaires increase their wealth during a crisis, and the poor get poorer, something is wrong with the “system”². It was Malcolm Gladwell who said: *“If everyone has to think outside the box, maybe it is the box that needs fixing.”*

No doubt, organisations will generate innovative responses to the “New Normal”. But without a fundamental overhaul of “the box” of our institutions and how our infrastructure impacts on economic activity, we shouldn't anticipate too many advances in repositioning business life within wider society.

2. Refresh

We need a complete rethink of our business strategy, operating model, and H.R. policies and practices. For some firms the pandemic crisis has revealed existing vulnerabilities. This is the scenario in which, for example, key initiatives in digitalisation or flexible working had previously gone around in circles of debate without resolution and implementation.

Warren Buffett points out: *“It’s only when the tide goes out that you learn who has been swimming naked.”* The pandemic crisis has spot-lighted firms who were already exposed and are now having to catch up with their more resilient rivals. For these lagging organisations the focus is on accelerating various change programmes to establish competitiveness.

For other firms, however, the crisis has led to more radical thinking. If customer expectations and behaviour are moving, and if a large percentage of employees are now working from home, what kind of business are we in and what kind of operating model is required?

Does our business have a sustainable future given the interplay of changing customer preferences, the changing mix of existing and new competitors, disruptive technology and a fluid set of employee concerns and hopes?

Nobody cares whether you have a grand theory of success. But are you able to adapt quickly or not?

Review of Nate Silver’s, The Signal and the Noise

3. Incremental Change

Business life will shift, but not as much as the thought leaders think. This is the argument that yes there will be a rethink of the product and services portfolio, a shift to smarter technology and more on-line activity, and remote working. But business life will continue based on very similar assumptions to the past.

Jeff Bezos of Amazon said: *“I very frequently get the question: ‘What’s going to change in the next 10 years?’ And that is a very interesting question; it’s a very common one. I almost never get the question: ‘What’s not going to change in the next 10 years?’ And I submit to you that that second question is actually the more important of the two - because you can build a business strategy around the things that are stable in time.”*

Any transformation of the business world is unlikely. At one level, there will be significant change, not least through further advances in technology and how, for example, companies interact and communicate with their customers and employees. But at a more fundamental level, business imperatives will largely go unchanged.

Does the organisation have:

- a differentiated customer proposition?
- a sustainable competitive advantage?
- embedded processes for rapid implementation and innovation?
- a robust investment model to allocate internal resources?
- a well-defined and coherent culture to articulate expectations and standards?
- talent and succession practices that prepare for the future?

These are not easy or new questions. But the answers in response to the coronavirus will need hard and different thinking.

All three arguments have appeal. And the obvious response is: “it depends”.

Fix The Box

Without a major change in government policy and funding, some industries and sectors can only be expected to under-deliver.

Embarking on another reorganisation will miss the point. No reconfiguration of the relationship between the public and private sectors will, for example, address the short-fall in care for the elderly.

No restructuring of roles and reporting relationships within the NHS in the UK will compensate for the fact that healthcare is under-funded.

And without an overhaul of the educational system - what and how it delivers - we shouldn't anticipate much renewal of the future work force.

Here it is hoped that business leaders will be more forceful in advancing an agenda for political and economic change to ensure that taxation policies, education, health-care, transportation, town planning (amongst a range of sectors) build the infrastructure needed for companies to thrive³.

In the meantime, as Oliver Shah's analysis indicates: “Businesses must rely on themselves, not this shambolic government, to survive.”⁴

Refresh

For these organisations a strategic rethink is critical. The pandemic crisis will focus minds on:

- what from our past do we need to abandon?
- what in the present should we build on and accelerate?
- what in future will we need to do and should start now?

Here the priority is to begin a series of strategic conversations⁵, a mature and well informed debate about market place dynamics, business options, the impact on structure and processes, and the deployment of the work force within a different operating model.

Incremental Change

For many organisations, life will largely continue “as is”. Of course firms will continue to evolve to flex to different market conditions, to adapt structures and processes, and to introduce new technologies. But this is change as ongoing improvisation and improvement rather than as a knee jerk response to “we are now heading to hell in a handcart”.

“Twas ever thus”. Organisations that adapt survive and succeed, those that don't, disappear from the business landscape⁶.

Nonetheless, some themes do emerge that indicate the likely hybrid⁷ scenarios facing most firms. The organisational tempo is changing with implications for employee work patterns and skill sets that in turn impact on leadership priorities and styles.

What specific challenges will leaders face?

- Remote working and productivity
- Well-being and social isolation
- Bringing in new employees and team development
- Blended lives to rethink learning and development

Remote working and productivity

Lockdown became a huge social experiment in remote working and its impact on productivity. Estimates of the percentage of the work force working remotely vary. But McKinsey reported that 55% of employees - at the height of the crisis - were either working either full-time or partly from home.

Home working of course is not new⁸. What was different however was the speed with which a large number of employees went from a conventional home-office-home 5 days a week routine to a very different work pattern.

Initially WFH was viewed as a success by employees and employees, and for some employees, the transition to working from home opened up a new work-life balance. If the working routine was:

- get up at 6.30 am
- go to the railway station and grab a coffee
- begin the working day at 9 am to attend to a mix of personal tasks, calls and meetings
- go out at 1pm to queue for a sandwich
- get back to the desk for 2pm
- leave at 5.30 pm to catch the train
- arrive home by 7 pm

the last few months may have been liberating in freeing up time and reducing the expense and the stresses of work travel.

Home working has also given many employees the flexibility to manage their work-loads in the context of other life demands.

For the productivity optimists, employees faced with fewer distractions are now able to complete tasks quicker.

But looking at the data in more detail, it may be that any gains in productivity are more the result of less commuting, shorter lunch breaks and fewer sick days.

The hybrid working model is likely to be the new reality.

Nele Van Buggenhout

Critics of the optimists also point out that averages conceal important variations. Working from home suits a percentage of the “super-achievers” (possibly a third of the work force). These are the individuals who relish a different organisational pace, and whose personality, life style, home arrangements as well as the nature of their work play to their strengths.

The productivity gains from this super-achieving minority may conceal a fall in productivity from most employees.

The latest survey by the CIPD, based on 1,000 employers, indicates a different pattern:

29% of firms have seen a gain in productivity from home working
37% have noticed no difference
28% of companies report a reduction in productivity

Much of course depends on the nature of the work. Lynda Grattan at London Business School questions some of these productivity gains given the lack of data for knowledge workers.

Productivity gains from WFH might be observed for well-defined and straightforward tasks where simple metrics (typically time) are utilised.

For other types of work, those occupations requiring judgement, initiative and innovation, the evidence is less clear. There are good reasons to expect a drop off in innovation⁹.

Josh Bersin argues that the last few years of digitalisation have not seen much gain in business productivity. And employees have seen few benefits to their working and personal lives.

“Now we’re going to have to make digital work thrive - we have no choice.”

Remote working, the kind that combines productivity and innovation, will require more than another wave of new technologies.

I would like to work from home more often; however I did not get a one bedroom apartment with this in mind.

Well-being and social isolation

This theme partly reflects concerns about the transition of going back to the work place, and anxiety about health risks, despite the measures - hygiene protocols, redesigned layouts for social distancing and staggered work shifts - employers have introduced. The uncertainty of shifting government guidelines as patterns in the incidence of the coronavirus fluctuate adds to employee worries.

There is also nervousness about the journey into the work place, particularly if the commute involves public transport.

The well-being agenda will become increasingly critical as employees adapt to any permutation of different patterns between home working and office life, as well as new routines for communication, collaboration and coordination. For some employees, hours working from home merge into the rest of the day. Without a “switch off”, the risk is of mental and physical exhaustion and ultimately, burnout.

A frequent theme in the Covid-19 research of working from home is the problem of social isolation. No doubt as everyone becomes more familiar with the technology of video-conferencing, there will be less of the: *“You’re on mute. Can you unmute?”* But as Phil Bentley, CEO of Mitie points out: *“No amount of Zoom calls can create creativity and teamwork.”*

This is probably an over statement. But the point is well made. On line communication and collaborative tools help¹⁰. But, without the nuance of emotional expression, body language and the sheer energy which emerges from the physicality of being in the same work space, much may be lost.

*Is digital now becoming more s**t to manage? Maybe the root of work stress is platform proliferation.*

Ted Bauer

For some employees a key factor in their engagement with working life is the opportunity to interact with others. This is about the enjoyment and fun of meeting colleagues of different ages, life styles and personalities which is part of our social nature, and an important component of personal and professional development.

As human beings we like to be part of different communities. Our office life provides us with the opportunity to:

- celebrate our and others' achievements and successes
- laugh about the ridiculous
- hug those who need reassurance and support
- gossip about others' failings and foibles
- build long-term friendships with valued colleagues
- moan about the injustice of our work loads and senior management

Many employees therefore miss the physicality of their working relationships with colleagues. This is the combination of:

- desk-side conversations that go off at a tangent but end up sharing important experience and knowledge
- impromptu catch-ups with no specific agenda but to check in and gauge employee feelings and how they are doing
- opportunistic encounters; those serendipitous moments that provoke new thinking and insights from colleagues outside the immediate team

During times of uncertainty, the risk is that “heads will go down”, partly as employees focus on immediate work worries. Employees will also fret about the long-term impact of the pandemic on their job security and financial well-being - for them personally as well as family members and friends.

In response to this risk, progressive firms are also reviewing their employee benefit programmes to rethink salary levels, bonuses and staff loans. This is to recognise the impact of financial security on personal well-being.

It is also an indicator of organisational commitment that goes beyond running the occasional conference call on “How To Keep Going”.¹¹

Around a third of employees have experienced worse overall mental health during Covid-19.

BCG Covid-19 Employee Sentiment Survey, June 2020

Bringing in new employees and team development

In the midst of the current crisis it is understandable that the immediate focus is on the well-being of current employees and teams. Here the emphasis is on supporting the work force to adapt to different working practices, particularly in the context of economic uncertainty and the various government initiatives for worker protection.

But as we emerge from the pandemic, forward looking organisations recognise that they will need to recruit and bring on-board a future work force. These progressive firms are now reviewing their selection criteria and methodologies to ensure they reflect a different organisational and employee dynamic.

Organisations have previously accessed any number of technological solutions for recruitment. Take your pick: video interviews, automated CV analysis, a spectrum of on line assessments from psychometric testing to gamified evaluations, and/or the less defensible “scraping” of social media data.

Less openly discussed are the concerns that these digital selection procedures may be more about minimising immediate recruitment costs rather than optimising long-term productivity.¹²

Nonetheless, firms will continue to shift from face to face assessments in selection to deploy a variety of on line applications to different degrees of success.

But perhaps even more of a challenge is how to bring new employees on board. Always a neglected activity, organisations are revisiting their processes for induction to ensure new recruits get up to speed quickly and become key contributors within their teams¹³.

The digital revolution has introduced a raft of new techniques and methods, for which there exist little or no data on their predictive properties with job performance.

Stephen A. Woods

On line induction at best replaces that combination of tedious class room briefings, watching dull corporate videos and reading windy employee handbooks.

The key elements of a thoughtful induction process:

- introductions to colleagues, in particular team members
- a briefing from someone in the senior management team and/or mentor
- the setting of expectations around cultural values and behavioural standards
- a review of key policies and the nuts and bolts issues of work equipment, technology and processes, etc.

won't go away. Instead the delivery will be very different.

Progressive firms are already introducing imaginative alternatives to conventional induction to deploy virtual on-boarding and provide a more personalised, interactive and engaging experience for new employees. They are also making more use of buddy systems to ensure joiners feel part of a social community.

Felix Hebblethwaite, Head of Global Recruitment at law firm Linklaters, recommends even more attention to every detail of induction; *“we’re covering everything we normally would do, but if anything we’re taking it one step further.”*

As highlighted, there is no genuine replacement for the sheer physicality of social interaction to meet colleagues face to face and forge relationships of trust and respect.

As and when we emerge from the pandemic, innovative firms will implement hybrid processes to combine the best of on-line technology with face time in a physical work-space (office, hubs, etc.)

Blended lives to rethink learning and development

Blended learning has been the buzz-word of the last decade. The proposition has been that that we combine the best of two worlds: the dynamic learning from face to face interactions in any variation of the “class room”, workshops, breakfast briefings, etc. and the cost effective functionality of on line learning management systems. However as Donald Clark remarks, *“much blended learning was in fact blended teaching”*¹⁴ and the simple migration of traditional class-room methods to an on line interface.

Historically, at least two themes have underpinned learning management systems:

1. Those **designed for compliance and an audited check-in of procedural knowledge** to meet regulatory

commitments. This is “learning” as ticking the boxes to indicate sufficient employee understanding of the parameters of role requirements to give employees the go-ahead to provide financial advice, install critical equipment, meet the guidelines of professional bodies, and so on¹⁵.

2. The **provision of “stuff”**. Initially, LMSs were little more than an on line course catalogue for employees to access and book event attendance. Then they moved to the design of modules of content for users to work through, pre and post a structured programme.

The problem wasn't the “stuff - although some content seemed a throw back to the theories and concepts of the 1950s. Much content was well-informed, evidence-based and insightful.

The issue for many systems was the problem of the end user navigating to the “stuff” that was relevant to them, within their specific context and at the right time in their personal development. There was also the challenge of user engagement to translate

learning into practical outcomes, specifically in behavioural change and performance improvement.

Donald Clark again makes the point that blended learning is pretty much over. The pandemic has accelerated an existing trend to reposition on line learning within an organisation's overall performance and career development strategy and priorities.

He suggests we shift our thinking to “blended lives”¹⁶ and how we incorporate personal development not just within our working lives, but across any number of other domains - healthcare, entertainment, travel, financial planning, etc.

Within the on line learning market and the proliferation of vendor offerings, we can anticipate more innovation - the use of AI in content curation, virtual reality to engage the user in simulations (learning by doing rather than reading) and also the deployment of social collaboration platforms¹⁷.

The coronavirus is becoming a disruptive force in the learning and development market, not least for the “all singing all dancing systems” of big HR Tech that claimed a seamless integration of recruitment, learning management, performance management, talent and succession management.

Arguably, these systems were not delivering in a pre-Covid-19 world¹⁸. They are now increasingly too slow and expensive to customise to a different set of business challenges, a new organisational pattern, and employees need for greater flexibility in what and how they learn.

This pandemic has really revealed that we're all human beings. No one is immune. Leaders who have excelled are the ones who have connected to that human aspect.

Rob Cross, Muru Leadership

A summary of key coronavirus challenges

As we make the transition through and out of the pandemic, working life for many firms will not simply be a change in the practicalities of office layout or more robust hygiene protocols. For most medium to large sized organisations there will be a fundamental shift in how employees think about work in the context of their overall life priorities.

For many employees the pandemic has helped rethink the work they do, and when and where they do it. And for a significant number, remote working (or a hybrid of home and office) has much appeal. This creates a new dynamic for individuals:

- the type and timing of their workloads
- the emotional connection with their employers
- their interactions with team colleagues and their manager
- how relationships with customers and suppliers are managed
- how employees learn and develop and progress their careers

There is a host of technical solutions to facilitate home or hub working, remote project management and team collaboration. But these won't be the complete answer to the "Different Normal".

For the firms that will succeed and thrive, there will be a change in leadership priorities and styles.

How well positioned are leaders to adapt and take advantage of a different operating model?

A leadership profile from an analysis of 360° feedback data

Thrive¹⁹ is one of Envisia Learning's off the shelf feedback applications for senior leaders. Based on the four Cs of sustainable leadership impact - Credibility, Capability, Character and Career Management²⁰ - it also reviews the Context in which leaders operate to explore what is helping or hindering effectiveness.

In addition Thrive measures levels of personal engagement and the extent to which leaders feel a sense of purpose, achievement and purpose within their roles.

The data set comprises feedback from individual leaders (their own evaluations as well as that from their line managers, peers, team members and stakeholders) operating across a range of sectors and firm types²¹.

- **which contextual factors are helping or hindering leadership effectiveness?**
- **which consistent strengths emerge?**
- **which leadership gaps are most evident?**
- **what are the greatest risks for leaders?**
- **how engaged are leaders?**

The contextual factors helping or hindering leadership effectiveness

This reflects the spectrum of support to challenge within the working environment to pinpoint what is helping or hindering leaders to perform. Seven dimensions were evaluated:

strategy, structure, culture, senior management, systems, communication processes, and the maturity and motivation of their own teams

The logic is that if leaders want to optimise their organisational impact, attention to their own personal and professional development - important though it is - will be insufficient. Their role is to understand and shape the context in which they lead to make it easier (not more difficult) for them as individuals and their colleagues to perform.

90% of thinking ignores context. Which is why most thinking doesn't work.

Dave Trott

A reliance on personal heroics - the typical narrative underpinning most profiles of business leaders - to overcome an adverse operating environment is not a sustainable position for long-term organisational success.

From our data, the most supportive factors were:

Senior management in the organisation and the capability of their own teams.

As Mandy Rice-Davies²² famously said: *"They would say that, wouldn't they."*

After all participants in this exercise were often part of the senior management team. And as individual leaders surely they must think they are leading their own teams effectively.

An alternative narrative is that we are looking at a group which feels fairly confident about its own leadership impact as well as the effectiveness of the teams it manages.

As we review the specific feedback patterns from colleagues, we will see this is justified in many cases, but not in others.

The most challenging factors were:

Organisational systems

Only 12% of leaders reported highly responsive organisational processes based on up-to-date technology. And almost one half of the group saw their systems as a major barrier to their leadership performance.

Communication processes were the next greatest challenge. 60% of leaders were ambivalent about the timely flow of information up, down and across their organisations. Only 9% saw communication as a positive enabler of effectiveness.

Structure was the third most frequently mentioned challenge. 59% of the group reported ambivalence about their organisations' structures and how they coordinate overall effort within a clear mapping of roles and responsibilities. Only 11% indicated that current organisational structures were facilitating high levels of performance.

There is a sense of a leadership group operating within the constraints of:

- slow and unresponsive organisational systems and processes
- sluggish communication which fails to provide colleagues with the right level of detail when they need it
- confusing structures with a lack of clarity over accountabilities and responsibilities

To jump ahead of the story, these barriers to effectiveness can only be exacerbated in the post Covid-19 era.

Collaboration based on timely communication, and flexibility to operate at speed have always been key strategic battle-grounds for business competitiveness. These factors will become increasingly important in determining which firms disappear, which just about manage to survive, and which go on to thrive and build market share and improved profitability.

Which consistent leadership strengths emerge?

In this evaluation of the leadership profile it is worth noting that different colleague groups (line managers, peers, team members and stakeholders) report different perceptions of effectiveness and impact.

Yes there are some consistent strengths and gaps across all groups, but there are also important variations.

For the most part, individual leaders are positive about their own levels of personal credibility, the repertoire of capabilities they can deploy, the character they display, and report proactivity in career management.

Notable strengths they report about themselves are:

- responsive decision making
- tackling the practicalities of what needs to be done
- supporting the coaching and career development of their teams
- building high levels of respect with peers and stakeholders by delivering on commitments
- establishing fairness and equity throughout the work area
- treating others with respect and consideration
- persevering with the difficult and frustrating tasks

This group also see itself as especially effective in **managing upwards** to meet the expectations of line managers; in this data-set, typically executive board members.

How much consistency is there between these self reported strengths and the perceptions of different colleagues? Reasonable is the overall summary, but with a few differences of perspective.

Their line managers and peers are less convinced that this leadership group does in fact cut to the chase to get things done. There is no doubt that these leaders are energetic and busy. But key colleagues are less interested in the inputs of leadership than in the business outputs. And there is a **question mark about the extent to which leadership activity is translated into organisational outcomes.**

Team members are more ambivalent about the extent to which coaching and career development is in fact provided by their leaders. This is a misalignment of expectations. **Team members are looking for greater support in this area than their leaders think they are delivering.**

Overall, key strengths are evident: a profile of a group fairly confident in its own leadership skin, largely seen as operating with integrity and drawing on a range of key skills to “get things done.”

Which leadership gaps are most evident?

Although this group is generally upbeat about its personal effectiveness and organisational impact, it is more cautious in some specific areas:

- generating **creative** proposals to rethink how to position for the future and create a compelling "story" of what needs to be done to build and sustain success - a view also shared by line managers
- making the optimum use of everyone's **time** through effective scheduling and coordination - also highlighted by team members
- developing imaginative ways to **communicate** key messages up, down and across the organisation - reinforced by all colleague perceptions
- managing proactively the relationships with other work areas to identify opportunities for **collaboration** - again a view shared by colleagues
- putting personal feelings to one side to keep composure in the face of any unreasonable criticism and hostility
- managing the **politics of organisational life** constructively to advance their agenda
- establishing radical goals to rethink how we operate and raise everyone's **expectations of what can be achieved**
- facilitating **high energy briefings and events** which involve everyone fully and stimulate creative thinking - a perception echoed by line managers and peers
- not seen as an issue by individual leaders themselves, team members also question the willingness to tackle any issues of **under-performance**

In summary, leadership gaps reflect a lack of proactivity to optimise long-term impact and some of the nuts and bolts of effective management are absent.

What are the greatest risks for leaders?

Here we analysed the most frequently reported contra-indicators, those “red flags” of leadership life with the potential to constrain effectiveness.

The thinking behind this concept emerged from an observation by Marshall Goldsmith: *“We spend a lot of time with leaders telling them what to do, but we don’t tell them what to stop.”*

Or as Charlie Munger puts it: *“It is remarkable how much long-term advantage people like us have gotten by trying to be consistently not stupid, instead of trying to be very intelligent.”*

The principle for leaders is know what to stop before you start developing new skills.

Contra-indicators identify the “stops”. The pattern from our data-set in highest ranking frequency is as follows:

Risk #1: “Heads-down leadership”: a short-term horizon to focus on today’s problems rather than tomorrow’s opportunities.

Trouble-shooting comes with the territory. Any leader who can’t fire-fight will be fired quickly. But for a significant number of leaders the reluctance to think through long-term solutions means that short-term problems are never fixed and keep recurring. Over time, this becomes an employee sense of “here we go again” and a frustration that systemic failings are not addressed.

The “heads down” leaders, from our follow on conversations, fall into two categories. The first are those leaders who report they lack the time and space to think strategically about the future. Here the typical response was: *“If only.... I know I should. But I can’t.”*

The second group in fact find “fire-fighting” energising and enjoyable. These are the leaders who temperamentally relish the opportunity to tackle day to day problems and the positive feedback they receive from resolving the issues. The honest response here: *“Thinking is hard. Doing is much easier.”*

Risk #2: “Over-committed”: taking on too much and spreading efforts too thinly.

This highlights the challenge of doing many things with the risk that no one task is completed with the excellence to make a long-term impact. Here promises are made but these commitments are not kept.

For some leaders, paradoxically, it is their own personal effectiveness that is the problem. Individuals, whose talent and motivation allow them to get things down quickly, are rewarded with an additional work load. As one leader commented: *“In a pie-eating competition, the prize is more pie.”*

For others, the issue of over-commitment is more about prioritisation and the reluctance to say “no” to any number of new initiatives and projects. Here *“more becomes less”*.

Risk #3: “Expedient decision making”: the willingness to make quick decisions without exploring the full options.

There are decisions where speed of response is critical. The issues are relatively straightforward and the gains of speed outweigh the downsides of any misjudgement. But there are other decisions that need an informed analysis of the range of possibilities to enhance outcomes.

For this group, no decision is perceived as dithering and procrastination. This is short-term pragmatism to keep on top of the decision making process, and where satisficing for the short term out-trumps optimisation for the future.

Risk #4: “Drift”: allowing projects and initiatives to lose momentum

Without a focus on critical priorities, time and energies are deployed on too many different fronts and implementation is either not brought to a final conclusion or delayed.

And some projects should be abandoned. But a combination of vested political interests and organisational inertia allows obviously failing projects - “Zombie initiatives” - to continue and take up valuable organisational resource.

This also arises from a lack of organisational discipline in project management and execution. Here accountabilities are badly defined and there is a cultural acceptance that commitments will not be kept.

Risk #5: “A soft touch”: allowing others to take advantage of good nature

This finding runs counter to the much discussed frequency of sociopathic behaviour²³ within senior leadership. No doubt there are toxic leaders whose aggressive behaviour creates organisational dysfunction²⁴. Our analysis indicates a different and far more common pattern: leaders are reluctant to take on the “tough stuff” of organisational life.

This pattern seems related to another set of risks within our analysis: dealing with under performance and managing conflict. It would be odd if leaders enjoyed tackling poor performance or were delighted to confront conflict. Nonetheless, as a leader there are difficult challenges to overcome.

This leadership pattern avoids short-term discomfort but with longer-term damaging consequences for the organisation.

Risk #6: “Silo mind set”: focusing on the immediate business area and neglecting key interfaces with other work areas

The issues of silo working are well known²⁵ and the causes are complex. It is human nature to be more protective of immediate colleagues rather than those in a different work area. Organisational structures and incentive systems typically reinforce competition rather than collaboration. And cultural dynamics can encourage political gamesmanship.

A leadership mind-set that focuses on the immediate work area incorporates hazards:

- opportunities for cross functional collaboration are missed
- systemic problems throughout the organisation go unresolved
- the translation of creative ideas into the implementation of innovation is delayed
- leadership progression reinforces rigid thinking within the top team which is defensive about functional portfolios

Risk #7: “Complacency”: sticking to one’s own personal comfort zone rather than try something different

Trouble-shooting short term problems, juggling competing priorities and coordinating multiple initiatives does not provide a happy context for leaders to extend the range of their business or managerial capabilities.

In the “busyness”²⁶ of organisational life it is tempting to maintain existing skill sets and operate within established work patterns, This is leadership as safety first. Pushing into unfamiliar territory that requires a different leadership approach is uncomfortable.

Multiplied throughout the organisation and the risk is corporate complacency and a lethargy that is badly prepared to meet new and different organisational challenges.

Leadership strengths, gaps and risks

To some extent, leadership vices are the converse of leadership virtues. For example, a heads-down approach to make it happen today is valued by organisations. But it comes at the price of long-term strategic thinking about future options.

Cross functional collaboration would be good, but in a busy world in which incentive systems encourage a focus on immediate priorities within the leadership portfolio, this cooperation with other work areas is an ideal not a reality.

Agreeableness as a leader no doubt maintains positive interpersonal relationships. The cost of this virtue may be a reluctance to address the difficult demands of conflict.

In summary, leaders seem reasonably placed to respond to a crisis. This data-set of leaders indicates a group which is highly motivated to engage with short-term problems and ensure the organisational show is kept on the road.

There is also flexibility to improvise and keep implementation on track.

And, accepting the potential skew in our sample, this group operates with integrity to do the right thing in the right way for employees.

The potential risks facing this group:

- a **tunnel vision** that focuses on current challenges within the immediate work area, and neglects big picture thinking for the long-term
- failing to give sufficient recognition to the **personal and professional development of team members** - individually and collectively
- **accepting the current organisational constraints** of clunky processes, out-dated structures and sluggish communication to “make do” rather than “build better”

How engaged are leaders?:

For this population of leaders, engagement levels are high. Here we acknowledge that the data-set is largely based on feedback captured in 2018 and 2019 - before the pandemic crisis of early 2020. It may be that a data set drawn from March 2020 to the present would indicate a different profile of engagement.

Nonetheless, this leadership group reports high level of motivation. It reports a sense of purpose and pride about its achievements, and enjoys the challenge it faces.

The most positive theme in engagement was the satisfaction these leaders derive from the relationships they have with their work colleagues. Leadership is not an individual undertaking; it is a social enterprise. And leaders gain energy from the ongoing relationships they have with their peers and team members. Remote working for this group will impact on their motivation as well as that of their colleagues.

This engagement pattern is not unusual. From other organisational surveys we run, senior leaders tend to be more engaged than the majority of the work-force, particularly, front-line employees.

High engagement²⁷ levels are predictable when times are positive, and the organisation is on the front rather than the back foot. Less obvious is the extent to which leaders will maintain this level of purpose and motivation during a phase of adversity and uncertainty.

How will leaders manage business life during and post the pandemic?

We are seeing the emergence of any number of “NEW AND SHINY” models of leadership that generate lists with different competency buzzwords. This is based on the assumption of a very different organisational paradigm for a post Covid-19 world²⁸.

It is highly unlikely that leadership is about to undergo a radical transformation. Robert Half makes the point that effective leadership has always been about the resolution of competing tensions²⁹. The pandemic crisis has simply reminded us of the impact of paradox³⁰ within leadership life, albeit with a shift in operating emphasis.

Given the anticipated changes post Covid-19 in contrast to the pattern we identified in our research, how well positioned are leaders for a different future?

1. The art of juggling to manage ALL colleague expectations - up, down and across the organisation. Our data indicates that leaders direct more time and energy to managing upwards. This after all is how career progression within the conventional hierarchy has worked.

If collaboration is becoming a more prominent theme post the pandemic, leaders need to reprioritise to give more attention to the proactive management of peer relationships. And they will have to adapt their leadership style to help their teams adjust to new working patterns.

This shift for many leaders may be difficult.

2. Short-term tactics AND long-term strategy

Leaders - as they always have - need to balance short-term tactical issues with longer-term strategic renewal. We anticipate a heightened risk that leaders will misjudge this balance as the pandemic continues.

For a minority, the need for a strategic refocus will direct their attention away from the pressing tactical agenda they face. In this scenario, leaders grapple with the uncertainties of the future - for them personally as well as for their organisations - but the nuts and bolts of leadership are neglected.

Leaders caught up in debate with their peers to think through future options will spend insufficient time with their own teams, and fail to recognise the concerns and anxieties of their direct reports. This is leadership gone AWOL from today.

Alternatively, unable to think clearly about the future and their organisations' positioning within it, some leaders will seek refuge in doing more of the tactical stuff.

Understandably these leaders are concerned to keep their teams up-to-date with developments, keen to ensure that virtual meetings reflect a shifting agenda and different format, and to provide regular check-ins with each individual employee.

The analysis from our leadership profile indicates that leaders are more likely to get caught up in the short-term tactics of tackling this phase of the pandemic.

This is commendable - now. But the hazard is that this becomes displacement activity to avoid the tough thinking about how the team has to be configured for a potentially different organisational future. This is leadership AWOL for tomorrow.

Based on our leadership data-set, we predict that a significant number of leaders will find it difficult to shift from tactical to strategic mode.

3. Soft AND Technical skills

“Soft” of course is a misnomer with the suggestion that these skills are seen as lacking the hard edge of commercially minded business leadership.

It is the so-called soft skills that equip leaders to deal with the tough challenges of working life. Our profile indicates that leaders may avoid the encounters of, for example, an under-performing employee or the negotiation of conflict with an awkward and disruptive peer.

Yes, leaders do need to raise their game in building trust with colleagues. Appointing a Chief Empathy Officer is no solution to the current challenge. This is about compassion to connect to colleagues during times of uncertainty and change. This is empathy as the willingness to avoid generalising from our own experiences and preferences to accept that our co-workers may have a very different set of experiences and preferences.

For some colleagues working from home opens up the opportunity to eliminate the grind of the daily commute, to avoid office distractions, and focus time and energy productively. For others, working from home is taking its toll. When a day of full on-line working creates cognitive over-load, when social interaction is missing, work-life boundaries are blurred, physical and mental health is vulnerable.

But the importance of soft skills can be overplayed. A reliance on interpersonal versatility and emotional intelligence - without in-depth technical understanding and expertise is problematic³¹

Technical skill sets are shifting, particularly as the move to digitalisation and automation accelerates and organisations grapple with any number of new technologies.

Leaders who are not prepared to step outside their comfort zone to adapt to a range of different project management methodologies, tools for virtual collaboration, and draw on more imaginative ways of communicating with a remote workforce will find “soft” skills insufficient to meet the challenges they face.

4. Transparent communication AND the acceptance of uncertainty

Employees value openness of message particularly during times of uncertainty, provided it gives an authentic, clear and consistent message. The role of the leader is to signal purpose and direction to help prioritise and coordinate employee effort around well-defined goals and changing work patterns.

This kind of clarity is difficult given the combination of the fluctuating incidence of the coronavirus and the starts, stops and U-turns of government guidance on social interaction, public transport and office working.

Leadership that is authentic recognises this uncertainty.

This requires openness and honesty to provide regular updates about the fluidity of events, and acknowledge that each employee might face different challenges, given a range of measures for working from home, child care as well as any other arrangements to attend to elderly relatives.

This type of leadership provides psychological safety for each individual employee to express and discuss their personal concerns.

Despite the stress, this is not the time for executives to retreat into their offices.

Manfred Kets De Vries

5. Performance as inputs AND outputs

Long before the pandemic crisis, conventional performance appraisal was in urgent need of repair if not complete replacement. But there was ambivalence about how future performance management needs to evolve³².

Covid-19 will accelerate this rethink about performance management and how organisations implement processes for objective setting, feedback and reviews.

Over the last decade the arrival of performance and productivity tracking tools has been a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, when they focus on outcomes of organisational value, metrics provide real-time insights into individual and team impact. This helps evaluate speed of progress to create a feedback loop that adapts to changing circumstances.

Alternatively, tracking software can reinforce the activity of busyness. Here the presenteeism of being in the office is replaced by PC presence, number of key strokes, etc.

Tracking software, badly designed and implemented, will also erode levels of organisational trust³³.

It is difficult for managers to do the performance observations they would normally do in the office.

**Andy Goulding, CEO,
OneSavingsBank**

The pandemic throws up some wicked problems.

If half of a leader's team goes back to office working, with the other half working from home, how does the leader maintain equity and fairness in the allocation of work loads, monitoring work progress and evaluating the contribution of each individual team member? How does the leader ensure that the entire team is engaged in celebrating its success, as well as learning from any shortcomings and failings?

Progressive leaders will apply more rigour in working through the dynamics of performance to identify which specific metrics link which inputs to what outputs. We can also expect leaders to allow more flexibility of inputs but direct more attention to meaningful outputs, e.g. service responsiveness, quality, innovation.

We can also anticipate an accelerated shift towards 360° feedback methodologies in performance reviews and development planning.

The reliance of the line manager as the all-seeing, all-knowing judge of contribution and impact has always been an issue in performance reviews. Post Covid-19 we can expect to see greater usage of peer and team member perceptions of effectiveness.

And there will also be a shift in 360° feedback design to place more emphasis on quality of outcomes rather than built as a check-list of competency inputs³⁴.

Given the profile from our research we anticipate a mix of leadership responses.

1. A very difficult transition

Some leaders (our estimate - 30%) will find it hard to make the shift to a very different organisational rhythm and work pattern. Individuals, for example, who relied on the physicality of their personal presence to dominate conversations and meetings will now find their power undermined. Those individuals who relied on upwards management for their career development now look increasingly vulnerable.

2. Taking time to get up to speed

Another 50% will make the transition but will need organisational support as they work though how they manage a remote team, shift their thinking about performance inputs and outcomes, empathise with team members and their concerns and concerns, and find ways of optimising the mix of different technology tools for communication and collaboration.

3. Thriving for the future

There will be another leadership group (20%) who will positively flourish in this new working environment. These will be the leaders who are liberated by a working environment in which presenteeism and politics are minimised. This is the group who engage proactively with different technologies, utilise their interpersonal adaptability and sensitivity to connect to their team against an imaginative agenda of future business opportunities.

Conclusions

1. Winners and Losers

For some organisations life post Covid-19 will largely continue “as is”.

For the “butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker” - those small to medium sized enterprises with a physical connection to their products and services - working life will follow a similar pattern to that pre Covid-19.

Of course, these firms will keep finding ways to innovate to serve their customers better and more cost-effectively. But while we await further advances in robotics, for firms in the trade business (e.g. builders, plumbers, electricians) and those providing highly personalised services (e.g. care workers, hair dressers, physiotherapists) it is likely to be a case of “carry on as you were.”

For other organisations, life post Covid-19 will be a difficult experience. Unable or unwilling to identify a fundamental shift and embark on a refresh of strategy, structure, culture and the operating model, their response will be *“back to the office and pick up where we were”*.

In this scenario, leaders will find themselves disorientated by the “Different Normal” and fall back on the skill sets and styles that served them well in the past.

But we are already seeing signs that some organisations are rethinking the business model. In higher education for example, pioneering universities are putting in place sweeping changes to overhaul the long overdue delivery of the educational experience³⁵.

2. Speed and Agility

Some organisations have learnt much from the lockdown(s) and how they have responded to what is now described in the cliché as “*exponential levels of unprecedented change*”.

Pre Covid-19, agility was rhetoric. Agility was a distant hope constrained by complex structures, cumbersome systems and out-dated technology, and not least a leadership mind-set that assumed inflexible and slow was the way it was.

Progressive leaders have always found ways to circumvent the busy bureaucracy within their immediate work areas. But for many leaders, there was an acceptance that ideas and initiatives would be delayed by any combination of:

- sluggish decision making processes, particularly in Procurement and I.T
- a lack of joined up thinking across different business areas
- political in-fighting at senior levels
- unwieldy measures to mitigate risk and enforce compliance

One of the few upsides of the pandemic is that it introduced a new discipline within implementation processes. Some (but by no means all) organisations faced with the need to respond to a very different working life found that initiatives they had previously assumed would take years, in fact could be executed within months - if not weeks.

The pandemic focused leadership minds on what can be done quickly with sufficient commitment and energy. It may be that this speed in transforming working arrangements owes much to the adrenaline rush of an emergency and is not sustainable in future.

No doubt, some organisations will see energy levels fall and they will revert to old ways of getting things done. Many other firms now see this episode as an informative learning experience that challenged long-standing assumptions about organisational

hierarchies, decision making processes and accountabilities within project management methodology.

The demise of bureaucracy has long been predicted. “*The end of bureaucracy is nigh*” was heralded by Gifford Pinchot over 30 years ago. But its funeral keeps being cancelled.

However, we do anticipate increasing levels of push back from leaders to question cumbersome and time-consuming activity best suited for risk avoidance within the status quo, and a barrier to speed of responsiveness in a changing world.

Pre-Covid surveys showed many employees were already disengaged from their work. The dysfunction of some modern workplaces was already plain. This crisis has sent a loud error message to business leaders - an alert that change is overdue.

Andrew Hill

3. Leadership as organisational development

Any number of H.R. processes - from recruitment and selection through to Board level succession - are embarking on a fundamental rethink to reposition practice. Here we look at how organisations will respond to a new set of leadership challenges.

Our research indicates that leadership development activity without integration within a broader enterprise in organisational development will be largely ineffective. This is not to suggest that the new wave of on line leadership programmes and a shift in coaching priorities is misguided. Far from it.

But the impact of initiatives for personal and professional development will be limited without attention to context and changes to the organisation's operating model, in particular the interplay of strategy, structure and culture.

Strategic alignment of course is presented as the goal; more often observed in PowerPoint decks than within the reality of organisational life. And full strategic integration is not without its risks³⁶.

But we should expect more joined up thinking particularly between the HR function and the business as organisations work through the implications of working life post Covid-19³⁷.

My worry is that in future months people will gradually just go back to the norm. We absolutely need to make sure that doesn't happen, because it's a massive opportunity.

Valerie Hughes-D'Aeth

In summary the pandemic has forced a debate, some agenda items reflecting past dissatisfaction with what organisations did and how they did it. But it has also opened up a new discussion about how businesses can evolve, adapt and grow within a different set of circumstances.

The pandemic has come at a massive price. The impact on individual employees, their families and communities, and on the wider economy has been devastating. And it is difficult to think of too many "silver linings" in the cloud of the current pandemic crisis.

But if there is one, it is the opportunity for organisations - at every level from government agencies and multi-national corporates and small to medium size enterprises - to rethink what they do and how they do it.

The Chinese proverb: "*Within every crisis, there is opportunity*" has achieved the status of corporate cliché. For many organisation the disruption of the pandemic has opened up new opportunities and an urgency to seize them.

Specifically this is the call for bold leadership³⁸ - leaders with the courage to shift their own operating style, imagination to think differently about business possibilities, and authenticity to connect meaningfully with their colleagues in navigating from the present to the future.

References

1. For example, David Goodhart's "Head Hand Heart" argues that over the past half century the rewards for "head" work have risen dramatically, while work in "hand" and "heart" jobs have declined. The pandemic has questioned the experts doing the "head" work and reminded society of the value of "hand" and "heart" work.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/sep/09/head-hand-heart-by-david-goodhart-review-does-getting-a-degree-matter-too-much>

2. Are the rich getting richer?

<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/the-pandemic-continues-the-rich-are-getting-richer-1965221>

3. Political and economic reform is outside the scope of this analysis. The point here is that the pandemic has highlighted a number of constraints to productive and innovative business activity.

"The economic crisis that is advancing towards us will not be solved by a drug or a vaccine. Nothing less than national revival is needed. Approaching COVID-19 as a syndemic will invite a larger vision, one encompassing education, employment, housing, food, and environment. Viewing COVID-19 only as a pandemic excludes such a broader but necessary prospectus."

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)32000-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32000-6/fulltext)

4. Sunday Times, 20th September

5. 28 Strategic conversations;

https://amazure.envisialearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/28-Strategic-Conversations_EN.pdf

Here the debate can be summarised as a risk assessment. Should we keep "battening down the hatches" as we progress from 2020 to 2021? Or should we start planning for growth for 2022?

6. Thought leaders on this topic are remarkably thoughtless in their analysis, generalising from a few high profile tech firms or from a relatively small proportion of the work demographic, mainly knowledge workers. Sweeping generalisations that apply to all firms (small to large) and every sector have little practical value. The focus instead should be identifying the specific challenges facing each firm.

7. Multiple hybrid models for the work-force of the future;

<https://www.bcg.com/publications/2020/remote-work-works-so-where-do-we-go-from-here>

<http://thecontextofthings.com/2020/07/20/the-work-from-home-hybrid-model-ye-see>

8. A 2014 study based on call centre employees saw productive gains of 13%.

<https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/want-productive-employees-let-some-of-them-work-from-home.html>

Looking at the detail, this improvement was only observed for employees without children, with access to a work space that wasn't their bedroom, and had high quality broadband.

9. "What concerns me is not short-term productivity but the threat to longer-term creative and innovative capacity."

Coronavirus has transformed work but risks snuffing out a creative spark;

<https://www.ft.com/content/788b8ab8-946a-11ea-899a-f62a20d54625>

And in one playback of the past, Mike Andrews at the National Bureau of Economic Research found that the number of patent applications fell significantly after Prohibition in the US in the 1920s. When scientists were no longer able to meet informally in bars, innovation levels dropped.

10. <https://www.aptimore.com/article/how-to-improve-employee-engagement-in-virtual-meetings/>

11. A recent Willis Towers Watson survey found 42% of firms have made, or are planning to make, significant changes to their benefit programmes as a result of Covid-19. "When employees begin returning to work after lockdown they are likely to have become more financially insecure, so it makes sense to invest in employee financial education to help them save and spend their money more effectively."

<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/long-reads/articles/what-will-reward-look-like-post-covid>

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12. “Our review of the literature highlights significant shortcomings in the scientific evidence base in IWO psychology surrounding the effectiveness of digital selection procedures.”

Personnel selection in the digital age: a review of validity and applicant reactions, and future research challenges; European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 2020, vol. 29

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2019.1681401>

13. On dispersed and virtual teams;

<https://www.aptimore.com/landingpage/how-to-get-the-best-out-of-your-virtual-teams/>

<https://www.aptimore.com/article/inclusion-managing-in-groups-out-groups-in-dispersed-teams/>

14.

http://donaldclarkplanb.blogspot.com/2008/01/blended-baloney_06.html

15. This of course is a cost effective solution – mainly.

But as Donald Clark points out: *“Look at all the compliance training that was done. Then in 2008 the world’s financial systems nearly collapsed. And the compliance learning had no effect whatsoever. And what did we do after? We increased regulation with more compliance training. Why do we think that would work? It’s just doubling down on the wrong way of doing things.”*

The impact of these on line systems in, for example, mandatory processes for greater diversity and inclusion is also questionable. Largely viewed as the route to obtain professional indemnity insurance, there is no evidence of their efficacy, with the suggestion these on line courses might reinforce the problem. .

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/diversity-training-doesnt-work-that-well-and-may-even-reinforce-stereotypes-2020-08-06>

16.

<http://donaldclarkplanb.blogspot.com/2020/06/everyone-wants-blended-learning-few.html>

<http://donaldclarkplanb.blogspot.com/2020/09/ifes-blend-10-ways-covid-has-blended.html>

17. A key driver in the design and delivery of conventional face to face programmes was the social benefit from the interaction with peers. For emerging and current leaders, the learning experience was more about networking to tap into others’ practical experiences and less about any conceptual knowledge. However there will always be a need for on demand access to the kind of knowledge that helps leaders navigate through the specific challenges they encounter - objective setting, resolving team conflict, etc.

More on the acceleration of leadership

https://amazure.envisialearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Acceleration-LeadershipDevelopment_EN.pdf

18. “Despite all the innovation, excitement, and growth in this market, HR Technology is harder to implement than ever.”

<https://joshbersin.com/2019/11/hr-technology-the-dirty-little-secret/>

Anecdotally, in the last 12 months, Envisia Learning have worked with several organisations to help implement talent review and succession processes. In every instance, the client had access to one of the Big HR Tech systems. In each case, they were unable to draw on the functionality they needed. Standard office software was the responsive and cost effective option

19. How leaders thrive

https://amazure.envisialearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/For-Leaders-Who-Want-To-Thrive_EN.pdf

20. A rethink of leadership impact

https://amazure.envisialearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RethinkingLeadershipRealities_EN.pdf

21. Trend analysis is useful in spotting general themes within a leadership population. But of course each individual leader is different, not only in the kinds of skills and styles they deploy but within the circumstances in which they operate and the specific challenges they face.

We also accept that our analysis is likely to be positively skewed, given that it tends to be the more progressive firms and open-minded individuals who participate in this kind of feedback exercise.

References

22. Mandy Rice-Davies during the 1960s Profumo scandal

23. Over-estimating sociopathic leadership;
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackmccullough/2019/12/09/the-psychopathic-ceo/>

24. A simple organisational hierarchy;
<https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2009/10/07/the-gervais-principle-or-the-office-according-to-the-office/>

25. The Silo Effect. “The word “silo” does not just refer to a physical structure or organization. It can also be a state of mind. Silos exist in structures. But they exist in our minds and social groups too.”
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/17/the-silo-effect-why-putting-everything-in-its-place-isnt-such-a-bright-idea-gillian-tett-review>

26. Ted Bauer on “busyness”
<http://thecontextofthings.com/2019/03/07/the-paradox-of-the-modern-age-is-within-busyness/>

27. Some of the research on engagement indicates that most of the “causal” effect of engagement depends largely on the consequences of organisational success.
www.hfi.com/articles/employee-engagement-paradox-2

It is more likely there is a complex dynamic of cause and consequence in which success drives up engagement levels which in turn lead to further success.

28. This consulting wheeze relies largely on the Jingle-Jangle factor
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2014/12/19/jingle-jangle-fallacies-for-non-cognitive-factors/>
Here the simple is complicated through re-labelling established constructs to announce the arrival of a new terminology for product repositioning.

29. <https://www.roberthalf.co.uk/advice/people-management/balancing-tensions-post-pandemic-leadership-challenges>

30. Paradox in leadership;
<http://integralleadershippreview.com/15719-learning-to-embrace-the-paradox-of-leadership/>

31.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241642098_A_Theory_of_Expert_Leadership

32. Some organisations who abandoned with great publicity the annual formal rating in favour of regular performance conversational catch ups soon found themselves embarking on alternative (and more secretive) appraisals for talent reviews.

“The fact remained, the majority of the organizations, who got rid of the ‘bell-curve’ of the performance appraisal systems, retained their ‘grading’ and ‘ratings’ still. The long-drawn-out sketch remained hazy and ratings were done subjectively and discreetly.”
<https://sightsinplus.com/practices/performance/should-we-kill-the-performance-review-system-how-to-replace/>

33. There has been a massive uptake of employee monitoring tools. Some are the equivalent of punch in - punch out systems and transparent about their purpose. Others put in place safeguards to avoid security breaches. But several “operate entirely in the background without workers knowing what metrics are being collected about their daily activity.”

One firm - Sneek - offers technology that takes photos of workers through their laptop and uploads them for colleagues to see.
<https://hrtrendinstitute.com/2020/09/14/to-track-or-not-to-track-the-balancing-act-of-managing-employee-employer-transparency/>

“There’s not really any evidence that workers are more productive when they’re monitored,” But what we do know is that the sense of being in a panopticon can actually depress you, and make you less productive.” Claudia Pagliari
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/27/shirking-from-home-staff-feel-the-heat-as-bosses-ramp-up-remote-surveillance?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

References

34. A guiding principle in 360° feedback design has been the “who knows what?” factor. Not every category of colleague has full access to all aspects of leadership activity and outcomes. Some aspects of leadership are more or less evident depending on the dynamics of the working relationship up, down and across the organisation. This theme is becoming increasingly important; the thoughtful construction of feedback tools targets different questionnaire variations at different colleagues groups.

https://amazure.envisialearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/FromFeedbackTo-Impact_EN.pdf

35. For example, a shift in higher education; <http://donaldclarkplanb.blogspot.com/2019/11/dont-lecture-me.html>

36. The fragility of strategic alignment; <https://amazure.envisialearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TalentManagementAsSnakesAndLadders-AntiFragileInAWorldOfUncertainty.pdf>

37. Paul Barrett makes the point that this is a genuine cross-roads moment for H.R. It can continue down the route of transactional functionality. Or it can “*assume the mantle, responsibility, and focus of substantive C-suite input.*”

38. Bold leadership <https://www.ft.com/content/9070fec3-b7dd-4aea-adc2-41b1c4d7c70a>

If any of the ideas in this article resonated with the challenges facing your organisation, and are interested in our applications within assessment, learning and development, please contact:

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