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For the information of Octara friends I have been away in Dubai since the last few weeks on account of a surgical procedure to implement an ICD Heart Pace Maker which was successfully carried out on the 24th of March 2020. The pace maker was recommended by my cardiologist to regulate the rhythm of the heart caused by arrhythmia. The abnormality was determined during a six monthly stress tolerance test in January. I am now recuperating in Dubai where I am riding out both the COVID-19 lock-in and post-surgery recovery by reading **Albert Camus's 'The Plague'**, a vivid read of a raging epidemic of bubonic plague taking place in an Algerian port. The story symbolically suggests other spiritual and political plagues.

My message from Dubai for you all - "I am convalescing and making reading past classics essential during these Corona crises and recommend the same to you readers."

Dear Reader

Perseverance Commands Success

The pendulum had to swing to the other extreme sometime, and with all this frenzied hustle and bustle in the global village that the past few decades have witnessed, this Stay-At-Home Order was inevitable. An enduring management maxim has it that if we don't regulate ourselves we get externally regulated. Enter COVID-19.

Not to worry, for this too shall pass by the Grace and Mercy of the Almighty, Inshallah. But be concerned, very concerned, and find solace in your own company for a while, and may Allah keep us all in good health and in His protection, ameen.

This issue we open with our new Octara Associate **Ayesha Tariq Sethi** and her very profound observations on reengineering mindsets, and follow it up with an in-depth piece on **Ayesha Tariq**, Product Specialist Training at Octara, who was declared Most Productive Colleague during the month of February 2020. Both Ayesha Tariqs represent the new dynamic generation of women-in-management poised to lead in the post-COVID-19 world.

Our illustrious overseas associate **Dr. Tommy Weir** has contributed three pieces on Remote Managing, The Remote Worker and The Coronavirus Fear. Bringing up the back-of-the-book is **Asma Sethi** who assesses the Readiness of Pakistan's Leaders to Embrace the 'Digital'.

On a visit to her LinkedIn profile two quotes Ayesha Tariq had posted there caught my attention. The first by Henry Kissinger said "**A diamond is a chunk of coal that did well under pressure.**" The second, by Napoleon Hill, said that "**Opportunity often comes disguised in the form of misfortune or temporary defeat.**" Both are very valid comments in this day and age of COVID-19.

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REENGINEERING MINDSETS

AYESHA T. SETHI
- Advancing Reinvention
Agility to Counter VUCA
Disruptions

In its search for tutors who can bring the Pakistani corporate sector up to scratch, OCTARA has struck upon a goldmine!

A person of considerable intellect and experience notwithstanding her young years, Ayesha Tariq Sethi was scheduled to host an OCTARA Workshop on the very timely subject of "Develop problem-solving, creative thinking & innovation mindset." But COVID-19 got in the way of not just the OCTARA Workshop, but a great deal more across the world, posing the kind of disruption that numbed the mind, momentarily at least, before the world jumped to action stations the best way it could.

While we lament the loss of face-to-face energizing interaction, a loss that we will recoup, Inshallah, in the not too distant future, we are here now with a comprehensive introduction to Ayesha Tariq Sethi and her very valuable thoughts.

Targeted interventions

Ayesha Tariq Sethi has been actively engaged in learning and organizational development across different functions in the industry through strategic projects both locally and abroad since 2010. Driven by a strong ambition to create lasting value in organizational development, Ayesha founded Sethi Learning & Company in 2017 to generate focused impact in the industry across different business streams through targeted interventions.

Her work experience spans across areas of innovating solutions for supply chain digitalization (Li & Fung HQ, Istanbul), conducting internal audits of business functions, managing control group forums, planning and executing nation-wide management trainee drives, and engaging in lean-six sigma and risk management.

Scientific approaches to emotional and social intelligence

At present, Ayesha's personal learning focus is on pursuing scientific approaches to emotional and social intelligence that go beyond conventional understanding. Hence, in 2018, she actively led research teams in 14 organizations across pharma, textile, banking, and FMCGs in Karachi to understand why teamwork fails to understand the local dynamic.

She was also invited to speak on 'Why teams fail' at the University of Waterloo, Canada, 6th National Project Management Conference, Islamabad, and moderated both 'Diversity & Inclusion Conference 2019' and Ingram Micro's First Digital Summit in Pakistan. She has facilitated learning programs across a range of organizations over the past few years. Her article 'The scientific approach to corporate excellence' was featured on the cover of the Association of MBAs (AMBA) global business magazine's July edition.

Original thinking

"Creativity is a key driver of business strategy and problem solving," says Ayesha Sethi. "Our ability to process information, ideas, and experiences in unique ways to address business challenges determines how quickly an organization innovates to adapt to dynamic market conditions."

However, as we acquire more skills and knowledge in our field, we are more likely to become complacent and get stuck in conventional mental routines until repetition becomes the norm and we lose the natural brain muscles to innovate, she feels.

"It's important to keep the creative juices owing by internalizing definite strategies that fuel the mind to make new associations. Original thinking is key to business innovation and personal power."

Ayesha T. Sethi consented to field a series of questions that OCTARA posed on a number of issues of current concern to the world at large.

Q: Starting with the present, how do you interpret the massive disruptions being caused by the Corona virus?

"It seems sometimes that the earth has stopped spinning on its axis and human existence has come to a pause. The wind still blows, the sun still rises every morning and sets at dusk, but nothing is the same as before. Life as we knew it has almost 'paused' in its tracks.

In my opinion, the massive disruption was inevitable, and the earth was just on a ticking time bomb. Over the past few years, the many sweeping changes that reorganized societies on a global level, one of the key themes has been the need for more of everything without due balance and proportion. We consume more of our planet's resources than we ever did before, and most of our 'wants' have now become our needs.

Consumerism is the norm of the day. During this rat race, I believe that humans forgot the wisdom of our ancestors, their failings, and their victories. We forgot to take care of each other, our limited resources, and the importance of balance and moderation. Most importantly, we ignored the voices that warned us of a pandemic ahead, perhaps because investing in its preparation was not in the best economic interests."

Q: In your engagements with the Pakistani corporate sector what gaps do you identify that need to be plugged?

"These past few years have been marked by an enduring struggle to learn more about challenges that our local organizations face in the wake of emerging complexity, and shifting business frontiers. I have had insightful conversations with business leaders across sectors, industries, and organizational hierarchy to identify gaps before addressing them.

Culture of distrust

The common themes that emerged revolve around work ethic, silo thinking, trust, and drive to create value. Here's how I would like to put them together to show how they make sense as a whole.

When we are not internally driven to become better every single day at what we do and create value through supreme excellence, we are unlikely to have a sound work ethic. That's mostly when our bosses blame us for slacking off, missing deadlines, and not delivering up to the required expectations.

For someone to show up consistently day in and day out, and deliver on their commitments, a robust work ethic is a must. Failure to execute timely is also often the result of a deficient work ethic; when employees lack work ethic, their managers find it difficult to trust them to deliver without playing the role of a Micromanager or an Authoritative Supervisor. This is just one scenario.

Our socio-political environment constantly bombards us with stimuli in which our leaders, stakeholders, and others we look up to consistently fail to deliver on their commitments and not keep their word. This partially explains the culture of distrust that prevails in our organizations that inevitably leads to silo thinking and lack of enthusiasm to actively connect to solve problems."

Q: Your Octara Workshop titled "Develop Problem-Solving, Creative Thinking & Innovative Mindset" is the most topical today given the reality of climate change and global warming induced disruptions never experienced before like COVID-19. Is it perhaps too little too late? Are the nation's governance structures, and the people who man them, up to the job?

"It has been an eye opening realization since the past few days that the need for 'Creative Thinking, Problem Solving & Innovation Mindset' becomes real when it becomes too painful to ignore, but then it is often too late.

When our social and economic order is in order, we find ourselves questioning why we need to become more creative or develop out-of-the-box problem solving perspective. After the outbreak of COVID - 19, I observe that resilience levels are low, and people are struggling to reorganize their lifestyles given the constraints and limitation of resources.

I believe that now people have developed more openness to experience, and at the same time are more willing to accept ideas that they did not entertain before. In other words, the resistance to change is on an all-time low.

Mental agility is a product of an innovation mindset, and these times are truly teaching us what agility stands for. While it is a little late, we must

lose neither courage nor determination to find ways to make the most of what we currently have. It's true that uncertainty looms and it's easy to lose perspective, but if our ancestors found ways to evolve in the midst of wars, plagues, and the 'Dark Ages', we need to find courage, hope and determination in our hearts.

With every crisis comes an opportunity, and this is indeed an opportunity to charge our innovation mindset to find new ways of dealing with old problems when 'social distancing' has become the norm. Perhaps, these times call for reinventing business models for resilience.

“Given the dynamism inherent in the global economy, innovation mindset is a need and a not nice-to-have.”

The ability to think outside the box, anticipate risks, and solve emerging challenges, or in other words to be 'quick on your feet', is the reason why I train people on this topic. This mindset pays you off every single day, no matter what you do and at which career stage you are. The higher we climb the ladder, the more potent the trap of missing out one's blind spots.

At this point in time, our governance structures need to think beyond defined lines. That is only possible if they take sufficient time to take a step back, actively reflect, develop a macro perspective, and put it all together.”

Q: What is your current read, and do you have a favourite author?

“I'm currently reading Linchpin by Seth Godin and The Night Circus by Erin Morgenstern. Amongst many favorite authors, Maria Popova rekindles my creative spark every time I read her work.”

Q: Are you an outdoors type with an interest in sports? How do you de-stress and unwind?

“De-stressing is a part of my regular routine and I ensure that I carve out sufficient time on a daily basis for self-care. The mind-body-spirit connection is real to me, a part of my regular experience, and not just some theory in a self-help book.

I ensure that I do my fitness workout at least 4 days in a week, and that helps me to de-stress. I'm drawn to exploring different forms of movement for e.g. dance, yoga, EFT tapping, and QiQong that I sometimes sprinkle in my workout routine.

Doing a grounding exercise every morning for a few minutes charges my productivity and increases focused attention. I find touring cities on foot and walking for hours without a map or a destination, to be truly a rewarding experience. I feel that my travel is incomplete if I do not engage in some thrilling, adrenaline boosting activities.”

Q: How well do you manage your Work-Life balance?

“I try to maintain this balance by having certain self-care rituals and routines in place that keep the week intact. I make a deliberate effort to steal moments of timelessness in the midst of a busy workday and be open to the beauty that surrounds me every day. Sometimes, we just need to pause, breathe, and be present.”

Q: Please share with us your experiences living overseas in Turkey, Canada and the UK during the course of your academic pursuits.

“Living abroad, particularly in Turkey, has been a challenging experience that pushed my mental frontiers beyond my own bubble of truth. In Istanbul, I experienced a deep identity crisis, particularly in the classroom, where my sources of social identity for e.g. schooling, and work experience in esteemed local organizations were not relevant anymore because hardly anyone knew about them.

Turkish elites have their own social nuances and blending in when you are the only international student in a class of 54 executive Turkish MBAs, is a truly challenging experience. The Turkish people taught me the true meaning of having pride in one's language, culture, and national identity.

Being a foreigner

Working with other Europeans taught me the meaning of work ethic, detail orientation, and showing up on time for every commitment. Sharing an apartment with female students from Kosovo, Azerbaijan, Germany, and Turkey redefined my understanding on nationalism, home organization, personal space, and all other aspects of culture. For the first time, I felt what it feels like to be a foreigner, and to be treated as one.

The time I spent exploring Turkish organizations provided refreshing insights on how consumer experience journeys are mapped through in depth research on human psychology. For e.g. behind the creamy taste of chocolate Godiva is an entire research on the history of emotions. These are some of the many experiences from Istanbul that shifted my mental model and how I perceive business and society.

Experiencing trust

Experiences at UBC centered more on experiencing trust, and compassion at every corner of the street. From the ticketing office lady at the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre who gave me student discount without asking me to prove my 'student' status because she 'trusted' me, to the strangers who would offer help without asking for my name, I experienced a different side to humanity. At the same time, I was emotionally stirred to come back to Pakistan and use my learning and experience to add value in as many ways as I can.”

Q: Do you have a view on the Aurat March? And where do you stand on the demand for gender equality?

“My understanding of feminism is informed by my studies and teaching experience that revolved around Sociology and gender was one of the key themes. Anyone who has studied feminism understands the various strands of thought for e.g. Liberal, Radical, Marxist, and Post-Modernist feminists and the philosophy driving their demands.

While the manifesto of Aurat March is justified and a need for this society to truly realize its potential, I feel that there is room for further improvement in the way this movement is organized and executed. For real change to truly take place at the grassroots level, the prevailing mindsets need to be addressed with courage, wisdom, and care.”

Thank you Ayesha Tariq Sethi.

Interview conducted by **Adil Ahmad** (Correspondent, OCTARA.COM)



Ayesha Tariq Sethi is a Karachi based Corporate Learning Facilitator and a Graduate from The London School of Economics (LSE). She is successfully conducting trainings on EI, Social Intelligence, Digital Innovation and soft skills among the corporates of the region. She is also working with Octara for management trainings.

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Scanning The Horizon & Beyond

IN SEARCH OF GLOBAL GURUS



AYESHA TARIQ

Ayesha Tariq is Product Specialist Training at Octara and the 'chosen one' for Most Productive Colleague during the month of February 2020 meriting a full disclosure of herself, her work and future ambitions. Congratulations!

Presently Ayesha is responsible for Research on Global Experts & Product Development, and also provides support in Pre & Post-Workshop Advisory services. "My job is to bring experts and their programs to help corporates function more effectively, and introduce them to progressive Pakistani companies to help them come at par with multinationals," says Ayesha who sees herself in working in HR in 10 years time.

Ayesha graduated from the DHA Girls College, and went on to do an MBA in Marketing from the Bahria University followed by a 6 months diploma on Creative Advertising from the Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture. She joined Octara in August 2016, and says it was her first formal experience of working in the corporate sector, having worked as a freelance writer before that.

Ayesha Tariq fielded a series of questions that provided an insight into the kind of person she is and how she is faring in the age of Corona.

octara.com Outside of work what other interests do you have?

Ayesha: "Not very exotic, I have pretty basic interests like going for a walk, watching series on Netflix and reading books. Apart from that I find cooking to be very therapeutic in my leisure time."



“It may sound clichéd but I would like to see women living their life to the fullest. In my opinion this can only happen when they are treated as human first and women second, and be able to choose the life of their choice and make more prudent decision for themselves.”



Receiving Certificate of the Most Productive Employee of the month from Jamil Janjua, CEO Octara

Ayesha with Jason D'souza



Ayesha with Robert Mosley

A Happy moment with Team Octara



octara.com: As a female how supportive, or otherwise, has your work environment been?

Ayesha: “I haven’t been exposed to any work environment other than Octara. I’m quite confident in saying that Mentors in Octara enabled me to voice ideas no matter how petty they may have sounded. All my colleagues are very co-operative on both the individual level and team levels in making things happen.”

octara.com: How impacted are you by the socio-economic upheavals Pakistan is presently experiencing?

Ayesha: “To be honest if we talk about socio-economic upheavals in Pakistan, I would say the socio part did not really impact me as compare to the economic part. The inflation rate in the past few months has risen to insane levels impacting the overall economic conditions, and which also has directly affected my decision of studying abroad.”

octara.com: Please introduce us to your family.

Ayesha: “I come from a family of businessmen and entrepreneurs. Both my parents were born, raised and lived in Punjab until my father came to Karachi to expand his family business. My Mother is a house wife. We are 4 siblings in total with 3 sisters and one brother. I am the youngest amongst the four of us. My brother is working with my father and both my sisters are married and housewives.”

octara.com: What book are you reading presently, and who is your favorite author?

Ayesha: “Though I am inclined towards fiction but contrary to my natural inclination I am trying to read books from other genres. I have recently finished “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” by Stephen Covey. Personally I feel I haven’t read too many books so I can’t really say about having a favorite author, but I would like to mention few of my all-time favorite books which include Moth Smoke by Mohsin Hamid, Animal Farm by George Orwell, and the Alchemist by Paulo Coelho.”

octara.com: If there is one change you would like to see happen in your life then what would that be?

Ayesha: “It may sound clichéd but I would like to see women living their life to the fullest. In my opinion this can only happen when they are treated as human first and women second, and be able to choose the life of their choice and make more prudent decision for themselves.”

On a visit to her LinkedIn profile two quotes Ayesha Tariq had posted there caught my attention. The first by Henry Kissinger said “A diamond is a chunk of coal that did well under pressure.” The second, by Napoleon Hill, said that “Opportunity often comes disguised in the form of misfortune or temporary defeat.” Both are very valid comments in this day and age of COVID-19 ■

Interview conducted by **Adil Ahmad** (Correspondent, OCTARA.COM)

Remote Managing

Blog by Dr. Tommy Weir

Published on March 24, 2020



COVID-19 is rapidly rendering 'business as usual' a thing of the past and as offices empty out and corporate doors close shut, conversations are turning to the topic of remote working. But this is a mistake. What companies are experiencing today is not remote work, it's displaced work.

Remote work is by design and by choice. In contrast, without warning COVID-19 is now forcing companies and their employees to operate from living rooms, kitchens – even back yards if the weather permits. In their droves, workers have been displaced from the environments they are accustomed to. Some have gone happily, others less so, but almost all have gone unprepared.

As a result, employees are learning how to work at a distance for the first time, and what is starting to feel like an impromptu social experiment is testing morale. Not only are workers figuring out how to use new video conferencing tools, they are simultaneously becoming homeschool teachers to their kids, all the while being tempted by the rampant distractions that surround them.

Simply put, employees are not prepared for being sent home, and companies are not prepared for managing them.

Before COVID-19, front-line managers were already struggling, and now managers have the added burden of learning how to remote work themselves while trying their best to manage their displaced teams.

Opinions on remote working are plentiful, but what's missing in all the social media chatter is useful insight into how to manage a displaced workforce. Of course, the situation we find ourselves in is unprecedented, but decades spent understanding leadership and workforce dynamics have taught me a thing or two about how to manage, motive and achieve results, whatever the scenario and wherever it plays out.

First things first, if you weren't already, now is the time to be more human-centric. With your team displaced, operate an open-door policy — albeit a virtual one — and be sure to check-in with every employee. Just as you would (should) in an office environment, ask each team member how they're doing, feeling and if they need any help. Encourage colleagues to do the same too, and get them to share tips

on how others are managing.

This ties in with another very important point. After the novelty and excitement of not having a commute wear off, employees will start to feel isolated and even lonely. What's more, many of the best ideas and thoughts are generated spontaneously over coffee or in hallways. How is this happening now? To keep ideas flowing and spirits up, encourage your employees to talk to one another.

And it's not just co-workers who need to communicate. As a leader, it's vital that you make expectations clear and communicate them openly. Don't assume people know what to do or how to do it. Guide them to the right path, or else risk your people diverging off course. Where you look, they will go, and right now, your team needs your direction more than ever.

If it isn't already obvious, that direction should be forward. In the midst of crisis, leaders typically pause and wait for certainty, but as Warren Buffett once said, it is wise to be "fearful when others are greedy and greedy when others are fearful." To get a jump on the market you need to move fast, but to do that, you need to stay abreast of

what your employees are doing. This was challenging enough in the office, but it is infinitely more difficult now. This is the perfect time to use an AI system that can do it better than humans. Allow the machines to learn and the humans to lead.

Let's face it: it is not business as usual. A laptop and video conferencing from home don't replicate the world that office workers know. Protecting employment is critical, and the best way to do that is to help our employees succeed in an environment that is both familiar and alien at the very same time ■

Source:

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/remote-managing-tommy-weir/>



Dr. Tommy is the leading CEO Coach in the Emerging Markets. Sitting in their shadow, he typically advises CEOs on growth in the emerging markets. He is exclusively working with Octara for his workshops in Pakistan and was the Keynote Speaker of 17th MAP Convention 2015.

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Not only are workers figuring out how to use new video conferencing tools, they are simultaneously becoming homeschool teachers to their kids, all the while being tempted by the rampant distractions that surround them.

The Remote Worker

Blog by Dr. Tommy Weir

Published on March 16, 2020

It's official: coronavirus is now a pandemic. But, the question on my mind is, what will the impact be beyond the virus? What are the implications for life as we know it? For many, switching into crisis mode effectively means switching off – temporarily at least. The NBA has suspended its season indefinitely, schools are sending students online, airlines are grounding planes, and borders are being closed.

But while the eyes of the world focus on slowing the spread of infectious disease, a different phenomenon is growing stronger by the day – another pandemic, you might say – and it promises to change the shape of business and economies for good. I'm talking about the remote worker, a mutation in the workplace DNA for which there is no cure.

The phenomenon is not new; working from home has been a growing trend for a decade or more, but the spread of COVID-19 is pushing the idea to the next level. Soon, working remotely might not just be the preference or privilege of the few, it could be mandatory for the masses, with side effects lasting long after a vaccine for the virus is developed.

For some companies, the migration from office to armchair has already started. Google parent company, Alphabet, has asked the bulk of its workforce to stay home, and other tech giants including Facebook, Twitter and Amazon have taken similar steps. Meanwhile, JP Morgan



Chase is asking the same of its New York employees. For now, they are requests, but they could soon become orders.

As governments and corporations hammer away at their calculators, the economic impact of a forced employee exodus is yet unknown, but it is

something that, virus or no virus, 21st century business leaders should be planning for.

Do you know how you would handle a remote workforce? Come to that, do you know how you would handle life as a remote leader yourself?

Advice on how to work from home is starting to flood social media faster than you can say 'coronavirus': Dress as if you're going to work. In the absence of a boss, make your own schedule. Don't nap. Go out for walks. Meanwhile, some seasoned remote workers laugh at those who prefer the conventional approach to employment. To paraphrase one writer for The Guardian newspaper: Your preferred environment is an open plan hellscape rather than your own kitchen where you can sing to rap music out loud before taking an afternoon bubble bath? "Clearly you have Stockholm syndrome," she concludes.

Some suggestions about how to handle the 'remote' life are practical, some hilarious, but they all point to a shift of seismic proportions. The workplace is changing. The nine to five office job is dying a death in many cases, and COVID-19 might just be the nail in the coffin. Sure, sending people to work from home is a temporary measure. But what if it works? What if they don't come back?

The probability is high that the hiatus from the office commute will shape the way we work. Personally, I'm not a raving fan of remote work for the simple reason that freedom comes with a cost: personal growth and development. Building these is a primary responsibility of front-line managers, and if they're not great at it now, just think how much worse they would be from a distance.

Fortunately, we work in systems that contain huge volumes of underutilized data, and it is here that AI-powered leadership solutions can help. AI technologies don't care if your employees are on a flight, at a desk or laying on a sun lounger; by drawing on your existing company data, they can measure productivity, motivate teams and help grow your business, wherever you are.

The arrival of coronavirus is a wakeup call. If you have not considered how you and your company would operate in a remote world, then it's time to get started – and at the center of your considerations should be the productivity of your people ■

Source:

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/remote-worker-tommy-weir>



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The Coronavirus Fear

Blog by Dr. Tommy Weir

Published on March 10, 2020

Supermarket shelves are empty, masks and hand sanitizer are like gold dust, sports games are being lost and won behind closed doors and offices are growing eerily quiet as employees choose to work from home – or forego their wages altogether. So serious has the situation become, entire companies have even collapsed – just look at the UK's Flybe airline. Welcome to the world of COVID-19. It has a ring to it, right? In years to come, don't be surprised if Hollywood releases a movie by the same name. For now though, forget cinema screens, the crisis we are facing is real.

Cases of COVID-19 – or coronavirus as we incorrectly call it – have topped 100,000 world-wide with more than 3,400 deaths reported, though the number is likely much higher. The World Health Organization has stopped short of calling it a pandemic, but that hasn't stopped the spread of panic – and where human panic leads, the markets follow. More than \$5 trillion was wiped off global stocks in the week ending 28th February alone, marking the biggest plunge since the financial crisis, the first Fed rate cut in more than a decade, and the fastest stock market reversal since the Great Depression.

Governments are calling for calm: only 1% of those infected are likely to die from the virus. There is no need for self-imposed quarantine. Food supplies will not run dry. But the advice falls on deaf ears. Once word is out, there's no going back, the damage is done.

Make no mistake, COVID-19 is spreading fast, and for those with underlying health issues, its effects can be severe. But as humans, we have a tendency to overreact, resulting somewhat ironically, in no constructive reaction at all. When fear sets in, paralysis follows, and the same is true of business. For corporations big and small, when crisis hits, the propensity all too often is to over-react and under-produce.

The question is, why have we not become better at handling crises? Why are companies not prepared? If the global financial crisis taught us anything, it was that nothing can be taken for granted and that preparedness and resilience are key to survival. Yet, we appear not to have learned the lesson.

Some might argue that the world could not have predicted the spread of COVID-19, but that's precisely the point. We can never know what is around the corner, but what we can do is always make sure that our businesses are in the best possible shape. That doesn't mean

contingency planning for survival in the event of a worst-case scenario, it means planning to be the best you can be, 365 days a year – through the good times as well as the bad.

Right now, the threat is COVID-19. Just over a decade ago it was the financial crash and several years before that it was the aftermath of 9/11. Each time the crisis is different, but the fear factor associated with each event exposes the same vulnerabilities and the same gaps that exist in our companies.

In the world of business, as in the world of infectious disease, prevention is better than cure, and the best prevention of all is ensuring that your company's productivity is as close to optimal as you can get it.

Even on a good day, too many businesses are paying employees for eight hours of productive work per day, but only truly getting three. So, when disease, natural disaster or political change causes markets to nosedive and threatens your bottom line, what then? Can you rely on your people to up their game, or will your productivity plummet even further?

Forget the crisis of the day. For the sake of your company's long-term health, break out of the state of fear and paralysis that is gripping the world and focus on nurturing the kind of productivity that will see you through to the other side.

Grab the bull by the horns – just be sure to wash your hands ■

Source:

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READINESS OF PAKISTAN'S LEADERS TO EMBRACE THE 'DIGITAL'

Article by Asma Sethi



Many of us now realize that adopting digital technology is vital in today's times of unprecedented disruption, requiring a shift from conventional business practices to innovative digital platforms. Leaders in Pakistan have started to understand the fruits of going digital: better team collaboration, increased employee engagement, business sustainability and improved communication. They are re-thinking digitization and analytics for improved decision making. However, they still have a long way to go to lead a successful digital transformation.

Having a digital mindset is the first step towards creating a digital workplace, and one of the challenges leaders face is 'shepherding' the organization in a time of constant change. 'Lack of familiarity with digital'⁽¹⁾ and no sense of urgency are top two reasons why companies struggle to embrace and embed a digital mindset¹. Leader's can play a vital role in initiating a digital change process, starting from having the right mindset:

RE-SHAPING MINDSET

Leader's must have clarity of purpose and understanding about the way things need to be done. Along with basic digital literacy, they must be able to pick technology that complements the present and future business model. A leader's flexible mindset allows room for experimentation; while they are exercising control to ensure business sustainability, they are open to flexing the reigns to induce inspiration. Encouraging and using creativity, allowing room for trial and error, and freedom to discuss mistakes will set the foundation of an agile mindset.

RETHINKING LEADERSHIP

For a digital-inclined organization to flourish, its leadership model needs to be re-assessed. From conceiving the idea to implementation of digital technology, a leaders style could vary between transformational, where positive influence is used to intrinsically motivate employees towards the digital vision; and transactional, where control is exercised to put systems and accountability in place to achieve shorter goals of implementation, for example, linking rewards and performance framework to use of digital platform.

CONTINUOUS EXPERIMENTATION

Finally, leaders must constantly experiment with digital technology and involve managers in the process. Introducing a digital platform prototype, for example, creating a social collaboration tool designed internally or integrated externally, can allow leaders to learn about organization's digital density over time. This can give an insight into additional steps required to unfreeze the culture, use of effective communication strategies, and determine how prepared they are for organization-wide launch of a digital platform.

HAVING A DIGITAL MINDSET IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS CREATING A DIGITAL WORKPLACE, AND ONE OF THE CHALLENGES LEADERS FACE IS 'SHEPHERDING' THE ORGANIZATION IN A TIME OF CONSTANT CHANGE.

To lead a successful digital transition, leaders must familiarize themselves with digital technologies, and demonstrate an agile mindset by being open, collaborative, and continuously experimenting. Leadership style could vary situationally depending on the need for direction during phases of digital change process. Ambitious leaders excited to adopt new digital platforms, can start from experimenting with small-scale digital project implementation defined by a timeline. This will allow the leaders to identify and measure ROI, gauge the sensitivity of the organization to digital and shepherd change in the desired direction ■

(1): Bolton, C., Machová, V., Kováčová, M. & Valásková, K., 2018. THE POWER OF HUMAN-MACHINE COLLABORATION: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, BUSINESS AUTOMATION, AND SMART ECONOMY. *Economics, Management and Financial Markets*, 13(4), pp. 51-56.



Asma Sethi is a seasoned HR professional who is a strong advocate of digital transformation and innovative organization practices. She has done her Masters in Entrepreneurship and Innovation from Queen Mary University of London, while specializing in Human Resources.

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Peter M. Senge

Founding Chairman of Society for Organizational Learning (SoL) & Director of Center for Organizational Learning at MIT

"It was a pleasure working with Octara on my recent visit to Pakistan. They did a great job coordinating all the details and planning the content of the event. The event itself was produced in a thoroughly professional manner at a high level that would meet any standards internationally."



Ron Kaufman

Service Culture Expert, New York Times Bestselling Author, Keynote Speaker & Founder of UPI Your Service

"I have worked with many event management companies around the world, and Octara is Absolutely World Class in event management for my public Uplifting Service workshops. In publicity, enrollment, on-site registration, room and stage layout, sound system, and graphic design - this company knows how to do it RIGHT."



Brian Tracy

Entrepreneur, Professional Speaker, Best Selling Author Success Expert & CEO of Brian Tracy International

"Octara is a good company full of very intelligent, talented and skilled people, and it has a great future."



Lucy Cornell

Keynote Speaker, Author & Founder of Voice Coach, Australia

"It has been a wonderful experience. I shared the day elevating the voice of inspiring business leaders in Karachi, crossing boundaries of age and business seniority. Thank you, Octara, for organizing an inspiring day and all the support and hospitality given to me throughout my visit."



Dr. José L. Cordeiro & Rohit Talwar

"Both José and I had a fantastic time and thought that this was probably the most demanding - and as a result the most personally stimulating - event that we had done this year. A massive thank you to our fantastic hosts at Octara and MAP and to all of the delegates who made this such a memorable experience for us."



Raj Kumar

CEO of UCSI Consulting Group, Malaysia Certified Blue Ocean Strategy Expert

"My experience with Octara has been tremendous, because I think that they are very customer-centric and they are very keen to give the best to the people in the country. Octara is a purpose-driven company, very experienced with their role and they are doing it very well."



Roger Harrop

The CEO Expert, Author, International Speaker Owner of Roger Harrop Associates

"It was a Great day - ran a CEO Masterclass, once again expertly organized by Octara-A Truly World Class company."



Catherine Bentley & John Bentley

"The whole experience was made extremely easy and most enjoyable, thanks to the high level of support and professionalism of the Octara team. At each stage of the process from planning the marketing materials, arranging travel, accommodation and business visas through to actual on site support at the event, the organisation and attention to detail exceeded all expectations. This enabled us to focus completely on the actual workshop delivery. The partnership of PowerBase Consulting and Octara will turn up with great work in future."



Kate Sweetman

Keynote Speaker, Co-Author of Global Bestselling Book & Founding Principal & President, SweetmanCragun, USA

"I cannot recommend Octara more highly. As colleagues, they are smart, professional, creative, willing and able. They get the big and the details. They know what Pakistani business leaders need to learn to take their businesses to the next level, and they work tirelessly to support the resources that they bring in to meet that need. It is an absolute pleasure to work with Octara"



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