Insights to Impacts

What matters …
from now to next

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Joerg Schmitz
Managing Partner
ThomasLeland

The opportunity to deliberately shape the "new normal" is now before us.

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from now to next

Like all profound crises in human history, *the jolts and jars of this one, will leave deep imprints on our collective psychology, institutions, social organization, economy, and workplaces. However, the current disruption is also extraordinary in human history; after all, a slowdown of this level and with such worldwide synchronicity marks the emergence of a new type of global consciousness.*

This consciousness is not a Pollyanna "we are all in this together", but rather the inescapable truth about profound interdependencies, inequities, and imbalance of the "old normal."

The opportunity to **deliberately** *shape the "new normal" is now before us.*

Seizing it will require us to upgrade our leadership, if we want to transition us, our people, and our practices safely and confidently into what is next.

Building on the previous article *Insights to Impact* the following observations offer some inputs to move from now to next in ways that leverage inclusive leadership and inclusiveness intelligence.

What still matters now:
Cultivating connection, belonging, psychological safety and proximity

1. Checking-in remains important.
A supportive connection across our individual ups and downs and various challenges and difficulties is critical.

Reinforcing our common bond of care and concern for each other - celebrating our community - are vital and require our ongoing and deliberate focus. We can do this in a number of ways:

A. **Deliberately schedule and make times for 1:1 and dedicated team calls and sharing events.** When doing so, remember to:
   - Make sure you are inclusive and do not unintentionally reinforce your "in-group" and "go-to people."
   - Pay particular attention to people, new or recent joiners or recently promoted individuals, and anyone who may not fit the "conventional/traditional" background.
   - Not make participation mandatory so that people don't feel additional stress and pressure by attending or participating
   - Demonstrate that you are and have been listening
   - Apply appreciative inquiry and deep listening to understand issues, concerns and challenges more deeply and connect in a resonant way
   - Avoid inadvertently communicating that negativity is to be avoided and only optimism and positivity are acceptable

B. **Make checking in an integral part of your regular team calls**. In order for this to be effective, remember to:
   - Allow extra and sufficient time; don't rush the checking in
   - Communicate why this is important to do and encourage sharing by role modeling
   - Follow up with empathy on information team members have shared
   - Encourage everyone to raise what is on their mind, including sensitive and critical questions and concerns

C. **Reinforce and normalize the humanizing elements in your communication and interactions.** These include ways of sharing personal moments, hobbies, interests and creating shared experiences. Leaders, managers, and team members should feel safe to share vulnerable moments and challenges, even mundane ones such as trips to the grocery store or homeschooling children.

2. Psychological safety and sense of belonging are fundamental.

Isolation and ambiguity amplify insecurities, anxiety, fear, and doubt for everyone and particularly those that feel less safe and secure in their environment (be it at home, at work, or in society in general).

> At every level, we need to draw up plans to restructure the workplace and transition ourselves and our employees into it.

With many of the subtle cues and signals of belonging absent and opportunity to enhance visibility removed for extended periods of time, people can easily feel out of the loop, perceive a lack of transparency about key decisions, and feel deprived of critical opportunities and recognition.

This can set in motion a vicious cycle that includes the following behaviors:

o Securing participation in as many meetings as possible; i.e., people calendars are book tightly with virtual meetings
o Over-communicating and over-engaging in work and meetings to demonstrate value
o Over-produce and signal 24/7 availability in order to demonstrate commitment
o Higher sensitivity to invites and other virtual indications of being in-the loop
o Increasing levels of rumors and informal chatter

These behaviors only aggravate individual stress levels and create competitive pressures and fatigue within teams.

Here is what you can do to turn this vicious into a virtuous cycle:

- **Remember that inclusiveness is much more than a meeting invite-list**. A great test of an inclusive environment is to ask yourself whether you need to be in a meeting to feel certain that your voice is heard or your perspective considered. If your answer is "yes" this can be a sign of belonging uncertainty and insecurity.

- **Diagnose behaviors and spot traps.** The behaviors listed above may help your observation of your team members and prompt individual conversation that can lead to a better understanding of what really drives their behavior. Repetitive actions that result in unproductive or even counterproductive outcomes may indicate your team member is caught in a 'trapped behavior'.

- **Have reflective and transformative conversations in your teams.** These conversations should make the implicit explicit, surface the patterns and traps you have spotted, and help create or renew psychological safety and a sense of belonging. Ultimately these conversations should help you cement inclusive rules for teaming that can serve you also in the next normal.

- **Make sure your communication is resonant.** Not only should you communicate often, but also in a way

that resonates with your team member. What that means is that you sincerely and accurately reflect the experiences, moods, and sentiments of your people. Resonance enables deeper connection, and closeness (i.e, psychological proximity). Being tapped into the dynamics of the team culture is key to being and staying resonant!

3. And … don't forget yourself!

Preserving your mental and physical wellbeing and vitality are key. Leaders tend to minimize or downplay this aspect particularly when so much is demanded of us and depends on us. However, now is the time to not forget to conduct a self-check in. Here are some things to think about:

- o What is my current stress level? How does it manifest? How am I managing it?
- o How is my physical wellbeing? What does it indicate about my stress levels and psychological health?
- o How is my psychological and emotional health? What am I thinking, ruminating, and worrying about? What is my mood?
- o How is my spiritual health and wellbeing?
- o What wellbeing habits and resources are helping me? Which ones do I want to strengthen?

What matters next:
Finding our feet and using our culture-shaping powers together

The sense of reawakening that emerges from this global slowdown is accompanied by the challenges to (1) establish confidence in a new reality, and (2) seize the opportunities and possibilities that have emerged.

1. Transitioning and transforming the way we work

At every level, we need to draw up plans to restructure the workplace and transition ourselves and our employees into it. This not only starts with new health regiments, changes to the physical layout, occupancy, and capacity, but also with different opening hours, schedules, health and wellness resources, emergency procedures, etc.

An important consideration needs to be given to upgrading policies, practices, and procedures to the new realities of work. This includes a new age of flexibility and integration of home-office routines for growing segments of the workforce.

Quite possibly, this also includes the expansion to entire "*work-at-home organizations*" enabled and expedited by growing technological infrastructure, capabilities, and protocols.

Leaders can leverage inclusiveness intelligence when drafting their plans for where and how we work:

- o What assumptions about the future and biases are we embedding in our decisions?
- o Are we thinking about the impact of the restructured world of work on all of our constituencies and stakeholders?
- o Are we drawing from a sufficiently large pool of perspectives and voices?
- o Are we engaging our constituencies and stakeholders sufficiently in the planning process?
- o Are our policies and guidelines sufficiently clear and relevant enough?
- o Are we considering the diversity of our stakeholders and constituencies in our transition/change management plan?

2. Shaping the norms of what's next

The physical and virtual structure of space and resources shapes minds, behaviors, and emotions in powerful ways. When left unattended, the norms that develop are not optimally aligned to our intentions and objectives. To deliberately shape the behavioral norms in an inclusive way, here are some things we can do:

o Re-fresh and re-ground ourselves in our values, intentions, commitments and principles. This should include considerations for critical issues surfaced in the Covid-19 crisis, such as:

  - What is our commitment to the health and wellbeing of our people and stakeholders? How will we demonstrate this commitment? How will we react and what actions will we take when we fall short?
  - What is our commitment to social sustainability; i.e., to maintaining and growing our diversity, reducing inequities and increasing inclusiveness in our organizational practices and processes, and value creation overall? How will we demonstrate this commitment? How will we react and what actions will we take when we fall short?
  - What is our commitment to environmental sustainability? How will we demonstrate this commitment? How will we react and what actions will we take when we fall short?

o Deliberately and mindfully apply our culture shaping powers to decisions and actions
o Institutionalize learning and continuous cultural optimization in formal and informal ways. **Routinely practice the following reflective actions:**
    - **Ask:** Are we evaluating a given action, situation, or characteristic because it is our tradition (ingrained habit), preference or because it is a true requirement?
    - Make **constructive feedback habits** integral to key interactions by asking: "How can we be better next time?"
    - Frame meetings with a reminder of the standards, principles, and criteria that apply to discussions and decisions; evaluate your meetings against those standards, and intervene when you deviate.

3. Pursuing social innovation that tackles the bigger picture agenda.

Even if fleeting and imperfect, the worldwide discipline of our collective actions is impressive, both in terms of affirming a common care for health and wellbeing as well as demonstrating positive environmental impact. It shows us that with a clear focus and collective resolve, we can galvanize powerful agency when faced with existential risks and threats.

In that sense, Covid-19 may be an important "*dress-rehearsal*" for threats to come and challenges to meet that are all related to a profound social and economic restructuring.

> *"Imagine what we could achieve together if we paired the evident power of our collective agency with a compelling, and inclusive vision for the thriving of this diverse human life?"*

The following four appear prominently on this future-proofing agenda:

- **Calibrating and optimizing the collaboration and coordination between business, non-governmental and governmental institutions** and their stakeholders in order to pursue care and the common good.
- **Accelerating carbon reduction and climate crisis responses** by transforming the ways we live, produce, consume, and work towards greater sustainability.
- **Reducing social and economic inequities and barriers,** including protecting, supporting those that are most vulnerable, marginalized and exposed to risk. This also includes meaningful valuing those who provide essential services more deeply into our social structure, policies and reinforcements, and compensation schemes.
- **Accelerating and progressing the digitalization and virtualization of organizations and institutions.** This involves a profound transformation in the way we transact and interact, as well as structure and navigate the virtual, social, and natural world.

Communities, societies and organizations that align their strategies and actions to the transformation agenda will be well positioned to succeed and generate the social innovation required.

We are well advised to welcome the current situation as a wakeup call and catalyst for massive re-imagination and transformation in how we live, steward resources, and produce and consume.

We can all take great pride and inspiration in (a) our collective resolve and restraint and (b) the knowledge that with clear focus and shared values, we can apply our collective agency at a worldwide level in service of the common good.

Imagine what we could achieve together if we paired the evident power of our collective agency with a compelling, and inclusive vision for the thriving of this diverse human life?

Joerg Schmitz is a business anthropologist and Managing Partner with ThomasLeland.
Contact: joerg@thomasleland.com

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