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The Next Step is Digital Leadership...

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The aim of this article is to shed light on the vital role of digital leaders in today's businesses. Many firms have already grounded their partnership with digital transformation before the pandemic. Others sped up all efforts to implement digital capabilities due to COVID-19 for the first time for survival. So, we tried to show that a digital leader needs additional requirements to face the new challenges of working remotely. Furthermore, we think that good online communication skills with digital leaders draw a compelling composite picture of an effective working environment in a digital world.

Keywords: Digital Leadership, Digital Transformation, Communication, Pandemic, COVID-19

“ We are witnessing the dawn of a new age” HP CEO Enrique Lores stated at the company's Reinvent conference this year. The leader of one of the largest technology conglomerates is here

referring to the dawn of new working environments and channels of communication. He added that several changes that were initially planned ahead in the future have prematurely

arrived now. Among such changes are new styles of leadership that today's leaders have realized are essential for growth and even survival. Such new dynamics are the result of a different number of amendments in life, in technology, and in business. These have sprung from the pandemic; from video calls to working remotely. In addition, the workforce as we know, is witnessing a fast pace of change on the personal level of employees and business leaders, hence developing new needs that need to be addressed today.

Prioritizing those needs does not mean that profit takes a back seat. According to HP CEO Enrique Lores, there is no need for leaders to choose between short term results and long-term contributions to the workforce. "I firmly believe you can do both, and we are proving that you can do both."

A recent article by Enda Curran (2021) in Fortune magazine refers to the lift in productivity by 5% in the USA due to working from home. The study sampled more than 30,000 employees to understand whether working remotely will continue after the resolution of the pandemic. The emerging results point to 20% of working from home compared

with 5% before the pandemic. It is important to mention here that working remotely was widely considered to be a "career killer" in the pre-COVID-19 era. It even frightened employees as it threatened promotion prospects!

The pandemic has certainly made vast changes in the business sphere. An especially strong impact on businesses has placed leaders at the forefront of these changes putting them through the ultimate test. Leadership skills have not been completely redefined, yet a new dimension has emerged. The "fourth industrial revolution" now calls for significant changes in the form of digital transformation.

WHO ARE DIGITAL LEADERS, AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

One definition to digital leadership is leaders' ability to embrace a meaningful vision of the digitization process and implement a strategy to drive transformation.

There are two types of digital leaders today: Digital natives who were born in the digital era, and digital immigrants who witnessed the quick digital change

and have had to attain necessary skills to adapt and fit with the new environment. Other scholars are more specific in defining the role of digital leaders in developing a good network to share similar interests and activities, thus, using the digital tools and techniques.

The importance of digital leaders arises as a result of digital transformation and digital advantage. A very interesting study was conducted in a joint research project with Deloitte and MIT Sloan Management Review (2019) to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with digital leaders. The study surveyed more than 20,000 business executives around the universe. Furthermore, more than 140 interviews with business leaders and academics from different industries were held to understand the needs of organizations in the workforce today. The results reveal a particular demand for new skills that organizational leaders should possess to succeed in a digital workplace. The new skills are:

1. Transformative vision: Knowledge of market and trends, business judgement, decision maker

2. Forward-looking: Long term vision, sound strategy, prudence
3. Technology literacy: Past experience, digital literacy
4. Adapt to change: Open-minded, adaptable, innovative
5. Strong leadership skills: Rational, focused, decisive
6. Other: cooperative, team builder

“Transformation is not a choice ,,

DEVELOPING GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS, MINDSETS, AND SPIRIT

In their pivotal roles as digital leaders, firm boards have prioritized the need to seed their organizations with relevant leaders that possess good communication skills with healthy mindsets and high spirits.

Why Good Communication Skills?

“Communication is the flow of accurate information which people need and are entitled to have for successful completion of the job.”

It is an established fact that one of the most important pillars of a successful company is a good system of communication. One employee at Deloitte company confessed that the main reason behind an unhealthy relationship with the team leader is the lack of communication, especially during the current pandemic. She believes that working online is a barrier to the transmission of genuine feelings, responses, attitudes and thus, creates a conflict between the employee and his/her team leader.

In her study, Grese Sermaxhaj (2020) found that “when we are face-to-face, we barely take time to think about what we say. But, in online communication, we tend to take a step back and refine our words”. Working remotely has certainly cemented our comfort zone and made us more reluctant in acting naturally with each other.

In the same realm of thoughts, Gentianë Paçarizi, a teaching assistant at the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”, Department of Journalism, media and information literacy consultant expresses her opinion on the

matter in an online communication: “I belong to the group of people who don’t tend to blame technology for the extent of misunderstanding among people. While it is true that technology developments have changed communication at large, to some extent, the lack of understanding (decoding) of a certain message from a sender to a receiver depends more on the shared system of codes people operate with”.

Omar Daoud, the chief medical officer at Calm claims that “The pandemic was a very challenging time for everyone globally, but it allowed us to open up a new dialogue around mental and behavioral health.”

“Communication is an art”

Conclusion

To summarize, the world is facing a vast technological change, and executives in every industry should be well aware of the important role of digital leaders in gaining digital advantage. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic opened doors for digital leaders to provide their followers with the needed tools to communicate well and relieve the anxiety of everyday work. The isolation brought onto each and every one of us

during the pandemic has further strengthened the toll of loneliness on many individuals. Digital leaders are typically well positioned to create safe spaces and encourage employees to seek the support they need from their workplace.

This article highlights the importance of digital awareness and the critical role of digital leaders in online communication. While the literature continues to grow and contributes to the optimal communication model, it has certainly become an interesting topic for businesses as they realize once again that transformation is key for long term success, especially in such turbulent and uncertain times.

“No survival for Analog firms today”

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