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Technology and the Future of Leadership in the Post COVID World

By F. Frank Ghannadian, Ph.D., *Dean, Sykes College of Business*

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It was not that long ago that we had the Y2K* scare, and many were afraid of computers being disrupted or malfunctioning in a world that was becoming increasingly digitized. Now, 20 years later, we are in a different world that encompasses more and more data every second. Decisions are continuously made based on data receipt and data delivery. How has all of this changed the leadership paradigm? How has COVID-19 changed our world? And what is in store for us in the next 20 years? The year 2040 will be an interesting period in human leadership and machines. Thus, let's discuss six major trends ahead of leaders in the next two decades:

> *The Y2K bug was a computer flaw, or bug, faced by computer programmers and users all over the world on Jan. 1, 2000. It is also known as the "millennium bug."

1) **The Post COVID World:** Businesses, individuals and to some extent, colleges and universities, who were forced to work away from their offices have realized that the brick and mortar is not necessary to thrive and get the job done. The job is done through the technology that is available and that technology is getting better every day. Some had not heard of "Zoom" before March 2020, which is an interactive synchronous video used for teaching and meetings. With all of the bad stuff that came with a virus, it surely catapulted many organizations forward by five to 10 years including colleges and universities.

2) **The World of Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Most managers and company CEOs claim that the growth of technology and artificial intelligence is the biggest driving force coming. AI is going to change businesses, the way we work, and how corporations will operate in the future. Today, there is fear because of the uncertainty in this new technology and because it is in its infancy. Driverless cars, robots that can identify flaws that humans cannot see, and the thinking power of the world in the palm of their hands. How are leaders going to engage in this new world of data? Engaging in and responding to it positively will be the best approach.

3) **Technology/Innovation:** While leading an organization in the late 20th century without a computer was not possible, the direction headed by companies and organizations in the mid-21st century is towards more innovation, more data mining and much more robotics. The 5G connection is just the beginning of all things connected with speeds that defy our thinking. The cost of keeping up with the pace of change will make organizations continuously looking forward and having to push the envelope. The agility, adaptability, and embracing change will be the leaders' most useful tool.

4) **The Challenge of Talent Attraction:** The younger generation, most likely Generation Z that are the individuals born from 1995-2015, and after them, generation Alpha, will be coming to the job market. The new generations

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like money but like even more jobs with meaning and purpose. Innovation and making a difference will be the attraction for talent acquisition. The success of an organization will be not only to attract and retain these new talents, but also to upskill them to be ready for changes as older employees, like the Millennials, will be starting to retire by 2040. Motivating and leading these new generations will require talent beyond what may be possible.

5) **Globalization of all Things:** The conduct of business with both local and global considerations will become the new norm in this new world. As the world of technology connects more people, leaders will need to appreciate new cultures and communicate better given language and local barriers. Foreign ideas and people will be viewed as an opportunity as trends move the world in the direction of usable and transferable technology.

6) **A Need for Ethical and Moral Leaders:** This need has always existed, but how will it be different with technology? As people and employees need more transparency, there will be a greater microscopic review of actions by leaders. Authenticity and caring for all will become more important as data becomes shared with more and more individuals.

With the technology of the future, the leadership challenges for managers and leaders will still stay the same. Motivation, empathy, communication, empowerment, and much more will remain on the plate of the leaders, but the form and method of delivery will be different.

This is 2020: What's New in the Conversation About Diversity and Inclusion at Work?

By Gena Cox, Ph.D., *Industrial Psychologist and Lead Researcher, Perceptyx Inc.*

2020 will go down in history as a year in which humans across the world have been connected in one shared experience; dealing with the challenge of surviving a global pandemic. Simultaneously, in the U.S., there has been a groundswell of dialog and action regarding social justice issues. These two forces, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the social justice imperative, are directly impacting the conversation regarding diversity

Gena Cox, Ph.D.

and inclusion (D&I) in the workplace. This article defines the ways in which the D&I conversation is changing in business settings.

Before we get into the details, it would be useful to define the terms "diversity" and "inclusion." Diversity is about the heterogeneity (or lack thereof) of the workforce characteristics such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, neurodiversity, LGBTQ status, etc. Inclusion, the other side of the coin, is about culture. Inclusion is about whether the way things are done in the organization help all employees feel safe. Inclusive organizational cultures encourage employees to safely express their opinions. Employees feel heard and all employees believe they can succeed when inclusiveness is an organization norm.

The pandemic and the social justice disruptions have significantly impacted the nature and content of conversations about D&I in organizations, creating four major shifts: (1) movement away from the business case to increased focus on a social justice perspective, (2) greater involvement from the CEO and other C-suite players, (3) increased focus on the concept of "belonging," and (4) enhanced awareness of the positive impact of neurodiversity.

A social justice perspective is supplanting the traditional "business case" for diversity and inclusion

The business case for diversity is a methodology often employed to convince senior organization leaders to enhance the diversity of their workforce and the inclusiveness of their organization cultures. The business case approach seeks to answer the question, "What are the positive impacts on long-term business growth, profitability, or other business outcomes, that warrants paying attention to the D&I issue?" In the years this business case approach has been championed, both business practitioners and researchers have done all they can to document the benefits businesses derive from workforce diversification. The conclusions are clear. Diversity offers a variety of benefits, regardless of the dimension of difference being analyzed. It has been unequivocally proven that diversity in the workplace has a positive effect

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on valued business outcomes, including profits, innovation and decision-making. Corporate board performance is also enhanced by diversity. Nevertheless, that proven "business case for diversity" has not resulted in a rush to demographic diversification in corporations.

The United Nations defines social justice as "the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of economic growth." The Business Roundtable is an organization whose members are chief executive officers (CEOs) of some of America's largest companies. In August 2019, the organization claimed in its Statment on the Purpose of a Corporation that "corporations exist to promote an economy that serves all Americans." Business leaders seem more willing to embrace the expanded social role of corporations in this fraught moment. Leaders are now doubling down on actions to address the race, class and gender disparities in justice, healthcare, education, income and in the workplace.

CEOs and C-Suite leading the charge on D&I

I was working at IBM when David Kenny became the SVP for IBM Watson and Cognitive Solutions. I was struck by this thoughtfulness and empathetic leadership style and decided to follow his career as a way to learn from him. Kenny became CEO of Nielsen in 2018 and then, he did something that is likely a bellwether for the C-suite, he decided to "make diversity a priority" and to be out front as the owner of the diversity and inclusion challenge for his organization. Mr. Kenney's title is now CEO & chief diversity officer and he said in a recent CNBC Closing Bell interview that "there is no more powerful position than the CEO and, quite honestly, this isn't going to change if the people with power don't use that power to change it." While Kenny is certainly ahead of many of his peers, other CEOs

like Delta Airlines' Ed Bastian are leading the commitment to diversity in their workplaces. We will be seeing more of this.

"Belonging" is the new expectation

As Pat Wadors would say, "being included is not enough." Corporate leaders have added "belonging" to the D&I equation. Belonging is the feeling of being accepted as a member of an organization. People who feel as if they belong can be authentic, they can express their individuality; they can show up in the organization in whatever unique way they were made, and not worry that they will feel uncomfortable or left out. Employees who feel they belong are more likely to speak out, have more to contribute, feel like they fit in, and do not just do the work, they also thrive. Belonging impacts employee engagement and employee engagement impacts individual and organizational productivity. The desire for belonging is universal. Everyone can understand and want to be part of conversations about belonging. Belonging is the new clarion call in conversations about D&I at work.

Neurodiverse employees are being understood at work

Stanford University defines "neurodiversity" as "a concept that regards individuals with differences in brain function and behavioral traits as part of normal variation in the human population." Recently, more organizations (especially technology organizations) have become aware that people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, Williams Syndrome, Downs Syndrome and Prader-Will syndrome can offer significant contributions to innovation and productivity. As the advantages of neurodiversity become more evident, there is every reason to believe that employers will embrace neurodiversity as simply another way in which humans can be different-but-essential.

There are many newer ideas taking hold when it comes to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. These ideas are being buoyed by changes in the workplace that result from the global pandemic and social justice disruptions. As employees affected by these two forces come to work, they seek support

from their leaders. The C-suite is becoming more conscious of the fact that employees need support to help them thrive and perform in the face of largescale social change. In response, the diversity and inclusion conversation in American workplaces is changing.

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Enabling Greatness in Others

By Bella L. Galperin, Ph.D., *Dana Professor of Management, Senior Associate Director of the TECO Energy Center for Leadership*

Addressing the (pre-COVID-19) packed house convened by the TECO Center for Leadership, Joe Lopano had this to say about himself, "I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I ended up where I needed to be." Well, Mr. Lopano, the Tampa Bay community agrees.

Since flying in from Dallas to lead Tampa International Airport (TIA), Lopano has been recognized as national airport director of the year in 2018 and applauded for leading efforts to enrich the traveler experience at TIA. The airport has consistently earned top honors for customer satisfaction, planning, and sustainability. And he is not stopping now, even while the rest of the world is on pause. TIA has broken ground on the most innovative curbside in the U.S., allowing for light-traveling passengers to avoid the ticketing level or baggage claim areas.

Revolutionary ideas are not new to TIA. The airport has a legacy of innovation. George Bean, the first director of the airport, had the courage and vision to implement a hub-and-spoke design that limits walking distances. For the first time in history, an automated people mover system was used to transport travelers from the main terminal (the hub) to the air sides (the spokes) to board their flights when the airport opened in 1971. At the time, the revolutionary architecture was featured in national media outlets such as *Life Magazine*, *Popular Science*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. The airport was recognized as the most passenger-oriented terminal complex in operations. During this presentation, Lopano stressed that "we're trying to be true to our history" and also credited his predecessor for his success. "The reason I stand here today and (we have) one of the best airports in the country, is because of Bean and the vision that he had, so we stand on their shoulders," Lopano said.

Bella L. Galperin, Ph.D.

Building innovative solutions does not come easy. In order to get solutions, you need to dig deeper. While building the 2012 Master Plan, the TIA leadership team recognized several problems including an overcrowded parkway, insufficient parking, and curbside congestion due to rental car operations. At first, the team proposed several obvious solutions, such as widening the parkway and building another parking garage. In line with one of Lopano's favorite sayings, "Be curious always! For knowledge will not acquire you; you must acquire it," the team began to examine the issues more profoundly. After asking several in-depth questions, the team agreed that a bolder idea was needed to alleviate the congestion. They needed to move the rental car operations and create a remote check-in opportunity at the rental car center.

Now passengers can check their bags at the rental center and get their boarding pass without entering the main terminal ticketing level. Lopano noted that "we did this, we're the only airport in the U.S. that is doing this at a rental car center, and it's worked really well…Customers love it. And there again we're just building on the legacy that we were given."

Lopano recognized that Bean's legacy enabled the success of TIA. Similarly, at a more personal level, Lopano shared how his wife motivated him to excel. Coming from humble beginnings, Lopano was uncertain about what he wanted to do in his career. Only one of Joe's siblings went to college. After high school, Lopano went to work to earn money. At the time, Lopano's girlfriend (and current wife) encouraged him to go to college in the evening. While Lopano initially thought it was too expensive, he soon realized that he was able to get scholarships and loans to support his studies. Soon enough, Lopano began to have a vision for

Joseph W. Lopano, chief executive officer, Tampa International Airport (center), stands alongside UT leaders and faculty (from left to right), Deirdre Dixon, President Ronald Vaughn, Bella Galperin, and Renée Vaughn at the Spring 2020 Leadership Speaker Series in February.

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his future. After graduating and working in the mailroom at Pan Am Airways, he was promoted to a financial auditor six months later and moved into management. His experience at Pan Am provided him with opportunities to soar to new heights. As Lopano reflected upon his leadership journey, he noted, "And so, she (my wife) really turned me around and she made me believe that I could do it. And this is part of enabling greatness and others."

Just as others have enabled success in Lopano's journey, he also strives to enable greatness in others. Lopano has learned over the years that is one of the most important roles of a leader. "Your job is to teach others to be better, to learn, to help them develop confidence, and to let them become better people—then you can enjoy the fruit of their labors," said Lopano. He admitted that to enable greatness in others has become the main goal of his career. In line with the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "Believe you can and you're halfway there," Lopano thinks people need to believe in their core and then they are able to achieve their goals. Without that confidence, it will be challenging to reach one's own accomplishments.

Lopano's inspiring speech not only showed us the importance of recognizing the special enablers in our own lives such as former colleagues, predecessors, bosses, a spouse, or friend but also challenged us to take action and enable greatness in others around us. Lopano said, "And my only request to you is that as you go along in your life that you reach down and help somebody else who needs a helping hand. And help them go to college, help them to achieve what they can." Just as Bean would have never imagined how his revolutionary ideas became a legacy of innovation to TIA, you can never envision how a small act of kindness will resonate with others.

Joe Lopano is the chief executive officer at Tampa International Airport (TIA) and was the TECO Energy Center for Leadership speaker at The University of Tampa on Feb. 5th, 2020.

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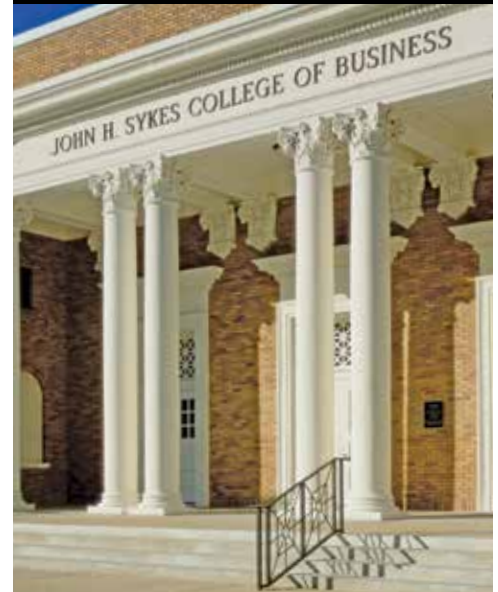
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