

Better by Design

A PEOPLE AGENDA TO REBALANCE OUR RELATION TO TECHNOLOGY

People create. People innovate. Technology enables. And the possibilities of innovative technology inspire further creativity.

Indeed, as we enter the third decade of the 21st century, the digital age has boomed and continues to beckon. It brings with it new paradigms — from the rise of Artificial Intelligence to the advanced networking that makes many of our efforts possible in today’s remote-working, COVID era. The impact on every aspect of society and the economy is profound.

Clearly, technology and the people who make the most of it have become the predominant factors of production. They have become the predominant factors for competition. They have become the predominant factors of disruption. There is a relationship dependency between the two. Our future world of possibilities arises

through this interaction of people and technology. Stephen Hawking describes this interaction well: “Mankind’s greatest achievements have come about by talking, and its greatest failures by not talking. It doesn’t have to be like this. Our greatest hopes could become reality in the future. With the technology at our disposal, the possibilities are unbounded. All we need to do is make sure we keep talking.”

Hawking’s perspective is people first, technology second. For the modern organization operating in a hyper-competitive world, what Hawking means by “talking” should not be random and left to chance. Rather there is a necessity to create a model, a design, a framework that strategically maximizes the interaction of people and the collision of their ideas. We need a system to enable these ideas and make them a reality.

However, today's balance between the organizational focus on people and its focus on technology leans more to technology. For many of us, the view is technology first, people second.

But for a truly symbiotic relationship between people and technology, such an imbalance cannot be the optimal scenario or optimal allocation of organizational resources. Further, as we look to the future, there is a high likelihood that technologies will evolve faster than the organizational people paradigm can adapt to them. The result is that organizations will limit their future possibilities because they have underinvested in their people.

Now is the time for organizations to rebalance the priority between people and technology — not by backing away from the progress of technology, but by innovating and elevating their People Agenda.

The People Agenda is underpinned by these defining philosophies:

- **The People Agenda is the single differentiating/ competitive factor** for any kind of organization. It is a philosophy to win people's hearts and strategies to win people's minds, to execute and transform and to deliver results.
- **Performance, flexibility and sustainability are the three universal objectives that drive the People Agenda.** They supplement each other without priorities. These aims will only be achieved long-term with a balanced combination of people and technology.
- **The Organization is its people.** Therefore, execution of the people agenda is execution of the business strategy by developing the organization.

- **Growing the organization means symbiotically growing the people within.** Aligning organizational and individual interests means creating a new deal that is "development for development." This is especially relevant for new organizational and individual digital capabilities that need to be developed rather than acquired.
- **"Trust and Empowerment" is the new leadership paradigm.** The complexity of today's organizations makes centralistic steering an illusion. Whereas "Command and Control" is an outdated model, holacracy or similar leadership philosophies will not fill the gap. "Trust and empowerment" is the operating system of 21st century organizations.
- **We need to re-think the concept of work itself.** AI and digital technologies will not only change how we work, but also disrupt what we will do for work.
- **Digitalization will amplify the impact of human work,** unveiling tremendous opportunities for organizations that are actively shaping their workforce and roles within.

These fundamental philosophies provide the framework for crafting the People Agenda to benefit the organization and ensure its progression.

Looking 10 years down the road, we see a significant elevation in the importance of people management and the People Agenda — not only for economic outcomes, but also for societal well-being. We see some of this already with leading CEOs attempting to overcome narrow definitions of shareholder value and trying to incorporate other stakeholders into the equation. The success of the People Agenda may solve some of the most pressing challenges of our times providing individuals, organizations and society with the opportunity to thrive.

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