

Forbes*IGNITE*

REHUMANIZING BUSINESS

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**Based on the Executive
Meetings of the Rehumanizing
Business Taskforce and Forbes
Ignite Original Research**

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HAVE YOU EVER LOVED A JOB SO MUCH YOU'D CARVE IT ON YOUR TOMBSTONE?

Here lies Jane Doe, Senior Sales Manager (Colorado and Utah) at WidgetCo. Beloved Mother, Daughter, Friend, and Pillar of the Community.

Most of us would be aghast if that's how we were remembered forever, yet what's the first question you're asked at a party? "What do you do for a living?" Looking at the broad sweep of history, though, what sociologists call our "work identities" have radically shifted in importance.

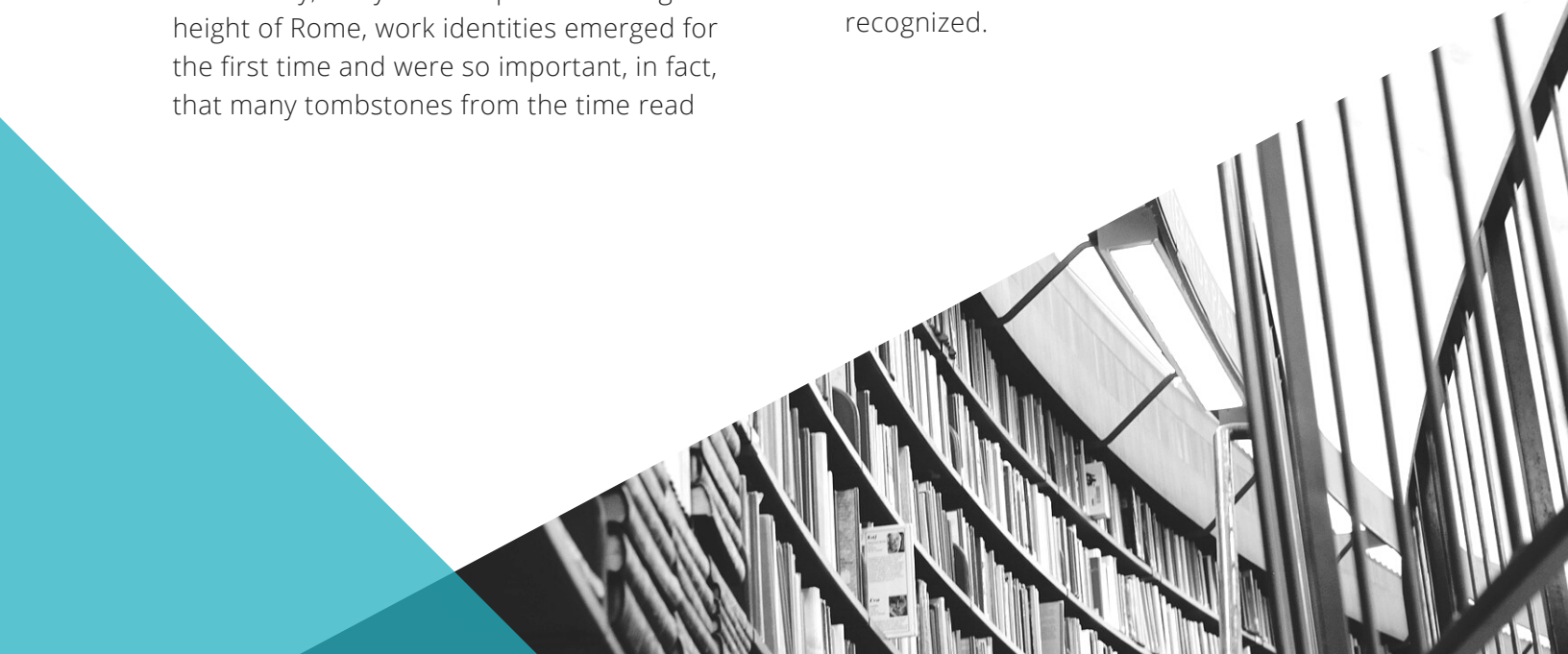
The Rise and Fall of Who We Are at Work

Before the rise of the Roman Empire, *there was no such thing* as a Work Identity. You were defined simply by where you came from and who your parents were - by your community, not your occupation. During the height of Rome, work identities emerged for the first time and were so important, in fact, that many tombstones from the time read

like a LinkedIn headline. For example, would you accept the connection request of one C. Pupius Amicus, Purpurarius (purple dye maker), whose tombstone/job title was discovered by archaeologists?

Ever since then, who we are at work has wrestled with our various other identities for dominance. Its stock has gone up and down over long stretches of time, relative to our places within families, communities, and other groups. Now, it appears to be in terminal decline.

The end of pensions and career-long employment started the race to the bottom. Then the rise of gig work and automation piled on. The last straw was the COVID-19 pandemic that saw the workplace as we know it disappear utterly, and with it, the last threads that tethered us to the kind of work identities previous generations might have recognized.



THE GREAT RESET

Each of us, no matter what industry we work in, no matter our title, or even whether we have a job, is undergoing a radical re-evaluation of our relationship to work and how it defines us as a person. What is work for? Should it pay for the life we want outside of work, or should it be a means of accomplishment and fulfillment that cannot be compartmentalized? What's more important to how we see ourselves and how others see us; our passions and missions, or status and belonging? Where do we spend an hour of extra time, when we get it? Answering those last emails? Visiting residents in a nursing home? Playing with the kids?

Each person's process of resetting their relationship to work, the values they'll use to guide that process, and where they'll end up are as different as their fingerprints. Companies that use radical and strategic empathy to lean into this intergenerational shift will find the wind at their backs. Those who don't will be blown off course and lost forever.

THE REHUMANIZING BUSINESS TASKFORCE

That's why Forbes Ignite, with the assistance of our strategic partners at UK-based communications firm, Eulogy, assembled a cross-industry task force of diverse leaders and changemakers. Our mission was to conceptualize new ways that organizations can embed strategic empathy within their everyday communication and decision making. The goal is not to create more meaningless metrics or corporate "initiatives" that waste people's time and die on the vine.

The goal is to find tangible and practical innovations to help companies attract and retain talent in a time where workers are feeling less and less connected and loyal to their employers.

Across four working sessions, our taskforce members built upon Forbes Ignite research using a design thinking-inspired process. This is their story. This is what we found, together.

STRATEGIC EMPATHY: THE WAY FORWARD, A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

One of the first things teams in our working sessions addressed was getting specific on what empathy actually means, and its pros and cons.

“Can we define empathy?” asked Erin Lanuti, Chief Innovation Officer of Omnicom. “I feel like we can’t solve the problem of using empathy strategically without really outlining what it means and what it doesn’t.”

DEFINING STRATEGIC EMPATHY

Empathy is basically a person’s ability to put themselves in someone else’s shoes. Or, as the Oxford Dictionary puts it more formally, “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.”

Empathy is hardwired into us through the parts of our brain that have to do with “mirroring.” How often have you cringed or maybe even felt a tinge of actual pain when you witnessed a character in a movie get hurt? Have you ever seen someone embarrass themselves so thoroughly that you felt the pain of shame even though you were just observing? That’s the brain’s mirroring system in action. When we see someone do or experience something, the pieces of our brain that would light up if we experienced the exact same thing become more active - even though we’re only watching it happen to someone else.

“When we witness what happens to others, we don’t just activate the visual cortex like we thought some decades ago,” said Christian Keysers of the Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience in Amsterdam, while speaking on a panel at the 2017 International Convention of Psychological Science in Vienna. “We also activate our own actions as if we’d be acting in similar ways. We activate our own emotions and sensations as if we felt the same.”



THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF EMPATHY

As distinguished by psychologists Paul Ekman and Daniel Goleman:

1. **Cognitive Empathy:** Simply knowing how a person is likely to feel. This has also been referred to as “perspective taking.” A more common way to think of it is “sympathy.” One can imagine how the other person must feel, but doesn’t really feel what they’re feeling.
2. **Emotional Empathy:** When you feel what another person is feeling. It’s like emotions that are contagious. These can even be physical feelings as well. But just because you may spontaneously share the same feelings or emotions, doesn’t necessarily mean you have the cognitive grasp of why they arose in the first place.
3. **Compassionate Empathy:** This is the fusion between cognitive and emotional empathy. You intellectually understand what a person is feeling, and why, and you also feel it yourself in a way that moves you to actually help the person.

Strategic empathy is when we consistently and methodically use one or more of the three types of empathy as tools to better achieve a long range goal or solve a complex challenge.

Just because empathy is used as a critical means to an end doesn't mean it has to be fake or insincere. In fact, as Nadine Augusta, Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer at Cushman Wakefield put it, "Fake empathy is impersonal and can set you back in your interactions with others." If we're only pretending to put ourselves in other's shoes, we can never get the strategic benefits of actually doing it. We'll never be able to actually understand what they feel and how they might respond to what happens next. Faux empathy could even harm the other person in question, and yourself.

One way to bring real empathy to the table while still using it strategically, according to Brandy Sanders, is to "start by asking more questions than making statements. Don't jump right into your agenda until you've really listened."

WHY EMPATHY?

"It's helpful to think about the evidence of why all this matters," insisted Solange Chamberlain, COO of Commercial Banking at UK banking leader NatWest. "We're doing this because it is the right thing to do but there is also economic value, how do you make it more available and understandable for people?"

Solange wasn't the only one to insist that there be a stronger business case for empathy, and a more simple way to communicate its importance to a wide variety of stakeholders. Why is empathy - among all the other potential differentiators in the talent wars - such a unique advantage for those who wield it effectively, and such a comfort to those it supports? Luiz Gondim, CTO of Z-Tech and VP of Innovation at AB InBev also wondered aloud whether a focus on empathy might sound more like pop psychology than business strategy to other decision makers.

“Look, I get how important empathy is. Not everyone else will,” asserted Gondim.

“To get the whole enterprise to buy in, we need to translate empathy into business terms that people won’t feel silly advocating for in front of their colleagues, their bosses or even the board,” he added.

So let’s give it a try, then.

Imagine you have a team of ten and three open positions you have to fill. If almost every single one of your employees and candidates are having an existential realignment when it comes to work and what they want out of it, then solving the problem isn’t as straightforward as it would have been a year ago.

If lack of empathy means you don’t understand what it’s going to take to keep the ten people you have from walking out the door before the three new ones arrive, you’ll have bigger problems than just filling a couple open positions. On the flipside, if you somehow manage to keep your team happy but can’t empathize with and understand the deeper, individual needs of the new talent you’re trying to attract, they’ll take their talents somewhere that does.

“We need to be mindful of all cohorts within the organization,” Christophe Catoir, President of recruiting giant Adecco affirmed to the group. “They need to be vocal and visible, which contributes to an organization’s resilience.”



To make all of this more complex, you simply can’t make everyone happy. Gone are the days when a few extra days of PTO would still the troubled waters. People of every stripe yearn to, in the words of business and marketing guru Seth Godin, “do work that matters for people who care.” And might we add to that, do that work with people who care about them as individuals.

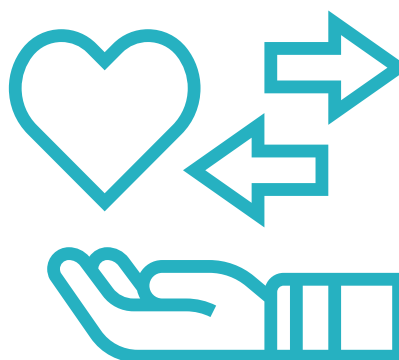
The problem is that what “matters” is highly individual and subjective, so making a change in the nature of a team or company’s work may upset just as many people as it pleases. Cultures must also be carefully built over long periods of time. So if someone wants a radically different environment today than they were working in before the pandemic, it won’t happen immediately - and of course some people won’t like that change either.

Marieke Flament, CEO of Mettle, a digital commercial bank in the UK, said it best. “You don’t have to solve everyone’s problem at once, but neither should your solutions to one problem deliberately prevent those affected by other challenges to perform at their best.”

If we can embed strategic empathy into our daily interactions and decision making, then we can at least better collect the proverbial data we need to understand the risks and tradeoffs involved with any talent-centric transformation. We can better know who won’t want to join us on the other side of a change so that we can proactively help those people find new paths. We can also appeal to the individual needs of valuable new hires in ways that will put less conscious companies at a disadvantage. Put simply, the company that best masters the art of empathy can be self-aware and nimble enough to win the talent wars in their industry.

AVOIDING EMPATHY’S DARKSIDE

One of the most important observations our groups had was that empathy is not an unalloyed good. Empathy, or its negative unintended consequences, have been responsible for great crimes and tragedies. Part of using empathy strategically, and one of the biggest constraints that the members of working groups faced, is how to minimize the negative consequences of empathy while taking maximum advantage of its benefits. Even harder is how to do this, not just in a one-off fashion, but to create a solution that does it systematically.



Three negative side effects of empathy took center stage in our discussions.

- Empathetic leadership is key to achieving the promise of strategic empathy, but leaders are uniquely challenged with being empathetic.
- Empathy can also unintentionally lead towards more bias because we tend to empathize more with people whose experiences are more like our own.
- Empathy can lead the needs of the one (or few) to outweigh those of the many

Challenge 1: Empathetic leadership is key to achieving the promise of strategic empathy, but leaders are uniquely challenged with being empathetic.

Brianna Appel, Manager of Marketing & Communications at IYUNO-SDI Group, called out the six hundred pound gorilla in the room.

“Leaders at companies haven’t done a good enough job listening to the stressors that existed before the pandemic, let alone those we have now. Leaders need to be strong, transparent, and more human.” After a brief reflective pause, Appel added, “But that’s easy to say and hard to do when you’re at the center of a storm.”

That’s true. Especially for senior leaders.

The higher any person climbs on “the food chain,” whether that’s in terms of money, status or power, the less powerful the mirroring activity is in their brains that gives rise to empathy. It doesn’t matter who you are or how enlightened you are, it’s a physical fact. How many of you who manage others have caught yourself writing a taciturn “boss email,” not because you were mad, but because you were just trying to send and respond to as many messages as quickly as possible? We know that taking a few minutes to think and communicate with more kindness wouldn’t worry, confuse or upset people on the receiving end of the email, but we just don’t do it.

But once a leader is aware of this challenge, they can take active steps to overcome it. Take Nishith Srivastava, the head of the CMO Practice for consulting firm, Tech Mahindra. Srivastava shared that he was once assigned to lead a business unit in a new geography where the employees lacked the kind of skills and experience he had become accustomed to in a previous role. After spending months of frustration where he increasingly began to doubt his team members, he had a fundamental shift of perspective.

“I realized the team may not have been able to do the things my old team could, but they had different gifts and talents. Instead of focusing on those and building on them, I was obsessing over what they didn’t have,” Srivastava said. “As soon as I realized this, I became a different kind of leader and the performance of my business started to take off.”

Srivastava’s success with strategic empathy was such that his experience is now a business school case study.

Challenge 2: Empathy can also unintentionally lead towards more bias because we tend to empathize more with people whose experiences are more like our own.

Understanding this, we can see that the “gravity” of empathy tends to pull people together in groups and cliques whose members are very similar. It’s also easy to see how, even if we’re trying to be aware of our unconscious biases, we’re still more likely to be moved to action by a sad story from someone “like us.” We’re also more likely to dismiss the wrongdoing of people who are more like us.

Unfortunately, unconscious bias training is famously ineffective. Not only that, but pushing too hard to surface and consider every single bias can lead to the kind of fake empathy that we said earlier was no empathy at all.

When one C-level participant in the group told the others that they sometimes felt they were overcompensating in formal feedback sessions to avoid unconscious biases, the very diverse group erupted in agreement. What’s worse, as the discussion progressed, it became clear that this kind of overcompensation wasn’t doing the company any favors, as it could lead to important issues remaining unaddressed. It’s also no good for the employee on the other side of the table because they not only aren’t getting the feedback they need to improve, but the use of fake empathy denies the executive the true understanding needed to take corrective actions that could have helped the employee.

Challenge 3: Empathy can lead the needs of the one (or few) to outweigh those of the many



“One death is a tragedy, one million is a statistic.” - Unknown

This phrase has been attributed and misattributed to villains from Oliver Cromwell to Joseph Stalin over the years. That’s because there’s something in it that cuts to the quick of our human condition.

In addition to humans having a documented inability to wrap their heads around very large numbers, the mirroring system that underlies empathy in our brains can only stretch so far. For instance, I can put myself in your shoes and really try to understand and actually feel what you’re feeling. I can maybe do that with one other person at the same time as I’m trying to empathize with you. But can I do that for five people at once? Fifty? Fifty million?

The brain just can’t handle that.

“Generally, companies gain traction and stay relevant by answering the needs of the many,” posited Marcus Sawyerr, CEO of EQ Community. “However, ‘the many’ consists of individuals; if companies do not cater to individuals’ needs, how will you ever add meaningful value to ‘the many’?”

Some consequences of this brain flaw include the situation Stalin was supposedly complaining about when he dropped that line; America’s WWII planners cared immensely when even one of their soldiers died but didn’t even think - or so it was claimed - about the millions of others’ citizens who suffered the same or worse fates.

Another consequence is that calamities affecting millions can roll on unimpeded until the story of one person manages to rise above the cacophony and grab everyone’s attention. For instance, a photo of one child who perished in a dangerous, seaborne escape from Syria famously focused the world’s attention on that country’s civil war, which had already raged - largely ignored - for years.

Less existentially, what happens if one or two of your team are complaining about a policy that, while complex and open to interpretation, is really good for the majority? Whether from fear of complaints escalating into scandals or from true empathy with those team members’ complaints, too often the squeaky wheels get the grease to the detriment of all. And if one solution for a squeaky wheel causes five other problems for everyone else, where do we end up?



“We need to encourage a deeper awareness of the skills and talents of our teams and develop an empathic leadership style that is in tune with those differences,” observed Marina Donohoe, Director UK & Northern Europe for Enterprise Ireland. “By acknowledging the different roles and needs of colleagues, and harnessing these talents, leaders can foster an inclusive and kind culture and that leads to positive outcomes for teams, individuals and all stakeholders.”

Yet, the team agreed that it was possible to overcome the deficits of empathy while taking advantage of its benefits. What was less clear, as the teams moved into architecting real solutions, was exactly how we could do that.

THE FIVE CARDINAL RULES OF STRATEGIC EMPATHY

One of the counterintuitive things about design thinking, the process our team was following during the working sessions, is that quantity of ideas trumps quality every time in the brainstorming phase. It flies in the face of common sense to just blurt out whatever thing, no matter how ridiculous, comes to your mind. Even crazier is the thought that a catalog of such outbursts could constitute a meaningful advance in solving a problem.

Yet, that's exactly how it works.

As our teams' debated, discussed, and offered up as many ideas as they could, the lack of pressure to have the perfect idea meant their brains could leap and bound. Unexpected connections between ideas, industries and disciplines bubbled up. From this frothing intellectual foam, critical patterns emerged that any solution to deploy strategic empathy must accomplish. Let's think of these as the five cardinal rules of strategic empathy - or the list of outcomes any solution must create to be effective.

Certainly not every solution can tick off all five of these rules, but one is better than none.

Let's look at the rules in a bit more detail.

The Five Cardinal Rules of Strategic Empathy

1

ANCHOR EMPATHY

as the foundation of successfully adapting for the future.

2

USE EMPATHY

as a strategic advantage, while rebalancing the relationship between organizations and people.

3

HARNESS EMPATHY

to unleash a culture of curiosity.

4

ACTIVATE EMPATHY

to catalyze authentic diversity.

5

INCORPORATE EMPATHY

into a non-hierarchical culture of communication that incorporates broader business perspectives and empowers feedback seekers.



RULE 1 - ANCHOR EMPATHY AS THE FOUNDATION OF SUCCESSFULLY ADAPTING FOR THE FUTURE.

As ABInBev's Luiz Gondim had pointed out earlier, the concept of strategic empathy isn't exactly tailor made to appeal to hard-nosed, skeptical business leaders. So we need to do two things 1) translate strategic empathy into business terms to build consensus and 2) demonstrate that an organization can't successfully transform without strategic empathy.

“Empathy needs a rebrand,” said Jennifer Young, Co-Founder and Chief Marketing Officer of the outdoor travel and RV rental marketplace, Outdoorsy. “If we can find a new way to talk about empathy, so leaders don’t see this simply as a task to delegate to the HR department, that would be an important first step.”

EMPATHY IN ACTION

Measuring a Movement | Empathy is the New Green

Christophe Catoir, Adecco | Solange Chamberlain, NatWest | Marina Donohoe, Enterprise Ireland | Marieke Flament, Mettle | Ozgur Tohumcu, Oxbotica

“The purpose is the mission. From here, you derive the actions.” - Ozgur Tohumcu, CEO at Oxbotica

For its proposed solution to embedding strategic empathy, one of our teams focused on how measurements, combined with powerful movements and storytelling could create outcomes that are more than the sum of their parts. What could it look like if empathy were “the new green?”

Step 1: Use a science-based assessment to understand the current baseline of empathy for individuals and across teams and organizations.

Step 2: Add empathy and empathetic leadership to existing 360-degree feedback processes

Step 3: Make it a movement, not an obligation. Use the power of storytelling and highlighting internal and external role models to give people a mission and a vision to buy into.

Step 4: Measure changes in existing employee and customer satisfaction metrics, and extrapolate what that could mean to customer lifetime value (and therefore stock price and enterprise value) in the near term, and over time.

Step 5: Use these numbers to convince investors and boards of directors how important this issue is and to build consensus on a long term strategy to scientifically test new interventions and tools that increase empathy, as well as financial results.

Step 6: Over time, you could even develop an “Empathy Index,” or a “World’s Most Empathetic Companies List” that creates a demonstration of the market value of empathy and spurs a competition to take these principles more and more seriously.

Indeed, research by cognitive linguist George Lakoff at the University of Berkeley has found that the words we use to describe something invoke a specific frame in our brain that we view an issue through. Think of them as different pairs of glasses with different tints and distortions that we unconsciously swap on and off depending on the context and the specific words we hear.

If we can not only shift the frames of our fellow decision makers, but also make the practical case - as we've attempted earlier - that empathy is key to survival, then action can happen.

Other recommendations from our team around this rule include:

- Quantifying empathy and its impact on decision making and results
- Make emotional intelligence and resilience measures and credentials of individual success, in the same way academic excellence is.
- Link empathy to company KPIs as well as group and individual compensation
- Use empathy as a talent magnet and talent generators

RULE 2 - USE EMPATHY AS A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE WHILE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS AND PEOPLE ARE BEING REBALANCED.

If people are re-evaluating their relationships with organizations - both as employees and customers - the organizations can't just stand still. They also have to move, change and evolve to meet people where they are and where they will be.



"Many people consider changing their roles and fields of practice at certain points in their life to align further with their purpose or passion. It can be daunting to embark in a new field after twenty years of specializing in another," pointed out Denise Chen, Chief Sustainability Officer of Melco Resorts. "However, I believe that while there will be many people in our new field who have far more experience, there is always something new and valuable that anyone can bring to the table."

Silicon Valley pioneer Steve Blank once told the Forbes Ignite team that, when he was a leader at one of his many ventures, he had over 1,000 conversations with customers per year. He said this was the main reason he gained market share by meeting people's real needs while his competitors hunkered down in their offices. That's strategic empathy in action.

Moreover, as employee experience is perhaps the most important ingredient to delivering stellar customer experiences, as much effort needs to be put into understanding where our teams are at, where they want to go, and what they need to succeed.

If a company is able to codify this process, democratize it so everyone from the CEO on down uses it, and embed it practically in the workflows and decision making processes for product and strategy, that company will have a meaningful advantage.

EMPATHY IN ACTION

Impactful Empathy | Listening at Scale

Martine Cadet, pymetrics | Craig Johnson, Detsu Aegis | Jody Madden, Foundry | Jose Murillo, Grupo Banorte | Erin Lanuti, Omnicom | Lin Zhou, Forbes Ignite Advisory Board

It's hard to have shared success or be unique without listening, that's why one group of leaders in our task force wanted to understand what we could do to augment our ability to listen. What could address this is a transparent, multi-directional, long-term feedback loop that augments all employees' ability to hear, be heard, act on their ideas, and be measured against an evolving profit-linked definition of empathy. If we can supercharge this through thoughtful use of data and technology, even more could be accomplished.

"It's not enough for us to listen, or for our counterparts to listen to us," asserted Craig Johnson, Senior Vice President and General Manager of the Chicago Office at the advertising agency holding group, Dentsu Aegis. "The people we speak with as leaders need to be heard, and the people we work with need to hear us too. Not just as leaders, but as fellow humans."

Their idea was to use advanced data analytics techniques and machine learning. Instead of asking people to report their empathy, or that of others, the idea here was just to observe. Once a data science team could define "what empathy looks like" in interactions, they could use natural language processing to create clusters of people, behavior and situations and spot commonalities.

"It's important to have a definition of empathy that a computer can understand so that we can assess it quantitatively and objectively with the right context." Dr. Lin Zhou explained to the team. "That's the baseline we have to start from."

Doing this would allow the creation of an ongoing series of experiments to improve empathy related outcomes across the organization and build buy in over time for its business value. This process of measurement and experimentation is something that one leader who advocated for it, Chief Analytics Officer of Grupo Banorte, Jose Murillo, has employed to create billions of dollars in financial returns. But, Murillo warned, "the golden rule of any machine learning project is to start with natural intelligence before blindly deploying artificial intelligence."

RULE 3 - HARNESS EMPATHY TO UNLEASH A CULTURE OF CURIOSITY

“The idea is to question all of your assumptions.” - Emmanuel Lagarrigue, Chief Innovation Officer at Schneider Electric

Much has been written in academia and business about the benefits of a growth mindset (believing that our views and the things that define us change over time, and that we can change them) versus a fixed mindset (it is what it is). The key to unlocking a growth mindset is being able to truly internalize the perspectives and ideas of others so that we can evolve our thinking and be challenged in ways that smack us out of our comfort zones. The secret to doing that is empathy.

Other things the teams pointed out:

- Put learning on par with results when measuring real success. One C-level automotive industry participant put it best. “When something doesn’t work but, through that, you learn what will, that’s sometimes more important than the initial result you were looking for,” they said. “But continuous failure means no one is learning, so these two goals have to be kept in balance.”
- Pretend you know nothing and talk to people outside of your usual spheres. We all know a little about things beyond our 9-to-5, but what if what we think we know is wrong? The only way to know is approaching problems like a child. Ask dumb questions. You’ll get insightful answers.
- Share the results of curiosity by creating a communication mechanism where information flows both up and down



RULE 4 - ACTIVATE EMPATHY TO CATALYZE AUTHENTIC DIVERSITY

It’s important to recognize that none of us, and no group of us, have all the skills to solve every problem we will face. This is especially true as equity and sustainability are forcing companies to both move outside of their comfort zones and address challenges they have little familiarity with. The less diverse the perspectives around our tables, the less effectively we can address problems before they arise or effectively solve them when they do.

The only way to address this problem is by augmenting existing equity and inclusion efforts with a strategic listening (empathy) campaign to better understand all of the things we don’t know, and who might have the perspectives we need.

Some other suggestions from the teams to do this include:

- Use training, calling out positive behavior and leadership by example to help team members understand strategic empathy and use it in their every day work.
- Conduct randomized, controlled trials with a few people or teams to demonstrate the difference between embedding and democratizing strategic empathy, and not.
- Use a keener understanding of employees' situations and needs to avoid micromanagement and its costs to employees (and the micromanagers themselves).

EMPATHY IN ACTION

Creating a Shadow Board

Marcus Sawyerr, EQ Community | Simon Mulcahy, Salesforce | Brianna Appel, IYUNO-SDI Group | Emmanuel Lagarrigue, Schneider Electric

"In the military," said Simon Mulcahy, the Chief Innovation Officer of Salesforce, "we had this concept of red teaming. You were on the 'blue team,' while another completely separate group of people (red team) did their best to undermine your plans, break your momentum, find loopholes, and otherwise defeat the aims you were trying to achieve. Applying this approach internally in business allows you to identify weaknesses and fix them before someone not on your side does."

What if, Mulcahy proposed, companies used that same logic, and instituted a red team to challenge their board of directors - a type of shadow board? The goal wouldn't be to stress test the company's plans, but instead to expose the board to more diverse perspectives that specifically enhance strategic empathy and raise the formal board's awareness of their gaps when it comes to sustainability and equity.

This idea was immediately seized on by the rest of the team. There was a clear path to implement it. It wouldn't take much work, time or money. The challenge would become in being methodical about who should sit on this shadow board, and why? Will the shadow board's activities and recommendations all be private, or will they create public pressure for the main board to act? How should the shadow board interact with the main board to improve its decision making abilities. We don't have the answers, but everyone agreed that it was a solution worth trying.



RULE 5 - INCORPORATE EMPATHY INTO A NON-HIERARCHICAL CULTURE OF COMMUNICATION THAT INCORPORATES BROADER BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES AND EMPOWERS FEEDBACK-SEEKERS

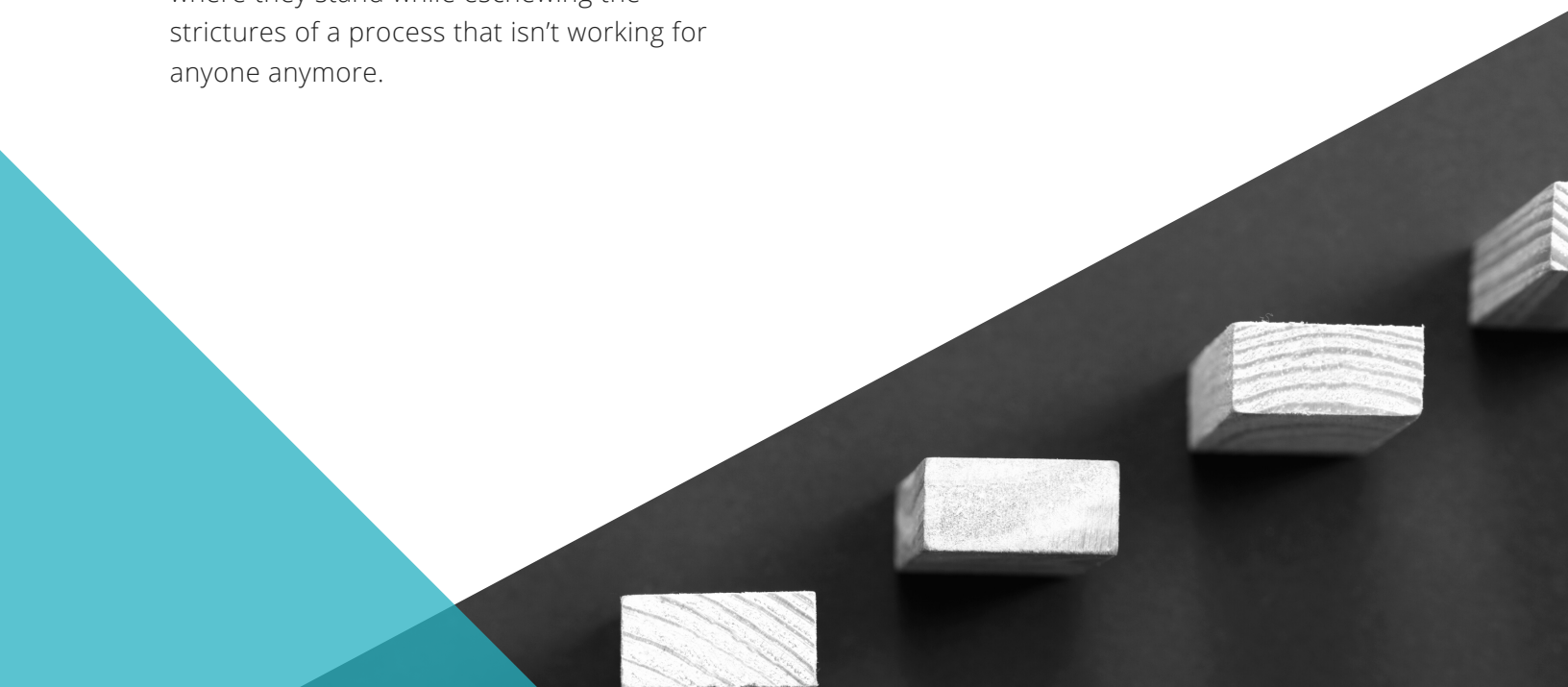
Too often, the process of feedback is a quarterly process forced upon employees and managers alike. HR is in the driver's seat, and the quality of feedback and interactions leave much to be desired. Alternatively, many in the group expressed frustration with a culture they see emerging among some employees that is less about feedback, and more about seeking constant validation outside of any formal process.

Instead of settling for either of these two options, team members advocated for creating a culture of continuous and cross-departmental communication. The goal is to let feedback seekers continuously know where they stand while eschewing the strictures of a process that isn't working for anyone anymore.

"The hybrid work environment is leveling the playing field in some ways, but tilting it in others. The productivity, progress and results we've seen during this time has been astounding, but it creates new challenges for developing the next generation of leaders," said Jody Madden, CEO of cinematic special effects software provider, Foundry. "Yet by focusing on enabling others to be creative, internally and externally, it allows me to keep the success of others front and center. I believe we can both tackle the jobs of today while nurturing the long term success of those who will be guiding us tomorrow."

Members of the team recommended creating some system of regular check-ins with managers to specifically discuss how feedback seekers are getting the input they want, from whom, what was said, and what they should do about it.

Doing this would also allow feedback seekers to move beyond their insular teams and form connections across the enterprise that will show them the bigger picture and how their role contributes to it.



EMPATHY IN ACTION

A Mutual Coaching Network

Brandy Sanders | Denise Chen, Melco Resorts | Jennifer Young, Outdoorsy | Luiz Gondim, AB InBev
| Nadine Augusta, Cushman & Wakefield |
Nishith Srivastava, Tech Mahindra

Coaching is a skill set of its own, and one that everyone should have. The better you can coach others, the better you can guide yourself - and vice versa. Instead of framing of feedback merely as an information collection exercise, this team advocated for reframing it as a shared or mutual coaching exercise. C-level executives have as much to learn from entry level employees as anyone can learn from them, though the types of things each party will learn are different.

If, as we mentioned before, learning should be on par with results as an individual performance goal, then this mutual coaching network can be a powerful mechanism to drive it. What's essential again is creating the accountability of measuring progress without imposing a one-size-fits-all system. Critically, all employees should be trained in the skills of coaching and feedback so the input they give others is more valuable and can translate more quickly into business outcomes.

There should be a constant process of measurement of results, elevating success stories through internal and external communications, and designing continuous improvements in the way coaching is shared. Such an approach could also play a crucial role in busting down the silos and fiefdoms that inhibit transformation, and blunt organizational effectiveness.

CONCLUSION: BUSINESS AT A CROSSROADS

What was more remarkable than any idea or insight our teams provided was the clear demonstration that leaders of the biggest companies in the world are just like you and me. They're also asking themselves how to balance the impact they want to create with the money they need to make. They're at crossroads in their careers - moving into completely new areas of practice, considering jumps into entrepreneurship, or looking at wholly different second acts.

The kinds of concerns and confessions we heard sounded just like those that could be

heard in the company break room - if we still had company break rooms. These leaders embraced their humanity, were vulnerable, listened, and worked hard to understand the circumstances of those they are responsible for. That's why their suggestions proved so useful for getting to the heart of strategic empathy.

To a person, every single one of these leaders wondered if empathy was, indeed, the place to focus in order to manage this titanic shift in how people relate to companies. In the end, it seemed obvious that, yes, it was, and that there were more than enough practical ways that companies could use strategic empathy to compete and improve the lives of others.

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