



Guest

My seventh guest at the Play to Potential Podcast is Abhijit Bhaduri. Abhijit is an Author, Columnist, Keynote speaker and a Digital Transformation coach to Leaders and Organizations. Abhijit writes regularly for Indian and International publications including The Wall Street Journal. Abhijit is the author of The Digital Tsunami (Published by Rupa Publications India in Oct 2016), where he talks about how Leaders and Organisations should reinvent themselves given the digital wave that is sweeping everything around us. He is one of the top HR influencers in Social Media according to SHRM, India.

Till recently, Abhijit Bhaduri was the Chief Learning Officer for the Wipro group. Prior to this he has held HR leadership roles at Microsoft, Pepsi, Colgate and Tata Steel and worked in India, South East Asia and US. He is on the Advisory Board of the prestigious program for Chief Learning Officers that is run by the University of Pennsylvania.

Abhijit is passionate about Theatre and has acted in plays and in a movie Apna Asmaan. He is an amateur cartoonist and uses sketches to capture key learnings across various fields. He has been blogging for about 10+ years. For a deeper insight into various other facets of Abhijit Bhaduri, please visit www.abhijitbhaduri.com

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 7th Play to Potential Podcast conversation. This is Deepak Jayaraman here, creator and curator of this series of conversations. I work with senior successful executives and help them navigate phases of high-stakes transition effectively.

My guest this time is Abhijit Bhaduri. Abhijit Bhaduri is a Leadership and Digital Transformation coach to CXOs and senior business leaders.

He is a well-known keynote speaker, voracious writer in leading journals and magazines including the Wall Street Journal and is one of the leading HR influencers in Social Media according to SHRM India. I also discovered that he is an amateur cartoonist and has appeared in a Bollywood movie – Apna Asmaan and has appeared in plays in India, Kuala Lumpur and the US.

He has held senior HR leadership roles in companies like Wipro, Microsoft, Pepsi, Colgate Palmolive and Tata Steel. Given the digital wave that is hitting us from multiple directions, I felt leaders could benefit from his perspectives on the Digital Tsunami and how we could deal with it effectively.

Without further ado, over to the conversation.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): A good place to start is the book. Give us a sense of what you mean by 'Digital Tsunami' and why you wrote this book?

Abhijit Bhaduri (AB): I initially thought that the book would be called 'The Digital Mindset'. I thought so because I find that a lot of companies actually invested a lot of time and energy in the technology part of it. So, they will invest in the right kind of software, the right kind of stuff to make the company's business model at par with the digital requirements. But I also noticed that a lot of companies do not actually do enough to change the culture inside the organization. Because the digital world is going to require very, very fundamental shifts, many of which are polar opposites of how we have been used to working. So, what happens is that the organizations automatically assume that they are going to move into a model which is going to be very efficient, but people take a long time to change. Think about how hard it is for us to keep up to New Year resolutions and here, we expect that the entire organization is going to take a New Year resolution one day and from the next day onwards, never falter. That's actually probably not very accurate. So, I wanted to draw attention to that aspect.

DJ: And what are some of the dimensions of polarities, to use your term?

AB: For example, if you think about the analogue world; the digital world is what I've contrasted it with. So, the analogue world is a lot more silted, whereas the digital world is boundary-less. If you think about how software today is written by some of the big five in the digital world which is typically your Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Google kind of businesses they actually have cross-disciplinary teams. So, you will have an anthropologist, you will have a behavioural scientist, you will have a coder, all of whom will come together and design the website. Or creating a product, you will have people of all kinds, very diverse teams. So, Trans disciplinary and border-lessens is a very fundamental principle that explains why companies the ones that I've mentioned it's very hard for us to figure out what business they are in. So, what business is Google in and why on earth is Google competing with Ford and General Motors at one level and maybe a completely different biotech company at another level, working with contact lenses and diabetes and medical devices and all of that. This boundarylessness is the essence of the digital world. So, this is hard for analogue companies to manage.

DJ: Just sticking with the theme, what's the 'therefore' for leadership? For a minute, if we reflect, what does it mean, from the mindset shift, to use your language, what are some of the themes that come up?

AB: The first thing is leadership. One of the most important differentiations is that in the analogue world, the leaders were not very accessible. So, they would be accessible to a few people, and they would show up for, let's say, some large public event kind of thing, public event or employee event, whichever way you define it, and they would pretty much come to the balcony, wave for the crowd and then go back. I mean this is pretty much the model, symbolically speaking. Whereas in the digital world, the expectation is that leaders actually engage in real time with people and that also means that the leaders are far less curated and polished. Their leadership image is a lot less of that; it's a lot more about authenticity, real time, and this is very hard for people who've grown up with the older mindset, because they need to be seen as perfect when they come in front of the audience. So, this doesn't work anymore. If I have a problem with the airlines I am flying, then I

would like the CEO to respond, because that may be the only name I know. If I were flying Virgin Airlines I would expect now, whether that is responded to by Richard Branson or not is really not the point but somebody who reads that should be able to respond back. I think that's the image you see, that one is talking about, authenticity and all that.

DJ: It reminds me of a lovely YouTube video of a guy whose guitar was broken...

AB: United!

DJ: ...'United broke my guitar,' it's a wonderful song. The stock went down 11%.

AB: Exactly! This is the power of the individual in the world that digital is creating. Everyone is really broadcasting. So, you don't have to wait for BBC to do a story on your company to be able to either take up the stock or take down the stock. An individual employee or individual consumer can do that.

DJ: Let's go back to one of the themes from the leadership standpoint, which is hiring, talent acquisition. Give us a sense of how that space is shifting, given digital. How are companies innovating using digital to hire leaders at the top, both in terms of what they're looking for, the digital quotient or a digital mindset, and the technologies that are aiding better decision-making from a talent-acquisition standpoint?

AB: Again, one of the polarities is that in the analogue world, while all the companies said that people are our most important assets or customers are king, neither of them was actually true. In the real world, people didn't care either about employees or about customers. In the digital world, actually it's just the reverse. You have to put the employee or the customer at the centre and then build the rest of the organizational processes around it. This actually is a very different mindset. So, the way in which the process of talent acquisition works is that you hire people not for competencies, but you hire people actually for their ability to learn stuff. So, competency is the old analogue model, where you have a world which we know, which we understand. There is the defined path, the roads are already created. You just need to have people who know how to navigate those roads very well. So, it is really like being a bus driver, a school-bus driver. You have a particular route it may be very crowded, very complicated, but it's a predictable set. Now, in this digital world, you are really looking for the cabbie that will be able to pick up weak directions. For example, when they train cabbies in London, they actually put them through a couple of years of training. You should be able to give them a very random street, landmark, or something to that effect and say, 'Oh, there is a pub which is known for the fries that they do and there is a laundry which is right next to it, which has got a funny name I think it's the name of a movie and that's the place where I want to go'. The person should be able to actually take you there.

DJ: It's almost like a different set of skills. It's not just how well you drive the car but how well you navigate...

AB: ...And build a conversation with the client, being able to engage the people. It's a very different set of requirements. In the digital world, there is no precedence. So, what happens is, the world is going to be made up of people who know how to create roads rather than drive on roads which are already created.

DJ: To your point, how do you test for learnability?

AB: Most people who are curious have, at some point of time, picked up stuff which they've tried to learn on their own. I just was speaking half-an-hour back to a person who is teaching a class in this particular organization. They're actually teaching someone how to run particular software. I said 'That's very impressive. How did you learn it?' He says, 'I have never attended any class. I used to listen to all these people talking about it in the online forums, and then I would go and try out the different things. And as I experimented, I discovered that I could actually figure out many different options. So, people would post screenshots. I would look at them and sort of try.' I have met so many people who've picked up you can't reach expertise level, but you can pretty much get way past average, which means you are pretty much at the other end of the bell curve — so I think it is possible for people to do that. However, one must also then say, while it is possible to sort of, let's say, go from 0 to 85 by learning on your own, then there is another aspect which actually takes over beyond that, when you want to really take it to the real realm of expertise. Then, you are looking at feedback, deliberate practice, and all that stuff that makes people move, crawl up from 85 to a 100. Then, that's a very, very, very slow glide.

DJ: You briefly spoke about leaders being onstage, 24x7. And in a lot of ways, we are leaving digital fingerprints all over the world, whether its social media handles, whether it's our surfing behaviours, whatever those might be. So, what are some of the lessons to be learnt in personal branding? Specifically, in the digital world, what do you see some of the good leaders do?

AB: As compared to the analogue world, the digital world places a colossal amount of premium on authenticity and transparency. We are in a connected world, so its way harder to sham and fake what you are not. So, for example, I have no clue about sports, but if I were to say 'This person scored a goal and I am just so excited, I am a fan of this guy,' it will look extremely fake. Because the whole world knows, at least all my friends know that I have no such capability. So, it's hard to fake things. On the other hand, when you are online, then you are responding in real time. There is a possibility you'll make errors, you'll make typos. Today, I put a doodle out and said, today actually happens to be Einstein's birthday and March for whatever reason, fat fingers I typed it as May and somebody said, 'So why are you wishing him two months in advance?' and I said, 'Oh my God, I made that mistake'. So, first of all, to be able to acknowledge and immediately put it out and say I made a mistake, instead of trying to explain and say, 'Actually you know what, it was a typo but then what happened was because I think sometimes when you are trying to type this autocorrect will change this'. Never do that! You just have to acknowledge it was a bad move: 'I was careless, I should have looked at it before I pressed post, and I didn't, so I made an error'. The moment you acknowledge it, actually, that's the other amazing thing. For all that you hear about people getting hammered online, actually, the audience is extremely generous if you acknowledge your mistake and say it was really a judgement error. People are fairly forgiving. They stop doing that. What people don't like is somebody trying to justify and then trying to act clever and wriggle out of the scenario. Then, people will gang up and ensure that they hammer you. So, I think it's a different set of norms.

DJ: I think it goes back to the same point about authenticity, in the sense if you are sincere in your apology...

AB: It is like really big, being authentic and just doing what you really are. So, personal brand well, a lot people could get fame, but fame and personal brand are two different things. You want to be able to craft the personal brand. Fame or lack of it is not necessarily something that... Fame can come from multiple things. If you make a really big boo boo, it could give you that 15 seconds of fame. For example, there's this BBC video of somebody who is an expert in Korean affairs. He was actually giving an interview and his kid walked in. That video was seen 84 million times in that one

day. So then, you know, just to be able to acknowledge that. And their life has been affected by what happened at that moment.

DJ: It's hard to figure out what makes something viral! Back to personal brand. How do you think about it? There are different channels, there are different platforms. In your head, how do you think about leveraging some of these platforms, whether it's LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, or whatever else you might be on? Is there a certain method to the madness here?

AB: There are three or four sections to this. One, I think, personal brand is really about self-awareness. You know, the more you are able to get awareness about yourself, I mean whether through your own reflections, looking at your digital footprints, or behaviour footprints, I would say, seeking feedback, you know talking to people and getting that kind of a feedback. All of that actually helps you understand 'what am I really?'. So, what are those two or three signature strengths which I can put out there, which is going to be useful to people. This latter half of the sentence is extremely important. You could be really great but if you are out there to toot your horn, people very quickly learn to ignore you. So, you have to do something which is going to value add to people. Attention is precious, even for 140 characters; people want you to say something which is meaningful. So, therefore, to say, 'Great weather today in Bangalore', I mean, well for you, but it doesn't excite anyone to know that. So, I think it's a lot of that which you have to keep in mind; there is self-awareness.

Second thing that you need to look at is, what is the content that I am going to write about, which I care about enough so that I should be able to write about it incessantly for a while. By incessantly, I don't necessarily mean 400 tweets a day, but even if you're putting out, let's say, one or two things that you're posting on Facebook or whichever social media platform, something that builds an association, that 'OK, here is a person who will write about, let's say, sport'. Are you going to write about sports, are you going to talk about tennis, are you going to specifically talk about how to become a good tennis player, or are you going to talk about how to build a great forehand? What is that niche that you're looking for? So, it's about that.

The third element is platform. Very rarely do you find someone who is extremely popular on, let's say, Facebook is equally popular on YouTube or is equally popular on LinkedIn or whatever. I think because each of these platforms actually has a different grammar, and until you're able to figure out that grammar, it's very hard to connect to people.

DJ: It's a nuanced point you make here. Double click on the word 'grammar' for me; what do you mean here?

AB: For example, the world is actually going extremely visual and that visual means different things in Instagram with all its filters. There is a certain language to it. Snap chat has its own filters and there is immediacy to it, and then it's gone and it's all of that. So, there is a certain grammar to posting that, there are certain set of rules, dos and don'ts. There is no place where you can learn, but you can observe other people, who are really doing it very well and then actually learn from that. So, that's another piece. On LinkedIn, when you are writing a blog post, a certain length works well, a certain set of words works well, a certain way in which you structure your statements works well, the way you write the title of your article actually has a bearing on how many people read it. So, the more you are able to experiment, the more you are able to figure out the nuances and say, 'OK, I think I have some kind of an idea about what works and what doesn't'.

DJ: I think you were talking about four things and you've done one, two, and three. Was there a fourth?

AB: Yeah. So, there is self-awareness, there is content, there is the platform, and the fourth one would be frequency. You have to be consistent and this frequency is really around what is going to be feasible for you, whether you are travelling, and by and large, unless you are in your deathbed, what is the kind of frequency that you can manage without feeling overwhelmed. Because a lot of times people will start to post things with great enthusiasm and they are posting like 10 things every day and after three days, they sort of give up, and then for like one month you've disappeared. It doesn't work very well in social media. So, you have to start only when you are mentally prepared that even if it is twice a day, I am going to do that consistently. I've been posting pretty much once a week on an average for the past 11 years on my blog. Sometimes, it is hard, because you are traveling, but what I do is, if I know that I am going to be travelling I will schedule it because you can do all that today. If I know that I am going to be partying somewhere on, let's say, new year's, I could always, 10 days before, write a new year post and put it there, program it, so it will appear sharp at midnight. Sometimes people say, oh, how crazy is this that instead of celebrating somewhere, you're blogging. Actually I'm not, it's actually posted there. So, those are simple things that people who blog will tell you. There are millions of articles which will tell you how to do it.

DJ: To move to a different theme, I am curious about this whole start-up ecosystem. As companies grow, clearly there is a point where there is a need for people with experience to start coming and leading chunks of the business. What are some of the lessons to be learnt on managing this transition well? For this set of people who have brick and mortar skills, trying to settle into a company which is young, which is growing in the digital era, with a bunch of people who probably speak a different language and are from a different generation. What are some of the themes that emerge in terms of handling these transitions well so that they don't become points of fracture?

AB: Most of the times, if you look at the start-ups, and this is fairly universal, which is, you cannot think of having a start-up without a technology pass, somebody who is the CMO, somebody who is looking at security, somebody who is the CFO, one could sort of go on with that list. But it's pretty common to find companies who do not have a CHRO. Most of the times, if you talk to founders, the best-case scenario they say, 'It's so important I will do it myself', which is, of course, really like saying, 'I think surgery is very important, so I would like to do it by myself' or something to that effect. Start-ups when they fail, they do not fail because well, of course, they fail because they do not have a great product market fit, but the ones which make it past that stage they inevitably face challenges which are driven by the fact that they haven't focused on the softer issues of building an organization. This could be the way that you've designed the org structure, the way that you've designed the leadership team capabilities, the kind of org culture that you're building.

Some of the largest unicorns around the world today, if we are looking at it, they face challenges which are really around culture, they're the softer issues which are about what kind of values are we going to hold people to. The moment you actually make those choices, it changes the trajectory in multiple ways. Because if you say we are going to have these values, these are the ones which we are articulating, these two or three things that we think are core values for the organization, when you articulate something like that, parallels, you have to ask yourself, 'Would I be willing to let go of a candidate who's extremely competent we need just those skills but that person does not display these values that we have identified as critical?' If that were to be the case, how would we deal with it? And most of the times, these are things that we haven't thought of, so we say, 'OK, you know, this time we'll make an exception, we'll coach this guy, but get this guy on board'. The moment you start doing it, you have to be aware that you've let go of a very vital piece and the implications of this are not visible in the short run. Therefore, most people do not understand how serious an error it is and they realize it only when there is a crisis.

There are enough examples of companies in the world which are very successful otherwise, which have had this kind of a challenge. They've had challenges of culture, which is how it explodes, because of either a harassment suit or it could be about the way some senior official has behaved in public, all of these things. And later on, many of these people have turned back and said, 'I need leadership help, I need someone to coach me, I think I need to grow up, I need to be mature'. These are all the words people have used. This is something that you need to do not after you've hit a certain benchmark in terms of turnover, which is how people look at it: these are luxuries we'll do once we hit a certain turnover or scale. These are things you start doing the moment you're hiring beyond the original lot of people who started to form the company. That is very hard, because now you are saying that OK, first of all, nobody wants to join me, now if I sort of sift out people based on values and all this fuzzy stuff, how am I going to ever run the business? And that's exactly where compromises start to take place.

DJ: Talking about leadership development, how has that shifted with digital, in terms of the approach that people take and in terms of how companies are using digital to drive more effective leadership development?

AB: When we are talking of digital examples, you've to keep in mind that there aren't that many great, successful examples of companies other than the ones that I've mentioned. In digital, these companies are pretty much the benchmark for pretty much everything, in the way that they approach the market, the way that they groom and train people, their org structures and many of the things. I think that's the one piece I want to put across. But fundamentally, the possibilities that digital throws up is massive. For example, you can have a chat bot to provide just-in-time feedback to a manager who is doing a certain set of behaviours which I'm trying to coach the manager on. There are various kinds of possibilities of leveraging something like augmented reality to build skills of people. Some of this is actually happening. Clinics in Singapore, the US are actually using augmented reality to train medical professionals in the work that they are doing, automobile companies are using augmented reality to teach people how to fix, repair, and maintain stuff. So, some of it is happening, but it's probably not mainstream. If you look at video in its different forms — and when I say 'video,' I'm actually using a wide range of technologies that I am going to club under this term, which is even augmented reality, virtual reality, I am going to put under video; it's a moving image if you were to sort of boil it down — the ability to use virtual reality to build even soft skills to help people build empathy. I mean, these are things which are today possible because of technology, and that's where it will go. So, learning is actually going to shift like that.

At this point of time, pretty much, we are in the first minute of the day as far as creating opportunities for people to learn using digital tech, so I don't think that anybody has got a massively evolved model yet. Where I think it will go is, the foundations will get driven by machine learning or artificial intelligence, which is actually going to help people find patterns and coach them on very specific things. So, you do find start-ups and companies, which are working in this space, they are building the products and they will need the help of large companies to be able to create those datasets through which they can create the machines. So, I think if the large companies pair up with the smaller companies that are really the sweet spot where you can do something really creative.

DJ: I want to move to building a digital mindset. I think it's a non-trivial shift for leaders who've spent a lot of time in the analogue world and some who've spent half that time and grown with the emergence of digital. First, how do you stay productive and how do you take in information given the deluge, given the tsunami? Second, managing time in a digitally distracting world. And then, just staying current, given the number of moving pieces, how do you really stay on top of these things? This digital mindset is almost like a multi-disciplinary shift, which feels like a big order. So, from a habit-changing perspective, what have you seen some of the leaders do, both in terms of how

they've approached it strategically but also even in terms of tactics that have worked well for them to really shift the needle from the analogue mindset to the digital mindset?

AB: I was talking to a leader, yesterday, who has just sold his company to a healthcare start-up. This is the sixth start-up he has sold, and his clients range from the Microsoft's of the world to Cisco and now this healthcare start-up. I was asking him what his interests are, and this person is actually an engineer from IIT Kharagpur and has deep interest in classical music and archaeology, and he's spent time going for excavations and all kinds of things, picks up stuff on his own. So, I was asking him what he reads, and he says, 'I read about 60 articles a week and then I try and sort of plough through about four or five books at a time and then finish off different books at different times'. So, I said, 'What are you reading now?' It's pretty amazing. This person is reading stuff which is ancient history, he's looking at a book on machine learning, he's looking at a book on photography, and there was another one, I think, he mentioned about music. This, in many ways, encapsulates the kind of mindset that we are talking about for somebody who is very comfortable with the polarity.

If there was only one symbol which describes the digital world I would use the ampersand. So, when I started my company, Abhijit Bhaduri and Associates, I used the ampersand, because in my opinion, the world is going to move to an 'and' world. It's no longer you are either a science person or a liberal arts person; you are actually going to have to be both. Yes, you will have to understand analytics perhaps, but you will also have to be able to tell the story of the insight that you got using analytics. Or, if you don't have every skill possible, which is more likely to be the case, you will be able to work very well with people across divisions and that means not only people inside your organization, but, in a seamless manner, to be able to also work with communities, talent communities outside. All of that is actually the mindset which is going to be extremely important.

I think the new leadership paradigm is going to be driven by two core values: one is actually having the humility to ask a question and say I really don't know, tell me about it. And you could ask that for anyone, regardless of the person inside the organization, junior, senior, peer, anyone. So, humility is one. Number two, having the courage to be able to fail as you are learning. Because if you look at what prevented people from taking to social media and by that I mean leaders of large companies — for a very long time, it was because they believed this is some child's play, this is something meant for teenagers and it's not made for serious people like us, we are not supposed to be doing all this. And suddenly you realize that the new language of communication has evolved and those people who did not sign on to it, who kind of thought that it's one of those frivolous things for somebody who has a lot of time on their hand. I have heard so many people say that: this is for people who have all the time in the world to do.

DJ: It comes from the either-or paradigm, right?

AB: It's the either-or. That I don't need to do this. So, one of those leaders, in a very large tech company, the person actually turns back and says, 'What I mean is, I have a day job, so now when do I get on to something like social media and do all this stuff?' And I am saying that well, the company has an internal social network, so forget going outside, what do you do? So, he says now that is for all those youngsters, the 25-year-olds who we have in abundance it's a tech company; the average age is 25-26 so, he says that this is for those kinds of guys and they are talking about all kinds of rubbish there. And this is the mindset which comes from the analogue world that youngsters are frivolous characters who have all the time to do stuff. 'I am beyond all this, I am the busy guy, I am the big guy, therefore I am supposed to do all the things that really matter, so I have to worry about profitability,' without realizing it is that youngster whose work is going to drive profitability. How do you engage that guy?

Actually, one of the biggest chasms I see in leadership learning and mindset is the fact that most people do not realize how large this new medium is, which they have ignored. I don't know, at the risk of sound really negative, I think it's too late to learn because it just is a very different mindset. For example, if you look at Facebook and look at the emergence of video. People consume something to the effect of 100 million hours of video every day on Facebook, contrasted with something like Netflix; people are consuming 160 million hours of video every day on Netflix. This is pretty amazing! It sounds like a massive number, until you think about the fact that on YouTube, people are consuming a billion and that's spelt with a 'b' and not an 'm' billion hours of video every day. So, if this is the language, if this is the medium where people have moved already, I mean, if there's a billion hours being consumed on YouTube, it's a very large proportion of people, going by the fact that not everybody is consuming the video 24 hours a day. You can do the math and figure out. If people are consuming 20 minutes of video every day or one hour of video every day, how many people is it? This is the point. How many leaders know how to communicate and engage the audience using this new medium? And very few companies are actually teaching it.

Again, if you look at all the digital companies, or digital-born companies I should say, especially the leaders the Amazons, the Googles and this and that of the world are actually encouraging all their leaders. Those are some of the few companies which are encouraging their leaders to abandon print and everything else and move to video, with the idea of engaging them. This method actually reflects the mindset change and for many people, this is very, very hard. In the social media, the first thing that it teaches you is, you have to earn your spurs. You could be any CEO; it doesn't guarantee that people are going to listen you, unless you have something to value add to people. One of the people who I was interacting with, a CEO, and he said, 'I've started my Twitter account near a couple of days back and I've told all my team members to follow me, but beyond that nobody is joining. What do I need to do to get a billion followers?' So, I was saying what you have been posting? So, he said, 'I post the fact that I am out for a game of golf'. Why should somebody care about it? Why should a million people care about the fact that you are playing golf today? It's not a massive event in the lifetime of humanity.

DJ: It's also an equalizer or a leveller...

AB: Of course, it is. When you say things like that you are living with an inflated self-image. You have to realize that you are not that interesting that a million people are going to spend time listening to your statements.

DJ: And even that's learning: how do you come across as credible and value-additive...

AB: This is about humility. I have seen people, like last year, saw a major shift in Facebook usage by CEOs of companies, people of the likes of Indra Nooyi have come on board. They're actually really trying to learn and they are grounded enough to tell people that I don't really know this; I am trying to learn this. And people then go out of the way to actually teach them, and say you should do this, read up this, I am sending you this. But the moment you kind of say that I know it all, and then people say OK, go right ahead and show me the chops. I think that's the place where we begin to lose the audience.

DJ: Maybe just wearing a coach's hat, if we talk about where does one start? What have been your thoughts on just triggering this shift? One understands that there is a different world out there. Second, is recognizing the polarities and the 'and' world. But really, how do you start moving the needle?

AB: The first thing that you do is, build it around your daily routine. This is not a world where the rules are documented, where you attend a five-day class and you are coming back completely prepared to face the world. This is the place where you will have to really learn to carve out your own dirt road, and that means, creating forums. I have seen people who will, actually, in their office, spend lunch time every day with a different person, trying to learn something. Once you start demonstrating that curiosity and you've actually built it into your routine, then every day you are picking up something. It's a part of the way that you operate. You read something online, you post something online, because this is the other thing that a lot of people believe that if I were to just lurk around on Twitter or Facebook or any platform I'm not even going to mention Snapchat because most people beyond 30 do not understand Snapchat that you are looking at, and even if it's not necessarily through social media, just to be able to get a bunch of people together and try and have conversations.

Learning today in the digital world is through conversations and that conversation. Technology platforms are really helping you connect to a very large audience. So, when you distributed prints of photographs, you could only do a finite number, you could do 100, 200, 500, but today you can upload a digital photograph, and a million people can see it in like a couple of seconds. So, this opportunity to scale up. Now, you may not be able to learn from a million people at the same time, but if you curate the ideas well, you will be able to actually start getting insight about the languages. It's really about learning new a language, so you learn the alphabet first and then you really try and form small words, and then you kind of get onto sentences and do that. So, it is the same principle that would work, trying out different things on a sustained basis, whatever takes you're fancy. Pick a subject that you are deeply passionate about and try and teach that to people. So, social media is not just about getting. A lot of people look at that as a megaphone: now that I can potentially reach three billion people, I am going to really use it like a megaphone and announce my presence. It doesn't work like that. It's not a medium to speak to; it is a medium to listen. It's a medium to learn, it's a medium to teach. So, you learn the fastest when you try to teach people something.

DJ: And what would be an example of that?

AB: For example, look at some of the most popular YouTube stars, and by that I don't necessarily mean the paid stars who have got like 50 million followers, I am talking about the average Joe, who is sharing his or her interests in life. It could be you're a great cook; share a recipe. You've learnt a particular skill? Share that. You know how to draw? Teach us how to do it better. Help me become better and that's the value add you can do to me. Or you are a business leader; you understand a sector and a particular industry very well. Help me make sense of this: why is that company doing ABC? Put out a commentary. I mean can you become someone like the John Oliver of the business world? Let's say, in a particular sector or maybe at least even of your company, even if you don't want to do it on Facebook, can you do it internally in the company? Maybe hold a weekly conversation, just say, this is so and so person's view of the last seven days as life has unfolded. You may start off with only two-and-a-half people in the room, but believe me, once the word of mouth happens, you will run short of room space.

DJ: I think it goes back to the earlier point you made about showing up time after time after time, so sort of the consistency.

AB: Consistency! A brand is about consistency. You don't do one thing today and then wait for six months and then do something else nobody notices.

DJ: I want to talk about CDO, Chief Digital Officer. That's a term that comes up quite often. Clearly, it's a role that a lot of companies are hiring. How do you think about that? What mistakes do you see

people making, as they think about this role, CDO? Is it one person that should play the role or is it a mindset or is it a combination of the two?

AB: I think what having a particular person in charge does is that it puts a little bit more of attention and resources that the company needs to invest in. So let's say, when an organization creates a Chief Learning Officer [CLO], it's a misnomer to think that chief learning officer is the person who becomes the one person who understands at all. Absolutely not! But, what it does is, can the person build the ability or the excitement and belief in the organization that all of us can be our own CLOs? So, you can create your own methods of learning, you can experiment, you can create content, do all that. That I think is the role of the CLO, to be able to facilitate. So, in the same breath, when you are talking about having a CDO, the CDO's role is to actually create the culture in which the nuances of the digital world are understood, create awareness of the board, let's say on things like cyber security, there is very little until you understand what that could possibly mean and the kind of impact of that on the brand, on the talent, and various things, it's very hard for you to craft the strategy around that. And a lot of times, the board may have people who are not necessarily that familiar with the shifts in the digital space. That's the kind of education. So, in many ways the CDO, at least in the initial stages, is going to be educating people about really the impact and possibilities and scope of the shift and talking about how to navigate that. So, the CDO today is really the mapmaker of this new world.

DJ: What would success look like for a digital officer coming into the company? What are the kind of things the person would demonstrate in a 12 to 18 month, or maybe longer, timeframe, from an outcome standpoint?

AB: So, I think, the first thing is, I'll go back to my term that it's an 'and' world, so you will have the analogue and the digital co-exist. We talk about a two-speed world, that there is the traditional business as usual and there is the new world out there which is emerging. So, most organizations will go through the transition, where you create the new world and maybe in the first year, your revenue coming out of the new world, the digital world, is only going to be single digits. There is going to be a point of time when as this grows, it is going to replace the old model, and that's the kind of transition, except for the fact that in the case of the digital shift, the time to make that happen is incredibly crunched. One way to sort of look at it is if you think about, sort of the growth of the e-books, Kindle and all of that. Go back five years, seven years, and you will sort of see that there was a point of time people said this was a fad. Who will ever not want to read a paperback? And there is a tactile feel to it which is true.

DJ: Even when digital cameras came in, right? People said, I want to feel the photograph...

AB: Exactly! I want to feel the photograph and what happened to that? So, it's a habit which is being formed. Obviously, habit-forming takes time, adoption takes time, but in the digital world, it's so easy to form the habit. Also, think about it, about five years back, if I had said, 'Will you put up your photograph on a website which millions of strangers will look at?' most people would have said, 'Absolutely not! I love my privacy'. And look at what people are doing today! We are sending our photographs all over the space on WhatsApp and a million other devices and a million other platforms. Think about the fact that we are leaving behind digital footprints which we are not even aware of. The other day I was chatting with one of the senior leaders who said 'I am extremely particular about my digital footprints and therefore, for me, privacy is of supreme importance'. So, I asked him, 'Did you ever have a profile on Orkut?' Which was the older social networking site and he said, 'Yes, I did'. And I said, 'So what happened to that profile?' He said, 'Gosh! Good that you reminded me, because I haven't used it in four years. I think I have forgotten the password'. And this is the whole point! There is a truckload of photographs you have got there, connections, data points,

this and that, conversations, all of which remain. So, we forget. The one time you wanted to get a deal and you sign up and put your email address there, you create a password, which you repeat somewhere else, and then you repeat it on a more important site. All this is exactly where the world is going to. So, it's a new world which we will have to get used to and we will have to learn new grammar. I don't think we have a choice.

DJ: I want to talk about building careers. I read your book and found two or three themes quite interesting. One is about commoditization of expertise, second is about being perpetual beta, and the third is moving from a 'T' to a 'Pi' in terms of how you build capability. So, one, how should people think about careers, how has that paradigm changed in the world we are in? And second, how do people think about staying relevant given the number of moving pieces?

AB: We have moved from a time when people stayed in one company over their lifetime. That is my dad's generation. They kind of stayed in one company and never changed and that's how the world was; it was a far more stable, predictable world. Then came people like us, who actually started off in one company and then moved through different employers. I've moved through several employers and sort of done that. And we are now going to hit to a time when individuals are actually going to hold multiple jobs. One individual will be employed simultaneously with three or four employers. And then, there is going to be another disruption because skills are going to become obsolete very quickly and business models are actually going to go out of the window very quickly. You will come to a scenario where most people will get forced to shift out of a particular company or particular career and they will hop through careers. So, you could be a software programmer one day, and then as that skill becomes obsolete and you sort of are no longer the prized commodity in the market, people will switch maybe and run a coffee shop somewhere and then maybe pick up another skill, learn music and teach music somewhere for a living, and then comeback and learn the latest language and then maybe comeback to something else and maybe teach history somewhere. So, the ability for people to navigate through careers is actually going to be driven by people's ability to learn many different things. The more you can learn many different things, the more opportunities are going to come for you. And the more you are going to get hung up about, you know, 'so I have to wait to be certified and coached and do all that,' I think it's going to be very hard for people to live with that paradigm because those options will reduce dramatically.

DJ: Specifically, your views on moving from a 'T' to a 'Pi'. Are there examples where people have done it well?

AB: You remember I was talking about this individual who's an expert in machine learning and has got interest in archaeology and loves classical music and has dreams of writing a book? This is pretty much people who can live in that 'and' world, the polarities. They are as comfortable talking about artificial intelligence and machine learning as they are about discussing the nuances of great fiction...

DJ: It's not even a Pi, right? It looks like an octopus, the number of...

AB: It's actually the fact that... You have one leg of that symbol [pi] that is straight and the other's got a little curve there, which in my mind is the piece which is... you learn about many different things so that you are able to use your expertise in that other depth area across many different contexts. So, this person, for example, that I was talking about, he's created apps for the healthcare industry. He's done it a bunch of different times, and he says that it's insight that he's gained from his archaeology expeditions. And I was trying to figure out, how archaeology is connected to building apps and he then explained to me the principles. When you look at a site, how do you deconstruct something which you have no clue about? So, how do you sort of go to a particular site and then look at the artefacts which are lying there and then say that you pick up something. What could this

have been used for, what is the possibility? And he was saying that the important thing is to not get conditioned by, what would I use it for? So, what would somebody from a different time and generation have used it for? And that I think is the mindset which is going to thrive in the new world. So, 'and' in a very blatant way.

DJ: One of the points that you touched upon is the gig economy. I think as we move towards a world where the boundary walls are coming down given technology is making coordination a lot easier and seamless — what's your advice to people in terms of how they think about committing to an organization and building a career there versus participating in the gig economy through a portfolio of strengths?

AB: I think organizations, if they are able to leverage and get people excited in multiple ways, to the example that if when the person's ability to code is diminishing, and they aren't being effective in that world and they're changing over to a different language altogether inside the organization, the same individual could be kept engaged. If I know that this person's really passionate about starting their own café, then the person could start the café inside the organization. Potentially, it's a frivolous example, but then people can move between adjacencies...

DJ: It's a great way to think about the need for the organization to listen as well to the aspiration of the individual. It's not just a standard path, right?

AB: Yeah! Because we assume that everybody who is an engineer, loves to be an engineer. This is a mistaken assumption. People have many different aspects and I think this is the one big shift in the workplace which is already happening. The ability of the employer to encourage you to bring your full self to work, so the work, whatever you are doing, bringing in your hobbies and your passion and your interest and that little dream, putting all of that into the work that you are doing today, whatever it is and figuring out a way to build that into the work that you are doing. I think it's the definition of very successful careers or employee engagement. Employee engagement is not about celebrating birthdays of employees, which is how a lot of companies do it, because they are like frivolous transactions. But if you are really able to engage people and teach them different skills and keep them curious, that's one of the biggest things about building people's engagement.

DJ: Rapid questions to wrap up: For students coming out of B-school, any headline advice about how they should think about the first transition that they are making from the world of studying to the world of being employed?

AB: So, I would simply say that it's going to be a world where expertise and deep expertise is going to be valued. So, it's not going to be about knowing one line of 500 different things, it's going to be about knowing 500 lines about one thing. So, being able to have that expertise. People are going to value the person who has the expertise and then finds the context inside the organization to use it.

DJ: Isn't that contra to the breadth point we have been talking about? How do you think about that?

AB: No, because until you build depth, breadth helps you to find different contexts, different applications, you bring in that unique capability to the workplace where you are better than anybody else; you are in the top 1% of that particular skill. The moment you have that then you can play in many different... you know, a great cricketer can play test cricket as well as T20 and something else at a different match format, day cricket, night cricket, all those are formats.

DJ: Three things that they don't teach you at B-school?

AB: They don't teach you enough about working in teams and giving people feedback and still keeping your relationship intact. I don't think they teach you enough about using the new medium, and people actually are still learning it by themselves. I also think that they don't teach you enough about the need to manage your career with a different set of rules which the new world is going to throw out. So, they are still, sort of, doing the same pattern, which they have done for the last 50 years. So, it's a horribly dead model.

DJ: Given we are talking digital, three apps apart from the usual suspects that you found extremely valuable in the context of what you do?

AB: I love using the app for Podcast. It's completely changed the way that I learn. I use the LinkedIn app a lot, because they now have short videos. I think that's the product which is still coming up, but it allows me to be able to publish on the fly, it gives me the freedom to be able to write a blog post even when I am at an airport and waiting or some such thing. The mobile app is really terrific, I love that. The third one is, I use a little app called it's for drawing and sketching, so it's the app which I use and that sort of is something that I find very exciting. It allows me to paint and draw some stuff. It's an app called 'A Sketch' and it allows me to do a little bit of illustration of whatever I add, so many of the things that you see, the little portraits done sometimes, all of that is done on that app, so it's very useful for me.

DJ: In summary, any headline themes you want to leave people with to play to their potential?

AB: I think it [Play to Potential] is a terrific title for the 'and' world, that you have to learn how to play and explore your potential through play. So, it's not just work, its play which is actually going to tell you much more about where your potential is.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am reminded of the book "Designing your life" by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans where they talk about applying Design thinking to sort out your life and they suggest taking stock of life across 4 dimensions: Work (what all you do including what you get paid for and not, Play (energy and joy), Love (where love flows in and out) and Health (mental and spiritual). The crux of what they say is that the key is to harmonize across work and play so that it is sustainable and is fun. Hope you found it purposeful. For more please visit Plattopotential.com. Look forward to having you at a subsequent conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast series. Bye now.

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Abhijit Bhaduri - Nuggets

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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