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Context to the nugget conversation

Darleen speaks about how organizations are beginning to think about the role of the office in the future. She provides her perspective on the insight from Charles Handy who said “An office will be like a club: a place for eating, meeting, and greeting, with rooms reserved for activities, not people”

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): and moving topics Darlene, in the book you refer to Charles Handy who says that the office of the future will resemble more of a clubhouse, a place for meeting, greeting and eating and rooms reserved for activities and not for people. What are you seeing around how organizations are thinking about getting back into a world of hybrid work, online and offline?

Darleen DeRosa (Darleen): Yeah, and by the way, that’s one of my favorite quotes that was actually in my book in 2011, because I was very fascinated by Charles Handy’s research, which really originated on building trust digitally. So, I was really fascinated with that for a long time, and I think frankly Deepak, that is more true now than when I wrote the first book in 2011. And it’s interesting what we conclusively know and you have probably seen this in other research is that the hybrid model is here to stay. So, you know, you may have some organizations who are much more office-centric especially with an apprenticeship model and they are going to really expect people to come back more fully. In the middle, you have got this hybrid model, where you have got some people in and some people with flexible arrangements and maybe a blend of both. And then on the other end of the continuum, you have organizations who are a bit more progressive, who are saying, you know what, you can work virtually for at least, you know, some period of time or forever and that degree of flexibility varies tremendously. What we do know at least as of right now looking at the data from different companies is that about 75 percent of companies are going to fall in the middle. So, you might have some outliers but in general many organizations are thinking about how do I lead and manage in a hybrid model, which is the most difficult model to manage in because it presents challenges around equity and fairness. And so, what we clearly know is that it’s not a one-size-fits-all approach, but there’s implications for companies who try to go back to normal because as Handy’s...

DJ: And when you say equity and fairness, what do you have in mind, Darlene?

Darleen: Well, what we know from other research is that there’s different power dynamics. If you are one of the individuals who is always in the office let’s say with your manager, you might have more access to projects, you might get promoted more. It’s the idea that if you are out of sight and you are virtual you might be out of mind.

DJ: Got it.

Darleen: Or things like, if you are not at the conference table in a meeting and you are in your home office, how is that an even-playing field? So, there's a whole... I mean, this is like or every conversation I have right now with CEOs and CHROs is about this equity. It's a huge hot topic right now. But the one point I did want to make is that companies who really try to go back to the way that they were are going to have issues from a talent perspective, you know, because most people want a higher degree of flexibility than ever before and we are seeing companies be much more thoughtful about the role of the office. So, Charles Handy even said, you know, what's the role of the office? At Spencer Stuart, we are talking about the power of place. We want our offices to be places where people come to collaborate, perhaps to coach, and to connect with one another, but it's not going to look like it did pre-pandemic, at least for us and that's the case for most organizations. So, how do you create an office that excites people where people want to go? So, a lot of clients are rethinking their real estate footprint commercially and are hoteling and rearranging the offices to foster collaboration and create the space that allows people to interact with one another. And they are even doing things like rethinking what amenities they offer, having more outdoor space, having more space for people to meditate, I mean, all types of things, and we are really seeing a big shift in this Deepak, so it's quite interesting.

DJ: And any interesting experiments on the edge that you see Darlene, given people are slowly beginning to come back?

Darleen: I think... I don't know if it's an experiment but I mean we have seen a number of examples and these are in the press about organizations being too specific too early on about what's going to happen. And I don't know if you saw the McKinsey article that talked about communication is more important right now because there's a high degree of anxiety and fatigue in the workforce and we know people want more flexibility at least in some form. So, even if as a company you don't know what's going to happen, it's better to say that and be authentic and genuine than to say we want everyone back in September and then say in September, okay, we are going to have to pivot and do this. People, that is causing extreme anxiety and so there's... I have seen some tremendously great examples of how to message this and say we don't know exactly where we are going to go but here's what we are thinking, the office is going to look different, work is going to look different, and we know we are going to offer more flexibility. We are in this together, we are trying to figure out what that's going to look like and we are going to get your point of view and see what you think and we are going to shape this together versus some companies who are very publicly saying we are all coming back, this is the way it's going to be and they may have issues from a talent retention standpoint. So, I think, these are really important considerations and my advice would be, don't put a stake in the ground too soon because you may not have all the answers and we don't know necessarily what's going to happen in the next, you know, 9 to 12 months.

DJ: And that's okay, right? And that's the point you are making, it's okay to be vulnerable to say, you know, we are still figuring it out, there are enough unknown unknowns and being authentic and vulnerable, probably trumps a missense of misplaced confidence is the point you are making.

Darleen: That's exactly right, a much better way to say it that I did but that's exactly right. And I would add the companies who are doing it better are taking a pulse and really checking in with their employees, because as you know Deepak, this is a change management strategy as well. You have got to get buy-in for the change, and so, I think, for many organizations they are just sort of making the decision and saying this is what we are going to do and many other organizations are being much more thoughtful and really thinking about how do we build culture? How do we keep people engaged? How do we take a pulse and see how people are feeling over the next 12 months?

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. If you are interested in the notion of Future of work and careers, you might also like my conversation with Anu Madgavkar of the McKinsey Global Institute who speaks about the Future of Work from the perspective of skills and capabilities that are required for us to stay relevant.

End of nugget transcription

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- 77.01 Darleen DeRosa - Relationships in a 2D world
- 77.02 Darleen DeRosa - Driving Accountability virtually
- 77.03 Darleen DeRosa - Communicating thoughtfully
- 77.04 Darleen DeRosa - Office of the future
- 77.05 Darleen DeRosa - Remote leadership with Boards
- 77.06 Darleen DeRosa - Remote apprenticeship
- 77.07 Darleen DeRosa - Transitioning remotely
- 77.08 Darleen DeRosa - Remote Leadership hiring
- 77.09 Darleen DeRosa - Managing your energy

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the 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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