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Amplifying Management Research for the Common Good: Lessons for Curious Individuals and Organization-A Brief Note

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Abstract

History shows us that the nature of work and how it is performed has changed over time and in some cases has been dramatically transformed based on circumstances and conditions, for example, the invention of the U.S. automobile in the early 1900s was instrumental in significantly advancing the U.S. industrial age economy as it outpaced the prior agricultural age economy. One could perhaps just as easily say that the U.S. industrial age was instrumental in creating the environment that spawned the innovation of the automobile.

Keywords: U.S. population; amplifying management research; pandemic; industrial age economy

Introduction

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Most folks would concede that the world-wide pandemic qualifies as a major transformative event. In a Gallup Poll, Brenan (2023) asserted for instance that almost half the U.S. population do not expect to return to a pre-pandemic normalcy. That being said, it begs the question as to what impact this transformative event will indeed have on our post-pandemic world especially as it applies to our U.S. workforce, workplaces and business life. It is of course still too early for us to fully gauge how the pandemic will shape work including business management as we shift into a post-pandemic period. However, it seems reasonable to conclude, based on what we now know, that remote work, remote learning and its hybrid manifestations have become fairly entrenched in our post-pandemic, daily work lives.

However, remote work and learning tools merely scratch the surface as we consider the various ways our world of work is being transformed due to post pandemic factors and conditions that now exist or are emerging. Chapters contributed for our upcoming book – *Amplifying Management Research for the Common Good–Lessons for Curious Individuals and Organizations* (IAP Publishing)-begin to challenge individual workers, their managers and supervisors, the work organizations they serve and for that matter any other curious people to critically evaluate business and management trends with an eye toward projecting what these trends mean for the future work lives of ourselves and others. Moreover, these presumed transformative changes will build on top of lessons learned from prior management research that preceded the pandemic. We anticipate that the many take-aways readers will have found in the enclosed chapters will provide both additive and transformative insights and perspectives. In this epilogue, we will attempt to tease out some of the major conclusions and recommendations contributing authors have shared as they examine the connections between prior management research and the practical lessons and implications that may have for our post-pandemic business world.

However, before we proceed in that direction, we would be remiss if we did not temporarily stop to draw attention to a pioneering study being done currently at Columbia University designed to catalogue, document and capture the myriad of ways U.S. citizens have tried to make sense of our pandemic

period and the long-term meaning it may hold in the minds and memories of we who have lived through this unparalleled moment in our history (Mooallem, 2023). Initial findings suggest we do not yet know how to think, feel or talk about the pandemic, and there appears to be a sense of alienation and normlessness among huge numbers of people. Should their funding be sustained, Columbia University's goal is to continue this study for longitudinal pandemic learning purposes.

Bearing the above in mind, Chapters One and Four placed a focus on supply chains which failed us miserably during the pandemic even when we were not operating at the mercy of hurricanes or huge ocean carriers. It is reasonable to suggest that we previously took the integrity of our various supply chains for granted. The pandemic forced us to challenge many long-held assumptions concerning supply chains and the products and services our supply chains support for our common use. We have come to realize and appreciate that our supply chains are only as strong as their weakest links. Our contributing authors have helped us recognize this along with other business factors that influence the strength and stability of our supply chains. These factors include economic and political power, the quality of communication channels, the technical infrastructure that supports the logistics and distribution network, working arrangements that hopefully bond supply chain partners together in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation, and perhaps most importantly the collective commitment for creating a fully integrated system that will solidify and sustain the supply chain regardless of the obstacles and threats it may encounter. With supply chains as with so many other business challenges we face, an ounce of prevention is worth much more than a pound of cure.

Chapters Two and Five also share some common threads. An irrefutable fact is that workforce shortages became a major manifestation of our post-pandemic business world. Conflicts that arose throughout the pandemic over vaccines, masking, social distancing, etc. along with the emotional upheaval at trying to deal with an unprecedented crisis converted into trauma for many folks. In our opinion, the pandemic can be viewed as a uniquely traumatic event for many. The quasi-lethal combination of physical illness triggered by the virus and subsequent secondary psychological overlay rippled through huge segments

of the U.S. population and for all practical purposes set the stage for workforce shortages that took hold. Throughout our post pandemic period, the historical "social contract" that has existed between employer and employee shifted in significant ways to the benefit of the employee. Employers suddenly and frequently found themselves struggling to recruit and retain workers. Terms like "the great resignation" and "quiet quitting" became commonplace. Employers therefore found it necessary to take a number of steps and use new methods designed to secure an adequate supply of talent. Broadly speaking, some of the strategies employers have utilized revolve around three major categories, namely workforce investments, workplace re-design, and organizational culture. Some brief examples of workforce investments include increased pay, upskilling, cross training and loosening of hiring standards. Examples of workplace re-design include remote work allowances, modified work weeks and hours and the introduction of robots to offset staff shortages. Examples of organizational culture include employers' efforts to focus more on employee health and well-being, creating new partnerships with less traditional suppliers of talent, and other employer initiatives designed to help the company be viewed as a good place to work and an employer of choice.

Chapter Two identified twenty different post-pandemic business trends which revolve around three major themes, namely workforce shortages, remote work and learning and changes in consumer behavior. In our opinion, we are also now beginning to see a shift back in the direction of greater employer influence and control. Layoffs that recently started in the tech sector are now extending into other sectors, more employers are requiring and even demanding their employees return to the physical office and tech sector employers are now pressing for greater efficiencies and doing more with less to the relative detriment perhaps of employees' well-being. Moreover, artificial intelligence (AI) tools like Chat GPT are fast coming onto the scene and will likely play an increasing role in this overall picture. How things will ultimately shake out with regard to a new and emerging "social contract" remains to be seen. However, it goes without saying that this entire employer-employee dynamic bears close monitoring as we move forward.

Chapters Seven, Eight and Ten share some common themes and recommendations, especially as they apply to organizations' talent optimization and utilization as

well as for leadership development. Provided there is a sound rationale for doing so, we believe that the authors of these three chapters share the opinion that multiple assessment tools and techniques can and should be used for hiring and developing talent and thereby helping work organizations and their managers, emerging leaders and employees alike achieve maximum potential and performance. Fueled from different sources, organizations and individuals have been increasingly encouraged to draw from and use their strengths and behavioral drives. The discipline of positive psychology as advanced by Seligman (2013) relies heavily on the idea that an individual's psychological and cognitive health are best instilled through an emphasis on strengths rather than deficits or dysfunction. At Gallup, Rath's (2007) work with Strengths Finder also operates from the same philosophical premise. Likewise, through his longstanding hiring and placement principle, Collins (2001) has strongly promoted his mantra of getting the right people on the bus and then getting them in the right seats on the bus.

To the extent that an organization can create an integrated people strategy and an alignment among its individual employees, its managers/supervisors and its C-Suite leadership around the goal of consistently capitalizing on its behavioral drives and strengths, then to that extent employees will be engaged, managers will display a coaching and development mindset, and organizations will more likely be committed to the health and well-being of its human resources. A sound evaluation system can also be key for leadership development. The mere fact that we have been dealing with workforce shortages and operating in an employee job market has facilitated and supported an employee friendly climate. As suggested earlier, if the economy softens, if layoffs begin to accelerate, and employers do substantial belt tightening, we could well see a shift back to an employer advantaged situation. Given that work environments currently seems to be in a state of flux, there seems to be some pressure and tension on both the individual employee and the organizational side of this equation.

The authors of Chapters Seven, Eight and Ten are also likely to agree that it is incumbent upon work organizations to clearly conceptualize and define the concepts and challenges they choose to address in order to effectively manage and align individual job

performance and in turn organizational performance and productivity.

Chapter Three draws stark, immediate attention to one of the pandemic's hallmark outcomes, namely the impact it had on the mental health of millions of people. Pasquini & Keeter (2022) suggest that as much as 40% of the U.S. adult population experienced high psychological distress during the pandemic. Among those hit hardest included folks who lost loved ones due to Covid deaths or chronic illness, marginalized populations who were compelled to remain on the job despite ongoing proximity to the public, and health care workers forced simply by the nature of their work role to treat and risk exposure to the virus. Whether they had pre-existing psychological conditions or not and whether made sick by the virus or not, there were untold numbers of Americans who, by virtue of the vagaries of their own status and situations, sank deep into depression and suicidal ideation, with some succumbing. McCarthy (2023) states that more than 50 percent of college youth experienced sufficient emotional stress to prompt them to consider dropping out. The pandemic underscored the rise in suicide rates especially among our most vulnerable populations and our corresponding need to push for faster intervention along with more effective treatment methods and procedures. The author identifies several synchronous and asynchronous resources and tools that can help counter the higher rates of suicides we saw during the pandemic.

Chapter Six and Chapter Nine embrace some commonalities while at the same time sending distinctively different messages. The commonalities revolve around the agreed upon understanding that there were tremendous leaps in unemployment after both the 2008 and 2020 crises. We make many assumptions in the work we do, and this applies not only to the unemployed population but to that subset which we call the "long term unemployed" (LTU). We have long assumed that approaches we have traditionally used to help the unemployed return to work would automatically apply to the LTU as well. However, research and workshops conducted by Malka & Tiell (2016) and Tiell & Malka (2022) have substantially challenged this view. They mounted initiatives using traditional job search techniques but which also included innovative behavioral health features. This unique hybrid approach ultimately demonstrated dramatic positive results with the LTU

population. One might be inclined to assume that this dual delivery model would be the preferred, advisable way to help the unemployed return-to-work be they be more traditionally unemployed or LTU. However, the SEED initiative described in Chapter Six seems to throw that thinking on its ear. The SEED work being done on the west coast suggests that a monetized approach with unemployed participants being given a stipend and allowed to use that stipend to craft their own pathway back to re-employment might actually be an even singularly better way to help the unemployed population. As promising as SEED's results seem to be, the chapter's author acknowledges that workforce officials may be reluctant to embrace SEED like programs. To do so could potentially cause re-employment practitioners to put themselves out of business.

Chapter Nine also takes an interesting look at important differences between the recession and high unemployment pattern generated back in 2008 and compares that to the high unemployment pattern witnessed in 2020 when the pandemic hit. The authors assert that differences exist with regard to unemployment rates, the nature and scope of the crisis, industry sector impact and secondary stressors. Furthermore, this chapter examined these unemployment patterns as they applied not only to the LTU population but to youth as well. The authors continue to believe that a combination of both traditional job search and behavioral health approaches under the guidance of trained professionals work best in quickly getting unemployed, especially the LTU, back to work. However, during the 2008 and 2020 periods, youth also represented a vulnerable, at-risk population. This was especially the case for college youth through the 2020 pandemic period given the way the pandemic impacted on them both as student learners and aspiring professionals who could not find satisfactory employment. The authors describe four differentiating shifts that were especially relevant for youth. These shifts are tied to the gig economy, career choice motivators, student debt and suicide rates. Suicide rates merit special consideration as we reflect back on youth in Chapter Three. According to Curtin (2020) at the CDC, the rate of suicide among youth aged 10 to 24 increased by 60% from 2007 to 2018. This significant increase occurred on the heels of the 2008 recession. Youth legitimately represent the lifeblood of our country's future. Beyond the career and employment challenges they customarily face, moving forward youth will likely encounter many new, complex challenges that include technology (AI and robotics), globalization, and climate induced geographical relocation. It behooves us to do everything we can to enhance and promote the physical health and psychological well-being of our youth for them to successfully manage the business and societal challenges of the next century.

Conclusion

As we conclude, we are compelled to raise broader questions as to what the future of work will look like and what leadership and business management skills will be required for work organizations to function productively and successfully continue the American experiment. We harken back to the Wartzman & Tang (2022) study cited in Malka's Preface. Wartzman & Tang point to the newly required corporate leadership traits and competencies that surfaced rapidly in 2023 compared to 2020, only three years earlier prior to the pandemic. We began this epilogue by defining the pandemic as a transformative event, one with lasting impact for work organizations and management. One can only begin to imagine what this means as we project much further into the future and ask ourselves what business and leadership traits and competencies will indeed be called for. Our book and the narratives contained herein have hopefully satisfied a lot of curiosity and made it a little easier to contemplate this exciting scenario.

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