Leading with Humanity
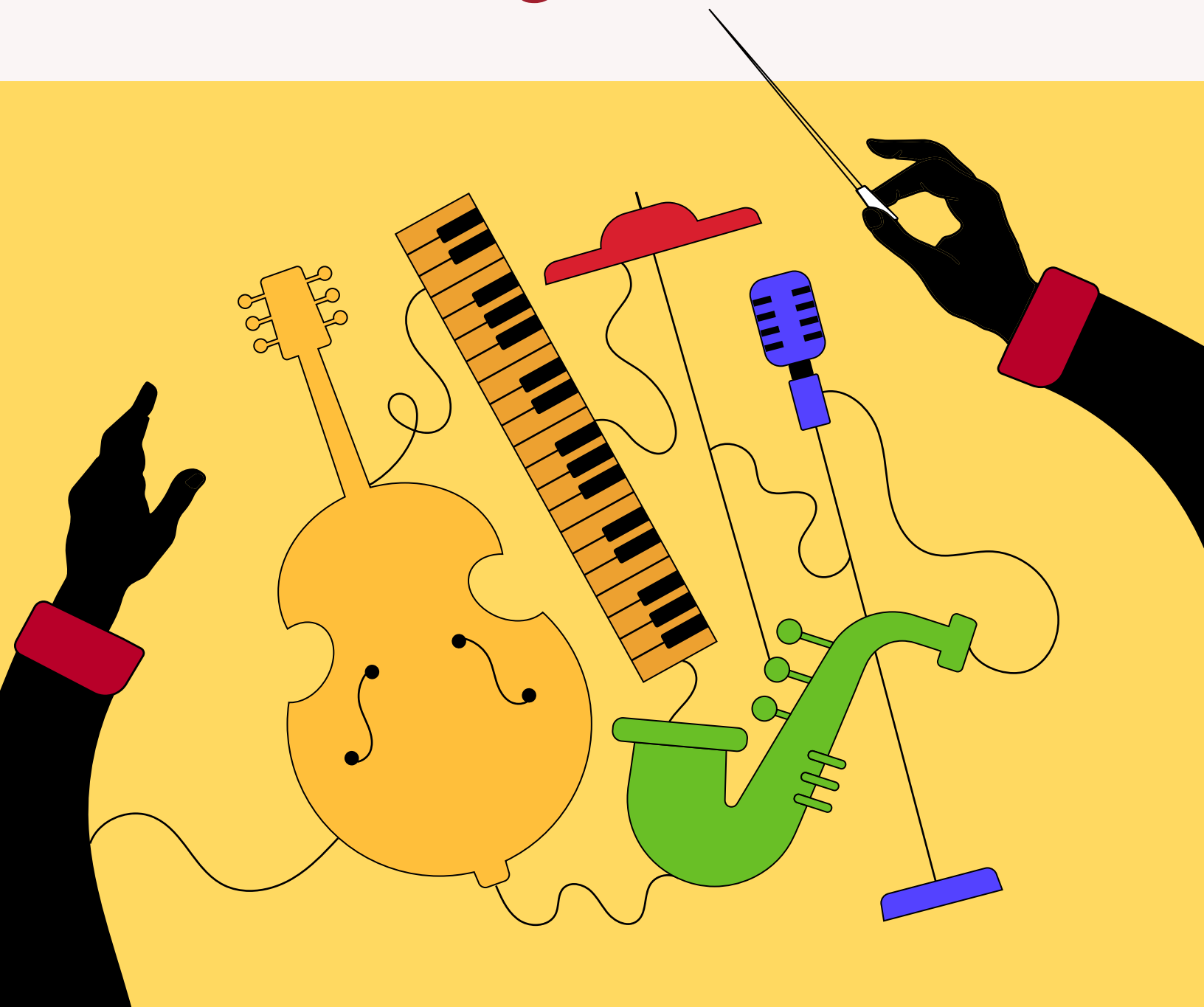
The Future of Leadership and Coaching

We haven't been human enough. The pandemic is providing us with an opportunity.

— Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35
   years of leadership experience, I-27

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Our sincere gratitude to all of the leaders who invested their time to share their life and work experiences during the health and social crises of 2020.

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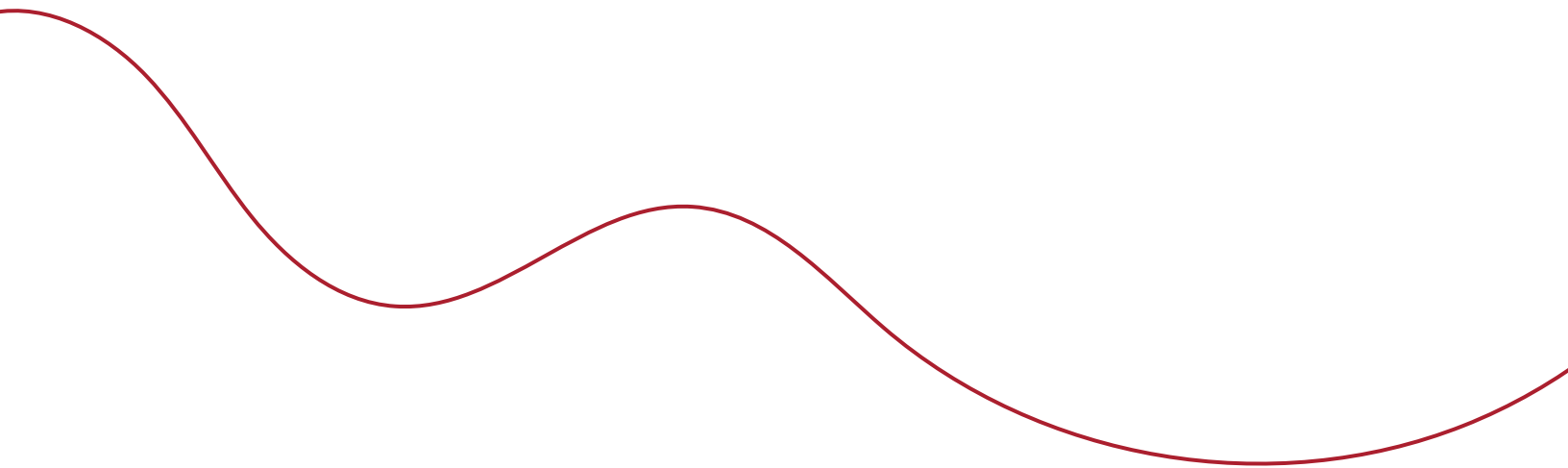
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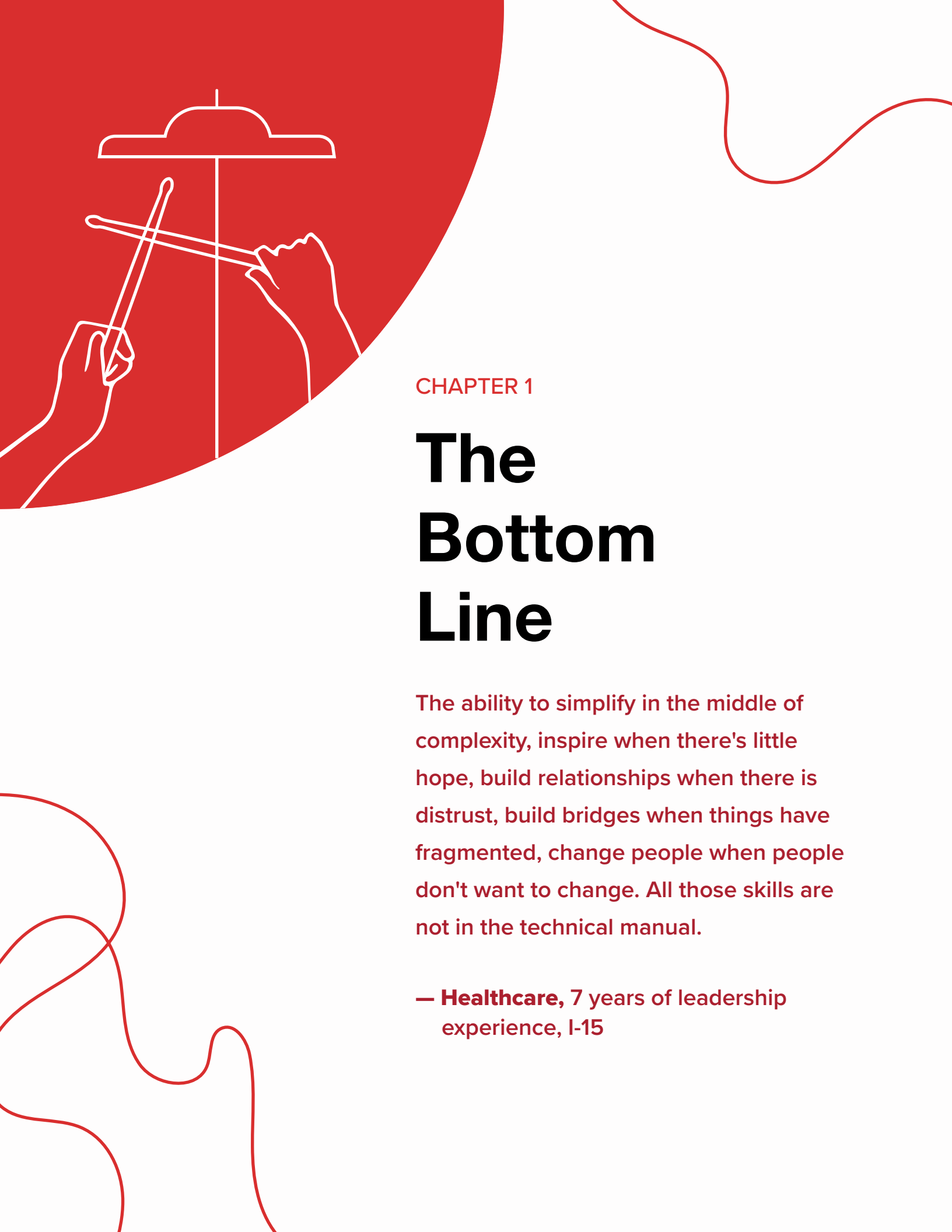Philip Beddows, David Bishop, Eileen Coskey Fracchia, Tracy Fuller, Margaret Moore, Christine Scordato

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The Bottom Line

The ability to simplify in the middle of complexity, inspire when there's little hope, build relationships when there is distrust, build bridges when things have fragmented, change people when people don't want to change. All those skills are not in the technical manual.

— **Healthcare,** 7 years of leadership experience, I-15

The project

In late spring and summer 2020, the Institute of Coaching (IOC) conducted an inquiry into the impact of pandemic-era disruptions on organizations, leaders, leadership, and leadership coaching. Our aim was to explore the lessons for leaders and coaches in shaping a post-pandemic future. A group of nineteen IOC fellows, executive coaches with extensive experience in coaching executives in large organizations, interviewed thirty-three executives in five countries, all of whom were invited to reflect on what they have experienced and learned about leadership and the role of coaching in leadership. This chapter is a brief summary, the bottom line so to speak. The project methodology is summarized in Appendix I. We provide bulleted lists of the key themes in the interview transcripts by chapter in Appendix II.

The pandemic era

The backdrop for this project was a pandemic in full swing, and a wave of social unrest, particularly in the U.S. The entire globe experienced huge trauma and faced colossal uncertainty about the future. The declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020[1] marked the beginning of a level of global disruption beyond what any of us have experienced in our lifetimes. Over 4.5 million people have died worldwide, and the pandemic rages on. Massive disruptions to schooling, businesses, employment, workplaces, and private lives have had a severe impact on psychological well-being, with symptoms of grief, depression, anxiety, and addiction at all-time highs.

The pandemic abruptly revealed the divide between those who benefit from socioeconomic advantages, having ready access to resources to soften the pandemic's blow, and those who are disadvantaged, suffering the highest rates of infection, severe illness, and death.[2] The wealthiest in some countries are gaining wealth, while the poorest are struggling more than ever to pay rent, and to buy food and other necessities.

These disparate economic and workforce impacts on human life are dramatic.[3] Work lives and careers have been devastated for many, especially low-income workers and young adults, while others have experienced an abundance of professional opportunities to expand and grow. Some industries experienced massive windfall gains, while others have been ruthlessly disrupted or decimated. The healthcare industry in the U.S. struggled prior to the pandemic with epic financial disruption,[4] and now faces a workforce ready to collapse from the strain of navigating COVID-19.[5] The health insurance sector, by contrast, saw financial gains.[6] Online offerings like streaming services and video conferencing experienced huge increases in usage, while restaurants, hospitality venues and movie theatres struggled, and many closed. The scope and scale of both positive and negative impacts of the pandemic escalated as what was early on thought to be a "short disruption or sprint" became a marathon.

The killing of George Floyd awakened many to the trauma, pain, social injustice, and economic disadvantages experienced by Black and other minority communities in the U.S. and beyond. Floyd's death spawned a vigorous social movement aimed at improving the lives of those most harmed by longstanding inequity and exclusion. Gender inequality has also more visible in the U.S., in light of the massive strain on working women, who suddenly and disproportionately have been required to home-school children without the support of public schooling and child-care resources.[8,9]

The report

Written by nineteen IOC fellows, the report captures the experiences of the executives transcribed from the interviews, which were then contextualized with relevant theoretical and empirical literature. In this first chapter we briefly outline each of the following four chapters.

In Chapter 2 we share leaders' descriptions of the crisis's impact on their organizations. We move on, in Chapter 3, to the soul-searching of leaders suddenly responsible for a workforce uprooted by a massive disruption. Emerging leadership themes are explored in Chapter 4, as leaders describe taking tangible steps to integrate human-centered leadership. The leaders we interviewed came to see employees first through the lens of their humanity; they discovered that this approach empowered employee contributions to organizational agility, resilience, and performance. In Chapter 5, we explore how coaches have supported and can continue to support executives on their journey as human-centered, agile leaders.

Our wish for readers is that they relive the acute phase of the pandemic with a reflective stance, harvesting the positive shifts as well as processing the concomitant pain and suffering. We hope that together, in this difficult time, we sculpt organizational life in a way that better serves humanity.

In good times, benevolence in leaders may not always be essential for optimal financial results. In contrast, in crisis our report suggests that leaders' focusing on serving humanity creates a path to organizational resilience, reinvention, and positive performance. Given our age of accelerating and unpredictable change, where the only certainty is that we will continue to face ongoing global disruptions, supporting our own and others' humanity may well be the crucial recipe for sustaining individual and organizational success.

Chapter 2: Organizations Meet Human Needs

Leaders began to see the important role of organizational life in meeting vital human needs for social connection and engagement. Some realized that a compassionate, whole-person approach to employee well-being and resilience was a key driver of organizational performance. The notion that organizational resilience depends on individual resilience came of age, or at least began to walk. Leaders learned or re-learned that their organizations need to support personal well-being to help their workforces be prepared to navigate crises.

> *First of all, there was a great fear about the disruption that happens to us all at the beginning of the pandemic. However, the changes were for us very obvious: we needed to support employee health and well-being to gain their trust and help them be less resistant to large corporate changes needed in something like COVID-19.*
>
> — Healthcare, 20 years of leadership experience, I-20

Chapter 3: Leaders Change Their Ways

The intense, traumatic experience of being a leader during the pandemic was not wasted. The struggles led many leaders to deeply question, redefine, and express their personal values, and to reflect on the ways in which they lead themselves, their workforces, and their organizations. They became more benevolent and flexible. They shifted their strategies and decision-making to be more collaborative. Many leaders grew in ways that enabled them to better serve their organizations, and the world.

> *It's a very interesting blend of things that are required now. On the one hand, a collaborative style of leadership, hearing every voice in the room, ensuring you are taking diverse views into opinion. I feel we need to be in a position of taking a range of views and nevertheless being decisive.*
>
> — Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35 years of leadership experience, I-27

Chapter 4: Human-Centered Leadership

Leaders are recognizing that they need to expand their roles beyond striving for organizational results to engage deeply with the individual and collective experiences of employees. Five "fundamentals of humanity" were revealed in their experiences: expanding consciousness, cultivating relationships, supporting well-being, integrating diversity, and building agile cultures. The future of leadership is then a combination of compassionate, human-centered leadership with agile, adaptive, and generative leadership of systems.

> *I always felt the real secret to leadership goes back to more adaptive leadership styles, which is connecting with people, bringing out who they are, bringing psychological safety into every conversation, showing empathy, building teamwork, where people can show up and be vulnerable.*
>
> — Healthcare, 7 years of leadership experience, I-15

Chapter 5: Coaching Leaders to Change

In the alchemy of human change and growth, including in crises, the coach plays the role of a catalyst, enabling and accelerating individual transformation. The leaders we interviewed who had formal coaching benefited from just-in-time guidance to discover, leverage, and expand their repertoires.

The urgency created by pandemic disruptions took away the luxury of time to change thinking and behavior - shifts needed to be made on the fly. Leaders found

themselves, as one pointed out, needing to "change tires while driving." Life and business had to continue while new processes and protocols were put in place, then adjusted and implemented, only then to be revisited once again.

Behavior change does not typically happen overnight. Real change in mindset and behavior is challenging in the best of times. It requires active intervention over time, with lots of practice, navigation of lapses, and regular rebooting of inspiration and motivation.

> *Well, you learn very early on in your journey as a leader that you take yourself with you no matter where you go. I've had the privilege of having access to formal and informal coaches on my journey, and deeply believe that leadership can become a very lonely journey because it starts within yourself. To have a coach to be a mirror, to connect with and to challenge your lens of who you are, why you're here, and to impact what you do, has been critical in my own transformation.*
>
> — Biopharmaceutical, 20 years of leadership experience, I-25

Leading with humanity

If we stand back and place the findings outlined in the next four chapters in a scholarly leadership framework, we can envision an improvisational leadership 'jazz,' which is human-centered, collaborative, and generative. Imagine one instrument playing compassion (Chapter 2), another singing values-based leadership (Chapter 3), a third instrument playing authenticity (Chapter 4), a fourth instrument weaving in agility (Chapter 4), and the fifth playing coach-assisted change (Chapter 5). Listen, then, to the music of leading with humanity as you engage with the next four chapters.

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Organizations Meet Human Needs

The changes were for us very obvious: we needed to support employee health and well-being to gain their trust and help them be less resistant to large corporate changes needed in something like COVID-19.

— **Healthcare,** 20 years of leadership experience, I-20

Introduction

This chapter describes the opportunities to serve humanity, or human needs, in organizational life, as shared in our interviews and supported by the scientific literature. Our findings resonate with a 2021 article by information systems researchers (interested in integrating compassion into information technology) on the practice of compassion in organizations. They conclude that compassion is an enabler of organizational resilience[1]:

> **One of the critical pathways to achieving organizational resilience is through the acknowledgement and practice of compassion. Organizational compassion refers to a collective aspect of organizational work, where people notice suffering (amongst one or more colleagues), become empathetic to the sufferer(s), make sense of the cause of suffering, and act collectively so as to alleviate the suffering.**
>
> **In an organization, compassion generates relational resources, strengthens shared values, and cultivates critical relational skills - factors that generate mutuality within the workforce, a prominent factor in attaining organizational resilience. In organizations disrupted by pandemics like COVID-19, compassion becomes an important consideration as employees wrestle with challenges of alienation, increasing technology dependence, possibilities of job loss, psychological pressures to maintain productivity, and managing work-life conflict.** (p. 1)

For many organizations, the positive impact of integrating well-being and work had not been so obvious and clear until now. The interviews identified five organizational themes of humanity that were illuminated during the pandemic. These themes align with existing literature on work and well-being[2] that signals an interdependent relationship, whereby well-being improves work engagement, satisfaction, and performance, which in turn improve well-being:

1. Social connection
2. Engagement
3. Well-being
4. Human-centered skills
5. Workplace design

1. Social connection

In a recent article on fostering social connection in the workplace, Holt-Lundstat describes the key aspects of social connection as physical presence, resources, and emotional support. She reviews the benefits of social connection and points to the important role of work in providing human connection[3]:

> **We now have robust evidence that being socially connected has a significant impact on our health, well-being, and even our risk for premature mortality.** (p. 1307)
>
> **Further, there is evidence that social disconnection is growing. Given most adults spend the majority of their waking hours working, it is important to consider social connection in the context of work.** (p.1310)

At the outset of the pandemic, workforces experienced a sudden and drastic loss of social connection. Physical presence was either impossible or much reduced with the requirement for what quickly became known as social (more accurately, physical) distancing. Executives described their own sense of loss while missing in-person connections and could immediately empathize with the loss of connection experienced by their employees and their families.

> *Somehow it feels different when you're physically present with somebody versus Zoom. I am craving being with people, my coworkers, my friends. It's exciting to go to the grocery store because there are a bunch of people there.*
>
> — Automotive, 12 years of leadership experience, I-06

> *We shouldn't take for granted the need for social interaction, whether it's our children at home that are dealing with homeschooling or whether it's a variety of generations in the workforce. So many people have really felt isolated, often on their own at home. The needs for social interaction are personal, depending on your own situation.*
>
> — Manufacturing, 20 years of leadership experience, I-13

Just in time, recent advances in video technology helped meet human needs for togetherness. In the absence of physical proximity and travel, everyone had to shift overnight to video-conferencing for professional meetings and events, including board meetings, sensitive management discussions, and conferences. In healthcare, using video technology for medical visits, called "telemedicine," became routine. Video meetings were also the only venue available for social events, including family get-togethers, birthday parties, weddings, and funerals. Fortunately, some co-workers and families were able to connect digitally and when they did, the level of sharing and supportive conversations was healthy.

> *On the personal too, I had never had a Zoom meeting with my family around the world before. It brought our family together. I know there are even several teams that are doing the virtual happy hour, not only on the professional front, but also on the on the personal side as well.*
>
> — Manufacturing, 20 years of leadership experience, I-13

When working from home or away from the workplace was not possible (e.g., in healthcare, laboratory, manufacturing or retail settings), one leader we interviewed engaged in togetherness-oriented team activities designed to provide comfort and support to employees.

> *When virtual isn't an option, like for many in healthcare, being positive, reassuring, and being visible were critical. We didn't think leaders would come to the unit, but they did.*
>
> — Healthcare, 6 years of leadership experience, I-35

2. Engagement

A 2017 research review of the relationship between work engagement and well-being described engagement as a state of work-related enthusiasm, vigor, dedication, and absorption. The review defined well-being as including physical vigor, psychological well-being through core need satisfaction (particularly autonomy and competence), and reduced stress. The authors concluded that work engagement both improves performance and generates well-being, the two-way street we noted earlier.[4]

With lockdowns disrupting workplaces overnight, and health fears and social isolation depleting psychological resources, one might expect that work engagement would deteriorate. However, from our interviews, we determined that this was not always the case. In many contexts, leaders indicated a healthy level of engagement remained despite the upheaval. Rather than seeing productivity declining, employees discovered ways to make working at home productive. With more autonomy, many cultivated the personal discipline needed to stay focused on work in a domestic environment.

> *Employees stepped up - taking responsibility. Many have had epiphanies on stay-at home; they have found it quite productive. It gives them more ownership of their own work environment, leading to a greater sense of responsibility and accountability.*
>
> — Biopharmaceutical, 20 years of leadership experience, I-25

Similarly, this executive reported that engagement improved or stayed the same for most employees under lockdowns.

> *We did a survey recently of our employees and asked them the question of engagement. Probably 65% of our employees reported that their engagement was either at the same or better. Very few employees reported that they felt like their engagement suffered as a result of sheltering in place.*
>
> — Robotics, 3 years of leadership experience, P-02

For some people, engagement peaked, in spite of the pandemic's debilitating impact. They were able to shine in ways that became visible during the pandemic.

You got to see some people shine that I don't know without COVID that we would have seen. We've been able to actually promote a number of folks and as we restructure give folks more responsibility. That is one of those byproducts that I think we all read about in Harvard Business Review, but I got to see it first-hand and it was awesome.

— Dentistry, 17 years of leadership experience, I-28

One investigation reported by four business school researchers showed that engagement pre-pandemic was an important predictor of engagement during the pandemic and of superior financial performance[5]:

Our study shows that organizations with higher pre-crisis employee engagement sustained more effective leadership under crisis, which manifested in clarity of strategic direction and concomitant attention to training and investments in employee wellbeing. Not only is organizational leadership important in continuing to maintain employee motivation and engagement, it further pays off handsomely due to the harnessing of employees' aspirations and abilities for superior financial performance even in crisis situations. (p. 15)

Our findings of healthy engagement and productivity during the pandemic are consistent with two studies reported by Harvard Business Review on productivity during the pandemic. One study concluded that, for at least certain types of workers, for example knowledge workers, productivity improved in lockdown. Working from home gave people more autonomy around work schedules, encouraged them to focus on work that matters most, and helped them view work as more worthwhile.[6] The second study indicated that the most productive organizations had an engaged, inspired, collaborative, and productive workforce prior to the lock-down, and that this resulted in productivity increases of 5-8% during the pandemic. The least productive organizations pre-lockdowns lost 3-6% in productivity during the pandemic.[7]

3. Well-being

The pandemic constituted an existential threat to workforce well-being, both physical and psychological. A research team who studied the health anxiety of the workforce during the pandemic began its article with a quote from an employee[8]:

> **I am dealing with feelings of helplessness—usually I am one to plan and control every aspect of my life, and in the face of adversity, I will simply work harder and smarter. In this situation, I cannot outsmart a virus, and the unknown, how it will impact the life of my loved ones, and what impact it will have in my life, comes in waves of anxiety. Construction industry employee, March 2020.** (p. 1234)

Workforce distress was severe for frontline workers in healthcare dealing with unprecedented uncertainty, elevated pressure to perform, higher risk factors with an influx of sick and dying people with COVID-19, extreme health anxiety for themselves and their families, and social isolation. All of this landed on top of the already high burnout of healthcare workers prior to the pandemic. To respond, several healthcare organizations reported the vital importance of having a "Chief Wellness Officer" role that is fully resourced to broadly address and improve clinician well-being.[9]

The executives we interviewed confirmed that their teams experienced high stress, which called on them to support employee health and well-being in order to gain trust and alignment with the corporate changes demanded by the pandemic.

> *For the first time it is not just financial crisis; it is about the health threat to their families, to their loved ones, and certainly in some cases about their vulnerabilities in their own health. This is an important part that we cannot ignore. So, we cannot just take a clinical approach and focus on finances.*
>
> — Banking, 25 years of leadership experience, I-26

> *First of all, there was a great fear about the disruption that happens to us all at the beginning of the pandemic. However, the changes were for us very obvious: we needed to support employee health and well-being to gain their trust and help them be less resistant to large corporate changes needed in something like COVID-19.*
>
> — Healthcare, 20 years of leadership experience, I-20

Supporting employees became more humanistic, less siloed, and less hierarchical. The feeling was that 'we are all in the same boat' – leaders and employees alike. Leaders quickly realized that, beyond the challenges of work (new processes, new issues, new geographical arrangements, etc.), employees were facing the new and for some even heavier burden of coping with life outside work. The line between work and everyday life became blurred. The employer's role now extended beyond supporting and empowering employees to get work done, because if employees did not get help with life outside work, their work productivity was bound to deteriorate.

> *We had to be much more understanding of staff capacity. Many of our workers had lost childcare. A lot of our staff really had to be both caretakers at home, teachers at home, especially I think a lot of pressure on women staff, because, you know, unfortunately there is still a bit of a gender gap in terms of family responsibilities.*
>
> — Global Development, 5 years of leadership experience, I-31

> *Prior to COVID we were not very sensitive to what was going on in their lives, when people are stressed out. And we were trying to recognize that and commit to continuing to develop people. Our leaders, they mean well and they care for us as people.*
>
> — Dentistry, 17 years of leadership experience, I-28

A team of psychologists studied the work–family interface during the pandemic and concluded that people with good resources and low family conflict were able to manage work–family demands well, while people with fewer resources and higher conflict suffered significant distress. They concluded that organizations which

provide genuine compassion and emotional support, as well as adequate technology training to reduce "technostress," can really help people who are dealing with work–family distress.[10]

Executives had to address their own exhaustion as well. In addition to physical exhaustion from being "on" virtually the whole day, they reported strain on their physical and mental well-being.

> *Spending all day on Zoom is much more exhausting than going to the office. I get breaks during the day at work. I'm mentally much more exhausted at the end of the day and physically too. I've got like this weird pain in my arm from sitting so much, and there are things that are not good about being on Zoom all day physically.*
>
> — Automotive, 12 years of leadership experience, I-06

A 2021 study[11] examined and defined the phenomenon of videoconference fatigue: people feel exhausted, tired or worn out attributed to engaging in videoconferencing. The researchers determined that videoconferencing can be harmful to employee well-being, and recommended ways to reduce the harm, for example, by cultivating group belongingness, allowing muting, and holding video meetings earlier in the day.

The good news was that leaders and employees recognized early on that the disappearance of commuting times allowed time to unplug and engage in self-care. This freed-up time became an impetus to resist the urge and tendency to be "always on" in a virtual work environment and to make time for recharging.

> *And it's not like I had a long commute, but I'm sleeping like a half an hour more each day. And I always exercise every day, since I don't need to spend as much time getting ready and I don't spend any time driving. Even though I'm working more, there's more time for me to exercise, eat, sleep, meditate.*
>
> — Automotive, 12 years of leadership experience, I-06

> *It's been really good that we were able to recharge. We are making sure the team is really thoughtful about recharging because we know this is going to be a long-term commitment.*
>
> — Federal Agency, 20 years of leadership experience, I-30

The large-scale stress and exhaustion across organizations taught many leaders that future workplaces will ideally be designed to optimize the physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being of employees in order to support engagement, productivity, and collaboration.

The pandemic has also shown that in order for organizations as a whole to be resilient in navigating the chaos brought about by a crisis, they need to support the personal well-being and resilience of each employee. Bolstering individual resilience is key to leveraging the entire organization's ability to adapt and thrive under extreme stress.

4. Human-centered skills

A positive result of the pandemic, which coincided in the U.S. with extreme social unrest, was the increased importance of human-centered skills at work. By human-centered, we mean non-task-related competencies. We mean practices that generate human connection, trust, and support, e.g., authenticity, empathy, compassion, shared purpose, transparent communication, and trust-building.

In our interviews, leaders talked about the importance of being "authentic" at work. Bringing one's "full self" to work, along with exhibiting emotional empathy, emerged as crucial in a crisis.

> *Authenticity, empathy just got higher in terms of people's expectations. There are a lot of people who know how to do cognitive empathy but don't know how to do emotional empathy. And I think that the demands during the health crisis particularly, of striking a balance between commercial and the empathetic and the human, was unparalleled.*
>
> — Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35 years of leadership experience, I-27

The pandemic democratized workplace dynamics and pressed leaders to connect with their people on a humanistic level. Leaders experienced first-hand the importance of "connectedness:" hierarchies were less evident in virtual settings, thus creating a more level playing field.

> *More even playing field; everyone is the same size. Even our town halls changed. In the past they were typically formal affairs with presenters. Now by Zoom or web cast, people felt it was more informal and democratized; everyone is the same size of box on screen, same distance apart, whether you are in the headquarters in Switzerland or in China or France.*
>
> — Biopharmaceutical, 20 years of leadership experience, I-25

The limitations of leadership driven mainly by an emphasis on financial performance was exposed. Leading people through a pandemic while employing mainly financial and operational metrics proved insufficient. Leaders had to pivot to a compassionate style that not only tracked the financials, but also fostered psychological safety to keep employees engaged and performing well.

> *The pandemic exposed leaders who were uncomfortable dealing with people issues, people who hide behind numbers, and are uncomfortable creating safe spaces for people to truly open up.*
>
> — Healthcare, 7 years of leadership experience, I-15

> *We've realized we've got a lot of leaders who are very strong in what they do, but not necessarily in the areas that the pandemic needed most, such as empathy, creating trust, having real conversations with their people about how they're feeling.*
>
> — Retail and Real Estate, 4 years of leadership experience, I-23

Going forward in a world of accelerating disruption and crises, leaders have come to recognize on multiple levels that employee-centricity will only grow in importance: work environments which are more open, diverse, welcoming, and attuned to the well-being of their people are most likely to be sustainable in the face of constant change.

5. Workplace design

In a 2021 article, Scottish and Canadian business school professors explored significant shifts in employee interests and values post-pandemic[12]:

> **What is also apparent is that the pandemic has altered what people expect from their places of work. The difficulty is that these shifts in expectations are not homogeneous. For example, many commuters now working from home have welcomed the increased time available to spend with family. Others, who have their main social interactions and friendships through work, have reported suffering from isolation and mental health issues. Thus, while some may want to maintain a reduction in the time spent in the office, others will be anxious to get back. Further, those with no choice but to go into work will have become more attuned to the differentiation in working conditions, health risks, opportunities for advancement, and remuneration.**
> (p. 584)

The executives we interviewed discussed their willingness to redefine the work environment. The lockdowns revealed that many workers might not need to be on-site to do their jobs well. With the emergence of new technologies that support high levels of engagement and productivity, for many jobs the workplace need not be a formal space designated by the employer. That said, of course some jobs will never have the option, or will have only a partial option, of a remote mode.

Many organizations have committed to moving towards a form of hybrid work environment that ideally will allow for more flexibility and autonomy, and still bring people together when needed for in-person connection and important gatherings.

It's going to be about: can you do your job from home? And if the answer is yes, we might not give people the option of being in the office full time anymore.

— Medical Device, 15 years of leadership experience, I-08

While organizations previously spent significant time and resources designing workspaces conducive to productive and collaborative work, many people are now juggling working and caring for family, school, etc., which makes working from home at least some of the time invaluable. The home space will continue as a workspace for a substantial segment of workers. The focus now must be on people well-being and engagement.

One challenge facing employers will be to maintain an equal sense of inclusion and opportunity for those employees whose functions allow for off-site work vs. those whose jobs require physical presence at a workplace. Just as belonging to an organization can fulfill the human need for connectedness, the balance between virtual and on-site work will also need to address this. Whether remote or on-site, the design of the work environment needs to create a sense of being together.

Some of the people working remotely are feeling very isolated, particularly the older team members or the ones living on their own. Some home environments are not happy places, and this is impacting on the mental health of employees. Working from home is not a good solution for all.

— Medical Device, 23 years of leadership experience, I-09

Large improvements in the quality of life enabled by remote work became apparent. The air in major cities has temporarily become cleaner due to reduced travel, and some workers have been able to reclaim hours of their lives each week because of reduced travel and commutes. Proximity to one's workplace is no longer important for many people. The broader impact on society and the planet has begun to enter organizational consciousness.

> *And an interesting question will be when we come back together, whether we continue to do some of our most important meetings in virtual form. Because business travel has climate implications, and health implications, that's an opportunity.*
>
> — Law Firm, 20 years of leadership experience, I-33

Organizations have the potential to prioritize human thriving both at work and in personal and family lives. Leadership practices will need to be redesigned for a distributed or partially distributed workforce.

> *The leader's way of being and way of leading needs to be more conducive to a permanently distributed environment.*
>
> — Robotics, 3 years of leadership experience, P-02

Conclusion

For all of its awfulness, the pandemic shone a spotlight on what a more humane workplace could look like. What in the past may have seemed secondary priorities – social connection, greater autonomy, more flexible work arrangements, and close-knit teamwork – have turned up as profound forces that helped people navigate a global crisis.

Leaders are learning, albeit at different paces and levels, that the future of work and the workplace will call for *compassionate leadership* – the integration of connectedness, flexibility, well-being, mutually supportive teams—in order to succeed. Many leaders discovered that leading with a focus on humanity is more than just a "nice to have." They witnessed how leading with benevolence directly supports their own and others' psychological resources and resilience.

Our findings are consistent with a 2019 study titled: *Does compassion matter in leadership?*, which broadens the application of compassion from suffering to everyday leadership[13]:

> **Compassionate leaders set themselves apart... They came from a place of integrity and presence. Within that space of integrity and presence, they were keenly aware of how their actions affected others and how they influenced and actively shaped the experience for their employees, organization, and community. They were acutely self-aware of themselves, behaviors, and thoughts.... Compassion for our participants was about taking action in a way that honored the experience of every employee in the everyday experiences of work.** (p. 549-550)
>
> **The act of compassion can have a spill-over effect, and encourage followers and other employees to act compassionately toward and with one another. The potential effects of such leader behaviors have far reaching effects such as building positive work cultures and enhancing learning as well as reducing dysfunctional behavior such as conflict and incivility that can have deleterious impact on work performance. Evidence from our study indicates that the sum** *is* **greater than the parts in the case of compassionate leader behavior.** (p. 557)

We learned from our interviews and the literature that a proactive, compassionate approach to engaging employees and caring for their needs prior to the pandemic created a readiness, agility and resilience not found in organizations that were caught in traditional modes focused mainly on financial results and productivity. Organizations that succeeded in sustaining engaged, productive, and high-performing teams in the midst of a pandemic have demonstrated the benefits that flow from prioritizing human thriving at work. As one leader noted:

> *We haven't been human enough. The pandemic is providing us with an opportunity.*
>
> — Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35 years of leadership experience, I-27.

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Leaders Change Their Ways

Especially during a crisis that we've just gone through, you realize what you're carrying on your shoulders, and that the morale of your entire team is dependent on your leadership.

— Healthcare company, 6 years of leadership experience, I-35

Introduction

In this chapter we describe the dramatic personal impact of pandemic forces experienced by the thirty-three executives we interviewed, including sudden shifts in their values, behaviors, and priorities as well as a rapid reinvention of organizational strategies called forth by not one, but several crises.

The Pandemic Era Crises

Not only did the pandemic precipitate sudden and profound risks and changes globally in how everyone lives and works, as we explored in Chapter 2, altogether we witnessed or experienced immense human loss: of lives, physical and mental health, jobs, proper schooling, family and social activity, and business and leisure travel. An article by two psychiatrists on COVID-19 and mental health noted[1]:

> **Extensive research in disaster mental health has established that emotional distress is ubiquitous in affected populations — a finding certain to be echoed in populations affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.** (p. 511)

Already reeling, the widespread social pain of racism, inequity and exclusion erupted and rightly demanded our attention and compassion. Leaders found themselves surrounded by, and in some cases experiencing, great suffering. Many leaders have come face-to-face with the fragility of their own humanness. With such pain sweeping across our society, many leaders experienced a heightened sense of empathy and understanding for those with whom they work, unlike anything they had previously experienced. Some respondents revealed that they were more introspective, and more aware of others' suffering, resulting in increased vulnerability and compassion in the workplace and beyond.

In addition to human suffering caused by pandemic-era crises, there was severe business disruption. A special issue on the COVID-19 impact on business describes the crisis[2]:

> **The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has forced many businesses to close, leading to an unprecedented disruption of commerce in most industry sectors. Retailers and brands face many short-term challenges, such as those related to health and safety, the supply chain, the workforce, cash flow, consumer demand, sales, and marketing. However, successfully navigating these challenges will not guarantee a promising future, or any future at all.** (p. 284)

Some businesses have thrived, some have closed, and others have survived but have found themselves drastically changed—struggling to re-emerge somewhere between these two extremes.[2] Overnight, many leaders were stretched to the limit trying to figure out how to keep their organizations operating – how best to lead, how to support their distraught employees, how to get work done, and how best to serve their customers.

Combining the massive global risks and suffering, mental health declines, and business and organizational crises, leaders were stretched to become crisis leaders. A review of the crisis leadership literature in the context of the pandemic found that scholars focus on two leadership areas:[3]

1. Leaders' psychological and behavioral responses to a crisis
2. Leaders' strategic responses to a crisis

The leaders we interviewed quickly re-examined, and in many cases shifted, their values and their ways of leading. As a defining moment in modern history, the personal pandemic experience for leaders is akin to a global "crucible experience." According to Bennis and Thomas, "a crucible is, by definition, a transformative experience through which an individual comes to a new or an altered sense of identity."[4] The executives we interviewed described the pandemic's profound impact on how they see themselves and others, including the types of questions they are asking, and their "way of being" as leaders. The social justice movement further deepened these self-reflections. Leaders questioned, as Bennis and Thomas phrase it, "who they are" at their very core, and what matters most to them and those they lead.

In this chapter, we organize the shifts and changes described in the executive interviews into four areas:

1. Leaders shift their values
2. Leaders change their ways
3. Leaders reinvent their strategies
4. Leaders reset their priorities

1. Leaders shift their values

Human values are deeply personal, often spiritual, and as social constructions they can be familial and cultural. They provide a compass for life's directions and decisions. They determine what we are willing and not willing to sacrifice. Our core values drive our behavior - how we live, work, and what we consider most important within our communities and society. The evolution of values over the human lifespan has been studied in Europe, showing modest changes with age. By young adulthood, in affluent countries, people tend to appreciate the greater good more and are less focused on self-interest. Later in life, people tend to become more conservative and less open to change.[5]

When core values are honored, we feel respected and appreciated. When these sacrosanct values are threatened or violated, the response may be upset and discomfort that can mobilize into a vigorous action like a strike, or a protest. If not quelled and mollified with calm deliberations and collaboration, what is perceived as a breach in values may result in a riot or violence.

Values can have inherent and conflicting elements, especially during a crisis, as many experienced during the pandemic. For example, a challenging conflict arose between two values - valuing safety—keeping children and adults out of harm's way with homeschooling—and simultaneously recognizing the valuable contribution to the mental and emotional health of children of in-person school.

A leader's values (for example, excellence, achievement, innovation, and good judgment) represent what's most important to an individual in organizational life. They guide action, by providing a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Core values directly impact how leaders perceive and relate to their roles. A review of the leadership styles of various countries identified three styles of leading during the pandemic, based on different values – charismatic (optimistic, hopeful, strengths-based), ideological (based upon values rooted in a sociopolitical doctrine), and pragmatic (rationality, problem-solving).[6]

Constructs of values-based leadership emerged early in the 21st century in response to multiple ethical and moral leadership failures (Enron, WorldCom, etc.), according

to a 2014 review article. To restore hope, confidence, and integrity in organizations, leaders needed to cultivate a strong set of values and ethics. These constructs are now ubiquitous in the leadership literature; values-based leadership styles include spiritual, servant, authentic, ethical, and transformational leadership.[7]

A business professor in Malaysia published an updated review of values-based leadership in 2020, adding "responsible leadership" to values-based leadership styles, defined as maintaining strong social and moral relationships between leaders and followers based on justice, recognition, care, and accountability for economic, ecological, social, political, and human impacts. Responsible leadership arises from a leader's self-discipline and self-mastery. This review concludes that leaders who lead with strong core values such as altruism, authenticity, and integrity deliver better organizational performance and more enrichment of the lives of followers.[8]

While human values vary widely in nature and ranking among us, for most individuals and leaders, they tend to be relatively stable over time.[5] The unforeseen calamity of the pandemic blew up human stability. Shock waves led to global anxiety, uncertainty, and instability. Overnight, leaders were navigating uncharted waters and had to find new ways to make sense of the world.

> *It's really navigating these uncharted waters now. It is unprecedented. Unprecedented because it's true. Even, even people as old as me have never gone through anything like this before. Nothing we've been through - recessions and national disasters and wars and you know, all kinds of things, but never, never a global pandemic that has caused us all to stay at home for four months. And it's going to be more than that.*
>
> — Automotive, 12 years of leadership experience, I-06

> *I initially felt anxiety, just having more anxiety than usual regarding the unknown. I am a person who leads with knowing where I am going. I can set even baby steps or giant steps to get to a goal, but with what's been going on, I cannot even set those goals.*
>
> — Healthcare, 40 years of leadership experience, I-19

> *Especially during a crisis that we've just gone through, you realize what you're carrying on your shoulders, and that the morale of your entire team is dependent on your leadership.*
>
> — Healthcare, 6 years of leadership experience, I-35

The pandemic caused many leaders to reappraise what was most important. New interests and values emerged, particularly around what people expect from employers, for example flexibility and equity, that were previously suppressed or subordinated. This was noted by other authors.[9] An early step taken by many leaders was to reflect on deep, existential questions that, heretofore, they had not been pondering on a day-to-day basis—the kind of identity-based questions that can cause values to shift: *"who am I"* and *"why am I here."*

> *To me, it really called on a deep awakening of asking myself why I became a leader. It challenged me to the deepest core. The pandemic opened up my eyes, to really drive myself to think about who I was and why I'm here.*
>
> — Healthcare, 7 years of leadership experience, I-15

Beyond questioning their fundamental purpose, many leaders began to question their roles and priorities, and whether they were investing their talents in the right goals. The impact of the pandemic brought about a shake-up in the values and behaviors of entire organizations as well as the broader society.

> *Is this really what I want to be doing? Do I have my priorities straight?*
>
> — Computer software, 4 years of leadership experience, P-05

> *Is the end goal worth the struggle?*
>
> — Pharmaceutical, 5 years of leadership experience, I-32

> *It wasn't just this single-stranded RNA on a molecular level that causes disease, but it fundamentally changed how we interact with each other and how structures interact with each other in terms of a larger scale. So what I mean by that is no longer could people see each other the same way and no longer can organizations behave in the same way because the pandemic exposed gaps in our society.*
>
> — Healthcare, 7 years of leadership experience, I-15.

Understandably, given the clear threat to physical health posed by the virus, the health and safety of employees, as a core value, took center stage.

> *Because I said, none of you will be able to take it. If any of your people get sick, you will hold it yourself forever. You will be guilt-laden. And God forbid they die. We need number one, health and safety.*
>
> — Healthcare, 27 years of leadership experience, I-07

The importance of human connection, social cohesion and support, as key attributes of effective teamwork (and work in general), became more apparent as the pandemic continued. One leader described a new emphasis on connection.

> *And honestly, I think the most important thing for leaders right now is to connect with their people at a human level.*
>
> — Automotive, 12 years of leadership experience, I-06

Leaders recognized that some of their colleagues needed to broaden from over-valuing achievement, tasks, and efficiency, to also embrace human-centered values, including empathy, compassion, and psychological safety.

Yet not all leaders were skilled at having authentic conversations with their team members about their mental, physical, and emotional well-being.

> *Dialogue is more important now than ever, also giving trust or finding meaning. Signaling psychological safety: we care about you and your situation; your job is not in danger.*
>
> — Healthcare, 5 years of leadership experience, I-20

The value of family and friends was elevated by the pandemic. In general, people were made aware of how fragile life can be – and felt the downsides of shut-downs and forced geographic and physical distancing. Many leaders reported that they increasingly supported employees to attend to family needs.

> *I'm more available because I'm home all the time. Family is more top of mind lately and I tend to worry about them more than usual.*
>
> — Computer Software, 3 years of leadership experience, P-05

However, this higher valuation of family didn't always translate into more hours available for quality time. In some cases, longer working hours than before the pandemic led to less family time.

> *I don't mind working hard or putting in many hours, but I now find I am consistently doing 70-75 hour working weeks and I find it difficult to switch off.*
>
> — Banking, 25 years of leadership experience, I-26.

> *Home life has been impacted too. There is less quality family time as I am constantly on calls and also working longer hours.*
>
> —Medical Device, 23 years of leadership experience, I-09

Many leaders recognized the importance of personal time to replenish their own resources and to build resilience in themselves and their employees, as the pandemic turned from a sprint to a long-term debacle.

> *The last part is recognizing that this level of leadership, not just with COVID, but particularly because of the changes, is a marathon, even though it feels like a sprint. So maintaining focus and resilience is very, very important. I focused on hobbies when I could, and really more so for the last month or so, have tried to be intentional about creating space for my own self.*
>
> — Healthcare, unknown years of leadership experience, I-17

If one were to summarize the shift in values experienced by leaders, using the Schwartz model,[10] what decreased in value were **self-enhancement,** through achievement and power, and *conservation,* through tradition and conformity. What increased in value were *self-transcendence*, through heightened benevolence for the workforce, family, and society, and *openness to change,* through a high level of new stimulation and challenge. These changes in values were accelerated by the witnessing of social unrest, massive numbers of deaths, and broad threats to public health.[9]

Said differently, before the pandemic, leaders placed a high value on their performance by traditional measures (financial growth, market share, efficient workflows). They valued having control of the workforce, requiring most employees to be present at the workplace. During the pandemic, leaders began to demonstrate authentic care for the health, safety, and well-being of their workforce. Leaders became open to the possibility of changes in organizational structure and work rules. One leader described the call for self-transcendence in prioritizing new values:

> *And I think helping leaders to figure out how to navigate this very new and unforeseen situation and to retain their humanity and their grace and you know, their optimism - yes, so humanity, grace, and optimism.*
>
> — Automotive, 12 years of leadership experience, I-06

2. Leaders change their ways

When the pandemic hit and lockdowns were enforced, many leaders we interviewed first moved to a top-down, command and control mode of crisis leadership as they marshaled their teams away from the office and into remote work. They emphasized logistics, technical accessibility, and security. They gave direction, set up remote

work protocols, and made decisions on what, how, and when people and teams would communicate. Leaders needed to show strength and decisiveness to help people through the shock of abrupt change.

Then, once the rapid adjustments were made, the human impact of pandemic anxiety and the trauma of the toll of COVID-19 began to take center stage. Rather than focusing only on control and decisiveness, leaders recognized the need for compassion and the need to address employee anxiety by listening more deeply and being a supportive voice.

> *The real secret to leadership goes back to showing empathy, building safety, building teamwork, where people can show up and be vulnerable. The pandemic really exposed leaders who were uncomfortable doing that because if you hid behind numbers, if you hid behind only management, if you were uncomfortable creating safe spaces for people to truly open up, there's no way there's any chance against COVID-19 because it exposed cultures that were based on fear. They were based on top-down management. They were based on just chasing metrics because there was no map, no guidebook, no pathway, no protocol, no process for COVID-19. You actually had to trust each other.*
>
> — Healthcare, 7 years of leadership experience, I-15

One leader described how she softened her tone, putting away her strong, authoritative approach, and instead starting to lead team sessions with a soothing voice meant to calm a frazzled workforce.

> *I cultivated a late night, DJ voice. Everything's fine. We're good.*
>
> — Federal Agency, 2 years of leadership experience, I-30

What was heretofore a nice aspiration –bringing the whole self to work—suddenly became paramount. Leaders needed to learn to be more authentic, and to make their relationships more authentic. It was no longer considered taboo to ask how an employee was doing at home or with family challenges.

> *What used to be required in professional boundaries has of necessity somewhat evaporated, both because of the circumstance of working from our homes, as well as a desire to connect. It's important that people feel like there's a real person sitting on the other end of the screen.*
>
> — Pharmaceutical, 5 years of leadership experience, I-32

> *I started thinking about this notion of bringing your whole self to work, and what that really, truly means. It was just so interesting. I was being seen, really and truly being seen.*
>
> — Robotics, 3 years of leadership experience, P-02

Likewise, leaders could deepen trust by sharing their own stresses and strains. Showing more authenticity about their own personal experience, to be open and more transparent about what they were experiencing, served as a reminder that everyone was in the same boat when it came to the virus.

> *People are really curious about the leaders' situation. So, I've done a blog about how I am coping, with photos of me standing at my desk in Amsterdam and at my standing desk in London, and how I had to cope with my husband being in Amsterdam where he has his business and my two sons in London, where I have my home in London.*
>
> — Banking, 25 years of leadership experience, I-26

The ability to balance openness, transparency, and vulnerability with competence and strength became a key success factor for many leaders. They needed to be open and honest with employees, but not so informal that they risked losing the faith and trust required to inspire confidence.

> *You can't be so self-reflective that employees question - how do I trust this person with my life?*
>
> — Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35 years of leadership experience, I-27

Leaders also shifted to be more intentional about team dynamics, updates, and communications strategies, not to simply assume that virtual work interactions would be the same as in-person meetings and updates.

> *I have needed to be more thoughtful and deliberate with how often I interact with my team. And because I took advantage of the fact that they were sitting next to me all day long, but I did not need to have a dedicated time to check in with everybody to see what you are working on, what I need them to work on, etc. As soon as we got sent home, we set up daily check-ins, we have a touchpoint first thing in the morning. I am learning what things they are struggling with and need to escalate to me.*
>
> — Design manufacturing, 2 years of leadership experience, I-29

Leaders, in this context, made the effort to hold regular check-ins, with more frequent and intentional communication.

> *I'm creating more space, creating more opportunities. We are doing a lot more you know; we are doing a weekly check-in with the whole team. We are doing the newsletter. I am going to be conducting some interviews after certain events transpire next week. I think having to be a lot more deliberate about communication is improving my communication, and then hopefully, I'll retain those habits.*
>
> — Automotive, 12 years of leadership experience, I-06

Some leaders recognized the value of empowering others and sharing the burdens inherent in virtual work and navigating disruption; hence, they gave away some of their power by delegating more.

> *The focus on empowering teams is really one of the most important leadership types of roles. So, what has been a challenge is bouncing back and forth between having to move fast, to get things done and take control, and then backing off to allow others to do the work.*
>
> — Healthcare, unknown years of leadership experience, I-17

As the pandemic months wore on, the *go, go, go* attitude of the early days of the lockdown experience wore off. Chronic uncertainty and anxiety became more prevalent. As much as employees might look to leaders for solutions, the leaders themselves were often at a loss. Timing of vaccine rollouts, opening plans, and the timing and degree of return to "normal" was extremely unpredictable. Leaders recognized that it was OK to admit that they didn't have all of the answers. They were genuine about their own lack of control, and thereby modeled authenticity.

> *I'm not leading with certainty because I don't know what certainty is.*
>
> — Healthcare, 40 years of leadership experience, I-19

> *In our current environment, all the ambiguity is daunting. If the world was perceived as ambiguous a year ago, my God, it is ambiguous now. And I don't have all the answers.*
>
> — Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35 years of leadership experience, I-27

3. Leaders reinvent their strategies

Prior to the pandemic, many organizations spent a great deal of time and energy focused on defining annual goals and conducting long-range planning exercises, typically putting in place strategies in three-to-five-year increments. The pandemic

handed leaders a sudden and unique opportunity to set aside long-range planning, reevaluate priorities, and accelerate change in plans on a more day-to-day basis.

> *This crisis has fueled a total re-evaluation of leadership priorities and strategy.*
>
> — Pharmaceutical, 5 years of leadership experience, I-32

Given the radical uncertainty brought on by the pandemic, the focus shifted to moving fast to address the immediate needs of the business – to survive – and to set up work dynamics that would provide, in the near term at least, a sustainable operating model.

> *There has been an intense focus on the here and now. We've never as an organization moved as fast as we have now. Teams are moving faster and focused on common goals because they know their priorities.*
>
> — Manufacturing, 20 years of leadership experience, I-13

A crisis situation requires a new and different strategy—and there would not be a "one size fits all" approach to maintaining business continuity or shifting directions. One leader emphasized the importance of not *"hiding behind the numbers,"* while another bluntly stated, *"cash is king."* Some leaders said that their primary need was to empower their teams more and focus on vision; others said they needed to be more operationally focused.

> *I think we've all had to become a little bit more micro-managerial, and I know that that's not what we want to be in life as executives.*
>
> — Dentistry, 17 years of leadership experience, I-18

> *For me it has been a confirmation not to be too operational.*
> *Continue thinking about the future and do visionary work, not micro.*
>
> — Biopharmaceutical, 20 years of leadership experience, I-25

Each leader needed to quickly transition their approach to strategy to fit the unique context and needs of their organization. Decision-making processes underwent closer scrutiny and adaptation by many leaders. Slowing down and becoming more reflective about decision-making became the order of the day. Some became more attentive to whether they have support and alignment before moving forward, prioritizing inclusiveness. There was an evident need to make space for listening, getting everyone on a team involved in decision-making and honoring diverse perspectives. Not everyone's experience of the lockdown situation was the same.

> *It's a very interesting blend of things that are required now. On the one hand, a collaborative style of leadership, hearing every voice in the room, and you would expect me of all people to say this, ensuring you are taking diverse views into opinion. I feel we need to be in a position of taking a range of views and nevertheless being decisive.*
>
> — Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35 years of leadership experience, I-27

> *You have to count the votes, make sure you have everybody lined up to support decisions.*
>
> — Pharmaceutical, 5 years of leadership experience, I-32

As a result of the social and political unrest that began during the pandemic, a heightened awareness of equity and social justice concerns caused some leaders to consider diversity and equality as a strategic mandate for a more inclusive workplace culture.

Ensuring you are taking diverse views into opinion— women, men, black, white - because I think we run the risk of hiring and working with people in our own image, or people that we gravitate towards. What the pandemic has done is surface the need for a collaborative style of leadership and much more willingness to accept that nobody has all the answers. It's important to hear every voice in the room.

— Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35 years of leadership experience, I-27

In some situations, leaders began to recognize that in order to rapidly implement new approaches to business processes, with alignment and support of those impacted, it would make sense to be less controlling, less hierarchical in decision-making. Collaborative approaches proved to not only be more inclusive, but also more agile and flexible.

In a virtual environment you just have to let go. Everything we did before to transform the organization to more agile and adaptive is stressed even more in a crisis. It reminded me that this path is the right one. It is a style that will help in a crisis situation, and you are not in control. We want a radically flexible organization.

— Biopharmaceutical, 20 years of leadership experience, I-25

4. Leaders reset their priorities

As the crisis wore on, people longed for connection, conversation, and feedback. People (leaders and employees) were experiencing a lost sense of community. This recognition of the value of social cohesion and belonging led many leaders to seek ways to reconstitute the social mores of in-house workplaces, to mend the social fabric that had seemed so easily woven together over coffee, in the hallways, and in meetings. Since remote work requires a complete reliance on the flatter, more two-dimensional interaction of email, texts and video technology, the missing third dimension became a concern. Leaders made a greater commitment to cultivating and deepening personal relationships at work. As one leader put it:

> *There's a chance to emphasize really connecting with people in order to bring them along with you, with the change in the direction you need to go. In the past you sort of took it for granted because you could have hallway conversations and people were always accessible.*
>
> — Pharmaceutical, 5 years of leadership experience, I-32

To cultivate interpersonal relationships in the virtual environment, leaders reported becoming less formal and more personal in their interactions with employees. They recognized the need to reach out more frequently and check in — and on topics that normally might have seemed inappropriate (e.g., mental health issues such as anxiety, grief, and even depression).

> *What used to be required in professional boundaries has of necessity somewhat evaporated, both because of the circumstance of working from our homes, as well as a desire to connect. It's important that people feel like there's a real person sitting on the other end of the screen.*
>
> — Pharmaceutical, 5 years of leadership experience, I-32

Finally, as the disruption became a long- term, chronic experience of stress and strain, lasting many months with seemingly no end in sight, the need for self-care became a priority. Leaders dealing with the unrelenting pressures of a dramatically changed work environment could not avoid their struggles with concentration and focus. They came to see the importance of taking care of their own health as key to maintaining the ability to be creative, think strategically, and to inspire hope and optimism in others. A vigorous investment in self-care, including sleep, mental breaks, and time off, became a necessity for leaders and their teams. The importance of this investment is consistent with advice provided by the American Psychological Association in its guidelines for leaders dealing with pandemic stress.[11]

> *And once it calmed down, you know, I think every leader at every level was like, no, everyone has to take time off.*
>
> — Healthcare, 6 year of leadership experience, I-35

Conclusion

The intense, sometimes traumatic experience of being a leader during a crisis was difficult but also led to powerful insights and positive change, revealed in our interviews and the literature.[3,9,12] Many leaders questioned and shifted their personal values, and the ways in which they led their workforces. At an organization level, leaders adapted their strategies and priorities to be more human-centric – caring, compassionate, and authentic. They also became more agile and open to rethinking strategy and direction. These changes in some instances unleashed innovation.

Many leaders internalized the value of psychological safety – creating environments at work where people felt safe to share their vulnerabilities and anxieties about, among other things, their own competence. Employees felt freer to admit mistakes and ask for help, and to offer observations, feedback, and ideas, including ones that questioned authority or disrupted the status quo. All of this was good news: a psychologically safe workplace has been shown to be more creative and collaborative, and conducive to greater, faster learning.[13]

Many leaders quickly turned the collective upset, with no time to spare, into their own growth, as explored by Tedeschi and Calhoun's model of post-traumatic growth. Handled well, trauma can be metabolized into more meaning, appreciation, relationships, strength, and new opportunities. The process is slow; it typically takes a year or more.[14] Most leaders couldn't wait a year to grow; they rapidly metabolized the pain and sought ways to find and leverage "silver linings" within the suffering. Examples of silver linings were enhanced teamwork, more power-sharing, and greater self-awareness in leadership practices.

Leaders are leading an era of rapid human post-traumatic growth from top to bottom – at personal, team, and organizational levels, faster and more completely than in any other time in living memory.

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Human-Centered Leadership

I always felt the real secret to leadership goes back to more adaptive leadership styles, which is connecting with people, bringing out who they are, bringing psychological safety into every conversation, showing empathy, building teamwork, where people can show up and be vulnerable.

— **Healthcare,** 7 years of leadership experience, I-15.

Introduction

Now that we have addressed the pandemic's impact on organizations in Chapter 2 and leaders as individuals in Chapter 3, in this chapter we consider in this chapter the future of leadership, in particular clear themes that emerged from our interviews. A multitude of disruptions - public health, social justice, economic and personal disruptions - unleashed an era of more human-centered, agile, and adaptable leadership.

We start by exploring recent relevant literature.

Human-centered leadership

A 2020 article calling for human-centered leadership in healthcare[1] aligns with our findings. While the article focuses on caring for people who are ill, it is relevant to any organization. Every organization, ultimately, exists to serve the needs of fellow humans – whether it be through collecting taxes, providing building materials, developing software, or selling bicycles:

> **While many health care leaders continue to believe in a linear method to reduce cost and improve quality, what if leaders chose to emulate the truthful child in the well-known tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes," and had the courage to go against popular opinion? What if leaders were offered a model that generates change from the center outward? What if they were allowed to start by changing themselves? What if leaders were acknowledged as the people who not only lead the people but also care for the people?** (p. 118)

> **If all of those things became the expected norm for health care leadership, would patients (the humans entrusted in our care) be more likely to heal, trust, and feel cared for? In the current state of the health care world, from the unit to the hospital to the new reality of mega systems, there is a need to recognize the reason all of those microsystems and macrosystems exist: the people being cared for. Human-Centered Leadership is a model and idea that's time has come.** (p. 118)

The leaders we interviewed are openly thinking and talking about fundamental values that underpin human thriving and sustainability: authenticity, purpose, meaning, trust, compassion, physical and psychological safety, traumatic growth, diversity and inclusion, resilience, and well-being.

Authentic leadership

Not only has the pandemic experience inspired more human-centered activity, authentic leadership has emerged as key. Authentic leadership is leading based on one's core values, strengths, motives, goals and principles. Authenticity was a theme that came up frequently in the interviews; it is about being true to one's core values and purpose, while investing in honest relationships and practicing self-discipline. Authentic leaders are self-aware, open, transparent, and consistent. They are motivated primarily by positive values and concern for others, rather than by self-interest.[2]

Agile leadership

Another leadership shift relates to leading in the midst of accelerating change, including during a crisis. Leaders are called to greater systems awareness, and more adaptability and agility. The construct of agile leadership came up in the interviews – a leadership style which allows teams and organizations to move rapidly in response to fast-paced change. Agile organizations decentralize control, they trust and empower teams to set goals, take risks, and innovate. Agile leaders behave like facilitators and coaches, supporting empowered teams by making sure they have the resources they need and helping them navigate conflicts and challenges.[3]

A special 2021 issue published by the Journal of Change Management focuses on reframing leadership in the post-pandemic era. The articles in this issue[4]:

> **...recognize leadership as a dispersed, complex, collaborative, collective and multimodal endeavor. Taken together, they (the articles) bring focus to the human element of leadership as a non-coercive relationship seeking mutual beneficial outcomes, something that is more complex and distributed than how leadership practice has traditionally been understood.** (p. 133)

One of the issue's articles focused on how leading a complex system well enables generativity and innovation[5]:

> **What we need now is leaders and followers who know how to enable adaptive responses. Adaptive responses happen when people and systems support conditions that promote the complex adaptive dynamics of generative emergence, the process through which new order is created in dynamic systems.**
>
> **Examples of generative emergence are prevalent throughout the pandemic and the social movements that occurred around it, for example, in the expedited development of COVID-19 vaccines, the stimulus measures and other actions adopted by governments and businesses to protect people and business from financial ruin due to shutdowns and lockdowns.** (p. 145)

Our findings support a future combination of more authentic, compassionate, human-centered leadership with more agile, adaptive, and generative systems leadership. Going further, we see that human-centered and agile leadership are interdependent, as displayed in Figure 1.
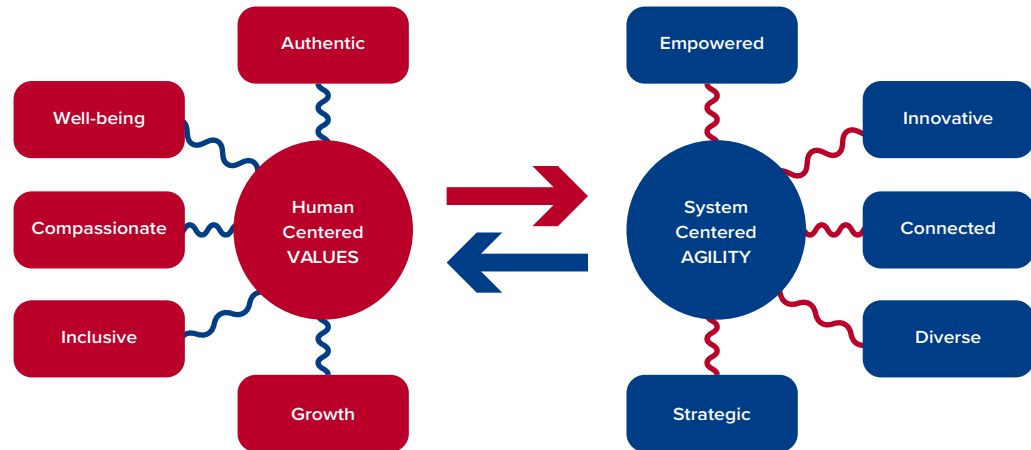
Figure 1: Human-centered leadership enables agile systems

Now let's turn to our interview findings, which we have organized into five *Fundamentals of Humanity:*

1. Expand consciousness
2. Cultivate relationships
3. Support well-being
4. Integrate diversity
5. Build agile cultures

Humanity Fundamental #1: Expand consciousness

For many of the leaders we interviewed, heightened levels of self-awareness and situational awareness proved to be essential in navigating the pandemic era. As we explored in Chapter 3, expanding conscious awareness for leaders starts with self–reflection and self-questioning. This new level of self-awareness results, for many, in a clarifying of personal values and priorities and an awakening to deeper meaning.

> *It really called on a deep awakening of asking myself why I became a leader. It challenged me to the deepest core. It opened up my eyes to really drive myself to think about who I was and why I'm here.*
>
> — Healthcare, 7 years of leadership experience, I-15

This evolution to a more heightened consciousness of inner states and personal reflections began to extend outward to include employees or followers. It started with more curiosity and genuine interest in others' states of being — their values, their health, their personal lives, and their individual needs in order to perform at their best. Leaders recognized that one thing that many people need is continued attention.

> *We could all listen a lot more, and actively listen. I've had to pay a lot of attention to that.*
>
> — Law Firm, 20 years of leadership experience, I-33

> *It's important to understand the intention of people and not just what they're saying.*
>
> — Global Development, 5 years of leadership experience, I-31

> *I also recommend that you keep close to your people. I contact four employees each week just to check in and see how they are doing. It is also giving me good context on the situation.*
>
> —Medical Device, 23 years of leadership experience, I-09

The social disruptions that accompanied the pandemic also awakened leaders to a greater systems awareness (the organizational system and its external context) beyond the immediate needs of work, teams, and individuals. The positive result of an expanded consciousness is that being more fully aware of the people, their needs, capabilities, and strengths, along with the systems context, can lead to better decisions and team alignment.

> *You can't hide your head in the sand and pretend it's going to go away. This is probably here to stay and it's probably going to be impacting us for a while yet. So, find out, use your resources, use your network, use all the information you have available to you to understand the way of the world.*
>
> — Aerospace, 3 years of leadership experience, P-03

> *Avoid group think and tap into your own thought process. Leaders need to think more in-depth and separate context from the content. Defining context is a key first step.*
>
> — Medical Device, 23 years of leadership experience, I-09

> *No longer could people see each other the same way and no longer can organizations behave in the same way because the pandemic exposed gaps in our society.*
>
> — Healthcare, 7 years of leadership experience, I-15

In sum, the pandemic brought about an opportunity for many leaders to step back and reflect, to raise their conscious awareness of the broader scope of responsibility and possibility that comes with being a leader. The following leader captures the full experience of this expanding consciousness, which ultimately supports everyone to change and adapt in a disrupted world:

> *The ability to simplify in the middle of complexity, inspire when there's no hope, build relationships when there is distrust, build bridges when things have fragmented, change people when people don't want to change. All those skills are not in the technical manual.*
>
> — Healthcare, 7 years of leadership experience, I-15

Humanity Fundamental #2: Cultivate relationships

Leaders were called to empathically and courageously connect with all stakeholder groups – especially employees. A complex web of relationships forms the wellspring of organizational success, providing a relatedness that stimulates motivation and engagement, and enables generative emergence of adaptive, innovative solutions.[5]

> *The kind of trust that is built as a result of the honesty during a moment like this is unprecedented. Every touch point with our employees and customers is an opportunity to elevate our relationships. People now see their primary job as maintaining the health of relationships – their teams, customers, important ecosystem partners, supply channels. It became about over-communicating, the touching-base. Seeing that not everything is about progressing the business, but about having a cohesive strategy and narrative around maintaining relationships, which will ultimately benefit the business.*
>
> — Venture Capital, 10 years of leadership experience, P-01

Many leaders became more compassionate about the significant pressures of family life on work lives. Since the COVID virus does not discriminate, leaders experienced first–hand the potential detrimental – and also positive – impact of home lives on their own performance at work. Working through the pain or loss of a sick relative was not uncommon for many months – having a negative impact on work focus.

> *We were humanized by seeing their homes and seeing their kids.*
>
> — Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35 years of leadership experience, I-27

> *Our leaders, we mean well, and we care for them as people. However, prior to COVID we were not very sensitive to what was going on in their lives.*
>
> — Dentistry, 17 years of leadership experience, I-28

Relationships are built upon trust, and to generate trust leaders need to be trustworthy. Leaders learned that communication needed to instill confidence, through a calm, empathic tone. A tone of optimism was also vital, conveying the "silver linings" and opportunities for positive change that could emerge even in the midst of calamity. It was important for leaders to strike the right balance between vulnerability and strength /competence.

> *Striking that balance to be trusted enough: that you're human, that you're balanced and you're listening to the people in the organization, but at the same time as being a leader. Giving sufficient direction and giving confidence; confidence builds on itself. A lack of confidence is where the challenges are for leaders now.*
>
> — Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35 years of leadership experience, I-27

Humanity Fundamental #3: Support well-being

Very early on during the pandemic, there was a profound decline in the mental health of employees around the world. Multiple studies were published on the public mental health impact, illustrating both mental health challenges and resilience in the face of the public health threat.[6,7,8,9] One author sums up well the process of turning suffering into resilience[6]:

> **The painful experiences in this pandemic will require time and shared reflection for meaning making, questioning old assumptions, and grappling with a fundamentally altered conception of ourselves and our interconnections with all others in our shared world. Taking a systemic view, the pandemic and our response will generate rever-berations we cannot foresee or control. Mastering these challenges will require great wisdom and humanity in the months and years ahead.** (p. 13)

Over the coming months and years, leaders are likely to continue to see employees struggle with anxiety, depression, burnout, and trauma. Thus they are exploring ways to foster resilience.[10] Many of the leaders we spoke with have become more present to others' well-being, for they have experienced the stress of lockdowns, working from home and anxieties around the health of loved ones first-hand.

> *For the first time it is not just a financial crisis, but about the health threat to their families, to their loved ones, and certainly in some cases about their vulnerabilities in their own health. This is an important part that we cannot ignore. So, we cannot just take a clinical approach and focus on finances.*
>
> — Banking, 25 years of leadership experience, I-26

There has been a noticeable increase in awareness around the importance of self-care and what it takes to be in shape – physically, emotionally, mentally – to sustain productivity. This recognition of the importance of self-care is not likely to be a fleeting response to the pandemic. Leaders have woken up to the realization that employee well-being is connected to performance of both individuals and teams, even when the overall context has returned to more stability. This over-arching emphasis upon well-being is likely to remain long into the future – perhaps becoming a permanent pillar of organizational success.

Humanity Fundamental #4: Integrate diversity

The pandemic may have been the most visible and global disruption that leaders encountered during 2020-2021, but it was certainly not the only volatile workplace concern that arose. In the wake of George Floyd's murder and the social unrest that followed, leaders have been forced to begin to reckon with long-standing issues of systemic racism, unconscious bias, and inequitable health outcomes and economic opportunities.[11]

The leaders we interviewed recognized that they have a role to play in creating a more just and equitable workplace. Many want to contribute to social transformation, which is emerging as a new leadership aspiration.[12]

Any residual mindset that leaders may have tolerated because "that's just the way it works" is no longer acceptable. In general, younger generations have become outspoken about the need for change and with increasingly global, multi-racial and multicultural workplaces, employees will continue to speak up and no longer accept a social environment that is unfair and discriminatory towards large swaths of the population. In this context, it became clear in our interviews that making space for more open dialogue on diversity principles was a leadership priority.

I think about how the George Floyd murder has impacted us individually and collectively across the world and how it may be what allowed us to be able to actually feel, be more empathetic, and maybe even a little bit more introspective. I think it also has helped us in our practice of being empathetic to our employees, when they're going through this 'shelter in place.' Now we had another way to apply that empathy and understanding, and there's something there that's really profound.

— Robotics, 3 years of leadership experience, P-02

We have to figure out a different dialogue on how we can be a better advocate and, and corporate steward for diversity justice and principles.

— Manufacturing, 20 years of leadership experience, I-13

As leaders become more schooled in the history of discrimination and inequity, and lean in to be role models of culturally competent behaviors, there is reason for hope. As many of those we interviewed noted, these behaviors must be modeled from the top. The good news is that this shift toward a more open, humble awareness around social issues has led many leaders to appreciate the power of inclusion: seeing, respecting and valuing each person. They are also appreciating the value of seeking and incorporating a wide array of diverse and at times even conflicting perspectives within their organizations.

The conflicting information is not just conflicting in the sense that the input impacts your decision, it also creates an anxiety and uncertainty that different people react to differently. In an organizational context, we were spending a lot of our time trying to be empathetic to that. We understand that it's fine if people have different perspectives and different concerns.

— Medical Device, 21 years of leadership experience, I-10

There is now a business and moral imperative to widen access to diverse voices, to include rather than exclude, to create a true atmosphere of belonging.[12] Interestingly, the lack of a clear roadmap around how to navigate sensitive issues of inequity and social justice has made it necessary to gather and integrate diverse perspectives and ideas across organizations. A proactive, compassionate approach to diversity translates into a strength that supports higher engagement, generativity, and performance.

Humanity Fundamental #5: Build agile cultures

The pandemic has exposed the limitations and strengths of varied organizational cultures, while also revealing that culture can change and adapt, especially in response to disruption. For example, one leader described the shift in leaders' mindsets about the potential for a distributed workforce.

We are transitioning into a deliberately distributed workforce, whereabouts 60% of our workforce will be permanently distributed. Prior to then people thought certain jobs just have to be in the office. And then almost one month into being sheltered in place, something just lifted from the eyes of our illustrious leaders. We are now in the midst of really helping to support our managers, leaders, and employees with really embracing this mindset and identifying the specific skills needed, especially managers and leaders.

— Robotics, 3 years of leadership experience, P-02

Another leader we interviewed noted that her people and organization were well-equipped to handle the disruption because they had already integrated agile methods and processes into their organizational DNA. This leader explained that her organization adapted even better, and became bolder. Creating an adaptive culture is seen as key to building a foundation from which her team can respond and adapt to future challenges and major disruptions.

The entry to a virtual environment was abrupt but given that we were undertaking an agile transformation we felt overall better prepared. Distributed and asynchronous work is enabled by agile methods. Employees stepped up, taking responsibility. Many have had epiphanies on stay-at home and have found it quite productive. It gives them more ownership of their own work environment, leading to a greater sense of responsibility and accountability.

We say "stand in the result," and "act from the future." We have created a common language. Our organization when interacting with other teams is known to be the one saying: "let's go for something a bit bolder."

We want dynamic resourcing, where every person is purpose-driven because we are being wonderful people leaders. We are now reimagining how to do performance management. With people self-assigning the results they will deliver, with people defining what ratings mean, such as 'satisfactory' or 'exceptional.'

One of my commitments was to act in service of transformation, creating space and comfort for my organization to be radically challenged. We want a radically flexible organization.

— Biopharmaceutical, 20 years of leadership experience, I-25

But there are obvious challenges, as changing a culture typically is a long-term project. Another leader we interviewed noted that some organizations are not on the way – cultures that traditionally relied upon a command and control, fear-based set of behavioral norms, appeared to struggle with people issues and fared poorly. She also describes an optimal leadership style based on authentic relationships and collaboration.

2020 exposed cultures that were based on fear, based on top-down management. But there was no map, no guidebook, no pathway, no protocol, no process for COVID-19. You actually had to trust and be open to the next best answer, realizing that hierarchy would not get us to the next best answer. The pandemic exposed leaders who were uncomfortable dealing with people issues, people who hide behind numbers, and are uncomfortable creating safe spaces for people to truly open up.

I always felt the real secret to leadership goes back to more adaptive leadership styles, which is connecting with people, bringing out who they are, bringing psychological safety into every conversation, showing empathy, building teamwork, where people can show up and be vulnerable.

— Healthcare, 7 years of leadership experience, I-15

We are under no illusion that all leaders will want to change the way they operate, but many are undertaking major shifts. There is momentum and the beginning of a 'herd' mentality – a realization that it's time. The early adopters are setting the pace; they are leading with humanity as a competitive advantage, as a retention tool, and as a way to be ready for the next crisis.

Conclusion

Our findings shows that many are creating a human-centered work environment that works for all of the people in it, not just for the C-suite or the stock price. As they lived and led through 2020 and early 2021, the pandemic became a marathon disruptor. Leaders questioned and re-examined the role they play in building trust and creating a safe space for brainstorming, innovation, and productivity.

What also emerged from our inquiry are not just valuable observations on the deep shifts in leadership consciousness, but a broader hypothesis on leading people and cultures through crises and toward a better future. We see more clearly now the interdependence of individual resilience and organizational resilience, and how the two interweave and complement each other. This dynamic interplay between personal and enterprise-level adaptability merits further study.

In earlier times when work was more predictable and stable, a leader could rely on a linear, rational thinking mindset and a top down, directive approach to communication and task management. With change and complexity as the new norm, an emerging body of literature supports shared purpose,[13] psychological safety,[14] and agile leadership as the pathway to sustainable generativity.[3] An agile environment that drives shared learning, deepens intellectual insights, and provides for faster, more flexible responses to upheaval, improves organizational performance.

We can hypothesize, then, that leading with the *fundamentals of humanity* has the potential to enable positive, systemic change. Leaders are recognizing they need to expand beyond the mandate of producing financial results to optimizing the lived experience for individuals and the collective, all while delivering the same, or even better, results.

As awful as the pandemic experience has been for leaders, organizations, and everyone, the mystery of organizational culture change may now be less inscrutable. Organizations are living, breathing communities made up of human beings in relationships, not simply mechanistic corporate entities with a focus simply on the bottom line. The basic principles of a human-centered approach to leadership can generate the energy and innovation needed to work through our biggest problems and navigate the next crises.
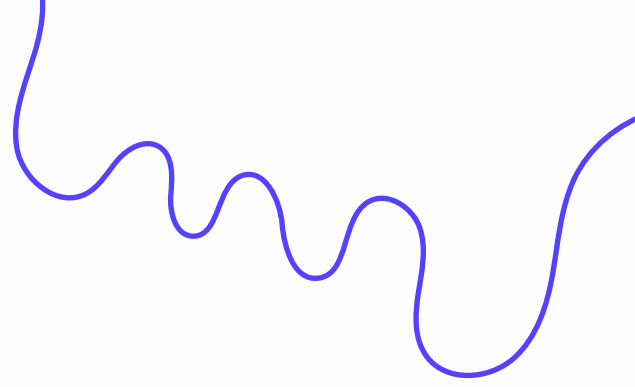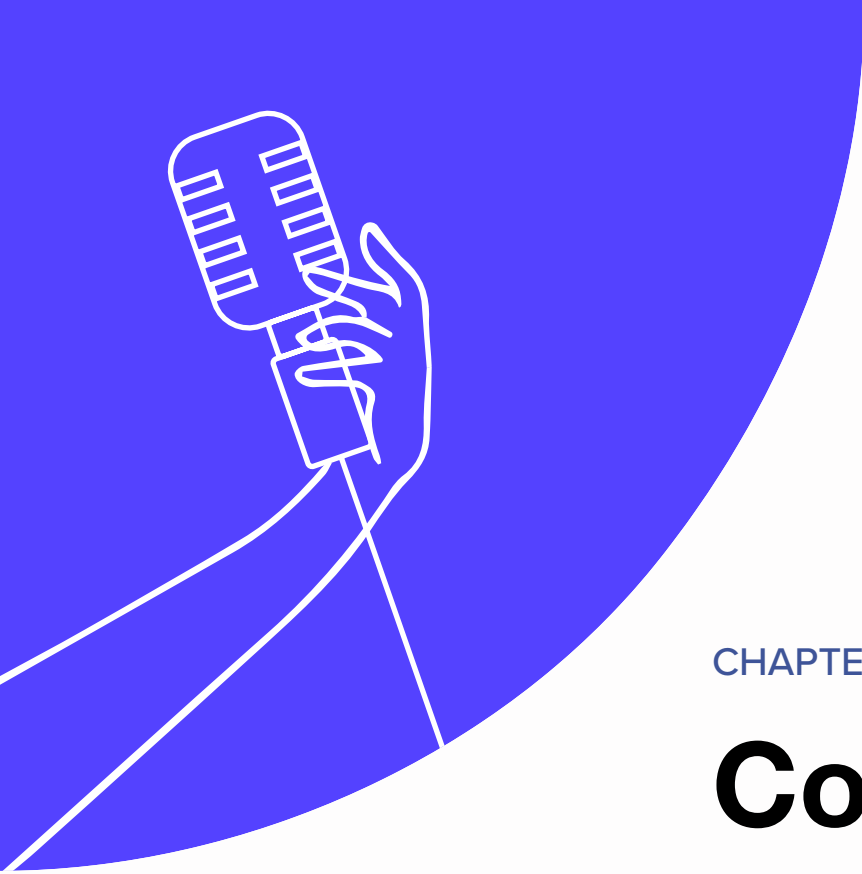
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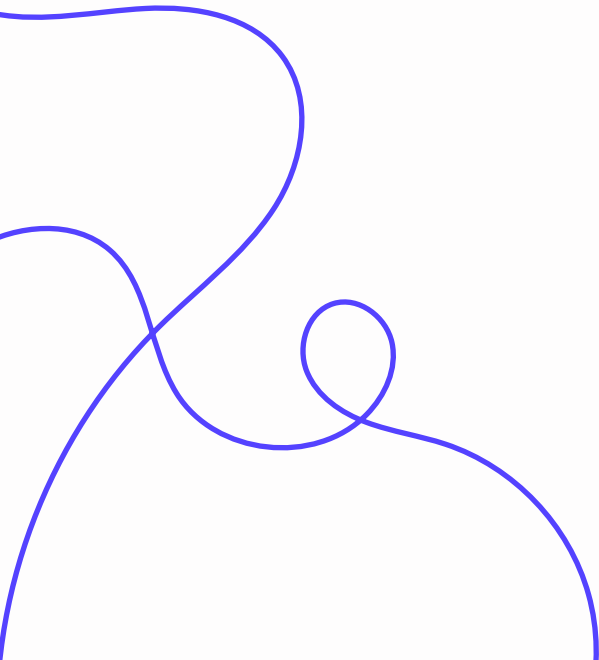
Coaching Leaders to Change

Well, you learn very early on in your journey as a leader that you take yourself with you no matter where you go. Leadership can become a very lonely journey because it starts within yourself. To have a coach to be a mirror, to connect with and to challenge your lens of who you are, why you're here, and to impact what you do, has been critical in my own transformation.

— **Biopharmaceutical,** 20 years of leadership experience, I-25

Introduction

In the last part of our thirty-three executive interviews in mid-2020, after we explored the pandemic era impact on their organizations, themselves, and the future of leadership, we asked leaders to explore the value of coaching to their leadership during a crisis. In this chapter, we summarize the role, impact, and value of coaching for these executives, all of whom offered insights based on their experiences of working with a coach.

Executive, or leadership, coaching is a professional service delivered to individuals, teams, or non-team groups, designed to facilitate change, growth, and even transformation. Transformational change happens when people think and act differently, having expanded their worldviews, perspectives, and behavioral repertoire. A 2019 McKinsey article explains that the reason organizational change initiatives fail 70% of the time is that leaders fall short in helping themselves and others change their thinking and behaviors.[1]

Many people are not ready to change, lacking the levels of motivation and confidence needed to change their mindsets and behaviors, which is no small feat in an already stressful context.[2] As a change intervention, coaching is designed to help people uncover their internal motivation and inspiration to change and develop the skills and behaviors that improve competence, confidence, and eventually performance.[2]

More than 100 research studies over the past 20 years have demonstrated that coaching improves individual leadership behaviors and performance, as well as improved well-being. Coaching also provides benefits to organizations, including greater engagement and effectiveness.[3,4] Positive coaching outcomes include improvements in self-awareness, communication skills, emotional intelligence, self-regulation, adaptability, team skills, people development, and workplace resilience. Coaching also aids leaders and employees in reaching other self-directed goals that previously had been elusive.[4]

Over the past year, researchers have started to study the role of coaching in supporting leaders and managers in grounding and processing their reality and lived experiences during the pandemic. Coaching helped expand perspectives, and further helped people engage in practices designed to improve well-being and performance

under duress.[5] One study showed coaching benefits included the opportunity for safe reflection, alleviation of negative emotions, generation of new possibilities and ways forward, and renewed confidence.[6]

Current themes for leadership coaching

The leadership themes explored in previous chapters point to key areas for development — engaging in compassionate, authentic, values-based, and agile leadership—that resonate with our findings on the role of coaching. To start, coaching helps leaders become more aware and self-compassionate around their own challenges and vulnerability, an important antecedent for effective leadership. A McKinsey & Co. article on compassionate leadership sums it up[7]:

> **Unless we recognize our own natural human response to a crisis and process these strong emotions, we won't have the capacity to grasp these reactions from others we seek to help. In other words, leaders must first relate to and help themselves before they can do the same for others.** (p. 3)
>
> **The overwhelming effects of a crisis strip leadership back to its most fundamental element: making a positive difference in people's lives. By turning inward to cultivate awareness, vulnerability, empathy, and compassion, and then turning outward to comfort and address the concerns of stakeholders, leaders can exhibit individual care, build resilience, and position their organizations to positively reimagine a postcrisis future.** (p. 7)

Coaching can also help leaders be more authentic – first, by becoming more aware of their own values and motives; secondly, by drawing out and empathizing with others' values and motives; and thirdly, by cultivating alignment that engages and empowers others to perform well. A 2021 Leadership Quarterly article on authentic leadership outlines the need for greater self-knowledge, non-defensive processing of information, and internalizing of core values that coaches often help with[8]:

> **We assert that self-awareness by leaders and followers of their motives, goals, and values provide them with insights that help them articulate their values in a way that may resonate and appeal to others…We contend that self-knowledge heightens one's ability to articulate such values to others in a compelling fashion. Second, relational transparency will facilitate the open exchange of ideas and hence heighten the appreciation of leaders and followers for the other party's point of view. Third, the balanced processing of information enables leaders and followers to actively listen to each other's viewpoints in a non-defensive manner, thereby increasing the prospects for achieving common ground. Finally, an internalized moral perspective incorporates basic values such as respect for others and justice that make it less likely that a leader striving for authenticity will seek to reconcile a values or goal conflict with followers by simply imposing his or her will.** (p. 2-3)

A team of authors discussing versatility and versatile leadership during the pandemic[9] note:

> **A leader can only manage a system to the extent s/he is capable of the range of responses needed to address the diversity of problems in that system. The implication is that leaders need a wide, nuanced repertoire of perspectives, skills, and behaviors in order to deal with organizational complexity, constant change, and the dilemmas that these conditions pose.… Research in this vein has provided empirical support for the proposition that leaders who have a broader repertoire of opposing and complementary behaviors are generally more effective, especially in complex systems undergoing turbulent change.** (p. 137)

Now let's turn to our interviews and the insights on the impact of executive or leadership coaching. Six themes on the role, impact, and value of coaching emerged:

1. Coaching provides a safe space to feel grounded and reflect.
2. Coaching helps leaders navigate challenges and crises.
3. Coaching expands leaders' consciousness.
4. Coaching helps leaders see their blind spots and biases.
5. Coaching expands a leader's capacity.
6. Coaching enables transformation of thinking and behaving.

1. Coaching provides a safe space to feel grounded and reflect.

Leadership, particularly at the top, can be lonely, especially during tumultuous times. Many leaders value the opportunity to speak with coaches who are outside their organization and in an environment which is psychologically safe. They enjoy not needing to perform. They appreciate the confidentiality of laying issues on the table without having to pull any punches or provide political shading.

> *I have been debating whether to let go of one of my people and that is not something I can talk about with most of my team. Having that kind of a safe space to just talk about objectively is helpful, 'What are the merits, the pros and cons of that.'*
>
> — Aerospace, 3 years of leadership experience, P-03

Many leaders turned to coaches to recalibrate, to get validation, and to feel grounded. Without opportunities for casual conversations at work, it's harder to find opportunities to test and reflect on a leader's observations and assumptions and to have a confidential, impartial sounding board for feedback. Engaging with a coach provides leaders this opportunity.

> *I'm a big fan of coaching. The benefit of just talking about things in a safe space, working through, you find the answer. It helped to have someone outside, not in the fire, and who helps you to do that kind of self-reflection. Personally, coaching was valuable to me in a very high-pressured situation. It is a mechanism by which I am managing to work through all those things.*
>
> — Audit, Tax & Advisory Services, 35 years of leadership experience, I-27

> *Taking an hour out every other week and say, let me step back, take a breath, have some 'me' time. And if nothing else, use your coach to review how you're using your calendar, how you're using your time, what are your metrics like.*
>
> — Federal Agency, 20 years of leadership experience, I-30

In a time of high anxiety, when it might be easier to make a rash decision, coaching provides a psychologically safe place where a leader can slow down, let off steam, and take the time necessary to think through how best to respond to difficult situations. A high level of stress can lead to knee-jerk reactions and decision-making styles based on longstanding patterns that held up in earlier periods but are no longer viable. In this context, coaches are valuable thinking partners.

2. Coaching helps leaders navigate challenges and crises.

During times of the greatest challenge or crisis, many leaders are required to focus on immediate action - on implementation and execution. As the leaders we interviewed pointed out, what worked prior to the pandemic may not work in this fundamentally different environment – and can lead to huge misunderstandings or failure to respond appropriately. Coaches can help leaders pause to expand and diversify their perspectives and possibilities before moving into action.[10]

We first struggled with 'how do we better execute' when the real question was, 'how do we need to change?' You know change is hard. Change is not what the leadership wants to do. Your inclination is to pedal faster. The role of an executive coach during pandemic time is to help folks get out of the box that they're in and contemplate the bigger questions about the change. 'Hey time-out! Let's assess where we are. What's in your control, what's outside your control and what do you want to do about it?'

— Dentistry, 17 years of leadership experience, I-18

A coaching session acts as a protected space for a leader to take a breath and decompress from extreme pressure. Race-car fast activity is paused just long enough to allow leaders to examine their situation more broadly and deeply, helping them explore their values and purpose, uncovering the "why" behind their approach to decisions, team dynamics, even their desire to lead in the first place.[10] These reflections on their deeper meaning and reasons for being a leader motivates them to be more thoughtful and present.

Reflection in coaching often focuses on a positive intention or vision for how a leader's actions may impact business outcomes, as well as other people. Coaching creates 'positive emotional attractors,' including compassion, future possibility, and optimism, that can be observed in fMRI studies of active brain regions related to these states. These positive emotional attractors are generated when coaching clients stop, step back, and create a positive vision or intention towards a desired outcome. In contrast, conversations that are focused on resolving weaknesses, gaps, and problems do not activate the brain regions related to positive emotional attractors.[11]

The safe space of coaching also has the power to support a leader to feel validated and appreciated at a time when she may have understandable anxieties about making the right decisions – especially when peoples' lives could be at stake.

> *Having regular contact with my coach throughout the pandemic and her experience with other executives and other places was really validating. How am I doing? Is there anything I am not thinking about? The conflicts that are coming up, are these typical, how are you handling them. It helped me keep my head on straight and stay calm and be aware that what I'm doing was right, appropriate. It was very much a lifeline. Like okay, am I at sea in the ocean? Am I going to drown? Or am I standing in the shallow end of the pool doing fine? I can't tell, it's dark out and I don't know what's going on. It was very helpful.*
>
> *One of the things that I think happens in a crisis is that leaders jettison things that they view as non-essential, and coaching is probably one of the things that they just won't find time for in a crisis. I think that's a mistake because if you understand how humans respond to a crisis, focus narrows. Leaders need to keep their focus as wide as possible in order to maintain their effectiveness.*
>
> — Federal Agency, 20 years of leadership experience, I-30

Coaching can help leaders navigate competing priorities. Coaching conversations, during the early days of the pandemic, helped leaders set priorities and agendas, and reflect on how to manage and communicate a sense of calm in the midst of great uncertainty.

> *The opportunity for coaches is to help leaders to navigate all these really different priorities that are pulling in different ways in trying to keep all those stakeholders satisfied. There's so much uncertainty right now. I don't think people are appreciating the impact it's going to have on our employees.*
>
> — Manufacturing, 20 years of leadership experience, I-13

3. Coaching expands leaders' consciousness

In support of more agile and versatile leadership, coaches can help leaders zoom out to a meta-view, to see the broader systemic implications of their decisions. Introducing a wider range of perspectives brings in new dimensions that they may not have considered, prompting them to ask bigger questions. Going further, coaching can get leaders to become aware of and challenge established habits, mindsets, and ways of thinking, and to consider trying new approaches.

> *I see coaching as a way to gain a meta-view as a daily-practice or tool, rather than an approach where somebody tells me exactly what I have to do.*
>
> — Healthcare, 20 years of leadership experience, I-20

> *Coaching starts with untangling your mindset and being conscious. There is the lens through which I look at how work is done, how I talk to people, and how we make decisions. During coaching we explore a topic, say a distributed workforce, and then we'll figure out how to permeate all of the shifts and changes throughout. Next is going through a re-imagining phase, looking at how you innovate your thinking and your 'way of being' and your way of leading, such that it would be more conducive to a permanently distributed environment. Only then are we focusing on - how do we return to being productive?*
>
> — Robotics, 3 years of leadership experience, P-02

On a reflective journey that goes even deeper, coaches can prompt leaders to ponder questions around the meaning of their leadership identity, such as why, how and who do I want to be as a leader? Leaders can then identify their core values and prioritize next steps accordingly.

> *I think it's really important to understand why you're there as an executive. What's your role? What were you hired to do? What does the organization and the mission of the organization require of you and your team? The most effective executives I know are clear in that and embrace it and really drive to do it extraordinarily well. The executives that I see struggle are not clear about why they exist.*
>
> — Federal Agency, 20 years of leadership experience, I-30

To support a leader or team to break out of deeply embedded habitual patterns, coaching can help leaders change the way they think by offering them new tools and practices.

> *The leadership team brought in an external coach for strategy discussions and retreat. One of the things we focused on was mindfulness, and about understanding intention. It challenges you to have to think in ways that you may not normally think, take approaches that you may not normally take.*
>
> — Global Development, 5 years of leadership experience, I-31

Especially in a disrupted situation, where there is no playbook to fall back on, a coach provides a support mechanism for calibrating what is most important, helping the client to keep in mind the long–term game.

> *I had to do a big presentation on strategic messaging and how we pivot and position us as an organization during this time of crisis. I worked with my coach on the presentation of what and how I present this to the CEO. My coach looked at my presentation and she said, "This is great. You are really highlighting all the important points, but I think the important part that you need to elevate is the opening, 'What is our north star as an organization?' That is the key message before you go into tactics and specifics."*

> *Every leadership team member should have at least some form of coaching, because while many leaders are very technically qualified, they can't lead effectively. The value of a coach is helping those who may lack more on the leadership side.*
>
> — Global Development, 5 years of leadership experience, I-31

4. Coaching helps leaders see their blind spots and biases

A coaching program often includes gathering 360-degree input from bosses, peers, and subordinates on a leader's style and performance. Sometimes the feedback can be startling; many leaders have blind spots that can get in the way of their effectiveness. Within a safe and confidential coaching dynamic, they may begin to realize that the version of themselves that others experience is not aligned with how they see themselves, e.g., *"I didn't realize I was projecting this."* A coach can contextualize the feedback in a way that acknowledges a leader's strengths while helping her see what gets in the way of her seeing herself as others see her. The opportunity for processing unvarnished data from key stakeholders can support leaders in moving past and letting go of flawed self-perceptions.

As Atwater, Yammarino[12] and others have found, self-other agreement on leadership perceptions is associated with better leadership performance. Helping leaders develop a self-perception that more closely matches the perceptions of others they interact with builds their foundation of self-esteem and integrity. This alignment can be particularly important during times of crisis, because discrepancies might have serious consequences where trust and connection matter most.

> *What coaches can do in a psychologically safe way is to hold up a mirror and to ask, 'Look, this is how you're seeing the situation, or this is how you came across, is this achieving what you want? What things can you change?' The role of the external coach is to be a safe person with whom to engage about difficult issues and support change.*
>
> — Law Firm, 20 years of leadership experience, I-33

> *The ability of coaches to work with people and give them feedback to help them grow is something that you only get in coaching. You know, training classes are great, and we need to continue to do those because that's a scalable solution. But the one-on-one feedback and practice is way more impactful.*
>
> — Automotive, 12 years of leadership experience, I-06

An effective coaching dynamic is designed to support leaders in reframing, exploring, and considering alternative options around their beliefs and operating principles. In this way, a coach can support a leader in uncovering both conscious and unconscious biases.

> *I'm very well aware of confirmation bias and blindness and the ways you can get comfortable in your own zone. A coach is really great at pushing you beyond that and saying, 'Yeah, you approach problems that way. How can you think about this a little different? Are you seeing that this is sort of keeping you in the groundhog-day of your life? You may want to try something else to move on.*
>
> — Federal Agency, 20 years of leadership experience, I-30

5. Coaching helps expand capacity

Just as the pandemic accelerated the conversion to more agile, digital communications, it has also intensified many leaders' need to develop a more agile and collaborative style of leadership. Coaching relationships can assist leaders in expanding their underused capacities, helping them realize there is a better version of themselves that they hadn't appreciated. With this greater sense of their own capabilities, leaders are able to take on bigger challenges.

> *Coaching has been really helpful for me overall, not even just during this time of crisis. It's about using and elevating the parts that are my leadership strength to help respond to challenges or demands. It's helped me access my strengths when my morale is dipping.*
>
> — Global Development, 5 years of leadership experience, I-31

> *I feel the super confidence of 'I can get through this, if it never ends, I can get through this.' I don't even know that without coaching sessions that I would have leaned into it. Without coaching, maybe I would have strayed away from challenges, reflecting on the past. Now I'm just able to lean into it.*
>
> — Healthcare, 40 years of leadership experience, I-19

Many leaders also described coaching as valuable in support of their emotional and physical health. A coach can provide customized exercises that help leaders reset, recharge, and model self-care for their employees. Role modeling is an important step towards building a more resilient culture.

> *The most important thing I think that my coach has been helping me with is not only resilience for myself, but also how do I help my team members to handle this every day, you're learning from many challenges.*
>
> — Healthcare, 16 years of leadership experience, I-16

Going forward, the importance of the resilience and mental well-being of both leaders and followers will remain vital dimensions of leadership and focus areas for coaching. Interestingly, according to the ADP Research Institute's Global Workplace Study 2020, levels of resilience increase with seniority.[13] In other words, even if a leader actively develops her own resilience, accelerating mental and physical recovery from shocks, those more junior or less experienced may be less resilient. The capacities that generate resilience can be supported and enhanced; a coach can support a leader to build resilience and sustainable performance from her team.

6. Coaching enables transformation of thinking and behaving

Many leadership development programs focus on building the capacity to reinvent, reimagine, and transform – personally, professionally, and organizationally. These are all vital for surviving and thriving. Our interview findings confirm that coaches are integral to leadership development through an intense focus on shifting and expanding thinking and behaving.

Coaching conversations often start by helping leaders redefine what it means to them to be a leader. This exploration can expand a leader's identity to include empathic, connected, and empowering approaches better suited to today's environment than the identity of a heroic, authoritative, technical expert. With a skilled coach, leaders can expand from being a one-note operator—decisive, authoritative—to becoming more agile and capable of utilizing more diverse approaches. Leaders can also develop more sophisticated people skills that are modeled by coaches—coaching, inspiring, providing feedback –-that are a prerequisite for human-centered, compassionate leadership. Last, with coaches at their sides, leaders can engage in the self-transformational leadership needed to support transformation of their organizations, whether intentional or in response to crisis.

> *One of the most challenging things about this organization is that you have very, very good technical experts, but very poor management skills – people skills. The feedback from staff is that the managers don't have people skills. It was really important to get a coach, to develop the ability to be able to effectively influence. All of the good leadership team members that I work with should have coaching because for me it's been transformative. I have learned to navigate those challenges of how we communicate, understanding the intention of people, and on how you approach and make decisions. Coaching helps me much more a leader that's able to respond to crisis in times of change.*
>
> — Global Development, 5 years of leadership experience, I-31

Coaching can help leaders step back and consider how they have defined leadership up to this point in their careers. The coaching dynamic provides a safe space to test their internal narratives and their beliefs. Coaches can help leaders revisit sometimes unquestioned stories of how they define the leadership role and their accountabilities.

> *I think coaching is valuable because it has been subtle, but transformative, by giving terms to how I see myself as a leader. My coach has used the term with me 'empowered grace,' giving sort of a definition. It helps me sort of become that. It wasn't about you have to just be a strong leader or you have to make good, strong decisions. It's about 'what kind of leader are you and what kind of descriptive words help describe that leadership?'*
>
> — Global Development, 5 years of leadership experience, I-31

Ultimately, coaching is a gift to many leaders, impacting all domains of their lives.

> *The ability to simplify in the middle of complexity, inspire when there's no hope, building relationships when there is distrust, building bridges when things have fragmented, changing people when people don't want to change. All those skills are not in the technical manual. And all those skills start with self-awareness and having very open conversations about your own derailers, your own strengths, your own opportunities. And so that's where I think a formal coach on a consistent basis makes a transformational difference.*
>
> *Coaching is essential to the journey of being a leader. It's not an option. It's who you are that's going to be part of their own transformation as a human being. It is a gift for anybody who can participate in coaching. For example, it makes me a better father, a better husband, a better human being, and a better leader.*
>
> — Healthcare, 7 years of leadership experience, I-15

Conclusion

The urgency created by pandemic disruptions took away the luxury of time to change thinking and behaving. Instead, leaders found themselves, as one pointed out, needing to "change tires while driving." Business had to continue while new processes and protocols were put in place, then adjusted and implemented, only to quickly be revisited again.

Barring severe trauma (e.g., the response to a severe danger or threat), behavior change does not typically happen overnight. Real change in values, mindsets, and behaviors is challenging in the best of times. Many cognitive and behavioral skills become deeply ingrained over many years of repetition and reinforced by successful accomplishments. Real change requires active intervention over time, with lots of practice, navigation of lapses, and rebooting of inspiration and motivation. The leaders we interviewed who had formal coaching benefited from just-in-time guidance to discover, leverage, and expand their repertoires. The velocity and range of personal development was substantially increased with professional coaching.

Unlike a training program or other educational modality, the coaching process occurs in real-time, is confidential and customized, and can therefore increase the speed of learning and adoption of new skills, thinking and behaviors. In the alchemy of human change *and growth,* the coach acts as a catalyst, enabling and accelerating individual change, growth, and transformation.

This study and report were conducted, analyzed, and written by executive coaches affiliated with the Institute of Coaching. As coaches, we note that the leadership framework offered in Chapter 4 and presented again below, is fully aligned with coaching principles.
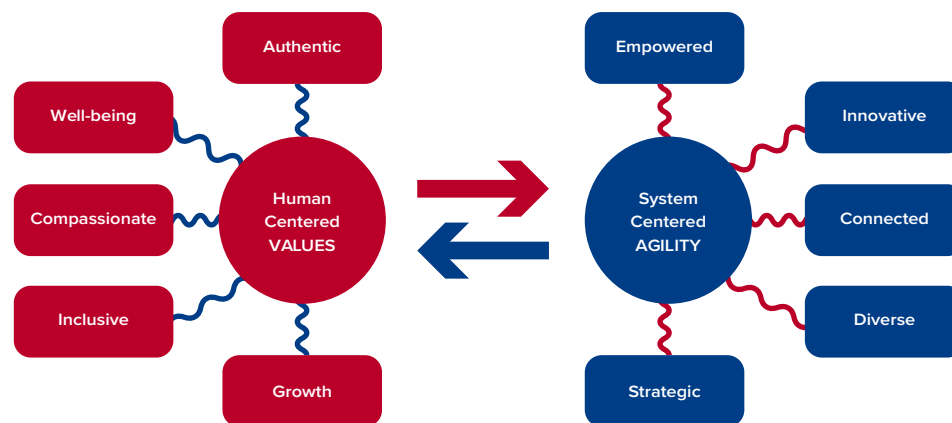

Figure 1: Coaching models human–centered and agile systems leadership

The framework conveys that adopting human-centered, compassionate, authentic, values-based leadership helps enable systems leadership that is agile, empowered, and innovative. Integrating the themes that emerged in this chapter on coaching leaders (safety, grounding, consciousness-raising, navigating challenges and biases, growing capacity, and transformation), we see that the coach approach to changing minds and behaviors is integral to post-pandemic leadership:

a. Today's context calls for agile leaders who have a varied set of skills to meet the diverse and often opposing demands of rapid and complex change.

b. Coaching conversations model a human-centered, values-based approach.

c. The coaching process helps leaders become more compassionate, authentic, and inclusive of diverse perspectives, while accelerating growth and improving well-being.

d. Coaching ignites agile thinking, disrupts thinking and behavior patterns, brings more purpose and strategy to empowering and developing people, and enables individual and organizational re-invention.

Leading with humanity

We closed our Chapter 1 summary with a jazz metaphor for our next phase of leadership and coaching. Now, with the benefit of all five chapters, we can each begin our own improvisation. One example could be a values-based melody accompanied by a harmony of compassion and authenticity and a rhythm of agility, carrying us upward in a spiral of positive change. Let's lead and coach, then, with a generative mind, tuning into our heartfelt values, and empowering everyone to be their best.

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Appendix I Project Methodology

In late spring and summer 2020, the Institute of Coaching (IOC), at McLean, a Harvard Medical School affiliate, initiated an inquiry into the impact and meaning of the pandemic era for organizations, leaders, and coaches. One aim was to better understand how the social and public health transformations brought on by the pandemic are shifting leadership and workplace dynamics. Concomitantly, we examined the role of coaching in supporting organizations and leaders in this challenging time.

The project mobilized nineteen fellows of IOC, with extensive experience in executive and leadership coaching in large organizations, to interview thirty-three executives of diverse and large organizations in five countries. The conversations, including five pilot interviews, focused on the future of leadership and the role of executive or leadership coaching during the pandemic era and beyond. Fifteen (45.45%) of the executives were female, twelve (36.36%) were male, and six (18.18%) did not disclose their gender. More than half (69.70%) of the participants resided in the United States, six (18.18%) lived in Europe, and one (3.03%) lived in the United Arab Emirates. Three (9.09%) of the participants did not state their country of residence.

The leaders represented organizations ranging in size from 3 to 500,000 employees and from a variety of industries: Audit, Tax and Advisory Services; Automotive; Biopharmaceutical; Computer Software; Dentistry; Entertainment and Leisure; Environmental Non-Profit; Federal Agency; Finance/Banking; Global Development; Healthcare; Legal Services; Manufacturing; Medical Device; Pharmaceutical; Public Relations; Real Estate; Retail; Technology. Six (18.18%) participants held a leadership title of President, CEO, and/or Founder. Eight (24.24%) held a title of Vice President (VP) or VP of a specific division within their organization (e.g., Senior VP; VP of Research and Development; VP of IT; VP of Talent Management). Seven (21.21%) participants held roles as Chief Officers or department heads (e.g., Chief Medical Officer; Chief Administrative Officer; External Affairs Officer; Head of Global Management). Nine (27.27%) participants held a leadership role as a director, chair, supervisor, or manager (e.g., HR Manager). Three (9.09%) participants did not state their leadership role. The number of direct reports each leader had ranged from 2 to 800 employees. Three quarters of the participants (75.726%) had experience with coaching.

The executives were assured that the decision to be part of this project was voluntary and that their reflections and recommendations would be kept anonymous. While a semi-structured interview guide was created to keep the inquiry focused, the conversations between the fellows and executives were flexible and interactive. We asked them to describe their pandemic experience as leaders and to explore the value of coaching to their leadership during a crisis and on their leadership journey. The conversations were audio recorded if the executives agreed, then transcribed and coded for patterns and themes. All identifying information was removed; when quotations from the interviews are cited, we note only the industry, years of leadership experience and interview number (e.g., I-15). If the quote is from a pilot interview, we designate it with (P).

We used the procedures of Thematic Analysis[1] through which we identified patterns (themes) in the interviews and interpreted them in their current social and organizational context. Initial coding was conducted for 5 of the transcripts with the support of the qualitative data analysis software package Atlas.ti.[2] This process led to the creation of an initial basic list of codes and coding categories. This list was shared with the full team, who conducted a similar process with the rest of the transcripts and added to the codes and coding categories. After this inductive coding a final codebook was created, which included the codes and finalized the coding categories into sub-themes and themes. The team of IOC fellows and staff then proceeded to refine the codebook and finalize the coding of the transcripts. The segments of text were extracted to an Excel file and organized according to the inductively identified theme and subthemes.

The resulting report weaves together the experience of the executives as shared during the conversations, relevant theoretical and empirical literature, and coaching experiences of IOC contributors during this public health and social transition.

Appendix Authors
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Appendix II: Key Themes from Interview Transcripts

Chapter 2: Organizations Meet Human Needs

1. Social connection

    a.   Leaders observed the human need for physical proximity and social connection.

    b.   Leaders experienced themselves the loss of human proximity.

    c.   Digital tools were used in new ways to improve social connection.

    d.   When virtual work was not possible, leaders cultivated togetherness.

2. Engagement

    a.   Engagement improved for most under lockdowns.

    b.   Employees stepped up, showing more ownership, responsibility, and accountability.

    c.   Digital tools enhanced productivity.

    d.   The talents of some people were revealed in the pandemic.

3. Well-being

    a.   Video meetings all day take a bigger toll than being at the office.

    b.   Home stresses and health vulnerabilities for employees and their families were high.

    c.   Leaders learned that a whole-person approach to employee well-being and resilience is vital to support organizational resilience.

    d.   Working from home brings new potential to improve employee well-being.

    e.   Organizational resilience depends on individual resilience.

    f.   Organizations need to support personal resilience to be ready for future crises.

4. Human-centered skills

a. Being authentic, one's whole self, was enabled.
b. Emotional empathy for employees' full lives became important.
c. Genuine caring for employees' well-being arrived.
d. The workplace was connected and democratized through zoom.
e. The value of psychological safety increased.
f. Human needs for whole-person well-being need to be integrated into business processes, workplace design, and decision-making.

5. Workplace design

a. Remote workspace may not be an option for certain segments of the workforce.
b. Workplace design ideally addresses human needs for connectedness and inclusion.
c. While previously designed with productivity and efficiency in mind, workplace design now ideally meets human needs and challenges well.
d. Providing real choice and flexibility meets individual needs.
e. Improving human health and planetary health was awakened.
f. Social connection in on-site workplaces meets human needs.
g. Leadership practices will need to be designed for a distributed workplace.

Chapter 3: Leaders Change Their Ways

1. Leaders shift their values

a. The unprecedented disruption of the pandemic shook leaders from their moorings.
b. Leaders asked deep, existential questions like *who am I* and *why am I here.*
c. Leaders questioned their roles, priorities and goals.
d. Leaders recognized that organizations and society need to shift values at scale.
e. The value of employee health and safety rocketed upward.
f. The value of individual connection at work increased.
g. Recognition of the value of psychological safety arrived.
h. Leaders who previously had over-valued achievement and numbers needed to shift to value benevolence - compassion, trust-building and well-being.
i. Leaders began to value self-care more.

j.   Leaders began to value family life more.
k.   Leaders shifted from (Schwartz) values of self-enhancement and conformity to values of self-transcendence, like humanity, grace, and optimism, and openness to change.

2. Leaders change their ways

a.   Top-down direction and decisions were necessary in the crisis mode of implementing lockdowns.
b.   Leaders began to listen more and understand people and their intentions better.
c.   Leaders softened pushy, edgy tones to convey a calm, soothing tone.
d.   Leaders learned to balance authentic vulnerability with confidence and strength.
e.   Leaders began to connect more and get closer to where people were doing well and where they were struggling.
f.   Leaders created more space and communication.
g.   Leaders gave away power, empowering teams more.
h.   Leaders slowed down decision-making to create space for collaboration and diverse views.
i.   Leaders confronted their vulnerability, their lack of certainty about the future.
j.   Leaders reassessed the necessity of excessive business travel.

3. Leaders reinvent their strategies

a.   Leaders shifted from long-term planning to a rapid reevaluation of priorities and strategy.
b.   Leaders focused on the here and now, the immediate problems, moving faster than ever before.
c.   Leaders took more time to consult widely and get alignment on decisions.
d.   Leaders saw the value in agile, adaptive organizations, in changing direction quickly.

4. Leaders reset their priorities

a.   Leaders commit to invest in relationships for employee well-being and alignment.
b.   To improve work relationships, leaders became less formal and more personal.

    c.   Leaders began to seek more diverse views and a collaborative style of leadership.

    d.   Leaders prioritized self-care to deal with ongoing, chronic, stresses and strains.

Chapter 4: Human-Centered Leadership

Humanity Fundamental #1: Expand consciousness

1. System awareness – better understanding of outside forces, "the way of the world."
2. Self-awareness - seeing one's own resources anew.
3. Self-awareness - a profound examining and clarifying of personal values and an awakening to deeper meaning.
4. Self-awareness - a thorough re-evaluation of priorities.
5. Other awareness - what others are experiencing.
6. Other awareness - that what people need is continued attention.
7. Other awareness - seeing other people's strengths and resources anew.
8. System awareness - awaken to the impact of social strife on work, workers, and culture.
9. System awareness – better understanding of outside forces, "the way of the world".
10. Customer awareness - customers' contexts and needs have evolved too.
11. Higher consciousness leads to better decisions, being more fully aware of the people and culture context that influences decisions and alignment.
12. Awareness that leaders' mindsets can be transformed, including mindsets around a distributed workforce.
13. Awareness of derailers, strengths and opportunities, which enables leaders to help others change.

Humanity Fundamental #2: Cultivate relationships

1. Awareness of the nature and vitality of relationships has grown.
2. Relationships start with benevolence, having others' best interests at heart.
3. Authentic caring about others' welfare was demonstrated through a genuine interest in how people are faring.
4. In more cases than not, leaders mean well and have good intentions but haven't conveyed their benevolence.

5. The pandemic has been a catalyst in cultivating more holistic relationships that includes home lives.
6. Leaders became more compassionate about the significant pressures of family life on work lives.
7. Awareness of the value of inviting people to be authentic and to convey both emotional and cognitive empathy burst into work life.
8. The pandemic introduced many opportunities to deepen relationships.
9. To be trusted, it is important for leaders to strike the right balance of vulnerability and confidence in their relationships.
10. Leaders prioritized relationships as the first priority, before the business agenda.
11. Relationship-building is a precondition to securing alignment on strategic and tactical direction and goals.

Humanity Fundamental #3: Support well-being

1. Health and safety became a first and foremost focus.
2. Leaders were more present, witnessing the stresses and strains on themselves and their employees.
3. Leaders got in touch with diverse individual concerns, including the strain of isolation for some employees, on top of high stress levels.
4. Greater awareness emerged around what self-care looks like, and how to cultivate it for self and others during a crisis.
5. Leaders gave more space to employees in a challenging time.
6. Supporting time to recover and recharge after extreme stress was addressed.
7. The realization that employee health and well-being is a leadership priority arrived for good.

Humanity Fundamental #4: Integrate diversity

1. The trauma of racial inequity and exclusion exploded into leaders' consciousness, catching them by surprise.
2. It became quickly clear that a new leadership priority was to make space for open dialogue on diversity principles.
3. It became important to be open and accepting of diverse and conflicting perspectives and concerns.
4. Leaders began to see the gaps in diversity and inclusion in collaboration and decision-making.
5. They learned that they needed to reach out to seek diverse views, not just react to them.

6. Leaders realized that inclusion means being truly seen.
7. Leaders recognized that inclusion means being more introspective and empathetic.
8. Leaders learned that they need to slow down "decisiveness" to make space for diverse perspectives.
9. Many leaders recognized that they need to be intentional about incorporating diverse viewpoints and, specifically, racial, ethnic and gender diversity.

Humanity Fundamental #5: Build agile cultures

1. The pandemic exposed culture limitations, including leading by fear.
2. Cultures which motivate by fear, and which are unable to deal with people issues well, fared poorly.
3. Open and frequent communication that inspires hope contributed to an adaptable culture.
4. Organizations which had already integrated agile methods and processes were able to adapt well.
5. The potential of flattening of hierarchies, thus distributing leadership, became more apparent.
6. The forces of the pandemic led to a more employee-centered, a more empowered, culture.
7. Leaders who made their people feel supported were rewarded.
8. Some leaders set the goal of helping everyone be more resourceful.
9. Some leaders discovered that a bold vision of the future was inspiring.
10. Some leaders became more ambitious for their people, in order to adapt to an unpredictable world.
11. A more ambitious aim for an adaptable culture is one that can handle big challenges and become radically flexible.
12. The pandemic confirmed the value of more humane leadership styles.
13. The value of individual human resilience and agility, not just organizational resilience and agility, was fully revealed.
14. Leaders now understand that people need to feel psychologically safe to describe their hopes, fears, and vulnerability.
15. The leader's responsibility for employee morale came to light.

Chapter 5: Coaching Leaders to Change

1. Coaching provides a safe space to feel grounded and reflect

    a.   Coaching is a safe space for leaders to find their own way.
    b.   Coaching helps leaders take a breath and reflect.
    c.   Coaching is a safe space for leaders to process difficult decisions.
    d.   Coaching is a safe space for leaders to get a handle on high-pressure situations.

2. Coaching helps leaders navigate challenges and crises

    a.   In a crisis, coaching helps leaders feel validated.
    b.   In a crisis, coaching helps leaders stay calm and grounded.
    c.   Coaching helps leaders debrief on high-anxiety situations.
    d.   Coaching helps leaders navigate the complexity of competing priorities.

3. Coaching expands leaders' consciousness

    a.   Coaching can help leaders step back from execution to consider what needs to change.
    b.   Coaching can help leaders get out of the box they are in.
    c.   Coaches can help leaders zoom out, rise above a situation, and expand and integrate more perspectives.
    d.   Coaches can help leaders focus on the larger picture.
    e.   Coaching can help leaders change the way they think.
    f.   Coaches collaborate with leaders to try new approaches.
    g.   Coaching can help leaders get clear about why they exist.
    h.   Coaching can help leaders identify the north star.
    i.   Coaching can help leaders shift their mindsets and way of leading to enable reinventing of business processes.

4. Coaching helps leaders see their blind spots and biases

    a.   Coaching can help leaders see themselves in a mirror.
    b.   Coaches can help leaders welcome and process feedback.
    c.   Coaching can help leaders see and navigate around their biases.
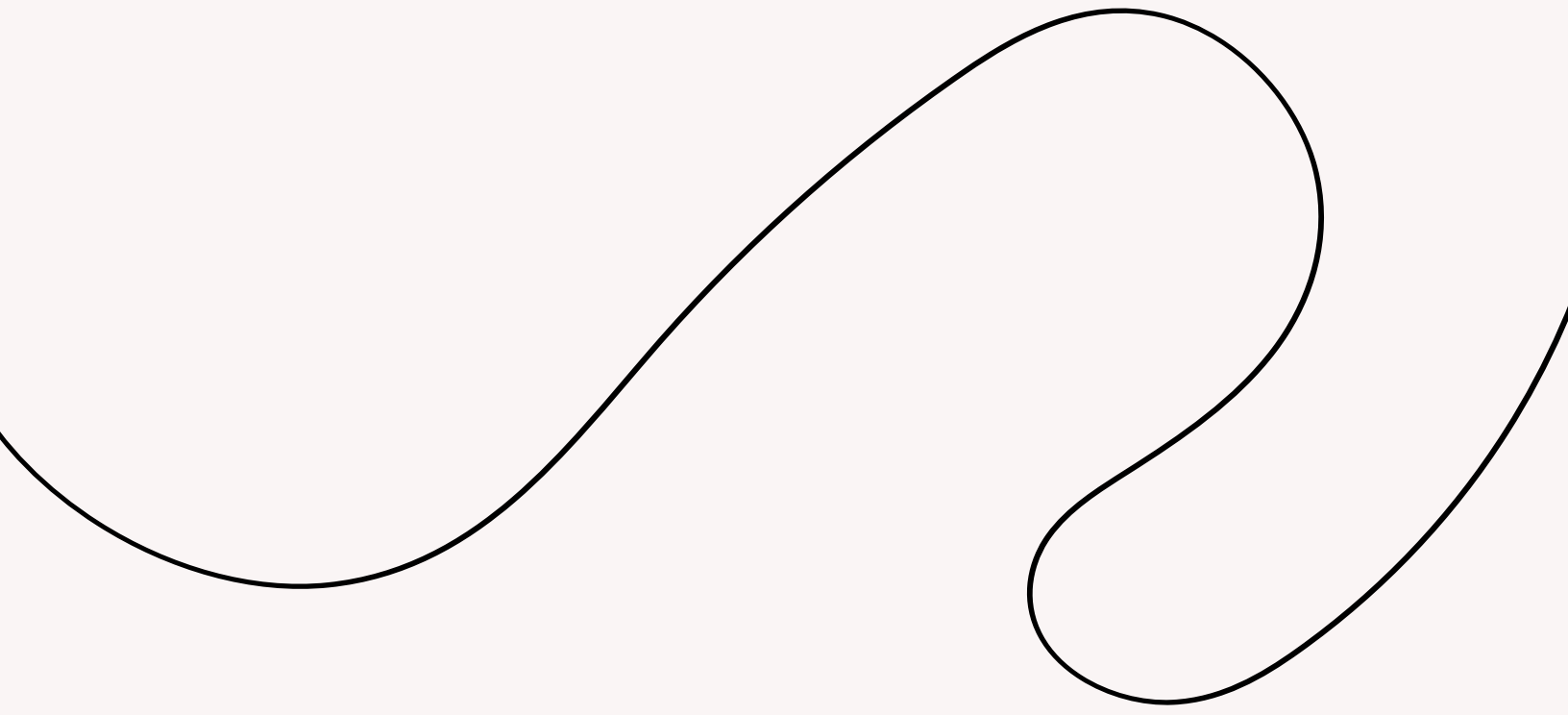
5. Coaching expands a leader's capacity

    a.   Coaching can help leaders identify and leverage their strengths.
    b.   Coaching can help leaders expand their confidence.
    c.   Coaching can help leaders leverage their authenticity.
    d.   Coaching can help leaders be more resilient.
    e.   Coaching can help leaders help their teams be more resilient.
    f.   Coaching can help leaders and teams be more agile.
    g.   Coaching can help leaders take on bigger challenges.

6. Coaching enables transformation of thinking and behaving

    a.   Coaching can help leaders create a development path that is an optimal fit.
    b.   Coaching can help leaders transform themselves, their identities.
    c.   Coaching can help leaders rethink their roles.
    d.   Coaching can help leaders define leadership for themselves.
    e.   Coaching can help leaders lead in new ways, transforming their leadership identity.
    f.   Coaching can help leaders see their strengths, derailers, and opportunities, so that they can transform their approach to helping people change.
    g.   Coaching can help leaders develop people skills.
    h.   Coaching is a gift to leaders, impacting all domains of their lives.

Appendix Author
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