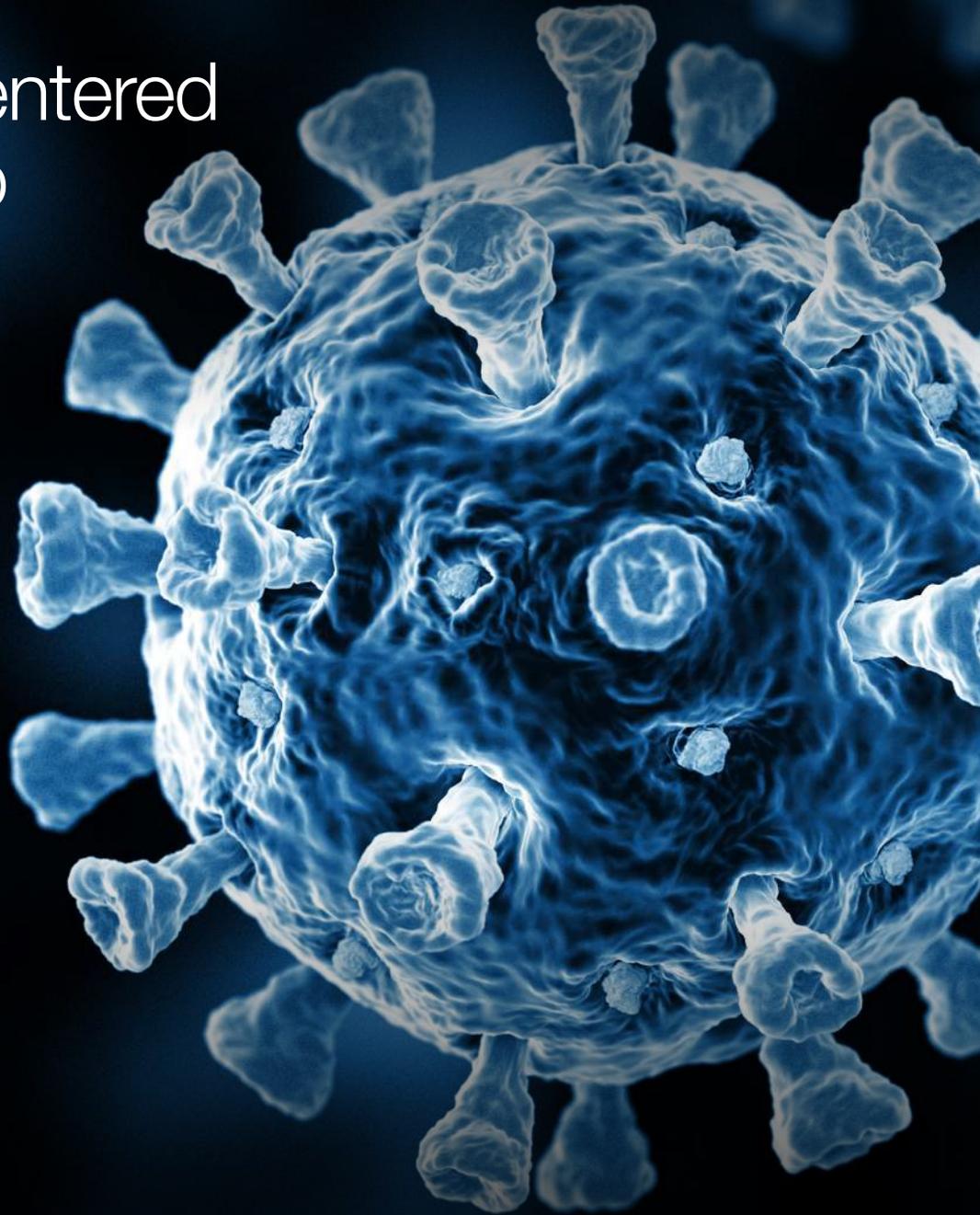


# Big Reset Playbook

Human-Centered  
Leadership



**joshbersin**

# The Big Reset in 2021: Human-Centered Leadership

2021 is a year of transformation and growth. As the pandemic subsides, consumers and businesses are unleashing demand, creating one of the most exciting economies in decades. But under the surface there are issues: every company is going through a digital transformation; people are working at home and in gig work arrangements; and organizations are becoming more agile, distributed, and creative. Employees are also under immense pressure; every study shows that stress, loneliness, and overwork are at crisis levels.

Under the covers, there's even more going on. Companies are embarking on a massive reskilling revolution. Every job, from restaurant worker to software engineer, is being transformed by technology, forcing us all to learn, reskill, and mentor others. And most importantly of all, leaders are under stress – creating the need for a new generation of leadership development, leadership support, and leadership coaching.

What have we learned over the last year? As our Big Reset groups (400-plus senior HR leaders who have collaborated with us over the past year) discovered, one of the biggest issues identified is the need for **human-centered leadership**.

Not only do leaders need to be curious, creative, and execution-oriented, they also now need to be empathetic, inclusive, and highly flexible. It's as if we are learning new principles of leadership, and these principles are impacting every company, industry and geography.

## Shaping the Response to the Pandemic

The global pandemic was a shock to our economic, social, and business systems, and it created a new cycle for modern leadership.

- **React:** Who is impacted by the pandemic, where are their problems of infection, stress, or low productivity, and what geographies, locations, or workgroup teams are impacted? In this stage, companies have been connecting HR, IT, facilities, and safety officers to quickly respond to unpredictable change.

- **Respond:** This is an era of the chief medical officer. While most companies don't have such an official role, there is a need for a coordinated response to stress – and that means bringing together HR, IT, and wellbeing experts to focus on work at home programs, new sick pay and benefits programs, support for families, and a wide variety of reskilling and education programs.

- **Return:** Many companies are just starting to think about returning to the workplace, and the reaction we hear is that this will be a move into a new and unknown normal. Yes, we know there will be hybrid work arrangements, but what will be the policies for in-office meetings, travel, and relocation? All these new policies are being invented.

- **Transform:** Most importantly of all, as the economy heats up, we are seeing the winners and losers in the post-pandemic economy, so companies have to seriously push their digital product, service, and consulting offerings. Retailers are being intermediated by delivery companies. Restaurants are becoming “dark kitchens.” And entertainment and event companies are unleashing digital experiences for their fans.

These four stages are all happening at once. While we talk about going back to the workplace, we're now understanding that the new post-pandemic economy is just different. We are just seeing how it will work, so companies have to adapt on a real-time basis.

Humana, for example, decided to conduct IT and HR staff meetings at local parks so it could create some sense of community and regular cadence. This is an example of creating a new response different from the original response in March.

We believe that the ultimate future is what we call the “the post-pandemic economy,” a reinvention of nearly every business and organization in the world. The issues of hygiene, safety, health, wellbeing, and resilience are here to stay – so in the long run this is really a problem or reinvention – often in real time with constantly changing information.



Figure 1: A Sampling of Big Reset Participants

## The Big Reset Working Groups

Started in March 2020, the Big Reset working groups have clearly transformed the way we share, ideate and research ideas to transform for the new reality of work. Hundreds of hours of dialogue with senior leaders from across the globe and many different industries helped us understand trends and burning issues, and supported leaders to share across company boundaries what works, what lessons they learned and how to not just survive but thrive in a world of crisis.

After the first two sprints conducted in 2020, we continued to convene meetings with executives and quickly realized that participant priorities and focus areas had evolved. Therefore, for this sprint, we formed six topical working groups and people self-selected accordingly based on their interests and needs. Each group was led by a senior faculty member of the Josh Bersin Academy.

The groups were arranged into five major areas.

1. **Human-Centered Leadership:** This group discussed the what, why and how of human centered leadership and its impact on business and people outcomes. This group was led by Nancy Vitale and Nuno Goncalves.
2. **Diversity and Belonging:** Participants explored leading practices, ideas and success stories associated with diversity, inclusion, belonging, and equity. This group was led by Ray Narine and Daniel Shannon.

3. **Future of HR and Employee Experience:** This group focused on how leading organizations are adapting and innovating to deliver the HR services, drive culture, and deliver a positive post-pandemic talent experience. This group was led by Nazneen Razi and Peter Sackleh.
4. **Hospitality and Entertainment Sector:** This group focused specifically on the impact and changes brought on by the pandemic on the hospitality and entertainment sector. This group was led by Nazneen Razi, Pete Sackleh, Paul Sanford, and PV Murthy.
5. **Learning and Culture:** This group focused on ongoing issues in career development, skills taxonomies, new learning solutions, and corporate learning strategies. It was been led by Nancy Vitale and Nuno Gonçalves.
6. **The Canada Group:** We also convened a group of HR leaders from Canada to understand the international issues in that country. This group was led by Naomi Titleman and Mark Edgar, our partners from future foHRward.

Throughout this report, we will give you detailed examples and case studies of what we discovered. Other findings and resources are available to Josh Bersin Academy members. The Josh Bersin Academy is a highly scalable learning and information platform for HR professionals, and we encourage you to join to get access to the full range of information we are capturing. Members will find video interviews, events, and programs on topics such as resilience, leadership and agility.

In the last year, every company in every industry and every geography has been fundamentally impacted. Business models, services and offerings, customer interactions, and ways of working and living are changing daily. Disruption and change are the norm. What we thought would be true changed the next day. Communities, regions, countries and states opened and closed, saw wave after wave of infections sweeping over them. As a result, mental health issues and concerns about work are at an all-time high. Employees need guidance and support every day – and leaders are the ones they look to for that support. So leaders play an even bigger role than they played pre-pandemic.

An HR executive from AstraZeneca explained the impact of the pandemic on leadership in this way, “As we are moving from a stable, predictable world to a world of unprecedented complexity and unpredictability, we require a totally different set of leadership skills, behaviors and mindsets.”

As we wrote about early last year, the pandemic created a need for leaders to be empathetic, forgiving, and good listeners. CEOs and business leaders started appearing on Zoom calls, listening to town halls, and regularly talking about employee support, investment, and wellbeing. But do such activities actually comprise a new model of leadership?

In this report, we want to explore the idea that human-centered leadership has emerged as a new domain in the past year. Not some new fad, this concept will continue to influence the way we lead and manage for years to come.

## The 2021 Agenda: Business-Centered vs. Human-Centered Leadership

Let’s start with the concept. At first glance, it seems silly to use the words “human-centered” in a discussion of leadership since the whole idea of leading is to deal with people. But in reality, this is not always true.

When you think of leadership, do you think of individual and team performance, deadlines, projects, status reports? Or do you think about the needs of the people who make work actually happen?

Most people think primarily of the first and neglect the latter. Our research shows that it’s time for a rebalance. Some leaders think about people first, others think about business first – so in this report we draw a stark line between the two. And what we point out in this report is that those that think about people first – and make success happen WITH people, not despite of them – have more sustainable lasting success.

Let us make a broad and simplistic definition to try to focus the topic. We’d suggest that among the hundreds of leadership models in the market, they fall into two categories.

- **Business-centered leadership:** Here we focus on how to grow, optimize, and improve the business, with a focus on innovation, marketing, growth, operations, R&D, manufacturing, quality, and financial results. We teach leaders about technology, the competitive marketplace, supply chains, and competitive advantage.
- **Human-centered leadership:** Here we focus on hiring, developing, coaching, inspiring, and pushing people to grow, innovate, serve customers, and improve the company. We teach leaders to understand what makes people thrive, what drives creativity and problem-solving in the company, and how we can support people during times of change, stress, or disruption.

We know that all great leaders focus on both areas, but in reality, these areas tax different sides of your brain. In a way, we are talking about left brain and right brain leadership, and it’s clear from our research that today, companies are desperate for the latter.

In every situation we face as leaders, there are business-centered and human-centered issues a play. If we acknowledge that there is a juxtaposition of business-centered leadership, how do human-centered leaders think, focus, and act differently? What skills and behaviors do they have that distinguish them from others? The following questions will offer some insight:

- How do we create a focus on empathy, listening, patience, caring, and flexibility when the company may be losing money or threatened by external forces? Do we cut wages and implement furloughs, or do we permanently let people go?

How do we manage the culture of poor financial performance when people view the company as their home?

- How do we create a culture of belonging that lasts through the crisis? If the company lets people go or mistreats people during the downturn, do remaining employees lose their sense of belonging? Of course, all companies have to make tough decisions, but once we come out of this crisis, what kind of organization will you have if people feel they were left behind?
- How are we teaching leaders to be empathetic and flexible when the rules are not clear? Most companies do not have firm policies for returning to physical workplaces or time off during the pandemic. Do we let leaders make these decisions themselves? And when people need help, how do we train and support leaders to become caretakers or counselors? Or do we simply pass such responsibilities off to HR?
- How are we going to select and assess leaders in the human-centered model? Will we reward kind and generous leaders over those who are hard charging yet unforgiving? Do we reward leaders who hit their numbers without regard to people issues?
- How is our organization as a whole more human-centered in its role in society? If we have a strong mission and purpose, is it truly relevant and reinforced by leaders? Do we expect our leaders to live by this mission, and if so, how do we remind them of these aspirations?
- How do senior execs feel about human-centered leadership and are they leading the charge, pushing HR to lead, or simply talking about it? What level of commitment do they have and how are they exemplifying that commitment at the board and executive level?

Additional questions to ask:

- Should we fire or demote people who underperform and create a competitive culture of reward for performance or should we formally support, develop, and grow people who under-perform to help them excel? At what point do we give up on certain people because the business cannot afford to have them underperform or harm others? In the old GE model, Jack Welch famously found that people who fit the culture are more valuable than people who perform but hurt the culture and developed a simple 2X2 grid to

reward and grow people who fit the culture. But do you as an organization know what your culture really is? Can you decide who to invest in and who to penalize?

- Do we as a company believe that empowering people and developing people are fundamental to our success? Or do we believe that hiring smart people and recruiting great skills are the way we grow? If the latter, do internal candidates get passed over for plum assignments when we need a strong new person on the team?
- Does our company invest regularly (even during bad times) in employee wellbeing, development, flexibility, safety, and personal growth programs because we believe employees are core to our success? Or do we cut back on pay, benefits, and employee programs when our profits lag because they are more optional to our success?
- Do we reward leaders who grow and develop people or do we reward leaders who grow and develop the business without necessarily growing their people? Would a leader who hoards talent be rewarded over a leader who promotes talent if their numbers were far better?
- How often do we discuss, review, or explain our leadership philosophy or purpose and mission to our employees? Is it a regularly visited topic that continues to drive us forward? Or do we spend most of our time talking about revenue, profit, new products, and market share growth? And do our employees truly believe that we act with purpose or do they perceive us to be shallow in these topics?
- Do we see diversity, equity, and inclusion as a noble HR program designed to help us win awards or do we seek to leverage best practices to create strong employee fairness? Do we see DEI as fundamental to our entire business, relationships with customers and suppliers, and our role in society? How inclusive is our culture and do employees really feel they can be themselves? Do our leaders honestly believe that every person brings value, regardless of their background, demographics, race, or origin? (Read our new research, *Elevating Equity*,<sup>1</sup> to learn more about this critical issue.)
- Do we believe that financial performance is more important than people issues like health, wellbeing, engagement, and

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1 <https://joshbersin.com/dei-research-report/>

retention? Or do we think such people issues are important in their own right and worthy of ongoing investment?

- How much self-awareness do our leaders possess? Do they challenge each other? Are they humble and good listeners? Do they regularly admit mistakes? Or do we hold leaders up as princes and princesses who can do no wrong and are rewarded for their commitment, tenure, and experience?
- How quickly and completely do we respond to people crises, like health emergencies, virus outbreak, harassment or legal claims, or drops in retention or engagement? Do we have systems and practices to quickly identify these issues and respond with meaningful solutions? Have we done this well in the past? Or do we push these issues aside and delegate them to HR or legal?
- Is our investment in learning and development truly strategic and business-sponsored? Or is it a set of programs driven by HR that focus on skills and productivity, but not necessarily aligned around long-term career growth and personal growth for employees? How much business leadership is committed to the L&D function and investment and do business leaders regularly participate, support, and influence how people are developed and trained?
- If our stock price dropped or we started to lose money, how quickly would we lay people off, reduce pay, or possibly sell off parts of the company to protect shareholders and investors? Or would we think more seriously about the long-term impact on people and our employees before we immediately respond to investor pressure?
- Since the pandemic interrupted many of our business practices and we had to re-engineer many parts of the company, how heavily did we invest in communications, change, readiness, patience, forgiveness, and the human issues in this disruption? Is our company stronger as a result of the pandemic or is it more fragile and disparate in its outlook for the year ahead?
- How do we manage our leadership pipeline? Do we regularly look for leaders at all levels and all ages and promote and incent people to lead throughout their career? Or do we have a model of tenure-based leadership where we force people to wait their turn or reach a level of performance before we give them opportunities to lead projects, initiatives, or teams?

- How well did we bring people together into cross-functional teams to invent and create new solutions for the pandemic this year and how well will these teams evolve as the pandemic subsides? Do people feel they were empowered to help and saw the pandemic as a career-enhancing process and learning experience? Or do people feel tired and stressed from the last year and wonder what will happen next?
- On a global level, do we believe our company can contribute to the long-term health and recovery of our communities and society? Or are we trying to survive by putting ourselves first and secondarily look for ways to help our communities and countries to succeed?

## The Issue of Heavy Workloads

Underlying this topic is the problem of heavy workload. Not only has the pandemic impacted business models, demand, and the economy, but it has also given employees more and more to do. People who work from home are overwhelmed with meetings, family distractions, and household needs. Healthcare workers are struggling with demand for care among all ages and need groups. Retailers are rapidly scrambling to deliver and implement logistics and supply chain systems for hungry consumers. And tech companies, consulting firms, and financial services companies are scaling up for increased demand for tools, new services, and new financial offerings.

Over and over companies tell us that people are simply overwhelmed with things to do. And this brings HR teams into a discussion about employee experience and how it relates to leadership, IT, job design, and business goals.

Human beings are very resilient under the right conditions, but not when they are stressed to the limit. Most companies are realizing that they must teach people how to focus, give people time off to rest and regenerate, and force leaders to lead in a more caring, empathetic, and human centered way.

I spent some time last year with Martin Seligman, often credited as the father of positive psychology. He studied the problem of burnout and PTSD in the Army, and his findings are just as applicable in business. He found that there is a bell curve of performance under stress; some people thrive, but others fall apart. He found there were three things that mattered most to determining how people react to stress:

- 1. Preventing trauma.** The first issue is to avoid creating or enabling trauma. This means focusing on safety, protection, and mental and psychological support. When a manager angrily blows up at a person, they are traumatized in a way, and their response to change is radically reduced. So the first issue is simple creating a safe environment in all respects at work.
- 2. Creating a positive attitude.** The second factor is giving people a positive view of the future. This prevents people from “catastrophizing” and worrying at work, and it can be accomplished through communications, vision, and a realistic plan for the future. Leaders have to think this way, and if they are not positive thinkers, they may not belong in leadership roles.
- 3. Generating a sense of joy.** Yes, I know business is not about having fun, but Marty’s research shows that one of the biggest ways to reduce stress (and create endurance

and strength) is to give people something fun. Let them bring a dog to work, sing a song, tell a joke. And stop talking about the news.

I’m not going to focus on these factors in this paper (you can listen to Marty’s interview<sup>2</sup>) but they’re important to consider. Each of these plays into human-centered leadership, and they have become central to the U.S. Army’s focus on rest, resilience, and combat readiness.

## A High-Level Model for Human-Centered Leadership

Following is a high-level model for your consideration, developed through hundreds of hours of conversations with HR leaders from all over the world.

<sup>2</sup> <https://youtu.be/LeuAcMnWOGA>

BUSINESS-CENTERED LEADERSHIP	HUMAN-CENTERED LEADERSHIP
<b>Mindsets and Attitudes</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confident, knowledgeable, decisive</li> <li>• Driven by personal growth, financial success, job title, and promotion</li> <li>• Highly aligned, coordinated, compliant, and linked</li> <li>• Context: structured, organized, stable, with clear goals and targets</li> <li>• See relationships as a means to an end, transactional in nature</li> <li>• Focus on the inside, managing the company</li> <li>• Focus on problem solving, accountability, solutions</li> <li>• Focus on goals, rewards, incentives, and alignment, hitting the numbers</li> <li>• Focus on organizational structure, execution, and functional and business goals</li> <li>• Believe complexity is a problem and always tries to simplify</li> <li>• Believe energy, passion, and execution must take place every day</li> <li>• Worries about errors, mistakes, failures</li> <li>• Believe leaders must set a good example through strength, execution, and focus</li> <li>• Believe in scarcity of talent and that people will work hard if they’re paid well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humble, empathetic, listener, growth mindset</li> <li>• Driven by purpose, mission, grit, and passion</li> <li>• Highly aligned, but loosely coupled – enabling growth and innovation anywhere</li> <li>• Context: Sees people, culture, and growth as enduring and critical for success</li> <li>• Sees relationships as essential to growth, innovation, wellbeing, customer success</li> <li>• Focus on the outside, listening to customers and the market</li> <li>• Focus on systems thinking, understanding why problems occur</li> <li>• Focus on inspiration, skills, empowerment, connections, culture</li> <li>• Focus on cross-functional teams, bringing people together and creating mobility and relationships</li> <li>• Tolerant of complexity, see patterns for growth in every customer and idea</li> <li>• Understand that people operate in cycles, focus on wellbeing/ sustainability</li> <li>• Create a sense of safety for new ideas</li> <li>• Understand that leaders need sustainability, rest, and resilience also</li> <li>• Believe in abundance of talent and try to align peoples’ needs to company goals</li> </ul>

BUSINESS-CENTERED LEADERSHIP	HUMAN-CENTERED LEADERSHIP
<b>Skills and Capabilities</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggle to balance innovation with execution, innovation in a silo</li> <li>• Technical, functional and financial capabilities rule</li> <li>• Try to push change through massive change programs and initiatives</li> <li>• Know the other leaders well, relationships with leaders</li> <li>• Feel like there's never enough time to get everything done</li> <li>• Very busy, delegates responsibility, doesn't interact with the team</li> <li>• Manage details, track and organize work</li> <li>• Believe leaders sit behind the desk and lead</li> <li>• Treat people issues as a sideline (they're players)</li> <li>• Large span of control, often 20-30 or more direct reports</li> <li>• Meetings are formal, structured, and focused on results and communications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that execution demands innovation every day</li> <li>• Power skills (essentially human skills) are as important as technical skills</li> <li>• Understand that change is iterative and a series of small measurable steps</li> <li>• Know the leaders and team around the world well, relationships across the organization at all levels</li> <li>• Always make time for the most important issue, person, team, or customer</li> <li>• Spends as much time as possible with the team, to listen and contribute</li> <li>• Lead more, manage less, develop leaders</li> <li>• Believe leaders run projects, teams, initiatives</li> <li>• Treat people issues as part of their job (they're coaches)</li> <li>• Keep number of direct reports smaller, but leaders are also "doers"</li> <li>• Meetings focus on results, alignment, coordination, inclusion, and ideas</li> </ul>
<b>Behaviors and Actions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead the business, people coming along for the ride</li> <li>• Trying to push past problems to focus on growth and change</li> <li>• Pick favorites, rely on trusted confidants to succeed</li> <li>• Lots of committees, standing meetings, 1-on-1s, and formal decision structures</li> <li>• Investments in R&amp;D and science ebb and flow depending on financials</li> <li>• Consume talent to hit the numbers</li> <li>• Always do something</li> <li>• Create an environment of competition within teams where there are winners and losers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead the people, people driving the business forward</li> <li>• Take time to talk about problems to learn and evolve the organization</li> <li>• Look for diverse performers, always open to new people and approaches</li> <li>• Lots of conversations, check-ins, and sprints with decisions made as a whole</li> <li>• Investments in R&amp;D and science are imperatives and never slow significantly</li> <li>• Grow talent for the entire organization</li> <li>• Leave "whitespace" to think and create</li> <li>• Create the conditions for people to help each other and lift others up, and support each other</li> </ul>

**Figure 2:** How Human-Centered Leadership Differs from Business-Centered Leadership

## Fostering Human-Centered Leadership

Understanding human-centered leadership and why it is a required paradigm shift is an important first step. But how do we foster this kind of leadership in our organizations?

HR plays a critical role in this. Developing new leadership mindsets, capabilities and behaviors is one of the most important things HR can do to set the organization up for success as we emerge from the pandemic and transform our businesses. Beyond traditional leadership development programs, the most successful HR teams build in new ways of working, leading and collaborating.

- **Learn from your team:** A leader's team arguably has the best insights into the leader's skills, behaviors and daily actions. 360 reviews have long been part of leadership development programs, but some organizations take this approach in a new direction to accelerate leadership growth and development.
  - At Sanofi, employees rate their managers and decide which project to work on in its new internal gig work marketplace. This program inspires a healthy competition amongst leaders to do better for their people and become the leader of choice.
  - Sabre includes a leadership equality index in its leader development plan. The index helps leaders become more inclusive and practice equitable people actions. The company also embeds DEI into its leadership development program (we learned in our DEI study that this is one of the fifteen most impactful DEI practices).<sup>3</sup>
  - Dow uses technology to track the most popular leaders through its leadership effectiveness survey; then, leaders are asked to share what they are going to work on from a personal development standpoint with their teams.
- **Learn from other leaders:** Senior leaders set the tone for the organization and are important role models for leaders further down in the organizational hierarchy. When these senior leaders demonstrate that a safe environment, trust, and empathy are just as important as financials, others will follow their example.

– At Biogen, the extended leadership team in the company was divided into groups of eight to ten. Senior leaders held workshops with the groups on trust and psychological safety and how to lead in an environment of uncertainty. Senior leaders were modeling and acting as a support network for these smaller cohorts in order to help participants model their own behaviors to their direct reports.

- **Become a better listener:** Listening is perhaps the number one power skill of all. In our pandemic response study and our diversity, equity and inclusion study, listening and acting on results has been identified as the most important practice. For organizations to actively listen, leaders also need to be skilled and experienced in the art of listening.
  - Target engages senior leaders in facilitating listening sessions with employees on difficult topics like racial inequality, providing leaders and employees with ground rules to help guide behaviors and expectations – with great success.
- **Learn through reflection:** The richest experiences and content are not going to result in optimal behaviors without time and space for reflection. Human-centered leaders need that time and space to sit back, think about what they learned, and consider how to do even better in the future.
  - Sabre builds in time for self- reflection time for leaders. The company has no meetings on Wednesdays. The CEO pulls up leaders' calendars to check for taking time outs, and the company uses Microsoft 365 Insights / Cortana to schedule breaks during the workday. These practices signify the shift from the industrial age of working to human-centered work and leadership.
  - Biogen has a “no meeting week” three times a year. Feedback has been absolutely enthusiastic. Leaders report increased creativity and flow of thinking; many have strengthened connections with employees over walks focused on development.

<sup>3</sup> <https://joshbersin.com/dei-research-report/>

- **Social learning:** Learning from and with others has been shown to have a bolstering effect on learning and the application of new knowledge. The exchange and mutual support in learning cohorts and the new relationships are invaluable for retention of learning.
  - AstraZeneca uses learning hackathons in which hundreds of people can learn together and benefit from the expertise of others. This program has been wildly successful with leaders and employees alike.
- **Care for wellbeing:** Human-centered leaders need to understand wellbeing and mental and emotional health more than ever before. But most leaders have not had any formal education in these complex topics, making this area a rich ground for expansion.
  - Zebra Tech’s “Managing Your Energy” program encompasses sessions conducted by the company’s EAP during which leaders learn how to recognize symptoms of burnout. These sessions have helped raise awareness and provided managers with skills for prevention and early intervention to better support for employees.
  - Kern Health System uses a “whole person” framework to help leaders develop a holistic understanding of employees that goes beyond work and includes health, family, and personal interests.
  - Pelmorex doubled down on mental health, providing managers with specific and detailed guidelines on how to detect stress and burnout even in employees working remotely and how to respond effectively.
- **Connect with the team:** Connectivity is key – especially in today’s dispersed and largely remote work world. But many leaders do not have the time or the capabilities to establish meaningful connections with their teams. Effective leadership development helps them build both capacity and capability for connection.
  - Sutter Health repurposed a leadership meeting to dedicate the time for leaders to connect with frontline people. Instead of meeting as a leadership team, leaders now listen to their teams, understand their issues and help them navigate challenges.
    - When Oberoi went virtual, the company didn’t just train managers on how to hold virtual meetings effectively, but it also included points on how to understand and appreciate homelife constraints. The training underlined the importance of empathy and human-centered leadership.
- **Coach and provide feedback:** The best leaders today act like coaches, not managers. We’ve heard a theme of transforming performance management in every session of the Big Reset. Beyond formal processes and technology related to performance management, the role of the leader has to change too.
  - Walgreen Boots Alliance shifted from a traditional performance management approach to continuous feedback, listening and coaching. Especially in the time of working remotely, the more frequent touchpoints were important for increased connection and engagement of people.
- **Develop an inclusive mindset:** “You can’t be successful as a leader and unsuccessful in inclusion,” said Ray Narine, talent development leader and deputy diversity officer at Consumer Reports. Inclusive leaders are human-centered leaders; they put people first and celebrate the similarities and differences of team members.
  - Siemens uses a “Race to Diversification” leaderboard to increase inclusion in succession management, sparking conversations around diversity, equity and inclusion on its board.

## Conclusion

We’ve learned so much in 2020. The pandemic has led us to experiment with new ways of working, new business models and new people approaches. It has accelerated digital transformation and remote work by five to ten years. HR has stepped up in a massive way to lead in new domains ranging from public health to rapid business transformation, from workplace design to safety protocols, from burnout prevention to social justice movements. All while helping employees learn, collaborate, and contribute at lightning speed.

Whatever topic we discussed with our Big Reset groups – remote work, safe workplace, returning to the workplace, health and wellbeing, HR transformation, learning, culture, diversity and inclusion – we heard a common theme. Leaders need to think, act and behave in new ways for any of this to be successful. Leaders need to put people not profit at the center of their jobs.

2021 will be an exciting opportunity for transformation, change and innovation. Now is the time for leaders to lead in a human-centered way. When leaders put people first, everything else will follow. Leaders will need help from HR to define what this looks like, and to put programs and approaches in place to cement new behaviors into daily work.

## Customer-Centricity and Empathy Accelerate at Wave Financial

Wave Financial is a Financial Services software company for small businesses whose offerings include accounting, payments, and payroll. Headquartered in Toronto, Wave was acquired by H&R Block in 2020.

Ashira Gobrin, Chief People Officer, had built a strong foundation for human-centered leadership practices prior to 2020. What the pandemic brought for many companies, she said, was “extra momentum to move faster and do all the things they had wanted to do for a long time.”

Wave’s customer-centric values keep its leadership team focused on creating programs to empower employees to serve customers in the best possible way. At the outset of the pandemic, management was transparent with employees about cost-cutting measures and future scenarios, which did not include layoffs unless revenue dropped significantly. They urged employees not to worry about job security and instead focus on the customers and their own health and safety. An example of that philosophy playing out is when the CARES Act passed in the United States, developers voluntarily worked over the weekend to update the software with new tax and payroll features to allow simple and easy access for customers to what otherwise would have been complex applications.

As a FinTech company, Gobrin describes the dominant culture as “super nice people who are left-brained and intellectual.” Prior to the pandemic, there had been some skepticism about focusing on emotions in the workplace, but that turned on its head when everyone had to work from home and navigate homeschooling, high levels of anxiety, limited space issues, and other home disruptions. Managers had to show up for their reports in new ways and focus on emotional connections, not just goals and objectives.

As 2020 rolled on into 2021, Wave continued to invest in L&D, manager training, and mental health resources. A monthly “Mind Share” program offers information and discussion on topics like physical health, self-care, and financial planning. HR business partners periodically initiate 1-1 meetings with every employee to gauge employee wellness and uncover issues not typically discovered in pulse surveys.

The consideration of individual needs revealed that work from home wasn’t working for some people. Ashira said, “Eighty percent of the suffering was happening to 20% of the people.” Wave decided to reopen the office in July 2020 as soon as the government allowed for opening —financial services is an essential business in Canada. A Back-to-Workplace Playbook offered friendly safety guidelines, and until early 2021 about 20 employees out of 350 come into the office on a given day, with about 50% of the employees coming in at some point in time. Those who do come in report great benefits to their mental health and productivity, including Gobrin herself.

Wave maintained its high engagement and eNPS scores over 89% in 2020 compared to 2019. For 2021, Gobrin is revising performance management to accommodate virtual work while keeping an eye on how to safely reopen the office in a way that responds to the needs for a hybrid workspace when it makes sense to do so.

## Sabre Supports Leaders with Structured Programs Delivered Virtually

Sabre is a software and technology company that powers the global travel industry: hotels, airlines, and travel sites depend on its software to make reservations. When the pandemic hit, Sabre suffered a precipitous drop in revenue and adapted with a combination of team member-related actions including pay cuts, furloughs, voluntary severance, early retirement, and some reductions in headcount. Most existing budgets were cut—including the budget for L&D.

In early 2020, Sabre was already amid a strategic transformation that involved shifting all software development and hosting to the cloud and implementing a new online collaboration tool for all team members. In addition, the company undertook a massive reorganization project that shifted roles and managers for about 60% of team members. Needless to say, 2020 was a pivotal year for both planned and unplanned change at Sabre.

After shifting to remote work, the Sabre People Team launched into determining how it could best support its 1200+ managers. A needs assessment revealed that they were clamoring for training on how to lead their teams virtually. Drawing upon the success of an online program that coached managers on how to conduct furloughs and layoffs in a humane way, Eric Paul, VP, global talent management, and his team created a skill-building series in a similar format. The training was delivered in 90-minute increments via the online platform during which leaders were given lessons, skill practice, and a tip sheet on essential skills for leading in the virtual workplace. Four modules were rolled out across

multiple time zones for a period of six weeks per topic. Topics included effective communications in a virtual environment, leading successful virtual 1-on-1 meetings, giving and receiving feedback, and navigating high-stakes conversations.

The team added to this successful rollout by developing an awareness/learning series for leaders led by leaders. One featured high-level leadership topics related to leading in “the new now” and another focused on inclusion and diversity. The combination of skill-building and storytelling gave leaders forums to connect with and learn from one another. These programs spawned a peer coaching forum for managers across the globe.

To measure results, Sabre is conducting surveys to capture feedback from leaders during the session. To gather input from team members reporting to the leaders who participated in these sessions, the team will re-implement its Leadership Quality Index, a survey based on the company’s six leadership competencies.

Delivering meaningful support to leaders in shorter chunks while working from home is a win for Eric’s team, who had previously delivered leadership training via multi-day in-person events. Sabre’s leaders are now receiving valuable skills virtually to help them lead their teams and deliver customer outcomes during this work-from-home environment. When the travel industry comes back up to full speed, they’ll be ready.

## Kern Health Systems Honors the Whole Employee

Kern Health Systems (KHS) is an integrated managed health care delivery system in Kern County, California. Headquartered in Bakersfield, 500 KHS employees manage the health plans of 300,000 county residents.

In late 2019, KHS employees moved into a new facility that would soon be vacated when COVID-19 restrictions sent everyone home. The organization had not embraced work from home previously, so it took some time to adjust to the visible overlap of work and home life.

Whole person care was a framework already applied to KHS members. In healthcare, looking at social determinants and home/life issues is known to influence better health outcomes. CHRO Anita Martin, Th.D. used her learning in the Big Reset to help guide KHS's approach to supporting "the whole person" working from home. "We had to get the executive team to understand that employees can't necessarily leave everything behind when they show up to work from home," she said.

With the leadership team on board, Martin's team took the following steps to support leaders and employees.

1. **CEO town halls.** Employees sent in questions, and Anita worked with the CEO and PR consultant to deliver answers to even the most difficult questions.

2. **Leadership training.** KHS hired a consultant to give managers the skills to lead and communicate in a virtual world.

3. **Leadership videos.** To keep leaders visible, directors hosted meetings about activities in their department.

4. **Coffee and conversation.** To keep work friendship connections alive, the L&D director reached out to employees to set up short meetings among small groups of employees who may not interact in the course of daily work.

Given the uncertainty of the year, Martin was surprised to find that the annual employee satisfaction survey delivered better results than ever. Scores on teamwork and collaboration, confidence in leadership, and satisfaction with communications rose significantly. KHS achieved its first-ever scores over 80% for satisfaction with corporate and department communications.

"We've had to be very deliberate about our communications since going remote," Martin said. "Before, we may have been taking little things for granted and assuming communication was happening within teams when it wasn't."

## About Josh Bersin



*Josh Bersin is an internationally recognized analyst, educator, and thought leader focusing on the global talent market and the challenges impacting business workforces around the world. He studies the world of work, HR and leadership practices, and the broad talent technology market.*

*He founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. Over the next ten years, he expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership. He sold the company to Deloitte in 2012, when it became known as Bersin™ by Deloitte. Bersin left Deloitte in June 2018.*

*In 2019, Bersin founded the Josh Bersin Academy, the world's first global development academy for HR and talent professionals and a transformation agent for HR organizations. The Academy offers content-rich online programs, a carefully curated library of tools and resources, and a global community that helps HR and talent professionals stay current on the trends and practices needed to drive organizational success in the modern world of work.*

*Bersin is frequently featured in talent and business publications such as Forbes, Harvard Business Review, HR Executive, FastCompany, The Wall Street Journal, and CLO Magazine. He is a regular keynote speaker at industry events around the world and a popular blogger with more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.*

*His education includes a BS in engineering from Cornell University, an MS in engineering from Stanford University, and an MBA from the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley.*

## About Mark Spratt



*Mark Spratt, senior vice president, advisory services, leads the Josh Bersin Academy's Big Reset initiative, created to help HR leaders address the unprecedented challenges of the coronavirus pandemic. He brings 20 years of management consulting experience to his client. In senior advisory roles at Deloitte and PwC, he worked with clients on a variety of engagements ranging from preparing workforces for the future to enterprise HR transformations to integrated learning and talent solutions.*

*Mark has dual master degrees in public administration and social research from the University of Southern California; he also served as an adjunct lecturer for three years at USC.*

## About Kathi Enderes



*Kathi is the vice president of research at the Josh Bersin Academy; she leads research for all areas of HR, learning, talent and HR technology. Kathi has more than 20 years of experience in management consulting with IBM, PwC, and EY and as a talent leader at McKesson and Kaiser Permanente. Most recently, Kathi led talent and workforce research at Deloitte, where she led many research studies on various topics of HR and talent and frequently spoke at industry conferences. Originally from Austria, Kathi has worked in Vienna, London and Spain and now lives in San Francisco. Kathi holds a doctoral degree and a masters degree in mathematics from the University of Vienna.*

## Contributors



### **Nuno Gonçalves**

Nuno is currently the global head of strategic capabilities building for Mars. In this role, he is working on understanding the critical capabilities for the future and ensuring the company's business strategy is fully aligned with the Mars University. Previously, he worked for UCB, a bio-pharma company, where he held different roles including the HR vice president for neurology, the chief learning officer, and the global head of talent acquisition and development. Before joining UCB, Nuno was also Sanofi's chief learning officer.



### **Nazneen Razi**

*President and Principal, NRHR Talent Consulting*

Nazneen specializes in HR and talent strategies to drive business improvement. She has 25 years of experience in working with leading HR organizations. Prior to her current role at NRHR, she was senior vice president and chief human resources officer for Health Care Service Corporation and executive vice president and chief global human resources officer for JLL.



### **Pete Sackleh**

*Workforce Optimization Advisor, SolutionSpark*

Pete led the strategic, experiential and physical development and operations of two world-class corporate universities - Deloitte's \$300m investment in Deloitte University in Westlake, Texas and KPMG's \$450m investment in the KPMG Lakehouse in Lake Nona, Florida. He now leads SolutionSpark LLC, a workforce optimization consulting firm, which applies Pete's expertise in areas such as innovative talent experience models, employee engagement, investment and retention.



### **Nancy Vitale**

*Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Partners for Wellbeing*

Nancy Vitale was most recently the chief human resources officer for Genentech where she was responsible for leading the team that was dedicated to creating a great place for the organization's 14,000 employees to do their best work. Upon leaving Genentech, she co-founded Partners for Wellbeing, an advisory and consulting firm dedicated to helping organizations create better places to work. Nancy also currently serves as a board member for the Make-A-Wish America Foundation.



### **Daniel Shannon**

*Chief Inspirational Officer, Daniel Shannon Speaks*

Daniel has nearly two decades of executional and thought leadership experience with Fortune 100 companies in the CPG, financial services, and retail industries. He brings expertise in the areas of strategy, diversity/equity/inclusion, marketing, multicultural market development, sales, change management, leading through ambiguity, training and development, emotional intelligence, professional speaking, large group facilitation, and motivation. In his current role, Daniel provides leadership for Target Corporation's D&I efforts.



**Ray Narine**

*Head of Talent Development and Deputy Diversity Officer, Consumer Reports*

In January 2020, Ray Narine joined Consumer Reports, the leading consumer advocacy organization in the US, to lead its talent development, employee experience, and DEI work. Ray develops impactful solutions that apply expertise in various domains, including talent management, engagement, culture formation and diversity and inclusion. Ray's contributions are noted for future-of-work focus and innovative practical approaches to talent-building programs, technology implementations, and operational efficiencies. Prior to joining Consumer Reports, Ray held HR and talent management roles at multiple companies, including S&P Global and American Express.



**Dr. P.V. Ramana Murthy**

*HR Advisor and Consultant, Indian Hotels Company*

PV has more than 30 years of experience across the entire gamut of the HR function. He currently serves as an HR advisor and consultant to the Indian Hotels Company Limited, which operates the Taj Group of Hotels, Resorts and Palaces. Formerly, he was global head of HR, with responsibilities spanning performance management, career and succession planning, leadership development, and culture. PV also served as the executive director of human resources for Coca-Cola in India.



**Paul Sanford**

*Chief Executive Officer, Wincome Management and Development Group*

Paul is responsible for Wincome's West Coast operations, including Southern California where he oversees all operations. His portfolio includes properties in the South Coast Metro area, as well as the Disneyland Resort. Prior to joining Wincome, he held a range of executive-level positions with a variety of upscale and luxury boutique hotels for brands such as Wyndham, Hyatt, Westin, and Holiday Inn hotel groups. He holds a bachelor's degree in business administration and master's degree in business and management from Pepperdine University.

## Fellows

**Brooke Harmon**

Brooke holds a B.A. in music business from New York University. She is currently completing her M.B.A. at the University of Southern California, Marshall School of Business and sits on the board of her program as the co-VP of philanthropy.

**Jill Gardner**

Jill is a corporate learning leader with experience in instructional design, talent development and HR technologies. She currently is a strategic consultant and operations manager for enterprise learning and development at Farmers Insurance. Previously, she held multiple learning-related roles at The Walt Disney Company and was a human capital consultant for Deloitte.

**Matthew Moeller**

Matt has more than 20 years of experience executing human capital projects and organizational transformations. He worked for Deloitte for 14 years and held a variety of positions. Most recent, he was manager of talent development for Deloitte Services and manager of workforce transformation for Deloitte Consulting. Matt holds an MBA degree from San Diego State University.

**Victoria Morgan**

Victoria Morgan has a masters from Tufts University, where she focused on communication, intervention and behavior change. She also holds a PHR certificate from the Human Resource Certification Institute. She has been involved with many aspects of corporate wellness including physical fitness, nutrition, psychological well-being, and culture change. In addition to her work with the Josh Bersin Academy, she is a marketing and communications associate with the Worksite Wellness Council of Massachusetts

**Minu Nair**

Minu has worked in the travel and hospitality industry in the Middle East and India for almost 14 years. Most recently, she was a reservations officer for Emirates Airlines and managed multi-cultural sales teams and key client accounts. She holds a bachelor's degree in hospitality management from Bangalore University and recently completed her master's degree in talent development and HR from IE University, Madrid.

**Karen Romero**

Karen holds a B.S. in business administration from the University of Southern California, where she recently completed her MBA. Prior to pursuing an MBA, Karen worked in retail management and human resources.

**Anne Stevens**

Anne has worked for nearly a decade in roles supporting global workforce mobility. She holds an M.A. in migration studies from the University of Kent and currently sits on the steering committee of the Forum for Expatriate Management. She recently took a cross-functional assignment in procurement at Mondelez International where she bridges cost-saving opportunities and human capital strategy. She is now completing her M.B.A. at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.