



NOMALANGA
Life-giving

TAPPING INTO HUMAN ENERGY TO ALLOW BUSINESS TO THRIVE

WHITE PAPER

Humanising Business Series

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THE HUMANISING BUSINESS SERIES

The Humanizing Business Series by The Nomalanga Tribe offers leadership insights that mature understanding of the “business and human” relationship in the pursuit of shared value.

We offer a new framework that guides and reimagines the role of the C-suite leading regenerative and responsible businesses of the future.





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Key Highlights

Business is, because we are. This is fundamental to bringing back ubuntu to business, particularly for the African story.

Rushing too quickly to "best practice" and "future proofing" undermines the very nature of a wicked problem, which is often dynamic in nature. Bringing the human back into the center of business requires a complete paradigm shift.

The traditional bureaucratic structures that most organizations still use to organize themselves, do not lend themselves well to effectively responding to crisis situations. Disruptive challenges often require an engaged network of people, exploring with new ideas, making mistakes, resilience, and "failing forward".




Introduction

COVID-19 has been a "wicked problem" for the world to deal with. It was around March of 2020, that the pandemic really took us by storm in South Africa. While this was not the first time we've dealt with a crisis, nor is it the only issue humanity is faced with, this disruption seemed like an uninvited guest that barged into our homes.

The suddenness, novelty, and brutality of the subsequent challenges have tested our human resilience and agility. At the heart of the pandemic is the threat to our well-being. Through the epidemiological model, which most countries applied to curb the spread of the virus, we learn that COVID-19 is spread through close physical contact with an infected person. This illustrates just how interconnected we are .

Nonetheless, people are voluntarily going to the office because human energy is contagious. We get engrossed in the workplace, the work, and the conversations with others. There was something significant to this light bulb moment at a human experiential level that I sat for a moment too long, and soaked in.

Collective human energy fuels businesses.



Clearly there is something special about people that brings energy to organizations and business. Since business is created by people, this should be obvious. Yet, when we hear the popular aphorism "People are our greatest assets" many of us roll our eyes, unconvinced. In fact, an article on the Harvard Business Review with a title that screamed: "People Are Not Your Greatest Asset". As society continues to deal with the collective trauma of how the pandemic unfolds - it is also not a coincidence that cases of injustice, gender-based violence, mental health and other social ills, are also bubbling to the surface. Subsequent organizational behaviour now reflects a more pressing story of the future of work, which includes the added layers of healing our collective trauma, and safe-guarding our collective well-being.

Leaders, who are often tasked with the tall order to navigate and shape the future, are logically expected to drive the "next normal" for economies and life to continue and thrive. Through such VUCA challenges, what we are rapidly learning is that "what got us here, won't get us there". The traditional bureaucratic structures that most organizations still use to organize themselves, do not lend themselves well to effectively responding to crisis situations. Disruptive challenges often require an engaged network of people, exploring with new ideas, making mistakes, resilience, and "failing forward". At the core, this is about the capability to regenerate; constantly and collectively recreating ourselves (London Business School, 2020). Hamel (2021) further argues;

In a world of unrelenting change and unprecedented challenges, we need organisations that give everyone the opportunity to learn and innovate.

The good news is that this capability is what makes us inherently human.

In other words:



According to psychologists, what differentiates us from other beings, is our open-ended ability to imagine and reflect on different situations, and our deep-seated drive to link our scenario-building minds together.

Work does not have to be contradictory to the human experience. How do we then tap into this human essence and energy to allow the businesses we create to thrive? Here are a few pointers we have put together for leaders who are interested in humanising business considering the current climate.

It is nearly impossible for us to develop "best practice" a) in a short timeframe, and b) with the same mindset as before, even for Consulting houses. As the world drastically changes, we need a paradigm shift - a profound change in a fundamental way. Rushing too quickly to "best practice" and "future proofing" undermines the very nature of a wicked problem, which is often dynamic. Bringing the human back into the center of business requires a complete paradigm shift.

1.

It's a paradigm shift.



Embracing new principles reflects the ability to reframe your worldview. Amidst the operational shifts required, businesses need to also invest in vertical leader development - processes like mindset transformation labs, think tanks to ask the big questions where people can imagine, experiment, play, and embrace new principles and ways of approaching the businesses they lead. I like the growing work on vertical development to elevate our sense-making, that Nick Petrie and team are doing on this. This leadership gap is often very intangibly felt - we all may have opinions about what is going on and what to do, but it only becomes impactful if we align more people to a common vision and hold everyone accountable for results. This is leadership at its best.

If you are waiting for your organization or government to give you all the answers to the new problems we face, you may be on the backfoot. I encourage you to notice how you take the responsibility for how you show up with yourself first every morning, and then your lockdown house mates, teams you're a part of, and the businesses we lead. As humans we can also get in our own way. By clinging on to what's familiar, we end up not being able to effectively adapt and instead, fall back on outdated strategies that actually lead to further dehumanization of workplaces and erode our own wellbeing (Welcoa, 2019).

2.

If you want to change the world, start by looking in the mirror



At a personal level, purpose, mission vision and other grounding principles can offer an anchor to root ourselves amidst chaos. The process of tending to our inner self is in essence 'working on your energy' - we all have a natural state, which is that of joy, wellness, growth, pleasure, and love, and it is always available for us.

We need to normalize the power of 'simplicity' in the business environment. Kluger (2008) introduces this concept to argue how complex things can be made simple. Executive Director at Monash, Sudder (2018) finds correlations on how to apply simplicity principles to aid business decision through principles such as creating detours for accelerated motion when need be, run simulations, be selective to the most significant part of the issue (not the whole issue), balancing short term with long term benefits, and passion for what you do.

3.

Respond with simplicity and abundance



Responding to situations with an abundant mentality often holds much more promise and possibility for many elements to coexist and regenerate themselves.

A scarcity mentality says: We need to only focus on the numbers, and we don't have time and money to do the "soft, fluffy stuff" (sometimes accompanied with a nice "people are our greatest asset" caveat if you're lucky)

An abundant mentality says: We need to work on all the things that make our business tick, starting with our people, there are infinite possibilities to what this business can be.

We need a system that maximizes contribution, not conformity. A recent COVID-19 study found that frontline workers who responded with ingenuity and vigor to the ambiguities and complexities of the emerging crisis, were leveraging the temporarily freed up top-down structures and rules as the system dealt with the shock. The costs of “bureausclerosis” don’t show up on the P&L, but are reflected in long decision paths, discouraging employees from taking initiative, punitive systems that discourage risk taking, distortion of data, and politicking (London Business School, 2020).

4.

Inject some freedom into the system



Injecting freedom in the system means empowering your people to be change agents. The process of innovation, from reimagining a product or a business model, to solving a new client need, requires individuals who are deeply empowered and feel like entrepreneurs (Forbes, 2020).

The authors further suggest to break big units into smaller operating teams of about 15-50, give real profit and loss responsibility to each 'tribe', give tribes autonomy to make decisions (and manageable mistakes), present a meaning financial upside at a personal level, and upgrade the business skills of client facing employees so that they approach opportunities with a holistic view .

Hope is the most important word leaders (and by extension all of us) need to evangelize as we influence the spaces we care about. This is the 'lighthouse effect' that Erica Keswin refers to in her book "Bring your human to work" (2018). While leaders do not have to have all the answers, the opportunity for leadership stands before us everyday, and the greatest task for leaders is to continue to instill hope.

Heifetz and Linsky (2020) point out that every day we must decide whether or not to put our contributing voice out there, or keep it to ourselves to avoid upsetting anyone. Being a leader is a behavior and a practice, that requires us to be impeccable with our words, and the courage to go against the grain. This matters in times of crises more than ever, exposing who we really are, because;

5.

**"Man shall not live
by bread alone, but
by every word"**



The process of developing as an extraordinary leader is the same process as becoming an extraordinary human.

It is therefore in human principle all of our responsibility to foster an inclusive environment, particularly, those of business in nature, to reflect the beauty and strength of our humanity - i.e. collective human energy.

We have shared 5 fundamentals in our introduction of humanizing business which form the very beginning of a beautifully unfolding conversation. We hope to continue these conversations with deep dives from experts and executives who have disruptive ideas about "creating organizations that are as amazing as the people within them".



Concluding remarks

Leaders, who are often tasked with the tall order to navigate and shape the future, are logically expected to drive the "next normal" for economies and life to continue and thrive with little support. Through such VUCA challenges, what we are rapidly learning is that "what got us here, won't get us there" requiring a new way.

In a world of unrelenting change and unprecedented challenges, we need organizations that give everyone the opportunity to learn and innovate. This in essence means leading from every chair and bringing our ingenious humanness to the tables we sit in.

The process of developing as an extraordinary leader is the same process as becoming an extraordinary human. It is therefore in human principle all of our responsibility to foster an inclusive environment, particularly, those of business in nature, to reflect the beauty and strength of our humanity

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About us

The Nomalanga Tribe is a pioneering purpose-led wellness organization in South Africa dedicated to improve the way people live, work, and lead. We are rooted in the conviction that one person who is conscious about their well-being, can inspire an entire ecosystem to thrive.

Our approach is threefold:

- Healing Expertise: Our tribe of certified psychologists and wellness practitioners provide holistic care for individuals, families, teams, and organizations.
- Thrive Academy: Accessible online courses equip individuals with the skills to excel in the future of work.
- Digital Mental Health: Collaborating with African creators, we're developing innovative products to improve mindfulness, sleep, and focus.



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