

In Conversation with Adam Kingl - Exploring the future of leadership

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Host 00:04

Welcome to Future Talent Learnings In Conversation podcast series where we talk to business leaders and thinkers to uncover their perspectives about the changing world of work. This episode is hosted by Future Talent Learnings Tom Ritchie.

Tom 00:19

Today I'm joined by Adam Kingl, the managing director for Europe at Duke corporate education. Adam leads Duke's business in the region and works with clients on fundamental challenges such as purpose, culture, adaptability and innovation.

Tom 00:32

In his work as a leadership consultant he has worked with clients including the BBC, Disney and GlaxoSmithKline. He is passionate about the subject of leadership for what's next and is writing a book on this topic titled Next Generation Leadership.

Tom 00:47

In this podcast I asked Adam about societal trends that are driving change in the workplace, how leaders must adapt to meet the needs of their youngest employees and what the C-suites of the future will look like in the hands of the next generation.

Tom 01:01

Hi Adam, thanks for agreeing to speak with us today. So, just to get the ball rolling, what are the changes that are happening in the world today that are driving this change?

Adam 01:12

Thanks for having me. I think what we're seeing in the world right now is an evolution of capitalism. It can be interpreted as a crisis, but really I think it's part of a natural evolution. So if we cast our mind back several hundred years, you see that actually capitalism has looked like a lot of different things over the centuries.

Adam 01:33

So feudalism actually was a form of capitalism and that made way for mercantile capitalism and made for industrial capitalism. And I would argue that's made over way over 100 years to shareholder capitalism, and I think now we're at that inflection point where we are about to see something new.

Adam 01:50

Now, what's interesting in terms of asking ourselves where might be the solution space to help us deal with this inflection point is looking at the youngest employees in our organisation, the so-called Generation Y.

Adam 02:04

Because not only are these people going to be our leaders that are going help navigate these choppy waters, but I think their paradigms actually are consistent with the direction of travel in which capitalism is evolving.

Adam 02:21

And of course, for Gen Y, it's not that they just sort of decided to have a different world one day. Like with any generation, they are responding to the context in which they were raised. We as companies have done them no favours.

Adam 02:38

We've made pensions dramatically worse than they were for our grandparents. You know, they're looking at societies and governments torn apart by the dual forces of liberal democracy on one side and populism and nationalism on the other.

Adam 02:55

They're looking up the prospect of living for a terribly long time, which also concomitantly means they are going to have to work for a very long and that changes the definition of one's career. When you no longer like our grandparents are assuming you're gonna work for say 35 years but let's say almost twice that that changes the proposition and it changes your relationship between employee and employer.

Adam 03:24

So I think that gives us hopefully just a sense of the rather seismic change that we're facing in society.

Tom 03:32

Yeah and just and to clarify before we move on, Gen Y would be people who are born after is there a specific date or...

Adam 03:39

Yeah well so of course there's always some debate about this so I'm not gonna be dogmatic about it but just for the sake of our conversation just between you and me I use the definition of Generation Y as those born between 1982 and 2004 so these are our youngest employees in our organisation right now but they're up up to their mid-30s at the oldest side.

Tom 04:04

Okay and you touched on it briefly there but Generation Y is a very different view of work compared to the people who have been in the workplace for decades or even a shorter period of time. So through your research, how would you summarize the difference between the baby boomers, the Millennials and the Generation Y and I guess it's a bit of a crossover between the Millennials in Generation Y?

Adam 04:28

Yeah, I actually use Millennial to be the same generation segment as Gen Y. So the youngest group still in school I call Generation Z just for sake of clarity. But I think the biggest difference that we see with Gen versus Baby Boomers or Gen X is the level of loyalty that they demonstrate to any given employer.

Adam 04:53

And actually what my research over the last 10 years is telling me is that with every generation since the post-World War II generation, the average number of employers that a typical person has doubles with every-generation.

Adam 05:12

So our grandparents, those who grew up probably before World War 2 probably only had a couple of employers maximum in their lifetime. For example, both my grandfathers had one employer their whole lifetime, and one of my Grandfathers not only had an employer, he had the same job for his entire career.

Adam 05:35

But then he retired. And the interesting thing is with those lovely defined benefit pensions that they used to have, yes, he has one job for 35 years, but he was able to retire and be retired comfortably on a final salary pension for 35 years, so he was retired as long as he was working.

Adam 05:53

But currently, Gen X will have about probably eight employers in their lifetime based on past patterns and the rate at which they're changing employers. And for Gen Y, it's 16 employers in a lifetime.

Adam 06:09

I did a survey of high potential Gen Ys, not just a random cross-section of Gen Ys, but specifically asking people who have been nominated by their companies as our leaders of the future to say how long do you expect to stay with any your employer.

Adam 06:27

90% said no more than five years. So if we're you know looking around and saying oh Gen Y they don't want to stay for life yeah that's right they don't. So that certainly has lots of dramatic implications for the HR sector not only in terms of retention and recruitment but development, how do you create a leadership pipeline? And of course going back to my point about long life you know what do you do with a workforce where people may be working into their 70s 80s 90s, dare I say. So I think that that was that bit about loyalty toward this company was really what started all of my research around Gen Y, which then led into other questions like, well, how do you want to be developed by your employer?

Adam 07:22

What would make you stay? Why would you choose employer A versus employer B, et cetera? If you're finding that there's a loyalty problem, yes, and that's been quantified.

Tom 07:33

Yeah and so you've touched on it there so increased longevity obviously I think it's estimated that the was it more than half of the children born in the UK today may reach the age of a hundred. We're seeing more people work late into their later lives obviously having more jobs so how can businesses create an environment that supports the needs and world views of these people who are having such a different career experience.

Adam 08:03

Yes. Well, I mentioned before that capitalism is evolving, and that also means that management is evolving. Most of the management philosophy and architectures that we use today are still those that were created millennia ago in the case of our architectures, which is still along Egyptian and Roman military command structures and then the philosophy of management which goes back at least a hundred and plus years with the foundations of scientific management right and Frederick Winslow Taylor the the father of Scientific Management. Which created fantastic wealth through the industrial revolution but that was about efficiency we're taking error out, increasing productivity, and it doesn't have to do with some of the challenges particularly facing developed economies in the 21st century, which is innovation, adaptability, and what we're finding is that the precepts of scientific management are becoming less and less relevant.

Adam 09:06

Unfortunately, most organisations haven't even begun to look for the solution space, let alone found the solution. And again, I think some of the things that we are resisting in terms of what Generation Y is telling us they're looking for in their managers is at least part of right answer to what 21 century management needs to be in order to respond to an evolving economy, to evolving capitalism, and evolving paradigms of management.

Adam 09:34

And certainly it has to do with very small things like, you know, less command and control, more inclusivity. But there are lots of, little tactical things as well that I've been researching that are fascinating.

Tom 09:48

And what does the new form of leadership in light of all this change, what has it looked like in practice?

Adam 09:56

So certainly it's a lot more of it is about helping your people create clarity in terms of where we're going as an organisation but having them be part of that conversation. Once everyone is aligned about where you need to go, the 20th century managers instinct would be to then say how we are going to get there.

Adam 10:17

The 21st century manager I hope will say now we've defined where we want to go. And we all buy into that. So now you tell me, or you let's create, you know, dozens or hundreds of little experiments that will help us identify the right direction of travel for us.

Adam 10:36

Because what we have to ask ourselves is, at the moment, our organisations seem to be struggling with the fact that we collectively are less innovative, adaptable, and inspirational than the human beings in our organisations.

Adam 10:56

Surely, if we get management right, then collectively our organisations should be exponentially more innovative adaptable and inspirational, than any single human being in it. At the moment that isn't the case.

Adam 11:13

But we see a lot of what when Gen Y's describe their careers and how they wish to be led, we're starting to see some of that and some of those those answers into where we might evolve.

Tom 11:24

So a less bureaucratic form of leadership in practice.

Adam 11:28

Yeah. And I think that's probably the biggest part of this. Professor Gary Hamill has talked a lot about this, but I think he's right. If there's anywhere you where you're asking yourself, where do I start?

Adam 11:38

If you have to start anywhere, I would start with bureaucracy. and exploding the handicap of bureaucracy in our organisations.

Tom 11:47

How can leaders adopt future focus methods in their leadership today?

Adam 11:52

Well, one thing I've already referred to is better leverage the wisdom of your crowd.

Adam 11:58

Leadership is no longer about the singular wise man or woman right at the top of the pyramidal hierarchy. How do you leverage all the experiences and perceptions of your dozens, hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands of people?

Adam 12:20

Because actually what research shows is that crowds collectively are really good about deciding which direction to go in. For example, look at markets like the New York Stock Exchange. The NYSE has created a better return collectively than any individual equity within the NYSC.

Adam 12:44

I think crowds are probably pretty bad about brainstorming because a huge crowd-sourced brainstorm exercise sometimes creates chaos, but huge crowds are really good about saying, no, pick this, not that.

Adam 12:57

That's why when, if you ever watch *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, ask the audience, is the highest odds of being correct. Not always, but just better odds. The funny thing is most people wait, they hold on to the lifeline of phone a friend until the very end.

Adam 13:16

Actually, it should be exactly the reverse. Don't assume that any individual has a monopoly on wisdom. A crowd is much more likely to. So I think as leaders, we have to learn humility and and ask more questions rather than be seen to be or perceive that we have to be some kind of paragons of wisdom.

Tom 13:38

And there'll be a lot of people listening to this who might think that when I asked you the question of future focused leadership that that means that you might have to sacrifice something in the short term.

Tom 13:48

Do you subscribe to that idea and how can leaders pass the expectations of the future with their deliverables in the here and now.

Adam 13:57

Yes, I certainly think there isn't a trade-off and actually what a lot of research shows is that the more long-term your horizon, right, the more you're focused on purpose, for example, which is by the way what Gen Y's are asking in the organisation, The more successful you are financially.

Adam 14:16

So I think when a Lot of organisations don't adopt so Gen Y paradigms of leadership or how to lead their organisations. They think there's a trade-off. If I were to adopt some of those paradigms, I am sacrificing the fundamentals of business, like revenue and profit.

Adam 14:37

Actually, it's exactly the reverse. Books like *Firms of Endearment* demonstrate that those organisations that have a strong collective shared purpose outperform their competitors by at least 10 to 1 financially.

Adam 14:55

Also what we see is in the vanguard of forward-looking organisations that those organisations say let's be innovative, let us experiment, let is keep our eye on the horizon rather than short-term quarterly reports or forecasts.

Adam 15:10

Actually the market can reward them for that so if you look at for example Unilever, former CEO Paul Pullman when he said I am no longer doing quarterly forecasts to the analyst community. The market didn't punish him for that.

Adam 15:24

But that's why most CEOs continue to do quarterly forecast. They assume that analysts need regular updates. But of course, if you're focused on three-month cycles, you can never think about your moonshot innovations.

Adam 15:45

Those are always gonna take a back seat. And that's one of the reasons, by the way, why we find as organisations we tend not to be particularly innovative, because we intend to fiddle at the edges of innovation rather than do anything truly transformational.

Tom 16:00

What role does technology play in supporting this new future-focused mode of leadership?

Adam 16:07

If nothing else, what we'll find is as an organisation has become more global and teams become global, and dispersed across a number of geographies, we have to think about how do we improve team dynamics, leadership of teams in a virtual space?

Adam 16:26

So I mentioned some of that does have to do with wisdom of crowds. Some of it also has to do with the role of the leader in creating the right dynamic. So how do you facilitate a conversation with teams where you have members that are on four different continents?

Adam 16:42

Some of that might have to do with having your dynamic occur on totally different platforms or media. For example, even today, most of us assume that meetings even across different geographies have to be synchronous, right?

Adam 16:56

We have find a time, and sorry, you people in Japan, tough. You've got to join in your pajamas. But actually, in the social media age, can we not have a productive, proper dialogue with a number of people for example on what what we would pejoratively call a chat room over a couple of days and probably get some of the same if not better results.

Tom 17:22

Okay and to look forward a little bit further what will the C-suites of the future look like in the hands of of the of the next generation or even Gen Y.

Adam 17:37

Yeah well first is I think this long-term focus yeah and that's that can only be a good thing. Second is the idea of sustainability not being a trade-off with financial performance. There's lots of new emerging research that demonstrates again those organisations that execute on their sustainability mission outperform their competitors. And then I think there's this point, and this goes back to my conclusion about the evolution of capitalism, is that the C-suites of the future are going to be much more focused on the outputs of business, meaning how do we add more value to customers, serve different needs or serve needs better, how to make sure that our employees are fully engaged in that mission, versus the outcomes, which is the bottom line, the financial performance.

Adam 18:31

That financial performance, that's just a report card. That is enhanced when you serve your customers and enhance their value. But a lot of organisations throughout the 20th century, as they became immersed in shareholder capitalism, focused on the outcome versus the outputs.

Adam 18:47

Why are we in the business we were in in first place? And this brings us back to purpose. So I think it's gonna be much more of the C-suite's job is to deal with some of those qualitative measures of why businesses do what they do and what that value proposition is.

Adam 19:04

And then the outcomes, your annual P & L, for example, takes care of itself a bit more. And just on this point of employee, adding employee value, there's a fascinating book by the CEO of HCL Technologies called a guy named Vinit Nayar, who wrote a book I believe called Employees First, Customers Second.

Adam 19:26

Now, it's quite a provocative statement, but I think the point he's making is that unless you have employees who are fully bought into what you're doing and are full empowered to keep improving what we do on a daily basis, how possibly could you say you are serving your customers as best you can?

Adam 19:45

So I that dual focus of customer and employee focus is a stakeholder focus that will serve us better in the in 21st century. At least what I found in my client work as well as my own organisation is that Gen Y have been saying that for years.

Adam 20:03

We just have to open our ears a little bit.

Tom 20:07

And so what do you think is the best way of cultivating leaders, the future C-suites, and what can businesses implement now to provide opportunity and learning for their Gen Y workers?

Adam 20:23

Well, one of the main things that the Gen Ys that I've surveyed and interviewed have told me they want right away, and as much as possible, is development, personal career development. Now, 20th century paradigm would say, oh, that's far too expensive, or oh we only give you that when you are promoted within five years time.

Adam 20:45

Well, as the research already shows, in five years time, most of them are going to be gone. But there are so many things you can do that actually constitute development that aren't expensive and in fact are often free.

Adam 20:58

And I've tested this in dozens of interviews. I said, would this be valuable to you? Would you consider this to development? And the answers have always been yes. And these are things like more senior projects, coaching, secondments, mentoring, shadowing, international placements.

Adam 21:13

These are all development opportunities, but they're in role. You aren't even taking the person out of the business. You're enhancing their professional development. And actually one of the most powerful mechanisms I've discovered is reverse mentoring.

Adam 21:26

The idea of if there is a lot to be learned from Gen Y, then let's pair them up with the C-suite now to get that perspective into the boardroom as quickly as possible. And it's a win-win because then for the Gen Ys, they are getting that senior access that they didn't have before, which in and of itself is a powerful development opportunity that many of their colleagues and other organisations aren't getting.

Adam 21:49

So now as an organisation you have a recruitment and retention tool that's very compelling.

Tom 21:56

And just to finish, one thing that has underpinned all of these questions is the management of change. What is your advice to leaders that are managing these changes and also to the young leaders of the future that are likely to be working in a very different workplace the one that they find themselves in.

Adam 22:18

Yeah, I would say the the most important lesson I've ever learned in terms of managing fundamental change in the 21st century is we have to think like activists rather than Napoleon, right? Napoleon would plan for many weeks and put out a map and delegate across his officers and you put all your little toy soldiers on and move them across the map.

Adam 22:48

Look, we have to think about talking to our people on an individual basis, create a little bit of momentum, then share it with another team, build some more momentum. Use social media to share your ideas with the wider organisation.

Adam 23:05

Just think about all the different ways in which some of the biggest movements happened. They started small and they gained momentum and then mainly started bottom up. What I'm finding more and more is that for organisations that say we need fundamental change, if it's change that's announced from the C-suite and it is expected to be cascaded down, is almost always a recipe for failure versus those that percolate it up and ultimately reached the c-suite hopefully with the ceo's endorsement and sponsorship all along but not architected by the C-Suite all of those ways in which we have made fundamental changes to society such as the you know the destruction of patriarchy the disruption of slavery etc all All these things started small and grew as a movement.

Adam 24:04

So I would say, how do you create big change in your organisation? Start a Movement.

Tom 24:09

Great place to leave it. Adam, thanks so much for speaking with us today. Thank you.

Host 24:14

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