

UNCERTAINTY REMAINS THE THEME OF THE YEAR. While volatility continues to be the norm, the outlook on the remainder of the year continues to raise doubts about the economy and country's direction. The daily stock market volatility and changing policies highlight the midyear report. As we look ahead and work to steady the course over the final months of the year, several trends continue to dominate and will likely remain in some capacity on the trend alert for some time, including the conflict between short-term returns and long-term sustainability; fear (lack of psychological safety) in organizations; the speed of business and life; and constantly shifting societal norms.

In our midyear report, we have identified 12 trends that we continue to see in research and work across the globe.

TREND ONE: THE PRESSURE COOKER: MOUNTING ORGANIZATIONAL PRESSURE

The pressure to achieve expected financial returns and to finish strong is growing even more extreme with the threat of a declining economy looming. This pressure, previously impacting the board and highest level of leadership, is now beginning to cascade through every level of the organization. Short term strategies followed by truncated plans of actions drive quick returns but aren't creating long term growth, creating cycles of unsustainable demand.

TREND TWO: THE YIN AND YANG OF PEOPLE: BALANCING RETURNS WITH EMPLOYEE NEEDS

While the workforce is feeling more direct pressure to perform, there remains the need and growing desire for balance between sustaining financial returns and increasing employee satisfaction. The hyper-focused emphasis on today's returns is sacrificing the long-term relationship with the workforce. Research shows the necessary balance that must be struck between the strategic system and culture system of high performing companies.

TREND THREE: THE GREAT DIVIDE: MANAGEMENT IN THE MIDDLE

The cog in the wheel of performance today is middle management. The need to invest in educating and engaging this level is as great as any previous time in business history. The disconnect between enterprise imperatives and the workforce is exacerbated by the lack of strong leadership in the middle. We're missing solid management tools in our rush to advance employees with skillsets that are valued while skipping the basic and advanced training of what is needed to effectively lead. This lack in the workforce is creating a critical gap in every industry and impacting frontline performance.

TREND FOUR: THE CADENCE OF SPEED AND URGENCY: FAST OVER EFFECTIVE

These twin dynamics provide the soundtrack to our current work environment. The unrelenting urgency of everything has changed the energy of work into something frenetic. Leaders are beginning to place increasing value on "fast" over "effective" and it is impacting the quality of the service/product as well as sustainability and connectivity of the people in the workforce. The constant bombardment of unnecessary stimuli, pressure for speedy decision making, and the ongoing integration of new technology creates a momentum that becomes an addiction to being "on it".

TREND FIVE: CULTIVATING CLEVERNESS: INJECTING CREATIVITY INTO THE ORDINARY

In the quest to find solutions in an ever-complex business environment, leaders are moving away from the tried and true in search of different. One of the most recent trends is the injection of creativity into the solution-set of leaders from complex financial solutions to innovative cultural activation strategies to external engagement platforms to innovative environmental design and workspaces. Creativity is being sought after in even more traditional, stodgy industries, as leaders look for ways to create more meaningful connections and cultivate previously unthought solutions.

TREND SIX: THE NEXT IDEA IS ALWAYS WAITING FOR US: STRATEGIC PATIENCE

The board directives, leadership expectations and evolving environmental inputs are creating an unrealistic hierarchy where the next idea is prized over the right idea. Leaders focused on “next” are often missing the bigger opportunity where increased consideration is given to “next after next.” Management is rewarding the just “get it done” mentality. This form of accomplishment looks like forward motion, but without connecting dots and creating a wholistic contribution. The “next” thing, rarely supports real strategic thinking and as a result, is often lacking in proper integration, which ultimately can cause misalignment that impedes true advancement.

TREND SEVEN: THE ERA OF MISINFORMATION: NAVIGATING THE TRUTH

We are not only bombarded with information; we are actively searching for new data points. More and more, the information we are seeking, or validating, is coming from sources, perhaps previously trusted, that cause us to take pause and consider the veracity of not only the information, but the source itself. This is not relegated to social media and news, information communicated throughout the workforce is questioned as well.

TREND EIGHT: WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP: LEADING ON THE EDGE

The swirl of information and impending “news” of economic, political, societal or technological changes has people waiting for what is next, instead of living for what is now. There is a genuine and palpable concern about what is to come (our future state) – as we overlay our own biases and filters on our current state which keep us off-balance and increasingly uncertain. The uncertainty surrounding the stock market, financial reports, tariffs, and global economic and political concerns has leaders on the edge attempting to anticipate what is ahead.

TREND NINE: EVER-PRESENT FEAR: PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

There continues to be an increasing chasm between trust, employee voice and empowerment, and fear in organizations across the world. The fear factor is real and causing havoc on the front lines of companies of all sizes. It is pitting individuals against leaders and employees against employees and in the process, creating a less productive and less safe work environment. This lack of psychological safety does not discriminate based on industry or company size and is a real impediment to employee engagement and performance.

TREND TEN: UNCERTAINTY IS THE RULE: CHANGE IS THE ANSWER

Status quo is gone. The world is changing around us, yet many leadership teams are reticent in using the “dirty c-word” – change. Out of concern their workforce will be shaken and not accept the change, they instead use code words like “modify” and “evolve” to connote the real change that is demanded for even basic survival. Today’s workplace requires every level to not only accept but adopt change as the solution.

TREND ELEVEN: POLITICAL CORRECTNESS MASQUERADING AS OPEN CONVERSATION: FALSE STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS

As the political rhetoric continues to build and as sides are being drawn on any host of issues, so too does the increase of politically correct conversation inside organizations. While on the surface, these conversations appear necessary and appropriate, they are actually inhibiting honest and full conversation. Both sides of the argument are retreating to safe politically correct positions, which disallow the full conversation. This is forcing the more honest conversation to small groups outside the board and meeting rooms and creating an environment where leaders are developing strategies based on 50-70% of the full information.

TREND TWELVE: CLUTTER OF EVERY KIND DISTRACTS: A FORMIDABLE CIRCUIT BREAKER

The natural and healthy energy flow of leaders and their teams is being derailed by an overabundance of clutter. This newer workplace phenomenon, which we first began experiencing in our educational practice work, is elevating in importance across multiple industries as teams become distracted by the clutter caused by internal work structures and environments, shifting leadership priorities and cascading responsibilities which overwhelm the workforce and make it difficult for employees to remain in clarity.

Deutser Clarity Institute publishes business trend reports each quarter based on research and work conducted in industries across the country and globe.

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