

Decoding Disruption Panel Discussion Highlights

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Panelists:

Dr. Anand S. Deshpande
Founder & CMD, Persistent Systems

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Moderator:

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Dr. Anand S. Deshpande

Founder & CMD
Persistent Systems

1.

What is your advice to leaders in the corporate world in terms of the core emotions that they should be aware of and exuding today as they communicate with their employees?

- We as the leaders ought to do three things to keep the employee's moral high and keep them engaged:

Engage – Engaging them with transparent communication

Empathise – Knowing the options and making decisions together

Explore – Together thinking and exploring the future possibilities

2.

What are the top three leadership skills that you think leaders should try to develop to navigate through this current crisis?

- In reality people behave quite differently and sometimes as a leader you have to step up and manage crisis differently from just normal leadership so the top three leadership skills:

Speed and agility - It goes hand in hand to make decision in crisis

Teamwork – Let the people be a part of the team and delegation

Decisiveness – long term view for business

3.

What advice do you have for the thousands of young, ambitious, capable but anxious professionals today who are in their early or mid-careers?

- When planning your career for next 40-50 years you should categorize them into:

First 10 years - You should focus on learning and networking, try to be as diverse as you can.

Second 10 years - Become an expert of something which defines your experience.

Third 10 years - You should have realistic estimates, where do you want to end-up.

Last 10 years - You should be focusing on delivering to your excellence, mentoring people and thinking about how you will contribute to your society post your retirement.

4.

Is it possible for an organization to maintain a human face while balancing the challenging economic imperatives?

- It is essential and we are a part of the society we have to live and float with it. In these kinds of situations, it's the actions that speak louder than words.
- When we know we are in crisis, we as an organization and as individuals need to chip in.
- We need to be seen as contributing to the local community and the society unless we do our part nobody believes us.



Warren K. Harris

CEO & MD
Tata Technologies Ltd.

1.

Undeniably anxiety pervades the business world. A precipitous surge of unemployment has begun globally. 66% of organisations have deferred or suspended their hiring schedule at different job levels. Based on your experience, do you realistically think leaders can continue to maintain transparency in today's environment without betraying genuine anxiety and panic?

- As leaders, it is crucial to take up all worries, challenges, concerns and issue that there are, own them and represent them. Unless you take responsibility for problems that your organization faces, you are doomed to undermined authenticity, compromised trust and misplaced targeting. It is only by way of accepting responsibility, that I took one of the greatest leaps of my career.
- It is absolutely critical to be authentic and real. To say things as they really are, is the biggest virtue for leaders.
- Your commitment to deal with challenges while being transparent and straight-forward makes you a good leader. Times may be difficult but the meanest thing you can do is not inform your employees where they went wrong. Own up the situation as well as the actions you take.

2.

A product development company like yours needs some fundamental and permanent alterations in its gene construct. And perhaps that is why accountability and ownership are traits you have championed. But how does one find courage in the face of adversity at this time?

- I have always thought that Nelson Mandela got it bang on when he said, "*Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it*". Over the years, I have evolved during times of great adversity and overcome scary challenges by doing things. The experience of manoeuvring difficult situations is what gives you the perspective to deal with fear.

- Fear is an emotion but courage is a practice. Of course there are people with inherent ability to deal with fear but eventually courage is a learnt practice.
- The current uncertainty and the vicissitudes will require leadership to use the perspective gained out of past experiences to deal with fear. And the three most important virtues will remain:
 - **Speed and agility**
 - **Clarity**
 - **Decision making**

3.

What would your advice for entrepreneurs be, for those who have been brought to a standstill in operations, from a psychological and emotional point of view?

- There are always two components to responding to a crisis:
The hard side of response that covers the three C's:
Customer, Cost and Care to employees.
 It also involves leveraging the crisis for a transformational scheme for your company while positioning its capability and capacity.
The more nuanced however is the emotional side to dealing with crisis which inevitably takes us back to the meaning and purpose of an organization or the agenda in the mind of the leader.
- It is only meaning in and a sense of purpose for the work you do that helps you sail through crisis. For instance, we believe in "engineering a better world" and for our clients that translates into providing them with "cleaner and safer" options.
- Remember, it is not a sprint but a marathon.

4.

Where do you think are the key aspects that C-suite executives and leaders should focus their energies on?

- These times hold great potential for leaders to embark on a huge learning curve to look at different paradigms and ways in which things could be done. For instance, the way we interacted with our customers or conducted business a few months back may need to change. This is our learning opportunity to reset our approach to business.
- It may be useful to break the conventional boundaries of hierarchies and break the silos for greater team work optimization.
- It will be upon leaders to empower teams to be creative by enabling them to do so.
- Finally, "It is not always going to be dark at 7"



Leland K. Bassett

Chairman & CEO
Bassett & Bassett

1.

With your sophisticated understanding of human emotions and applied communication psychology, what do you think teams and employees around the world are feeling?

- Need to recognise the challenges. COVID-19 knows no boundaries or geography we are all in it together as brothers and sisters.
- Need to be honest about our emotions: Fear, anxiety and be vocal about it. Especially leaders must be transparent about emotions and listen to your employees and understand what they are saying. Empathy and honesty are paramount.
- Leaders need to recognize life is a chess game and not checkers - think long term.

2.

Which three points of advice will you offer to leaders struggling to construct messages to their internal teams - especially if they are laying out a challenging economic landscape and trying to be reassuring at the same time?

- Have maintained a multicultural team at Bassett & Bassett. It gives you perspectives you haven't thought of.
- Three points of advice:
 - Get real:** Accept it. Accept the reality as it is presented to you.
 - Get in front of the situation:** Engage with the team; we believe in family farm model of management - Everybody does their bit. Engage with the team and let them know everyone has to pitch in to understand the way forward.
 - Provide sense of future:** Talk to our employees, suppliers, customers and provide them a way forward. Perception is reality - What your message is, is decided by the listener.

3.

Let's talk about the post Covid lockdown era, whenever it comes. What are some landmines that business owners & leaders should anticipate?

- It's a three prong strategy (AAA): **Accept Adjust Adapt**
- One rule (TTT): **Think Things Through**
- Need to accept there will be **Unknown Unknowns**
- Stay focussed on employee's health and safety. Litigations will come out of it, if we do not do right by our people. We need to play the long-term game and be a good listener rather than a talker.
- Best plan will be the plan when everyone affected by it is engaged in it.

4.

Can positive thinking be a dangerous thing in an environment of so much uncertainty and anxiety? In other words, how can leaders avoid misleading their employees with positive talk if the future looks bleak?

- Positive thinking is not a negative thing.
- We need to use it with a sense of purpose for the future else you will lose the point of being positive.
- Be realistic and be real about the problems we face. Accept the fire, do not hide it.
- Relationships need to be nurtured in these times and thanks to technology it has become easier, we need to communicate with each other and understand what the other person is feeling.
- Relationships are more crucial now than ever.



Eric S. Yuan

Founder & CEO
Zoom Video Communications

1.

Your product is proving to be a blessing for many at this time of crisis. What is your mission and vision for Zoom?

- I started the company in 2011 with an ideal vision for the future of video conferencing like zoom.
- In the future, no matter which language you are speaking, everybody will understand each other. The product will include real-time language translator.
- Emotional expression through video calling will be possible. People will be able to reach into the digital world and interact. For example - give a hug!
- Our vision is to deliver a secure and friction less video collaboration experience.

2.

Can you give us an example from your own professional experience when you converted a challenge to an opportunity?

- My American dream began in 1996. My visa got rejected 8 times. The next attempt was successful. It did teach me a lesson don't give up.
- Perseverance is very important especially during the time of crisis.
- Explore how we can leverage this crisis to completely transform product, team and company to the next level.
- Quick response is the key especially to critical customer issues. So, prioritize.
- Special emphasis on Corporate Social Responsibility is necessary during a crisis.

3.

What is your advice to the business leader who is coping with a sense of failure at this time? What are the key corporate lessons that we all must learn from the crisis?

- A leader must be decisive during a crisis.
- Adapt to the new situation and adapt quickly.
- Don't fear failure - the next step of failure is success. As John F. Kennedy's said - *"Those who dare fail miserably can achieve greatly"*.
- Think beyond today; Think future.

4.

What is happening is beyond the control of man and the future cannot be predicted. What is the redefined role of flexibility, adaptability and response time now and how can a leader who has thousands of people in their company strategize these aspects at a time like this?

- Response time, adaptability and flexibility is important especially at this time of crisis full of uncertainty.
- Don't look at this as a problem - your perspective can see this as an opportunity.
- Fast-forward 2030 - 2040 and when we look at what's happening now, it will matter most that we do the right things.
- Be patient – we will be ok.
- Opportunity to serve the world and make the world a better place.