THE
NOW
of
WORK

Post-Pandemic Reflections

Yemi Faseun

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Let us start with a question: Why do certain organisations perform better than others?

I first became interested in the "future of work" about 4 years ago and it occurred to me now as it occurred to me then, that it is one of the biggest and the most successful work-habit formation experiments in the 21st century.

No doubt, the "future of work" was met with mixed feelings. While some organisations skeptically contemplated the benefits that could come with the "future of work" and stalled to embrace, other businesses eagerly jumped on the wagon, ready to embrace what the workplace future may hold, irrespective of its uncertainties.

These organisations, the 'curious and willing Georges', which had quickly adjusted to the new work demands and styles, are the few businesses that successfully scaled through the uncertain times that came with the pandemic adjustments.

With all that has been happening around us, it is no longer news that the future of work has evolved to the 'Now of Work'. The future we talked about yesterday, has become the reality of today.

The next question is thus: what will happen to the businesses that are yet to evolve and are still stuck in the past? Do they shut down? Do they lose all they have worked for over the years?

Right now, many organisations are at critical crossroads in terms of performance, growth, and survival. Leaders and managers are now being forced to confront the most challenging questions of their business performance and survival: How can we keep employee performance and productivity high in these challenging times? How is COVID-19 de-constructing and re-constructing talent management conversations? And what will the 'new normal' look like for business growth?

No one has a crystal ball offering easy answers, but one thing is clear: What leaders and manager need to help their organizations thrive are tools for problem-solving, agility, adapting, and innovating in wildly unpredictable circumstances.

Through it all, we now know why new work-habits emerged following the pandemic that hit our world in 2020, how businesses change, and the science behind successful companies that embraced the change required to survive the pandemic. With the "Now of Work", we now know how to break businesses into parts and rebuild them to the 'new normal' specifications.   We understand how to make people work more efficiently, deliver better results and live better lives without compromising the value they deliver to their organisations.

Transforming a company to embrace the "Now of Work" is not necessarily an easy or quick fix. It is not always simple. But it is possible. And now we understand how.

chapter one
The Post-Covid Era: Working & Living With The Virus

If we are true to ourselves, we know that the world has moved in phases, or, let me be specific to say that, our world in this part of the divide has moved in phases between February 2020 and today.

The global position of things right now is that, virtually all economies in the world are facing a serious downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Businesses and their executives are also having a hard time facing considerable challenges managing in a downturn. So, in this period of uncertainty, what can we see, and how should leaders across board lead in these times? I believe that, for us to fully understand what is expected of us in this post-covid era, we need to first analyze our initial position at the beginning of the pandemic, and see where we are in the scheme of things right now.

The first thing that happened was that, we were shocked by the pandemic; the rate at which it was happening in other parts of the world, the increase in the number of deaths, and then, we were thinking somehow, hopefully, it was not going to come to our part of the world. But you know, hope is not a great strategy. One man boarded the plane from Italy to Nigeria and then, the pandemic hit us as well. We were shocked, and fear gripped us, and from the phase of fear, we went into a lockdown, trying to find a solution to a pandemic that had no cure.

After that phase, we started to realize that we cannot permanently be locked down. We were understanding more and more about the virus, and knowledge was giving us a sort of power. We were coming out of the phase of fear gradually because of the knowledge of the situation. Then we moved from that point of knowledge to the point of survival.

We have to live with the virus to survive. Knowledge was helping us to move to the phase of survival.

The virus is not going to go away for another year or more. We are realizing how we are going to live with this virus, and how the virus is going to live with us for now. So, it is safe to say that we have moved to the phase of survival, and I promise you that for so many other businesses that were ready for the future of work that we have been talking about for two to three years, it was so easy for them to move quickly along those phases that I mentioned. Some quickly moved from survival to recovery.

Today, many organizations are in recovery mode. The virus has not gone away; we are learning to live with it. We are waiting for the vaccines to arrive. However, we must continue to survive. So majorly, businesses are now in the recovery mode. And in all of this, employees have been affected, impacted along this continuum, and businesses also have been impacted. Businesses could not make money, or sell products, and businesses that were not ready for the online possibilities were in limbo for a very long time.

What we have seen is an impact both on the side of the employee, and on the side of the employer from a performance perspective that summarizes the context of the situation we have found ourselves in.

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Our initial position was that of fear, and we were forced to go on a lockdown. But having realized that we cannot be on a lockdown forever, we are finding ways to live with the virus because of the need for survival.

chapter two
The Defining Factor of Preparedness

In reality, we cannot categorize all organizations and put them in just one box. From an impact perspective, I promise you, some organizations have made money – good money. From an analysis, Zoom has made so much money during this crisis, and I know some organizations here in our local space who have also made so much money. So, we are not going to box every organization inside one quadrant and say that all organizations have been negatively impacted.

But it is evident to see that a lot of organizations are trying to recover. However, some may not. For those that have recovered, what should they look out for when it comes to performance? Is there hope for these businesses and organizations in the next six to twelve months?

During my introduction, I did say that some organizations were listening to the sermon around the future of work, and they were already getting their businesses ready for that future. Right now, the narratives show that we are in the 'now of work'. Those organizations who prepared for the 'future of work' were easily able to grapple with the new realities quicker than others, and they are enjoying the first-mover advantage right now. So, have organizations been impacted? Yes; some negatively, some positively, and some adversely, and the truth is, some might not be able to recover from it.

Again, it is not too late in the day. If you ask me, any organization that does not have a Business Continuity Plan or Business Continuity Management in place should have done that maybe about 3-4 months ago, immediately the pandemic hit. Smarter organizations had their BCM in place, way before now; just in case there is an earthquake, just in case there's a flood situation, just in case there is a fire situation, like we always have in the US from time to time. Just in case the business cannot continue in Victoria Island or Ikoyi, what next? BCM helps us

answer the question of what next if we cannot continue business the way it is currently structured. So, the guys who had their BCM in place - alternative worksite, alternative workforce, and alternative technology, were quicker to move from those phases I talked about, to a survival and recovery mode.

So, let's not just survive. Let us thrive because of the fundamentals that have been built, structured, and the processes in place to move the organization quickly to that little space where we do not really need human interactions. Some people were not sure there could be a pandemic. *"Could there ever be a situation where the whole world will be in a lockdown?" was their question, until it happened.*

You know, in a moment of change, there are those people who make change happen, those who watch change happen, and then, the wonderful people who are saying "*whoa*"; they have been caught in the middle of the things that happened already, and they have become victims. So, some organizations have become victims because they didn't have a BCM in place. And again, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago - the next best time is now.

How should organizations respond? Some have responded way before now - two years, three years ago. For example, while I was working at Stanbic-IBTC around 2007-2010, we already had BCM in place. I was at Standard Chartered Bank between 2002-2006, we had BCP in place. Different what-if scenarios run for the organization so that we can switch the mode of the business. Those organizations were quarterly, and yearly improving their BCM in case anything happens. They are always fine-tuning as the technological possibilities are available to them. So, nothing really happens that they won't have a clue on how to manage it. I know about two or three international

organizations in this country that have not been at work since February or March 2020 till today. Guess what? They are making money because the BCP is in place.

Like I said, the best time to do this was 20 years ago, but the next best time is now! Organizations must start thinking about BCP. Now the pandemic is a great example of a leveler. Leveled all of us at the same time. But if you don't have a BCP in place, you were either almost gone or by now you are gone. If organizations can still quickly use BCP to recover their businesses and then move along those phases of recovery that's the only thing I can advocate.

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> **Not all organizations are struggling; some are experiencing a boom, because, ever before the pandemic hit, they had prepared ahead in case of eventualities. The best time to plan was 20 years ago, but the next best time is now! Organizations must start thinking about BCP (Business Continuity Plan).**

chapter three
The Now of Work

With the recent happenings around the world, it is safe to say that the pandemic has fast-tracked the 'Future of Work' people have always been talking about – no doubt. Most of the conferences we had last year (2019), the topic was mostly on the Future of Work. Most of the conferences we had in 2018, and where I was a part of some of those conversations, the topic was on the Future of Work. We were talking about Artificial Intelligence, Digitization, Leveraging on Technology, Robotics, and all of these things are already happening, even here in our clime. Did the pandemic fast-track the Future of Work for the entire world at the same time? It is an unequivocal yes. No doubt about it at all. Now, people are talking about the 'new normal' - new realities. It is the same thing about the Future of Work we were talking about in the past.

There is an Industrial Revolution, and it is powered by technology. Before now, people will say that the world has become a global village; it's one global work space right now. I mean, for example, look at the way Canada is "taking our people" in Nigeria, and you've seen organizations saying, *"Okay. You want to go to Canada? Go to Canada, but you can continue working with us."* That's happening - absolutely! If we can collapse the distance of ten thousand kilometers, and still have employees working for us, because of what technology can allow us do, that's awesome! So it's just that more and more organizations need to grapple or leverage on the opportunities that exist with technology, and make work-life integration better for employees.

So many organizations are even thinking about cost. I don't need to have hundred people scoring for spaces. Let's analyze this using my office for instance: the power has been on all day, my air conditioner

has been on all day, and I probably have a fridge that is powered as well. If I do 3 days a week at work, and 2 days at home, is there a saving to cost? Absolutely! That means we don't have to power this room, and many other rooms. And how do I manage the guys who are out there in my office? I'm not seeing them; they are not with me 24/7. We still have some spaces between us, but what is collapsing that space is technology, and the technology is getting more and more advanced to the point where that space is getting smaller and smaller.

Eventually, we wouldn't have a choice; that's what I'm saying. People will ask for it, and it will become a competitive advantage. Organizations will only need to find ways to make it work for them. At the end of the day, we would need to find a way to make sure that work is performed anywhere, and not just in a physical location.

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chapter four
Leadership & Sensitivity in Organizations

The disruption of Covid-19 has led organizations to adopt remote working practices, engage employees differently, and work is being performed in radically new ways. In this critical period, there will be emerging trends in the roles of managers, and in the way they should manage the employees' performance. These changes will center on four key things that are largely based on the conversations I have had in the last couple of months at different forums.

1. Resell The Vision

This is the time we are calling on leadership, and I am using leadership from a broad perspective. I am really referring to individuals who are supervisors, managers, directors, and even CEOs - leadership at different levels, to resell the vision - the purpose of the organization. This is the time when leadership is called to question to resell. We sold the vision when we were going to go into the year 2020 by October/November last year. Most of us were done with budgeting. We made certain assumptions around Economic, Political, and the likes. Nobody made an assumption for the pandemic when we were planning our budget for 2020. We need to bring the pandemic into the mix of the business assumptions and fundamentals to 2020, and say to team members how this has impacted the business, and how it has impacted the vision that we had for the business from a 1-2 year perspective.

But remember that before you can sell a vision, you must also have bought into it yourself. Not just anybody can lead through this crisis. Leadership in a crisis situation is calling for a level-five type of leadership. You must be able to hold on to the vision of the organization, and must be able to resell the vision to members of the

team. *"Guys, this is where we said we were going to go, but this has happened. What are the impacts of this on our business and how are we going to grapple with the challenges and the new realities? We cannot do this alone unless we have you guys behind us."* These are the things a leader needs to embrace at this time. If a leader cannot resell that vision, he's going to wake up one day, look behind him, and there would be nobody following him. Reselling the vision despite the odds facing all of us is very key.

2. **Empathy**
Anyone who cannot lead with empathy at this time cannot lead an organization or a business at all. The world is no longer looking for leaders in moments of peace. This is a war situation. We are in a war-like situation. Even though nobody is carrying any gun, the war is going on. Nobody is carrying sub-machine guns, rockets are not flying here and there, but there is a serious economic war going on.

When we were talking about Future of Work 2-3 years ago, remember we were talking about: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA). These things have moved to the next level because of Covid-19. We are totally uncertain of what the future holds, we are totally vulnerable to an enemy we cannot see, and that's the virus. We cannot see this enemy, but it's hitting the world left, right and center. It has become so complex; work from home, work in the car, etc. Our world has become so fluid. We are moving from one another, all in the same goal. We need leaders who will lead with empathy, who will understand how the pandemic has affected individuals and families, who will understand the mental health, mental well-being, and mental stability of the team members, who will not only concentrate on the KPIs, reports, meetings, etc.

Don't forget that the individuals are working from home right now, and some of these individuals are living in a one-room apartment. In that one-room or two-room apartment, the kids are not going to school. They are at home. The spouse cannot go to work because of the pandemic. Around you is a house full of people, and you are expecting the individual to concentrate on work! Kids crying, children running around, catering for the family, etc. The infrastructure is not very adequate. There is no adequate supply of power to charge laptops, phones and other devices. Or in some cases where a neighbour's generating set is running people crazy due to the noise coming out from it, and you still expect that individual to deliver. If you are not leading with empathy, then you shouldn't expect anything from your team.

3. Communication
We need leaders who can communicate; I mean great communicators. The impact on the business. For example, an HR person seats with the CEO and the CEO says *"Hey, about 20 people need to leave the organization. We cannot sustain the wage bill anymore."* True or true? Very true! Businesses are moaning and groaning under the weight and effect of the pandemic. The top lines/revenue are impacted and we need to watch the cost lines. In reality, we might not be able to afford the wage bill anymore, but who is going to do the communication? Who is going to be involved in that engagement with the entire workforce? To say this is how we have been impacted, this is the reality on the ground, and these are the hard decisions that we have to make right now? If you cannot communicate that in a way that brings about empathy and humanness in you, you might be losing the entire workforce because, how you treat people in a time of crisis like this, is an indication of how you will treat them in the future.

So, we need leaders, supervisors, managers who can communicate adequately and effectively; leaders who can engage and connect with the people. There is an element I called 'connectedness' in the leadership function. This is the time to connect and not just to look at the KPIs, results, my board, and my stakeholders. This is the time to also put the employees in the mix of all that is happening, and how you can interrelate everything and make sure you're communicating the right stuff to your employees. You can communicate in a way to the employees to say, this is the situation, and they will stick by you, through thick and thin and when this is all over, you look behind you, and everybody is still around with you.

4. **Emotional Intelligence**

If you cannot lead with a high degree of Emotional Intelligence, you might not be able to lead at all. Emotional intelligence is understanding the impact of all of these on different individuals in your team, or in the organization, and addressing each person in a way they have been impacted. So, this is not the time to say *"this is the way you were last year when there was no pandemic."* No. There has to be a shift. There has to be a fundamentally new way of reasoning and dealing with employees. Understanding self, understanding every member of the team, and being able to relate with them given the situation we found ourselves.

These four things I have mentioned stand out when it comes to leadership in this crisis situation. They have become important skills in leading people through a crisis situation, and therefore, through a recovery mode.

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chapter five
Managing Performance Reviews

Below is a question that was asked during one of the online forums, about whether or not performance review should be a 'go-to', or a 'no-go' area, and how I responded to this question.

"There are immediate concerns, such as whether organizations should proceed with performance evaluation for 2020, and if so, what do you suggest, and how do you think this process should look like? For example, some tech firms, like Facebook and Google, have made headlines for eliminating or delaying performance reviews during this challenging time. Whereas, many other companies are holding performance conversations."

First, I do not agree that it should be eliminated. Remember, businesses have been impacted in different ways. We cannot have a blanket cover for all organizations because the outcomes have been different from one organization to another.

I know a couple of my colleagues in this same industry who have not been to the office since about March till today. About 100% of the workforce are still working from home, and they haven't lost a percentage of their market share. Revenue is still great, profit is still good, and overall, they still have a good market share. Yet, they are not in the office. Should we then say performance reviews should be scraped in 2020? And on the other side i.e. those businesses who have been negatively impacted, employees were not going to work.

There are two categories of employees: Individuals who are **working from home**, and the individuals who are **staying at home**. The 'staying at home guys', there's no business to do, so they might as well stay at home.

A business owner called me about two months ago - very great franchise in Lagos, Nigeria, expanding his business. He had some concerns during the lockdown period, and he was like, *"Yemi, some of my workforce could work from home, and some could not. Who am I going to pay, who am I not going to pay? Who am I going to lay off, and who am I not going to lay off?"* That business is impacted differently, and some businesses actually shut down and laid off people. Where you are in the outcome value chain of the pandemic will determine how you are going to relate with the performance management system in the year 2020. For the guys who have continued to do business, physical or online, will need to revisit the fundamentals.

You know, 'fundamental' is not performance appraisal. It is the performance management system itself, and what we say is that you shouldn't wait till the end of the year to do performance appraisal. You must look at the continuum of the performance management system - where we set objectives in January, we monitor the objectives as the year goes by, and then at the end of the year, we appraise performance.

If you also go back again to great leaders communicating very well and reselling the vision, performance management has a very important aspect of the leadership question to play in that absolutely, because the leader must have set the objectives at the beginning of the year before the pandemic, then the pandemic hit, and the leader or great business manager will reevaluate the objectives in the face of the realities, and therefore, do for instance, by Q2 (3+9) i.e. three months of actuals, and nine months of forecast. When you get to Q3, you'll do (6+6) i.e. six months of actuals, and six months of forecast, and by Q4, you'll do 9+3 i.e. nine months of actuals, and three months of forecast.

So, great managers must constantly communicate and engage, and if

those objectives need to change in the face of realities, he must engage and communicate it. So, let's not do **performance appraisal**, let's focus on **performance monitoring** and a sort of **business performance evaluation** on the goal. If you move me from a physical platform to service customers, to an online platform to service customers, does that not mean that my KPIs should change? If you move me from sales, just because I could not sell anymore, to operations, because I can do operations at home, should my KPIs not change? It's the **fundamentals of performance** I think we must continue to visit and revisit in the light of the performance management system, so that we can say at the end of the year, we should do an appraisal or not. If the fundamentals are in place, yes, you should do a performance appraisal at the end of the year. But of course, we must put everything in the mix; we must put everything into consideration. There was no pandemic when we set the objectives. Now that pandemic has happened, we must evaluate, re-tweak, and rejig the objectives - but the employee is still there, working at work originally, and now, working at home.

But in all, how do we manage the employees? We manage them by objectives. If your objectives have changed for whatever reasons, what are you achieving based on the changed objectives? That is what you should measure at the end of the year. For me, the tool is not actually the most important element of performance management, but what is important is actually the fundamentals. However, you may want to do it, let there be objectives at the beginning of the year. Let there be constant dialogue and communication. Let there be continuous monitoring of performance. Let there be no surprises at the end of the year. Do not put me on trial when we get to the end of the year, and you say you want to do a performance appraisal. I should not be too surprised working with you if you are my manager. I shouldn't be

surprised when I come to the last quarter of the year because Q1 you told me I wasn't doing well. Q2 you told me, *"Yemi, you are not doing well"*, and same in Q3. So, when it's Q4, I should not be surprised about my performance because we are engaging and communicating all throughout the year.

Should the 2020 appraisal be scrapped? No, I don't think so. It just depends on how the pandemic has impacted the organization.

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> **We manage employees by objectives, and there was no pandemic when the objectives for 2020 were set. So, if your objectives have changed for whatever reasons, like the pandemic for instance, what are you achieving based on the changed objectives? This is what you should measure at the end of the year.**

chapter six

A New Perspective on Performance Objectives

Usually, HRs, supervisors, heads of departments, managers, and generally, leaders, were more concerned about completed paperwork, signed registers, up-to-date certifications, and all that stuff. But right now, the parameters have changed. Leaders are more interested with new ideas and productivity – and not necessarily a signed register that shows when you clocked in, or when you skipped work. The concentration should be on how employees are meeting performance objectives, and this is a very practical action that companies can take to best manage near-term performance conversations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An objective is like the compass that guides the performance conversations from the beginning of the year and the rest of the year. It is about my KPIs, my objectives, my deliverables, and my KRAs. I feel that's what we should concentrate on. We shouldn't concentrate on *"when I log in to the system in the morning, and my manager can see it because IT has put something on the system, and when I log out in the afternoon or in the evening..."* It shouldn't be about **time**; it should be about **productivity**. We shouldn't be measuring time now, but how productive an employee is. The fact that I log in to the system, and you can see it, does not mean that I am working. It is my productivity that should measure my outputs for the period. The concentration should be on clear cut objectives. If they change for whatever reason, let's communicate that change.

Also, we must give attention to **learning** and **development** at this period. Learning and Development is taking a hit right now. We need to retool and reskill the organization. Things have changed dramatically. Can we retool and reskill the organization for the new normal, new

realities? Let's not just ask, ask, and ask the employees for one, two, three, and four. Can we also let the employees know that we are here to support them in terms of growing to be able to deliver what we are asking of them? So, there's an aspect for management by objectives, there is an aspect for measuring the output and not time, and also, there's the aspect of what can we do to help them in terms of performance. The organization should continue to show its duty of care to the employees. You expect me to do things totally different from how I have been doing it before, and that's because of the new realities - but you haven't skilled me. You have not retooled or reskilled me to do it, and you are asking me to do, do, and do. That's why I always say that the entire value chain of HR cannot be taken in isolation. You are talking of performance management, but there is a piece around reward, there is a piece around learning and development, and there is a piece around leadership, even though, we are talking about performance management. Leaders also need to take their game a little higher to the point where we are not just asking the employees to deliver, but we are also saying what we can do to support them through this process. The employee assistance program is another one.

So, in the near term, what we should be doing is to concentrate on what we need to achieve engagement, manage productivity and output, and not just time monitoring, or the managing of face time. These are things I think we should concentrate on in the near term. We need to constantly review along the different phases - what's working, what's not working. Let's not be slaves to processes. Step back, review, what's working, what's not working.

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chapter seven
Building An Enjoyable Employee Experience

In our days, for instance, if you tell somebody, *"I'll give you a job for N450,000 and a car"*, it was a big deal - the car was a big deal! If you speak with the current generation, and you say for *"N450,000 plus data for life; your connectivity is 24 hours a day, and you are never going to run out of data"*, they'd be like, *"WHAT?!"* It is obvious that Maslow's hierarchy has been disrupted; it used to be food, shelter and clothing. Now, it is data connectivity and power banks! That's the way it is because that's what the reality on ground suggests.

So as long as we are now managing people by deliverables to come back to employee experience, we are now integrating work with life. Then we can say to a new mother, *"You can stay at home for six or seven months, until your child is really ready to let go of you, and you can come to work. However, when you're at home, you still have deliverables."* We've almost bought that employee's loyalty, if not for life, but for a longer time, and it becomes a competitive advantage for organizations.

However, in being considerate about employee experience, we also need to have a constant reality check with what the market itself is saying. For instance, *"Do I need to change the status car that I give out to my employees at, for instance, manager grade?"* If my limit right now is 5 million Naira, and it's not enough to attract people into my organization, I'm not going to take a decision to change it from 5 to 15, or to 20, without first checking what the market is doing. I would have to look at my own subsector and say *"Ok. Amidst other investment banks, (for instance), what are they doing?"* Given the averages in terms of what initiatives are out there, yeah, we will make those proposals, but we are not living without a context. Our context is either our subsector, or the industry where we work. So, there must be a constant check between

what we want to do and what our peers are doing; that's leadership - it's constant review; it's stakeholder engagement. We need to constantly, in the cycle, engage the stakeholders. The stakeholders are the employees. The stakeholders are the leadership. The stakeholders are possibly suppliers - anybody who needs to be engaged within the process. There must be continuous engagement of all the stakeholders involved in the process.

For anyone who comes into my office, it's right there on my white board: *"HR is not for nice people."* But you can see that I've got "nice people" in inverted commas, and that's because the job of HR is not to say 'yes' to everybody. The job of HR is not to make everybody happy, otherwise, we should just make an appearance every December 25 or 26 when we become clowns. If you want to make everybody happy, don't come to HR; go be a clown because that's not your job. For instance, employees do not want the salary you are giving them - they want different salaries. Are you going to say "yes" to them every time? Not likely. Are they going to see you as not being nice? Yes, they will see you as not being nice. But are you going to remain professional? Yes, you will. So, your primary calling in this business is not to be a nice person. Again, "nice" is in inverted commas - saying "yes" to all the demands of employees.

Your primary calling is to be professional, be approachable, be warm, listen to people, but there are some things that we will not be able to do. I mean, you will come with 48 things based on affordability, workability, and logistics, but we will do 15. We will not say 'yes' to everything. So, the blend of the job of HR is therefore to be a business partner. You will wear that hat. You must be an employee champion. You must listen and see the ways that you make things a lot better to give the employees pleasurable work experience.

Our job is also to be admin experts. Somebody walks in and says *"I want this", and I say, "oh yes you can have it"*, I still need to go through a process. We need to have all those in perspective. When we say we are in the human resources function, our job is first and foremost, yes, to be human; I agree, but we can't lose sight of the fact that we're not here to make everybody happy. Don't forget the organization is not making money, and people are asking for 'this' and 'that'; how do you balance both? You are in the middle somewhere thinking for the business, thinking for employees, and then, you're thinking how is this going to happen at the end of the day.

HR is also a change agent, and you know what we say about change - not everybody likes change. Not everybody will be on board with you. Some people are going to be switched on immediately, and others will tag along. Eventually, some others will never get there because it's not working for them. So, the job of HR in all of that is, what's going to happen to make sure that the impact of this change or these changes in the organization is/are positive for the employees? But is it going to be positive for all employees at all times? Not likely.

If you want to do things, and you want people to be on board, you are not going to have a 100% acceptance of that initiative, I promise you. Not every time, but the negative impact of change or changes in the organization will be minimized if you take the design thinking approach because you've co-created the solution with them, and therefore, you are just selling back to them what they worked on. The impact of negativity will be reduced.

As for training, everybody wants to go to Harvard for training in basic communication skills. *"Yemi, I want to go and do it in Harvard."* Am I going to say yes to that? I'd say no because I can do it at LBS (Lagos Business

School). I can do it at Workforce Group. I can do it at *"XYZ"* locally, or you can even do it online without going anywhere - given where technology is today. And the guy in question goes on to say, *"The reason I didn't go to Harvard last year is because of Yemi. That guys is not nice."* So, this is the context in which I say *"HR is not for nice people."*

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> **When we say we are in the human resources function, our job is first and foremost, yes, to be human; I agree, but we can't lose sight of the fact that we're not here to make everybody happy. Don't forget the organization is not making money, and people are asking for 'this' and 'that'; how do you balance both? HR is not for "nice" people.**

chapter eight
From Me To You: Navigating Beyond The Challenges

Businesses have taken a hit. We can't run away from that; especially businesses that have to deal with physical contacts, and retail. And for those who couldn't ply the trades online, they've taken a massive hit. I mean, if banks can be saying that, *"Hey, guys, we can't sustain the headcount cost that we have right now"*, you can imagine what then is going on with the SMEs and with family businesses; they largely depend on physical contact. And in the last couple of weeks, we've not been able to make that contact in terms of extending value, product, or services for money. Things are really not fitting for business for many businesses.

So, in rounding up, I just want to give some management advice on how to navigate this period, and also, career advice to those who are employees (individual contributors) on how to perform during this challenging time.

For Managers

• Again, Empathy.
From the employees' perspective, things are really tough. Almost every day, I get calls from colleagues, friends, people who are looking for jobs, and saying, *"Well, Yemi, during this pandemic situation, I lost my job"*, or *"my salary has been cut by 40% or 60%."* I know that a lot is going on right now - I promise you, a whole lot is going on. But like I said, in one of my posts, I think what is required at this point is empathy, and also, sacrifice; empathy on both sides really - on the side of the employer and the employee, and also sacrifice especially on the side of leadership in organizations, and employees as well.

Even if we must make people lose their jobs, for obvious reasons, can we communicate? Can we engage? Can we make it the right time? Everything rises and falls on leadership, everything about leadership rises and falls on communication, and everything about communication rises and falls on timing. If you can get those three elements right about the entire process, we will leave people with some humane feeling. So, even if I know that I'm going lose my job, we can engage properly.

• It Is A New World.
No one alive, or let me say, a few people have experienced a pandemic situation before. The last one we read about happened in 1918. If anybody is alive today, who's witnessed a pandemic, they won't be many. This is not the time to grandstand. Managers, you do not have all the answers. Please, engage with your employees. You will be amazed at the kind of results, answers, and solutions that will come out of naughty issues when you engage with your employees.

• Mental Wellness Is A Big Issue.
When you are on the phone or zoom call, and you are shouting at the employees, you cannot get the best from them. If you want to get the best from your employees, **connect** with them. Before you can connect with their heads to do stuff for you, please connect with their hearts. Be involved in their 'now', rather than just asking for performance.

• Talent Conversations.
These are totally different from what they were before the pandemic. Talents have choices. You need to know that. Be careful of the impact of your daily conversations, and daily transactions with your employees. I am not talking about workers; I mean talents. They

will take your team or your organization to the next level, you need to change your game.

For Employees

• Sense Of Entitlement

Employees must throw it away; that's the reality. I was listening to a management consultant this morning, and he was asking about learning and development - if it's a right or a privilege. Remember, I mentioned that we should train people. From the employees' perspective, we also shouldn't see it as a right. Businesses are not making money, and you are still saying *"send me on training."* Businesses are not making money, and you are saying your salary has not been increased. Businesses are not making money, and we are saying *"forfeit your leave and consider that as part of your leave days because you're home for one month, you are not doing anything anyway"*, but you are saying *"no, I am entitled to my leave days."* This is not the time for a sense of entitlement.

• Empathy

I talked about this from the perspective of the managers, but it must also be seen on the part of the employees. Empathize with the organization. Things have not been very rosy for most organizations. This is the time to lose every sense of entitlement. You know, the current generation is said to be highly entitled; I don't buy that unconscious bias, but that's the general notion around the millennials, that they are highly entitled. But if anyone is entitled about, *"Oh, my salary"*, or *"Oh, my job"*, the truth is, we are living through unprecedented moments in history. Yes, nobody planned for it, but we are planning for the future of work. Even the future we are planning for is nothing close to what we are witnessing right now. This brings me to say that, what

will take us over this generally, on both sides of the divide, will be empathy on both sides, and sacrifice on both sides.

• Value Up

Nobody pays you for anything except the value you bring to the workplace on a daily basis. So, number one, show up, and number two, value up, and then, you can expect value from that ecosystem. With all the drama that has happened in these past few months: salary slash, staff reduction, etc., you either respond or react. The truth is, it has happened. No amount of negative emotions and negative reactions will bring back the job. What to do is within the context of what has happened, and that is asking yourself, *"What next? What can I do?"* And I'm not saying that is easy. Honestly, I totally admit and agree with anyone who's going through this situation right now that it is not easy, but negative actions will not bring back past realities. What we need to do is to respond to the situation by saying, *"What next? What can I do?"*

It is going to be tough for individuals who didn't even plan for surviving a month, or two, three, six months, or one year, because what we typically say when we find ourselves in tough situations is, *"I always have a savings of one year, or six months, that can help me stay afloat before I get another job."* So, for anyone who's not even prepared at all for a month or two, it is going to be very tough.

• Find Support Groups.

This is a time to talk to people. Look for support systems around you. A support system could be a WhatsApp group, for instance, in your profession. A support system could be family. A support system could even be friends, but just look for a support system. It's not easy to always go through these things alone. If you can look for a mentor, if you can trust anyone who's a coach, look for a coach and have

conversations. What you do not want to do is to stay in a state of permanent negative emotions, or negative reactions because, it will blind you from seeing what the options are. This is the time where if you have not built good solid relationships, build them.

From my experience, at the end of the day, it was because I had built some sort of relationship, that helped me get over that hell. Because as I was going through, some people even asked me if I had ambition at all, I must tell you. *"You've been told to go, yet, you're doing this project job as if your life depended on it. Why don't you just find something to do?"* But I was taking my time and I was leveraging on relationships. Now here's what really happened. I left KPMG in 2002, to join this organization that I was talking about later. And then, in 2010, an individual who was in the same department that I left in my former organization gave me a call one day, and said, *"Yemi, we are looking for somebody in a particular client organization. Are you interested?"* And I'm like, *"Are you kidding me? I'm interested. I've been interested since the day before yesterday!"* And that was how the conversation started, and I moved into the job.

For Job Seekers

• Maximize Relationships.
For job seekers, do not rely on going on LinkedIn only to go look for jobs. Do not rely on going to the portals of organizations to scroll and look at vacancies. Solid relationships help for referrals. If you do the job you are doing very well, or what you were doing before you were laid off, you should have built some relationships to be able to say, *"hey, this is what happened to me. If any opportunity comes up, please let me know."* Don't go through times like these alone. The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is today. So, it might be late, but not too late. Today is a time to start it.

Let me make an allusion to isolation. We are just in physical isolation, right? But we are not in isolation right now, are we? We are talking. I'm not sure what part of Lagos you live in, and I'm somewhere in another part of Lagos. We would still be having this conversation if you were in London or me being in Spain, but it's not isolation in the real sense of it. So, make use of available tools and technology to still build your relationships. Say *"hi"*. If you can say *"hi"* to 10 people, and nine people are saying *"Oh, you look pretty"*, maybe there could be one person who would say *"what can I do to help?"* But we can't just sit and think, *"I can't build relationships. I'm not a relationship person."* You've got to start somewhere. You could just call a recruiter and say *"I'm available, if anything comes up."*

However, there's something that happens a lot now that I do not really subscribe to. People go on LinkedIn, and look for the names of influencers or HR people, and the first thing you say is *"Hi, I need a job."* That doesn't work. That is a huge turnoff, and so many people do it. Do not come on LinkedIn and say *"Hi, my name is Jennifer CEO."* And you appeal to pity and say *"I've been affected by the loss of my job. I'm looking for a job. This is my CV."* No. Build a relationship. Even if it's *"Hi. How are you today?"* And then, another couple of days, *"Hi. How are things with you?"* Just build a relationship first.

You can imagine the number of interactions that I might have right now. I mean, with about 68,000 followers on LinkedIn. And I'm sure a couple of those people would be looking for jobs. Why should it be you who is saying *"hi"* to me today that should be my priority, when I have other people who have been with me for three or five years on the same platform? Do not let the job search be the basis of relationships; build genuine relationships. It might seem like a desperate situation; I totally agree and admit. But the point is, let's still apply some level of

wisdom in terms of building that relationship with people.

• Offer Exceptional Value.

I have been talking about this in almost all my conversations online for the last three to four weeks, and it's been around a couple of concepts, with 'value' being one of them. If you do not possess enough value to announce yourself upon arrival, then I'm sorry, we can't help you. Nobody is looking at your certifications or qualifications. At this point, in two, or three minutes of having a conversation with you, let them quickly see that there is some value to be derived from this individual.

We need to do some kind of self-analysis and situate ourselves in the context we have found ourselves right now. If you know that there is a value gap, then do not venture out yet. You need to do some follow up and mine that gap. Understand yourself. everybody is not going to be in the same space, at the same level, or at the same place. What you need to do is understand the value gap.

I always advocate something. I call it 'personal conference'. A personal conference is what you do when you wake up between 2am to 4am, and have a kind of conversation with yourself. It's a conference with self. *"Where exactly am I? Yemi is saying that I should reach out to people. If I want to reach out to people, what am I saying to them? What am I offering the market? I don't have anything, or I have few things. Okay. So what do I need to do?"*

There are so many free programs and free courses online today, that can help us to mine those value gaps. What we need to do is to quickly take advantage of those opportunities, before we venture out to go say, *"I have value to offer."* If you send your CV to me, I have a conversation with you, and I can't sense value in two minutes of

conversation, it's going to be difficult for me to say, *"Oh, I'm going to refer you for a job."* It's going to be. Let all our conversations be valued based, and value is what I am offering in the marketplace. The marketplace doesn't pay for anything else, except value. We are all leaving home every day, or working from home every day, and the driving force behind all activities is that, at the end of the day, you put something valuable on the table of the organization, so that you can get value in return. Before you go to sleep on a daily basis, ask yourself, "what value have I added to myself today, so that I can add value to the ecosystem that I belong to?"

• Be Focused, and Build Expertise.
The individuals that I do not like engaging in conversations, when it comes to looking for a job, are the individuals that, when I ask, *"What do you want to do?"*, and they say *"anything"*. For me, that is a complete lack of focus. The conversation of value cannot start without talking about focus. Do not get ready for anything; get ready for what you are focused on. Get ready. As a matter of fact, you know, the way the human mind works, you would notice that the human mind answers a lot to our focus.

Can you think of the time you bought your first car? You will remember that, the moment you decided that you were going to buy that car, that was the car you started seeing everywhere on the road – because of the power of the mind. So, let your mind stay focused on what you want to derive value from, and be able to get value from as well. If you are in accounting, and you're saying, *"I'll do everything, I'll package my CV, so that if they ask for HR, I'm there. Accounting, Sales manager, procurement, ... I'm there!"* – you will come across as a confused individual! You can only be authentic in a particular field once you have built credibility over time. You have got to be credible, experienced,

technically savvy in one area, before you can say that. When you get to a leadership position, you can switch to anything, because some organizational believe that once you are a leader, or a manager, or a director, you can handle any function. But you have got to build a track record of consistent performance in a particular area or field, before you start saying you are an expert in that area. At times, you probably need to be in the valley before you gather enough strength to climb the mountain. You need to be in that state, and that's the space where you are developing your knowledge, your technical capability, and your experience.

If you do not have a job yet, develop knowledge. If you have been paying attention to all I have been saying here, my words are not centered around 'certificates' or 'certification'; I'm emphasizing knowledge. If you are going to get your knowledge that you can apply from your certification, by all means, do so.

• Self-Branding
To the individuals who already call themselves 'experts' on social media, this is just three years out of the university, or three years with an HR experience, and you are an expert; how did that happen? Be careful who you say you are because, when I see you come through, I am already biased from a point of view of what I know about you. To this, I think we need to move away from organizational branding to self-branding. Do not attach the success of today with where you are; attach today's success to   what you are as a person. We want to identify you with who you are first and foremost, rather than with your organization. Please, go and brand yourself. People want to see what you are talking about. People want to read what you are talking about. It is alright for us to slay on Instagram and Facebook, but it is also important for people to listen to you, and to read your words in a

professional environment. For instance, on LinkedIn, what thoughts are you putting out? That way, you become whoever you want to become without necessarily attaching you to your organization. It's about self-branding.

Again, self-branding cannot be complete without content. Organizations spend millions of dollars every year to differentiate their brands on the shelf. Let's say, beverages - Ovaltine, Bournvita, Milo, etc. I walk into a shop or supermarket, and I'm thinking "Which one should I buy?" Loads of money have gone into that decision making for me to decide what to buy. It's the same thing. Spend time, spend money, and spend resources to develop your brand. That way, when it is time for recruiters to shop, and they see you on the shelf, they will identify you, and buy you as a brand.

There are so many things about self-branding. It is about your daily interaction with people, your communication, emotional intelligence, and about you being positive. It's about so many things. Somebody asked me one time, *"Yemi, you mentioned something about the currency of relationships. How does one spend that?"* And I said to him on LinkedIn, that, *"the daily interactions that you have with people, see them as transactions, so that at the end of every transaction, there is an exchange of value."* People will not forget you in a hurry when you constantly put value on the table of relationships.

> **"**
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About The Author

Yemi Faseun (YF) started his career journey in the HR profession in 1999, joining the firm of Arthur Andersen, now KPMG Professional Services. Yemi's Human Resource experience cuts across the entire HR value chain and he has been a top player in the consulting, banking and telecommunications sectors with over 20 years' experience. Prior to HR, Yemi Faseun had worked in the Academia, Sales and Direct Marketing.

A globally recognized HR thought leader and influencer and a top 50 Personality on LinkedIn with over 80,000 followers and growing, YF (as fondly referred to), is the recipient of multiple awards including PeopleHum Top 200, 2021 Global Thought Leaders, Top 150 Global HR influencers, Tech Time Africa Top 3 Africa HR Influencer, and Best Revenue Sales Supporting HR.

He is an Elected Council Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management.

YF has successfully combined his vast leadership experience, his expertise as a teacher and content creator to share knowledge and positively impact others on digital platforms.

In 2020, he founded 'The Yemi Faseun Network', a community of marketplace professionals and entrepreneurs, with members from multiple countries and diverse sectors to co-share, co-learn and inspire other leaders.

He loves Mondays!