

Empathy matters—appreciating others’ perspectives, tapping into their emotions, and acting based on that understanding matters. Empathy has long mattered in our personal lives, but got short shrift in our transactional, professional encounters.

Empathy mattered as advanced, interconnected technologies increased the pace of change and complexity in business and we had to draw on interpersonal skills working together.

It mattered before pandemic restrictions catalysed greater digitisation that hastened the arrival of the Future of Work. Now, as we shape our future working lives, empathy matters more than ever.

Business has not been personal, almost by definition. It did not need to be when operations were slow, predictable, and involved mostly simple, independent, linear tasks. We could get on with our own work each day by ourselves.

But, integrating more networked, technologically-accelerated operations, customer feedback loops have shortened and updates are needed more quickly. More complicated issues have been arising, requiring closer connections as we work together in teams, bringing different disciplines and perspectives in varying combinations on projects.

Superficial or traditionally formal relationships are no longer adequate for working effectively in groups under these conditions, especially with continuing uncertainties that test and stress us.

It is by integrating empathy practices that we can improve our work environment and interpersonal interactions and achieve sustainable growth for our businesses.

**Make your workplace culture  
one that supports wellbeing.**

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Here are critical ways empathy shapes our future working habits:

## Culture

During periods of great change, a strong corporate culture offers the stable foundation people need to focus on their work and not be distracted by turmoil around them as they iterate and consider next steps forward or potential pivots.

Nurturing an empathetic culture which is open-minded and inclusive creates an environment where employees feel welcomed, heard, valued, and can develop a sense of belonging. People are then ready to engage and trust can grow.

## Connection

Using empathy skills, employees can connect deeply and build relationships based on trust which improves interpersonal dynamics significantly.

When co-workers find common ground, identify mutual interests, and create shared experiences, their ability to appreciate each other's points of view greatly increases.

When colleagues share strong bonds and understanding, they are better able to work constructively, putting themselves on the same side of the table.

## Communication

People from different disciplines spanning generations can work most effectively in decentralised teams across multiple locations when they use empathy skills.

If they lean into conversations and use active listening and open questions to clarify meaning thoughtfully as well as watch colleagues' emotions carefully, they can work together closely to solve the kind of complex problems the Future of Work is challenging us with.

## Creativity

User-centric design-thinking emphasises empathetic understanding to figure out the best product or service based on users' revealed—rather than assumed—desires, habits, and needs.

Empathetic environments are conducive to creative-thinking as safe, trust-based spaces. Participants feel comfortable to take (reasonable) risks, not fearing consequences for failure while empathy allows them to connect with end-users' perspectives to be able to craft relevant new prototypes or upgrades.



**Create a workplace that nurtures  
inclusion and diversity.**

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## Collaboration

Whether brainstorming new ideas, debating strategic plan phases or checking on tactical sales approaches, empathy skills help team members contribute their different points of view in constructive, rather than contrarian, ways.

People build upon, rather than undermine, each other's suggestions fostering wide-reaching exploration of new possibilities and encouraging productive discussion, even in the truncated time periods we can now expect going forward.

## Choices

The Future of Work has accelerated the pace at which we work and the speed with which we must respond to new inputs and adapt to new scenarios, raising the bar for how we react, make decisions, and perform overall.

If empathetic leaders and managers work together with employees to shape new working models—whatever extent is reasonable/possible—for individual and teamwork preferences, greater engagement and 'flow' will be achievable and better results.

## Covid-19

Pandemic legacies will remain as we follow lasting safety protocols and need repeat vaccinations or boosters in months ahead anticipating new variants and waves.

Leaders bringing empathy to teams' interactions will be best-equipped to manage ongoing raised health-related risk levels and concerns as well as notice signals in people's tones or delayed responses and hear their hesitations. These managers

can step in swiftly to address lingering mental health issues.

Businesses will surely struggle if their employees are not engaged and able to respond quickly, if they cannot collaborate and continue to pivot effectively as our post-pandemic world takes a very different shape, with new rules of engagement and operating principles.

Executives and managers must utilise their empathy skills to meet the needs of Future-of-Work conditions, steering their organisations, guiding their teams, and becoming adaptive enough to succeed and grow, no matter what the future holds.

Leaders who understand the strategic and tactical imperative of integrating empathy into the culture, as well as their leadership styles, mindsets, and approaches, will be able to shape their working situations and trajectories.

They will be able to engage, manage, motivate, and support their partly- or wholly-distributed workforce at the pace the Future of Work unfolds before us.

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### **About the author**

Sophie Wade is a speaker, author and authority on Future-of-Work issues. She has held senior management, strategy and finance roles around the world and worked for companies such as IMG and Yahoo.

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