

## Talent Development 48 The Perfect Storm

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Section 3.8 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Future Readiness. Section B states, “Knowledge of internal and external factors that influence talent development, for example organizational/business strategies, availability of labor, developments in other industries, social trends, and technological advances.”

The world learned some amazing lessons on future readiness in 2020 that the framers of the ATD Certification Program could not have dreamed would converge on all of us at the same time. Through incredible personal and corporate struggles, we learned that survival requires us to be nimble and react very quickly to the forces that are around us.

I will describe some of the forces of change as I observed them. Recognize these forces were all external at the start but quickly became internal as organizations tried to invent their way around the obstacles. Let’s take a look at the major forces that impacted 2020 and the first half of 2021.

### The COVID 19 Pandemic

At the start, the pandemic looked like a minor blip on the scale having to do with the health of a few workers. As the number of people in Intensive Care reached the capacity of our hospitals, we realized that the pandemic was real, and it would be the most disruptive force impacting every single organization in the world.

Groups needed to pivot to a configuration where all jobs that could be done from home would be done from home, and jobs that required a person be in attendance had to find ways to change operations to allow protective gear and social distancing. The magnitude of the change was exacerbated by the speed with which all this change needed to be done.

Many organizations went from an in-person environment to a working-from-home model over the span of just one weekend: March 13-15, 2020. As we crawl out of the lockdown, it is still unclear what the ultimate configuration will be. Some hybrid form of operation is expected to continue for many years. It also affects the labor force in many ways. For example, many industries are not able to find enough workers to operate.

In addition, the pandemic caused global supply chain interruptions that created shortages that are ongoing. Many organizations were unable to perform their function because they simply could not get the required parts or supplies. The economic impact of these disruptions is immense and ongoing.

### **Extreme Social Unrest**

The death of George Floyd on Memorial Day, 2020 started an avalanche of protests and marches that is still in evidence, and the fallout is likely to be felt for decades into the future. Our society woke up to recognize that the kind of racial biases that have been the model for hundreds of years were not only unfair but intolerable. Yet, to disentangle the society norms and practices that did not allow true Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is going to take many decades of concerted work and patience on the part of us all.

The ongoing outcome of all this social unrest is that the world is a lot more dangerous for everyone. Homicides have shy rocketed this year, and it will be many years of work and expense to get back to a safer environment. Couple that reality with many new laws and actions that are making it more difficult for the police and less secure for businesses, so the trend is for less rather than more safety.

To have all this confusion dumped onto the society at the exact time when we were vulnerable due to the pandemic was breathtaking.

### **Environmental Disasters**

A third element we had to deal with at the same time was a string of disasters long in the making due to our inability to recognize we have damaged our spaceship to the point that it may be unrepairable. The California wild fires were just one piece of evidence that we are currently out of control and slipping badly. We need to anticipate things getting much worse before they get better.

At least in this area you can see more signs of leaders paying attention and trying to make the necessary changes. It is hard to be optimistic that we can change quickly enough to have a livable world over the next few decades.

### **Out of Control Political Situations**

Simultaneously piled on top of the first three disasters, we have witnessed a melt down of our systems of orderly transition of power the likes of which we have never seen before. I am not going to get political here, but just recognize that the system is seriously broken and in need of some major repair.

### **Widespread Power and Internet Failures**

We have endured wide-spread power and internet interruptions throughout the period. The root cause is twofold. First, since all resources are stretched thin or not allocated in a balanced way, critical infrastructure is bound to suffer lower reliability. Second, cyber criminals have become more sophisticated, so the internet as a place to do business is much more problematical. Ransomware, hacking, and denial of service attacks are bringing down major online service providers and vendors.

## **Conclusion**

For Talent Development professionals to operate in this environment is like trying to navigate in the midst of five tornadoes at the same time. It takes a strong hand and incredible wisdom and patience to do the right things under these conditions, yet we have no choice but to do that.

The worst may be behind us, but it will take decades to unscramble the messes we now have before us. We will never forget the pain and helplessness we all experienced over the past couple years.

*Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online, Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind, and Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.*

