On the Verge: The Future of Work
On the Verge, the Fox School’s flagship research publication, aims to enhance the contributions and impact of the school’s research on society and the world around us by showcasing leading research insights and industry engagement from faculty and doctoral students.

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TECHNOLOGY
Will Robots Replace Humans At Work?
Tuning Out Security Warnings
Where Is Big Data Going Next?

COVER STORY: Emotions at Work
How Different Generations Work on the Go
Keeping Stress at Bay
What Impacts Company Culture?

COVER STORY: Marketing to Millennials
Research in the Real World
Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Decoded
How Women Leaders are Changing Business

The Power of Getting Proactive

COVER STORY: How Mindful Leaders Spark Success
To Be a Credible Leader, Perceiving is Believing

Introducing the Dean of Research

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Temple is a top research university. A leader in education, science, healthcare and the arts, we are the powerhouse that charges the Philadelphia region.

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Established in 1918, the Fox School of Business is the largest, most comprehensive business school in the Philadelphia region and among the largest in the world, with more than 9,000 students, more than 220 full-time faculty and more than 60,000 alumni around the globe.

OFFICE OF RESEARCH, DOCTORAL PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The Office of Research, Doctoral Programs and Strategic Initiatives strives to enhance the reputation of the Fox School of Business and the School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management at Temple University as global leaders in business research and community engagement to better serve our constituents: students, faculty, academic, industry and society in general.

Approved as of 9/12/19.
Our world is facing fundamental changes at a faster rate than ever before as digital innovation and cultural evolution add to the economic and geopolitical factors that have always influenced the market.

Some of those changes clearly show a progression to a more diverse and inclusive business world. Others reveal an uncertain future as the nature of work evolves. Change is often intimidating, yet those same changes that intimidate us have given us the ability to increase value in our world at an inspiring pace.

In this edition of On the Verge, we look at “The Future of Work,” where the Fox School’s research informs us about where we are heading as a society. We examine the role of women leaders, the automation of management tasks and the changing nature of how and where we work.

Our researchers have replaced the prognosticators of the middle ages, using data science to reveal future possibilities. They inform industry and academia about business trends and best practices in a world transformed by digital innovation. These insights present opportunities for our business partners, faculty, alumni and students to shape the future of work and to augment its societal value.

Sincerely,

RONALD ANDERSON, PHD
Dean
Fox School of Business
School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management

FOR OVER A CENTURY, TEMPLE UNIVERSITY’S FOX SCHOOL OF BUSINESS HAS BEEN USING OUR RESEARCH, INNOVATIVE EDUCATION, MARKET-DRIVEN PROGRAMS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES TO ENSURE THAT OUR STUDENTS ACHIEVE THE BEST POSSIBLE OUTCOMES.

As innovators, we know how crucial change is to progress. Our goal was simple: to create a strategic plan that incorporated all our stakeholders’ wishes for the Fox School.

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Together, we will move Fox forward.

For more information or to download the plan in full, visit fox.temple.edu/fox2025.
TECHNOLOGY EVOLVES, THIS QUESTION HAS BEEN ON THE MINDS OF MANY. SOME REPETITIVE JOBS ARE ALREADY AUTOMATED. BUT MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS, WHOSE JOBS REQUIRE HIGHER LEVELS OF COGNITIVE ABILITY, SHOULD BE SAFE—RIGHT?

WILL ROBOTS REPLACE HUMANS AT WORK?

BY: PUJA SHERLEKAR

XUE GUO and ZHI (AARON) CHENG, two doctoral students in the Fox School’s Department of Management Information Systems (Dr. Cheng is currently on the faculty of the London School of Economics), along with Dr. Paul A. Pavlou (former Senior Associate Dean of Research and current Dean of the C.T. Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston), studied how new technologies like TaskRabbit, a leading online platform to find immediate help for everyday tasks, have affected managerial-level jobs.

In analyzing data from the housekeeping industry, Guo and Cheng found a 2.9 percent decrease in the total number of offline full-time workers after the platform’s introduction—a drop mainly driven by a decrease in the number of frontline supervisors and managers.

EFFECTS OF DIGITAL MANAGEMENT

The evolution of the gig economy—and its subsequent digital platforms—has created new opportunities for those searching for work. Gigs allow people to be more selective about the employers they want to work for, receive relatively higher pay and choose from a field of work options. Even employers enjoy the flexibility of recruiting extra help as needed, reducing fixed labor costs and opportunities for utilizing more specialized skills.

So how do these platforms change the rules of the workplace, especially for management?

To answer that question, the researchers integrated data from TaskRabbit, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau, aiming to better understand the impact of the gig economy for routine cognitive workers versus manual workers.

“After the entry of TaskRabbit,” Guo, “we observed a 5.5 percent decrease in first-line managerial jobs.” Manual workers, such as cleaners and janitors, were not as affected. This suggests that the platform mostly affected middle-skill management, whose primary tasks were to arrange and schedule service in the housekeeping industry.
MANAGERS MOVING TO TASKRABBIT

TaskRabbit reduced the demand for offline managers in the industry by directly connecting some of the tech-savvy cleaners to their clients. According to Guo, the detailed information about clients’ requirements and workers’ qualifications “allows them to connect with each other at lower search costs.”

Not all managers who left the industry were replaced by robots, however. Supervisors who were skilled in using technology could move to these digital platforms, giving them more freedom in an online role. “On TaskRabbit, managers could recruit and supervise regular cleaners more efficiently,” reasons Guo. “The platform also provided more flexibility and autonomy, incentivizing them to move online.”

LABORERS GRAPPLE WITH TECHNOLOGY

The researchers found that TaskRabbit increased the productivity of manual workers by efficiently planning schedules, monitoring their performance and solving disputes, subsequently driving market demand. The platform also attracted workers of different skills and backgrounds while increasing labor supply and accessibility by reducing the barriers of entry to get a job.

Laborers could also take advantage of the options for flexibility and mobility. “We observed that, even though the number of jobs has reduced, we could see an increase in self-employed workers,” says Guo. “Later studies may look at the actual wage differences, but TaskRabbit can support the option of self-employment of both managers and laborers.”

LEARNING TO KEEP UP

Thanks to technological changes like these, the dynamics of the traditional workplace are continuing to shift. Generalizing to other industries, Guo mentions that these platforms increase productivity and allow for more efficient business models, but may come at a cost to the less computer literate.

The researchers, however, are positive about this emerging economy in the future of work. “The barrier to entry of TaskRabbit is not very high,” says Guo. While this skills-based technology change is happening in the workplace, it can create new opportunities—particularly for those entrepreneurial workers willing to learn.

GIG JOBS TO THE RESCUE

FINDING IT HARD TO GET A FULL-TIME JOB WHERE YOU LIVE?
GIG PLATFORMS MAY BE YOUR BEST BET.

When a local area experiences an economic crisis or unemployment shock, Kevin Hong, PhD ’14, notes that people turn to gig platforms as their safety net. Hong, an associate professor of information systems at Arizona State University, analyzed the data from Freelancer, a leading crowdsourcing marketplace website for short-term jobs, and other publicly available sources such as unemployment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, alongside fellow alumni Nina Huang, PhD ’17, and Gordon Burtch, PhD ’13. They found that the number of residents active on gig platforms increased by 20 percent when the area experienced an economic slowdown.

WHAT MATTERS MOST?

HERE’S WHAT HONG SAYS ARE THE FACTORS THAT MOST ACUTELY AFFECT THE SWITCH TO GIG PLATFORMS

> Nature of the Industry
When faced with job loss, workers in the information data and technical services sectors were more likely to switch to gig platforms.

> Availability of Tangible Resources
Uber and Airbnb require that service providers have access to cars and housing, which affects the likelihood of workers opting into the market.

> Demographic Features
Regions with a younger, more female and more highly-educated population that have reliable internet access are more likely to go for gig jobs following unemployment shocks.
We get dozens of digital notifications every day. From text messages to calendar reminders, privacy permission requests to software updates, our reactions are near-automatic each time: dismiss, snooze or remind me later. Why do we let these important notifications pass us by?

“Our brains are wired to tune things out over time,” says Anthony Vance, director of the Center for Cybersecurity at the Fox School. It often has to do with memory: “We saw it last time, so we don’t have to scrutinize it so much this time,” he explains. “Sometimes we remember something more than we actually see it.”

Vance, who studies cybersecurity as an associate professor in the Management Information Systems Department, is concerned with how quickly people are willing to swipe away important security notifications. Unfortunately, it’s a habitual behavior we all learn as soon as we are old enough to use a computer or tablet. For example, pop-ups explaining a new software update are not usually intrusive enough to stop us from finishing our email.

“The thing is, software updates fix security vulnerabilities that hackers know about and can take advantage of,” says Vance. “As soon as Apple or Microsoft publishes these security updates, the whole world knows what needs fixing. Hackers start writing attacks to take advantage of these holes.” That means the longer we wait to update our devices, the more susceptible our devices are to hacking.

To investigate how to stop us from ignoring important updates, Vance and his colleagues experimented with changes in the design of security warnings. They added visuals like a triangular yellow “warning” symbol, a red background, a “jiggle” animation when the warning appears and a dynamic zoom that increased the size of the warning.

In the first part of the experiment, Vance tracked users’ reactions to the varied designs of notifications through fMRIs and eye-tracking. The work was unique in that it tracked the changes in these reactions over the course of five days, while most fMRI experiments only capture a single session. The design changes seemed effective. “Those treatments sustained attention across that whole week,” explains Vance, meaning that the users were less likely to ignore those warnings, even when repeatedly exposed to them.

The researchers followed up this lab experiment with a field study. Over 100 participants were recruited to evaluate apps on, unbeknownst to them, a fake Android app store. “These were people using their mobile devices in everyday life,” says Vance. “We measured their actual behavior. Out of a list of 10 apps, they were asked to download, install and evaluate three.” The researchers randomized the permission warnings—as well as the visual displays—on each app. The warnings ranged from the innocuous, like connecting to the internet, to the outrageous, like “record microphone audio at any time.” The participants needed to decide whether or not to risk downloading the app.

“The people who saw the variations in warning designs had more secure behavior over time,” says Vance. “These designs are more resistant to habituation, which is tuning things out.” By the end of the three-week study, nearly 80 percent of those who saw messages that change their appearance in dynamic animations were still adhering to safe-security behavior, compared to only 55 percent of those who saw static warnings.

Vance and his research team shared their findings in their paper, “Tuning Out Security Warnings: A Longitudinal Examination of Habituation Through fMRI, Eye Tracking, and Field Experiments,” published in MIS Quarterly last summer.

“It’s not entirely our fault. Our brains are working against us to make good security decisions.”

However, this research demonstrates there is a clear opportunity to change behavior. “Employers and designers of software need to be aware of this and design their systems so that they work with the way the brain works and not against it,” says Vance. Based on this research, he suggests using innovative and novel designs to ensure that users are taking note of important notifications—like asking people to use unique swiping patterns or smash virtual glass with a hammer.

Vance and his team received a grant from the National Science Foundation to continue this research; the next step will be understanding how habituation to messages generalizes across platforms. For example, your phone gets notifications all the time and you learn the automatic response. “But when you get a rare security message, even if it’s on a different platform, we respond similarly with the same instinctive ‘dismiss,’” explains Vance. “Our question is: With all these notifications that we’re barraged with, do they make us less able to respond to a rare security message that actually matters?”

As more systems become automated and intelligent devices more prevalent, these human decisions—what to ignore and what to act on—become more important. “The danger is that this can desensitize us to things that really matter,” Vance warns. With more research, Vance hopes we can move away from automatic reactions to notifications and become more conscious in how we can protect our cybersecurity.

“Our brains are working against us to make good security decisions.”
WHERE IS BIG DATA GOING NEXT?

BIG DATA IS A CATCH PHRASE EVERYWHERE IN THE BUSINESS WORLD, BUT THERE ARE A FEW SPECIFIC SECTORS WHERE THIS REVOLUTION IS MAKING AN ESPECIALLY BIG IMPACT: INFORMATION SYSTEMS, OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT AND HEALTHCARE.

That’s why SUBODHA KUMAR, the Paul R. Anderson Distinguished Professor of Marketing and Supply Chain Management at the Fox School, turned his attention to these areas. While big data experts across the board have breakthroughs in their individual fields, Kumar’s research focuses on the importance of sharing these advancements, as well as the data and systems that made them possible. Cross-pollination of ideas will be the key to future progress, according to Kumar.

The insights Kumar gleaned from his analysis of the existing academic research in these specific sectors informed his predictions and recommendations for how businesses might harness big data in the future. “The whole idea is that there have been a lot of discussions and a lot of research about how big data is impacting industry, but less attention has been paid to how all the different work in big data fits together, how it is connected,” says Kumar.

For this research, Kumar picked three areas where some of the most interesting and innovative developments in big data are happening. These are areas where massive amounts of data aren’t simply being collected, but that data is also being analyzed and put to use. Take healthcare as an example: As entities across the healthcare space, such as hospital systems, begin to combine their data sets, you can create more intelligence and make better inferences.

“But whenever you have data from many sources, you need smarter systems to read all this data and make sense of it. How can we create algorithms to help doctors make better diagnoses? That requires new and different thinking,” says Kumar.

As researchers learn how doctors use an enormous database of cancer patients worldwide to settle on effective treatment, more quickly, experts in the information systems space are racing to find effective ways to work with the massive flood of data like text, photos and video generated by social media use. Meanwhile, operations management experts perfect the algorithms needed to detect fake online product reviews.

“In different industries, people are very siloed. Healthcare people are only worried about healthcare,” says Kumar. Competition has made firms secretive, reluctant to share and combine their data and methods, but this fear often does more harm than good, according to Kumar. “We really need to learn from each other. What would happen if Amazon were more open to learning from how hospital systems use big data and vice versa?”

To that end, his research synthesizes what is already known from research in these three key areas to create a framework for thinking about big data going forward and how these disparate learnings and datasets can be put together for the greater good. “Our research shows that even direct competitors can benefit from sharing data,” says Kumar.

He points out that as data collection devices (including smartphones, smart speakers like Alexa and wearable devices like Fitbit) proliferate and more data-producing machines infiltrate everyday life, business opportunities and challenges will grow. It’s only a matter of time before most people live with smart refrigerators that track your calories and driverless cars that know your daily routine and pinpoint your real-time location.

Unless everyone interested in big data learns to share and solve problems together, missed opportunities will continue, costing firms time and money. “Right now a lot of the data being generated from social media and other sources is not being collected or analyzed in a way that makes it meaningful or useful,” says Kumar. His research could change that.

Kumar outlines a proposed framework for mapping big data applications and insights across industries in his recent research paper, “Emergence of Big Data Research in Operations Management, Information Systems, and Healthcare: Past Contributions and Future Roadmap,” published in the journal Production and Operations Management. “The framework essentially provides a breakdown of different topics that have been investigated and what could emerge because of new advancements,” explains Kumar.

Looking to the future, Kumar sees some specific subareas of the domains he studied where big data will make an even more significant impact and improvements in business. His proposed future roadmap points to cloud computing, the internet of things and smart cities, predictive manufacturing and 3D printing, and smart healthcare as the likely places big data will flourish most dramatically in the years to come. The possible developments have the potential to change the quality of life for people around the world.

As boundaries between these once discrete domains continue to fade, big data emerges as a powerful common denominator. Up until now, the focus has been on how to get more and more data. But, according to Kumar, the focus must shift into how this data can be combined and analyzed to make sense of it. Without context, the data is little more than ones and zeroes.

“This research is about how we can generate value for the whole society from this data by collecting, analyzing and sharing data,” says Kumar.
CULTURE

16
EMOTIONS AT WORK

18
HOW DIFFERENT GENERATIONS WORK ON THE GO

20
KEEPING STRESS AT BAY

22
WHAT IMPACTS COMPANY CULTURE?
EMOTIONS AT WORK

A CALL FOR CHANGE
Not all emotions at work lead to discord, says Geddes. “Psychological research demonstrates that expressions of anger to management in any form—whether it be in respectful complaints or in emotional outbursts—is healthier and more productive for both the worker and the workplace overall.”

So what happens next? The researchers advise that companies build a culture of open dialogue within their organizations to promote expression up and down management lines. Nonhierarchical, team-based structures, leadership’s encouragement of meaningful debate and clear channels for expressing opinions all help employers address emotions while the employee is still in the workplace.

Eisenstadt and Geddes also suggest that the court system rethink its implementation of the existing retaliation doctrines. They propose that the judiciary take an approach that considers the circumstances that led to retaliation and view the scenario from all relevant perspectives, not just the employer’s.

“This more global approach would undoubtedly create a greater sense of security in employees,” says Eisenstadt.

REATIONS VS. RETALIATION
In the face of perceived discrimination, employees may turn to the courts for help in resolving disputes. However, Eisenstadt argues that current legal frameworks may negatively affect employees’ willingness to speak up in the judicial system. Currently, judges use the following two problematic legal doctrines that disincentivize employees from making any complaints—thus costing companies.

A CYCLE OF DISCONTENT
When employees suppress anger at work, it not only affects their mental well-being but also their attitudes—often resulting in lowered productivity.

“When employees fear the consequences of retaliation by management,” says Geddes, “they tend to either suppress it by keeping silent, or express their frustration to their peers, who usually have no power to respond or effect change.” These negative discussions often spiral into increasing discontentment among employees that impacts the overall health of the workplace.

LEORA EISENSTADT, assistant professor of legal studies, and DEANNA GEDDES, professor of human resource management at the Fox School, delve deeper into these emotional situations in their interdisciplinary studies. The researchers discuss the implications of expressing anger at the workplace and highlight two problematic legal doctrines that disincentivize employees from making any complaints—thus costing companies.

“IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING.”
AS INTUITIVE AS IT MAY SEEM, SPEAKING YOUR MIND IS HARD—ESPECIALLY WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF AN OFFICE ENVIRONMENT. MOST EMPLOYEES FACE THE FEAR OF RETALIATION AND THE SOCIAL COSTS THAT COME WITH SPEAKING UP TO MANAGEMENT IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS.

WHEN EMPLOYEES SUPPRESS ANGER AT WORK, IT NOT ONLY AFFECTS THEIR MENTAL WELL-BEING BUT ALSO THEIR ATTITUDES.
How Different Generations Work on the Go

For many, remote work is a normal occurrence. A 2016 Gallup poll found that 43 percent of working adults spent at least some time working from home. With advancements in technology, cloud-based file sharing and storage, and demands for more flexibility, it’s a trend unlikely to stop anytime soon.

Sandra Webster, DBA ’17, knows more than most about flexible work arrangements. First of all, she negotiated her first such job situation in 1981, decades before it became a common practice. She also recently completed a dissertation on the subject. Webster’s work explores the tools that make remote work possible and how Millennials and Baby Boomers—two very different generations—use them.

An alumna of the Fox School’s Executive Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) program, Webster became interested in studying flexible work arrangements because of the things it made possible in her own life. Early in her career, when she worked in marketing for American Express, she wanted to get her undergraduate degree but couldn’t afford to stop working to study. “I tried night classes, but that never worked. My job was demanding and I often worked until midnight,” she recalls.

Still, she continued asking how she could work and go to school at the same time when she spied a weekends-only degree program offered through Marymount College in Tarrytown, New York. “It was perfect. I just needed Fridays off.” Not only did Webster manage to obtain that flexibility for herself at a time when it was unheard of, but she also got a study commissioned internally that looked at flexible and remote work. The results were so impressive—the remote workers produced more, better quality results in fewer hours—that later in her career Webster worked on high-profile projects staffed exclusively by work-from-home employees.

Since Webster left American Express to run her own companies, she’s always offered employees flexible work arrangements, and her current and past employees were her first sources when she began compiling data for her research for her DBA dissertation. She also tapped her larger professional network to circulate surveys that asked Baby Boomers and Millennials how they use technological tools when working remotely.

One of the things she found upends the way companies have long done business. It used to be standard that a company have a contract with a specific technology company to supply employees across the board with the same devices. “Those days are gone,” says Webster. “You can’t have millennial employees working with client information on their personal MacBook, but if you give them a Dell laptop, that’s exactly what they’ll do.” Another difference that emerged between the generations is that millennials like to do a wide variety of tasks on mobile, while baby boomers want to work on a laptop.

Her research suggests that for a happy and productive staff, one that adheres to best practices, companies need to give individuals the tools with which they are most comfortable. She suggests giving employees the freedom to conduct virtual meetings via Webex, Skype, GoToMeeting, Join.me or FaceTime. “It costs more upfront, but you get more out of your investment when you give them the thing they’re used to and they can run with it,” says Webster.

Webster also conducted interviews as part of her research. She used NVivo software to analyze and draw conclusions from her largely text-based data.

Her research also suggests that not every employee benefits from a flexible work arrangement. Some workers struggle without the social interaction, structure and supervision offered by the traditional in-office arrangement. But, surprisingly, generation isn’t a reliable indicator of whether an employee is right for remote work. “It’s more a personality type,” says Webster.

Workers who are susceptible to the isolation and depression brought on by working at home see their productivity drop to near zero as they squander work hours on social media and other online distractions. According to Webster, those workers often self-select into traditional work environments over time.

Webster still believes that, for the right people, flexible work arrangements create opportunity and boost a business’s productivity and earnings. The learnings from her research shed light on how to set both companies and employees up for success.
There were no differences in either the employees’ investment in their work and degree of creativity when working from home, at the office or in a combination of the two settings. However, Vogel says, “we found significantly higher levels of stress and lower levels of positive emotion when employees worked at home.”

Why would employees feel more stress when working at home? “There could be several factors,” says Vogel. “But our research suggested the strongest factor was that people are more psychologically attached to home when they are at home.” For example, many employees who are working remotely may find themselves distracted from their work to-do lists by their personal tasks. Imagine trying to work next to a giant pile of laundry—for some, that is hard to ignore.

Unsurprisingly, the same was true for those who brought their work home with them, mentally or physically, after leaving the office. Employees who emphasized time in the evening to recover from work and engage with their families reported lower stress levels than those who did not.

This study supports the notion that working at home versus in the office does not impact an employee’s ability to be creative and engaged in their work, but it does suggest that employers and companies should exercise remote work options mindfully.

“Flexibility to work remotely is an important benefit that fulfills employees’ need for autonomy,” says Vogel. “However, these findings bring a level of nuance to the conversation.”

Companies are feeling the pressure to use remote work opportunities to satisfy employees. But how does working from home affect our productivity, creativity and stress levels?

“Flexible work arrangements are popular, but can often lead to higher stress,” warns Ryan Vogel, assistant professor in the Fox School’s Department of Human Resource Management. Vogel conducted a survey of over 500 U.S.-based employees of a multinational software corporation. He asked each employee to respond to a short questionnaire four times a day for three weeks, seeking to understand how their creativity, engagement and stress varied throughout the day and in different working environments.

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WHAT IMPACTS COMPANY CULTURE?

DIANA KYSER, DBA ’17, HAS PLAYED NEARLY EVERY POSSIBLE ROLE ONE CAN IN BUSINESS. EVEN WITH JOBS LIKE PROGRAMMER, MARKETING MANAGER, CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE, CONSULTANT AND COO UNDER HER BELT, SHE WAS NOT SATISFIED WITH HER SCOPE OF KNOWLEDGE. TO CONNECT HER PRACTICE TO THEORY, SHE DECIDED TO PURSUE AN EXECUTIVE DOCTORATE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (DBA) FROM THE FOX SCHOOL.

Over the course of her career, Kyser found herself at companies with a variety of leadership styles. She noticed that company culture often manifested itself as a reflection of the founder’s personality—for better or for worse.

When it came time for Kyser to decide on a dissertation topic for her DBA, she wanted to use research to investigate her experiences in the workplace in order to better understand the link between founder personality and organizational culture.

USING DATA TO INVESTIGATE REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCES

“I have spent equal parts of my career in businesses that were co-founded by me and those that were founded by others. In my own businesses, I felt comfortable and fit in. In the ones that were founded by others, I often did not. I noticed the impact of the founders’ personality on the company culture and sometimes it was very negative,” Kyser explains. “By exploring this in my DBA and researching my dissertation, I was able to understand and put names to all the things that I had been feeling all along.”

Kyser’s research used ethnographic tools, interviews and survey data to explore how founder personality and organizational culture is linked at four firms in a variety of industries. She then used a 54-item Organizational Culture Profile to assess cultural factors such as adaptability, integrity, collaboration and more in a larger sample of founder-led companies. The data she uncovered both supported and contradicted predictions from established models of organizational behavior.

NEW DISCOVERIES IN COMPANY CULTURE THEORY

Kyser’s research, highlighted in her dissertation “Through the Looking Glass: Company Culture as a Reflection of Founder Personality in Entrepreneurial Organizations,” found that companies tended to hire (and be more successful with) employees that exhibited complementary personalities to that of the founder, rather than those with overlapping traits. That is, organizations often advertently or inadvertently hire people who have strengths and skills that are unique to them and are lacking in the founder.

Kyser suggests an alternative mechanism linking founder personality to organizational culture, finding that employee personality mediates between founder personality and organizational culture, rather than simply reinforcing it. Contrary to much theory, employee personality often trumps founder personality when determining culture, and established theories might conspire to create a culture that escapes the influence of the founder.

LARGER POTENTIAL IMPACT

Managers and consultants, take note. This research finds that, unless managed explicitly, employees might complicate efforts to create the kind of culture a founder might want to create. To the extent that collective personality shapes culture and executives hire complementary personalities, not clones, founders could find themselves working in a culture of their employees’ making, not their own.

“Organizational culture is so personal,” Kyser notes. “Each company has its own DNA, and no specific approach is a perfect fit. In the future, I want to build on this research and develop a model for where the founder can, based on his/her own personality, understand what type of employees will best enable them to build their business culture and their vision.”

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Visit fox.temple.edu/dba to learn more.
“Nano-marketing” is more than just a buzzword—it’s a way for companies to capitalize on the current trend of personalized and authentic marketing.

As the Millennial generation has grown—both in size and purchasing power—to be the largest demographic segment in the country, companies are trying hard to gain their attention. “As a whole, this group of 80 million prefers photos and mini-videos that are visually appealing and can be processed quickly,” says Jay I. Sinha, associate professor of marketing and supply chain management at the Fox School. “That is part of the reason why we’ve seen a tremendous surge in the popularity of visual platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest and YouTube, among others.”

Together with Thomas Fung, assistant professor of instruction, Sinha advises the “Right Way to Market to Millennials” (as seen in their blog post of the same name in MIT Sloan’s Management Review).

Who are micro-influencers?

It may seem like everyone is Instafamous these days. Micro-influencers are social media personalities who have cultivated their defined brand and fan base, typically between 1,000 and 100,000 people, with very specific areas of focus. For example, Melissa Alam, BBA ’10, a brand strategist, shares her recommendations for food and drink locations around Philadelphia. She has cultivated relationships with companies like Starr Restaurants and Drink Nation to arrange giveaways of gift cards and event tickets for her 11,000 followers on Instagram. “I’ve been hired as an influencer and worked with many large brands,” says Alam. “I share all sides of my life so that people can relate to me both online and offline if they meet me in person.”

“Micro-influencers bring credibility and authenticity,” says Fung, “typically due to their extroverted nature, relatability and genuine passion in some niche field.” In Alam’s case, her followers may see her as a real person with insider knowledge and honest advice. “The internet is full of people showing off lavish lifestyles or reaching unattainable goals for the average person,” says Alam. “It’s so important to stay genuine, authentic and true to yourself and your personal brand if you’re trying to attract an honest following.” The grassroots feeling of this kind of marketing allows companies to address the unique needs of individuals through their relationships with micro-influencers.
ADVICE TO COMPANIES
So what do companies need to know to take advantage of this new kind of marketing?

> 1. Micro-influencers have their own brands and followers with very specific interests. “They provide opportunities for companies, big and small, to reach out to narrow and often difficult-to-access sub-populations,” says Sinha. For example, he shares that GE used micro-influencers to help find and recruit female technology specialists for the company.

> 2. Micro-influencers are accomplished and personable storytellers. Millennials relate well to storytelling. “The best micro-influencers bring in their own personal narratives that mesh well with the brands they endorse,” says Fung. Micro-influencers have been able to build up their own personal brand by leveraging this skill, so companies should encourage sponsored influencers to incorporate their products or services into their own authentic narrative.

> 3. Micro-influencers are not direct marketers. Traditional marketers may feel that the sponsored content is not coming across in an obvious way. But with micro-influencers, their endorsements should never feel forced. “Micro-influencers have finessed the subtle ‘nudge’ into an art form,” says Sinha. He notes that many influencers will refuse to accept relationships with brands or companies that are contrary to their own beliefs or interests, which would damage their credibility with their followers.

Beware of inauthenticity

“Young, creative micro-influencers know their audience well.”

BEWARE OF INAUTHENTICITY
The biggest pitfall companies should avoid is appearing inauthentic. Millennials are discerning and skeptical consumers who will turn away quickly from a brand or company that they feel is trying too hard or selling out. “Young, creative micro-influencers know their audience well,” says Sinha. “Let them guide the positioning of the product.”

By diligently finding the right micro-influencer to sponsor, companies of all sizes can cultivate marketing relationships that are interactive, personalized and authentic with the millennial generation.

RESEARCH IN THE REAL WORLD

While research experts like Jay I. Sinha and Thomas Fung, professors in the Fox School’s Department of Marketing and Supply Chain Management, are studying how companies are innovating to reach millennial audiences, these three Fox alumnae are living it.

The On the Verge editorial team caught up with these micro-influencers to talk about their experiences developing a personal brand, engaging their niche audiences and working with companies.

Melissa Alam
Digital & Experiential Brand Designer
Food, Drink & Events Influencer

How have you developed your personal brand?

I learned at an early age that in order to stand out, I need to embrace my weird. The same concept goes with social media. I try to represent an authentic version of myself through my content—from the late nights working on my business to the goofy sides of my personality to the days where I’m feeling stressed or anxious.

What skills or qualities do micro-influencers need to successfully engage with their audiences?

Micro-influencers may doubt their impact because of their smaller audience. However, your followers trust what you have to say and often see you as a “friend” through social media. Micro-influencers should provide valuable content to their audience, engage both online and offline at events or meetups, and respond back to comments and DMs to further build those relationships. Don’t be afraid of reaching out to a brand that you truly believe in to collaborate!
ON THE VERGE

WHAT COMPANIES OR BRANDS HAVE YOU WORKED WITH?
I’ve worked with Temple University, Philadelphia Zoo and several other companies to promote employment opportunities, identify talent and develop candidates. I’ve had the opportunity to promote beauty brands such as Shea Moisture and Mielle Organics. I am still developing my influential approach with beauty brands as I believe my look is an important part of my professional approach. I not only enjoy sharing how I manage my long and curly hair but also how I navigate my professional look through natural hairstyles.

WHY DO YOU CHOOSE TO WORK WITH A COMPANY?
I choose to work with a company after reviewing and researching what a company stands for and how it relates to my goals and standards. Some of the questions I ask are: Does it align with my personal brand? Does it align with my purpose? Will it provide the opportunity to gain exposure or more networks? Is there a shared focus or a focus that does not deter from the brand I’ve established?

WHAT TIPS CAN YOU GIVE COMPANIES ABOUT WORKING WITH MICRO-INFLUENCERS?
Build genuine relationships with influencers and make them feel as if they are a part of the team. As influencers, we are able to integrate both the voice of the brand and our own; within that dynamic, we are agents of improvement, growth and purpose for the companies.

WHAT TIPS SHOULD OTHER MICRO-INFLUENCERS KNOW?
Narrow your content focus so that you can become an influencer with a niche. Lifestyle influencer is just too broad these days, we’re all living our own lifestyles, so what really sets you apart from someone else? Finally, don’t take numbers and growth so seriously. Social media can be detrimental to one’s mental health at times so it’s important to set your own boundaries, not compare your hustle to someone else’s highlight reel. Have fun with it!

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WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION DECODED

BY: ANNA BATT

SABRINA VOLPONE, PhD ’13, is an organizational diversity expert, researching topics of diversity and identity within the context of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation and immigrant status. Since graduating from the Fox PhD Program, her work has been published in peer-reviewed journals such as the Journal of Applied Psychology, Personnel Psychology, and Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes.

The On The Verge editorial team had the opportunity to chat with Volpone about how she got started researching the experiences of traditionally underrepresented employees, how a more diverse workforce requires organizations to adapt and how they can do better.

HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION?

When I was growing up in Texas, I was not exposed to much diversity. The Dallas-Fort Worth area was very different 30+ years ago than it is now; the only people I knew were white and Christian.

My mom, who had a business degree in accounting and worked for a huge company in Texas, told me a story about how she got fired because she was getting sick at her desk too often when she was pregnant. Her company shrugged it off, saying that they assumed that once she became a mother she would be leaving her job anyway. Hearing these things opened my eyes to small-town values—taking care of your neighbors, for example—being pushed aside when stigmatizing factors were introduced.

Then, when I was working toward my degrees, both my bachelor’s from the University of North Texas and PhD in human resource management from the Fox School, I wanted to do something meaningful that could speak to people’s experiences at work. The research I was seeing did not capture what was going on for women, people of color and other disenfranchised groups.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION? HOW DOES YOUR RESEARCH INCORPORATE BOTH?

Diversity is more than just checking a demographic box. To really leverage the benefits of diversity we have to talk about inclusion, a separate but related topic. The difference has often been illustrated in the following quote from Verna Myers, the vice president of inclusion strategy for Netflix: “Diversity is being invited to the party, and inclusion is being asked to dance.”

In a recent research project, my team went back to basics to investigate how organizations actually define diversity. There are a host of organizations that would like to improve how they are managing diversity because they are facing lawsuits, or simply because they want to be more strategic about managing human resources. There is an increasing need for organizations to collectively rebuild and expand the way we think about these topics.

For example, we looked at the way a few Fortune 500 firms were defining diversity and found that only 38 percent had established definitions on their websites. A large number of those who did so listed standard descriptors typically found on HR hiring paperwork that are based on Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws, stating that the company does not discriminate based on age, sex, race, etc. Other companies take a different approach, however, and use language that extends beyond “legal” terminology.

In my work, I am trying to illustrate that diversity and inclusion must work hand-in-hand. The diversity element establishes the organizational environment and the legal mandates required by law. Inclusion facilitates a climate where employees feel valued and included as a result of their unique characteristics. This is important because, as some of my other research shows, leveraging diversity in this way can result in financial gains. We found that one small change in a diversity definition can relate to more than $2 billion in current profits and more than $1 billion in profit growth. Thus, being inclusive when defining diversity results in increased financial outcomes for companies.

HOW DOES INCLUSION IMPACT COMPANIES?

To explore the importance of inclusive policies and procedures in the workplace, I was part of a research team that examined the experiences of women who breastfeed in the workforce. We interviewed women in the morning, afternoon and night to see how the quality of their breastfeeding space throughout the day improved work outcomes. The data and quotes from the women illustrated a powerful point: The legal definition of what must be provided (a space to pump that is not a bathroom and is shielded from view) will not make a satisfied, productive employee. When companies provided more than the bare minimum for breastfeeding mothers, we noticed an increase in their work goal progress and their breastfeeding goal progress while also seeing improvements in their work-family balance satisfaction.

HOW DOES A MORE DIVERSE WORKFORCE AND CONSUMER BASE REQUIRE ORGANIZATIONS TO ADAPT? HOW ARE BUSINESSES INNOVATING AROUND MAJORITY-MINORITY, WOMEN, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, MILLENNIALS AND OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS?

Some companies are not, and their workplace cultures and even financials are seeing the impact of that. Many organizations that are not evolving along with their workforce may cease to exist in 10 to 20 years because of their inability to strategically manage their human resources in a way that captures the diversity of their employees.

For example, in a paper that my co-authors and I recently published, we looked at the hiring process for people with concealable stigmas. Specifically, we examined the relationship between applicants disclosing their hearing disability during the interview process and whether or not they received a job offer. Changing our policies and procedures throughout each human resource function to be inclusive of employees with invisible disabilities is an example of adapting from systems that, historically, have been focused on accommodating employees with visible physical disabilities.

But those who are thinking about the lived experiences of employees, they create policies and procedures that capture that. They are also being strategic through all of their human resources functions—hiring, training and promotions—and are threading the importance of diversity and inclusion practices through all the ways they do business. Executives are making sure that employees are taken care of and heard. In order for companies to survive, these considerations will become a requirement.
HOW WOMEN LEADERS ARE CHANGING BUSINESS

BY: PUJA SHERLEKAR

A BOARD OF DIRECTORS PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN DETERMINING THE SUCCESS OF ANY ORGANIZATION AND IS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR MAJOR STRATEGIC DECISIONS. HOWEVER, WOMEN ARE OFTEN UNDERREPRESENTED IN THESE TOP MANAGEMENT ROLES. COMPANIES WITHOUT WOMEN ON THEIR BOARDS ARE LOSING OUT—NOT ONLY ON TALENTED LEADERS, BUT ALSO ON DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES OF BUSINESS. THIS RAISES THE QUESTION: IN WHAT WAYS DO COMPANIES WITH WOMEN ON THE BOARD PERFORM DIFFERENTLY THAN COMPANIES WITH ALL-MALE BOARDS?

Prior research suggests there are gender differences in risk-taking decisions, with many researchers supporting that women are more sensitive to risk than men. However, OFRA BAZEL-SHOHAM, DBA ’17 and research assistant professor in finance at the Fox School, reconsiders the implications of this conclusion.

Bazel-Shoham argues that female leaders change the way business is being done in her paper, “The Effect of Board Gender Diversity on R&D.” She looked at boards’ decisions regarding high-risk, high-reward investment decisions, as well as their professional behavior, to understand the differences in outcomes that gender-diverse boards produce. Her research won the Best Paper Award at the 2018 Engaged Management Scholarship Conference, hosted by the Fox Executive DBA Program last September. The award was sponsored by Indiana University’s academic journal Business Horizons.

As a proxy for analyzing risk-taking decisions, Bazel-Shoham used choices around research and development (R&D), often a risky yet highly rewarding investment. “It requires upfront resources and has a very low probability of success,” she says.

Bazel-Shoham, who is also the academic director of the Fox Part-Time MBA—Conshohocken, collected data from CEOs and board members in 44 countries and over a period of 16 years. The gender disparity was already obvious—as she notes in her sample, only 2 percent of all CEOs and 9 percent of all board members were female.

The study found that while the direct correlation between the number of women on boards and the number of investments in R&D was negative, women were more likely to focus on monitoring performance, which ends up incentivizing risky but data-driven decisions. Bazel-Shoham says, “As female leaders put more emphasis on monitoring, gender-diverse boards were able to quantify and measure their decisions better than all-male boards.”

Bazel-Shoham proves this argument by analyzing the behavior of female directors who are most often outnumbered by their male counterparts. Her interviews with female leaders suggest that being in the minority puts more pressure on women to not make mistakes and rely more heavily on data-driven decisions.

She elaborates, “We realized that female directors felt they were ‘under a magnifying glass’ most of the time and were judged more stringently than their male colleagues.” This made them make more conservative decisions, which usually translated into making lesser high-risk R&D investments. However, teams that quantified their results better supported performance-based compensation where incentives are measurable and dependent on the actual outcome rather than on vaguely defined promises.

Organizations often use performance-based incentives to motivate managers to make riskier but potentially more profitable long-term investing decisions. Bazel-Shoham says, “We observed that such remuneration systems encourage CEOs and senior management to engage in more R&D activities.” With women involved, boards more often supported this form of compensation, in effect encouraging managers to make more of these investments. Bazel-Shoham found that these actions successfully mitigated women’s effect of being more risk-averse.

Besides indirectly increasing R&D spending, Bazel-Shoham notes that having even one woman on the board of directors significantly influences how the board behaves, the decisions it makes and their resulting outcomes. To illustrate this, she quotes the experience of a male CEO of a large educational organization. “The women directors read all the materials ahead of time, have specific questions and are more professional than the others,” he says. “They have changed the organizational culture of the board. The men, in turn, have started to prepare themselves better as well.”

Underrepresentation of women on boards of directors continues to be a pressing issue to shareholders and society at large. However, organizations are slowly understanding the strategic importance of leveraging a more diverse top management team. With rapidly changing market dynamics, leveraging the power of gender diversity is beneficial for the long-term success of businesses.

This article was originally published in December 2018 on Idea Marketplace, the Fox School’s online hub for research news. For more, visit fox.temple.edu/research/idea-marketplace.
THE POWER OF BEING PROACTIVE

HOW MINDFUL LEADERS SPARK SUCCESS

TO BE A CREDIBLE LEADER, PERCEIVING IS BELIEVING
THE POWER OF BEING PROACTIVE

Almost everyone who works has a boss. It’s no secret that the quality of this relationship can have a big impact on the lives of supervisors and employees alike. The best bosses provide mentorship, training and support for their direct reports, facilitating professional growth and success for their team. But is it possible for employees, through their actions on the job, to impact their bosses as well?

Soojung Han, a PhD candidate in the Fox Department of Human Resource Management, thought so. During her five years as the first woman engineer at a South Korean petrochemical company, she had an outstanding relationship with her boss, who gave her an unusual amount of autonomy, respect and trust.

“I knew it was out of the ordinary from talking with my friends about their jobs, and I also knew it was important,” says Han. Every time her supervisor acknowledged her work or granted her additional responsibilities, she wanted to do an even better job. The experience had such a profound impact on her that when Han decided to pursue her PhD, she chose to focus her research on just this style of empowering leadership. Her personal connection to the subject is perhaps one reason her scholarship had been so exceptional.

Han and her colleagues’ recent paper, “Examining Why Employee Proactive Personality Influences Empowering Leadership: The Roles of Cognition- and Affect-Based Trust,” explores this territory. The research was published in May in the prestigious Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology. A publication of that caliber is a rare achievement for someone who is still a student. This fall, Han assumed a faculty position at Cal State Los Angeles.

Employee proactivity is often the catalyst for supervisors to grant workers greater autonomy and more responsibility, which increases employee engagement, productivity and job performance. Given the importance of these self-starters in the workplace, the proactive personality type is of great interest to researchers. However, to date, most of the research has focused on employee-centered outcomes, such as the relationship between proactive personality and career success. But the complex ways that an employee’s proactive style may affect his or her supervisor has been largely overlooked by scholars. That’s why Han decided to turn her attention to how these proactive employees affect their bosses.

“The proactive personality type is defined as someone who makes changes in their environment, so we suspected that these employees might change their supervisors as well,” she says. She gathered more than 100 pairs of supervisors and employees and surveyed them to assess the qualities in question: proactive personality, empowering leadership and supervisor trust. Via questionnaires, employees rated their own proactive personality traits and their boss’s leadership style, while leaders scored their direct report’s level of trust in an employee.

Han’s research examines two types of trust typical of work relationships: cognition-based trust, which is based on logic and facts regarding an employee’s work responsibilities, and affect-based trust, which boils down to whether or not a supervisor personally likes his or her direct report.

To test their hypotheses, Han and her co-authors used statistical models, including hierarchical multiple regressions, to analyze the data. The team found that supervisors were more trusting of employees with proactive personalities and thus were more likely to empower them.
“It’s risky for leaders to let employees make decisions,” says Han. “What if they lack skills or, worse, what if they take advantage of less supervision and more autonomy?”

Her work shows that, in spite of the risks, the payoff can be significant for an organization. Empowering leadership pays tangible dividends. “Previous research has supported that empowering leadership is associated with a host of positive outcomes, including increased psychological empowerment, task performance and citizenship behaviors for both individuals and teams,” says Han. She recommends that companies work on building both cognitive-based trust, through formal skill-building training, and affect-based trust, by taking the time to plan and invest in social events and team building.

This specific research paper gives the edge to affect-based trust—likability. But Han cautions that the two types of trust are more interrelated than they may first appear. “Though it seems like affect-based trust shows a stronger effect, its impact on empowering leadership is less likely to occur when cognition-based trust is low,” says Han. “Therefore, both cognition- and affect-based trust are important to induce leaders’ empowering behaviors.”

Her research also speaks to the importance of improved screening of prospective employees. It pays to be able to identify new hires who will consistently demonstrate proactive behaviors at work, not just say they will during a job interview. Han believes tools like personality tests and questionnaires that assess proactive traits specifically would be helpful as companies seek to fill their ranks with these go-getters.

“As we can see, their proactive style benefits not only the employees themselves, but their supervisors, too,” says Han.

FOR MANY, IT’S THE MOST DREADED DAY OF THE YEAR: THE PERFORMANCE REVIEW. “YOU SUPPOSELY FIND OUT WHAT YOU DID WELL OR YOU DIDN’T DO WELL OVER THE COURSE OF A YEAR. AND YOU MAY SAY TO YOURSELF, ‘WELL, GOSH, IF YOU THOUGHT I WAS NOT PERFORMING WELL, WHY DIDN’T YOU TELL ME NINE MONTHS AGO?’” EXPLAINS MICHAEL RIVERA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AT THE FOX SCHOOL.

There’s got to be a better way, thought Rivera and his colleague TONY PETRUCCI, associate professor of human resource management. Together, they founded DevelapMe, a startup that offers a new way to give and receive digital, real-time feedback. Its core product is an app that allows colleagues—supervisors and direct reports as well as all other co-workers—to provide feedback on competencies and behaviors to one another in real-time, named or anonymously, whenever they want to, using their mobile device.

During the past five years, Rivera and Petrucci noticed the landscape changing. “There is a major generational shift,” says Rivera. “By 2020, a majority of people in the workplace will be millennials and Generation Z. These groups have a strong affinity toward technology and use it in all aspects of their lives.” They saw companies shifting away from the annual performance appraisals, and while big data was having an impact on other strategic decisions within an organization, no one was using it to capture the behavioral interactions between people, which can be mined for strategic insights.

Rivera and Petrucci, as well as another colleague Subodha Kumar, outlined the findings of their research in the paper, “Are Annual Performance Reviews Outdated? An Empirical Analysis on Continuous Real-Time Mobile Feedback in the Workplace,” which is currently under peer review for publication in the journal Information Systems Research.

USING REAL-TIME FEEDBACK

1. Relationships matter. The digital feedback supplements face-to-face interactions. It isn’t meant to substitute for conversations, but rather enhance them.
2. Evaluations get better. The app trains everyone to give more constructive feedback over time. “It sets the right tone for everyone to feel safe in these exchanges and become better feedback givers, receivers and seekers,” says Rivera.
3. Create a culture of feedback. Data from the app can reveal an organization’s feedback culture, which can be the first step toward enhancing performance.
RAVI S. KUDESIA, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AT THE FOX SCHOOL, STARTED TO CULTIVATE MINDFULNESS FOR STRESS REDUCTION. BACK WHEN HE WAS WORKING AT A FAST-PACED, HIGH-PRESSURE STARTUP, HE BEGAN A MEDITATION PRACTICE HE MAINTAINS TO THIS DAY. IT LED HIM TO YEARS OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON THE SUBJECT.

In a recent research paper, “Leader Mindfulness and Employee Performance: A Sequential Mediation Model of LMX Quality, Interpersonal Justice, and Employee Stress,” published in May in the Journal of Business Ethics, Kudesia examines the complex ways an individual’s relative mindfulness, loosely defined as the ability to pay attention in the present moment, can have ripple effects throughout an organization. The paper explores the relationship between mindful leaders, leader-member exchange (LMX, a measure of the quality of interaction between a supervisor and employee) and the employee’s job performance.
THE MAJORITY OF PAST RESEARCH has focused on how the quality of mindfulness benefits the individual person. While it’s certainly relevant to firms how mindfulness might make any single person less stressed or more productive, it’s also worth examining its potential impact on interpersonal relationships and interactions that are central to every kind of organization. This gap in the research is one thing that motivated Kudesia to explore the topic in his paper.

Kudesia suspected that more mindful supervisors would have better-performing employees, because they had more positive relationships with their bosses and felt they were treated with respect and consideration. Moreover, he thought the employees would perform better by two measures: in-role performance (executing their core job responsibilities) and extra-role performance (going above and beyond in their work).

MINDFULNESS—ESPECIALLY FROM LEADERS—GIVEN HOW SCATTERED THEIR ATTENTION CAN BE, IS A RESOURCE.

To test their hypotheses, Kudesia and his co-authors conducted two field studies of supervisor and employee pairs. They first assessed leader mindfulness, LMX and employee in-role as well as extra-role performance. The second study builds on this by also evaluating perceived workplace fairness and employee stress.

The work is an analysis of responses to online questionnaires completed by participating pairs of supervisors and employees plus trios of supervisors, employees and peers, who were questioned about the employee’s extra-role job performance. Leaders’ relative mindfulness was measured with an assessment that asks how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements including, “I rush through activities without being really attentive to them” and “I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I’m doing.”

LMX quality was evaluated by asking employees questions including whether they would defend their supervisor’s decisions even if he or she wasn’t present. Employee performance was evaluated by their bosses directly as well as by their peers.

The research revealed that workers who report to mindful leaders excel at their jobs compared to those with less mindful supervisors. The research finds that this is likely because of reduced workplace stress and a feeling that the boss’s treatment is fair.

What accounts for the reduction of stress on an employee when it is a boss who’s mindful? Kudesia thinks it’s probably due to the positive feeling you get from those high-quality LMX interactions. More absentminded bosses may make their direct reports uneasy because they are distracted. These are the people who check their phone while you’re having a conversation or type emails as you ask a question. Absentmindedness comes off as disrespectful and does not contribute to positive relationships. Mindful bosses, more fully present, are able to give their employees the full measure of their attention.

Kudesia’s survey questions didn’t ask how participants achieved mindfulness, but meditation practice is a common way people develop the quality. “We cannot say whether the more mindful bosses mediated regularly, but there is evidence that people who meditate more regularly respond higher on our questionnaire,” he says. Positive social interactions and challenging tasks are other ways to boost mindfulness on the job, while busyness, office politics and red tape breed mindlessness at work, according to Kudesia.

“Mindfulness—especially from leaders—given how scattered their attention can be, is a resource. So if I’m giving you my time, my actual mental focus where I’m not thinking about something else, I’m just interacting with you directly, that might be a really valued thing,” explains Kudesia. Norms of reciprocity likely come into play, with employees wanting to show their supervisors the same kind of respect by performing at a high level. It’s a kind of resource exchange.

How mindfulness contributes to a sense of interpersonal justice is less straightforward, particularly because the mindfulness in this study isn’t attached to religious or moral tradition. Kudesia posits that leader mindlessness might be contributing to unfair practices. After all, it’s difficult to be circumspect and just when many things escape your attention because you’re scatterbrained. On the other hand, leaders who are mindful seem to engage in more interpersonally fair behaviors. This could be because mindfulness supports clear thinking and good judgment, according to Kudesia.

DUE TO THE GROWING BODY OF RESEARCH showing how mindfulness contributes to happier, healthier and more productive workplaces, Kudesia expects the practice to become more and more integrated into the way modern companies do business. In the future, this might take the form of firms investing in mindfulness training for staff or even creating positions like chief mindfulness officer to ensure the organization as a whole operates more mindfully.

Yet the rising popularity of this ancient practice also brings up anxiety for Kudesia as well. “There’s always this fear that the fad is outpacing the research on this. What I would like to see, to the extent that companies are using this, is that they’re utilizing mindfulness training as something that has a relational aspect to it, something that’s part of a web of social relationships and not just in a single person’s mind,” he says. He also worries that having a corporate mindfulness program in place might mean no other measures are put in place to combat stress, remedy low pay or improve working conditions.

“Mindfulness isn’t a replacement for other things. It isn’t a magic bullet. Companies should see it as part of a set of interrelated practices that all facilitate healthy organizing,” says Kudesia.

“We cannot say whether the more mindful bosses meditated regularly, but there is evidence that people who meditate more regularly respond higher on our questionnaire.”
THE POWER OF PERCEPTION

Andersson’s previous research started by identifying behaviors that make employees cynical towards their leaders. She identified two key factors in credibility: perceived competence and perceived trustworthiness. Both elements are dependent upon outsiders’ viewpoints—whether or not they believe in the leader’s skills, knowledge, values and dependability.

“These perceptions are extremely important in the digital age,” explains Andersson. With so much information available to be collected and scrutinized, from social networks to artificial intelligence, people may have concerns about who is in control. “Employees want to know that those who are managing them and assessing their performance are competent and trustworthy.”

After having started the research around the question of cynicism, Andersson reversed the point of view. She and her colleagues conducted research studies, gathering feedback from blue- and white-collar workers located all over the country over the course of three years, to identify specific actions that leaders can take to improve credibility with their employees.

BUILDING CREDIBILITY, PROJECTING COMPETENCE

Leaders who emphasize the future were seen as the most competent by their employees. “Creating clear plans for future success is different than simply stating a strategic vision or setting performance targets,” Andersson notes. “It involves mapping out, in detail, how the organization will achieve its goals.” Keeping on top of industry trends, predicting upcoming changes and having clear ideas of how to respond to both are other ways for leaders to demonstrate their visions for the future.

Employees value leaders who demonstrate a focus on organizational outcomes but who also attach those outcomes to an individual’s job. “It’s important to convey that an employee’s work affects the whole organization,” Andersson advises. “Employees attribute competence to leaders who can make those connections.”

Competent leaders also look for ways to improve their organization’s operations. “You can consider eliminating unnecessary reporting structures, reducing spending waste, establishing new roles or investing in technology that improves business effectiveness,” Andersson says.

She also advised against putting too much emphasis on credentials. “In our meritocratic world, we love credentials—but people in our study did not equate credentials with competence. Leaders had to prove it through their actions or behaviors, not their resume.”

PROVING TRUSTWORTHINESS

The most important step to take when trying to project trustworthiness is speaking and acting consistently. “To begin, it means making decisions that aren’t contradictory,” says Andersson. “But it also means behaving in a way that aligns with promises, explicit or unspoken.” Leaders should deeply understand all of their stakeholders’ needs in order to prevent potential conflicts.

According to the research, employees were more trusting of leaders who valued them. “While you may prioritize your employees in your words, make sure that employees are recognized,” says Andersson. “Show how important your employees are through things like rewards and plum assignments.”

TO BE A CREDIBLE LEADER, PERCEIVING IS BELIEVING

As the way we do business evolves faster than ever, leaders need to be prepared. Employees look to their senior executives for confidence, guidance and direction—especially in times of change. But being a leader means nothing unless people choose to follow, and people generally choose to follow those in whom they believe. “It all hinges on the leader’s credibility,” says Lynne Andersson, associate professor of human resource management at the Fox School.
INSIGHTS FOR BETTER LEADERS

How can senior executives apply this research on the job? Andersson notes that leaders should be cognizant of two main points. First, the good outweighs the bad—sometimes. “When regarding competence,” says Andersson, “people tend to weigh positive information more heavily than negative information.” This means that one competent action may be a good signal of reliability to a leader’s employees. However, the opposite is true for trustworthiness; one dishonest statement or unethical action can make employees lose faith.

Second, restoring credibility is difficult, but not impossible. “To regain lost credibility, leaders must reestablish positive expectations,” Andersson advises. “This means they must repeatedly engage in trustworthy acts, since a single act won’t mean much.” By focusing on the actions outlined by Andersson and her colleagues, leaders can slowly build back that relationship.

“EMPLOYEES WANT TO SEE CONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE WALK AND TALK.”

CREDIBILITY IN ACTION

Actions speak louder than words, and according to Andersson, these are the most important things leaders should do to increase their credibility among employees.

WHAT DO COMPETENT LEADERS DO?
- Emphasize the future
- Prioritize employees
- Take action and initiative
- Communicate effectively
- Gain knowledge and experience

WHAT DO TRUSTWORTHY LEADERS DO?
- Communicate and act in a consistent manner
- Protect the organization and employees
- Embody the organization’s vision and values
- Consult with and listen to key stakeholders
- Communicate openly with others
- Value employees

IN JULY 2019, SUDIPTA BASU WAS APPOINTED THE FOX SCHOOL’S NEW ASSOCIATE DEAN OF RESEARCH AND DOCTORAL PROGRAMS. WHAT’S HIS TAKE ON THE ROLE OF RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE OF WORK?

Q: WHAT ROLE DOES RESEARCH PLAY IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS?
Most business schools promote faculty and student research to increase our shared knowledge. Business schools’ missions usually shape the type of research they support. At research-intensive schools like the Fox School, rigorous empirical and theoretical research takes prominence. At teaching-oriented schools, pedagogical and practice-oriented research are valued more than theoretical research.

Q: WHERE IS THE LARGEST INTERSECTION OF RESEARCH AND INDUSTRY IN THE FUTURE OF WORK?
Researchers dream up the technologies, products, business models and organizational forms of the future. Every technological advance frees people from doing some kinds of routine work, which are delegated to animals, machines and now computers. The freed-up workers can better use their minds to make higher quality and unique products and services that were previously too costly to market.

Q: HOW CAN COMPANIES WORK WITH FOX SCHOOL RESEARCHERS?
Companies can learn from the new ideas developed byFox School researchers and conversely inform them about changing realities in the marketplace. Ideally, we would develop a virtuous cycle wherein firms identify emerging problems, researchers propose alternative solutions, firms try these out in practice and observe how well they work and provide feedback, which in turn lets researchers refine their prescriptions.

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