Emotional Intelligence, Artificial Intelligence or Both?

A Futurist Discusses the Key Skills and Technologies the Hybrid Workplace will Demand of Leaders

CBRE

2020 has been a year of extremes. COVID-19 has upended traditional work arrangements across the globe, forcing the quick adoption of new technologies, along with business strategies centered around resilience.

CBRE Host's Global Product and Technology Lead, **Brennan McReynolds**, sat down with author, keynote speaker and futurist, **Jacob Morgan**, to discuss how leadership, the employee experience and the workplace will evolve.

BRENNAN
MCREYNOLDS

JACOB
MORGAN

On Leadership

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS: You write and speak a lot about technology and leadership. In your book, *The Future Leader*, you write about mindsets of effective leaders. Are the mindsets you write about still applicable for the COVID and post-COVID era?

JACOB MORGAN: The book came out right before COVID, a couple of months before it became a global pandemic, and originally when I did the research for the book, I was looking at the future leader and asking, "How are things changing, and what should we be doing now to prepare for the next five or 10-plus years going forward?" As a result of COVID, the timeline shrunk. In other words, the future leader has become the present leader. The skills and mindsets I talk about in the book have been amplified so much that they're essential for leaders around the world to practice now—specifically, the mindsets around putting people first, self-awareness and empathy. I don't think there are any new skills or mindsets COVID has forced on leaders, but the big difference is the timeline and necessity for practicing those skills and mindsets is now much more urgent.

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS: Are there skills you'd say need to be prioritized?

JACOB MORGAN: It's hard to say if there's a particular mindset or skill that's dominating the others, because I'm seeing how all of them are becoming more relevant. I talk a lot about the skill of Yoda, which is emotional intelligence, empathy and self-awareness. That has taken center stage because when you jump on a call with your employees now, the first thing you need to do is ask them how they're doing, if they're safe, how their families are doing. You need to have a lot of empathy and self-awareness instead of just jumping in and talking about sales numbers. But at the same time, the other skills are also relevant. I also talk about the skill of the technology teenager. Now, everyone is basically their own IT department. You've got to set up your own cameras and mics, and you have to diagnose your own WiFi issues. Everyone needs to be a little more tech savvy and digitally fluent.

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS: This is really the first time we've had five generations in the workplace with different leadership styles. What are you being asked when you're out in the market speaking with people about multiple generations and the leadership qualities and styles you mentioned?

JACOB MORGAN: This speaks to the importance of having more of these human mindsets and skills like empathy inside our organizations, because you're working with people who aren't like you. They came from a different generation, a different decade, another part of the world. Maybe they were raised without the technologies we now have. Having that empathy is very crucial. One of the things I love about these skills and mindsets is that they hold strong in any environment, any scenario, for any employee of any generation.

On Technology

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS: We're all adapting to the new role of the workplace. How do you think workplace technology is helping organizations address the acceleration we've just experienced?

JACOB MORGAN: It's kind of crazy to think what would have happened if we didn't have these technologies. Let's say COVID happened a decade earlier. We still had some of these technologies, but not nearly the same type of broadband we have now, and certainly not to the same scale. If COVID had happened a decade or two earlier, I think the results would have been far more catastrophic and disastrous. Businesses would have literally just shut down. What are you going to do, get hundreds of thousands of employees together on phone calls or send out massive email chains? Things just would not have gotten done.

I think technology has actually saved a lot of businesses and created a lot of innovation. Even small businesses have been able to use technology to make it easy to order and customize everything online. This wouldn't have been possible without technology, and businesses are still largely able to run because of technology. If we didn't have these platforms, employees wouldn't be able to communicate and collaborate, sales wouldn't get done and I don't think we'd be able to engage as effectively with our customers. I think far more small businesses would have struggled, and a lot more people would have lost their jobs.

Also, this idea of digital transformation—what companies have been trying to do for the last ten years, they've actually been doing in the last ten weeks. The speed at which organizations are using, embracing, and implementing new technologies— software and hardware—is creating a more distributed and connected workforce, enabling new things like real-time recognition and feedback and giving employees the opportunity to have flexible work arrangements. Overall, it's going to help create a more engaged, productive and efficient workforce, which honestly benefits everybody.

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS: What's the next innovation you're most excited about around the future of work?

JACOB MORGAN: The easiest one to point to is AI and its ability to remove and eliminate more mundane jobs and tasks, allowing employees to focus more on the human and creative aspects of work. I'm definitely excited about that, but it's also important to note that when I talk about automating a job, I don't necessarily mean replacing the person. One person has many jobs. In my job, I have to do paperwork sometimes. Contracts, proposals, NDAs. If I didn't have to do paperwork, I could spend more time on stuff like this: having conversations that I genuinely enjoy.

One of the mindsets I talk about in the book is the mindset of the chef, which means there are two ingredients that leaders need to balance: technology and humanity. Sometimes you see organizations go off the deep end with technology, where they have so much of it that they lose connectivity. Everything is like, "Oh, you have a question someone can answer? You've got to take this assessment, then you've got to play this game, then this bot is going to ask you some

interview questions, then you've got to record something via video, and then it's going to be analyzed by this algorithm. And then if you get through all those steps, then *maybe* you'll get to talk to a human being." That's a little much. We should focus on technology and use it, but let's remember that business is still about relationships and human beings, and we need to make sure we have that balance between the two.

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS: When I think about the role of our technologies in the workplace—we do the background work to help people make the choice of whether to go into the office, how to get there, where to sit—a lot of what we're working on is a combination of employee experience and space optimization. If I say, "This group of colleagues should all go into the office today," and the technology suggests we all sit together, it's not just creating a great experience for us as a team, it's also optimizing the floor plate in the background in a way that allows us to shut down a neighborhood or floor, turn the energy off and not have to run the HVAC on the other side of the building. There's an algorithm here that looks at dynamically stacking spaces in a way that optimizes experience at an employee level but at the same time really drives some efficiencies that haven't been seen before in real estate.

JACOB MORGAN: Even with something like that, there's always a balance. Maybe I got in an argument with my significant other before I came into the office, and I just want to be alone today and not around other people, but this bot is telling me I've got to go sit next to everybody. Where you sit is a very personal thing, but this piece of software is telling me where I have to sit? There's a fine line between productivity and efficiency versus taking away decision-making from a person for something so basic as where to sit. I'd imagine it's an interesting but hard problem to solve.

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS: Of course. When you think about all the variables, ultimately it should be a personal choice around what I choose to do. We study a lot of that and ask ourselves what's the impact if someone opts against a recommendation to work in a specific place or sit somewhere? What are the downstream implications to the rest of my coworkers if technology recommends a seat to me, and I say, "I don't want that seat." How does that impact everybody else?

JACOB MORGAN: It's important not to remove the choice. I think once you remove choice from people, that's when you get a lot of pushback. If it's a recommendation for productivity, you don't have to do it, and that's okay—but we think it'll be really great for your team if you do.

On the Workplace of the Future

JACOB MORGAN: A lot of people are asking, "Is the office going to die?" or "Is the office going to disappear?" I certainly don't think so. It's very easy in the short term to look at it in a state of panic, but at the same time, if you look at next year or the year after that, I think it's safe to say that by and large, a lot of employees are still going to be working from an office. That doesn't mean we won't have more workplace flexibility—we will for sure. We'll have a lot more workplace flexibility, and more people will certainly be working remote, but is it going to be every employee around the world? No. I think we're still going to have offices.

After the vaccine gets widely distributed, I think a lot of people will still be living in cities like New York and San Francisco. These hubs will keep booming and thriving. A lot of employees and leaders I talk to want to go back to the office. They're excited to see their coworkers again. Especially if you have an office that creates a great experience for your people, why wouldn't you want to work from a place like that? Where you have all these technologies, you have food, great coffee machines—you have all the conveniences you need to be effective in the work you're doing, and you get that vibe, that energy. There's still a very crucial role for workplaces to play, and I'm not a skeptic or a pessimist who thinks offices are going to disappear and that all these companies are just going to vanish.

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS: The workplace is no longer about the physical walls, it's more about the willingness of the employee to engage with their employer, with their colleagues or with one another. There is a team of us solely dedicated to understanding, elevating and connecting the workplace experience within CBRE through services and technology. We approach technology by questioning, "Can and should you deliver a more omnichannel experience that gives employees choice, and what are the factors to consider and offer to employees when recommending whether they should go into the office?" Safety concerns, traffic concerns, project deadlines, types of meetings, others who will be in attendance that day, all contribute to helping employees decide whether face-to-face is necessary.

JACOB MORGAN: There's still a lot of value in seeing people face-to-face. The trust, building relationships, connections, brainstorming, creative problem solving, strategizing, the ability to have serendipitous conversations and interactions. Those things are really valuable for organizations when it comes to innovation, trust, psychological safety and creating a place where you feel like you genuinely want to be there.

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS: Employers and workplaces need to facilitate employee growth, even with limited physical interaction. What's your perspective on corporate responsibility and its evolution?

JACOB MORGAN: It's definitely become more front-and-center. You see organizations creating programs around how to homeschool your kids if they can't go to school, how to practice meditation, how not to get stressed out. These are deeply personal things, and an organization typically wouldn't play a role there. But as a result of COVID, organizations are trying to play a more integral role given their understanding that there is this big integration of work and life; they're kind of becoming the same thing.

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS: We've been thinking about this for years. How can we approach people like people and, through technology, help make their experience, and how they feel about their work experience, more engaging, turnkey and positive? Then COVID hit, and now the question is, how do we get people back to the office safely, but also make sure they're confident about that return so they can be as unencumbered as possible, especially given everything else we've all got going on? There's complexity there about communicating who should come in, when, where, how and why, and what everyone should expect when they get there—which are all things we didn't necessarily have to think about a few months ago.

All that said, it definitely feels like many of us are looking forward to a restored level of normalcy pretty soon. Do you have any parting thoughts on things to keep in mind so we can all be better in the new year and years to come—anything else you feel the pandemic has really brought to light?

JACOB MORGAN: You can't rely on IT to meet all your technology needs. It goes to show the importance of everybody being that technology teenager, being tech savvy and digitally fluent, because technology can literally save your career or your job.

It's also shown the importance of putting people first, being more vulnerable, being more empathetic, more of that emotional intelligence stuff we talked about earlier. We can challenge conventional workplace practices and still be okay. We don't have to be in an office all the time. We can be in virtual or remote environments and still function, because we have the right technology to do so.

I think this pandemic has shown that when we are presented with difficult challenges, we can come up with opportunities. And if something is a priority, it'll get done.

I think this is a very telling time for leaders who want to make change inside their companies. If you want to make change, you can do it.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

JACOB MORGAN is an author, speaker, trained futurist and one of the world's leading authorities on leadership, the future of work and employee experience. He has four bestselling books: *The Future Leader*, *The Employee Experience Advantage*, T*he Future of Work* and *The Collaborative Organization*. In addition, Jacob provides advisory and thought leadership services to various organizations around the world, and he is the founder of The Future of Work University at FutureOfWorkUniversity.com, an online education and training platform that helps individuals and organizations thrive in the rapidly changing world of work.

BRENNAN MCREYNOLDS is the Global Product & Technology lead for Host, a proprietary service offering for corporate occupiers and institutional property investors designed to meet the rapidly growing demand for enhanced employee experience in the workplace. Led by people and enabled by technology, Host allows both occupiers and investors to manage workplace needs through intelligent, AI-driven experiences.

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