No, It Isn't Just More Overhead, It Is Techno-trauma!

"We, the unwilling, led by the incompetent, have been doing the unbelievable for so long with so little that we are now going to attempt the impossible, with nothing!"

--VARIOUS ATTRIBUTIONS

For more than forty years, the two guiding themes in manufacturing have been *increase productivity* and *reduce headcount*. These two themes are guaranteed to create more value for the shareholders, at least for a while. Certainly, this works when business is good. When business is not good, the burden lies heavy on the employees who are left. "You'll have to pick up Joe's and Sally's duties as well as your own. It's just the way things are."

We have all been in that position. You can manage to get as much of the other person's job done as you can, do yours, and try to be okay with it, and hope that your management understands that you are doing the best you can. The other choice is to leave.

Several million people died worldwide during the Covid-19 pandemic. That's a lot of "Joe's jobs" that the people who are left are being asked to pick up the slack on. Is there any wonder why so many people are leaving their jobs?

People report feeling under more pressure at work and at home, and that pressure can lead to poor performance, health, and mental-health issues, and potentially, violence. Fear of the future is a real thing and has produced a kind of hyper-partisan tribalism that is expressing itself in everything from politics to music to marketing and business operations. In a discussion recently with analyst Dan Miklovic, Disney's problems in Florida came up as an

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example of how this hyper-partisanship is affecting business operations. Disney makes money from creatives, and creatives tend to the left in the political and social spheres. Florida is one of the most hyper-partisan "Red" states, many of whose population are violently opposed to the positions espoused by many creatives. This leads to a sense of anomie and a cultural disconnect.

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This disconnect is directly linked to fear of the future in a sort of feed-forward/feed-back loop. The more disconnect, the more fear, and the more fear the more the feeling of disconnect is strengthened. If Disney caters to their artistic talents, they run the very real risk of censure or worse from the state, and boycott from the guests.

This partisan divide isn't just political. Because the causes are social, the divide is also social as well as political. This exists within manufacturing organizations too. Remember that the first mass murders were called "going Postal"?

Add to this the lack of stability in world affairs that we discussed last month, and you have an entire society on quicksand.

Now add to *this* a rapidly changing technological basis for manufacturing and for our lives in general, and what you have is what psychologist and analyst Joy Ward calls "Techno-Trauma." A great example of this is the evolution of the cellphone from a simple wireless voice communication device to a handheld computer with great processing power and the ability to interface with computers and devices all over the world thanks to the Internet. The rapidly changing technologies of the modern business environment (or home environment for that matter) are giving many people a sense of anxiety that increases as the rate of change of technology increases. Anxiety breeds anger and distress. Anger breeds violence.

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It is as though society is inside a screw press. As the screw is tightened, the poor, the different, the marginalized are squeezed out. This is not limited to People of Color or immigrants. Whites with lower educations, and rural whites are in many ways just as marginalized and feel squeezed out too. Remember the chanting of "Jews will not replace us" in Charlottesville. Fear breeds anger, anger breeds violence. None of this is good for a manufacturing environment that seeks stability above all else.

When societies are under pressure, they devolve into *ingroup* versus *outgroup*. This is apparently hardwired behavior, according to Joy Ward. She says that her research found this behavior in everything her group studied, from SUV choice to abortion to politics, not to

mention race and gender. It may seem silly to be so invested, but people have been getting into fights over which car brand is better, Ford or Chevy, for nearly a hundred years now.

In the workplace, we are beginning to see *ingroup/outgroup* behavior concerning remote working. We saw it in the masking controversy during the pandemic and are continuing to see it as the pandemic continues to make comebacks. It is hard to imagine a less stable environment in which to conduct business or do manufacturing.

The devolution of society is increasing the turn to authoritarian governments, because the authorities promise stability and a return to a simpler life where things were better, greater. In *The Shockwave Rider*, a science fiction novel by John Brunner based on Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*-- a great work of futurist thought, the Techno-Trauma can be seen, felt throughout. Brunner's novel is eerily prescient. He uses the metaphor of celestial mechanics to describe coping with a constantly increasing rate of change of society and technology. "You are in circular orbit around a planet. You are being overtaken by another object, also in circular orbit, moving several km./sec. faster. You accelerate to try and catch up. See you later, accelerator. Much later." To make sense of Techno-Trauma, slow down.

> **"…You accelerate to try and catch up. See you later accelerator. Much later."**

There is always the creeping sense that some people are wired in better than you, that they know more about what is happening than you, and that they are profiting from that knowledge more than you are. And so, the anxiety increases, and the pressure increases.

The modern economy, and even modern society simply cannot be run without the Internet and myriad private networks. Companies are rushing to develop "digital twins" of both assets and processes because information is so critical to business success. And ask any teenager how important the Internet is to them. Being an "influencer" is a common life goal among them. The worm in the apple is that whole groups of people are dedicated to stealing from you or pushing you in an emotional direction you might not want to go.

The beauty of the Internet is based on you getting timely and accurate communication and information from authorities and friends. But we are all aware that there are dark places on the

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Internet where that's not true, and we need to be protected from hackers and data pirates and false information.

We used to call it cybersecurity, but it is really cyber-insecurity. We all get phishing emails, some of which are too hard to resist. Most people working in an enterprise have little or no training to handle invasive cyber-attacks. This is one of the main reasons why defensive cybersecurity schemes have been found to be unworkable. If an employee has to spend a significant amount of their time combatting cyber-attacks and making sure that all their vulnerabilities have been patched, that time and energy has to come from somewhere—and

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where it comes from is the job they are supposed to be doing, for which you are paying them. And what is doubly unfortunate for cyber defense is that your employees and you, yourself, know that you *might* be fired for an accidental cyber breach, but you *will* be fired for not getting your job done.

The next decade is going to be hard for enterprises, whether they are service-oriented or are manufacturing-based concerns. It is going to be hard for the people within them because all enterprises are made up of people. People suffering from fear, anomie, anxiety, anger, Techno-Trauma, and even panic.

If you want to catch up, slow down. See you later, accelerator!

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