

The Personal-Professional Divide Is Over

Tech disruption demands new ways of engaging with colleagues, customers and the general public.

The onslaught of new disruptive technologies has resulted in business and operating models being turned upside down. This requires a shift in mindset. Invariably, change is difficult. We are all creatures of habit and subject to long-standing attitudes. Those of you who have been in business a long time will likely have built up some entrenched beliefs about what it takes to succeed. Some of these thoughts will always stand the test of time. But some old paradigms need to be rethought.

Of course each business needs to make a profit, have areas of control and plan effectively. Crucially, however, we must make room for a new mindset to have space to grow and challenge the ways in which we are currently ineffective.

Old mindset	New mindset
Professionalisation and specialisation	Multidisciplinary and collaborative
Profit	Purpose
Shareholder return	Customer/Employee centric
Directive and authoritative	Opt in, empathy and humility
Control	Empower
Hierarchy	Decentralisation & networks
Privacy & confidentiality	Transparency

Old mindset	New mindset
Information is power	Sharing is power
Perfection	Imperfection
Permanent education/ Learning for development	Continuous learning
Planning	Experimentation
Finance & marketing	Design & coding
Classic PR	Influencer marketing

In order to make the transition from old to new, we must first accept that it is no longer possible to separate the professional from the personal.

Empathetic engagement

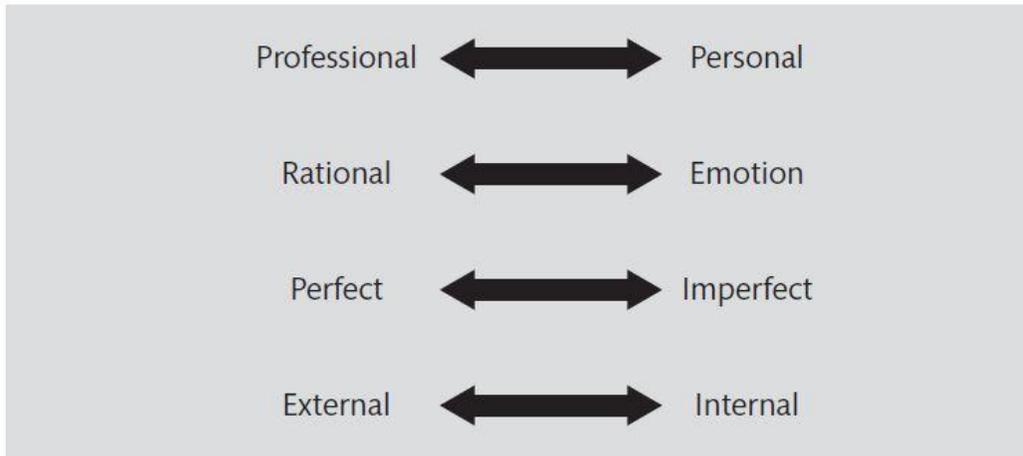
Why is that the case? First, we should make a distinction between “personal” and “private”. By personal, we mean our full person, including our sense of humour, values, history and eccentricities. The private zone, which may include intimate details of our relationships or information about our children, should remain shielded from public view or shared only among those closest to us, as we so choose.

We must seek to bring our full personality to work. Real engagement happens when we get personal. Your brand’s first and biggest fans need to be your employees, especially in an era where good talent in specific fields is hard to find. For employees to be fans, they need to love their team. Teams are soulless without passion. Passion without personality is impossible. People need to be personal and, when its members do so, the team can confidently perform to the cheers of commitment.

Good pay is obviously essential, but real motivation and performance enhancement comes from personal engagement. Additionally, a brand grows in power and attractiveness the more it connects with emotions, an area that is accessed only in the *personal* sphere.

Finally, the vast majority of these new disruptive technologies require a deeply human connection. We see this in great design, which is based on empathy and the designers’ ability to put themselves in the shoes of the customer. It is remarkable how many senior executives ignore their own personal experiences on a smartphone, social media or e-commerce when it comes to overseeing company sites and applications.

Instead, they create or approve interruptive, unfriendly and awkward user experiences for their customers. Yet they would be the first to moan dramatically to family and friends, lambasting brands that give them a poor user experience or service in their personal lives. For all the above reasons, we need to be both personal and professional at work.



Accepting imperfection

What does that mean? It means creating a workplace environment where it is not just okay for people to be themselves, but it is actively and wholeheartedly encouraged. In effect, this means giving more space for emotion, so people can, indeed, begin to be wholehearted. If adding a ping-pong or foosball table is a nod in that direction, an even more powerful approach is to foster a culture where people can express themselves, where they feel safe to laugh and even cry. In business schools and, historically, in senior management, the focus has been on providing strategic rationale, leading with authority and hitting the numbers. The rational side is not to be diminished. On the contrary, it should be connected *with* the emotional side.

At another level, it is about accepting imperfection as well. Common sense tells us that certain environments—such as laboratories and factories, where safety risks are an urgent concern—call for rigid adherence to highly specific rules. However, for most companies, there must be room for imperfection and for making mistakes. There are many organisations wishing to be more “agile” or to adopt an entrepreneurial attitude. But this cannot work without the opportunity to err or fail. And, if there is failure, there must be the ability to fail quickly, so that lessons can be rapidly taken on board.

Finally, in the crossover between professional and personal, we like to talk about congruency. On a personal level, is who you are on the inside reflected in your outward behaviour? For an organisation to optimise engagement and energy, there must be consistency between the external projection and the internal mechanisms. When one accepts the presence of such a wall between the professional and personal spheres, disorder sets in. Breaking down that wall liberates pent-up energy and births creativity, both within yourself and throughout your business.

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