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Aligning Human Capital To The Business Strategy Is An Accelerant.



Dr. Anastassia Lauterbach

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Lyra Schramm, *Vice President Strategy and Innovation at Google*, shared her key leadership lessons with me in my latest *"Leading Through Disruption"* interview. [Subscribe here](#) to receive future interviews.

Lauterbach: How did you end up in an HR function in the first place?

Schramm: I've always wanted to be part of game changing

companies, working with truly smart people passionate about ideas. My first job was for an e-commerce and software services startup that was going through significant growth, putting infrastructure and business fundamentals in place while raising funding. There, I saw how investing in people and culture became a competitive differentiator. That brought me into HR. I went to Amazon where I was part of building the talent and acquisition strategy for AWS during their significant growth and international expansion phase. After Amazon I spent about ten years in the Gates Foundation, and then landed at Google. I'm leading a strategy and innovation team now, focused on how we as a company intentionally invest in people and culture in alignment with business strategy. This alignment drives innovation and is a competitive differentiator.

Lauterbach: What is different today in people function compared to when you started?

Schramm: So much has changed just within technology. Smartphones enabled the gig economy. Social media brought our lives online, and then big data and AI took off. Similarly, we experienced shifts in society. The global pandemic impacted how we work and live. It also accelerated innovation. All these things impacted profoundly the HR function. Initially, HR was more of a reactive service function, focused on supporting operations rather than on moving the strategy forward. Over time, it became more strategic as an advisor to the CEO and leadership team. Aligning human capital to the business strategy is an accelerant. Besides, systems and processes in HR evolved. Performance management systems have been reimaged, with DEI becoming imperative. Today Wellbeing and Mental Health come into focus, as they are linked directly to performance and productivity. Finally, the HR function helps companies define and navigate through initiatives with broad societal impact in a given geopolitical and macroeconomic environment.

Lauterbach: How do you mirror the uniqueness of a company's business strategy and culture in HR? I am thinking about Leena Nair, the former CPO of Unilever, where HR drove business value.

Schramm: Google's mindset is all about product excellence - focusing on the user, and all else will follow. We have been trying to adopt practices from product design and go-to-market in corporate functions. How do we always think of the customer first and embed users' feedback at the very beginning? What does our product development life cycle look like, and what does it mean for talent? How do we take a product to different markets, and what are the outcomes that will drive enterprise-wide metrics? When you think about these questions, you think about HR more as a business. Our people strategy at Google should accelerate the business through innovative, multi-year people investments.

Lauterbach: How do you keep the innovation and creative muscle of your workforce?

Schramm: As a company matures and becomes larger, you do have to put infrastructure and processes in place. The art consists of not falling in love with these processes but with the outcomes, which means you're still allowing your employees to take risks and fail. In complex multinational organizations, it's very matrixed across product and services verticals and horizontals, geographies, and support functions. Organizations can be designed for product integration and decision-making velocity. Diverse and inclusive teams can bring new ideas. Success can depend on aligning your operating model and organizations to your longer-term strategy. Companies that are equally intentional about their culture as they are about their business priorities often see higher revenue.

Lauterbach: What is the hardest thing in leadership today?

Schramm: I'm just returning from a week with my daughter who's a multisport athlete. It's so interesting to see the parallels between competitive sports and leadership and what a difference a coach can make. The biggest question is the same in businesses and sports: How does a leader balance full commitment to performance while inspiring fellowship along the way? Besides, leaders today are navigating some of the most challenging and unprecedented times just given how dynamic the external environment has been, with a macroeconomic climate, the

geopolitical environment, and the acceleration of AI. The global pandemic changed the way we work and live. In such environment companies are being asked to play larger societal roles. Clarity on values and bringing people along on the vision while you adjust – which sometimes comes with downsizing – isn't easy.

Lauterbach: What qualities do you look for in a leader when interviewing?

Schramm: Leaders must be self-aware about their strengths and development areas. No one can do everything. The self-awareness of a leader contributes to building great teams capable of translating great vision into reality. Really good leaders understand the correlation between well-being, mental health and productivity, and business performance. Finally, a leader must be bold and courageous, which implies a willingness to make tough calls. I've seen leaders almost get paralyzed or take too long and miss the opportunity.

Lauterbach: How would you approach the strategy-building process for people function in traditional businesses?

Schramm: At Google, we think three years forward when it comes to people strategy. We consider existential threats and opportunities to our business models. We analyze the markets, our business, the needs of our employees, and our product portfolio and how they blend with the existing people strategy. We focus on those outcomes that matter most to the business imperatives and our employees. Just like the business, we measure our progress along the way through quarterly reviews, using data and insights to course correct along the way to assess the impact.

Lauterbach: How will AI impact HR?

Schramm: AI is rapidly changing how we live and work. It's estimated that 80% of jobs today can incorporate AI. HR plays a critical role in understanding the impact on their workforce. Some work will be automated. Capacity reinvested. Innovation accelerated. I'm optimistic about the positive impact, but we have to do it in a thoughtful and responsible way.

Lauterbach: What kind of early influences shaped your

leadership style?

Schramm: I came from a single-parent family and a low socioeconomic background. I worked while going to school at a very young age, and my mom worked two jobs. I had limited access to resources but knew early on that I wanted a different outcome for my life. I was involved in sports growing up. Being part of a team with the same values gave me my north star. I believe in having a shared purpose and broader impact on society. I respect the opportunity and believe everyone, no matter where you're born, should be able to live a healthy and productive life. These beliefs and experiences early on shaped who I am today.

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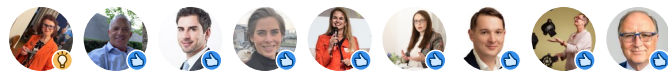
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The way that [Lyra Schramm](#) takes a long term approach to investing in our people and culture is consistent with the big bets [Google](#) likes to take on innovation. It takes a serious level of expertise to call your shots and nail them.

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Truly enjoyed reading this interview [Dr. Anastassia Lauterbach](#) and [Lyra Schramm](#)..this comment stood out to me "Clarity on values and bringing people along on the vision while you adjust – which sometimes comes with downsizing – isn't easy. "

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