
Post-pandemic leadership will be about empathy and insight

Podcast Ep 48: Dottie Schindlinger from the [Diligent Institute](#) discusses how the pandemic has transformed modern governance and challenged CEOs to “lead with empathy.”

It is almost a year since many of us left our offices and any suggestion of a return date remains firmly beyond the horizon. What many believed would be a temporary crisis has turned into a long-term reality with the potential to permanently alter the way businesses operate.

Against this backdrop, [Diligent Corporation](#), which recently announced the launch of its European Hub in Galway with the creation of 200 new jobs, interviewed boards of directors, and members of executive committees of Standard Chartered Bank, JPMorgan Chase & Co., BCG Global, Credit Suisse International, and dozens more, to seek their perspectives, advice, and projections for 2021.

Diligent Corporation is the leading modern governance company whose solutions are trusted by nearly 700,000 board directors and leaders. The company is backed by Insight Partners, Clearlake Capital Group, and Blackstone Group, and was valued at more than \$4bn last year.

Leading the research into how CEOs and boards are evolving is Dottie Schindlinger, executive director of the Diligent Institute who looked at how boards are shifting out of crisis management into long term strategy.

Crucially, the biggest change appears to be a change of focus from primarily financial-based targets to the overall health and wellbeing of employees.

Leaders gain deeper insight into how their businesses work

ThinkBusiness.ie · Episode 49 - Dottie Schindlinger - Diligent Institute

Schindlinger describes Diligent Corporation as first and foremost a software business. “Our purpose is to provide what we call modern governance solutions. The idea is to have software that helps to support the work of boards of directors, senior leaders of companies and all the activities that go into good governance. This includes everything from helping to make good decisions, keeping an eye on risk and understanding the opportunities for growth. It is about making sure the company is performing the way it should be performing and communicating all of that back to

shareholders and stakeholders. It is about the information flow between directors and senior leaders through an end-to-end experience.”

Diligent Institute, which is a subsidiary of Diligent Corporation, serves as a hub for sharing insight and best practice with Diligent’s community of 700,000 board directors and leaders.

According to Schindlinger, the company’s research into the impact of the pandemic began in March last year just as most countries went into lockdown and offices began to empty.

If anything, the pandemic has led to a change of mindset in the C-suite.

“Every leader of a company or an organisation of any kind has to be concerned with the financial health of the organisation, if they're not concerned with those things, they're not doing the right things by their stakeholders and their shareholders.

“What's been interesting about this pandemic is, in addition to that regular focus on financial health, they've had to think about lots of different aspects of health, including the mental health of their leaders and their employees, the public health of the communities surrounding their physical plants, they've had to think about how can they make sure that everybody is protected, and remaining safe, while still keeping the business going.

“Those are not easy questions to deal with. And in many cases, directors were finding that they were leading first with empathy. And empathy was not necessarily a skill set that they were seeking, when they were trying to find new board directors or new leaders of companies. They didn't interview for empathy. And yet, empathy became one of the most important skill sets that they had to draw from throughout this pandemic.

“They also found that they really have to communicate completely differently than they did in the past, not just because of Zoom or other web conferencing systems, which I think we've all become so used to. This is the way that we've been able to stay connected. But I mean, in terms of the kinds of communication they're having. It used to be they would get together every quarter, let's say, and have a formal board meeting. They were finding that throughout the pandemic they were staying in contact at least once a week.”

This constant and more regular communication also led to a deeper operational insight, says Schindlinger.

“They began to understand on a much more immediate level, the operations of the companies that they were overseeing. It used to be that they would sort of get these summary reports. And that might give them a 30,000-foot level of oversight of what's happening at the company. But because of the nature of the crisis, they got much further down into the details.

“Not from the not from the vantage point of trying to get in the way of management or slow things, but more so that they could offer any insight or any connections they might have, you know, any doors they might be able to open to help the company get over any hurdles that it was facing. And there were a lot of hurdles.”

If anything, the post-pandemic future of business could be very different.

“It's been great to speak with these directors and learn how they're working differently and the kinds of conversations they're having. I think it portends some interesting changes on the road ahead.”

By [John Kennedy](#) (john.kennedy3@boi.com)

Published: 19 February 2021