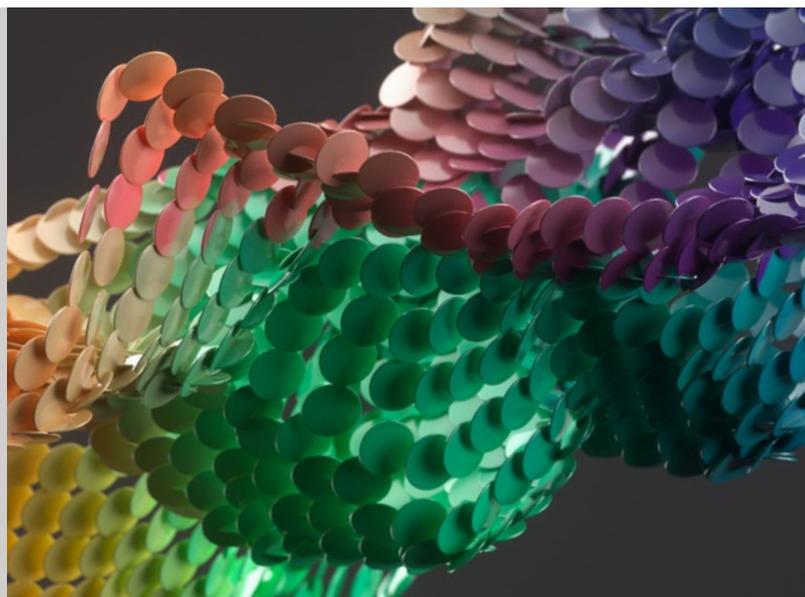


Leadership with a difference

Conversations with global technology leaders based in EMEA



No one knows when, or indeed if, the world will ever officially be classed as fully post-pandemic. But alert leaders are already closely reassessing what they learned during the Covid-19 crisis, and defining which “survival” measures will outlive the emergency to be fully absorbed into the fabric of how their companies do business.

These deep-dive re-evaluations are taking place as many organisations necessarily enter complex and unpredictable periods in their lifecycles. We invited four CEOs in the TMT sector to join us for a series of virtual fireside chats to discuss the kind of “leadership with a difference” on which navigating this next crucial stage will depend.

A spread of the sector was represented among our group of participating CEOs: Melissa Di Donato at open source company SUSE; Chano Fernandez, co-CEO at financial, HR and planning software company Workday; Keri Gilder at telecoms supplier Colt Technology Services; and Pam Maynard at Avanade, the leading digital innovator on the Microsoft ecosystem. Here, we discuss some of their key insights.

Putting DE&I front and centre

It is clear that none of our discussion partners is examining the repercussions of the pandemic crisis in isolation. There was a striking shared recognition of a sustained public appetite for social and economic change — notably in the wake of the Black Lives Matter and MeToo movements — across a range of long-standing DE&I inequalities and, increasingly, for heightened ethical and environmental standards.



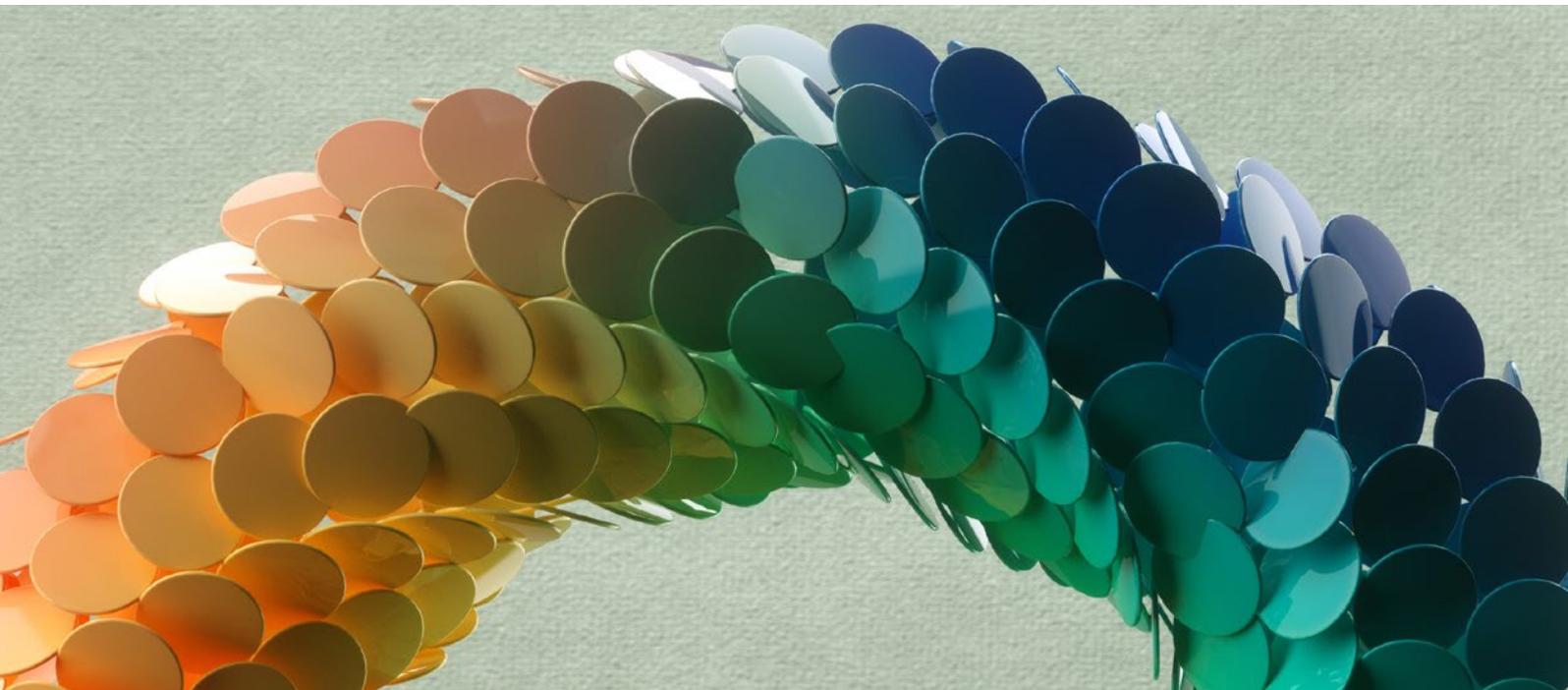
You cannot innovate without diversity. We want to go to clients with teams that represent them and their customers.

PAM MAYNARD
AVANADE

Failure to respond to that appetite for true diversity was seen as fatally undermining of a company’s resilience, sustainability, and ability to innovate. A knock-on impact identified among the group was that action that is not robust and meaningful weakens employee and public engagement, and further damages the company by stalling recruitment efforts.

“It’s vital to build an inclusive and diverse team beyond gender and race,” said Pam Maynard at AvanaDE. “Recent events have pushed us to accelerate our thinking around this. You cannot innovate without diversity. We want to go to clients with teams that represent them and their customers.”

Added Colt Technology’s Keri Gilder: “You can’t have diversity without inclusion, otherwise diversity talent will walk. Gen Xers and millennials select firms on DE&I, that’s the strategic index we need to be thinking about.”



Gilder also chairs the Diversity and Inclusion Council at the TM Forum, which focuses on educating the sector on the benefits of diversity. She advocates moving diversity “from a moral objective to a strategic imperative. There needs to be a strong tie to the business, driven and embraced by top-level executives”.

Workday has “a pretty hard quota for the next few years,” said the organisation’s co-CEO Chano Fernandez. “We’ve increased diversity by rethinking our location strategy investments. We’ve also targeted universities in certain locations, as well as working with organisations that help us train individuals on technology skills from underserved backgrounds. It’s about opening up access to more diverse talent.”

Purpose, sustainability & ESG — at the heart of future growth

In common with other sectors, TMT companies making coherent investments in ongoing DE&I work are likely to be doing the same in the realms of sustainability and ESG performance. The three areas share vulnerabilities, which, if left untended, have the potential to exact not only terrible human costs but unwelcome corporate ones.

Thus, alongside calls for genuine diversity and inclusion, employees, customers, and investors are increasingly vocal in their demands for verifiable sustainability, as well as for environmental, social and governance activity that is clean, in all senses. Failure undermines trust in the business, damages its reputation and deters talent.

“One of the biggest changes for leaders during the past year has been an intense focus on purpose,” said Workday’s Fernandez. “Employees want leaders to be real, be honest and admit when they got it wrong.”

Against this backdrop, the Covid-19 pandemic prompted near-epic surges in employee engagement. That shows little sign of abating, and the CEOs we spoke to are keen to build on that input and in particular its contribution to sustainability.

“We’ve continued to focus on sustainable growth, preparing for different outcomes and making decisions at speed both at board and employee level,” recalled Melissa Di Donato at SUSE.



Employees want leaders to be real, be honest and admit when they got it wrong.

CHANO FERNANDEZ
WORKDAY



Everything we do has to have a sustainability angle or it won’t get funding.

KERI GILDER
COLT TECHNOLOGY

“Our most important asset is our people, so we concentrated on things that really mattered to them. One example: we launched a ‘Go Green’ group, run by employees, looking at ways to reduce our carbon footprint. We used the passion of our employees in tandem with the openness of our software to achieve this goal.” SUSE also established a number of employee groups including Women in Tech and Pride groups across the organisation, added Di Donato.

At Colt Technology, said Keri Gilder, “sustainability by design” is a core strategic driver: “Everything we do has to have a sustainability angle or it won’t get funding.” The importance of that business imperative is unambiguous across the organisation, where environmental awareness training is mandatory for all employees.



Leading in a more flexible world of work

When the WHO declared the global pandemic in 2020, CEOs in the TMT sector found themselves on two frontlines. On the one hand, agile TMT businesses stood to grow rapidly by enabling and scaling up secure remote-working tech — providing operational resiliency and integrity — for a suddenly voracious market. On the other hand, tech CEOs had to be mindful of preserving the well-being of their own teams, who would be serving this immense demand under stressful and disruptive conditions.



We allowed people to choose based on what worked for them. And by doing that we’re moving away from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset.”

MELISSA DI DONATO
SUSE

Now, TMT leaders are mulling what working from home is going to look like in the future. The only certainty among CEOs in our group is that normalised WFH will not be ending as abruptly as it began for so many.

The overriding question for Melissa Di Donato at SUSE is: “How do I get people back to a sense of normality without disruption?” SUSE employees were given the choice of permanently working from home, a hybrid arrangement or going back to the office full-time.

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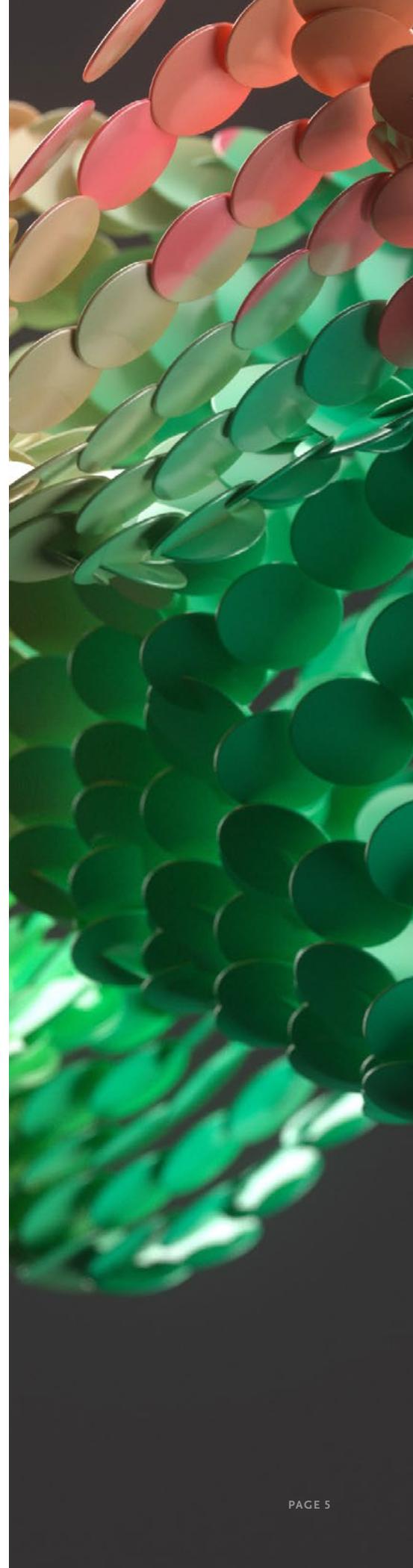
Like many companies, SUSE scaled back its office space during the pandemic. “We’ve learned that much as people got used to working from home, they still want to meet employees in person. We’ve taken on a hybrid model that fosters employee collaboration whilst creating spaces that reflect the neurodiversity of our workforce.”

This experience resonated with Pam Maynard at Avanade: “Avanade has provided flexible working to our employees for years, but at the start of the pandemic we shifted to 100 per cent home working. Some of our centres were harder to do than others, but once up and running we started thinking about flexibility. We’ve been piloting flexible working across a number of geographies.

“But the office is still important — there’s a huge need for contact with colleagues. Flexible is here to stay, but we’re learning a lot and are on the journey.”

One CEO though sounded a note of caution. “I worry that inclusion won’t be related to diversity in future, but a question of whether you’re working from home versus the office,” warned Colt Technology’s Keri Gilder.

“There’s a potential silo separation between home and office workers. This will become more profound as there’s a split between two modes of working. How people are participating regardless of location will be important.”



A continued focus on mental health and wellbeing

As already noted, the dash to digitise galvanised by the pandemic put immense pressure on TMT workers, across all levels. As with their counterparts in other sectors, the CEOs to whom we talked are stepping up safeguarding strategies around well-being and mental and physical health.



Employee wellbeing goes beyond the physical — the emphasis should be on ‘employee renewal’

PAM MAYNARD
AVANADE

“There’s a need for compassion at a level we’ve never seen before,” said Pam Maynard at Avanade. “As leaders we need to be thoughtful, and it doesn’t always have to be about big change.” To combat rising fatigue exacerbated by the stress of seemingly endless remote meetings, Maynard personally committed to not schedule or host team video calls on Fridays. “Employee wellbeing goes beyond the physical — the emphasis should be on ‘employee renewal’.”

“We’re definitely seeing fatigue,” agreed Workday’s Chano Fernandez. “We’re encouraging employees to take time off and switch off the computer. People need to refresh and recharge.” At Colt Technology, every other week includes a full day to “eject from the digital world”, starting with no meetings — and the encouragement to maybe get some fresh air or kick back to a podcast. Colt’s Keri Gilder pointed out that this wellbeing initiative has also delivered a huge boost to engagement.

One final core theme to emerge from our group of CEOs reflected the confluence of a crisis-led imperative to innovate rapidly and deeply, alongside heightened demands for responsible innovation. For Chano Fernandez at Workday, “data privacy has been a constant topic, and with it fairness and trust — it should always be clear to the customer exactly how their data is managed.”

The key driver here, said Avanade’s Pam Maynard, has to be a comprehensive “designing-in of the principles and behaviours of an uncompromising set of digital ethics”.

TMT organisations that came through the pandemic were the fast responders who helped other businesses successfully pivot to using tech to fully re-fashion how, and where, they worked. What the most successful among the TMT sector had in common was that they were able to show both their customers and their own people that they were tech companies that could innovate at speed, but that they were not reckless or unsafe.





With thanks to

Melissa Di Donato, CEO — SUSE
Chano Fernandez, co-CEO — Workday
Keri Gilder, CEO — Colt Technology Services
Pam Maynard, CEO — Avanade.

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