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CAPITAL H
The expiration of 'transformation'

Evolution of transformation

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Burt Rea: Hi everyone, and welcome to Capital H—a podcast focused on all things related to work, the workforce, and the workplace. I'm your host, Burt Rea, a managing director with Deloitte Consulting LLP and leader of Deloitte Consulting's Human Capital Research & Sensing team. Today, we're focused on a critical question: Has the current climate pushed organizations to think beyond traditional large-scale transformation? In today's disruptive environment, we're seeing organizations build and gather the necessary plans, processes, and people for

their transformation efforts, only to find themselves falling back on a vision of work that's already obsolete. Are there ways to avoid these pitfalls? And what role does organizational resilience play?

In this time when workforce and the workplace have been so disrupted, the question begs to be asked—have we moved past transformation? In today's episode, we'll discuss this question. We also want to explore how building resilience into organizations helps preempt the need for step change transformation, but rather

enables organizations to continuously synchronize work, workforce, and workplace to be in a constant, yet balanced state of agility. On our panel today, I'd like to introduce a few of my colleagues. Erica Volini, Steve Hatfield, Robin Jones, and David Mallon. Erica, let's start with you. If you could please say hello and tell us a little bit about your role at Deloitte.

Erica Volini: Sure. Thanks, Burt. Very happy to be here. Erica Volini. I am the global leader of our Human Capital practice. And as Burt mentioned, our Human Capital practice

deals with anything and everything related to the work, the workforce, and the workplace at organizations, which is clearly a hot topic these days. So, looking forward to a very robust dialogue.

Burt: Wonderful. Thank you, Erica. Thanks for being here. Steve, if you could say hello and tell us a little bit about your role.

Steve Hatfield: Sure, Burt. I'm very happy to be here as well. So, I'm Steve Hatfield and I lead our efforts globally around the Future of Work. The Future of Work is a frame that we brought to the market through our Human Capital Trends report. We started to see the trends back in 2016 and '17 and the dynamics of work, workforce, workplace, and the changes there are something we've been talking about, it feels like for a very long time now.

Burt: Absolutely. So relevant now. Thank you, Steve. Robin, if you can say hello and tell us a little bit about your role at Deloitte.

Robin Jones: Sure. Hello, Burt and team. I am Robin Jones. I lead our US Workforce Transformation practice, and this is really the practice that brings all the services, capabilities to our clients around transforming their work, their workforce, and their workplace, as you said, in a balanced and harmonious way. Happy to be here.

Burt: Wonderful. Thank you, Robin. Thanks for being here. And, David, you probably don't need an introduction as our co-host of the Capital H podcast, but please say a few words. And we're having you in a speaker role this time instead of a host role. Welcome.

David Mallon: Sure. Thanks, Burt. And happy to be here along with my colleagues to engage in conversation. I am the chief analyst with our Human Capital Research and Sensing team and very much happy to be a voice for our research on this topic as well.

Burt: Wonderful. Thank you, David. So, to get us started, let's talk about the current

environment. We are living in a time of accelerated pace of change in the way that we work, the way that we interact with customers and markets that we serve, the way that we bring markets together in both technology and in other aspects of the world around us—macroeconomic, social issues, etc. All of this has pushed organizations to think beyond traditional large-scale transformation. In your work with clients, and, Robin, maybe I'd like to start with you, how are you seeing the impacts of these accelerated forces of change impacting your clients and how they think about organizational improvement?

Robin: Well, I think the number-one way it's impacting our clients is how quickly and how fast they came at them. Many of these changes that companies, we used to spend time pre-COVID and pre-pandemic talking about changes across the work that they wanted to, say, digitize or bring AI and technology to transform or new workforce management practices, because they are seeing the emergence of nontraditional workforces in the workplace. And they hadn't put in place programs or policies to support them, or they contemplated different ways of working across the workplace itself and toyed with more flexibility and hearing loudly from their workforces the need and the wants of more flexibility.

But we didn't see quick action on that until literally the pandemic hit and the situation forced executive teams all around the world to look at every one of those and say, "We need to take action right now and take care of our people and at the same time, keep our businesses up and running." So, it was immediate. It was swift. And this continues to be the number-one topic that our clients in the C-suite are continuing to wrestle with.

Burt: It seems to me that a year ago, the primary emphasis for massive change within organizations was the adoption of new technologies that really forced process, organizational, and job change. And now that's been eclipsed by the pandemic and the ways that we're working. Steve, in your

work around Future of Work, how are you seeing that balance shift, and what are organizations doing about it?

Steve: It's a great point. I think many organizations now are starting to recognize that there's this demonstration effect. We did it. We made it work. And it surprised ourselves in some respects. And I think what we're hearing time and again is how do I bottle some of that up and continue it? How do I take advantage of it? What does that new future look like? I would argue that maybe initially in the past few months, there were the conversations started with this belief that it was a passing storm and perhaps we need to get back to the office and what would that look like? And how do I begin to chart that course? But I think it's become more apparent that this is really evolving into a new normal. So, the organizations are beginning to think about, "Well, what is that new normal, and how do I begin to shape that new normal?" exploring the different tenets of what it would be.

Burt: I think that's the real opportunity is how do we learn from this experience and take the best practices of it that we've learned forward. Erica, I'd love to bring you in. In terms of your exposure to our global practice, looking at different countries around the world and how they're dealing with this. And specifically, your background with regard to HR technologies and how organizations are able to still implement transformational change using revolutionary new technologies in the context of the current pandemic, what trends or best practices are you seeing?

Erica: So let's start with transformation because I think the question you framed at the beginning is really interesting. I don't think it's that transformation itself is going away, but in addition to what Robin said about it happening faster, it's also happening ongoing. So, it's not a one-time event anymore. And I think that's been an enormous shift. You can't start and end and say, "We're done. We don't have to worry about it anymore." This has to become an

ongoing capability that organizations have, which I think leads to your point around technology. And by the way, I don't think it's just HR technology. I mean, dealing with these disruptions with work, workforce, and workplace, we have to open up the aperture beyond thinking about this just as something that HR can tackle. In our Global Human Capital Trends report, we talked about this idea of the symphonic C-suite, which meant that the enterprise needed to work together in an integrated way.

There is no greater time when that is needed than right now. as we see human capital issues, issues around work, workforce, workplace being at the top of the C-suite agenda. We have to apply that to technology as well. So it's not just HR technology. We're seeing a ton of new technologies come into this space that are coming from all different areas—the traditional customer space, the traditional infrastructure space, the traditional cloud space. If organizations use that broad range of technologies, they can then build that ongoing capability that they're going to need to constantly transform in the face of disruption. That's the environment we're facing now.

Burt: I think that's really consistent with the capabilities of cloud, with technology as a service, with agile methods of creating opportunity and delivering improvements to users of technology. So that it's less and less that big, disruptive step change and more and more of the, as you mentioned, Erica, a gradual constant improvement.

Erica: I think so. It's also about looking, not just at the technology capabilities, but the technology and the human capabilities together. And one of the big things we're talking about right now is that for organizations to navigate this type of disruption, they have to remain distinctly human. And what that means is we can't just be looking at the technology as the solve, but how do we look at technology and human capabilities as one integrated whole.

Burt: I think that's a really interesting point. Thank you for bringing it into the conversation that this idea that we may have

reached a threshold on the productivity that we can achieve through technology as a panacea and that really it's now about the combined focus of human capability and technology together. And that's what's really differentiating high-performing organizations, organizations that have realized that it's not just technology alone with human capability as status quo, but it's really about raising the bar for both our people, their capabilities and contributions, and the technologies that support them in a complementary way.

And, Robin, maybe back to you in your role as our lead for workforce transformation, what are some of the signs of health or signs of vitality that you're seeing in organizations that are doing this well? How are they transforming their workforce to take full advantage of technology, to take full advantage of the human side of work?

Robin: You just hit on something, Burt, that I think really portrays the last, call it 10 years, where companies were doing what we often said, the foundational work of getting the packaged solutions in the workplace. Those define those major operational transformations that were highly structured, highly programmatic, and had the end game of getting up on S/4HANa or Workday or any of the technology packages to run businesses, ERP programs.

And we always said then, and we still say, that was just foundational. That was just to get the core business ops digitized. And for the people, it was teaching them how to do the process, the way it was configured. Now the work and all the digital and the technology that's coming in, it's once they're open on that, it's about bringing cognitive solutions combined with humans, we're working together on teams to define in-the-flow problems, in-the-flow problems with customers, in-the-flow problems with supply chains, with workforces distributed, and make work better and make the experience better, make business better.

So we've gone from cost efficiency, process standardization to now, higher value solutions and outcomes. Higher value

ways of meeting the customers' needs more dynamically, leveraging the power of technology and cognitive solutions along with teams who have the human elements of knowing context, knowing customer needs and wants, and bringing that to a better outcome for businesses—again, customers and workforces alike.

And that's what's driving this difference in, as you pointed out, transformations expiring, because we are moving to a constant state of innovation, constant state of digital savvy and technology savvy, and a constant state of seeking out how to solve new and emerging problems and building a workforce that is ready for that, is resilient for that, and can be redeployed across the business to solve similar problems, patterns of problems over and over again, is really, I think, what is playing out in front of us as the new frame of transformations and these workforce strategies companies need to be considering in their workplace.

Burt: I really love your point about patterns of problems because maybe the old model was, we're going to teach you the rote solution. You have to memorize that and solve this over and over and over. Today, the problems are changing so quickly that we need to understand the principles behind the problem-solving approach that we're taking so that we can solve the next problem that we haven't anticipated yet. And yet we can't slow down to take it apart, analyze it, and piece it back together.

Steve, in that context, looking ahead, we've always talked about the Future of Work, you mentioned going back to 2016, I think it was. So the Future of Work is now, we're in it. Tell us more about this idea of how organizations are embracing this simultaneous need to think about work, workplace, workforce, and maybe how that's contrasted from maybe what we used to think about before, where we could take a look at the workforce and fix that, and then we could go over here and think about the workplace separately and fix that, and then come back to the work itself and play with that. We're really forced to think about all three in concert. How are you seeing those changes playing out?

Steve: So, what I believe organizations are doing a bit more of now than they may have in the past is they're starting to recognize that we need to zoom out further and understand where these trendlines are taking us, to then zoom back in and start plotting the first steps to get there.

And that plotting those steps becomes part of that continuous process. And as you plot the steps, you need to plot them against an iteration around work, workforce, and workplace. And so, you can start from any door, but you will, as you pull on the thread and you begin to iterate, you're going to hit across all of them.

So we're seeing organizations work through, "Well, what does my digital workplace need to be in order to support the workforce experience of the new hybrid work model? What does that mean for the physical workspace, as well as the digital workspace?" And the minute you go to those questions, it's like, "Well, what work are we doing? And what are we doing in that digital workplace? Or when are we together physically versus when we're not? And if we're going to be together, then what does that mean for the workplace itself? Physically, it needs to become a destination where we get together to create and collaborate."

There are moments in time when you want to be together as a team, back to Robin's earlier point. And as you begin to iterate past that, you move into a redesigned workplace, both physically and digitally. You move into breaking down the work in a different way than you had in the past. That unlocks the ability to consider your talent and their worker sentiment with their needs and what their interests are greater than you may have in the past. And it's in that iteration that we start seeing clients ask questions about, "Well, what does that mean for leadership? What does that mean for culture? What does that mean for diversity, equity, and inclusion?"

And all of those things can be brought to the table in a very different and much more compelling way. So, for example, you move

past thinking about, "Am I comfortable in the workplace?" to thinking about, "How can I really appreciate the contribution I'm making in the workplace, given the kind of work that we're now doing?" and that connection can create much more impact, much more meaning, and much greater performance for an organization. And so we're starting to see those lines get drawn out.

Burt: Thank you for bringing it to a practical application focus, because that really is the result that we're trying to achieve here is what do we do different? How do we take the insights that we've gained, apply them in the context that we find ourselves, and achieve results?

So, Erica, I'd love to come back to you. In this season, we've really chosen resilience as our theme. What we've been talking about is really a journey that a lot of organizations are on. How do we help organizations or what are you seeing organizations doing well to support their organization along that journey, building that capability of resilience as an antidote to burnout, as an antidote to organizational fatigue? If we're changing constantly, how do we get through the day?

Erica: Oh, I wish I had the answer to that question. But in all seriousness, I think there's a couple of things. The first I'll talk about is what I mentioned earlier around symphonic leadership. It cannot be a functional, siloed approach anymore. The problems are too complex.

So, step one is figure out what's on the agenda, across your enterprise, across your functions, and build those cross-functional teams or cross-organizational teams to try to tackle it. I don't think there should be an initiative like this that is so transformative, just to go back to that word, that doesn't involve at least two or three, really, three C-suite leaders working together, championing across the enterprise. I think that will help in a big way.

The second thing, which we talked a lot about, is this concept of potential. We have to figure out how to fully leverage the true capabilities and abilities of the workforce

to get things done. And I think that worker potential is one of the biggest assets that an organization has right now, but it's not fully understood. The tools that we have to understand what workers can do are their resume, what they have done before, and then maybe some type of skills database that captures it in probably a very historical context. How do we start to get a better sense of the true abilities of each worker, what they can do? And how do we provide—we've been talking a lot about internal talent marketplaces—how do we provide the infrastructure to allow organizations to tap into that potential? I think that becomes key and can help us figure out how we can get work done in radically different ways, because we can bring different capabilities to the table. There is a great story highlighted in our 2021 Global Human Capital Trends report on this topic related to vaccine development and how they looked beyond the traditional individuals who have the skills in drug research and development and just pulled in people who had a passion and interest in this area and how that fundamentally changed how they did vaccine development. And that's something that's front of mind for all of us, but I think is a great story that highlights if we understand workers' potential, if we understand their passions, and if we have the ability to harness those, we can get things done much more easily moving forward.

So those are two that jump out to me. And maybe the third, I would say is, it goes back to the point I made earlier, which is, we have to stop treating things as it has a start and a finish because in today's world, it doesn't anymore. So, how do we look at building these ongoing capabilities that we need and bringing those distinctly human capabilities to the forefront more, because they will have the greatest impact on the organization, I think, to succeed moving forward.

Burt: I agree. I love this idea of symphonic. We've talked about it for years, but it really resonates now because the challenge is so immense. It's almost like if you were trying to improve your car, if you only gave yourself a better engine, you might not be able to stop because you didn't upgrade the brakes. Or

if you give a good engine, give good brakes, but you don't upgrade the interior, your passengers aren't going to be comfortable even though you get there faster. So, I love this idea of symphonic. And the start-stop and start-finish goes back to that idea of transformation is no longer a step function where we hold our breath, grit our teeth, and come out at some future plateau and then everything is status quo again. David, tell me more about what the research is showing vis-a-vis organizations that are doing these things and embracing these ideas. How is their performance different from organizations that are struggling?

David: Sure. So, let me connect the dots between a few of our recent studies. So, in the last 18 months or so, we released a maturity study on organization design broadly. So how organizations approach their operating model, big picture questions of strategy and leaders and decision rights and, of course, formal and informal structure, and so on. And it kind of picks up on, I think, what a couple of my colleagues have already talked about, Erica most recently, that if you look at the discipline that is organization design, for most of its history, it's been focused on this sort of orientation towards equilibrium. The organization has an operating model, and we want it to be generally in keeping with the marketplace and with the environment and the ecosystem in which you operate and so on, but over time things happen, right? And so it gets out of step and eventually it gets so out of step that you have to break the organization to bring it back into equilibrium because there's some embedded assumptions there. One, there's an assumption that to do the kinds of change you need to keep it in equilibrium, it's just painful, and it's expensive, and you don't really want to do it very often. So you're only going to do it when the pain is great enough. And two, there's this idea that there is such a thing as a steady state, and it's a project and at some point the project can end, and then we'll go back to our day jobs as it were. What we found, and this has been true broadly speaking, as organizations have been studying this topic

for a while now, and it certainly showed up in our data, the companies that are driving greater impact are the ones that are beginning to realize that how you approach operating model-type conversations can no longer be something that you only fix when things are so painful that you have to break the organization.

Instead, we need to be building adaptability into the bones and the DNA of the organization itself. And many of the ways we do that are things we've talked about so far already in this conversation. It's about creating pockets of potential.

And so, regardless of what happens, the organization—maybe it's not the best analogy, but it's one used often—it's more amoeba-like. The organization can flow into whatever's going on around it, whatever disruption, however the marketplace is changing, and so on. And the organizations that are doing this, I mean, our research is showing that they're clearly showing differentiation in their ability to meet their financial targets, their ability to have higher customer satisfaction, and internally to engage their workforces and to keep their best people. I'll connect the dots quickly to our most recent major study, which is on workforce broadly. And there's the single largest stat in that study, which says everything about, for example, understanding the potential of your people to reinvent. Something we talked about in this past year's Global Human Capital Trends study. The level-four organizations in our high-impact workforce study are 37 times more likely to invest in the individual's abilities to meet their personal career goals.

Why are they doing it? Because they understand that helping the individuals in the organization get where they want to go from a career perspective. Yes, it might mean they might leave the organization, but still it says everything about their understanding of, if the individuals in the organization are empowered to grow and to reinvent, that energy and that potential becomes a source of resilience for the organization, but it also becomes a source

of future innovation, future growth, future ideas. It becomes the lifeblood of how the organization grows over time, which has everything to do with, I think, what we're talking about.

Burt: And really, David, when you say level four, you're talking about top-quartile performance, which is the outcome that we're trying to achieve in thinking about organizations, in thinking about workforce, thinking about people, what is the business outcome that we're able to accomplish through the people dimension of our business. So, I absolutely love to tie it back to that. And as we're getting close to our time, I'd love to just get a short answer from each of you in terms of what do you see, looking ahead, as we emerge from the pandemic and reopen the office? What do you think will change? What do you think that we'll carry forward from this time where we've learned so much? And, Steve, we'll start with you.

Steve: Well, I don't think we're going back to what we once had. And I think that the recognition that, I'm going to call it the digital workplace, is so inadequate to the work that we want to do in the future. And the extent to which all the different apps on your desktop were apps that you were moving in between and context switching to get things done and the inefficiency of it all. I think that we are going to create a much more efficient, shall we call it digital and physical workplace mix, where work can be very, very different. And the realization that that's possible became apparent when we were thrust into this virtual world and the inadequacies of it became so real. And I think that will change and is changing as we speak.

Burt: Something we'll carry forward. Robin, your thoughts as we reopen the office, as we move to a future new normal, what will we carry forward with us that we've learned from this time?

Robin: Well, I think we have definitely proven that organizations can meet workforces' needs to be flexible and remote when they need to be. And we will see that continue in pockets. We will also see

people return to the workplace because it's a better environment for them to work, for example, and teams and collaboration, and the human connection is so important. I think the real difference, though, is that we're going to have the variation of models all happening at the same time. So, the fact that we all used to typically show up on Mondays, work a standard set of hours, and leave on Fridays, or maybe we had a few people who had predictable standard weekly days off, or they were working home, we came to know that, but the multi-direction, the multi-dimensional flexibility that's all going to happen concurrently, is going to be harder.

Burt: I agree. And I think the key is how will we carry forward an intentionality about managing across these different work modalities so that we're purposefully getting together in the office and we're purposefully giving people the flexibility to work from home? And it's not just willy-nilly, but it's intentional. And we get the benefits of each type of different work style at the appropriate time with the appropriate task. Erica, to you. What do you see as best lessons learned, best carry-forward practices as we reopen the office and emerge from the pandemic?

Erica: Burt, you just hit on one that I was going to say, which is more intentionality about what work is being done and in what way. I think we're going to be way more thoughtful around work. We're going to start to actually have conversations about work, how it should be done, how it should continuously change, how it can be, in the word we're using, rearchitected on a continuous basis. And oftentimes we think about work as a process. A mechanistic process that we need to go through. How do we start to fundamentally shift that mindset to think about work as something that can unleash our creativity, can help us build relationships, can motivate us, can unlock productivity? We're going to fundamentally shift that view, and I think that's a carryover from the pandemic.

There was a great story around how workers for the first time understood how the work they were doing had an impact, not only on their organization but on society as a whole. That's a great story that every organization should keep in mind as they ask themselves, are we rearchitecting work to bring that full value to the forefront? And are we thinking about work in a deliberate manner? I think that's one. The second one, which Steve and I wrote about in an article, is around transparency. We've seen unprecedented transparency in the workplace from our leaders. I mean, unprecedented across organizations.

I think that is going to continue. And I think organizations are going to have to be very thoughtful about how they don't go back to a culture where decisions were made in the back room and then shared on an as-needed basis. How are we going to get to this more continuous culture of transparency and embed that at all layers of leadership? Which leads to my third one, and Robin hit on this a little bit as well, which is the role of the team leader, in the environment Robin described where everyone is working in totally different ways. The team leader becomes such an essential role. And we've been talking about this for a while, but I think this is going to be a huge change. Because these are the individuals that are going to have to now think about, "Okay, some of my people are working from home and some of them are working in a hybrid way and some of them are at the office or at the factory. And how do I balance all their needs and still make them operate as a team. And how do I inspire them and still have a single North Star?"

These are very difficult things for leaders to do. And I think we're going to find we have gaps at that team leader level that we need to quickly fill in order to make sure the organization has that strategic direction and the culture they need to operate in this new environment.

Burt: I love that third point because so many frontline leaders, first-time managers are promoted into their position of

leadership, not because they know how to lead, but because they know how to do the technical aspect of whatever group they are a part of. They're the best accountant, they're the best draftsman, they're the best customer sales rep. How are we investing in preparing those new leaders to really, truly manage, as you've just described, to architect work, to orchestrate and coordinate? I think that's a critical, critical point. Thank you.

I'd like to just close with a reminder that as this episode airs, we'll be launching our next Human Capital Trends update, Human Capital Trends 2021. And maybe to close out this discussion, and David and Erica, I know you're both part of the author team on the report. Can you give us a flavor for the 2021 trends and how they relate to this conversation around resiliency and continuous agility and responsiveness? And maybe, Erica, to you.

Erica: Sure. I'm incredibly excited about our 2021 Global Human Capital Trends report. One thing that's incredibly exciting about this report is it's the first time in our 11-year history where we had more business executives completing the survey than HR executives, which I think is fascinating. Over 1,200 board members and C-suite members, 233 CEOs, which is pretty incredible, across 99 countries. So, I think we've reached the point where human capital issues are business issues, and we need to be talking about them that way.

The report has everything to do with resilience. And the frame of the report is how to make the shift from survive to thrive. And what we found is we ask questions around an organization's preparedness to understand how their definitions of preparedness have shifted, but almost more importantly, what are the key attributes that organizations need to focus on to be prepared? And what we found is those organizations that said they were very prepared for the pandemic were ones that were focusing on the human element. They were focusing on helping their workers adapt, re-skill, adjust to new environments, that was built into their DNA.

We've seen massive shifts in how organizations are thinking about the topic of work that I talked about earlier. And now this executive confirmation that work reimagination, or what we call work rearchitecture, is front and center. And then finally, for those in HR, an exciting finding around the confidence levels in HR, and the fact that business executives are significantly more confident in HR than they were just a year ago. And that opening up the door to what we believe will be an incredibly exciting new role, an expanded role for HR to play. So those are just a few of the findings, but an incredibly exciting report released on December 10 and hope everyone gets a chance to read it. David, what would you add on?

David: I'm not sure what else there is to add onto that, other than just to say, certainly one of the key ideas that was in the 2020 report was this focus on potential and perspective and purpose. And that's still just as important as you'll see in this upcoming report going forward. And, in fact, it connects to some of the conversations we've had today. Basically, in this world in which we live, the ideas matter, and our connections to who we want to be as organizations matter, and our abilities to look around us and to sense and to ask the right questions of the data we have available to us to push ourselves forward. But these things are the kinds of things that matter. And as Erica pointed out, that the thing

that's probably most exciting is that there's reasons for optimism given everything that we're seeing. And in a moment like now, we really could use the optimism.

Burt: Wonderful. Well, thank you for giving us a preview. We'll look forward to taking a look at the latest findings. Well, Robin, Erica, Steve, David, thank you so much for spending a few minutes with us to talk through what we're seeing today, as well as what we see looking forward.

I think that is the important perspective to keep in mind, that we're going to get through this and that we're learning a lot along the way and that there are good insights and good lessons learned that we can take forward with us to make work better for humans and humans better at work. Thank you for joining us.

Burt: In the wake of COVID-19, more organizations are being forced to make adjustments to their work, workforce, and workplace. As they make these changes, they should think beyond the traditional large-scale transformation mindset and focus more on ways to maintain a balanced level of agility that allows for quick, effective responses to disruption. Thank you to my Deloitte colleagues for sharing their insights and experiences on the evolution of transformation and the Future of Work. And thank you all for listening.

CAPITAL H
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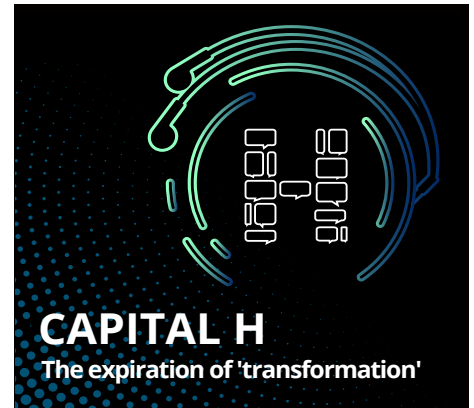
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