

Kyle Nel on why strategic narratives are critical in a post-Covid world

These are the highlights of Kyle Nel's talk at the SingularityU South Africa 2020 Summit.



Kyle Nel, CEO and co-founder of Uncommon Partners, Singularity University faculty member.

Nel is a behavioural scientist and has helped many companies transform. He recently contributed some of his research to a book called *Leading Transformation*.

He believes that all of life can be summed up in the “choose your own adventure books” from the 1980s and 1990s. The idea is that you are presented with the premise on the front cover. You then learn who you and your friends are, before being presented with a series of choices. This is similar to how the world works. Acquisition of knowledge about your surroundings is key – the idea is that if you learn more, you will make better choices.

This is not always true. Learning things does not always enable us to make better choices. We often underestimate the importance of how we make decisions. So, how do we make better decisions?

Nel describes what he refers to as the “human problem”... So many changes are happening around us all the time. Companies are made up of people. These people contribute to the culture of the company and how the company acts. Sometimes companies act irrationally.

In today's pandemic, seismic changes are happening all the time. The only companies that will survive are those that can adapt to change. One of the best ways to do this is to start an innovation lab. Many companies have done this. However, companies often lack the talent to do this. They then hire engineers, robotics people, millennials, etc. and wait for ideas to come forth. Unfortunately, there is often no plan or system to implement these innovations.

Nel explains that when you start using strategic narratives, however, you can affect real change. (Inserted note: A strategic narrative centres on a leader's ability to articulate a clear and compelling vision and strategy for the future of the organisation. ... Strategic narratives are a form of storytelling, and like all good stories, they need a compelling plot, characters, a climax, and a conclusion.)

Nel suggests that you need three elements: a strategic narrative, to break bottlenecks, and to develop future KPI's. This enables you to move from small to large innovations, and ultimately transformation. Strategic narratives explain where you are going. There must be high clarity and low certainty. This is essential. There must be a clear plan with defined steps. Then you work on future KPI's and future measures of success.

Transformation is a never-ending state. You get there by making small innovations all the time.

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