



# Innovative Workforce Solutions

## The Myths & Realities of Transitioning Out of the Pandemic

by Dr. David DeLong



### Your Workforce a Year From Now

- Which jobs should stay remote after the pandemic?
- How will telemedicine effect skills our staff needs?
- How do we motivate a pandemic-weary frontline staff?
- What does the “patient experience” need to be to compete?
- How will we do more with fewer..nurses, MAs, coders?



# Today's Agenda



- Innovative thinking about workforce challenges
- Mt. Everest expedition: preparing for worst
- What to do when your routines/processes break down at 29,000 feet?
- Breakout groups – what would you do?
- Rethinking workforce problems to improve performance





# Everest Ascent: Kangshung Face Expedition

- Most remote, least explored side of Everest, 29K feet
- 4,000' wall rocks & ice, 12 days to scale
- 17 days on glacier, deep snow covers crevasses, higher risk of avalanches
- Final summit push 5 days

"Building Organizational Resilience," Suarez & Montes, Harvard Business Review, Nov/Dec 2020

© D.W. DeLong 2021

5

# Everest: Ultimate Uncertain Environment

- Extreme weather
- Technically difficult rock & ice climbing
- Risks of high-altitude hypoxia in "death zone"
- Constant threat of deadly avalanches

© D.W. DeLong 2021

6



# Everest Ascent: Preparing for the Unknown

- Expedition leader Chilean Rodrigo Jordan
- Team of 6 trained daily for 2 years
- Prepared, practiced routines for ascent, e.g. setting up camp, packing back packs, managing ropes, etc.
- Mission seriously under funded



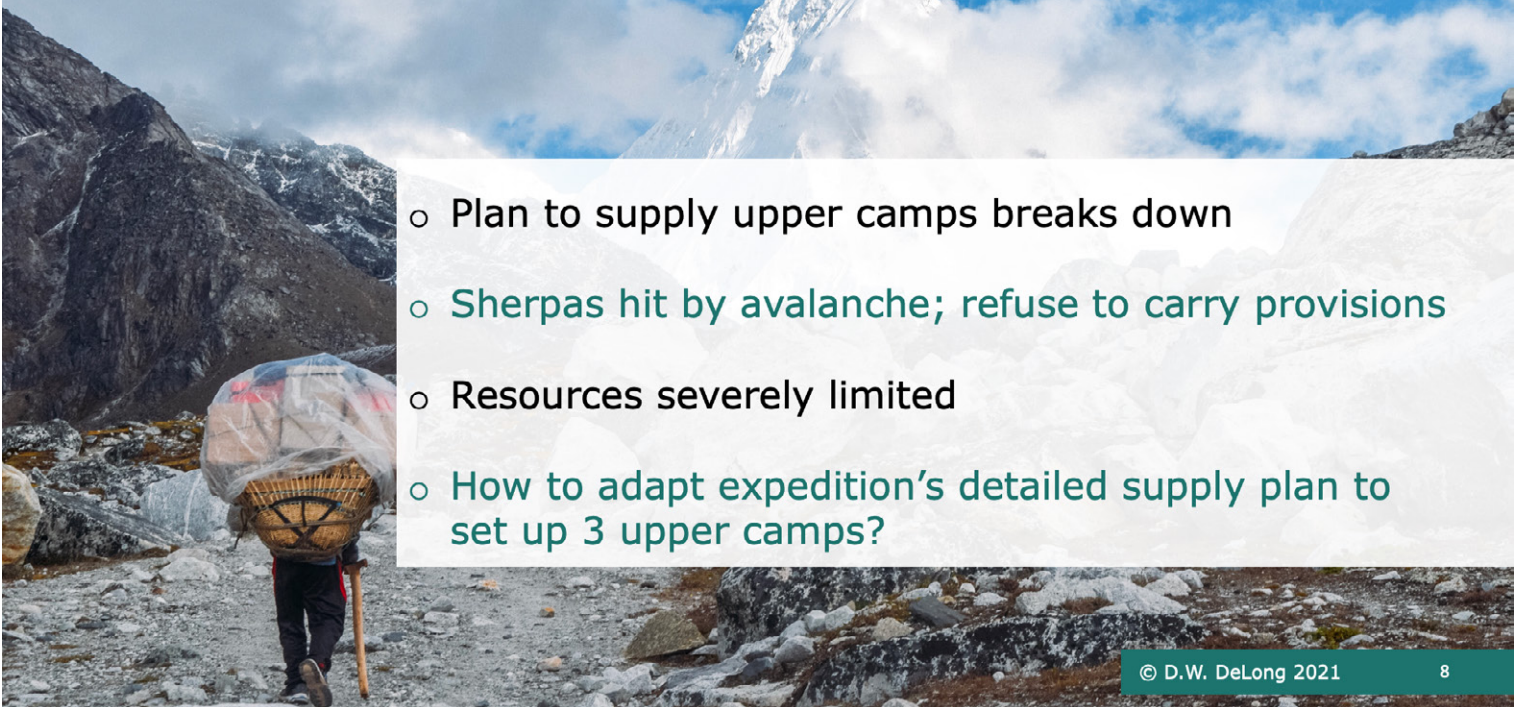
"Building Organizational Resilience," Suarez & Montes, Harvard Business Review, Nov/Dec 2020

© D.W. DeLong 2021

7

# Everest: Breakdown #1 Supplies Routine

- Plan to supply upper camps breaks down
- Sherpas hit by avalanche; refuse to carry provisions
- Resources severely limited
- How to adapt expedition's detailed supply plan to set up 3 upper camps?



© D.W. DeLong 2021

8



## Everest: Breakdown #2 Climbing Routine

- Climber's on 4,000' rock wall...Jordan at base camp
- 2 climbers open route...constant threat falling rocks, ice
- Jordan can't make decisions fast enough from base camp
- How to regain team's trust in safety and speed of ascent?

## Everest Ascent: BREAKOUT GROUPS

1. How should Jordan deal with resource constraints around supplying upper camps after Sherpas quit?
2. How can the expedition team move climbers up the wall faster?
3. Lessons/insights gained about how you approach critical workforce challenges coming out of the pandemic?

## BREAKOUT Discussions: Take Aways

1. How Jordan deals with resource constraints...Are you constantly short staffed, confronting personnel constraints?
2. How to safely speed up climbers' progress? ...Struggling with slow, bureaucratic hiring processes?

## Solving Routine Breakdowns With New Heuristics

- "Routines" – standard sequence of actions to accomplish specific tasks, SOPs
- Everest highlights mismatches between group's routines & demands of specific context
- "Heuristics" – brief but explicit rules, accepted by group
- Prime triggers: resource constraints & need for speed
- Searching for solutions, social agreement – discussions key



## Lost Sherpas Heuristic: *Carry Only Critical Supplies*

- How fix breakdown in routine to supply upper camps
- Searching for solutions, discussion
- New rule to address resource constraints
- "Carry only minimum supplies needed for climbers continuing to next stage." No redundancies in food & oxygen.

## New Climbing Heuristic: Decision Making on the Wall

- Slow decisions putting climbers at risk, need for speed
- Discussions over dinner: how to speed decision making?
- New rule: "1<sup>st</sup> climber on ropes calls shots."
- More pressure on technical capabilities of climber, saves energy & time, provides more flexible responses

# Solving Routine Breakdowns With Improvisations

- Improvisations – unique behavior deviating from previous designs, enacted on the spot, no pre-existing script
- Often in situations of higher uncertainty, higher risk impacts
- Prime triggers: unanticipated problems & opportunities
- Potential for big impact

"Routines, Heuristics, & Improvisations in a Mount Everest Expedition," Suarez & Montes, Organization Science, 2019, vol 30 n 3

© D.W. DeLong 2021

15

# Everest: Uncertainty & Race to the Summit

- 3 climber's approach summit in "Death Zone"
- High uncertainty about body's reaction to altitude
- Few routines to fall back on
- Start final ascent with 20 lb ropes

© D.W. DeLong 2021

16



## Everest: Improvising in the “Death Zone”

- Assumption: extra ropes essential for Hillary Step
- Overwhelmed oxygen-starved bodies, won't make it
- Improvisation under extreme uncertainty
- Drop the ropes! High risk move, tradeoffs

## Conquering Everest: Successful Ascent

- 3 climbers summited two hours apart
- Returned safely to Camp 3
- Improvised again: melting snow for water
- Entire team made it off Everest safely

# Healthcare's Response to Pandemic

- Emergency room **routines** break down
- Need to speed up triage decisions with **new rules of thumb**
- **Heuristic:** who gets time on limited ventilators?
- In extreme cases: **improvisation** on reusing protective gear, *sharing* ventilators

# Rethinking Your Post-Pandemic Workforce Challenges

	Routines	Heuristics	Improvisations
Recruiting			
Hiring			
Onboarding			
Training			
Performance Mgt			
Employee Retention			
Knowledge Retention			



# Everest Story: Implications for Your Post-Pandemic Workforce

- Which of your workforce/staffing **routines** have broken down?
- **Heuristics** – Can you identify & negotiate new rules of thumb to act faster or make better use of resources?
- **Improvisation** – situations where assumptions about staffing are no longer valid? Context disrupted? Try creative solutions? Balance learning & risks



© D.W. DeLong 2021

21

## Meeting Workforce Challenges Climbing Your Everest

Recruiting

Hiring

Onboarding

Training/Upskilling

Performance Mgt

Employee Retention

Knowledge Retention

Improvisations

Heuristics

Routines

© D.W. DeLong 2021

22

# Summary: Transitioning Your Workforce Out of the Pandemic

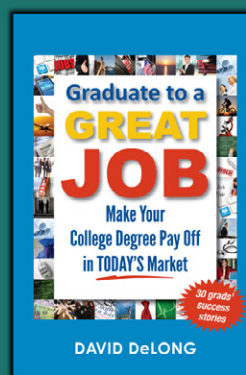
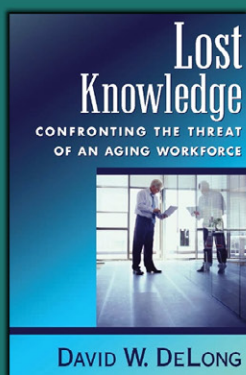
- Continually challenge assumptions underlying your workforce routines
- Where does changing context (e.g. telemedicine) demand new heuristics or improvisation?
- Practice gratitude for the team you have
- Think before you drop the ropes!



© D.W. DeLong 2021

23

## To Learn More



Subscribe to my newsletter  
<https://www.smartworkforcestrategies.com/blog/#sign-up>



David@SmartWorkforceStrategies.com

© D.W. DeLong 2021

24