

# HRD

The only independent strategic HR publication

the **HRDIRECTOR** DECEMBER 2020 | ISSUE 194

## SPECIAL REPORTS

IF LEADERS REALLY WANT  
THE TRUTH, THEY NEED TO  
LISTEN TO WHAT THEY  
DON'T WANT TO HEAR.  
PLUS, THE OFFER YOU  
CAN'T REFUSE.

MELANIE TANSEY, GROUP HR DIRECTOR - HACHETTE UK

## { PAGE TURNER }

“WE’RE IN THE BIGGEST WORK EXPERIMENT IN HISTORY.  
THIS WILL BE MARKED IN TIME AS REVOLUTIONARY”

### ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

**DECISION SCIENCE** Now is not the time for rule of thumb, decision heuristics, illusions of control, group think and strategic blindness

**KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT** The technology tail must not wag the dog, forcing us down paths at odds with our needs

**HR REPORTING** Outside what we once termed normal - people mostly out of sight - HR must be the lighthouse, visible and coherent

**MATRIXED ORGANISATIONS** Stoic, “business-as-usual” firms are like Wilson’s cows, standing in the rain, hoping the sun might shine again



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# HRD

## ON THE COVER

In this issue, Melanie Tansey, Group HR Director - Hachette UK. If ever an industry was threatened by the relentless march of change, it is book publishing. Yet despite the unstoppable digital wave, the demand for print books endures and grows. However sophisticated new formats become, it seems people still want to unplug with a book in hand.



Melanie Tansey shot exclusively for **THEHRDIRECTOR** Cover & Interview photography by Stuart Thomas

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## EDITOR'S WELCOME

Welcome to **theHRDIRECTOR** - the only independent publication dedicated to HR Directors.



Peter Drucker said that, the product of the pharmaceutical industry isn't pills, it is information. Science is pure R&D - quintessential information work - and, as the world's pharmlers race to find a vaccine, cross collaboration is unprecedented.

In the Fourth (digital) Revolution the human resource has transcended from manual labourers and deskbound, paper pushing bureaucrats, to information workers, increasingly without fixed times, locations or affiliations. But in this era where plans and corporate "secrets" are shared across a myriad of teams and individuals, how can KM ensure that businesses are not compromised?

The reformation of business operations is underway as leaders assess the past year of business paralyses and plan for recovery. The disruption to the workforce is unprecedented in peace time. HR's priority is to assess how this level of remote working can be supported in the long-term and mitigate against the predicted impacts on health & wellbeing, engagement and performance. The task ahead is considerable in scale and complexity, but these trying times have drawn HR closer to the heart of the business and, in this crucible of fast and furious enforced change, there is the opportunity to build back better.

Those organisations which, pre-COVID-19, lacked the impetus for change and maintained a stoic, "business-as-usual" approach, were quickly plunged into chaos and a fight for survival. Meanwhile, matrixed organisations, which had either adopted at birth - or had the prescience to adapt to flatter frameworks - were capable of making decisions at speed and had the platforms and technology in place to scale up remote working to the wider workforce, with the minimum of disruption. In this volatile and ever-changing era - typified by the pandemic - AI, machine learning,

data and analytics are key to accelerating the scope and scale of innovation.

As an eerie silence descended upon workplaces and hung like a question-mark over the future, the constant thrum of people data has become an information lifeline. The challenge has been that there is no data to compare this crisis to, to help inform on decision making and it demonstrates the importance of real-time feedback from employees, building data to inform on the journey forward. Decision-making is even more challenging during crisis, when the future is a rolling unknown and so to be effective, data must underscore every aspect of the business, in real-time, so that plans can be re-adjusted. This is the real dawning of decision science.

JASON SPILLER - EDITOR  
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## LEGAL UPDATES

from **theHRDIRECTOR** Editorial Panellist, Makbool Javaid, partner, Simons Muirhead & Burton. They comprise employment law and diversity briefings, both of which provide the latest legal information affecting business.



**1** Can an employee's failure to return to work after maternity leave be regarded as an acceptance of an employer's repudiatory breach for the purposes of constructive unfair dismissal where she has not actually told the employer that she considers this to be the case? Yes, said the EAT in *Chemcem Scotland Ltd v Ure*. The ET had held that although U had stated in evidence that she did not return to work after her maternity leave because her statutory maternity pay had been discontinued in circumstances where the employer had been entitled to stop her payments, there were a variety of other factors that justified her decision not to return to work and because those factors were repudiatory breaches of contract in character, U was entitled to refuse to return to work and treat the employer's conduct as constructive dismissal. The ET further held that her failure to return to work constituted a communication of her decision to end her employment, even though nothing was said to the employer. The EAT held that the ET was correct to treat the various repudiatory acts as a sufficient ground for U's decision to rescind the contract and claim constructive dismissal and while ordinarily it was necessary to communicate a decision not to return to work, the circumstances of this case meant the employer could not have been in any doubt that the breaches were the cause of her decision not to come back.

**2** The implied term of trust and confidence requires employers and employees not to 'conduct themselves', without reasonable and proper cause, in a manner calculated or likely to destroy or seriously damage the relationship of confidence and trust between employer and employee. In *Nair v Lagardère Sports and Entertainment UK*, N alleged that the implied term of trust and confidence had been breached when the employer failed to secure payment of bonuses due from other companies in the broad group of companies in which N was employed and over which the employer had sufficient de facto control. One of the arguments the employer put forward in applying for the claim to be struck out was that a failure to take steps to secure the bonuses (a failure to act) had no prospect of success. The Judge disagreed. The term 'conduct themselves' means failing to do something not just actually doing something.

**3** In *Chell v Tarmac Cement and Lime Ltd*, tensions arose between the Tarmac fitters and fitters provided by a contactor, Roltech. The Tarmac fitters thought, probably wrongly, that their jobs were in jeopardy and that they would be replaced by the Roltech fitters. H, a Roltech fitter, brought two "pellet targets" with him on to the site and he put those on a bench close to a Roltech fitter's, C's, right ear. H then hit them with a hammer causing a loud explosion as a practical joke, but the joke 'misfired' as C suffered a perforated right eardrum. The High Court held that Tarmac was not vicariously liable for H's actions which had caused the injury as there was no sufficiently close connection between the risk posed by the tensions on site and the wrongful act to make the company liable. Nor was Tarmac negligent in failing to take steps to prevent the injury as there was no foreseeable risk of harm being caused as the tensions were not that serious so as to indicate any possibility of violence or physical confrontation. Furthermore the findings in relation to vicarious liability impinged on this aspect.

To see full updates, movers & shakers and much more, please visit our website [www.thehrdirector.com](http://www.thehrdirector.com)

## MOVERS & SHAKERS

This issue we report on some moving & shaking across a broad range of sectors.

### CLARE BOOTH

Human Resources Director - Scania (Great Britain) Limited

Clare Booth has been appointed to the position of Human Resources Director for Scania (Great Britain) Limited. In her new role, Clare takes overall responsibility for Scania's UK HR function, which supports the company's 1500 plus staff at its Milton Keynes Support centre and nationwide network of commercial vehicle service centres. Clare has many years of experience in HR and the automotive sector.

### ROSS SEYCHELL

Chief People Officer - Personio

HR software provider Personio, has appointed Ross Seychell as Chief People Officer, tasked with driving people strategy and employee experience to support organisational and business growth across Europe. Ross will play a pivotal role in executing company and product strategy from an HR perspective, to support business plans. He brings more than twenty years of experience in developing and implementing people strategies.

### NORA LEGGETT

HR Director - BVRLA

Nora Leggett has been appointed the BVRLA's new Director of Human Resources, Formerly the BVRLA's director of member services, a position she has held since 2013, Nora will now be responsible for managing recruitment, internal communications, payroll and benefits. She will also maintain responsibility for the association's Learning and Development team.

### NATASHA OWENS

HR Director - Oprema

Oprema announces the appointment of Natasha Owens as its new HR Director. Natasha is the first female to join the Board, providing new angles to discussions. The decision to give HR a place at board level reflects the value the company places on its people. Oprema's objective is to support its employees to develop themselves both professionally and personally.



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*If ever an industry was threatened by the relentless march of change, it is book publishing. Yet despite the unstoppable digital wave, the demand for print books endures and grows. However sophisticated new formats become, it seems people still want to unplug with a book in hand. Hachette UK embraces all platforms, with one foot firmly in the strong traditions of storytelling, and the other in the digital future.*





## MELANIE TANSEY

### GROUP HR DIRECTOR, HACHETTE UK

INTERVIEWED BY JASON SPILLER & PHOTOGRAPHED BY STUART THOMAS

***Melanie tell us about your early life and how you found the path to a career in HR.***

I was born in Dublin and raised in County Sligo, on the west coast of Ireland and I studied commerce at the National University of Ireland in Galway because the business world has always appealed to me. My dad managed a further education and training centre and my mum was a housewife while we were young and later ran a bed and breakfast from our house, which helped to fund my university years. She was a public servant, like my dad, before they were married but as was law in Ireland until 1973, women working in public service had to resign when they became a wife, which is unthinkable now. I was the first generation in my family to benefit from a university education - a route that my parents carved out for me - and I'll always be incredibly grateful for their encouragement. The degree was really broad and I found myself drawn to the HR Management elements and how they drive business performance, so I majored on that in my final year. On graduating, I had a hotlist of companies that I most admired, each of which had a big presence in Ireland and were mostly in the tech sector. My number one choice was Compaq, which had a major software development centre in Galway. As luck would have it, Compaq had an entry level grad placement in general HR administration. This was just at the point when Compaq was merging with Hewlett Packard (HP), so it was a massive growth and transformation period while Compaq was absorbed into HP. I would go on to spend almost a decade at HP, being promoted every 18 months on average and experiencing the full spectrum of HR responsibilities as the business was expanded and consolidated through multiple acquisitions. It was the most comprehensive set of experiences that anyone starting out could hope for, in terms of pace, diversity and complexity of roles.

***What was the most important learning from this early experience?*** Without question, the importance of relationships and your personal brand. HP was an early adopter of developing

a talent management framework, with collaboration across the business and avoiding that siloed thinking that's so entrenched in many organisations. The leadership team lived these behaviours and were a real inspiration for how I intended to build my career. So, it was a time of massive organisational transformation, but I wasn't daunted - I was really energised and made a name for myself, putting myself forward for as much variety of experience as possible, to put myself on the radar. It worked and the diversity of role opportunities to come provided an incredible foundation for the future. When anyone asks me for early career advice I say, put your hand up for - almost - anything and stretch yourself well beyond nailing your core role. In my last role at HP as Group HR Manager for HP Enterprise Services, my role delivered strategic and operational HR support to the business in the UK and Ireland and included; workforce planning, succession planning, bonus programme design, leadership development and culture transformation. Before that, an early secondment took me from Ireland to HR Operations in the UK and later into Reward, where I became a specialist in compensation and benefit programmes. That and my tenure as HR Manager for the Imaging and Printing consumer business prepared me pretty comprehensively for the road ahead. At that stage, HP was the biggest tech company in the world - the pace never slowed - and my time there culminated in the acquisition of EDS. As the closing stages of this transition came into view, I knew that the time was right for me to look outside HP for the first time, perhaps in a different sector.

***Tell us about your next career move.*** I could easily have spent my entire career at HP - it was a whole world inside a company, buzzing with ambition and opportunity. But after nine years - and by now I'd been living in London for several years and knew it was home - I felt the need to be in a business where you could see the decision makers and have more influence in the strategic planning. HP was so massive, much of the strategy was set in the US - by

people who were brilliant at engaging a company of that scale in that strategy - but I wanted to be in the room. So I made a very deliberate decision to move to a company where I would create the HR agenda, at executive level, leading the strategy for the overall organisation. I still felt drawn to the tech sector, but as I narrowed down my search, one particular fast-paced and mission-driven business jumped out at me... but it wasn't in tech, it was media, at ITN. This was 2010 and I joined as HR Director, working for the newly appointed Chief Executive, John Hardie. It was a most disruptive, but exciting, time in media and this long-established and much-revered news production business was to be subject to the biggest turnaround, transformation and diversification in its history.

***Tell us about ITN and the road ahead for its transformation?*** World-renowned and highly respected for the integrity of its journalism, ITN is responsible for news output across ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 and is the main commercial rival to BBC News. ITN was teeming with talent, but it was a commercial enterprise - not able to rely upon TV license income - and it was loss-making and that had to change fast. So, John was building his leadership team to turn the business around, with a massive focus on diversification. We restructured into two divisions, ITN News and ITN Productions and we secured the contract to produce 5 News - previously outsourced to Sky - and Channel Four News was also subject to transformation at this time, with a major emphasis on online. ITN productions was a very small part of the organisation, so that was to be subject to rapid growth and development, expanding from TV production into digital content services, advertising and sports production. We grew it three-fold and gained a reputation for being a world-class, international content creation business, including securing our first repeat series with Netflix, *Drug Lords* and an Oscar nomination for the documentary *Watani: My Homeland*. So, the brilliance of the journalism was now matched and supported by the



transformed ITN Productions division, which has gone from strength to strength.

***What is the impact on a culture that thrives on integrity, when the big focus becomes money?***

Well, the transformation and shift in focus did have an impact and the leadership team had to work very hard to ensure that the new organisation was an ecosystem, which could support the news business and ITN productions teams and ensure that everyone had their commercial head on because, the bottom line was the commercial imperative

challenging of times globally, the more sources of news there are available to people, the more they reach for the high quality and trusted sources. ITN's mantra is 'trusted to tell the world's stories' and ratings for all its news programmes are up significantly this year. That comes down to integrity, trust and reporting of the highest quality. ITN is a special place, with the right culture, environment and, of course, exceptional journalistic talent to drive that success. My time there will always stand out in my career as very important.

WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF THE GREATEST HOME WORKING EXPERIMENT OF ALL TIME - HOW EXTRAORDINARY IT WOULD BE TO LOOK BACK AND, NOT FORGETTING THE DEVASTATION AND TRAGEDY, MARK THIS TIME AS REVOLUTIONARY TO THE WORLD OF WORK?

and fundamental to the future of ITN. In terms of strategy, it was more about capitalising on output, capability and capacity - rather than cuts and consolidation - and so the news and production teams alike were really bolstered by having a vibrant and commercially ambitious brand and a thriving and profitable organisation. Combine this with a very dynamic, hard-working and mission-based culture and you have a winning formula. From an HR point of view, it was such a privilege to be able to play a part in this.

***Newspapers are famously partisan and subject to blatant bias in favour of their political allegiances and indeed, most TV news platforms around the world have followed suit, but ITN seems to work hard at conveying balance. How important is that today?***

When we look at the way world events have been reported in recent times, some newspapers will be partisan, some online news can spin out into conspiracy theory, but public service licensed television news in the UK has to report with impartiality, give the public the facts and not drive the story in any biased direction - so the responsibility of a news platform cannot be underestimated. It's also essential for trust and integrity that a news platform is representative of its audience, so diversity, equality and inclusion was and remains, a key driver of the organisation.

***There's a case to say that people have gravitated towards unreliable sources with the potential for being fed fake news and have been driven back to reliable sources. It's really interesting that in these most turbulent and***

***As a journalist, I wonder how you could ever have left ITN... tell us about your move to Hachette UK and what attracted you to the company?*** ITN was a very hard place to leave, but eight years into my tenure as HR Director, with the company in great shape again, I knew it was time to move on and give somebody else the opportunity to take it to the next stage. I was a year back from maternity leave - having had my twins - and knew that the next move would have to be carefully considered. I deliberated whether it should be a large organisation or a start-up and in what sector. I was still drawn to tech, but I had loved working in a creative, commercial business. If I could find a role in which the worlds of tech and media/creativity converged, that would be my target. I was also drawn to the potential of another challenge in an organisation on a transformation and growth journey. It was an opportunity that arrived in the shape of a global publishing giant that caught my interest. I met David Shelley, Chief Executive at Hachette UK, who at the time had recently been appointed to the role and he was looking for an HR Director. It was not a brand or a sector that I had on my radar, but I found his vision, energy and ambition for the business so compelling. He wanted a HR Director who was at his right hand, on the top team - not just as a functional expert - but as a fully integrated Board member. This is essential to me because the value of HR comes when you are fully immersed in the commercial agenda, really understand the priorities and can create an HR offering that is truly in service of the business and its people, whilst enabling the values and



behaviours which underpin the culture and performance. Hachette UK, as an organisation, with its rich and diverse history, is far from what I imagined before I met David. Nearly 200 years on from its formation, it's a highly commercial, dynamic and growing business in a sector in consistent growth, publishing thousands of new books every year, by some of the best-known authors in the world, including; JK Rowling, John Grisham and Stephen King, as well as some of the most talked about books of today, such as British Book of the Year 2020 *Queenie* by Candice Carty-Williams and *The Boy at the Back of the Class* by Onjali Q. Rauf. What I also hadn't appreciated was that publishing is the bedrock of the creative sector and a massive originator of on-screen content - 52 percent of the UK-produced top 20 box office films were based on books and about 40 percent of high-end TV series produced in the UK began life as a book. Research over a five year period showed that TV dramas based on books delivered 58 percent higher ratings than dramas based on original material. Our product is very much multimedia and we're the number one eBook publisher in the UK. It's interesting that, by far the fastest growing area of our business is audiobooks. But it remains that 70 percent of sales across the industry is still in the form of a physical book, so the breadth, diversity and dynamism are really compelling. If we look at the current market climate during the pandemic, publishing has proven to be resilient and thriving despite these unprecedented conditions. During the initial lockdown, immersive fiction sales really spiked, as you would imagine.

***I can see how the juxtaposition of creativity and technology was so compelling for you. Tell us about HR's input, impact challenges and opportunities.*** To really understand what the business needed from HR, I spent the first couple of months with leaders, managers and top talent at all levels across the business. This enabled me to see how the business operated on a human level, where the areas of collaboration and cohesion were, to gain a feel for the culture and how decisions are made. As an incoming HR Director, you have a vital opportunity to be curious and I would urge anyone to do the same, to really understand how the organisation and its people tick. The talent at all levels of the business was inspiring - from the creative to the commercial - and this time enabled me to clearly formulate my HR plans, to match the future needs, growth and evolving culture of the business and set them out to the Board. Like they say, content is everything and storytelling, as in the best books, is fundamental. So I try to emulate that in HR and paint pictures with words to bring

people onboard with the HR agenda, to deliver our mission. As for company objectives, we have put the people agenda at the centre of the business agenda and our people and culture are undoubtedly a strategic differentiator for us. We have established four pillars of strategy - Growth Mindset, Owner Mentality, Understanding Consumers and Making Diversity Part Of Our Identity - which are all behavioural and a key focus of mine

## THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ENABLE STAFF TO EMERGE TO A BETTER, BLENDED WAY OF WORKING FOR IMPROVED BUSINESS PERFORMANCE, WILL BENEFIT IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS. BUT IT WILL TAKE COURAGE AND PRAGMATISM

right now is to bring those pillars to life and truly embed them throughout the organisation, so that everyone knows exactly what we mean by each one. Take Owner Mentality for example - we believe everyone should take accountability, show a consistent determination to complete the task, deal with issues as they arise and stop anything that isn't working - as if this were their own business. For Making Diversity Part Of Our Identity, I call on my experience at ITN and the work we did there. Right across Hachette UK, diversity of thought, perspectives and stories is essential to connecting with our consumers. Consequently, diversity across our employee base is fundamental and we have to attract and keep talent from as broad a base as our readers, so that people feel that our business represents them. I believe transparency today is essential, so if you can demonstrate authentically that you're a company with real credentials in diversity, that there are compelling opportunities and the capacity for thriving diverse careers, you will attract the people you want and need. The broadest range of talent leads to better storytelling and that fuels our business. Growth and development ambitions begin with the organisation design and we restructured the Board last year, with a view that our formation as a business - and having the right set of leaders at the top table - was essential to take the business on the next stage of its journey. My focus has been organisation design and our culture - ensuring they drive growth and greater success. We're a destination company that creative people in the publishing industry want to join, but when it comes to technology, HR or other central enabling functions, you wouldn't necessarily think of Hachette UK. That's why this work we're doing on our employer brand and our mission is so important. As an HR team, we're

creating our story for Hachette UK and that is an important part of the employer attraction brand. Of course, right now, our HR focus is optimising our new way of working during this protracted pandemic crisis. As for all of our readers, I'm sure, it has impacted every part of our operations and we need to be agile within this constantly moving narrative, in order to support our people during an anxious and unpredictable journey.

***Looking ahead, what do you think the big challenges and opportunities are as the world of work continues to change beyond all our imaginings?*** The pandemic has accelerated change that was already happening and forced remote and flexible working to a level no one could have imagined. We are in the midst of the greatest home working experiment of all time - how extraordinary it would be to look back and, not forgetting the devastation and tragedy, mark this time as revolutionary to the world of work? For us, we had already been building our trust-based culture. In January 2019, we ran a flexible working fortnight that enabled every single person to choose their terms of working in the office or home and flexible working hours, which was a success all round and our flexible approach has been embedding since then.

***What do you think workplaces will represent in the future? Everywhere you looked in London, there were cranes encircling would-be new office blocks.*** I think offices will most likely be adapted and repurposed away from their nine-to-five profiles, ironically to more social hubs where people can come and touch base, collaborate, brainstorm and feed on the energy created by other people. I think in the future we'll see a blend of home and office-based working, with each individual and team finding the optimum blend for overall increased organisational productivity. Progressive companies that embrace this opportunity to enable staff to emerge to a better, blended way of working for improved business performance, will benefit in many different ways. But it will take courage and pragmatism to radically change the status quo, particularly in how productivity is measured.

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HRD

# LISTEN TO WHAT YOU DON'T WANT TO HEAR

ARTICLE BY GARY BURNISON, CEO OF KORN FERRY AND AUTHOR OF *LEADERSHIP U: ACCELERATING THROUGH THE CRISIS CURVE*

I asked an executive about his process for gaining buy-in when making decisions. He didn't pause: "It's actually amazing! Every time we have a discussion, there's complete alignment... 100 percent buy-in! "Last week, during a Zoom meeting, we had a decision to make. So, I went around to everyone and asked for a 'thumbs up' or a 'thumbs down' on my idea. Before they voted, I told them what I thought... for me, it was definitely a 'thumbs up.'"

The discussion continued: "So, how did that work out?" I asked him. "It was unanimous! I have to admit, one guy's hand wavered a little bit, but in the end, he was 'thumbs up' as well. It was just incredible, to see ten people on my screen and all completely aligned." Clearly, that's not listening for feedback and it's certainly not leadership. It's ego-driven "me-der ship." When people are afraid to tell leaders the truth, they will only say what they think the leader wants to hear. In the case of this executive, by giving his opinion first, he told his team that he wasn't really interested in their feedback. Today, more than ever, leaders need to listen and especially to what they do not want to hear. For this candour and direct feedback to emerge, organisational hierarchy needs to be invisible. As a leader, you're listening to people at all levels of the organisation. Such "skip-level feedback" allows you to reach out directly to people who are closest to the problems, solutions and, most of all, the customers. With deep and discerning listening, you can educate your intuition. In the early days of the crisis, top-down or command-and-control leadership was sometimes necessary to devise an immediate response. Today, however, to accelerate through the crisis curve, you need "bubble-up" leadership.

People throughout the organisation and especially those closest to customers, must be empowered to notice everything and provide feedback. But that won't happen unless leaders engage in an extremely important skill, listening. Changes ahead span everything - virtual engagement with customers, "reshoring" supply chains, less porous borders, less travel, more safety protocols, no buffets at restaurants - until a biological solution to the crisis is developed. As widespread remote working becomes institutionalised, companies won't need mega-office "mansions." They'll downsize to "cottages" with places to meet customers and to accommodate the occasional in-person collaboration. For many people, commuting will become something they do occasionally, not every day and so much more. Mature companies will need a start-up mentality and start-ups will need to be more entrepreneurial than ever to drive change. For all this to happen, leaders need to listen, information, insights and marketing intelligence must bubble up, not cascade down.

It's a common complaint in relationships: "You aren't listening to me." One person speaks and the other person mumbles the occasional, "Yeah... yeah... uh-huh... uh-huh." Or someone pretends



to listen, then goes off and does the exact opposite of what was discussed - a clear sign that this person wasn't really listening - what was heard did not register. Since business also involves relationships among people, it's no surprise that these same disconnects are common. Listening is more than just hearing and definitely more than waiting for the other person to take a breath so you can speak again. Listening takes singular focus and diligent practice. It is the antithesis of multitasking - a pause in the rush of achieving things. While important, these realisations only set the stage for listening, they are table stakes. If leaders really want the truth, they need a proven track record of being open to feedback. Leaders and especially those at higher levels in the organisation, must understand the risks people perceive or experience when speaking up. Here are four problems that keep people from speaking up - and one solution: Number 1; people naturally defer to the most senior person in the room because that's who controls the resources. What incentive is there for someone to speak up and tell the truth if they fear that their own livelihood is on the line? Economic stability is the ultimate truth serum and leaders need to recognise that. Number 2; speaking to the leader makes people hesitant or guarded. They filter what they say, with a bias toward the "good news" - or what they think the leader wants to hear. Face it, for leaders, it's hard to hear the truth. People fight the data all the time, preferring their version of reality and not what's really happening in the moment. Problem number 3 is; let's say a project has been delayed, but the boss keeps telling the higher-ups that "everything is great" and "we'll meet the deadline, no problem." Then, one day, the boss's boss reaches out directly to someone on the team and starts asking probing questions. The biggest fear on that team member's mind is whether the senior leader will immediately call their boss and say, "so-and-so just told me..." Leaders need to "protect their sources", never using names when sharing feedback. In at number 4; why go through the charade of pretending to want feedback - like that executive with his "thumbs up, thumbs down" exercise? If a leader hasn't

created a safe environment in which people can speak without fear, then the whole exercise is pointless. So, here's the solution; make it safe for others to tell you the truth... that's the bottom line.

If you want candid, unvarnished feedback, people must see you as approachable. My absolute favourite example of what not to do, is a manager I knew several years ago. This manager wanted to protect his time for quiet, uninterrupted work. So, he made a big red stop sign and set it outside his closed office door whenever he wanted silence. His direct reports were so offended... the manager, however, was stunned. He really thought his stop sign would be helpful and even when he took the sign down, his team still perceived him as unapproachable. Being an effective leader means being an effective listener,

*If leaders really want the truth, they need a proven track record of being open to feedback. Leaders and especially those at higher levels in the organisation, must understand the risks people perceive or experience when speaking up*

with an "open door" policy - literally or virtually - so people see you as approachable. As you listen, you need to distinguish between the urgent and the important. Day to day, leaders face a multitude of issues, both urgent and important, but in the normal course of business, I've found that many leaders have difficulty distinguishing between the two. When a crisis hits, though, everything blurs as events and their

implications constantly change. What's important often becomes urgent and the urgent becomes critical. You must delegate the urgent by empowering others to lead around a common purpose.

Every single day, leaders need to be clued into their two most important constituents; customers and employees. These two groups are at the heart of having an outside-in and an inside-out strategy: Outside-in means looking at mega-trends (e.g., potential nationalism or virtual engagement) as well as their customers' perspective. What are they hearing and experiencing? How do they view your organisation? How is their business expected to be disrupted, thereby affecting your company? What are their needs, current and projected? Inside-out means putting yourself in the shoes of people throughout the organisation, obtaining direct, skip-level feedback. How are employees feeling? What is on their minds? What problems do they see and what ideas do they have for solving them? As the leader, your job is to marry the two perspectives as you anticipate, navigate and communicate. To pivot from crisis to opportunity, you need to elicit collective genius. Truly visionary leaders - an Elon Musk or a Steve Jobs - are rare. Most of the time, the best and most innovative ideas emerge from within the organisation. To tap collective genius, you need to promote open and honest discussion. Constructive conflict should be welcome, because when people disagree and debate, new insights are unearthed. In a group discussion, or one-on-one, ask each person, "What do you think?" This not only jumpstarts the free flow of ideas, it also sends a clear message that everyone matters.

Nothing shuts things down faster, though, than the word "but." When one person floats an idea or asks a question, then another jumps in with "but," what comes next is always negative. Invariably, it leads to disagreement. Replacing "but" with "and" improves team effectiveness, such as; "that's an interesting idea and you might also consider..." Several months ago, I was in a meeting when an employee asked a sincere question, albeit

not something that needed to be addressed immediately. A leader quite literally dismissed the question, saying; “but that’s not what we’re talking about.” It was like the air was sucked out of the room. The question was important, but not urgent and the leader was attempting to outline urgent priorities. After the meeting, the employee came up to me and said, “Boy, he (the leader) just doesn’t listen.” Such a simple pivot by that leader, from “but” to “and,” could

*This manager wanted to protect his time for quiet, uninterrupted work. So, he made a big red stop sign and set it outside his closed office door whenever he wanted silence. His direct reports were so offended... the manager, however, was stunned*

have prevented 30 people from feeling deflated. To listen to others, leaders must compartmentalise at times. Whatever is going on in the leader’s life is secondary to being fully present to others. There have been so many times when, just before a big meeting or giving a speech, I received upsetting or bad news that I had to set aside in that moment. It’s a reminder - yet again - leadership is not about you! To be there for others and truly listen to them, you need emotional intelligence - especially empathy - you’re putting yourself in the other person’s shoes. I can remember conversations in the early days of the pandemic when people shared deep concerns about their loved ones. One person told me about her son who had a fever, another shared

concerns about family members stranded in South America who had health issues and couldn’t go back to the United States. Someone else told me his father had prostate cancer, but couldn’t receive treatment right away. After our company made a series of gut-wrenching decisions that affected many good and talented people, I made a series of calls to leaders who had delivered some tough messages, the kind that no leader wants to give to their team. As I called around to gain a pulse, I learned that one leader, in particular, was struggling. I reached out to them immediately and, when we spoke, I acknowledged the leader’s feelings - without ever disclosing what I heard or from whom. “I know this is a nightmare. I’m sorry these past two weeks have been so tough,” I began.

I heard a story a year or so ago about a manager at a technology company. The manager stopped by the cubicle of a direct report on a Monday morning. “So, how was your weekend?” the manager asked. The team member sighed, “Actually, a little tough. Last night, I had to put my dog down.” To which the manager replied, “That’s too bad. Team meeting at 10am, see you then.” The leader knew I was interested in real feelings, not a brave face. Listening and communicating with empathy require a safe atmosphere, in which others know that I am truly listening and want to know what they are actually thinking and feeling. As a leader, you’re not a priest in the confessional, allowing others to unburden their souls. You’re acting more as a combination of psychologist and mentor, with the goal of helping people identify problems, decide on solutions and take actions. Listening to others should lead to their empowerment. There will be times when people ask you for something that just can’t be done - perhaps not now or not in the way that they desire. In these challenging moments, rely on the “sandwich principle”, with positive messages on both sides (the bread) and the negative (filling) in the middle. In this case, the first positive is showing that you really listened, such as by reiterating the issue or problem the person is facing. The negative is the reality that what the

person wants simply isn’t possible. Or maybe the problem is more of the existential variety, fear and uncertainty about how long difficulties are going to persist. The reality is that these challenges aren’t going to go away any time soon and they’re beyond anyone’s control. Then provide a hopeful message at the end. Let them know you’re willing to listen and then help them see how and where they can take positive actions. ●

This is an edited extract from *Leadership U: Accelerating Through the Crisis Curve*, by Gary Burnison (published by Wiley).



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# THE OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE

ARTICLE BY STEVEN VAN BELLEGHEM, SPEAKER & AUTHOR OF *THE OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE*

'Customers are just ordinary people,' says speaker and author Jos Burgers. ... and the same is true of a company's employees, they are just ordinary people. For this reason, many of the elements that are important for the customer relationship are equally important for the company's relationship with its own staff. As a result of growing talent scarcity in recent years, the balance of power has shifted from employers to employees.

Customers have always had the choice about who they want to buy from, so that companies have already been investing in the customer relationship for years. They now need to do the same for their personnel. Notwithstanding the clear need for a better employee experience, companies still give themselves a low score in this domain. Some 80 percent of company leaders say that the employee experience is very important, but only 22 percent feel that they are offering a differentiating experience to their own staff. The challenges for keeping employees satisfied are looking increasingly like the same challenges for keeping customers satisfied. Of course, this requires something more than simply substituting the word 'employee' for the word 'customer' in a presentation or model. For customers, the bottom level of the model was the need for a good product and good service at a good price. For employees, this lowest level is the need for good job content and a good salary. These are minimum requirements and they are important, but they will not be enough for an employer to differentiate their company.

The second level for customers was ultimate convenience - this also applies for employees - everyone wants access to smart and easy-to-use tools that save time and energy. As a company,

it is important to make the workposts of your employees as user-friendly as possible, equipped with all necessary aids and support mechanisms, so that they can focus their time on the things in their jobs that are truly important. Of course, today it almost goes without saying that these tools also need to work with equal ease in a home environment. These first two levels form the employee's transactional experience: 'Is the job interesting, am I well paid and is it easy to work here?' The next two levels focus on the employee's emotional experience: 'What is my feeling as an employee of this company, both personally and from a societal perspective?' The third level relates to the 'partner in life' philosophy. For employees, this not only means a partnership in every aspect of their day-to-day existence, but also a partnership in their professional career. So how can you do this? How can a company be a partner in someone's life and career? Being able to continually offer your employees more and more added value is one of the most important challenges for attracting and retaining talent. What talent wants is to become increasingly interesting for the labour market through collaboration with the employer, whilst at the same time have sufficient time to realise personal dreams and private objectives. The fourth and highest level of the model is, of course, 'save

the world'. This level is even more important for your employees than it is for your customers. If you invest all your professional energy in a company, you want that energy to lead to something that goes further than your own or the company's interests. In short, you hope to be able to make a positive contribution to society. In order to implement this model for employees successfully, leadership is crucial and the manner in which the CEO and senior management communicate and act during the different phases will have a major influence on employee perception. Simplification of the processes is an important starting point for improving employee experience. A study by Deloitte revealed that 74 percent of employees regard the processes in their company as being too complex. Only four percent work in a simple working environment<sup>2</sup>. Complexity is a general problem in our professional lives.

There are three axes of investment that would allow companies to offer greater convenience to their customers and these same three dimensions can be used for employees. Faster than realtime: If your employees have a problem, try to anticipate it. Making use of data that should be readily available, will allow you to gain insight into your employees' levels of (dis)satisfaction and the reasons for them. This insight will help you to identify and proactively respond to particular needs or concerns.

Hyperpersonalisation: We all have our own particular way of working. Investigate how you can personalise your tools and communication in ways that will allow individual employees to make use of their preferred working methods. No two iPhones in the world have the same composition of apps on the home screen, so remember, people like to personalise and do your best to take this into account in all aspects of the employee experience. Convenience - last but not least - is the ease of use of tools, which is crucial if you want to prevent unnecessary frustration. I have seen many contacts stop communicating via their work computer - because it is so cumbersome - and have switched instead

to their own private computer. If people have better and easier-to-use tools in their private lives than they do in their professional lives, this is seriously detrimental to an employee experience. A 'partner in life' strategy understands the concerns, dreams, fears and ambitions that people have for their own lives. This strategy is not about the company, but about each individual employee. Empathy for his or her hopes and worries is a basic requirement for taking the right steps to develop the necessary partnership. Of course, this partnership is about more than a brand simply being a 'partner in life' for customers. The company also needs to be a partner in the career of its employees. Based on research by PwC and Deloitte, I have identified four elements that are important, if you want to establish this dual partnership, a partner in life and career.

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Recently, I had the pleasure of making a couple of visits to the SpaceX factory in Los Angeles. All the staff wear 'Colonize Mars' T-shirts. Everyone, from the humble cleaner to the most senior engineer, has the feeling that they are working as part of a unique project. They are convinced that in the foreseeable future, people will be walking on Mars. Each time that a SpaceX rocket is launched, thousands of SpaceX employees watch the event on a giant screen in the middle of the production hall and this usually results in a sense of euphoria and loud applause. If, however,

the launch goes wrong - which happens only very rarely - you can hear a pin drop in the icy silence that follows. In 2011, Daniel Pink wrote his bestseller *Drive*, in which he argued convincingly that if you can offer people autonomy, mastery and purpose, they will be happy in their work. His research is now more than ten years old, but the basic principles remain the same. Many people see their job as part of a life-long career trajectory. By continuing to learn and develop throughout that career, they hope to keep their profile interesting for the labour market. Research indicates that employees under the age of 35 years regard opportunities for continuous learning as one of the most important drivers for choosing who to work for<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, organisations with a strong learning culture have 92 percent more chance of bringing innovative products and services to market; are 52 percent more productive than others; have 56 percent more chance of being first to market with products and services and are 17 percent more profitable than their competitors<sup>4</sup>.

Ann De Bisschop wrote an excellent book on this subject entitled *Wellbeing = winst* (Wellbeing = profit)<sup>5</sup>. She contends that companies that invest in the well-being of their workforce book better results across the board. To support this argument, she uses the definition of Karen Danna and Ricky Griffin, the first authors to put literature and research relating to wellbeing in the workplace firmly on the map; "well-being at work is the result of satisfaction in and about the work in question, in combination with good physical and mental health". A study by LinkedIn has shown that 49 percent of employees have a preference for benefits linked to health and well-being above all other benefits<sup>6</sup>. According to an article in the *Harvard Business Review*<sup>7</sup>, employees covered by Walmart's healthcare plan spend 14 percent less time in hospital and return to work 20 percent faster than employees who are not covered by an equivalent employer plan. Walmart is good, but Apple has taken things even further, in its concern for the health of its employees. Since 2019, Apple offers these employees the chance to have their DNA



checked for the presence of certain hereditary diseases<sup>8</sup>. The results of these tests are then used for the development of a personalised treatment approach, designed to keep the health of the employee stable for as long as possible.

*Young people use their own values as the basis for finding the right employer for them. Some 64 percent of this demographic would no longer accept a job with a company that does not have socially beneficial and sustainable objectives*

Researcher Josh Bersin has shown that 70 percent of multinationals no longer organise annual evaluation meetings with their employees, but have switched to a system of continuous conversations as the best means to discuss performance and plan future career developments<sup>9</sup>. The classic evaluation procedure focuses on the assessment of past behaviour and then rewards or punishes people via financial incentives. But if you want to be a partner in the life and career of your people, you need to look to the long-term future and plan it together through a process of constant dialogue. More and more people are opting to work for employers with positive, ethical and sustainable values. I increasingly read and hear how young people use their own values as the basis for finding the right employer for them. Some 64 percent of this demographic would no longer accept a job with a company that does not have socially beneficial and sustainable objectives<sup>10</sup>. For companies, it is becoming ever more important to take account of the opinions of this group. By 2025, 75 percent of the working

population will consist of millennials<sup>11</sup>. This means that in the future war for talent the 'save the world' level of your offer will become a crucial criterion for making the difference. The 'save the world' idea is much more important for this internal target group and not just for the youngsters. It is a fallacy that it is only the millennials who attach importance to positive values when choosing an employer. Young people may attach more importance, but the 'save the world' philosophy also appeals to a large section of more seasoned employees. Seventy percent of the total working population wants to work for an employer with a strong and positive climate policy. Fifty percent of people are even prepared to work for slightly lower pay, if this gives them the opportunity to find an employer with positive societal objectives and values. For one-in-three young people, the absence of a societal sense of responsibility is a deal-breaker.

So why are more and more people opting for companies that have a 'save the world' plan? In my opinion, there are three key motives. In the first instance, a 'save the world' strategy creates a sense of pride in employees. But this pride only emerges when their company exceeds the societal norm. During the lockdown, Panera Bread continued making its delicious salads and sandwiches. Lots of them were sold to customers via home deliveries and street pick-ups, but the company also donated thousands of its meals to poor children. Many American children from poorer families rely on free school meals, so that when COVID-19 forced the closure of schools, many families found themselves urgently in need of another source of free food. Panera Bread gave away tens of thousands of sandwiches, far more than any other foodstuffs company, to children who would otherwise have gone hungry during the corona crisis. This is the kind of action that makes employees proud, because it goes beyond the norm of what society expects. The more employees can be actively involved in these inspiring actions, the greater their impact will be. The second motive is a derivative conclusion drawn from the very existence of a 'save the world' strategy. Future employees assume that

a company that wants to take care of society will also do a pretty good job of taking care of its own people. Lastly, projects with a societal added value often strike a chord with the employee's own values. A good fit between personal values and the company's values is one of the most important drivers for intrinsic motivation. There are a growing number of people who choose an employer based on a 'save the world' mindset, but if their daily experience of working in the company is disappointing the strategy will lack impact. As far as customers are concerned, there is slightly more room for manoeuvre regarding which aspects of the model you apply and how, but with your employees you do not have this luxury. You have to score well with every element of the model. You have no choice. Every step in your strategy is crucial for determining the satisfaction, pride and loyalty of (and your attraction to), both your present and future employees. ●

This is an edited extract from *The Offer You Can't Refuse*, by Steven van Belleghem

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# MACMILLAN AT WORK

## Helping people with cancer back to work

Each year, more than an estimated 125,000 people of working age are diagnosed with cancer in the UK.<sup>1</sup> That's why Macmillan Cancer Support has developed workplace training, guidance and resources to help managers and HR professionals feel confident and equipped to support employees affected by cancer. For people with cancer, staying in or returning to work can be hugely positive. But it can be difficult to know how to support someone with cancer at work.

## Reasonable adjustments

Cancer is classed as a disability under the Equality Act 2010 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. That means employers are required to make reasonable adjustments to make it easier for someone with cancer to work if their location, working arrangements or a lack of extra support puts them at a substantial disadvantage. Cancer and some cancer treatments can leave some people with long-term side effects. Fatigue, pain and depression are common ones, so reasonable adjustments such as flexible working and giving time off to attend medical appointments can make a big difference to someone affected by cancer. It's important to remember that every person may need different support. So how can employers equip HR professionals and line managers to provide the best individual support for staff they manage, while following organisational policies?

## Keep the conversation going

Often one of the biggest concerns can be starting the initial conversation with someone who has been diagnosed with cancer. Starting conversations and keeping communication channels open are key steps to help managers gain an understanding of their individual needs and the support they need in the workplace. It's also important to discuss arrangements for keeping in touch with an employee before their absence, and to maintain appropriate contact with them during periods of sick leave.

## Support for employers

Our support can help you understand the impact of cancer on work, your legal obligations to employees living with cancer and how to start a conversation with someone affected by cancer. It's designed to help workplaces support employees with a cancer diagnosis, or those caring for someone with cancer.

Getting back to work during or after treatment can mean so much to someone living with cancer. Find out more about how Macmillan at Work can prepare your staff to support them.

Sign up at [macmillan.org.uk/atwork](https://macmillan.org.uk/atwork)  
Email us at [workandcancer@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:workandcancer@macmillan.org.uk)  
Or call us on 020 7840 4725

**MACMILLAN**  
**CANCER SUPPORT**  
**RIGHT THERE WITH YOU**

<sup>1</sup> Based on the number of newly diagnosed cases of all cancers per year (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) in people aged 15 to 64, using the most recently available incidence data for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.  
England: 2017 (Office for National Statistics), Scotland: 2017 (Information Services Division Scotland), Northern Ireland: 2013-2017 (Northern Ireland Cancer Registry), Wales: 2016 (Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit).



# FOR BEAUTIFUL CHAOS, READ LABEL CAREFULLY

*It pays to remember that even the best strategist is subject to biases and errors, the convergence on the attractive, reliance on rules of thumb and decision heuristics, illusions of control, group think and strategic blindness. We have become very good at micro-analytics - developing algorithms that can predict very useful outcomes - so long as the rules of behaviour stay the same. But we can be awed by our technology and the new precision of our measurement.*



ARTICLE BY PROFESSOR PAUL SPARROW, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL HRM - LANCASTER UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT SCHOOL

Textbooks are full of well-intentioned, but ultimately foolish strategies that everyone thought were evidence-based. So, what have we learned from other evidence-based disciplines? Look at our world right now, I admire our scientists as they try to navigate us through the pandemic and yet they will wonder whether history books will ask - outside their modelling - were they ever off-sided by assumptions such as “COVID-19 is like flu”, “herd immunity” or “symptomless infection”? Evidence-bases need good (and the right) theory to make sense of data. Distinguished scientists can disagree fundamentally on the best strategy to pursue when looking at the best data and models. Rightly so, have sympathy for them and for yourself, as you now operate in similar territory. Those who made strategy on the basis of evidence need to be fit for purpose and so we

ask, is evidence-based HR and decision thinking a great opportunity to “upgrade” our function, its reputation and our personal impact and contribution? HR has often been stereotyped as being a function full of wise birds - perhaps a little too nay-sayer - but savvy operators, pragmatic and with an ability to bring individuals to the heart of strategy. But place that individual in the wider context of society and make judgements about fairness, ethics, culture and rules.

The very skills that lead us to be seen as pragmatic, but not strategic, will position us well in the new world. I am a great fan of evidence-based decision thinking, it is a powerful tool to shine a light onto and into our strategies. It requires huge upgrades in capability in the strategy team and our own teams, but the opportunities are endless, the gains are high -

so too are the risks - for as with all innovations, it comes with important health warnings. Decision science requires huge changes in the culture of decision making. Don't be bamboozled by science, nor blinded by professional expertise - your own too. Algorithms and data-based strategies can be seductive. However, an algorithm, no matter how clever, is simply a set of mathematical rules brought together to best solve a problem or achieve a particular goal. Models are not science, they are simulations that output data or forecasts and much decision science thinking is based upon models of what happens. The models and their forecasts - the evidence - are not the science. They are simulations, representations of what might happen under certain conditions and assumptions. This is powerful, modelling often



alerts and forewarns us to important developments. But actual numbers in the forecast are just that - numbers that have the potential to happen. To believe the data, or better know what it means, you need a good theory backed up by good intelligence capabilities. Data is only as good as the science, or experimental design that unearthed it.

A word of warning, don't bet your mortgage on forecasts and never tweet them! Let's use the analogy of the weather forecaster, who stated; "we've run our forecasts and on 30th October 2022 the temperature will fall to minus ten degrees, be very afraid!"

You, quite rightly, would burst out laughing. Have a warning bell in your head that says "well, it could happen" but no more than that. Yet daily we hear economists - a field whose predictive validity makes the weatherman look good - make such claims. The science is not in the modelled "best estimate". The science (hopefully) is in the assumptions and relationships that have been hard baked into the algorithm that was used. Many a day, you could be forgiven for thinking that we could gain a better fix on the weather, simply by looking out of the window - it is not true of course - a five-day forecast today is as accurate as a one-day forecast of 40 years ago. Every day the Met Office pulls in tidal waves of data - some 200 billion observations - from satellites, planes, weather stations and buoys. The latest supercomputer project guided by the new atmospheric condition, "model of everything", cost £1.2 billion. It predicts down to a resolution of 1500 metre squares in the UK, every hour. Data from 15 measurements can now be used, for example, to predict whether lightning will create a wildfire, with 77 percent accuracy. The algorithms solve complex multiple equations that would take an expert, months to calculate. Machine learning can even self-correct some forecast errors, resolve bias and adjust future use of the algorithm accordingly. The value of the weather data has mushroomed as new applications and services are being created. For every £1 invested in the super computers there is £19 economic benefit.

The problem with algorithms is, it is not what they say, but what they don't say. Despite the best technology, investment and capabilities, there are two golden rules: You need cross discipline insight and root cause thinking. What disciplines have been brought into committee? Who is being listening too? Is there too much influence or too little? Did someone strike lucky in an early prediction? Well, that luck does not guarantee future reliability and validity? You need good scientific discipline to really understand how the evidence-base is arrived at. Evidence-based anything requires data intelligence capabilities, to filter data or unearth relationships in data. The weathercaster's supercomputers are supported by a network of high-performance computing services across seven Universities, each bringing together a range of disciplines such as; artificial intelligence, energy storage and supply, materials and molecular modelling and drug design. This learning and skill development behind the data is immense. So how



QUIZ DATA  
FIVE TIMES...  
WHY WHY WHY  
WHY WHY...  
TO ARRIVE AT  
THE ROOT OF  
ANY PRESUMED  
RELATIONSHIP.  
QUIZ IN  
DIFFERENT  
DIRECTIONS -  
WHY DOES IT  
HAPPEN? WHY  
WOULD THAT  
BE? WHY DO WE  
THINK THAT? -  
BUT QUIZ YOU  
MUST



Has your organisation  
adopted data science?

15% Yes

85% No

can your organisation replicate and build such intelligence capability? Think what new skills are being created right now as experts model COVID-19 and solve problems across previously unconnected fields. It's important to not be enticed by Strategy by Powerpoint and quiz the robustness of the analyst's method.

Weather forecasters know simulations are unstable. Processes thought not to have a bearing might, under certain conditions, have a powerful effect, but the evidence-base weight needs to be "coupled" with alternative data - for example bringing in variables that climate forecasters see as important such as, deep ocean circulation, atmospheric chemistry or the carbon cycle. They use "ensemble methods" - where a model is run many times to obtain a spread of possible scenarios and put probabilities on a range of outcomes. The conclusion from that is that a combination of both machine learning and expert interrogation across teams is needed, to improve the analytics and focus the prediction. Trust no one, least of all those who think forecasts are facts! Use the five "whys" technique to establish cause and effect and root causes behind each and every component of the algorithm or presumed evidence. You have to quiz data five times... why why why why why - to arrive at the root of any presumed relationship. Quiz in different directions - why does it happen? Why would that be? Why do we think that? - but quiz you must. The problem for the HR function is that it doesn't want to be seen as part of the awkward squad, nor appear naïve in asking questions, so we back off.

Models and algorithms have reputational cache; "we have clever people or proprietary technology here". They may unwittingly bring reputational harm (don't ask us how we came up with this prediction). There are ethical issues often associated with the choice of data necessary for the algorithm, its collection, harvesting, retrieval, encoding, mathematical manipulation, projection and linkage to other data. You need wisdom to understand the financial gains that can result, but also the destruction of organisational wealth if you get it wrong. Manage the decision thinking process and the discussion. We know how to ensure ideas are not closed down. But to be given the right to influence the process, you have to have something valuable to say yourself. Ask the algorithm not "what can you do for me" but "what can I do for you?" HR Directors are ably equipped to understand why and where some of the rules of the algorithm are dependent on the quirks of human behaviour. Ask the right questions and your own strategy starts to crystallise. ●

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## STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

*Analytics communities within organisations have started to emerge, focused on retaining talented staff and advancing analytics internally. These communities thrive with a focus on training and development and they hold many opportunities to improve how an organisation works with data; breaking down silos between departments and geographies, facilitating conversations on data literacy and enabling greater access to build data skills.*

ARTICLE BY EVA MURRAY, TECHNOLOGY EVANGELIST - EXASOL & AUTHOR OF *EMPOWERED BY DATA: HOW TO BUILD INSPIRED ANALYTICS COMMUNITIES*

Building an analytics community within an organisation is not easy but is certainly worthwhile and can be achieved in stages. Demand for talented data professionals remains very high and so recruitment and retention are a constant challenge, but despite the war for talent, it is possible with the right approach. Some organisations start with small meetups to connect people, while others focus on technology solutions to foster collaboration, but no matter where you start, it is important to be clear about the community's purpose first, because it will direct all subsequent efforts. A purpose could be knowledge sharing and upskilling or breaking down silos and enabling better collaboration between departments or showcasing people's expertise to the wider industry. Importantly, identifying the core reasons for establishing an analytics community will act as a guide - it's taken as read that this will evolve over time - but it's a good starting point. Next, consider the structure of the community; what systems and tools are in place already? What organisational structures are in place and where are people located? Structure is important for the community and needs to accommodate future growth, so take into account where the community will be located in the future and how it will grow and evolve.

As with all such projects, finding a champion - or preferably several - is critical to outcome. People are the core of your analytics community and identifying those who can build and drive this community is important. If you see yourself in a facilitator role enabling this community but may not be actively engaged in its data-focused activities, then having these champions is vital. They go above and beyond in the delivery on their targets, as well as keeping their own skills sharp and stay close to industry developments and innovations. Community champions are often passionate about teaching others and sharing their knowledge and can motivate the community to build it into a programme that



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IS IMPORTANT



encourages others to join. Finally, activities are important to establish opportunities for people to connect, learn and build new habits around their professional development and engagement across the organisation. Activities for an analytics community should be influenced by the data and business strategy of the enterprise, as this will dictate the desired outcomes and specific business challenges that need to be solved with data. Such activities involve regular meetups, with presentations by subject matter experts, data challenges that target specific technical skills and understanding, feedback sessions that allow community members (and others) to have their work peer-reviewed, which again feeds into developing and growing their skills.

A practical roadmap needs to include milestones to maintain momentum and focus, especially for those working with data every day. Concurrently, setting specific goals for the activities can guide community champions to establish their priorities, in line with business strategy. Communities thrive when people are inspired to join, so encouraging community members to go beyond inviting their favourite colleagues and bring others into the community, whom they have not worked with, has obvious advantages. Importantly, key to sustainability is the aligning the community role with people's core jobs and responsibilities - tying it into performance reviews and goal setting - to ensure there are incentives to continue and will allay fears that this will distract them from their core responsibilities. Finally, find a way to capture all this potential and a great way for people to make their expertise more visible and accessible, is for them to create content that is shared on a central platform, allowing anyone to benefit from the work this community does. ●

This is an edited extract from the book *Empowered by Data: How to Build Inspired Analytics Communities* by Eva Murray (published by Wiley).

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# YOU CAN HANDLE THE TRUTH

THE PROFOUND DISRUPTIONS OF THE PANDEMIC HAVE BROUGHT MORE PRESSURE TO HR, RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THE DISPERSED AND REMOTE WORKFORCE IS SAFE, REMAINS ENGAGED, CONNECTED AND PRODUCTIVE TO MEET OPERATIONAL GOALS. THIS TIME HAS ALSO BEEN AN UNFORESEEN CATALYST THAT HAS ACCELERATED DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION.

ARTICLE BY PAUL BURRIN, VP MARKETING SAGE PEOPLE - SAGE

*“With the need for scenario planning and making decisions quickly in the rapidly shifting world of work, having a cloud-based, single source of truth, is imperative to agile decision-making and galvanising business resilience”*

Every organisation will be at different stages, but now is the time to accelerate that journey. The journey starts with having accurate and accessible people data, preferably as a single source of truth. Our research revealed only a third of HR and people leaders (33 percent) had a single system of record for their people data. With the need for scenario planning and making decisions quickly in today's rapidly shifting world of work, having a cloud-based, single source of truth, is imperative to agile decision-making and galvanising business resilience. Establishing a single source of truth enables the next step, which is to automate people reporting, arguably the most common requirement from HR and people teams. A cloud-based automated system which enables HR and business leaders to access data in real time means simple information, such as headcount reports, can be accessed in seconds, rather than days. Many may already be creating charts and dashboards to visualise people data and create those all-important report packs for managements meeting. With access to accurate reports, dashboards and KPIs, HR leaders can analyse the data, identify anomalies and trends. With these insights, action can be taken to resolve them and bring the business back on track.

Companies should dig into the detail to explore the 'why' behind the 'what. This involves creating and testing hypotheses based on the analysis already done. If we consider attrition, questions to consider are; why are people voluntarily leaving the business? Is the root cause the same in different regions? What's the driver or drivers such as; remuneration, management issues, inadequate

opportunities for personal growth and career progression, conscious or unconscious bias and many more? Once these are determined, policies can be put in place to address the problems. Channel Four is one company that has made effective use of analytics, to improve efficiency and achieve its diversity goals. The broadcaster had been labouring with nine separate HR systems, expending huge resources to find the data that HR leaders needed and impacting employee productivity across the board. By moving to a single, cloud-based HR system, Channel Four's people managers are now better able to report on their diversity progress. The wide availability of data and people analytics also empowered the broadcaster to move towards a more connected and flexible working environment - putting it in a strong position to weather the disruption of the pandemic and potentially discover where employees prefer to work, whether that be at home, in the office or a combination - providing the business with the necessary information to develop new hybrid working policies.

COVID-19 has brought into sharp relief the necessity for insight for HR and people teams. The businesses that were already using data at the start of the pandemic were able to track their global teams in real-time, making decisions to maximise productivity, stabilise talent retention and implement cost-saving measures at speed. These teams were also able to support scenario planning and prepare for the future. Yet too many, sadly, still lag. In fact, in our research published before the global pandemic, just 26 percent of HR leaders

had adopted people analytics technology and only 28 percent had the skills within their teams. It meant that the vast majority of organisations were unprepared to gain actionable insight and visibility of their people during this crisis. Unquestionably, now is HR's time to drive insights into the business. With 76 percent of HR leaders with their sights set on implementing people analytics within the next three years, the pandemic has now catapulted this to the top of the HR agenda. So now is the time to level-up analytics capabilities and ensuring their teams are trained in the latest technologies. The C-suite expects accuracy and confidence in decision making, now more than ever and people leaders must have the capability and tools to provide this seamlessly. By looking to people analytics, businesses can flex and respond to changing situations as they happen. There is not a shadow of doubt that insight-based agile decision-making has gone from an aspiration, to being essential. ●



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# “WE ARE PROGRAMMED JUST TO DO, ANYTHING YOU WANT US TO”\*

*I miss music festivals! As a former festival builder and promoter, there's nothing like the raw energy of the crowd. Last year, Sonar music festival made news in incorporating AI to; “extend the possibilities of what (musicians) can do on a stage”. Tech and business media were thrilled by all the ways AI could transform music, but the fans... not so much.*

ARTICLE BY ANDREEA WADE, PORTFOLIO DIRECTOR AI/ML - ICIMS

AI could replace musicians, but what if all music sounded the same? How would we know what was real and what was created by a robot? Music is personal and we don't want it to be touched by technology. But the reality is that technology does not limit human creativity, rather it opens more doors so we can bring our visions to life. AI is the next chapter of our journey with technology and, stay with me on this one, music and hiring have one thing in common... it's personal! It's a way that we humans, connect with one another. We have different opinions and perspectives on how it should be done and that's why the objections and fears against AI are the same in hiring as they are in music. Let's be honest, a recruiter's job would have to be easy for us to replace it with a robot. But of course, recruiters are doing more than just recruiting. Recruiters report on their immediate ROI, whilst strategising at least two years ahead, to ensure pipeline for roles that don't even exist yet. Then add the fact that they are being asked to avoid bias every step of the way and the layers of complexity begin to be apparent. Companies are sitting on a gold mine of hundreds and thousands of CVs that represent top talent. AI can sift through your existing hiring systems to identify former applicants or internal employees who are perfect for the current job vacancies. It also alleviates the pressure to feel like you must start from scratch every time your business makes a shift. The bottom line is, recruiters are not being replaced - they're being elevated to the role they should have always been in. Another myth is that If you feed an AI machine with biased data, yes, it will spit out a biased decision. It is important to make sure that we do not build something where the outcome is either an exclusionary or discriminatory practice.



THE REALITY IS THAT  
TECHNOLOGY DOES NOT  
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RATHER IT OPENS MORE  
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IS THE NEXT CHAPTER  
OF OUR JOURNEY WITH  
TECHNOLOGY



Patent-pending technology - appropriately called 'ensemble AI' - creates an ensemble of models and one of algorithmic engines, with a voting system to provide you, the human, with a view of how to guide your next decision. Additionally, the models must focus on only what you need to make a confident, data-driven decision - a candidate's skills and experiences. We would never train the data on gender, sexual orientation, address, or pull in someone's social media feed. The approach must be a prevention against aiding in biased decisions. Bias can emerge due to many factors; the design of the algorithm itself and decisions relating to the way data is coded, collected, selected, or used to train the algorithm. Data selection is a crucial step in bias mitigation. The next myth is that you can't trust AI. Think of how we hear - we use our hearing to make sense of the world and to protect ourselves, but our canine friends can hear frequencies above what a human can hear. Algorithms see beyond what we can as humans, so you have to focus on how the models are being built, the data they train on, and then lastly - how it can best explain to you the 'why' behind a result. That's called interpretability. After the AI matches data from multiple sources, it then can provide simple, easy to understand language that clarifies the results. It delivers transparency around the decisions so you, the conductor, can have confidence in acting on that outcome. The reality is, no technology can be completely stripped of bias. What you do want to see is that the supplier works really hard on bias mitigation. ●

\* *The Robots* by Kraftwerk, from the album *The Man Machine* (1978)

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## FOLLOW THE EVIDENCE

*HR analytics means different things for different people. For some, it might be descriptive HR metrics, but for others it is a set of complex predictive modeling procedures. There is also confusion regarding the true meaning and whether it helps in HR strategy implementation or not. But Levenson and Fink research suggests that it has now become synonymous with HR data.*

ARTICLE BY IRFAN AHMED KHAN, DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIST - BRANEX INC.

The success and failure of your HR research and analytics initiative depends on identification of shareholder requirements. To determine stakeholder requirements, you will have to form partnerships with key stakeholders. These stakeholders play a pivotal role in defining HR research and analytics agenda. The key to success during this stage lies in presenting the clear picture of the organisation's biggest pinpoints. Once you have identified the stakeholder needs, it is time to create a defined agenda for HR research and analytics, which can be both short or long-term. At this stage, it's important to consider that, with the pace at which technology is evolving and growing, demand for data aggregation, visualisation, automation, algorithms and artificial intelligence, definition of long term has also changed... instead of five years, it is now two.

Turning to the creation of the HR analytics agenda, to begin with; ask broad research-based questions for every theme, generate more questions and hypothesis under each broad research question and determine the short-term and long-term requirements. Then strike the right balance between reactive and proactive work and, as ongoing procedure, iterate and refine your agenda from time to time. Once you have a clear HR analytics agenda in front of you, now you should identify the sources of data to answer HR analytics questions that you have raised while creating the agenda. When evaluating existing HR research and analytics practices in the light of data, if it is not relevant, you can modify the HR research practices and processes, but it's important to carry out some research when adopting new processes and practices, as it can backfire in some cases.

Once familiar with the sources, it is time to collect data and there are a number of ways of gathering it: Primary research, secondary research and organisation data. Primary research is new and original and can either be carried out inhouse or in collaboration with universities



BY FAR THE MOST  
CHALLENGING AND MOST  
IMPORTANT STEP IN THE  
HR ANALYTICS CYCLE IS  
DATA TRANSFORMATION.  
AT THIS STAGE, YOU  
MIGHT HAVE COLLECTED  
TONS OF RAW DATA, BUT  
IT IS USELESS UNTIL  
YOU EXTRACT USEFUL  
INSIGHTS



and third-parties. Secondary research is carried out by using data already available, through literature review of journal articles and reports from authoritative institutes. HR benchmarks and labour market databases can also be used for secondary research, but the most effective evidence-based decisions usually derive from scientific research studies. Lastly, you can also mine data from the organisation database and there are two ways to do that; theory driven approach and data driven approach. But By far the most challenging and most important step in the HR analytics cycle is data transformation. At this stage, you might have collected tons of raw data, but it is useless until you extract useful insights from that data.

Advanced enterprise resource planning software such as SAP, Oracle and Salesforce, have already integrated HR analytical capabilities into their software suites. This allows users to take advantage of; predictive, process, real-time and text analytics. Despite this, most of these tools could not automatically codify, visualise and interpret reams of raw data - this is also true for evidence-based and insight-driven findings, along with applied HR research and projects in organisations. The core purpose of HR analytics is to tell a story, by visualising and providing context to the organisation, so that it can resolve some of its biggest problems. Then, aligning storytelling with data-driven insights achieves a perfect combo for stimulating emotions. Both Rasmussen and Ulrich were concerned that: "HR analytics can be misused to maintain the status quo and drive a certain agenda." So, how data-driven insights are derived, communicated and used is an ongoing and important consideration, so that HR analytics cannot be misused and, above all, HR strategy should reflect organisation culture and characteristics. ●

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# PULP FRICTION

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*Readers will need no reminder that international businesses have had to address a vast range of organisational and Human Resources challenges, brought about by the pandemic and resultant public health policies. As we all know, it's a very fluid, fast changing situation and for global firms, rules vary from country to country and are subject to change without warning. Now, along with agile and flexible, an absolute imperative is frictionless knowledge management.*



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ARTICLE BY MELISSA COOPER, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF GLOBAL OPERATIONS - GLOBALIZATION PARTNERS

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Faced with unprecedented circumstances and the need to urgently adapt to enable entire organisations to continue operating, HR leaders and their teams have implemented new working practices and processes in record time. Changes that, under normal circumstances may have taken years to design and deploy, have been fast-tracked, bringing far-reaching implications across key areas of working life and culture and permanent shifts in the way people work. Right now, organisations are fine-tuning their approach to pandemic employment, examining how they can optimise processes, enable better cooperation and use technology to digitally transform their approach to everyday tasks. There has been understandable focus on the impact of remote working and its effect on organisational culture, communication and collaboration. There's growing evidence, for

instance, that employment trends - including home-based and flexible working - have become mainstream corporate policy. Global brands such as; Adobe, Salesforce, Twitter and Amazon - being just a few among many - have changed their HR policies to protect employees and, in the process, have facilitated a radical shift in working culture. Fujitsu is one of the biggest examples of businesses making widespread and permanent change, having announced their intention to "redefine working styles" for 80,000 workers in Japan. For them, the intention is that home working, will be the primary option for employees to "transform corporate culture".

Despite these huge challenges and a climate of constant change, operating an international or global organisation remains dependent on delivering processes and tools

that remove barriers to success and arm dispersed teams with the knowledge to bring corporate vision to life. As a result, knowledge management remains an established driver of effective international growth and long-term success. Its importance, however, has been renewed as organisations define their own 'new normal', re-shaping their go-to market strategies and internal processes to cope with unprecedented pressures. As a legacy organisational process, knowledge management was already in the throes of digital transformation, as businesses looked for technology-led efficiencies across boundaries and cultures. Pre-pandemic, for example, many businesses had developed something of an obsession with the collection and interpretation of data, to improve their corporate knowledge capabilities. The growth of complementary,

enabling technologies such as; cloud computing, collaboration and communication tools has also helped international companies to find affordable ways of harnessing their collective expertise and experience, wherever it is required.

So, effective knowledge management has always been important and during the past eight months, it has become even more vital for international companies to build a robust and frictionless knowledge strategy that supports best practices across teams and territories. However, once an organisation goes global, it faces a number of hurdles in building an effective knowledge management strategy. Choosing the right tech tools is where many global organisations lose their way, almost before they have begun and so it's vital to carefully assess the key requirements of any knowledge management process and select tools that will deliver on those needs. Ideally, a single, unified tool will meet the needs of every team and department. But the technology tail must not wag the dog - procuring knowledge management tools, which force users down a path at odds with their needs, is likely to be wasted investment. Nevertheless, there is no lack of vendors and product choice, so finding a good fit should be practical for any business, despite the complexities of working and sharing knowledge internationally.

International businesses often operate a globalised team-based model, where key functions such as technical, product, sales and marketing are located in different territories and time zones. Where teams do not have the benefit of integrated communication, collaboration and knowledge management, they will be less effective. Instead, what often happens across these teams is that the knowledge required to produce great outcomes exists somewhere in the business, but it resides in silos and no single source of truth is available to guide behaviour and decision-making. Effective integration, therefore, will determine how consistently the right knowledge is available and applied across any global business. It's about building integrity and knowledge as a valuable commodity, driving both proactive and reactive organisational behaviour. As such, it needs to be created, organised and maintained with integrity and a commitment to keeping it relevant to changing business needs. This also serves as a useful reminder about the importance of content quality. Knowledge management content that is creative and engaging will help build a positive ecosystem among users and foster a reputation that the strategy is effective, reliable and trustworthy. Anyone who has used knowledge management resources and tools that were inaccurate or out-of-date will be familiar with the frustration and negativity it can create.

Across international teams in particular, the emphasis on 'management' takes on added importance, relying on subject matter experts and 'guardians' to deliver coherent content. When this doesn't happen, organisations can quickly find themselves in challenging situations and, in the worst-case scenario, providing team members with

information that might be inaccurate or even illegal in their locality. In a wider sense, security, data protection and regulation are vital considerations. Organisations must build knowledge management systems and processes that are compliant with international and local standards. Regional variation must be built into the system too, or there is a risk that a data breach may not adhere to important rules, such as GDPR. User access must also be carefully controlled to ensure that there is an appropriate level of content classification, which limits access to information based on job role and responsibilities. Access to documents, such as contracts of employment, for example, must be tightly controlled and provided only to employees, with appropriate levels of authority and permission. Similar issues are relevant across virtually every function of contemporary business. From intellectual property and pricing, to competitive analysis and performance data, sharing knowledge makes businesses more vulnerable to potential cybersecurity breach. HR leaders, therefore, are faced with the challenge of delivering effective knowledge management strategies in an information security environment that is increasingly complex and risky. Working alongside internal and external cybersecurity experts is becoming increasingly important to ensure the integrity of technologies used internationally.

Ultimately, the successful implementation and long-term viability of any knowledge management strategy relies on employee engagement. A key consideration is to acknowledge the cultural differences at play in building adoption across an international organisation. Tools or services that might be familiar in one country, for example, might be totally unknown in another, so training may be required that accommodates a range of capabilities and skillsets. Processes and tools that have the backing of advocates, based across teams and territories, will be more readily integrated into standard practice than those which are rigidly imposed. Strong and consistent internal communication can turn early adopters into knowledge management champions and, by demonstrating tangible benefits, convince sceptics and laggards to take a positive attitude to the overall company philosophy driving the approach. Bill Gates, for instance, is quoted as saying: "Knowledge management is a means, not an end" - and that certainly applies to every international business pursuing an integrated culture, where its purpose is to facilitate better business performance, customer service and a whole multitude of both trivial and strategic benefits. ●

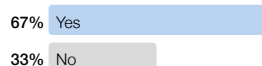


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# PERMANENCE IS DANGEROUSLY OVERRATED

FOR 50 YEARS, THE JOB LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED FROM PREDOMINANTLY MANUAL JOBS, TO MORE KNOWLEDGE-BASED WORK, FUELLED BY THE TECH BOOM, CREATING WHAT CAME TO BE THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY. BUT LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT THE WAYS WE'VE BEEN WORKING AND NOT MUCH REALLY HAS CHANGED.

ARTICLE BY CATE MURDEN, FOUNDER - PUSH

*"People can be brilliant and vulnerable at the same time, by removing the restraints and pressures that, before the pandemic, fuelled another very worrying pandemic, that of stress and mental health illness"*

This point has been made many times since the pandemic hit, but it deserves discussion, because it says a lot about how businesses can continue to ignore the need to change until forced to do so. A classic example is, companies had been saying for years that working from home was simply not possible - while others paid lip service to its possibility - when suddenly the crisis hit and lo and behold, business was able to continue via remote working, almost seamlessly. Everyone figured out how they needed to adapt, the tech was in place and, aside from - let's be honest, split opinion and many concerns and considerations - it's been a success story that will be marked in time as a great transition. Indeed, throughout the crisis, businesses have worked faster and better than they dreamed possible just a few months ago. Teams have overhauled their entire ways of working, come up with better, more efficient solutions and have maintained that sense of possibility throughout a truly impactful crisis, which will be an enduring source of competitive advantage going forward, come what may.

Pre-COVID-19, the business press was full of stories whereby businesses across sectors - and often massive, much-admired brands - had lost their competitive edge or indeed came to grief, simply because they felt immune to change. It's partly to do with complacency and a lot to do with the fear of the unknown and, consequently, there are many case studies that exemplify the damage that can result from simply ignoring the driving imperative to change, or indeed reacting too late. There's an oft quoted phrase that, 'if you have to react to change, you are

already too late and that is becoming increasingly obvious. The clear blue water that so-called disruptors are able to gain on legacy-laden firms, is usually associated with technology, but it's not all about digital, it's far more complex and nuanced than that. Businesses need to change culture, to one that is aligned, compatible and supportive of the mindset and approach which are essential components of competitiveness. More than ever before, firms need to promote positivity and acknowledge that people can be brilliant and vulnerable at the same time, by removing the restraints and pressures that, before the pandemic, fuelled another very worrying pandemic, that of stress and mental health illness. So, what are the key drivers of this new way of operating? Team support, collaborative working and knowledge management, across a landscape where the bunkers and silos of yesterday, have been eradicated.

Now, more than ever, the role of managers is vital... when was that not the case? I hear you cry. But be mindful, that it's a different way of managing that is required, in order to cope with the current crisis and meet the challenges ahead. Leaders need to understand the role of human emotions, they need to upskill on emotional intelligence and, they need to fundamentally rebuild organisations into emotionally intelligent systems. For only through that built trust will knowledge management flourish. There is little doubt that those ahead of the pack on this transformative journey now, are likely to be those who will gain the competitive advantage, both in terms of market and talent,

as they will be able to adapt ahead of the curve of a future, that will inevitably be characterised by increasing uncertainty. As the crisis persists and key to sustainability and continuity over the coming, challenging months ahead, it is important to consider how to rewire our organisations for speed, based on design, rather than just adrenaline. Indeed, the next phase is not a plan with an end goal, it is a constantly moving target.

To enable knowledge share to thrive and become an organically generated lifeblood of the organisation, there are key areas that are essential for every business to consider during this time: Clarity on what the organisation stands for - beyond shareholder value - is essential to continuity. Conscious leaders - who realise their impact and can lead and empower a team - regardless of proximity. Plus, small, nimble and highly-connected teams that can make important decisions faster and better, and finally an engaged workforce, whose training has been invested in extensively with new skills, behaviours and beliefs. Ultimately, this next phase must not be considered as a return to a version of what we had, but the opportunity to genuinely reset and to prepare businesses for an ever-changing future. ●



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# A CHAIN IS AS STRONG AS ITS WEAKEST LINK

*Faced with the immediate dilemma of sending employees into remote work environments, some firms fell back on best-laid Business Continuity Plans, while others hoped to make it work on the fly. The challenges varied from company to company and those were predominantly HR's operational hurdles. But there were new challenges too - not least cyber threats - which turned their attentions to the vulnerabilities of unsecured home offices, occupied by the dispersed workforce.*



ARTICLE BY HARDING M. BUSH, ASSOCIATE MANAGER OF OPERATIONS - GLOBAL RESCUE LLC

As remote working looks to be part of the new normal and in this, the era of knowledge sharing, organisations must conduct assessments to identify exploitable assets - like home networks, personal laptops and smartphones, or unencrypted documents - and the vulnerabilities around those assets. Equally, employees need to understand the importance of keeping information secure in cyberspace and in the real world. Risk, threat and vulnerability are often used interchangeably, but they shouldn't be. It is crucial to understand these terms, in order to quantify the level of existing risk and re-evaluate the changes after mitigations have been made. As part of this drive, it is crucial to define terms and include work from home policies, so that assets are protected and managed correctly during work operations. The term assets are both physical and virtual and include; personnel, physical property and information and a threat is anything that can damage an asset - either by intentional, criminal attacks, or the unintentional actions of unaware or untrained staff. There are also significant threats associated with natural events such as; pandemics, hurricanes, earthquakes and other natural disasters. In this frame, we must also consider vulnerabilities, which are gaps in policy, process or activity, that can attract a threat. An example of a vulnerability would be a work environment not adhering to a visitor policy and where unauthorised persons could freely access restricted areas, if this basic policy is not enforced. Finally, risk is the combined presence of assets, vulnerabilities and threats and, when all three are identified, the potential consequences of the risk are realised.

Companies must prioritise efforts to mitigate vulnerabilities which are attracting the threats to the assets via two steps; identification and prioritisation, as a security assessment. During assessment, organisations can determine acceptable levels of risk and mitigate the vulnerabilities. When the vulnerabilities are reduced, the threat is less critical, which lowers the level of risk. After the recommended mitigations are in place, they should be reassessed and validated for effectiveness. It will also be necessary to forecast new risk levels, after the recommendations from the initial assessment are made. One of the first questions asked when cybercrime is discovered is... "how?" Like all types of crime, few



cybercrimes are random and even the smallest requires some surveillance, because criminals choose the easiest, yet most lucrative, target. Consequently, in the wake of the proliferation of remote working, criminals will be targeting corporate organisations, knowing that new remote workers fit that vulnerable and more lucrative profile. It's a reality that workers new to the remote environment, are not as protected as they would be in the office. They may be connected to questionable Wi-Fi networks, they may be using some home devices for work purposes - a personal cell phone, home computer, printer and Wi-Fi network - which are all present vulnerabilities attractive to threats. One classic example is, if somebody is printing company information on an all-in-one printer at home, a digital copy of that document is saved in the printer and is then vulnerable to attack at any time.

be physically present and the associated anonymity and the limited enforceability of cyber laws are also very appealing. Threats in the virtual world are also more challenging to recognise and their methods and recognisable characteristics change and adapt when challenged.

There's no question about it, policies have to be in place and, like all organisation policies, must be consistent with the strategic objectives. As visited at the top of this article, during the pandemic, many companies experienced the importance and advantages of having a business continuity plan that supported remote working. Indeed, this should be part of a larger, overall company policy or company security plan. Security policies should be multi-layered, meaning they have built in redundancies and not one single point

and validations, employees must be trained on new policies through formal and documented training, which should be conducted as part of the validation process and, importantly, periodic policy reviews should be scheduled in. Each policy must contain procedures - essentially, the instructions for the processes related to carrying out the policy - because without complete instructions or guidelines, policies can be left open to each individual's varied interpretations and will be inconsistent across the organisation. The policies must also account for all personnel with access to any amount of organisation information and this includes contractors, temporary employees, vendors and visitors.

Creating a policy is a top-down effort, with the executive leadership providing guidance and direction regarding goals, whilst the security department oversees a diverse team to develop, test and implement the policy. Operations must be involved in developing these policies, to ensure there are no conflicting elements of the plan and HR needs to be involved and taking responsibility for writing, disseminating and maintaining policy enforcement. Meanwhile, the technology department must ensure the tech devices and procedures are compatible and the legal team must also be involved in the policy development and approval process... for sure, maintaining policies is very much a team effort. Organisations use compliance and security as interchangeable terms - or focus more on compliance rather than risk-based strategy - when they must be properly balanced, because nothing can be fully protected by compliance alone. This is often true in organisations that have replaced the physical security manager position with a facility manager and information security manager, with a leader from the IT department. These organisations do not understand the critical difference between a compliance-based policy, which is limited and reactive and a risk-based policy, which is multi-layered and proactive. The stakes are higher than ever and the duty-of-care, requirements for compliance with various laws and regulations and the ever-present threat of cybercrime are rolling agenda toppers, henceforth. ●

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RISK, THREAT AND VULNERABILITY ARE OFTEN USED INTERCHANGEABLY, BUT THEY SHOULDN'T BE. IT'S CRUCIAL TO UNDERSTAND THESE TERMS, IN ORDER TO QUANTIFY THE LEVEL OF EXISTING RISK AND RE-EVALUATE THE CHANGES AFTER MITIGATIONS HAVE BEEN MADE"

Even if workers are on company devices with protected networks and VPNs, there is less security awareness in the home office environment. Then are other distractions not incurred at the office, for example, children, spouses and partners - even a delivery person, the house cleaner and guests - all have access to the "office" and all contribute to a more vulnerable environment. It's nobody's fault, it's just part of who and what we are. Speaking of humans, error is never far behind - it's any organisations' most critical vulnerability - and the remote environment during this pandemic has enhanced this. Most remote workers are likely not even compliant with most standard remote work policies and no home office could be as physically secure as the corporate office. Clever criminals can manipulate security measures through significant human interaction, known as social engineering, to exploit the weaknesses and emotions associated with the remote work environment. Criminals choose the digital platform for many reasons; they don't need to

of failure, what is termed, defense-in-depth. To validate the functionality of any plan, it needs to be rehearsed and this rehearsal must include in depth discussions and reviews of the policy procedures with key personnel, followed by an execution of the plan under simulated conditions. For example, before the pandemic called for those that could to work from home, many organisations began to send portions of their teams to work remotely, creating an environment where capabilities and productivity could be tested. After such a rehearsal, a debrief is necessary to discuss how the new plan facilitated, or perhaps to demonstrate limited capabilities and what could be expected while executing the plan in a real situation. As always, lessons learned need to be evaluated and recommendations for changes made, so that the plan can be made more effective or efficient. Again, in consideration of human vulnerabilities, these can be mitigated through effective and well-enforced policies and regular training and, in addition to the policy discussion, rehearsals



## SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

*This year, we entered a strange era of single, modal human interaction, rendering the majority of our professional interactions virtual. For many, remote work technology achieved the transition smooth and business continued as usual, with minimal interruption. But as time passes, the loss of informal workplace interaction that cannot be replicated virtually, has begun to show. What happens next, matters.*

ARTICLE BY BOBBY BECKMANN, CTO - LIFESIZE

Have you noticed how connecting with co-workers is now a formal interaction? Before, we casually asked our colleagues if they wanted to grab a coffee or further discuss a project in the kitchen. Now, a “quick chat” requires an email invite, with a tightly scheduled beginning and end time and some type of conferencing tech hoops to jump through in between. Losing these relaxed, desk-side chats and after-hours dinner discussions deals a significant blow to creativity and knowledge sharing, what has been termed the “creative combustion” that drives success. This loss is difficult to measure, but we can draw parallels and make projections, by looking at what has taken place in schools across the country during the remote or hybrid learning. School is where students first develop interpersonal and collaboration skills as they grow and learn together. But today’s school age children are struggling to learn in the same way, in front of a screen and we’ve already seen a wave of low test scores. Are they learning anything, sharing knowledge and growing as creative ideators?

We can apply this same logic to the workplace, where employee performance will suffer, when there is a lack of interpersonal connection and collaboration. Without informal workplace interactions, ideation, organic knowledge sharing and growth are in danger of stagnating. It’s difficult to loop in relevant stakeholders to a project when you haven’t seen them in over six months. As employees unintentionally - but increasingly - leave out voices from the conversation, knowledge sharing deteriorates. Not only does siloed information create knowledge gaps and creativity pits, it also introduces concerns with equity across the organisation. Junior employees and those who are not comfortable pushing to have their voices heard in crowded video calls and chats suffer first, losing out on valuable information that could help them with their own projects and accelerate their career advancement. This out-of-sight, out-of-mind



INFORMAL WORKPLACE  
INTERACTIONS AND THE  
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BEEN CALLED THE  
“CREATIVE COMBUSTION”  
THAT DRIVES SUCCESS.  
THIS LOSS IS DIFFICULT  
TO MEASURE



dynamic creates breakdowns in natural communication, productivity and the bottom line will suffer because of it.

Virtual meetings that are supposed to provide a creative spark, have become reports rather than workshops. Employees complete their tasks alone and then come together to present the results in a series of monologues. We could lose the creativity that flows from hammering out a project together in a physical room, with whiteboards and sketchbooks. Now, more likely, we’re brainstorming documents, quickly scribbled ideas and first drafts live across myriad digital folders, shared drives and email threads. The point is, if you discussed anything of significance in a group chat more than 72 hours ago, it is as good as gone. The bottom line is, managing creativity with current remote collaboration tools, is not conducive to quality outputs and productivity. The solution? Managing analog and digital knowledge together... and, more importantly, doing it right!

Now, leadership must look for solutions to repair sterile, stagnant work environments. A facade of busy employees is camouflaging a real issue with knowledge sharing and creativity. From a people perspective, project leaders and managers have to make an effort to ensure that everyone’s ideas are heard, not just those from the loudest in the (virtual) room. That can mean using built-in hand-raising features on video calls or simply staying cognisant of which employees are interrupted, so you can circle back to them later in the call. Remote work doesn’t always mean video - nor does valuable collaboration and creativity have to happen in-person. What is crucial for moving forward in a hybrid or fully remote environment, is finding a balance of the right tools and technology to encourage both informal interactions and formal meetings with set agendas. With both the fuel for creative combustion and the structure necessary for productivity, you can expect more organic communication and essential knowledge sharing. ●

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## HR REPORTING

# LIGHTHOUSE ON A ROCK AT SEA

*Navigating the black, broiling seas of this pandemic has inevitably led to tensions. Nevertheless, the biggest sea change of all, remote working, achieved a sort of generally sanguine acceptance from all parties in the first lockdown. Then came a glimmer of light when R numbers retreated and talk of a quasi/remote working framework looked very appealing. But at lockdown 2.0, hearts sank. Right now, HR is going to have to be on its A-game in terms of reporting*



ARTICLE BY ABIGAIL ETHELLES, SENIOR ASSOCIATE - STEVENS & BOLTON

With the push to return to offices a problem for another day, the benefits of remote working have been discussed, debated, championed and demonised in this journal and others. Usually, the pros point to the work/life balance, of course - that longed for work serendipity that was always tantalisingly out of the reach for the masses. But for every pro there seems to be a con to cancel it out. Could the isolation and lack of interaction - not to mention the blurring of home and work - potentially fuel more mental malaise? Indeed, there are reports that many employees have found that lockdown has exacerbated existing mental health problems and such problems have even been created in employees who were previously well. This can arise from a number of aspects of working remotely, such as social isolation and a reduction in the formal structure of the day.

This is where HR reporting will be fundamental to outcome.

Outside of what we once termed the normal workplace parameters, with more people mostly out of sight, HR and managers must be mindful of risks and ensure that they are checking on employees and their wellbeing, particularly if there are indications that the employee may be struggling, marked by changes in behaviour or quality of work. Any concerns should be raised sensitively, in a way that does not increase the pressure on the employee and appropriate steps must be taken to reduce the risk of issues occurring by encouraging and facilitating social contact between employees who are working remotely, for example by scheduling regular team catch-ups - subject to social distancing - and ensuring that employees are able to raise any concerns at any time. Caution is advised in

how performance and productivity are assessed and monitored as a threatening, heavy-handed approach will quickly exacerbate a situation, reducing the chances of achieving better outcomes. It can make anxiety worse and lead to employees feeling that they are not trusted. Indeed, all monitoring and reporting must be proportionate, mindful that mental health issues can constitute a disability in some cases, triggering reasonable adjustments.

Where HR reporting will be increasingly called upon is in the context of employees attending their workplace. Here, one of the biggest concerns facing employees is the extent to which they can enforce testing for COVID-19. Employees can be reluctant to undergo testing, not least because the experience of the test itself can be deeply unpleasant. Employees often also have concerns about the way in which their test

data is used and how this will affect decisions made in relation to them by their employer. The results of a test for COVID-19 are classed as “special category data” for the purposes of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as it relates to the health of the employee.

Accordingly, employers need to ensure that they can demonstrate that testing falls within one of the conditions, set out in the GDPR for processing such data and that the approach to testing is reasonable and proportionate. Whether an employer can show that their approach to testing is reasonable and proportionate will depend very much on the particular circumstances and the nature of the business. For example, it is unlikely to be reasonable to require employees who are not displaying symptoms to undergo testing unless the employer can demonstrate a real need for this, for example where the nature of the employee's work means that it cannot be carried out in a COVID-secure way, or the employee will be in regular contact with individuals who are particularly vulnerable to coronavirus.

If testing is to be carried out, it needs to be made clear to employees why testing is required, how the data arising from it will be used and that the data is generally processed within the requirements of the GDPR - including that data is retained for no longer than is necessary - to fulfil the specified purpose for the test. The Information Commissioners Office (ICO) has published guidance for businesses on the data protection implications of the COVID-19 pandemic generally, including a section on testing, which can be found on the ICO's website. Ensuring that the data arising from testing is handled appropriately could also help them to show that requiring an employee to take a test is a ‘reasonable management instruction’, permitting them to take disciplinary action against the employee if it is not followed. Whether an instruction is reasonable will depend on the circumstances of the case, however and it pays to take specific advice before disciplinary action. The flip side of this issue is that employers may find themselves in a position where certain employees refuse to return to the workplace, because they believe that adequate testing is not being carried out. Here, the employer can still require the employee to attend the workplace, but that will again depend on all of the circumstances, including the risk to that particular employee, if others are not being tested. This illustrates how fluid and complex this aspect of our new normal can be and illustrates how HR reporting must be alert, timely and accurate.

Lockdown restrictions aside, one of the potential benefits of remote working is that there is no limit on where the employee can be physically located to carry out their work. As a result, an increasing number of employees are asking to work overseas, sometimes to be closer to family and friends, sometimes in search of a different lifestyle. In some cases, employees are moving overseas, without seeking consent from or even informing their employer. While it is easy to see the attraction of such

a move, it can have unforeseen consequences and give rise to a number of tax, immigration and employment law issues. Indeed, remote working overseas for any extended period could lead to an employee becoming tax resident in the ‘host’ country, as well as tax resident in the UK, meaning that they have to account for local and UK taxes on their income. The employer could find itself with similar overseas tax reporting and collection obligations to those under UK PAYE, including any local social security reporting and collection obligations. Employers could also find that, having an employee work remotely overseas creates taxable presence (permanent establishment) in the host country for corporation tax purposes and that affects the employer's VAT position. From an immigration perspective, if the employee is a sponsored migrant worker and works outside the UK for an extended period, their sponsorship may be invalidated and they may find it difficult to return to live and work in the UK. The sponsoring employer could face compliance action from the Home Office, including possible suspension, downgrading or revocation of their sponsor licence. Accordingly, consideration should always be given to these issues even if the employee will only be working remotely overseas for a short period. There may also be implications under the immigration system in operations in the host country. In this instance, HR reporting must provide clarity of information between employee location and status and the implications on the business.

On the employment law side, the employee may obtain employment rights in the overseas country by virtue of physically working there, in addition to the rights they have under UK law. This could lead to a situation where employees can ‘forum shop’ in the event of a dispute and bring claims against the employer, in whichever country proves to be most favourable. In addition, there can be issues around data protection, where personal data is transmitted outside the UK and appropriate safeguards will need to be considered, particularly in relation to the security of personal data. Given the potential pitfalls of these arrangements, advice should always be obtained in both the UK and the other country, before an employer agrees to allow an employee to work remotely overseas. Employers should have policies in place, setting out how such requests should be dealt with, although it is important that a blanket approach is not adopted, in order to avoid discrimination against certain groups. These are just a few of the considerations caused by the pandemic, the disruption to the workforce is unprecedented in peace time, but HR has the capacity, as a pivotal entity, to marshal the business and its employees through this crisis and beyond. ●

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## DRILLING FOR THE NEW OIL

*Little wonder that data has been termed the “new oil”, it has become a currency, a resource and one of the most influential drivers. Readers will need little reminding that data permeates and streams through every aspect of the HR profession and its many and various responsibilities. But HR reporting and analytics is relatively new and brings its own challenges and opportunities.*

ARTICLE BY TOLU ADEYANJU, HR DATA ANALYST - EY

There is no doubt that, whilst HR was late to the great data race, the profession has been an enthusiastic and voracious consumer in a relatively short space of time. Practitioners have been able to unlock a new dimension in HR reporting, now fuelled by the examination of datasets and spot trends, that provide the sort of timely and immediate insight which is fundamental today, but could only be dreamt of in the pre-digital age. Now Pandora's box is well and truly open and HR's dataset has become one of the most influential bell weathers in the boardroom, informing upon and supporting decision making, leading to more accurate planning and concurrently improving employee performance and wellbeing. Indeed, when we look back at this era, it will be marked as the time the HR function became a force to be reckoned with. So far so good, but it is the next stages that promise the real excitement including; descriptive data, which can predict future trends and enable planning around possible scenarios of HR metrics, using mathematical and computational analysis.

In HR's circle, it was recruitment that became the pioneer, using predictive analysis in so many ways, such as; spot hiring trends and ensuring that hiring in the future is based on insightful decisions. Once through the proverbial door, analytics in the hands of HR can play a brilliant role in identifying where the highest risk of turnover is likely to be and who is at risk. It also helps to determine what resources should be the focus, in terms of retention activities and support. In predicting employee productivity, mathematical models analyse which candidates are likely to experience a reduction in performance. The use of statistical software, to study movements and interactions in employees and determine which bonds are most efficient is a valuable insight to optimise productivity of employees. So, there is no doubt that the technology revolution has brought some big wins to the world of HR but, alas, every rose has its thorn.



FOR DATA TO BE  
EFFECTIVE, IT NEEDS TO  
BE AS SYMMETRICAL  
AS POSSIBLE. AN  
IMPORTANT ELEMENT  
HERE IS TO BRING  
ALL STAKEHOLDERS  
ON BOARD - HR  
COLLEAGUES, LINE  
MANAGERS AND  
PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE  
FOR INPUTTING AND  
REVIEWING THE DATA



To overcome the challenges that are inherent in data management and HR reporting, it's important to prioritise business needs. Every business is different and so HR analytics solutions need to be too. Whilst it is fine to highlight your key HR metrics, a game changer is always to start by identifying the business problems. The route here is of course no surprise to readers, as it involves aligning business objectives and mapping out data solutions, based on the challenges, obstacles and problems. For instance, creating bespoke tracking reports of training and compliance data, would minimise the risk of exposure to data breach and ensure compliance to regulatory requirements. Data quality is key - no surprise there - and most data errors are made at the manual point of data entry. The output result is only as good as the data input, so inaccurate data poses a major barrier to accurate data analytics. Outdated data is another quality issue, as is data changes that are not made that go completely across data sources and leaving analysts with asymmetric data. This is best explained as a disparity in data - at different points in most cases - from different sources.

For data to be effective, it needs to be as symmetrical as possible. An important element here is to bring all stakeholders on board - HR colleagues, line managers and people responsible for inputting and reviewing the data at all levels of the organisation - because HR reporting analytics cannot be effective without organisational support. It's taken as read that, all stakeholders should be aware of the importance of quality data, in informing decision making, achieving effective business processes and ultimately benefitting efficient operation, competitiveness and the organisation's bottom line. ●

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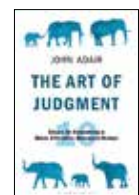
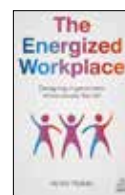
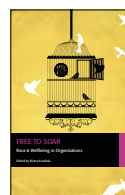
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# DATA SINGS LIKE A BIRD

Evidence-based decision making and HR reporting at speed, is intrinsic to operations and it calls for world class data and technological infrastructure. Many companies are developing new businesses based on data and analytics which undermine traditional value propositions to the extent that some form partnerships along the value chain. But not all businesses are succeeding in this, because they are responding with ad-hoc initiatives and one-off actions.



ARTICLE BY  
JANE WILLIAMS  
DIRECTOR  
PEOPLE INNOVATION LTD.

There is enormous commercial power in the effective leadership and management of data analytics. McKinsey reported in late 2019 in its *Global Survey*<sup>1</sup> that the changes in data and analytics, brought to industry are growing in magnitude and scope. Survey respondents from high performing organisations report that their data and analytics initiatives have contributed at least 20 percent to earnings, before interest and taxes (EBIT) over the past three years<sup>2</sup>. We all know that it is important to be quick and agile, but where successful firms are winning is in the creation data and analytics strategies for the long term too. Where HR needs to have its focus is where data is becoming a core part of employee workflows and mindsets, as the company builds a data-driven culture. However, HR has suffered from a lack of skilled resources to really optimise opportunity and so investments in technology and people skills have to be made quickly, in perhaps what is the most volatile environments for many decades. This pandemic has led to serious falls in UK GDP and has caused the closure of many businesses and dramatic restructuring of others.

For all of us leading a business, whatever size, any strategy or business model has been revised at speed. Quick, agile responses are crucial - coupled to high quality, timely data - as a basis for decision making, with HR alongside the operational, technology and data leaders, shaping the people strategy and building a data-driven culture, characterised by the capabilities for rapid iteration, decision making, experimentation and failure before success. Learning & development must step up to plan and execute employee and manager development, from updating the frontline on new data and self-service tools, to leading agile and flexible working practices, cross functional teams, plus greater interaction with staff, to promote decision making at the point of responsibility. Here HR reporting is key to inform and communicate joint working partnerships at all levels, in order to deliver both the new culture and capabilities. This will call for greater emphasis on relationship building with leaders, managers and staff in any business and, in these remote working times, HR's reporting and communications needs to be strong, comprehensive and consistent. It follows then that close working with finance will be a pre-requisite to input essential people data into analytical processes, to solve business problems and the outputs will be used for evidence-based decision making, giving insights about workforce, policies and practices. HR data and business information will be united to measure input on workforce and organisational performance, so the organisation can measure the return on investment.

Those of us that remember the beginning of the journey, it all began rather rudimentarily, with the monitoring of turnover, sick absence and overtime and now we've moved to a much-awaited new era - the intersection of HR, can be full realised. The language has changed too, data is viewed as quantitative i.e. - measurable or numbers, compared to qualitative - i.e. subjective or interpretative. Meanwhile, analysis itself has three levels; descriptive, predictive and prescriptive and each of these aspects need to be harnessed professionally to secure optimum outcomes. Nowadays of course, data science and analytics is a recognised profession in its own right, especially in the US, where it has its own qualification. Within the UK, it is an emerging discipline, as the levels of skills are lower here and, as a consequence, every HR team in a medium-size enterprise, will need trained analysts and data scientists. For success, it is an area in which nationally, the Government, companies and individuals should invest - it is heartening to see the growing number of first and second-degree courses. People and their relevant skills are

fundamental to creating organisational value. Given the current climate UK companies need to redouble their efforts to grasp this challenge as evidenced decision making is key to business success. The results from the *Harvard Business Review* 2019<sup>3</sup> survey, led by Professor Davenport, concur. The research covered fifteen hundred and ten respondents, from 23 countries, across five continents, in companies with revenues in excess of one hundred million US dollars (\$100m). Fifty-one percent of HR functions perform predictive or prescriptive analytics and 89 percent agreed that HR is highly skilled at using data to determine future workforce plans, while 94 percent are accurate at predicting the likelihood of turnover in critical roles and 94 percent have real-time insight into employee's career development goals. There is increasing collaboration with finance on data and this strengthens substantially the role of HR as a contributor to business success, solving business issues, through effective workforce planning, predicting accurately turnover, identifying roles and people at risk.


It is excellent to see the growing quality of human capital reports in the FTSE 100/250 companies in the past few years and the three most popular categories of reporting - highly relevant for these current economic challenges - are; knowledge, skills and abilities including innovation and entrepreneurship, employee equity. These issues key to any successful people strategy and form the spine of HR reporting. This is coupled too with the expanding remit of Remuneration Committees, to include the people strategy and reporting. The most popular usages of data analytics for HR include decision making during the hiring process, on promotions, salary rates, attrition, retention, measuring performance and establishing benchmarks. There are common pitfalls in data analysis which, with relevant training, experience and knowledge, in the team can be minimised. Many pay attention only to the data, but there can be ethical or other business-related issues. This means that domain knowledge - whether business or professional - is essential for decision making. Furthermore, there is no single right answer to a problem, the data provides a range of informed choices from which the users must decide. One common danger is data for data's sake, so understanding of the story or trends behind the data are very important. For effective use, it is important to take the reader on a journey, with simple basic data from excel or other simple tools and guide them to the optimum decision.

Another challenge is the link between correlation and causations, correlation does not necessarily point to causation. There can be many differing factors or underlying causes of the correlation, so retaining an open approach is essential. Validating any model regularly is always important as is updating the data. Impact and understanding of the data are often aided by visualisation - a picture is worth a thousand words - to give immediate understanding. The quality of the data is vital for success yet it is difficult to predict


outcomes financial or otherwise. Two suggestions to check the quality of the data input are review both its meaning and relevance. If the input lacks coherence then the output is likely to be flawed. Completeness and understanding of the data input are very important otherwise any output could be distorted. Finally, the data and model need to be based on the right population, for some insight into what happens when this and the data are incomplete, consider<sup>4</sup> Caroline Criado Perez's book *Invisible Women*<sup>5</sup>. This shows the consequences of drawing conclusions applicable to men and women, from research groups in which women are underrepresented. In terms of optimising data analytics and reporting, it has to be tightly integrated into the business organisation, operations and processes. It is a capability that is able to make a huge difference to business results, when properly targeted and utilised. Results can be disconcerting and oh-so insightful, but leaders will need the ability to understand and grasp these challenges, to secure the best outcomes, in the interests of the organisation and stakeholders. ●

1. *How leaders in data and analytics have pulled ahead.* McKinsey 2019 Global Survey
2. *UK People Analytics CIPD Workday* 2018 Survey
3. *Is HR the most driven analytics function?* HBR April 2019 Nigel Davenport
4. *Reporting your company's true value: Valuing Talent* - Valuentis 2015
5. *Invisible Women* - 2019 Caroline Criado Perez

The author would like to thank Sharon Green, Nicolas Pascazio and Tim Allcock for their input in this article.



CORRELATION  
DOES NOT  
NECESSARILY POINT  
TO CAUSATION.  
THERE CAN BE MANY  
DIFFERING FACTORS  
OR UNDERLYING  
CAUSES OF THE  
CORRELATION,  
SO RETAINING AN  
OPEN APPROACH IS  
ESSENTIAL



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# SECRET SQUIRRELS

*Recalling first reports of a flu-like virus in China, it wasn't "our" problem at first and then... The impacts have been multifarious and firms have grappled with top line issues of limited operating capacity and acute financial pressures, plus a countless myriad of operational challenges beneath.*



ARTICLE BY PHIL PARKINSON, HEAD OF COMMERCIAL LAW &  
PAUL KELLY, HEAD OF EMPLOYMENT LAW - BLACKS SOLICITORS

The phrase, "these are unprecedented times", has been said many times since this crisis struck. That a virus should test the mettle of the corporate world to such an extent could never have been imagined. For many businesses, the continuation of work has been the most important consideration, some have reluctantly resigned themselves to an extended period of silent running, just so that the cogs can keep turning. Others have endeavoured to persevere with "business as usual", even continuing with ambitious business plans, which bears great testament to corporate endeavour. This is particularly surprising, considering the massive changes to workforce operations and an estimated 60 percent remote working during the second lockdown. For HR, out of sight can never be out of mind and filling the void means leaning in even more on data management, analytics and HR reporting. With all this comes an increasing chance of breaches in GDPR and so HR must be the guardian, constantly alert to that possibility and informing all employees on all levels and departments, to ensure that sensitive information held by a company is kept secure. There are many reasons why this is important of course, but trust tops the list. In this volatile time, breaches of trust are even more magnified than usual. Customers are increasingly gravitating towards organisations that are stable and can be trusted and nothing rattles that belief more than media condemnation. If ever there was a need for accurate and coherent HR reporting it is now.

HR must take the position of control room, liaising with all parties to maintain operations and, with the greater onus on digital - in terms of GDPR - it is highly recommended for IT departments to review procedures and security. This will enable people to successfully continue working from home or return to work after a period of furlough leave, without breaching data protection. It may be that companies already have policies in place, particularly around working from home, but all staff must be informed and guided about how they can protect data and make sure that all decisions are recorded. Remember that some people may have been on furlough for many months, so it may be necessary for HR teams to offer refresher training to returning employees, so that they fully understand their obligations. Even if there is no formal policy, whilst this is being set up, an email or

correspondence should be shared with staff, highlighting issues to be aware of and how these can be combated.”

As we move in and out of lockdown and strive towards “the new normal”, many employers are increasingly accepting the fact that more employees will be working from home more regularly, if not permanently. For those employers that, prior to the pandemic, had no provision in place for staff to work from home, it will come as quite a shock to learn that it is not as simple as giving employees a laptop and telling them to just carry on regardless. Just because an employee now works from their kitchen table and not the office does not mean that employers can take their eyes off GDPR and the handling of sensitive information. Quite the contrary, compliance with data protection obligations, is now more important than ever given the increased opportunities for inadvertent breaches. Duty of care is just as pertinent, if not more-so, as is ensuring that employees are correctly equipped. Here, HR reporting is the oracle for meeting needs and understand what equipment is needed. For example, if employees are using their own IT equipment either in the workplace or at home,

situation, it’s just not feasible to physically visit every home office site and here trust in communication is key. If there is doubt about a specific remote working arrangement then employers really do need to intervene, to assess remote workspaces and ensure they are happy with the arrangements of employees at home, particularly where third-parties are a concern.

This sounds obvious but it happens all the time, every day, so where possible, documents should not be sent to private emails, as these are much more likely to be insecure. Instead, employees should keep all business property, including documents, confidential and to a work email. Employees should also be conscious when discussing client or business issues over the phone and, if at all possible, ensure that the conversation takes place in a location where they cannot be overheard. Data can still be information that is heard rather than written down, so it is just as important that employees are aware of that. Likewise, transportation of documents can also present significant risks, which both employers and employees must consider. We have all heard the stories of data sticks left on

working flexibly, is an increasingly complex situation, but vitally important, to ensure that a culture for sweeping issues under the carpet does not develop. Thought also needs to be given to making sure the policy is fit for purpose and updated if necessary and staff need to be trained, not only to recognise breaches of GDPR, but also how to report them and to whom. The procedure should be clear, so that there is no ambiguity about what to do and who to go to.

Here is the bottom line, every employee, whether office based or home worker, should be left under no illusion as to their responsibility to keep sensitive data securely and that failure to do so could amount to misconduct and be dealt with under their employer’s disciplinary process.” Companies should make sure that privacy policies are up to date and in particular, staff are aware of how they hold customer data. Are they collecting information correctly and storing it securely? In addition, employers must communicate any rules and regulations to employees regarding sending data overseas and ensuring that any companies involved have signed appropriate data processing agreements. The societal and economic changes currently taking place in the UK are having far reaching and significant consequences for the majority of businesses. However, if the workforce is kept aware of important updates and methods of protecting data, the day-to-day running of most organisations, including the ability to comply with GDPR regulations, shouldn’t be impacted. There is no doubt that HR reporting will continue to play an integral role in keeping hard impacted businesses on track. ●

IN THIS VOLATILE TIME, BREACHES OF TRUST ARE EVEN MORE MAGNIFIED THAN USUAL. CUSTOMERS ARE INCREASINGLY GRAVITATING TOWARDS ORGANISATIONS THAT ARE STABLE AND CAN BE TRUSTED AND NOTHING RATTLES THAT BELIEF MORE THAN MEDIA CONDEMNATION

everything should be password protected and no passwords should be given to a third-party. Furthermore, for people living with or working around other people, any computers or other devices in use should always be locked when leaving the room. This consideration should extend beyond IT and, in the process of HR reporting, questions need to be asked, for example, what arrangements does each employee have for storing sensitive data in paper form and destroying it securely thereafter? Employers should also invest in providing employees with lockable cabinets and a shredder, if this is an issue. Asking if an employee’s workspace is secure and who else has access is a difficult

the train, containing sensitive information. Therefore, if an employee is transporting any sensitive documents in any format, it’s critical that safeguarding measures are in place. Consideration should be given to whether secure couriers should be used to reduce the risk. Increasingly, HR reporting will play a fundamental role in monitoring the security of sensitive data, who has access to what and identifying areas of potential weakness. HR is also the vital link between remote teams, ensuring that protocol is followed at all times, despite the volatile times in which we now operate. HR also has to own the policy for reporting breaches of GDPR, which, with a workforce spread out geographically and

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# SURVIVAL OF THE MATRIXED

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*Some organisations, regardless of type or sector, somehow have the capacity to withstand sudden, unexpected changes and challenging circumstances, while others struggle. The reasons are complex and varied, but this crisis has exposed and tested them all and, some organisations have responded and adapted well and others have not. We can say with some surety, that COVID-19 has been a litmus test from hell and a perishing lesson of preparedness and contingency.*



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ARTICLE BY JO REID, MANAGING DIRECTOR - CALVIUM

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The tragic human impact of COVID-19 can never be forgotten. Beyond that terrible mark in time, comes a horribly damaged economy, somewhere down a long list. But as with all aspects of life, some market sectors have been badly affected, while others - such as online businesses - are booming. As we have all witnessed, the hospitality industry, in particular, has been hit hard and it's clear that many firms will cease to exist over the coming months. But could any of this have been avoided, or at the very least, could the blow have been softened? As readers will know, Organisational structure, culture and use of technology are critical factors that influence the ability of a business to respond and adapt to market change and other external pressures. Here, the pandemic has served to highlight organisational failings and weakness. A headline example is the capacity to

instantly deploy staff remotely, without disruption and still operate as teams, which has been critical in terms of business continuity. Some organisations have structures, cultures and technology that are better able to respond, adapt and collaborate while working remotely and others have struggled. There is a case to say that traditional hierarchies have been well-and-truly exposed as inadequate and that new technology should be embraced, not just to survive, but to be effective and competitive in the future. As with many things, it's never that simple.

There are more traditional hierarchies that work incredibly well and there are flatter, matrix systems that have been introduced into organisations, with little effect or improvement. There are hybrid organisations - a good example of one is the police service - which have traditional hierarchical structures, driven

by their command and control frontline operational model. But when you go behind the scenes, matrix teams are operating on projects and critical work streams. These organisations, possibly because they are very comfortable planning and responding to the unexpected, have been able to adapt quickly, deploying thousands of people - predominantly support staff - to work from home, still maintaining an effective police presence, while progressing with new business. Of course, there are pros and cons for all organisational models and, for any to work effectively, a number of critical elements must be in place. Top of these key factors is a progressive senior leadership, which can live with the fact that, we learn more from our mistakes than we do from successes. A culture that encourages an element of risk taking, has given oxygen to that now popular cliché - 'fail

early, fail often' - and it is a mindset for our time, that can push organisations to places where they need to be, more nimble and more flexible. However, all this is easier said than done.

Creating a culture of innovation requires sustained support and sensitivity. It's understandable that individuals, who have worked hard to progress up the management ladder, may see cultural innovation initiatives as a threat - or even a wrecking ball - to the structures they understand and where they thrive. So, with a need to rebuild and develop a business culture, it doesn't take a brainbox to recognise that those affected will become more risk averse as a result - but things are rarely textbook straightforward. Organisational learning has demonstrated that matrixed organisations are, with all other things being equal, able to adapt and respond quicker than typically hierarchical organisations. This flatter, project-based structure is probably the direction most organisations should be heading, if their aim is to react to external changes rapidly as market and other external influences come into range. The ability to re-skill parts of the workforce and redeploy quickly can be an enormous advantage to performance. A matrixed organisation is well placed to do that. A flattish structure, with progressive leadership, is all well and good, but they must bring the workforce along too. Excellent internal communications is another vital element for a modern, effective organisation. It must be genuinely two-way, with a willingness to deal with awkward or challenging topics head on. This is one of the areas where the HR function can play a key, enabling role. It can facilitate these communications, ensuring they are authentic and not simply box-ticking. It can do the heavy lifting years in advance, by nurturing an environment of empowerment. Plus, it can develop systems to ensure blockers are handled positively and involved in the process. For example, some IT departments resist the introduction of new software or equipment. Often, this is for good reason, with security concerns and the impact on network integrity. It is not a reason - in and of itself - to not do it, however. It is essential the IT department is heavily involved in any decision-making process from the outset. Ultimately, without being too prescriptive, for any organisation to react and evolve, regardless of leadership or technology, a culture of openness and sound internal and external communication must exist.

Adopting any new technology is a journey. Being willing to experiment and prototype on a small scale can aid long term success. It is not necessarily the case that a matrix organisation is any better placed to introduce new technology, but some would argue that they can adapt and implement quicker. The ability to trial and scale-up deployment quickly, but carefully, can have a significant influence on the bottom line. There will always be an element of risk when introducing new technology - what is good on paper, doesn't always translate in the real world. If the culture embraces the fail early, fail often approach, this is fine. Otherwise, the risk is that



CULTURE THAT  
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MORE NIMBLE  
AND MORE  
FLEXIBLE



senior management will back off and pull up the drawbridge. Then investment is lost along with the potential to lose ground to the competition. It is a high stakes game, but there is plenty that can be done to ensure risks are minimised, so plan carefully and manage expectations at the outset - here, progressive leadership with an open culture, can pay dividends. When an organisation is considering which technology to introduce, there must be a shared understanding across the business that is consistent. Start small, empower your workforce, expect failings, adapt and try again before any organisation-wide deployment. Technology can help to develop capacity in a workforce and aid the ability to re-skill, up-skill and redeploy when necessary. We truly live in an age of emerging opportunities. Regularly trialling and adopting new technologies to enhance processes and productivity ensures that whole companies are always learning and sharing their knowledge. If the organisational culture sustains a learning environment, then by definition they are open to risk and therefore set up to pre-empt change and adopt the right technology for the individual business context.

There is no point pretending that adopting new technology, or developing a bespoke mobile solution is easy. The introduction of an app to book annual leave is one thing, but to develop a bespoke mobile solution for a team of field engineers, who can interact with client machines and systems back at base remotely can be more challenging. This is where smart organisations can utilise the skills of a smaller specialist, to work collaboratively. Think about how difficult it is for a large oil tanker to manoeuvre - extremely difficult on its own. This is where agile, small, yet powerful tugs come in, designed for the very purpose, they work with the tanker, to finish the job... partnership working at its best. The same is true with business, where large organisations collaborating with small specialists can develop and trial before scaling up for company-wide roll out. This can be an extremely practical and effective approach rather than just putting it in the 'too difficult' box. It is critical to understand that digital technology alone, is not the golden ticket to success in times of uncertainty. Organisations need to adopt the right technologies for their particular circumstances and keep on experimenting. Good cultures create good organisations, or is that the other way around? ●



Would you consider your organisation collaborative and matrixed?



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# GAMES WITHOUT FRONTIERS

OUR TIME IS ONE OF DISRUPTION, MOVING FASTER THAN EVER BEFORE AND HIGHLY UNPREDICTABLE. MATRIXED ORGANISATIONS, WITH THEIR INNOVATIVE MINDSET, FLATTER FRAMEWORKS AND SHORT FEEDBACK LOOPS, ARE BETTER EQUIPPED TO MAKE THE TIMELY DECISIONS NEEDED AND HAVE THE INFRASTRUCTURE IN PLACE TO DO SO SMOOTHLY.

ARTICLE BY ANDREAS LIEB, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES - INNOGAMES GMBH

*"The 360-degree view challenges the "business as usual" approach and promotes preparedness and action instead of reaction. Innovation is really at the heart of our HR team"*

I am the HR Director of InnoGames, based in Germany and we develop and publish online and mobile games. Digital by design, speed and agility has enabled us to respond to the pandemic proactively, taking steps far before it is deemed necessary. These attributes can be traced back to decisions made at the company's founding and guides the teams across all their work, including our HR team. We decided together early on, to keep work in-house which means that the employee lifecycle - and steps from recruiting talent to designing products - are managed internally, by the respective teams made up of over 400 colleagues from over 30 nations. This allows for all decisions to be made with the full picture in mind, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of shaping a quality, sustainable workplace for employees and making great games for players. Sharing this vision, the HR team works collaboratively, cross-department, to bring it to life. Following an iterative methodology, ideas are taken, evaluated and improved upon to ensure the company is moving in the right direction. Focus on the following components has been key in progressing, while remaining prepared for the unexpected.

Hiring the best talent who are experts in their fields, goes without saying, but combining subject-matter expertise with a knowledge of intersecting disciplines, is an advantage that allows companies to stay agile. Our HR team can be broken down further into six sub-teams, each with a different focus, including Analytics and Tools, Talent Acquisition Management, Talent Development, Operations, HR Marketing

and Business Partnering. While each team member has daily tasks that match their expertise, they are also introduced to the workings of the other sub-teams. For example, Talent Acquisition Management members also learn about HR marketing and employer branding practices, while the Operations team learns more about Talent Development and vice versa. This not only offers employees the chance to explore interests within their field and offers more experience in becoming well-rounded HR professionals, but broader skills also allow for more agility. Should the company's needs change drastically in the future, to require an abundance of new talent, for example, the HR team can readjust their workload and dedicate more team members to recruiting efforts. It becomes easier to meet the company's needs and can be achieved without overloading a single colleague or the need to hire additional recruiters.

Analytics within an HR team is further proof that playing to strengths and focusing on the data, is crucial for a matrixed organisation. Our business is data-driven and relies on its analytics teams and tools such as; Power BI, databases and surveys - following the most secure, GDPR-compliant regulations - to gather relevant information for informed decision-making. The data provides clarity when moving forward, as well as serving as a method to learn from the past, to predict how topics may develop. In addition to experts sharing their knowledge with their teams, they are also consulted to share and review data when the process involves their wheelhouse. Neither management nor HR make top-down decisions themselves. In our

case, access to the tools and technology needed, alongside flatter hierarchies, have allowed for better, more-informed decisions. The 360-degree view challenges the "business as usual" approach and promotes preparedness and action instead of reaction. Innovation is really at the heart of our HR team. With the outbreak of the pandemic, the company was already used to remote work and easily transitioned to being completely remote without disruption. Emphasis was not on how to work from home as that was already established, but how to make employees comfortable doing so for an extended time. Not all companies can or do start out as matrixed organisation, indeed our business has evolved into what it is today. The key is to remember that a company is malleable and steps can be taken in this direction no matter the starting point. This year has shown that stoic approaches are not always best and that new, evolving models allow business to be more agile and better capable of dealing with the obstacles that come. ●



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# FROM RUSSIA WITH CHEESE

He told me afterwards it was like being punched in the chest with a sledgehammer, knocking every cubic inch of air out of his lungs. Now it so happens our new production director was a big man, but I can bear testament, for I was there and I know he never laid a finger on our factory manager. In fact, all he did was ask a question... just one simple question.



ARTICLE BY  
GRAHAM WHITE  
HRD RETIRED  
& CONSULTANT

This all happened in a matter of minutes, yet it set in motion a change process that was to guarantee employment to over one thousand staff for another ten years, bringing job security, prosperity and wider community confidence to the whole area. Bucking every trend in the industry, that simple question slowed the demise of manufacturing in that one UK town by over a decade. I recall the day clearly, our factory manager, with abject panic written all over his face, burst into the weekly production meeting twenty minutes late. He didn't wait to be seated or for there to be a pause for him to speak, he just announced to all present that the finishing machine was down. It might not seem a major comment but, in the textile industry, if you can't finish a product then there is no point in starting it. Everyone in that meeting did know the textile industry and so every one of them knew the dire consequences of our only finishing machine, breaking down eight weeks before Christmas. Everyone that is, except the new production director, he simply stood up and asked his question and silence descended, for almost a minute, before the phoenix began to appear in weird and wonderful snippets that were beginning to pop up all around the factory.

Bringing this right up to date, it's a little-known fact that, more than half of the companies on the current Fortune 500 list, were founded during an economic downturn. Many of today's success stories including; Airbnb, WhatsApp, Groupon and Uber, are children of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-2010. The ongoing consequences of this current, terrible virus is a stark reminder to all businesses, that nothing is sacred and no one and no organisation is exempt. Who would have thought in this new millennium that a UK Chancellor would declare: "We won't be able to save every business"? Yet in every crisis in history, even those as devastating as COVID-19, something happens that creates new business opportunities. With the world economy shifted off its axis, this type of meteoric imbalance has historically created new demands - whilst also releasing resources from their previous use - to fill the new demand. Yes, it is sad to hear the threat to city centre sandwich and healthy food providers, but are we really supportive of them simply demanding government bail outs? If we are to believe many organisations will never fully return to their multistorey office blocks and many government departments are looking to relocate out of inner cities, then the need remains - it's just the provision that changes - and, in this environment, these organisations need to manage complexity rather than seek to minimise it. So, understanding what changes are happening, how they affect your business - and what to do about them - is crucial for every business, not only to survive this pandemic, but also to turn this around, buck the trend and prove you can make a silk purse after all. However, is it really as simple as someone asking one question?

As far as I can see, the sad reality of this situation is that far too many organisations are approaching this situation in the same way they have addressed every other challenge. They look for the easiest option, the average approach, the workarounds or temporary fixes that might hold things together just long enough to allow the cloud to pass and things to settle, so they can go back to their normal operating arrangements. Some years ago, as a guest speaker at a professional body event, I was invited to sit on a panel taking questions relating to my presentation about "continuous improvement". The first question was directed at me; "what is wrong with being average?" It was asked in a manner that one might assume meant the questioner didn't agree with me. All I could think to say was "average is easy, that's why it is so popular". Glib, some

might say, but I actually wish I had read more of the philosopher Colin Wilson's writings, so that I could have quoted this: "The average man is a conformist, accepting miseries and disasters with the stoicism of a cow standing in the rain."

For so many organisations, the unfolding implications of this pandemic are rapidly and mercilessly exposing them as firms who have fallen into the trap of ignoring complexity, woefully unprepared for disruption... happy to be average and lacking any impetus for change. By maintaining a stoic, "business-as-usual" approach - like Wilson's cows standing in the rain - these businesses hope that, if they wait long enough, the sun might shine again soon. They could have been implementing collaborative and matrix based operating models, they instead implemented simple, static solutions to the growing complexity and dynamism of the modern digital age. The bait was often a consultant's cash register melody promising to simplify or at least minimise complexity despite the new demands of AI and digital disruption. While some organisations have quietly developed and evolved their structures, communications channels, and engagement techniques others, have been convinced to "stick to their knitting".

Back in that weekly production meeting, which took place "on the floor" in that manufacturing site, I still remember "the question", as it set in motion the vision our new production director had for our organisation - whose advice and example I credit for all my own meagre career successes. Like many great leaders, he never waited for Ken Olsen's concepts to be published in a book. He just acted and, long before the word matrix management was coined, he was turning us into a flatter organisation, with the capability to make decisions at speed and at the heart of the issue, not elsewhere in out-of-touch ivory towered boardrooms. Without realising it, our new production director, had created multiple managerial accountability and responsibility across the whole production site. Using dual chains of command following functional and product lines we were more than ready for this latest challenge.

By the way, you're probably wondering what this question was? "What do the other production line teams suggest we do?" The last one hundred years are peppered with examples of leaders who benefited from ignoring slow-moving hierarchies and bureaucracies and refused to accept anything less than real-time, decision-making and streamlined core processes that ask the very people at the heart of their organisations for solutions. The temperance movement of the early 1900s in the USA, led not only to the demise of breweries and distilleries, but also to the creation of a whole new multi-billion soft drinks industry. While many complained, demanded compensation or fought the alcohol bans, some organisations asked their workforce about the consequences. Coca Cola, Dr. Pepper and Pepsi-Cola, all listened to their workforces tell them that people will still need alternative drinks for

socialising, at mealtimes and for relaxation.

Acting on this information, these organisations are now world leaders in their field. They also anticipated that premises, machinery and skilled labour would become available at bargain rates as breweries and distilleries shut down. With the capacity to re-skill, upskill and redeploy people these organisations looked to capitalise on new markets and emerging opportunities - they didn't stay standing in the rain, they acted.

Following Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 2014, Europe and the USA-imposed strict sanctions on Russia, which retaliated with import bans on products from western countries. These sanctions resulted in the Russian people losing access to a range of European products, including cheese. Today, Russia has a flourishing cheese industry, where none existed before. History, as always, is repeating itself again - take face masks and how they remain hot commodities - the media was breathless in its condemnation of a few operations, shamelessly hyping prices and using the huge spike in demand to passively cash in on the windfall. The media frenzy just increased the demand and they quickly sold out and could not benefit further from the increased demand, because their supply chains shut down. However, by contrast, Respilon, a matrix-styled organisation - established by Roman Zima in 2013 - with the aim of launching products to help people live better, healthier lives - found ways to continue manufacturing and put new face masks in its online shop daily and at realistic prices. Many other organisations, like ASOS and Amazon, all point to similar successes. So, commercial success in a COVID-19 world is about pre-empting change, not reacting to it, with speed and agility hardwired - or should that be flexy wired - into the matrixed framework. Simply "coping" with uncertainty, can no longer be a nice-to-have twitter handle (#copingwithuncertainty). For those organisations who are genuinely seeing this as an opportunity to reset - and are minded to develop an entirely new model - I strongly recommend they look to the matrix management concept. ●



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# BURNING ON A STANDING PLATFORM

*Rebellious, energetic, dynamic, resilient, cooperative and ambitious... this is not a list of the qualities necessary in a senior manager, but the characteristics of an organisation that is able to survive and thrive post coronavirus. But is the structure right to take advantage of these qualities?*



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ARTICLE BY BLAIR MCPHERSON - FORMER DIRECTOR, AUTHOR AND BLOGGER

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I have worked as a senior manager in a number of large, complex organisations, which were under severe financial pressure. All of these organisations sought to be less bureaucratic, to streamline decision making, to be more corporate, to work across departmental and directorate boundaries, to change working practices - in order to increase efficiency and to maximise the benefits of new technology. They also all sort to encourage innovation as a way of doing more with less and to develop external relationships and formal partnerships, in recognition that cooperation and collaboration are more effective than working in isolation. This was often a slow incremental process, a collection of initiatives advancing, as opportunities arose and thinking matured. But, taken as a whole, it can be viewed as progress towards an entirely new organisational model, progress that now has a sense of urgency, as organisations work on recovery plans and their post-coronavirus business plans. The successful implementation of this new model is not simply about finding the right person to lead the organisation - someone with vision who can inspire - or a dynamic senior management team with the energy to change the way the organisation does things. It also requires a structure that puts power and responsibility where it can be most effective.

At one point in my management career, I took up a post in a large, nationwide Housing Association. This HA had three distinct and separated business streams and each business stream had its own senior management team. I was the Acting Director for the south of the country and I had a counterpart in the north of the country. We had little to do with each other - just two business streams passing in the night - although sometimes, we shared office space. Covering such a large geographical area and managing a very dispersed workforce presented challenges, in terms of effective communication and amount of time managers spent travelling to meetings. It was not unusual for me to spend a whole day travelling from my base in Birmingham, to attend a strategic partnership meeting in Exeter or Plymouth - a meeting that was only scheduled to last a couple of hours. On one memorable occasion I travelled down to Somerset for a partnership meeting, only to arrive as the meeting was finishing, having encountered holdups and delays on the

motorway. Despite this we were a tight, well-motivated management team and our business was growing.

A new Chief Executive arrived with a brief to grow the business faster, develop new business streams, increase our share of the market and make us more financially robust. Their strategy for achieving this was to significantly enhance our partnership working and generally be a more ambitious organisation. Their assessment was, that the organisations structure - based on specialist business streams - did not help achieve this strategy. Their solution was to introduce a matrix management structure. The country was divided into geographical "Areas" and an area manager was responsible for all the organisations business activity in that locality. This included building up relationships with existing partners, developing new partnerships and new business activity. Areas were grouped into three regions and each region was line managed by a director, who each had a lead responsibility for one of the specialist business streams. Local relationships were strengthened, enabling area managers to make the most of local business opportunities.

In another role, as a director of a large and complex organisation, under severe financial pressure, I was very aware that the pace of change was relentless, but that our response was too slow, resulting in high levels of frustration amongst managers. The decision-making process and the bureaucracy inhibited innovation and made changing the way things were done unnecessarily arduous. As a result, there was a culture of orthodoxy and yet, at the same time, a tradition of each directorate doing their own thing, the classic silo mentality. Innovation was taking place, but it was not driven by senior management, it was a small number of frontline managers, acting under the radar, finding ways around the system. As in my experience working for a national HA, it took a change in leadership to move from evolution to revolution. A new Chief Executive, a new Chair and a new more dynamic board, driven by tough financial pressure, to deliver improved performance and greater efficiency. There was a sense of urgency, the CEO spoke of, "standing on a burning platform". As a result, there would be no lengthy debates or protracted negotiations. This was a clear signal of a change in the culture. We were over-managed and one-in-

reduced and possibly outsourced. Business plans were to be focused on "doing more with less", by maximising the benefits of new technology and changing the approaches and procedures. Sometimes this was as simple as introducing hot desking and offsite working, as a way of reducing office accommodation costs. All around, there was innovation, but now it came from the corporate centre or senior managers - possibly at the expense of the frontline - as they could not so easily operate unseen. Senior managers with broader spans of responsibility put individuals in posts, where they were responsible for parts of the business that they had no previous background in or experience of. Some were able to bring themselves up-to-speed, while others relied too heavily on overstretched middle managers.

Organisations can become so obsessed - even bogged down - in a restructuring that they forget why they are doing it. It's not about trying to achieve a structure that looks neat and logical in the annual report. The structure can be messy and it's difficult to explain the rationale in places, but that doesn't really matter, as long as it supports the organisations priorities. In the matrix example in this article, the priority was to grow the business and generate more income more quickly. In the flatter hierarchy, broader spans of responsibility exemplify that the priority was to increase efficiency and reduce costs. Both organisations shared a modernisation agenda, to increase efficiency, maximise the benefits of new technology, encourage innovation as a way of doing more with less and be a more agile organisation. There was never a time when we didn't seek to reorganise in response to a changing business environment. There was never a time when management was not about managing change. Organisations are always responding to the pressure of change and adapting. It can be a gradual change but, in times of great upheaval and uncertainty, it is a step-change, spurred on by a sense of urgency. This is such a time. ●

## ORGANISATIONS CAN BECOME SO OBSESSED - EVEN BOGGED DOWN - IN A RESTRUCTURING THAT THEY FORGET WHY THEY ARE DOING IT. IT'S NOT ABOUT TRYING TO ACHIEVE A STRUCTURE THAT LOOKS NEAT AND LOGICAL IN THE ANNUAL REPORT

Consequently, the business did grow faster and the organisation became more financially robust. However, whilst area managers reported favourably on their ability to generate new business, they spoke of experiencing tension between their line managers priorities - around existing business - and the priorities set by the senior service leads for new business. Less dramatic and not as distracting - but potentially achieving the same ends - a flattening of the hierarchy, a broadening of the spans of responsibility, an expansion of the group of managers responsible for strategy, partnership working/ relationship building and working across traditional boundaries, was realised.

five management posts would go, the structure would be flatter, senior managers would have a broader span of responsibility and with more emphases on relationship building and partnership developments. Senior managers would each take a lead on a corporate initiative, as part of challenging the silo mentality - I was given the lead on Equality and Diversity. We were to become an agile organisation, which meant we needed a different type of manager, one with transferable skills and a corporate mindset. Support services including; HR, IT, Communication, Policy and management development - all previously based in directorates - would now be centralised,

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## TO THE POINT

## HOW BEING APART BROUGHT US CLOSER

Our company launched on January 15th with 15 employees, then on March 23rd, our whole team moved to remote working. This posed a real challenge for a brand-new company and one that valued team-building and collaboration in the same physical space.

Article by Joe Levy, CEO - Uplevel

**H**ow does a small, relatively new team maintain the camaraderie, productivity and efficacy necessary to continue building? An employee survey in the weeks after employees started remote work, found that 'connection to co-workers' ranked low. As a result, everyone pitched in to come up with ways to help each person feel supported, productive and happy. An immediate response to employees sentiment of feeling isolated while working from home, we implemented a committee called The Uplevel Yacht Club, to come up with creative ideas to help employees feel like a team. The results have been a huge

success, with the committee organising two big initiatives: Chopped - Uplevel Style: Each participant was sent three ingredients for a lunch bake-off; celery, Fruity Pebbles and soy sauce. Then, for lunch, everyone shared the results via video and voted on the the most creative. The result was an entertaining lunch and shared employee experience. Meanwhile, we subscribed to an app that tracks new habits users want to form. Each team member chose three habits to track and receive points and this turned September into a competitive challenge with plenty of trash talking and positive encouragement to change habits. Our Head Designer never did so much yoga in her life and the CTO was walking at all times of day - and night - to keep her points up.

It also became clear very early on that a few adjustments were needed, to what "business as usual" looked like with remote employees. As a result, several practices installed themselves including: A move to fully remote and, with a lease ending in early 2021 - and no end in sight to the stay-at-home order - we terminated our lease and embraced remote work completely. This meant that all employees were given a generous stipend to set up a home office. We now organise mental health days monthly for the full company, so that people could take time off without worrying about being a bottleneck. Also, there are weekly demo lunches for employees to informally share what they are working on and to stay connected and celebrate successes. Then Friday game time has become a firm favourite, where employees take part in games like *Charades*, *Pictionary*, *Jeopardy* and *Code Names*, including meal delivery paid by the company.

One initiative was to divide into teams to play *Tetris*, which mixed colleagues who don't work together usually and this proved to be very competitive. The team also decided to block calendars from 12-1:30pm every day and all day on Wednesday, so that everyone can have a break from meeting. Other initiatives include the occasional remote events like inviting a zoo expert to show off some animals.

These initiatives have had a measurable impact on the company's productivity and overall happiness. Last month the Uplevel management team asked employees "What if we were a fully remote company?" and it turns out that the majority are interested in keeping it that way. However, this isn't just a story about making employees happy - the whole company has been extremely productive. It's easy to improve culture if that's the only focus, but it is difficult to do while working hard on growing business. While driving culture shifts, we have grown our team and customers, pivoted and shipped new WFH product features, hired amazing talent without recruiters and more. The management team balanced improving culture and still delivered on business growth. As a company that has put a strong focus on culture since it's inception, its been interesting to see how moving all-remote has brought everyone closer and improved business. This historic time shows us that humans are resilient and there are many ways to build a successful team. ●



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NEXT MONTH  
ISSUE 195

## INTERVIEW

Genevieve Glover, Group  
HR Director - Barchester  
Healthcare.

## TRENDS FOR 2021

We leave 2020 as a memory of turmoil, with a lagging hangover. But this is also a time of revolution in work dynamics.

ADDRESSING THE  
SKILLS GAP

Remote working from anywhere has huge implications. No longer will swish city centre hubs be required to attract metropolitan talent.

VIRTUAL  
COLLABORATION

That the pandemic took the fusty, time-weary conventions of work and forced them into flexible and remote working overnight, is a most obtuse paradox.

THE RISE OF  
EMPLOYEE AUTONOMY

A cursory look at a general employment contract that is still doing the rounds today, would reveal policies that simply do not reflect the rapidly-evolving world of work.

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- HR financial reporting • Collaborative and matrixed organisations • Decision science & evidence-based HR
- Trends for 2021 • Addressing the skills gap • Virtual collaboration • The rise of employee autonomy
- The Digitalisation of HR • Apprenticeships and Graduate placements • The next evolution of business ethics
- Remote working redefined for employees and HR Professionals

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## THE BLOG

## INTRODUCING THE BLOG

WELCOME TO 'THE BLOG' FROM THEHRDIRECTOR, WHERE WE OFFER UP OPINIONS AND VIEWPOINTS FROM THE VERY BEST BLOGGERS IN HR. HERE, WE SUMMARISE THREE OF THE BEST BLOGS FROM THIS MONTH ON THE KEY ISSUES WHICH AFFECT OUR SENIOR HR READERSHIP. LET US KNOW IF YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH OUR GUEST BLOGGERS VIEWS, AS WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.



SARAH DENNIS

Sarah Dennis, Head of International at The Health Insurance Group, joined the company in 2014 with over 20 years senior management industry experience for intermediaries and insurers. Sarah has won a number of industry awards and is a regular speaker, committee member and contributor to global industry conferences and the media.



DR. BRENNAN JACOBY

Dr. Brennan Jacoby is a philosopher and the founder of Philosophy at Work, an organisation helping businesses think their best. He delivers learning and development training sessions that teach sharp thinking skills, facilitates team sessions and delivers talks that spark curiosity. Originally from Detroit Michigan, Brennan studied in Australia and is now based in Oxfordshire.



SAMANTHA WOODHAM

Samantha is a family law barrister who co-founded The Divorce Surgery, which allows separating couples to access legal advice together from one impartial barrister. This award-winning One Couple One Lawyer model is changing divorce for the better. The Divorce Surgery advises employers on how to support employees through divorce and advising on policies.



### HIRING LOCAL NATIONALS IS ON THE RISE, SO HOW CAN HR SUPPORT EMPLOYEES?

As Covid-19 travel restrictions continue to impact businesses, many are turning to recruiting local nationals to fill vacancies where hiring a globally mobile workforce may have previously been the norm. The pandemic has added another layer of complexity to managing an international workforce, and HR professionals need to ensure that their recruitment and retention strategy is fit for purpose to remain competitive and attract the best talent. Sarah points out some of the areas to keep workforce safe.



### AWAYDAYS ARE GONE - LONG LIVE TOGETHERDAYS!

The best awaydays were never really about the unique location, the food and drink, or the activities. And though it pains me to say it as someone who has been a guest speaker at many awaydays, it was never really about the content of the day either. It's always been about encounter, and in this time of workplace revolution, it is encounter that we and our colleagues still need most. Brennan advocates a revolution toward what he's calling 'togetherdays'. In our current isolated situation, one of the things that we miss from normality is being together with colleagues.



### HOW DOES FURLOUGH OR REDUNDANCY AFFECT MAINTENANCE: WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW

Divorce is increasingly an important issue for employers. Family breakdown most commonly affects individuals in the age range 45-55, so often impacts the productivity of senior management. An added factor in the current climate is COVID-19 which has an impact on the financial aspects of divorce in particular spouses looking to reduce their maintenance payments due to furlough or redundancy or re-assessing a proposed financial settlement. For couples who are separated or separating, this issue is particularly pressing.



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