

# HRD

The only independent strategic HR publication

the **HRDIRECTOR** JANUARY 2021 | ISSUE 195

## SPECIAL REPORTS

FROM MEAN MACHINES TO DREAM MACHINES, WHY TECH NEEDS MUCH MORE HUMANITY. PLUS, HOW TO BUILD POWERFUL VIRTUAL TEAMS.

GENEVIEVE GLOVER, GROUP HR DIRECTOR - BARCHESTER HEALTHCARE

## { TRUE COLOURS }

“DEVELOPING PEOPLE, BUILDS COMPETENCY, BUT THE BEATING HEART OF GOOD CARE IS HUMANITY”

### ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

**TRENDS FOR 2021** Panicked businesses stuck band aids and gaffer tape around problems. What lies beneath is about to be exposed:

**THE SKILLS GAP** This white-knuckle ride will see people switching roles en masse and rapidly gaining a completely different set of skill

**VIRTUAL COLLABORATION** Simply replicating the office virtually, won't cut it. It's a mix of push and pull, the synchronous and asynchronous:

**RISE OF EMPLOYEE AUTONOMY** Micromanagement becomes obsolete, once a diverse group of people are on mission and purpose

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## ON THE COVER

In this issue, we interview Genevieve Glover, Group HR Director - Barchester Healthcare. As the scale and danger of the pandemic became apparent, the health and care sectors were already exposed in the path of the storm. What happened next will never be forgotten. For those on the frontline, it was the staunchest test of vocation, responsibility and bravery.



Genevieve Glover 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.



We leave 2020 as a memory of turmoil, with a lagging hangover. But this is also a time of revolution in work dynamics and business operations, as we look towards more uncertainty, opportunity and enforced change.

The driving necessity is to predict, plan and adapt at a gallop. COVID-19 raised the people agenda to its zenith and accelerated a way of working that has been envisaged for years, but never fully-realised. The result is an "employee spring", where people are exercising their newly-acquired - but largely uncontracted - rights to work when and where they want, creating a quasi-workforce framework, which will demand new and innovative approaches to people management.

Remote working from anywhere has huge implications for the conventions that we have become accustomed to. No longer will swish city centre hubs be required to attract skills, which demand completely new strategies in attraction, recruitment and competing for talent and employee demands and expectations are changing right across the Employee Value Proposition. Turning to Brexit, for some time now, predictions about access to skills has painted a bleak picture, mainly because of the restrictions that will be placed on immigration. An inescapable fact is that UK organisations across sectors, have relied heavily on foreign talent, which may well have inadvertently damaged the domestic skills pipeline.

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 so-called "rush hour" madness, just to fulfill the contractual obligations of work, was a time-weary relic that may have finally been resigned to the history books, for the most unexpected reasons. But whether it really does represent the much

longed for hope of work/life serendipity and a remedy for the stress and mental health that has crept up on the workforce, only time will tell. But for the immediate future, the reality is a reimagining of the workforce.

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. In this emerging era, the most significant driver of change is independence, supporting a culture of autonomy, ownership and self-responsibility in this era of remote and flexible working. The traditional workforce framework is completely out of step with this, where people are monitored and micromanaged, as it stinks of mistrust and exploitation.

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## LEGAL UPDATES

from the **HRDIRECTOR** 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 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.
- 2 Cases alleging a breach of the Transnational Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations 1999 (TICER 1999) are very rare and (1) *Verizon EWC* (2) *Charpentier v Central Management of the Verizon Group* is the first application of its kind for penalty notices to be issued by the EAT for failures to comply with the TICER 1999 provisions. Given the current COVID-19 driven redundancies being proposed by employers, those employers with EWCs should take note as the maximum penalty is £100,000. The Verizon European Works Council applied to the EAT under Regulations 21 and 21A of TICER 1999 for the issue of penalty notices against Verizon's central management for breaches of TICER 1999 and the agreement between the parties which were the subject of findings by the CAC. Because of Verizon's failure to properly inform and consult with the EWC about a proposed reorganisation involved redundancies in eight European countries the EAT issued a penalty notice in the sum of £35,000. The EAT rejected Verizon's argument that the gravity of the failures was slight, the period of time over which they occurred was short and the reason for them was accidental and well-intentioned.
- 3 In a previous legal update we reported that in *Taylor v Jaguar Land Rover* an ET found that the protection under the Equality Act for those undergoing gender reassignment extended to non-binary and gender-fluid individuals and went on to uphold Taylor's harassment, discrimination and constructive unfair dismissal claims. Ms Taylor, who prefers to use the female pronoun, had worked as an engineer for the company for almost 20 years and previously presented as male when she began identifying as gender fluid in 2017. She claimed she was subsequently subjected to insults from colleagues and abusive jokes. The BBC report that at a subsequent remedy hearing compensation was agreed at £180,000. JLR apologised and said it was using the recommendations of the case to strengthen its "diversity and inclusion strategy".

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.

### YOLANDA TALAMO

Chief People Officer - Heineken

Heineken has announced the appointment Yolanda Talamo as Chief People Officer. Yolanda is currently Senior Vice President of Human Resources at Heineken Americas. She is a Venezuelan national, joined Heineken in 2016 and has held a number of senior management Human Resources positions throughout her career.

### NATALIE SAUNDERS

HR Director of Consulting - Clarion

Law firm Clarion has appointed Natalie Saunders as Director of HR Consulting. Natalie has held a number of senior positions in HR, most recently with Leeds Beckett University, where she was People Director. Natalie's specialisms include; culture change, HR transformation and complex, sensitive people problems. With her unusual blend of law and HR skills, Natalie will be taking on an outward-facing role.

### EVELINE PATERNOTTE

Director HR, Executive Committee - ForFarmers

Eveline Paternotte has been appointed to Director HR in the Executive Committee of ForFarmers. Eveline has spent the largest part of her career in international HR positions in the food & beverages industry at PepsiCo and Grolsch, both in the commercial divisions and supply chain side. Eveline's appointment is fully in line with the objective of ForFarmers to enhance internal promotions, as well as diversity in management.

### HANNAH REID

Chief People Officer (CPO) - ReKTGlobal

ReKTGlobal, the parent company of Rogue and the London Royal Ravens, has announced the appointment of Hannah Reid as its Chief People Officer (CPO), who will be responsible for the design and implementation of human resources infrastructure and programmes to be scaled across the business. Hannah joins from digital media agency VaynerX, where she was HR Leader, assisting in people processes as the company underwent global growth.



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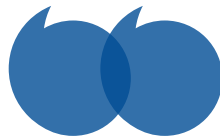
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# TRUE COLOURS

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*As the scale and danger of the pandemic became apparent, the health and care sectors were already exposed in the path of the storm. What happened next will never be forgotten. For those on the frontline, it was the staunchest test of vocation, responsibility and bravery. The rest of us stood on doorsteps and applauded, without really appreciating the true impact on a personal and human level.*





## GENEVIEVE GLOVER

### GROUP HR DIRECTOR - BARCHESTER HEALTHCARE

INTERVIEWED BY JASON SPILLER & PHOTOGRAPHED BY STUART THOMAS

**Genevieve, tell us about your early life and how you found a career path into HR.** Because I was so sporty at school, the careers advisor suggested I became a PE teacher, but even then, I knew that wasn't right for me. As an alternative, she suggested a new degree in Recreation Management at Sheffield Polytechnic. I specialised in Business Studies and Sports Science and had a great time, although I didn't really know what I would end up doing. Whilst there, I joined a gym and a career in the Fitness Industry topped the list of options. Following a variety of roles, including launching and running the Health Club at The Savoy - my first start up - I then joined the gym chain Bladerunner and ended up running 25 corporate gyms across the South of England. Wendy Thorburn, a former Dun & Bradstreet HR Director who worked at Bladerunner, suggested I specialise in HR and studied for a Masters. She must have seen some spark of potential in me, so I took her advice and have not looked back. Further on, I joined a VC backed start up called Businesshealth in a hybrid role. This was a great opportunity to gain insight into the workings of businesses and HR functions across a variety of sectors. So early on, I was developing a wide base of skills and, throughout my career, that has definitely been the pattern - operations, consultancy, commercial, non-exec roles and volunteer leadership roles in rugby - I was never a HR purist and it's definitely made me a better business-minded HR leader.

**How useful was having a sports mindset in forging your early career?** There's no doubt that a sports mindset has been really important to me. Sport gives such positive experiences and develops great skills for everyone, regardless of age or level that the sport is played. My sporting life has reinforced the importance of the team and embracing diversity, along with discipline, competitiveness and ambition, resilience, commitment and so much more. It has also given me confidence in myself and my abilities; I'm an ex-Wasps and England A player - my shirts are here on the wall (points) - well...

not the really big one, that's Martin Johnson's from the 2003 Rugby World Cup win. I'm so proud to still be part of the rugby community.

**What happened next?** An opportunity came along that I could not refuse, a new music and entertainment venue that was being developed from what was then called the Millennium Dome. They were recruiting for an HR Director and I applied and joined the then small team, focused on launching what was to become The O2. It was an amazing six years, being part of the team that launched what became the world's most successful venue. During my time with Anschutz Entertainment Group - or AEG as it is more widely known - I ended up as European HR Director, looking after The O2, AEG Live, which was the music promotion side of the business, the David Beckham Academy and Thames Clippers, as well as supporting the opening of the new venues in Europe and providing consultancy support to the Australian business. I was also Chair of Thames Clippers for three years, which was an amazing experience to learn about that sector.

**Give us some specific examples of the HR challenges in bringing The O2 arena to life.** My first challenge was to build my HR Team from scratch. We wanted to do something completely different in music and entertainment, prioritising the customer experience. My team worked across The O2, supporting recruitment, induction and training. We also had to communicate our vision for The O2 and AEG's EVP, in a way that people could engage with, not least considering the not-so-positive press and perception of the Millennium Dome at that time. It was quite a challenge to overcome the "white elephant" image of the Dome and to share a vision of a music and entertainment destination that had never existed. Working with GLLaB, Greenwich Local Labour and Business under Michelle Rankin's leadership, they facilitated our section 106 commitment to make "reasonable endeavours" to recruit staff locally and helped us to communicate this vision. I will

never forget turning up to the local football stadium and seeing a queue snaking all the way round the ground of people there to meet the various brands and employers recruiting for the venue. Rosa D'Alessandro, our Head of CSR, was a key partner in this and I learnt a lot from her about the business value of CSR. At The O2's launch in June 2007, 34 percent of our operations team lived in Greenwich Borough, a fact that I am very proud of.

**The way careers evolve is so interesting. Sometimes you can be ready for a role, while others, it's a big stretch, a kind of, baptism by fire.** Usually when I interview people, they say, "I don't think I'm ready for this role," and I say, "no you're not and that's why you need to go for it." If you're perfect for a job, how long before you're frustrated by it? It's much better to grow into a role, fail fast and learn from your mistakes. I will give anything a go and I have a real dislike for lazy stereotypes and think pigeon-holing people is the worst crime against potential.

**What happened next?** I was expecting my daughter and decided that I wanted a role that offered greater flexibility. I was approached by someone who said that they had an opportunity that was a bit different, so that appealed to me. I met Kumar Jacob - who was Chair of the Maudsley Charity at the time - who shared his vision as to how we could raise awareness and understanding of mental health, using technology-enabled learning. This was a great opportunity to be a Managing Director, start up a new business and work alongside the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP) and Maudsley Charity. Our vision was; "to develop and deliver accessible learning in mental health". The aim was to work with the world-renowned academics at the IoP and to translate their knowledge in a way that everyone could understand and by making it freely accessible using technology. I have, over the years, understood the importance of having an effective board and this was an opportunity to build one from scratch, with the right balance of skills,



experience and diversity of perspectives, to support me and the business. I learnt a lot and quickly and, whilst being the number one didn't faze me, I did find the stakeholder management a real challenge. We opened a meeting and events venue, which was a beautiful new building in Camberwell - which was shortlisted for the Stirling Prize - and opened it to the community and beyond. It was a fully-inclusive environment where clinicians, academics, local residents, business and patients rubbed shoulders in the café and at events. But there came a point where I felt that I had come to the end of my time with the business, after about three and a half years. At the same time, I was approached about the opportunity to join an organisation that ran care homes and it was a move that I felt compelled to take. I carried out some due diligence and when offered the role of Group HR Director at Barchester, I wholeheartedly accepted. It helped of course that Pete Calveley, CEO, was a big rugby fan, but we had great synergy in general and I felt energised by his vision of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

to reach this point, but we now have a really strong team that, not only has the basics right, but has also stepped up positively in response to the pandemic. From an HR perspective, the challenges and pressures are many and varied, but the headliners are; a shortage of skills and unparalleled attrition, which developed a sector mindset of; "let's just recruit 6,000 people a year and lose 6,000 people a year." When consistency of staff and developing people are the foundations of good care, that doesn't help. Care is a local community mainstay and so a focus on our local brand was very important, in order to recruit good people from the localities around our care homes, across the country. In fact, this was seen from the start as much more critical than the overall corporate brand. We then looked at the EVP, an area that has historically not been a mainstay of recruitment in the care sector, but we identified this as being crucial to bringing in great people that had a caring and learning mindset. So, recruiting well, efficiently and at scale had to be based on attracting good people with a competitive offer. It was also

SHORTAGE OF SKILLS AND UNPARALLELED ATTRITION DEVELOPED A SECTOR MINDSET OF; "LET'S JUST RECRUIT 6,000 PEOPLE A YEAR AND LOSE 6,000 PEOPLE A YEAR." WHEN CONSISTENCY OF STAFF AND DEVELOPING PEOPLE ARE THE FOUNDATIONS OF GOOD CARE, THAT DOESN'T HELP

**What were the key objectives for the organisation and explain what challenges needed to be addressed?** I reflect back five years to when I joined, replacing an interim HR Director. Pete had joined as CEO in 2014 and his first major task was to bring in a new Leadership Team, with a fresh new perspective for the journey ahead. The guiding principle was and still remains, 'Quality First'. This was based on the premise that this quality of care focus is a key part of our purpose and culture and we achieve commercial success because of this. My role was to develop a people strategy that would enable and contribute to this, which is what I have delivered and, over time, our quality of care ratings - as assessed by the regulators - has improved year-on-year, as has our commercial performance. I'm proud to say that the people strategy has been part of delivering this success.

about building a team culture, which makes all the difference in a care setting. This is something we call "the whole home approach", where all members of the team in a service, no matter their role, contribute to the resident experience. It sounds simple, but it achieves great camaraderie and, most importantly, understanding and empathy across teams, because everyone is contributing to the fundamental aspect of the business; providing great care consistently.

**Explain the strategy behind this achievement?** Pete was keen to build a leadership team that could work with him to drive this vision and our business plan. It took a number of goes

**What about senior managers, what are the challenges there?** Recruiting the best in any business is always a challenge and this is no different, but we are uncompromising in recruiting those who can step up to leading a service in 'The Barchester Way'. The majority of our operational managers are nurses and we expect them to balance consistently good delivery of care, the commercial performance of the home, leading a large team, proactive and positive engagement with relatives and links with LAs and CCGs. It's a very broad role and we support them to do that. We're constantly thinking about how we can

improve how we recruit and from where, what we provide in terms of induction and leadership development, what we pay and how we incentivise and how we support. It's about listening, talking to people and understanding the detail on a human level, as well as looking at what the data is telling us, because in normal times, we would be visiting our homes and hospitals regularly.

***How difficult is it to implement change in the care sector? With multiple settings, each with their individual managers and styles, this must be a challenge.***

When we recruit managers and leaders, we ensure that they can demonstrate that they have and do, respond positively to change and this ability to implement change has definitely improved over the last couple of years. Partly, this is because I think our culture is more collaborative and constructive in working across functions, with operations and across Divisions and partly because we have strong and consistent leadership at the top. At the same time, I think we have clarity on how we measure and reward success across the business. We did have, at one point, a myriad of different pay and bonus schemes, which is always a surefire source for disengagement, as some paid out and some didn't, against different criteria. So, unifying that aspect of the business was an important move and a big task. From an HR perspective, it's not about decreeing change and executing new policies from an ivory tower, it's about engaging with people in the journey and ensuring that you have buy in through the business and particularly from our operational leaders, as they know their teams so well. We created a framework where we are all measured against the same two metrics; quality of care (as assessed by the regulator) and EBITDA/R. That's it, from carer and housekeeper right through to the CEO. It sounds simple and, to an extent it is, albeit that behind the scenes there's a lot of work required for its delivery. So consistent measures, consistent communication, consistent timings to measure and feedback and transparency.

***It's a sector that has made the headlines for all the wrong reasons before the pandemic and during the crisis. How has this impacted Barchester?***

In the last couple of years, our culture has evolved to be more positive, collaborative and aligned in terms of delivering to our purpose. Our people strategy, called 'Together, People make Barchester' played a fundamental role in the evolution of this culture, as our corporate and operational leaders bought into four commitments that we made to our employees and expectations of our leaders. Simply, it was around who we attracted

to join our teams, how we would develop them to fulfil their potential, how we supported and drove their performance and how we retained their talent. All this with a focus on consistency in delivering good care and commercial performance. At the same time, we set up Barchester's first Internal Comms function, which sits within my team, so that we could build a strong framework of two-way communication, both in our homes and hospitals and across the organisation. Clarity and a rhythm of communication is maintained, across a variety of media, using consistent messaging. Where, as far as we are able, we check receipt and understanding - was also an important part of this culture change. This increased openness and transparency was

WE CREATED A FRAMEWORK WHERE WE ARE ALL MEASURED AGAINST THE SAME TWO METRICS; QUALITY OF CARE (AS ASSESSED BY THE REGULATOR) AND EBITDA/R. THAT'S IT, FROM CARER AND HOUSEKEEPER RIGHT THROUGH TO THE CEO

reinforced by ensuring open channels into the business, through direct emails to the CEO, intranet message boards, surveys, home and hospital visits etc. Having this foundation of two-way comms, has been instrumental in supporting our whole team response to the pandemic. So, that's the journey we've been through and, without a doubt, that has meant that Barchester as a whole, has stepped up to the challenge of COVID as a team. Our teams tell us that they have never felt more of a family and are glad to be part of a large organisation in this sector, as they feel that we are supporting them and 'have their backs'.

But even on our A-game, it was and continues to be a long and formidable challenge that has impacted on people and hit the most vulnerable extremely hard. The deaths that visited the care sector in the early stages of the pandemic were horribly tragic and the ongoing distress, caused by people being isolated and unable to be close to loved ones, has been heartbreaking. I'm proud to say that Barchester was proactive and quick to respond and we have been consistent throughout and rigorous in our management. We have even managed to continue building and expanding during this period - including the acquisition of 36 new services - and our staff have stepped up to integrate those into the business. That's effectively 1500 new residents and 3500 new staff and, next year, we intend to open ten new residential homes. I'm immensely proud of how we have collectively come together, not only to keep going, but to continue to evolve and build.

***What does 2021 hold for you and your HR plans?*** Barchester's current people strategy will be in its third year in 2021 and already I am thinking about 2022 to 2025. Next year, our focus will continue to be on the mental, physical and financial wellbeing of our people, providing even more support for our leaders throughout the business and tracking the development of our top 250 leaders, so that we can future-proof our growth and performance. We are also currently mapping our next five years, in relation to systems planning and we will be developing further our equality, diversity and inclusion activities, to ensure that everyone who works at Barchester - and all our residents and patients too - feel like they belong and can be themselves.

***I can't finish the interview without revisiting your esteemed rugby achievements and you say that you still play a part in the game?*** Not on the pitch any more sadly! Over the past 15 years, I've supported rugby in a number of non-exec roles. As a former Wasps player, I am a Trustee and Vice-President of Wasps and I now Chair the Wasps Legends' Charitable Foundation, which is a charity that's based on the alumni of Wasps - for both men and women, who are former pro and amateur players. We raise charitable funds through rugby and the Wasps community. I also sit on the RFU Council, by virtue of my chairing the Diversity & Inclusion Working Group, with a focus on leadership and governance in the game. All experiences that add value to my personal skills and professional career.

***What do you think you have learnt about yourself and others in what you've experienced over this pandemic?***

The quote that keeps coming to mind is from Dr. Martin Luther King - I've tweaked it slightly because the original refers to a man - but it's; "the ultimate measure of a team is not where they stand in the moments of comfort, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy." I've used that a couple of times, because I think that's very, very relevant to Barchester and us all as a team.

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HRD

# FROM MEAN MACHINES TO DREAM MACHINES

ARTICLE BY MAËLLE GAVET, AUTHOR OF *TRAMPLED BY UNICORNS: BIG TECH'S EMPATHY PROBLEM AND HOW TO FIX IT*

I remember the first time I used the word “empathy” in a room full of engineers, explaining that in my experience - very limited at the time - the best engineers had mastered empathy as a skill. From the way they looked at me, I thought I had used the wrong word. Turns out I was using the right Russian word, but that it wasn’t a concept that engineers considered remotely relevant.

I was CEO of OZON at the time and all the meetings were in Russian. As I was walking to my office, a senior engineer I had a good relationship with came up to me and said: “You may want to avoid lecturing them on empathy being a core engineering skill. It makes you look like you really don’t understand what engineering is about.” Luckily, things have changed since those days and yet there’s still much to do. As former Facebook Chief Security Officer Alex Stamos famously told a large crowd of security and software professionals at the Blackhat conference in 2017: “We have a real inability to put ourselves in the shoes of the people we’re trying to protect.” Indeed, the majority of large tech companies I know are far from purposefully, systematically and successfully implementing a more empathetic approach for their product, design and engineering teams and then measuring progress against both human and financial targets. This process begins with helping teams understand how cognitive empathy is pertinent to software-building and can help them build better products, while also dealing with the thorny problem of legacy code, built without biases, that result in some software ignoring a large number of their users. I’ve come to believe there’s a great deal to be said for sending engineering, design and product teams out of the office to burst

the “campus bubble” in which most tech giants operate. All varieties of engineer should spend a fixed number of days. It might be one day a month, meeting actual users and customers - not behind the safety of a screen, remotely observing a focus group - but face-to-face to understand what people actually do with their product or service, how they use them, where true pain points are and so on. To date, most companies only have their user experience (UX) researcher and product managers do this. Engineers rarely spend meaningful time in person with real-life customers. Finding time to take engineers away from their screens and into the field, when under relentless pressure of deadlines, is hard. But “proximity promotes empathy” is a principle I enthusiastically endorse, as it can lead to a seismic shift in perception. But more than that, imagine a senior Facebook engineer being sent to Myanmar to meet genocide victims, to understand first-hand, undiluted, how their product has been abused or used to disseminate hate or propaganda or to justify killing. Or imagine a Twitter executive sitting, once a week for a year, across a table from women who have been harassed online with rape and death threats or threatened because of their ethnic background. This executive would likely return home with a very different understanding of what to focus on and strain every sinew - or so you’d

hope - to design more empathetic tech and fix these issues, rather than utter yet more warm words. This would need to happen regularly to have a genuine impact, otherwise there's a risk of companies saying; "don't worry, we checked that box two years ago."

Similarly, Big Tech firms must do far more to encourage their employees to engage with the community on their own doorstep. James Higa, who ran special operations for Steve Jobs at Apple, thinks one way around the luxurious isolation provided by Big Tech is for these companies to give their teams tasks to perform in their local community. He offers the example of assigning to an engineering team the mission of building an LED lighting system for a neighbourhood youth basketball team, to enable them to play at night. Out in the real world, problems would be solved, connections would be forged and empathy would likely flourish. Engineering talent could even be promoted based on leadership performance on projects of this sort. Furthermore, it's critical to ensure that empathy is embedded in the product development process itself. One possible step would be to have an empathy committee, composed not just of product and engineering and business people, but also of sociologists, ethicists, philosophers - in short, people who are focused on thinking at human scale. This group would review the concept and the code of major products and features, thinking through the scenarios and pitfalls. On a day-to-day basis, a lighter approach would be to have a few dedicated engineers who would be responsible for challenging product and engineering teams throughout the development process, to take into account the larger impact of their code on the world. I acknowledge that both measures would be cumbersome, but I believe that they are the best way to change attitudes. In a similar vein - and a cause I have long championed - the tech giants should be more aggressive in recruiting people with humanities backgrounds - people as familiar with Voltaire and Thomas Paine as with Java and Python - and create special career pathways for them in product and

engineering. With the rise of computational design - which harnesses computing power, machine learning and data and applies them to the design process - over time, people with non-programming backgrounds will increasingly become product designers and engineers. This offers a huge opportunity to bring in more diverse candidates with a wide variety of experience, which will not only result in smarter teams, according to research by McKinsey<sup>1</sup>, but ones with greater emotional intelligence, who are more innovative too<sup>2</sup>.

*Helping teams understand how cognitive empathy is pertinent to software-building can help them build better products, while also dealing with the thorny problem of legacy code*

In one of my previous roles, where we had a relatively small engineering team of about 50, we started recruiting non-engineers who wanted to move into product and engineering. They were hired initially to work in quality assurance (QA) and from there, after a couple of years, they would make the transition into engineering. Whereas the overwhelming majority of engineers are still young white males, two of my first non-engineering hires happened to be women of colour. This isn't an overnight process, but the end result will be more diversity of thought and varieties of background and experience at tech companies. Most companies will hire based on a CV and a few rounds of interviews. Sometimes, they will add a technical exercise. The most advanced will conduct in-depth reference checks

that will focus not just on results, but also on interpersonal skills, or even some kind of challenge assignment, so that they can see how a candidate interacts with their possible future colleagues. Large tech firms usually have a well-structured framework with which to assess candidates, based on their values and the results they want to see them driving. However, very few test explicitly for empathy<sup>3</sup>. But what might "testing for empathy" look like? It would involve asking questions that, for example, probe a candidate's ability to view a given problem, task, or situation from multiple perspectives and it would mean exploring a candidate's experience in resolving conflicts in a fair and sensitive manner for everyone involved. Two of my favourites are asking a candidate to describe a time when they had a positive impact on someone, as a way to understand their ability to see when other people need help and actually do something about it, then systematically including in the review process report on how "the people who do not matter in the interview process", were treated by the candidate. In terms of feedback, most companies will follow a fairly similar approach - annual or biannual performance reviews - leading to decisions around compensation and promotion. They may also mention continuous feedback, but very few will implement that in reality because, let's face it, giving good feedback is hard and time-consuming. Particularly in large organisations, training all managers to be able to give empathetic feedback once a year, let alone throughout the year and to all employees, amounts to a Herculean task.

Like many senior managers, I have implemented and advocated regular formal performance reviews and "stack ranking" processes. During these, employee performance is measured along a bell curve - also referred to as "calibration process" - where ten-to-20 percent of employees are rated as high performers, 60-to-70 percent as average performers and ten-to-20 percent as low/nonperformers). They are pretty useful tools, but they are often misused and they definitely should not replace continuous feedback. Over the years,

I've come to the opinion that stack rankings should be viewed as a performance indicator, rather than a strict target to be implemented. If half of your employees are low performers not meeting expectations, then you need to urgently review your expectations and/or the profiles you're hiring. Likewise, if half of them are top performers exceeding expectations, you probably have the wrong expectations. But performance reviews and stack rankings should not be used exclusively as tools to side-line and fire people. For me, assuming the

*Tech giants should be more aggressive in recruiting people with humanities backgrounds - people as familiar with Voltaire and Thomas Paine as with Java and Python - and create special career pathways*

recruiting process is effective, they allow a company first and foremost to identify the ten, 20 or 30 percent of employees who need extra support, either because they're still in the learning phase, or they're in the wrong position, they are going through difficult personal times or, indeed, they have the wrong manager. The problem is that this is not how most companies operate. For all the conversations about the "right to fail," if you have one bad performance review in a high-performing tech company, you will likely end up being exited within the year. This leads to people becoming more short-term focused and pushing features/products without really debating whether their "side effects" are acceptable, beyond usability issues. How you treat people when they become "surplus to requirements" is a pretty good indicator of your empathy level.

I'm not only talking about the exit package, but the way you communicate it to the employee in question, to the rest of the company and the way you help the employee process what's happening how you support them to move on and how much you believe that the company failed them as much as they failed the company. There are, of course, extreme cases where people are ill-intentioned, have broken fundamental values of the company or caused irreparable damage. There should, of course, be a zero-tolerance policy regarding things like sexual harassment, racism, bullying and stealing etc. I have conducted more than my fair share of "separation conversations" because over time I've learned how to conduct these meetings in an empathetic way, to the point that I'm actually still in touch with quite a large number of people whom I have exited over the years. As a result, I have been asked to handle these conversations rather a lot. To be clear: I don't enjoy them, I'd rather avoid them if I could and I have extremely mixed feelings about being praised for my "firing skills." Having said that, I believe that there is a good way and a bad way to fire people and, from what I've seen, the tech industry mainly does it the wrong way, including; limited feedback beforehand or, more often, nonactionable feedback and no real explanation. General counsels have played a huge role in explaining all the bad things that could happen if the employee was given too much information, that they could then use to attack the company. Legal departments need to find a way to protect companies against major risks without hiding the truth or hurting individual employees. Often too, there is no human conversation... no empathy. Again, general counsels have cautioned generations of managers and HR leaders against saying things like, "I'm so sorry for what is happening to you," or "we, as a company, should have done a better job." Then the final straw is giving the individual no opportunity to say goodbye properly.

There's a better way to do it - and while I understand that what I'm about to suggest potentially exposes the company to higher legal risks - my personal

experience is that the vast majority of employees will actually be less likely to sue you if you treat them with empathy and transparency: To begin with, provide a clear and transparent explanation - if you don't have one that you feel you can share with the employee and you would be ashamed if it was to become public - then you really need to think again about whether firing is justified. If it isn't, go back and think again. If it is, set a meeting that is not time-restricted; some people need ten minutes to process the news; others will need an hour. Throughout the process, offer genuine human care for their wellbeing, which can include discussions about the best next position for them, whether they should take some time off, potential people you could recommend them to, outplacement and so on. Importantly, don't promise things that you can't deliver or won't do, but try to think about how you can really help a fellow human being in what is, for most, a very difficult time and discuss how to best say goodbye to colleagues and hand over projects and rehearse, because finding the right words can be difficult. ●

1. David Rock, *Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter*, Harvard Business Review, November 4, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter>
2. Rocio Lorenzo, *How Diverse Leadership Teams Boost Innovation*, Boston Consulting Group, January 23, 2018, <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2018/how-diverse-leadership-teams-boost-innovation.aspx>
3. Not to be confused with an "empathy interview," a technique used to better understand the behavior, stories, journeys and processes of a candidate, or with conducting the interview process with empathy to ensure that candidates have a positive experience and build relationships from the very beginning.

This is an edited extract from *Trampled by Unicorns: Big Tech's Empathy Problem and How to Fix It* by Maëlle Gavet (published by Wiley, 2020)



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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

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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).

# VIRTUALLY INSEPARABLE

ARTICLE BY PETER IVANOV, EXECUTIVE COACH, BUSINESS CONSULTANT & AUTHOR - *POWER TEAMS BEYOND BORDERS: HOW TO WORK REMOTELY AND BUILD POWERFUL VIRTUAL TEAMS*

In a time where remote working in virtual teams is the new norm, maximising the performance of people will have to change, in order to establish trust and build powerful virtual teams. Though not at all new - it's a framework which has existed, more or less across sectors for years - but the difference now is, virtual is the only option for many organisations and that's a game changer, writ large.

What with everything that has happened in 2020, in a business operations context, the overwhelming and most prolific headline grabber has been about the many and varied impacts of an enforced move to remote and virtual working. For some firms that have adopted the strategy of reaching beyond physical borders to find the right talent, it has been business as usual, to some degree. But for many, this is new territory and the entire experience has been daunting. The more traditional businesses have wondered and debated; "how can our managers maintain control over their teams from computer screens? How do we keep people motivated? How do we keep them productive? Of course, for years, research has been conducted on virtual teams and, over time, what we have found is that the number one reason why remote teams fall short is a failure to build trust. Trust is the foundation on which remote teams are built, because it creates an interpersonal relationship between managers and team members, that transcends the superficial professional relationship. By being able to understand the individuals in your team on a much deeper level, you can unlock a new layer of productivity and be left amazed at the results generated. So, what can managers do to improve trust in remote teams and really bring the best out of people by building trust?

Unfortunately, with remote teams, it is all-too easy to look at team members as professional assets, rather than individuals with emotions, feelings and fears etc. In a virtual context, there can be the mindset of; "well I don't see the people, so why should I bother learning about them as individuals?" The amount of times I have heard remote managers say this in one way or another is alarming. In my opinion, approaching virtual teams with this attitude is a huge mistake and companies like Google know this better than anyone. In 2012, Google launched a research programme called Project Aristotle. It was an ambitious project across the company, to determine why some of their teams thrived, while others failed. After everything was done and dusted, one of the most prominent differentiating factors between their successful and unsuccessful teams was down to "psychological safety". The idea of psychological safety is that individuals need a safe space to make mistakes and they need to be able to show vulnerabilities and take risks without fear of being punished. Each individual in the successful teams felt comfortable speaking their mind, coming up with new ideas and putting a large amount of trust in their colleagues and managers. In order to identify and implement this idea of psychological safety, first we need to begin to build a foundation of trust.



Throughout the 20 years I've been in management, even to this day, every time I work with a new team, I start by running a two-day workshop, where I invite each individual to present a 'lifeline'. This is a way for someone to present a chart showing a timeline of key events in their life they are most proud of, including the highlights as well as the moments they found most difficult, but managed to overcome. By allowing each team member to present this quick ten-to-15-minute lifeline, within a very short period, you can begin to build a solid foundation of trust with your team. But more than that, your team also begins to put trust in each other, discovering their own and each other's strengths and weaknesses. A picture is worth a thousand words and another great way to instantly build trust with a new or existing team, is having each person bring a photograph that resonates with them, for whatever reason. Whether they find it funny, sad or moving, it's a great way to instantly gain a glimpse into the soul of each individual on your team. Creating a remote working environment that is psychologically safe and where trust is high doesn't happen overnight. It takes time to nurture. The good news is there are things you can do now that can make a big difference and start planting the seeds of a great interpersonal relationship.

I like to start with four simple questions I call "The Flash Intro", which is designed to start building trust within 60 seconds. These are my four magic questions: Do you have siblings? What were your hobbies as a child? What are you most proud of? What else should others know about you? Starting with simple, easy to answer, conversational questions like the first two, covering family and hobbies, acts as a warm-up, enabling individuals to feel comfortable to talk about themselves on a personal level. However, the next two are more advanced, as they require the individual to decide what they share with you and the rest of the team, giving them a sense of control and allowing them to open up and become more vulnerable in a safe space. This is the foundation of building trust. By implementing these four questions when managing a new team, or when someone

new joins, you will be amazed by the level of depth you can reach in 60 seconds that some remote managers fail to reach in years. The saying that, "trust is hard to make, but easy to break", rings true, whether that applies to business, dating or friendship. In a work context, it is not enough just to start on a good foot and build initial rapport, managers must consistently look to sustain the level of trust they have worked to build. This is important for anyone managing conventional teams face-to-face, but when it comes to remote teams, it is mandatory.

*Questions like, "How can I be a better leader?" are excellent ways to not only gain valuable feedback, but also to give the team a feeling that every one of their opinions and ideas is valued. So, take the time to know each of your team members, ask them questions, listen to their responses and watch trust build*

So, once built, how can we sustain trust in virtual teams? Again, the most simple and effective way is by asking questions and I don't mean just in group meetings either. Taking the time to run short individual meetings with team members, asking questions and actively listening is vital to creating a safe workplace. Questions like, "How can I be a better

leader?" are excellent ways to not only gain valuable feedback, but also to give the team a feeling that every one of their opinions and ideas is valued. So, take the time to know each of your team members, ask them questions, listen to their responses and watch trust build, confidence grow and productivity rise. The reality now is about building powerful, virtual teams beyond the organisational boundaries. Of course, teams that have been working remotely for some time will be further advanced and operating at sophisticated levels across international teams and running global projects. However, these days things are very different, with the pandemic fueling a rise in virtual teams to the point where they are everywhere. Even small-to-medium-sized companies now work strategically with partners overseas, using key suppliers or outsourcing departments, while for many companies, they rely on these partnerships to survive. But one thing that all businesses with this operational framework will be familiar with, is that any problems need to be addressed immediately, as issues arise and importantly, they must be resolved on a human level. So how do we build powerful virtual teams in this case? How do we build strong interpersonal teams, especially when we have to involve other organisations with their own people, too?

Now it's true that each organisation is different and will have its own separate goals. However, when dealing with partnerships, it is crucial that you come together online and set some mutually strategic goals together. There needs to be a core team that can meet regularly and determine the optimal strategic goals for both parties. They can then set out a strategic roadmap, which is a big part of building a powerful virtual team and allows each core team to see where they are in the process of achieving this common goal. Once there's a roadmap and both core teams fully understand their goals, trust can start to build on a much deeper level. Trust is won in many ways. One method I want to mention here is about creating transparency between organisations. If both organisations can open up and

reveal all of their goals, not just the mutual ones, then a deeper level of trust can form. The best way to do this is to invite other teams to take a look into your business, move amongst the departments and begin to build a relationship with each other. This will in turn enable work on mutual goals together and will enable a collaborative approach to resolving conflicts and making changes, with both parties will be more willing and ready to help each other, having built up personal trust. Another great enabler is to nominate ambassadors, that could be responsible for the virtual meetings' day-to-day organisation. Ideally, they would be excellent communicators who can build and maintain strong relationships.

*This collaboration doesn't just have to be with friendly companies. The phrase "make frenemies" applies here, because building partnerships with the competition is an excellent way of extending the reach of virtual teams too. Historically, this has happened many times before, just look at Amazon and Apple as a topline example*

Another fundamental strand is building another roadmap, this one leading to the common strategic goal you share with overseas partners. Here, the core team must understand all of the goals of their

organisation, not just the mutual goals, in order to build powerful virtual teams across the business and borders. Once an understanding of goals is made, this builds trust and generates the wave engagement and excitement to accomplish objectives. It all starts by building a winning spirit. As with all incentives how outstanding performance is rewarded matters. I like to work with an appealing prize when it comes to outstanding performance. I remember working on a two-year project with a global multinational where I was responsible for the entire European team. About six months in, I suggested that I take the thirty people involved on a trip to the Canary Islands, if we finished this large project early. After agreeing this with the board, we set up a great visual aid to help the teams all across Europe visualise this goal. Instead of the usual traffic light project reporting, we set up an island with each country that we needed to transfer as a parachuter approaching milestone after milestone to get close to the mutual strategic goal. Every team had to make it to the island for the trip to go ahead and what came out of it was a wonderful spirit of cooperation and teamwork and the results were amazing. We finished the project early and also saved €250,000 of the €one million budget. It is an excellent example of building strong virtual teams. People who feel a sense of togetherness and teamwork are always willing to go the extra mile and that winning spirit, driven and incentivised, culminates in a united quest for common purpose. If you can reach this level of cooperation with your partners and their teams, the results can be extraordinary. This collaboration doesn't just have to be with friendly companies. The phrase "make frenemies" applies here, because building partnerships with the competition is an excellent way of extending the reach of virtual teams too. Historically, this has happened many times before, just look at Amazon and Apple as a topline example, but it applies to all businesses, great and small, across sectors, not just tech. It's the same deal, collaborating and finding a way for your virtual teams to connect, share ideas and improve the customer experience. In this frame enemies can become friends and

reap mutual benefits. So today, it's becoming increasingly possible to expand beyond organisational boundaries. Having strong virtual teams can put anyone in the position to benefit from opportunities in different geographical spheres and across industries. So, remember to set the mutual strategic goals, establish a strong structure of communication, build a winning spirit and start thinking about competition differently. I wish you the best of luck in the building of your powerful virtual team. ●

Peter Ivanov is the author of *Power Teams Beyond Borders: How to Work Remotely and Build Powerful Virtual Teams* (Wiley, 2020).



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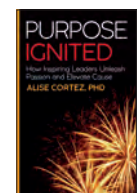
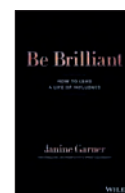
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# “SOCIETY IS INDEED A CONTRACT”\*

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*With hope that this year will be better than last, making predictions in the current climate fills me with trepidation, but there is one issue worth focusing on. For me, the outstanding outcome of 2020 will have huge implications for 2021 and beyond - the change in our expectations of the contract between business and society. Particularly, we are facing long-standing changes in the way we view the employer-employee social contract.*



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ARTICLE BY ALBERTO LOPEZ VALENZUELA, FOUNDER AND CEO - ALVA

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What will the new social contract look like and how it will affect the role of the HR Director and the position of employees? First, let us explore the issues that have led us to this situation. One shift that emerged during the tumults of 2020 was the sense that costly and well-meaning announcements alone no longer cut the mustard. Organisations had to display their authenticity by making tangible, action-based and targeted commitments - and by moving quickly. The era of PR spin was well and truly over. This provided a new lens through which to look at business leaders, prompting a rethink of what leadership should look like in the future. After all, during 2020, leaders have had to navigate the coronavirus pandemic, sweeping technological changes, worldwide Black Lives Matter protests and of course the US presidential election. Plus, in the UK, Brexit and its economic consequences continues to be

a major consideration. Perhaps the spark of this new way of looking at leadership came when Government failed to settle upon clear guidelines and measures to deal with the pandemic - a sluggishness compounded by failures to communicate effectively. As societies dealt with the shades of grey and changeable guidelines which required more user discretion, the picture became even more muddled and, as such, even more dangerous to public health and the economy. Against this backdrop, a number of smart big businesses managed to fill policy gaps out of pure necessity and, perhaps, a desire to create clarity.

Some company policies arguably represented a watering down of the rule of law, but nonetheless provided a form of clarity. For instance, major UK retailers made clear as early as July, that they wouldn't enforce face masks in their shops. These rules from supermarkets,

in part, acted to protect their staff - workers at Co-op and others have faced abuse over masks and distancing rules - but they also provided customers with a degree of clarity. Misinformation, economic uncertainty and health all underpinned heightened anxiety levels. As a result, business executives had to become drivers of honest conversation. Leadership needed to be more open and responsive - directly engaging with stakeholders, taking action, changing direction and even acknowledging faults where necessary. The business leaders who have been most successful throughout 2020 are those who stepped forward to act decisively, without waiting for Government legislation or guidance. Indeed, our own research found that leaders who seize the moment and take strong vocal positions on emerging social and political issues have resonated most effectively with stakeholders.

Business leaders have had an unenviable range of factors to juggle; the health concerns of their employees, the financial effects on their businesses and the economy and the long-term impact on the mental health of employees. All of these issues and more, have had a reputational impact on businesses and perhaps the most pressing focus was that of every organisation's people. Fast-moving, smart businesses quickly sought to ease the worried minds of their workers. They launched schemes to help staff cover the cost of childcare or offered supplemental tutoring to ensure children didn't fall behind. Jitse Groen, CEO of Just Eat, announced a radical pivot away from gig contractor schemes, offering staff more benefits in light of the "difficulties" brought about by COVID-19. Walmart and Amazon also made major announcements that they had begun screening workers for COVID symptoms.

Research into the reputation of businesses in the news during the pandemic outbreak found that corporate announcements relating to employee health achieved significantly more impact than other initiatives. These moves by major corporates indicated a shift in the responsibility and perhaps reach, of companies in their workers' lives. They changed the way we view the employer-employee social contract and raised important questions over the role and remit of employers and how far they should go to support their employees. Such questions do not simply go away, once we head into a different - and hopefully much more stable - future. COVID-19 raised the 'people agenda' to its zenith and accelerated a way of working that has been envisaged for years, but never fully realised. It is likely that workplaces will be permanently reimagined to support a more occasional, ad-hoc attendance. Likewise, I expect that the time-worn parameters of the nine-to-five have finally relinquished their grip as well.

Needless to say that all of these changes will impact the role of the HR Director. The employer-employee social contract represents a lot more than employee relations, it fundamentally impacts a company's social positioning, consumer brand and external reputation. As employers work harder to reposition themselves in a post-COVID world, their relationships with their employees will be a huge focal point. It will affect how they engage people, how they measure performance and what constitutes the Employee Value Proposition. HR will have to find its own new role/s, as the importance of the employer-employee social contract continues to grow strategically. But despite these daunting changes, HR leaders should feel emboldened and ready to enact long-lasting change, including moves to more flexible working practices and a streamlining of processes. Most of all, the pandemic has shone a light on one very valuable asset, talent and there is no doubt that employee wellbeing is a growing priority. Indeed, for those businesses who put their people first during COVID, company culture may well be stronger than ever, with silos having been broken



HYPER-  
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IN THE BALANCE  
OF POWER



down and employee engagement levels at an all-time high. Organisations will face challenges on the road ahead and a key one is the question of how to keep up the momentum. HR will need to remain relevant and find ways to keep pushing itself outside its comfort zone. It will need to use the learnings of COVID and translate them into actionable insights to help make better, more informed decisions. The responses to all of these challenges are not yet apparent. What is clear to me is that all of this points towards, what I believe will be the next major phase for business, stakeholder capitalism. Hyper-transparency, interconnectivity and media anarchy are forces that are changing how corporates and leaders connect business with society and prompting a dramatic shift in the balance of power from institutions to civil society. I believe that this shift will be hugely influential on the future of the employer-employee relationship. In time, I expect that we will arrive at a "new reality", a post-pandemic take on capitalism that may well rewrite the rules of "business as usual".

Through the phases of business response to the pandemic, it was demonstrated that companies were able to be flexible and to rebalance their stakeholder focus as events shifted. Indeed, the virus proved that the business world is able to step away from hierarchical shareholder-centric capitalism - in which financial stakeholders are always the top priority - and move towards a model in which stakeholder prioritisation is fluid and based upon shifting needs. This stakeholder-focused model would lead to businesses positioning themselves as important parts of society, with equal responsibilities to employees, customers, the community and their shareholders, rather than solely as a conduit for channelling profits to investors. It would build on the growing emphasis on environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues and we may begin to see increased finance streams being redirected into fair employee pay, community programmes and enhanced customer service. The trade-off for shareholders on the receiving end of reduced dividends is simple - and very attractive - a stake in more robust businesses, that are better able to survive whatever the future brings. If so, coronavirus may ultimately be remembered as the catalyst for the realisation of a fairer, more enlightened form of capitalism that allows society and the planet as a whole to thrive. In such a future, the relationship between employer and employee would surely thrive. ●

\*Edmund Burke, Philosopher and Statesman (1729-1797) Reflections on the French Revolution

Alberto Lopez Valenzuela is the author of *The Connecting Leader* (published by Lioncrest Publishing).

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Has AI and machine learning been received positively or negatively in your organisation?



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# LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

*HR Directors can enhance their strategic business impact as they tackle unprecedented employee health challenges in the year ahead. Supporting employee health, managing absence and embracing testing enabled continuity and productivity for organisations last year, and raise many questions about how to navigate 2021. Is this a burden for HR leaders to bear, or an opportunity they should not miss?*

ARTICLE BY MATTHEW BERGMANN-SMITH, CEO - EMPACTIS

HR leaders must inform executive responses - but standard HRIS and business systems are not designed for real time absence or health data. HR directors should make a case for appropriate systems for ongoing challenges that will only become more complex with new test types and immunisation opportunities. How will you manage testing to get healthy staff back sooner? How will you know who has and has not had a vaccine? Which employee groups are safe together? Unfortunately, employees no longer assume safety at work. Many are nervous about returning from the perceived protection of their homes. Strategic HR directors must lead initiatives that motivate staff to return, otherwise resistance, performance issues, impractical demands and grievances could impede continuity and drive disharmony. HR leaders must redefine policies, defend the reasonableness of decisions, and deal with any refusals to return or inequality accusations. New policies are needed - such as how firms deal with refusal to take vaccinations. How will you maintain an accurate audit trail of decisions and actions, to defend against claims or show regulatory compliance?

Workforce health is complicated by new factors, including the unfolding impact of 'Long COVID'. Stress, fear, and bereavement mean many workers will return with mental health issues. Others may be burned out. Sensitive and informed engagement is essential, with health cases and associated issues such as absence and performance issues carefully tracked and connected. HR leaders must direct a joined-up approach and help managers throughout the organisation engage around tough topics, including suicide. What systems will you provide to help managers, prompt them to act when needed and guide them to the data and information they need? Many organisations hoped that redeploying staff to remote working was temporary. Now it appears a long-term challenge. Institute for Employment Studies



OH IS OFTEN  
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ABSENCES OR MITIGATE  
POTENTIAL CLAIMS.  
NOW IT SUPPORTS  
CONTINUITY



research revealed an immediate increase in MSK issues<sup>1</sup> due to inadequate, unergonomic home-working. Disengagement, stress and social isolation can result if managers struggle with remote management. HR leaders must now not only manage extra health cases but set and defend parameters for adjustments and OH referrals. How will you identify and deliver adjustments? How will you know when to review? How can you ensure that records 'follow' employees around the organisation?

OH is often seen a reactive necessity only to shorten absences or mitigate potential claims. Now it supports continuity: firms turned to providers for testing and may do so again if private COVID-19 vaccinations become possible. Unregulated operators and unqualified practitioners present risk however. HR leaders should educate themselves to make smart decisions. Potential regulatory changes also loom: the eventual impacts of the workplace health Green Paper consultation may not only be the envisaged requirement for all employers to offer OH support. They may be broader and influenced by COVID-19. HRDs will play a key role in shaping responses. The most proactive will grasp the chance to redefine overall employee health and wellbeing strategies. How will you manage OH and health providers? Can your systems support a portfolio of health providers and consolidate employee health data? This year HR leaders must effect important changes and take a stronger position on employee health, which must be on the Board agenda. Productivity worries, rising employee health costs and the risks of getting responses wrong all require strategic solutions. Health data is as important as finance data and an influencer on the bottom line and cashflow. Leaders need complete, current, and consistent data about employee presence and fitness to solve operational challenges and drive recovery.

1. [www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/ies-working-home-wellbeing-survey](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/ies-working-home-wellbeing-survey)

FOR FURTHER INFO [WWW.EMPACTIS.COM](http://WWW.EMPACTIS.COM)



HM Government

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**This will not apply when hiring Irish citizens or those eligible for status under the EU Settlement Scheme.**

**Find out more at [GOV.UK/HiringFromTheEU](https://www.gov.uk/hiring-from-the-eu)**

# CAREERING OUT OF CONTROL

THAT THE JOBS MARKET HAS BEEN TURNED ON ITS HEAD IS HARDLY A REVELATORY STATEMENT. A MASSIVE SPIKE IN THE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES AND EMPLOYERS FORCED TO RAPIDLY ADJUST, THEN RE-ADJUST IN ORDER TO STAY THE COURSE DURING THE STORMS AND LULLS PREDICTED THROUGHOUT 2021.

ARTICLE BY ARTICLE BY CHRIS PLATTS, CO-FOUNDER AND CEO - THRIVEMAP

*“The issue is not that hiring bias exists, it’s that once it’s uncovered it can’t easily be explained. This is partly to do with black box algorithms and AI solutions predicting talent from biased data”*

The pandemic has had tragic and disruptive impacts, but events during this time have also informed on how we operate, both on a business and social level. Even when the pandemic seemed all-encompassing, the Black Lives Matter campaign shone a bright and telling light and, in turn, raised issues of hiring bias and other concerns across diversity and inclusion in the workplace. It also demonstrated that there are many complex challenges ahead and recognising these is the first step to overcoming them. Employers are anticipating a tsunami of job applications which, after a period of shortages, may well be the most difficult aspect for organisations to cope with effectively. The number of candidates for junior office roles has more than doubled according to data from Reed over the course of the year. In the same period, the average number of applicants is now 267 compared to 110 back in February<sup>1</sup> and some reports indicate an increase in applicants per vacancy of up to 400 percent in some sectors. Recruitment teams will need to become accustomed to doing more with less and so it’s vital that they use technology, to reduce the burden of candidate screening. Organisations need to be prepared, leveraging tools such as application tracking systems and pre-hire assessments, to help them quickly identify the most suitable talent.

Another trend for 2021 is the death of the Curriculum Vitae. For decades, employers have been wedded to the CV as a predictor of job performance, but a growing number of companies are moving to CV-free hiring, as more data supports removing them entirely improves hiring decision-making. Not only is

prior experience often a poor predictor of future performance, especially for lower-skilled roles, but requesting CVs invites the potential for hiring bias. The types of jobs available are changing too, for example, while positions on the high street are reducing, the number of delivery roles are increasing rapidly. Beyond the direct effect of the pandemic, job roles are evolving swiftly. According to the World Economic Forum, 40 percent of current core skills are expected to change in the next five years<sup>2</sup> and so the importance of previous experience is declining, in favour of capability and commitment. For social mobility to occur, a better way is needed to hire entry level talent than considering education and prior experience. Instead candidates should be tested on their ability to do real tasks required in the role. Upskilling and reskilling can help, but organisations need to be open to fairer and more valid ways to select candidates. So that leads neatly into another trend which is committing to fairer hiring. It is no longer acceptable to talk about fair hiring, you need to fully commit to it and those that fail to do this could find it very costly. The example of Wells Fargo in the US, which was forced in August to settle allegations of hiring bias at a cost of \$7.8 million, provides a stark warning. The issue is not that hiring bias exists, it’s that once it’s uncovered it can’t easily be explained. This is partly to do with black box algorithms and AI solutions predicting talent from biased data. Put simply, if you can’t explain why your recruitment process is hiring a disproportionate number of people from certain demographics then expect to come under similar scrutiny.

Greater applicant volumes coupled with reduced recruitment resources, can lead to hiring shortcuts. These shortcuts are the cognitive biases we use to help make decisions quickly, under-pressure. They often lead to unconscious discrimination, recruiting those with similar backgrounds to ourselves. Developing a scalable process that eliminates as much bias as possible, will not only ensure the best talent is hired, but will also attract more diverse candidates to apply, helping to create more inclusive workplaces. One last trend, although there are many is the necessity for agile attitude in a flexible workforce. The coronavirus has shown companies the need to react quickly to outside forces and that they were not fully prepared to address the immediate spikes of essential and frontline workers. While throwing up many challenges, the pandemic also offers the chance to create a fairer, more inclusive job market. Employers and recruiters have a responsibility to make the most of this opportunity and embrace, not fight against these trends. ●

1. <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/news/article-8802117/Number-job-hunters-chasing-junior-job-offices-doubles.html>

2. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020>



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## CULTURE HUB FOR KARMA CHAMELEONS

*What long term impacts the pandemic and forced retreat to remote working will have, only time will tell. Businesses pushed through policy modifications and quick fixes, to keep some semblance of the operation ticking over, but these changes have been exactly that, hastily implemented, as and when required. That's fine for now, but band-aids have a nasty habit of coming adrift.*

ARTICLE BY MARTIN O'ROURKE, COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR AT BIRCHWOOD PARK

One thing is certain, in a world where working styles and preferences are so varied, businesses cannot simply hand out laptops and expect employees to continue working from whatever surface is available to them at home, with no foreseeable end in sight. Firms must take a more intelligent approach to the requirements of their employees. The office still has a crucial role to play in our daily working lives in 2021, but expect to see great change coming to the configurations of office facilities, vital to business progression - centred on a tailored approach to provisions for employees - and encompassing both technological advancements and attitudinal shifts.

We are one of the north's largest out-of-town business parks and when we discussed and considered what the driving trends for this year could bring, everything pointed to more uncertainty and further testing times. So we committed our strengths and resources to gaining an even greater understanding of our customers - our occupiers, both current and potential - and so we undertook a dedicated survey\*. The main thrust of this was to really understand what the future of the office vs remote would entail in the long term. Whilst current government guidance dictates those that can work from home should do so, we discovered that the majority of workers (64 percent) were expecting to return to the office on a part-time or rota basis - once they were able to do so - and that those expecting to return to office-based working in some capacity in the future remained positive. Indeed, 42 percent of those surveyed were happy to be returning to the office, as long as the appropriate health and safety procedures are in place, with 15 percent actively looking forward to returning to the office.

The crux of this positivity for returning to office-based working - which may come as a surprise to those who have thrived on home-working - is the simple fact that human interaction cannot truly be replicated to the same



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IN OFFICE CULTURE



extent, when conducted virtually. Indeed, 38 percent of workers said they were looking forward to socialising with their colleagues and feeling part of a team, while 30 percent expressed that clearer differentiation between work and home was a huge benefit of returning to the office too. However, in order to be able to deliver for their employees, change is afoot. We recently co-developed a whitepaper, looking at what the future of the office will look like and one of the key findings was that the future is not one of diminishing space, because of reduced headcount and footfall, but one centred on great advancements in technology. The likes of 5G, flexible and immersive screen technology, technology to improve the working environments of employees on an individual and needs-based basis - and even the likes of 3D, virtual and augmented reality - will all become commonplace in an office of the future, looking to keep up with changing times - and that will inevitably require investment.

Leaders, like employees, will have developed a mindset that remote working is perfectly workable, but for the long-term, it's vital that we shift their attitudes when it comes to giving more provision for the wellbeing of employees. Indeed, it is this change in perception of wellbeing, that is rapidly becoming more of a necessity than a buzzword, which needs to be reflected in office culture. Unquestionably, the people agenda absolutely needs to be front of mind, because we are seeing an increasing number of reports exploring the rise in loneliness during the pandemic and various states of lockdown, so employers need to ensure that they are looking after their staff - perhaps now more than ever before. The new destinations for business will not be the grey images of dour commercial business parks of yesterday, but instead spaces focused on community, on business collaboration and on wellbeing for workers, surrounded by open spaces. ●

FOR FURTHER INFO [WWW.BIRCHWOODPARK.CO.UK](http://WWW.BIRCHWOODPARK.CO.UK)



# ETHICS & EXPEDIENCE AT THE CROSSROADS

*The pandemic really brought home the importance of what is fundamental in people management.*

*Adversity is challenging us to question our decisions, motivations and chosen pathways and makes the blinkered pursuit of our own ambitions seem selfish and futile. So, as we look and plan ahead for the new year, we need to do so with a fresh mindset formed by this experience.*

ARTICLE BY TONY HOLMWOOD, CULTURE AND CHANGE STRATEGIST - OUTPERF4M CONSULTING

When not in balance, compliance will stifle originality. Our professional bodies must accept conventional standards and practices and the pursuit of merit may distract from the deeply ordinary activities and relationships that support emotional growth and make life meaningful. Though success is not a recognised medical addiction, for many people, success has addictive properties. Marshall Goldsmith, a renowned leadership coach, coined it the “Success Delusion”. Praise stimulates the neurotransmitter dopamine, implicated in all addictive behaviours. This is how social media hooks people in the constant search for validation and similarly, the singular pursuit of a specialisation or expertise in the absence of human relationships and fulfilling a greater good, can be one of being special, over being happy.

Many studies show that successful people are almost invariably jealous of people who are more successful and, in a workplace context, feelings of partisanship and privilege often aggravate in hierarchical organisations, fostering resentment and bias. The rise of Bernie Sanders, with his anti-establishment social agenda, is proof this even presents at a country level. In The tyranny of merit is tearing America apart<sup>1</sup>, Stan Grant paints a picture of the US at a crossroads - this is not about being left or right leaning - it is about being inclusive, instilling trust and opening minds to change. Surely a wake-up call to leaders the world over. A world facing an urgent climate emergency, far greater than the pain of COVID-19, must be encountered with social unity and our role for this new year and beyond, is to rise above merit and learn to be adaptive. Embracing adaptation shifts our perspectives beyond our personal agendas and egos, to communal and societal challenges and to collectively manage risks. It also requires us to redefine a “successful” life. Countering merit, privilege and egoism, with sharing cultures must be the responsibility of HR. To initiate this transformation,



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HR must be seen to be independent and allowed the authority to act. Strategically reframing organisational cultures to be socially purposeful, building trust to coach team agility and transforming leadership qualities founded on social skills (Ei).

Knowing how 50-to-70 percent of an organisations culture is influenced by leadership behaviour, role modelling desired behaviours will support this cultural transformation and businesses will flourish. HR needs look no further than the influential, autonomous, energetic and compassionate natural leadership qualities. Emotionally astute, this adaptive personality leverages their unique big picture and inclusive perspectives, to act strategically and objectively through relationships. Humility and passion for social causes is what defines HR’s transformational capability. These adaptive leadership characteristics may change according to their circumstances, but will invariably display the empathy, generalist skills and passionate idealism of the intuitive and feeling types.

What supports the transformation from achiever to individualist are socially purposeful goals and being passionate about a cause. A strategist has the vision, courage and presence to generate and sustain transformational change (Torbert 1998). They express personal authentic power in the interests of serving their whole community and not just selected interest groups. They generate a new world through their convictions and intentions, living authentically by their principles and in tune with their life purpose while embracing others with compassion and enthusiasm. Many people wrongly confuse individualism with ambition - the expert or achiever. This personality stands out as a considered, uniquely principled humanist. ●

1. Tony Holmwood is the author of *Best Behaviour*

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# HARD HAT & HI-VIS REQUIRED

*Some sectors that were struggling to recruit before the pandemic, such as teaching, have seen significant increases in applicants. People will have inevitably considered their future careers and, whether it's a 'pandemic calling' to teach the next generation, or wanting a stable guaranteed income, who would have thought that trainee teacher applications would surge by 65 percent.\* There is no question, this time will have massive impacts on the world of work.*



ARTICLE BY HARVEY FRANCIS, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT - SKANSKA UK PLC

In construction, we have made significant changes to the way we operate, which will undoubtedly have long-term implications on our sector career attractiveness and where, when and how employees deliver their work. With the exception of a few days at the beginning of the first lockdown, when most of our sites closed, to assess how we could create COVID-safe workplaces, we have seen a reasonably limited impact on our ability to deliver our projects. In fact, some parts of the sector are seeing very high productivity rates, where the utilisation of technology and digital methodology has enabled different ways of working, combined with stronger planning and scheduling. This has not only impacted productivity - there are projects achieving 100 percent-to-115 percent productivity, with 80 percent of the pre-lockdown workforce deployed - but also our


lowest ever accident rates. Reduced traffic volumes on both the road and rail networks have provided positive opportunities to deliver works with less impact to the travelling public and collaboration has come to the fore, with projects like the creation of the Nightingale Hospitals. It has shown what can be achieved when we put our minds to it and, as the old saying goes, "necessity is the mother of invention".

Adoption of flexible working has been on the industry's radar for many years, but resistance has been high and, as such, was perceived as an uphill struggle to implement. Some client contracts included payment mechanisms based on presenteeism and the industry mindset was one where 'first on site, last on site' was applauded and, it could be said, expected. Skanska's practical commitment to flexible working took a step up in 2019

through a partnership with sector specialist Timewise and participation in Build UK's programme, to create a mechanism for such working within the construction sector. On one project, pre-pandemic, we had zero take up when flexible working was offered. Meanwhile, the crisis has meant that people were forced to find alternative ways to work and changed many fixed hearts and minds about what was possible. Staggered shifts and drone usage to view sites remotely are two examples that have been embraced through this period, enabling more flexible working, but it's the feelings expressed in our pulse survey that have been most uplifting. Those parents who have never been able to do a school run, or have breakfast as a family, have clearly felt the benefits, not to mention the positive effect on both our physical and mental health of an extra hour's sleep.

To ensure we retain and develop workplace agility and flexibility, we have developed over the past few months and launched our Flex-it framework, which encourages employees and line managers to consider where and when they work, to drive the best productivity outcomes and, in doing so, contributes to significant mental health and wellbeing benefits. Also, let us not overlook that it helps us deliver on our pledge to be carbon neutral by 2045, by cutting the CO2 emissions our employees generate whilst commuting. For very practical reasons, a significant number of roles in our sector will not be able to feature regular flexibility on where or when work is delivered. However, we believe that most roles can provide some flexibility, if we really think about it and, as I've mentioned previously, the pandemic has caused us to push our thinking. The response to the killing of George Floyd has also created, what I hope, is a long-term shift in our expectations within the workplace. Through regular, honest - and sometimes emotional - dialogue with our BAME+ network, we have seen a huge shift in the expectation of our organisation, to recognise the systemic issues facing our colleagues from ethnic minority backgrounds. What were once maybe viewed as societal, rather than business issues, can no longer be viewed as such. Companies and their people are merely microcosms of our wider society, so those things which have such a deep and profound effect on our people in their personal lives, must affect their working lives too, if we subscribe to the notion that we are 'whole' human beings. These changes in expectations we are seeing, should be viewed as good news and should provide the impetus to create more healthy, ethical and transparent working environments. Recognising this, we have created a series of films and discussions to enable all our employees to explore and develop different perspectives and to challenge themselves to put themselves in someone else's shoes.

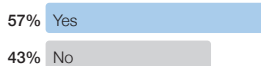
So, what about skills? A recent Government survey found that only 13 percent of our sector's workforce is female and ONS data suggests only 7.4 percent is from BAME backgrounds. The pool of talent that brings our skills, could clearly be so much broader. The mindset shift and new practicalities caused by the pandemic will undoubtedly create, not only different roles, but also the opportunity to recruit from a broader population. Giving people more control over their ways of working must surely help us attract a wider pool of people to our industry. Currently the construction industry employs 2.4million people. Over the summer the Prime Minister announced a £5bn "New Deal", to build homes and infrastructure, as a means to counter the economic shock of COVID-19, as well as the "most radical" changes to the planning system since WWII, to help the country "build, build, build". Construction is a sector that will have strong employment opportunities going forward. But as I've outlined, the sector will also continue to experience change and with that change comes stress and anxiety for many.

  
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Are there skills gaps in your organisation that render your business uncompetitive against rival firms?



COVID-19 has changed our work virtually overnight and has made many of us feel uneasy about what will happen. Layer that with the challenges of Brexit, new trade agreements, as well as a new way of employing talent from the EU and there is a lot for us all to contend with.

The expectation is that the skills challenge in the UK construction industry will increase when the UK leaves the EU. In choosing to leave the single market, voters have effectively ended freedom of movement of people. It is widely accepted that the UK construction industry has relied for too long on a supply of labour from overseas, including from the EU. A study by CITB in 2019 showed that 14 percent of the UK construction workforce are non-UK workers and that figure rises to 54 percent in the capital. One of the reasons for this is the historic underinvestment in skills development, driven in no small part by the susceptibility of our sector to the volatility of the economy. This has meant that for some companies - happily not ours - long-term investment in development and training, has had to be weighed up against often very limited certainty of work pipeline. With such a rich availability of EU labour historically, it's not difficult to see how we are where we are. By leaving the EU and setting our own rules, it represents both a big challenge and a huge opportunity. The challenge will be to encourage more UK nationals into the construction industry to replace the overseas workers that either don't meet the new criteria for skilled workers coming into the UK, or no longer feel welcome in a country which voted to end free movement of labour. All this at a time when Government is committed to 'build-build-build', which has been proven as a very reliable way to stimulate the economy. The plan is to increase UK nationals working in the industry by 44,000 by 2025 (CITB *Migration Survey* October 2019).

Clearly, the imperative is to create a more sustainable homegrown industry, but encouraging sufficient numbers of people into the construction industry, to meet future needs, will require a wholesale change in the way the sector promotes itself and how it is perceived by those who influence the career choice of the young. We must build long-term partnerships with education bodies, to achieve those continuous and multiple interactions required to influence a young person's career choice. Going virtual with our career insights and work experience, to inspire young people about the possibility of a career in the construction industry, has broadened our reach into diverse talent pools for the future. ●

\*Guardian newspaper 30th July

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## WHITE-KNUCKLE-RIDE

*This coronacoaster has seriously tested the nerves and rattled businesses into taking drastic measures, just to stay operational. The perilous ride isn't over just yet and one of the biggest worries is the threat to skills, both in terms of retention and acquisition. The future is looking uncertain for many businesses and this presents a worrying roadmap for future skills.*

ARTICLE BY GEOFFROY DE LESTRANGE, INTERNATIONAL PRODUCT MARKETING & COMMUNICATION DIRECTOR - CORNERSTONE ONDEMAND

The pandemic is widening the skills gap and forcing employers to look ahead and prioritise skills that will be future relevant to the jobs market. In this respect, the pandemic presents some positives and learnings that we can take into the future, such as the generally successful, mass migration to remote and digital working demonstrating that massive change can be managed with the minimum of disruption and quickly. Now it's time to transfer that attitude to the skills gap, show that resilience and wholeheartedly let technology and digitalisation do the driving. Skills development has become business critical and only by turning to technology and strategic skilling can we fix the issue head on.

As the jobs market becomes even more saturated, organisations are now facing further challenges with their people when it comes to skills and development. The good news is business leaders are recognising the problem - 83 percent of leaders prioritised development in the last year according to our recent skills report. But even though leaders are aware of the gap and attempting to address the problem, there remains a confidence gap between businesses and their people. The report shows that 90 percent of leaders feel confident in their ability to develop the skills of their people, but only 60 percent of employees feel confident in their organisations ability to develop them for the future. This confidence gap is a worrying sign.

The problem is even more complicated in larger organisations with lots of employees who each bring a different set of skills and you have to keep track of what capabilities are missing and who and what needs development. From the employee side, organisations also need to think about what value they bring to their people and how they feel about their careers and the future of the company. Many times, leaders claim to think they know what matters to their employees, but again, in a big



EMPLOYEES MAY HAVE TO COMPLETELY SWITCH ROLES AND USE A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT SET OF SKILLS - WHICH HR ITSELF TYPIFIES, BUILDING TRACKS INTO OR OUT OF SPECIFIC ROLES - BUT RARELY IS THIS HAPPENING AT SCALE



organisation with a large team, it can be difficult to keep track of and often managers can turn to bias, which can hinder individual career paths.

So how can we analyse the skills of individual and team in a way that is consistent? Strategic skilling means mapping out skills with people, learning and job roles to quickly respond to dynamic business change, using data and AI to bring it to life. From this, organisations can capture a deeper understanding of their workforce, giving them a better idea of what skills they already possess and what they must develop, to align with the business goals and prove impact. In turn, this helps managers and employees develop a better working relationship, closing the confidence gap between employees and organisations when it comes to skills development. It's a win-win, but in addition to analysing the internal needs of your people, organisations and L&D leaders must also look beyond their four walls into the wider community - what is the mood of the public, how is the industry changing? What are my competitors doing? A high-level approach to new skilling requires leaders to pay attention to what's on the outside as well as the inside, making sure that both are aligned.

It's not just our technical skills that have changed during recent times, our soft skills have too. In fact, employees may have to completely switch roles and use a different set of skills - which HR itself typifies, building tracks into or out of specific roles - but rarely is this happening at scale. There's no one way approach to addressing the skills gap and each industry has its own challenges when it comes to skills development. But what organisations can affectively discover through strategic skilling is a deeper understanding of their employees, whether it's their professional or personal desires and then use this information to put a skills plan into place. ●

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# THE IT CROWD

*Skills shortages in technology is a time-wearly problem that has somehow eluded attempts to remedy. COVID-19 has left deep scars across the economy, caused a record number of redundancies and nobody would dispute that the pandemic has not been a massive spanner in the works. Yet this could be the catalyst that brings a much-needed positive, a rare opportunity to re-imagine tech roles, that are open to a more diverse range of talent.*



ARTICLE BY BEV WHITE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE - HARVEY NASH GROUP

Throughout this time, a sector that has been somewhat insulated is technology, making sure everyone is plugged in and connected, playing a crucial and pivotal role in facilitating the move en masse to remote working and ensuring consumers can continue to gain access to an array of digital services and products from their own home. This spike in demand is bound to increase the value of IT skills and spread a finite resource even thinner. Indeed, our research, in collaboration with KPMG CIO - the largest IT leadership survey in the world - shows that the majority - 82 percent of the UK's tech leaders - are either increasing or retaining their staff over the year ahead. Notably, the skills that are in most demand are cyber security, architecture, organisational change and cloud. The fact is though, the ongoing skills shortages is a continuing problem, that sees leaders struggle to find the specialist skills they need. Just before the pandemic, skills shortages were close to an all-time high and now demand continues to out-strip supply, especially around software development, cyber security and data. I expect there are many HR professionals reading this, who will nod in recognition at discussions they have had with their own CIO, lamenting these very challenges. So, what is the prognosis and is there a sustainable strategy?

At a time when a large number of jobs are being lost across other sectors, from retail to aviation, the tech sector should be a magnet, drawing all of these highly-skilled and experienced people towards it. However, because of a fixed mindset, which is essentially stereotyping writ large, this highly-valuable resource is not on the radar. This has to change and fast, with employers changing their focus, to target potential recruits with transferable skills, concurrently candidates must have the information, confidence and motivation to demonstrate that they have the initiative to upskill and re-skill. This states the obvious, but it's worth hammering home - it both finds a viable route out of redundancy for candidates and fills the void of tech skills, that has vexed many businesses for years and held them back in the race to digitise. Is this not the most tantalising win-win in these otherwise bleak times? Indeed, there are a number of dynamics brought about by COVID-19 that could change the skills shortage picture. The pandemic has affected the supply of candidates



in the market in a way never seen before, through three key trends. Firstly, even though in high demand, such has been the impact of the pandemic, there are more tech professionals on the market. This includes some very strong and experienced potential candidates, people who through sheer bad luck were working for a business or on a contract, brought to a standstill by the virus. This is countered, to some extent by the fact that churn rates in technology roles have dropped - average tenures of only one-to-two years for many positions pre-COVID - as postholders have become less willing to risk a move in uncertain times. Nevertheless, the net effect is still an increase in tech professionals looking for their next position.

## RATHER LIKE THE MIGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY TO THE CLOUD, THE MIGRATION OF PEOPLE AWAY FROM THE OFFICE, HAS REMOVED THAT SENSE OF LOCATION, POSSIBLY FOREVER AND THIS PRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DRIVE UP DIVERSITY

Secondly and to reiterate, there is a strong potential supply of non-tech candidates who are in sectors that have been structurally affected and who have the potential to cross-train and make the breakthrough into a new career. Indeed, most of the workforce has been part of the digital transformation journey in their careers, even if they have not been directly in IT themselves. There are promising prospects in tech businesses and corporate technology functions, for solid business professionals, along with an ongoing need for soft-skills and people who can translate business concerns into technical solutions. Post-pandemic, many businesses will be revisiting disaster recovery and business continuity, for example and so those with strong communication and great people skills are going to be crucial in this. They are also going to be key in working alongside automated platforms - as some elements of code become the preserve of algorithms - businesses will need creative, flexible thinkers to ensure that systems meet the demands of an ever-more fluid customer base with evolving needs. The pandemic has led to a fundamental re-assessment of what a "job" is,

as staff across sectors, in large organisations and small, have made the switch to the kitchen table and to Zoom and have begun working in truly flexible patterns at different times of day and night. We can expect that people will generally return to offices when it safe to do so. But there seems little doubt that nearly all of us will spend more time than before working remotely, especially in roles where there has been no loss in productivity. In time, it is likely that the term "remote" will be dropped altogether - indeed the phrase suggests there is a place to be remote from - a HQ, a hub or a centre. But rather like the migration of technology to the cloud, the migration of people away from the office, has removed that sense of location, possibly

forever and this presents an opportunity to drive up diversity. These changing views on job location and flexible working also have the potential to increase and diversify the potential candidate base. The new model of working opens up possibilities to recruit talent from much further afield and also to support flexible working patterns, that could be ideally suited to those who need to balance other responsibilities such as parenting or caring.

Technology businesses and internal tech functions have long struggled to increase diversity in a meaningful way - the CIO survey finds that only around 11 percent of tech leaders are women for example, while only 24 percent of our respondents feel that their organisation is very successful at promoting diversity and inclusion within the technology team. The benefits of diversity, however, are patently clear, with two-thirds of respondents believing that being successful at promoting diversity has improved trust and collaboration in the technology team and boosted access to the right skills. Given these factors, business and HR leaders can use this as an opportunity to skill their tech teams and

increase diversity, especially in gender. Now is the time to review digital training programmes within the organisation and ensure they are available to those who need them and are focused on key areas of current and future priority. There needs to be clarity around the areas in which talent solutions can be built internally and externally sourced.

Turning to external sourcing - as with current staff - there is an opportunity to reimagine the job, with location and the old nine-to-five, no longer key barriers, opening the door to potential new talent pools and fresh thinking. One such area is apprenticeships and here, the Government's Apprenticeship Levy scheme assists, for people of all ages. Within our Group, our IT support company runs a scheme in partnership with Digital Native and this year's intake is a mixture of school leavers and mature job changers and their motivation and willingness to learn is really inspirational. One of them was an experienced professional of 15 years, in another discipline and has three young children. So again, we all need to look further than lazy stereotyping and change the perception that apprenticeships are only for young people just starting out. HR teams and businesses really should look at the potential of an apprenticeship scheme, which now has the potential for widening the diversity net across the demographic. There are also a growing number of Government-backed courses - including the new skills package, set to launch in the New Year - many of which are designed to boost the nation's technical and digital skills. There has been considerable growth in technology training and skills development courses - and a lot of them are free, run by academies such as Codecademy or commercial businesses, Revolut being an example - who see the benefit to all in providing upskilling opportunities. These really need to be considered, alongside experienced business professionals, STEM graduates and those who have taken paid-for qualifications at further education institutions. So clearly, there are some very viable routes through which businesses can tap into a new wave of talented, determined and skilled technology resource. All that is required is a new approach. ●

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# THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR EXPERIENCE

TRAINING COURSES HAVE LONG BEEN THE STAPLE OF L&D, BUT AS TO WHETHER THEY ACTUALLY CREATE NEW SKILLS, IS OPEN TO CONJECTURE. CHASING SKILLS THROUGH THE DELIVERY OF COURSES ALONE IS FUTILE AND THAT IS WHY THE FOCUS NEEDS TO SHIFT TO PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT, RATHER THAN SKILLS ATTAINMENT.

ARTICLE BY STEVE DINEEN, FOUNDER & CHIEF STORYTELLER - FUSE

*“The madness lies in the method, chasing skills through the delivery of courses is fundamentally flawed, because acquiring knowledge at a course does not denote the acquisition of a new skill”*

Addressing skills gaps presents something of a revolving door for L&D departments. The target is constantly moving and, as soon as one gap is filled, another one opens. To plug these gaps, learning leaders have typically turned to training courses, but while these certainly have a role to play, they are not aligned with the metrics that matter most, creating active learning habits and behaviours through immediate, frequent and in-context application, for the purpose of improving performance. The L&D rulebook of old needs to be re-written and the focus must switch from measuring skills attainment and course completion rates - meaning learning delivery - to measuring positive learning behaviours, against wider business performance.

Of course, the attainment of skills often does support business performance, nobody is denying that. The madness here lies in the method, chasing skills through the delivery of courses, which is a fundamentally flawed approach, because acquiring knowledge at a course does not denote the acquisition of a new skill, but rather just an understanding of it. The skill “happens” when that understanding is subsequently developed over time, through practice and application. Knowledge only transports the learner to a base level of competency, it is beyond this that they must regularly apply that knowledge in context, to develop and retain the skill. In practice, there are many illustrations of this distance between attainment and application - a pianist who doesn't practice will lose the ability to play and the IT graduate who learns to code in a theoretical world, will not be ready to apply that as a skill in the context of

their work, because they're still only at an entry level. It's a simple concept, yet many L&D departments still wrongly equate course completion with skills development and the result is; heavy spend on L&D, widening skills gaps and a lack of attributable impact on performance improvement.

Key to solving this puzzle is retiring the course-centric model and placing contextual learning experiences, that actively engage people in the flow of work at the heart of a new learning and performance development model. This is where positive learning habits are formed and it makes all the difference in terms of addressing skills gaps and improving business performance. What we do know is that content libraries alone won't achieve this. So, what will? A curious mindset of continual discovery, but that relies upon the right culture, leadership and technology. The objective here is to reinforce the value that employees take from learning, by emphasising its benefit in performance terms. This is best achieved by engaging people with trusted and accessible learning content - in context and in flow - and by delivering digital-led, consumer-like learning experiences. Leaders play a vital role because, if they are actively engaged in learning themselves, their employees are more likely to do the same. It makes sense that if leaders are not only championing, but are actively involved in learning, employees will be more able to understand the value of L&D and seize the opportunities presented. By making engaged learning an integral part of people's working lives, it will become an integral part of company culture.

Measuring skills in isolation is a pointless exercise, because alone, they do not impact performance unless they are applied often and in context - and only then if they help someone to perform better at work. Instead, the emphasis should be on looking at active learning engagement as an indicator of measurable business performance. Put bluntly, by focusing on courses as the path to skill attainment, L&D teams will resign themselves to the revolving door of perpetual skills gaps. There are positive signs of a growing departure from this stance, the majority is still to realise the subtle but significant impact of thinking about performance ahead of skills. Think of it in these terms: would you rather upskill 20 people or see those 20 people performing 50 percent better? By making skills the goal, outcomes will be far more limited than if the goal had been one of performance improvement. ●



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# QUO VADIS... HR?

*Back in 2016, Bank of England Governor, Mark Carney, suggested that up to 15 million jobs in the UK - almost half the workforce - could be replaced by robot technologies over the next few decades. Fast-forward to now and the combination of ongoing economic uncertainty and the rise of the automated organisation, already presents a major challenge and the effect of the pandemic has now changed the game entirely.*



ARTICLE BY JOHN MARK WILLIAMS, CEO - THE INSTITUTE OF LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

An uncertain global economy, widespread technology submersion, coronavirus pandemic, what does it all mean for middle managers and for HR? The UK is no stranger to a volatile economy. In the last 50 years, UK unemployment has veered between 3.5 percent and 12 percent and has changed direction eleven times<sup>1</sup>. In that time, the world has moved from authoritarian management to servant leadership and from being largely manufacturing-driven to increasingly serviced-based, bringing with it a plethora of principles, styles and behaviours. That coincided with a rise in start-ups, who began small and stayed lean and the advent of the Millennial, for whom the idea of being supervised by a middle manager, is anathema<sup>2</sup>. Along with this shift came the long journey of HR from being largely a manager of terms and conditions to the modern talent pilot and strategic influence of today.

Yet while these trends all move in tandem, they do not necessarily move in parallel. For example, fast-moving start- and scale-ups, don't need 'strategic talent management' - or at least, believe they don't - adding in the rise of the gig economy creates a nudge effect, away from strategic HR - toward short-term, project-driven interactions. Two divergent currents have emerged - talent planning and interaction management - the former supports an accredited, strategically-orientated HR profession and the latter, an immediate practical skill. Then throw in technology.

Ever since the Spinning Jenny, technology has caused mayhem for workforces. Yet, if Mark Carney was right in intimating that accountants would all be replaced by robots, it ought to have happened already, thanks to; Sage, Xero Excel, or the many other programmes. History is full of examples of technology that should have

destroyed industries and jobs and didn't. It is also full of examples where technology reduced a thriving industry to little more than a hobby and not just in the distant past. Vinyl records, audio tape, video tape, DVDs, mainframe computers, personal computers, none of these existed 100 years ago. Even cars only became common in the 1920s, so hindsight tells us clearly that the future will look unlike the past. The technologies that we already see around us are barely comprehensible to most of us; augmented and virtual reality, blockchain, advanced and predictive analytics, the industrial internet of things and artificial intelligence. The difference between these and the products mentioned above is that 21st century technology does not merely change how we do things, it changes how we experience things.

A banking app on a smartphone negates the need for face-to-face, telephone or email

contact. It facilitates decisions on whether I can open a savings account, obtain a loan for a car, or buy a house - and the actual decisions are taken by a computer. These are not entry-level functions, these are the roles occupied by middle management. The traditional role of middle management has been to translate strategic intent into operational accomplishment. When technology replaces functions, it replaces the people that do them and the more sophisticated the technology, the more senior the functions it replaces. This focuses the spotlight on middle management, because they add value in the effectiveness of that translation of strategic intent into operational accomplishment. It was not merely frontline travel agent staff that were challenged by online booking - the process of helping a traveller decide where and when to go, where to stay, how to travel and even what to take with them, can all be done by technology, without a highly experienced adviser. Transfer that principle to HR and we see the challenge for HR professionals. In a world where technology can design an experience, based on customer preferences, it can design a business plan based on organisational capacity, or a primary care system based on accessible local services and capability. It could also design a career based on individual competencies and the more sophisticated the HR function becomes, the more it lends itself to data-driven decision-making.

So, the double dilemma for HR is solving the challenge facing the plethora of middle managers, threatened by the forthcoming ubiquity of artificial intelligence and automated systems, whilst simultaneously facing the same threat to HR itself. The answer lies in the approach taken by Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon, who says; "focus on the things that don't change". His example is that consumers will always want lower prices and faster delivery, so that's what Amazon focuses on. There is, somewhere, the HR equivalent of; "lower prices and faster delivery". The third task in the Herculean portfolio facing the future HR function is forecasting the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Mark Twain once said; "if you take hold of a cat by the tail, you will learn things you cannot learn any other way." That was how lockdown felt for most organisations. The instant enforcement of agility and adaptability starkly illustrated, not merely which organisations could cope with a systemic change, it exposed those people within organisations who were able to add value, as well as those who were not. Stories abound of customer-facing teams, adrift from management oversight, fulfilling customer expectations in unprecedented ways. Smaller, nimbler organisations were able to capture market share, by being able to do business through shorter, local supply chains, because they didn't have layers of decision-making inertia. The pandemic also thrust HR into the limelight as the source of wisdom and competence, in helping individuals cope with the pace of change and it has emerged as the rock on which human emotions stand for comfort and security.



TWO DIVERGENT CURRENTS HAVE EMERGED - TALENT PLANNING AND INTERACTION MANAGEMENT - THE FORMER SUPPORTS AN ACCREDITED, STRATEGICALLY-ORIENTATED HR PROFESSION AND THE LATTER, AN IMMEDIATE PRACTICAL SKILL. THEN THROW IN TECHNOLOGY



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Has your organisation adopted virtual technology to support remote working?




Perhaps, after all, that is where all these three influences are taking us. From the perspective of middle management, the future looks demanding. The process is not the output and where middle managers have been responsible for the process between strategy and delivery, they are vulnerable. They cannot flatten out peaks and troughs in the economy, they cannot avoid the encroachment of technology and they cannot displace the C-suite - or the customer-facing teams - in the rapid response to the pandemic. Of course, these are generalisations - during the past year, there have been organisations where the senior team hesitated and middle managers stepped up. There are others where middle managers took control and operated with military efficiency, without guidance from above. Yet these are exceptions. There is a saying in stockbroking: "Never take a long-term decision on short-term considerations". The effects of the pandemic are temporary yet will persist in the long term. The ongoing unpredictability of the economy, the behavioural shift caused by increasingly pervasive technology and the devolution of decision-making to where the customer is, all combine to make the future for unreconstructed middle management bleak.

As for HR, let us just pause a moment and consider the five pillars of any organisation; strategy, marketing, operations, finance and, of course, people. In a volatile, uncertain and complex world, strategy, marketing, operations and finance must all pivot rapidly and frequently. Each of them is dependent upon people. If HR is to be the rock on which successful organisations stand, there are three things that HR could do. Firstly, become agile - not in processes, agility is not a methodology, nor even a mindset - agility is a behaviour and HR has proved it *can* be agile in response to organisational need. Secondly, adopt confidently, the mantle of adviser, because the advisory role goes beyond strategy and planning and needs HR to demonstrate the impact of understanding how to motivate, support and reward teams. Thirdly - and this is the most vital function of HR - learn to predict and prepare. Pre-emptive HR means learning to extrapolate from effectively-gathered data, focusing on those things that do not change. The direction for HR is clear, identifying and cultivating the fundamental talent requirements for organisations to meet every kind of problem and learning to navigate the world of predictive analytics. ●

1. Source: Statista ([https://www.statista.com/statistics/279898/unemployment-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/#:~:text=The percent20unemployment percent20rate percent20of percent20the,in percent202009 percent20to percent207.6 percent20percent.](https://www.statista.com/statistics/279898/unemployment-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/#:~:text=The%20unemployment%20rate%20of%20the,in%202009%20to%207.6%20percent.))
2. Source: BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20150624-the-end-of-middle-management>)

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# "WHO'S ZOOMIN' WHO?"

PRE-COVID, THE MAIN WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS WERE EMAIL, IN-PERSON MEETINGS AND CONFERENCE CALLS. IN A VERY SHORT SPACE OF TIME, THE TOOLKIT USED FOR COMMUNICATION HAS TRANSFORMED. BUT VERY FEW ORGANISATIONS HAVE CREATED NEW PEOPLE-FOCUSSED GUIDELINES AND RULES TO HELP EMPLOYEES ADAPT TO VIRTUAL COLLABORATION.

ARTICLE BY ASHLEY FRIEDLEIN, CEO & FOUNDER - GUILD

*"Try a mix of push and pull, synchronous and asynchronous communications tools and platforms. Many organisations have simply replicated the office environment, by relying heavily on video calls"*

Right now, the digital transformation of almost every workplace has been rocket-fuelled and it can be a challenge remembering whether that ten o'clock inter-departmental meeting is a call or a Zoom, Teams, or Bluejeans video call and which whiteboard team collaboration tool is being used for tomorrow's D&I workshop. But regardless of the operating model and existing 'tech stack', now is the time to take a more people-centred approach to virtual communication and collaboration, because technology is only part of successful adaptation to whatever the "new normal" for work becomes. Undoubtedly, tech has the capacity to make employees; happier, more productive, flexible and agile but the opposite could also be true too and it will be HR picking up the pieces if that comes to bear whilst trying to solve the challenge of working remotely. So what are key principles of putting people first in the frame of using tech for WfH?

Forced remote working has exposed years of under investment in internal communication tools, planning, training and resource and those businesses who were found lacking at the start of the pandemic, will have felt the impact. The crisis has also highlighted the strategic role and importance of internal communications professionals and the talent that exists. A user-needs, focused approach to designing and delivering workplace collaboration requires specialist IC professionals to start with the question, "what communications problem do we have?" Rather than pushing forward with, "here is a collaboration technology solution". It's important to think 'communications and people challenge' first and 'technology' second. Successful internal communication should

be built on clear definitions and purposes for each channel in use, including traditional ones like email or in-person meetings. Not having this makes integrating new communications technology difficult. Using and adapting frameworks like the 'Hierarchy of Messaging', proposes which workplace communication channels are appropriate for broad purposes. It summarises needs met for individual participants in different channels and this forces a needs plus people-centred approach to new tool adoption.

Pre-pandemic, it was often the case that the IC team or individual was physically located in the vicinity of the marketing team and often had a direct report here - their skillset being deemed more akin to the PR and comms role than any other department. However, even in this period of remote working, a mindset shift to bring the IC role closer to HR can reap rewards. Key is to try a mix of push and pull, synchronous and asynchronous communications tools and platforms. Many organisations have simply replicated the office environment, by relying heavily on video calls, but 'Zoom fatigue' is a real phenomenon. We're forced to sit still and look at a camera for long periods of time, when in the workplace we'd rarely stare so intently at colleagues in meetings. We would also chat informally, whilst moving around the office. The "constant gaze" on video calls is exhausting. There is, of course, a time, place and need for video calls - in the same way that there's a requirement for certain meeting formats - but it's important to explore different options for people to connect and collaborate, both formally and informally.

However, it's important to remember policies and procedures, for example, an unsanctioned use of consumer messaging platforms for professional communications brings the danger of non GDPR and CCPA compliance. This issue of 'shadow comms' can also cause a range of corporate governance issues, lack of corporate oversight and control and even security issues. As well as security and compliance, 'appropriateness' of channel is also key, so HR teams will need to decide on the suitability of tech, depending on what is on the agenda, be that remuneration, recruitment or wellbeing, amongst many others. So, it's clear that there must be; behavioural guidelines, policies and clarity around best practices on communications platforms. These rapid developments are re-writing conventions as we speak and a case in point is the "right to disconnect" being proposed as a human right, with some countries incorporating this into law. Just because a technology exists within an organisation doesn't mean it's the right solution for everybody or anybody. If HR doesn't fight the corner of employees on this front, it will be their door on which staff come knocking when they need support for mental health, burnout or other WfH-related issues. ●



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# IT'S JUST A PLACE, WHERE WE USED TO WORK

In a normal year, there is enough uncertainty to contend with - whether it's shifting markets, employee turnover or fluctuations in supply and demand - but understandably, few businesses were prepared for the unprecedented challenges of a global viral pandemic. The impacts on the way we work have been profound and the subsequent changes to operations will require vital new strategies.



ARTICLE BY  
JULIANE STERZL  
VP OF UK&I  
COACHHUB

There are plenty of impressive statistics that exemplify the impact of COVID-19, but the one that catches the eye is that, in the UK, only 5.6 percent of the population regularly worked from home pre-pandemic, compared to almost 50 percent of the entire workforce in April 2020. This radical shift has left HR grappling with an entirely new set of challenges - from; maintaining engagement virtually and fostering creativity, to helping colleagues deal with personal hardship - running an entirely remote operation involves reassessing almost every aspect of our work. Mistakes in managing this process can be costly, particularly when many industries are already operating on a financial knife edge. But despite the difficulties, the pandemic has also provided a rare opportunity for large scale and meaningful change. Never has there been a more pertinent time to reinvent and shape processes, to suit the needs of both employees and the business.

The office is a shared experience - regardless of seniority, salary, or personal circumstances - it is the hub that brings everyone together and unites them as a team under a common roof. Remote working, however, has the obvious potential for causing the opposite effect. The average team might include a homeowner working from a purpose built home office, a renter crammed into a single bedroom or a parent juggling work with childcare. These differences can have a huge effect on individual performance, which will in turn cause issues across the wider team. But it's not just the working environment that can prove challenging. The ability to successfully work remotely can also be linked to the nature of the role being performed. Staff whose work relies heavily on data and analysis, may find the lack of interpersonal interactions has no effect on their output, which demonstrates a contrast with managers and creatives, that rely on the to-and-fro of discussion to make progress. Sales teams can particularly struggle with the lack of "buzz" and isolation, resulting in poor morale and this can quickly and directly hit the bottom line where it hurts. All this is not even accounting for the constraints to normal life in lockdown, such as; the lack of leisure activities and the constant threat of catching coronavirus hanging over everyone. It's little surprise that 80 percent of survey respondents (McKinsey, June 2020) said that the crisis has materially affected the quality of their work and their employee experience. In the darker, shorter days of Winter, the problem is further exacerbated. It's simply not possible for everyone to deliver to the same standard, when there are so many individual variables and a failure to acknowledge this can result in a seriously disengaged workforce.

The cost of disengagement is far-reaching and multifarious and globally, we are facing a disengagement issue of a similar size to the current pandemic. At the beginning of 2020, one-in-five members of the worldwide workforce reported feeling disengaged, with the UK economy alone losing an estimated £340 million a year in training and recruitment, sick days, creativity, and productivity. Whilst disengagement can happen for a variety of reasons, the outcome is invariably poor, both for morale and profit. Concerningly, but surely not surprisingly, one of the key contributing factors to disengagement, is a sense of isolation and lack of allegiance to the wider team. In normal times, inclusion can be driven by gathering in a shared space to meet, socialise and collaborate with colleagues. Face-to-face with those we work with, it's easy to remember the common goals we are all working towards. When this becomes impossible, there is a real risk of damage to the bonds of social cohesion that usually hold us together. Some people will find that they are naturally able to connect with colleagues virtually, whilst others may silently struggle to be heard above the digital noise.



In line with social interactions, the majority of collaboration in the workplace now takes place online. While this has been essential for allowing day-to-day work to continue, companies that use technology successfully, will understand that the quality of these interactions is more important than the quantity. For example, it's tempting to encourage all calls to be on video, in order to maintain engagement and foster social cohesion. However, researchers have identified the very real phenomenon of "Zoom fatigue", which is destined to be a phrase that marks this time. But buzzword or not, the stress, tiredness and worry that comes with overuse of virtual collaboration platforms and the pressure to constantly perform 'on camera', is cause for concern. Most importantly, managers should listen to the feedback and concerns of their teams with regards to how and when technology is used for internal communications, especially considering the potential psychological effects of continuous use. So, considering these challenges, what steps can we take to foster communication and cohesion online? The first step to improving collaboration is to recognise that each individual has different requirements to achieve success. In order for the team to be operating at peak performance, people need to be able to fulfil their role to the best of their ability and the methods for achieving this can look wildly different from person to person and can vary, depending on personality, experience, and circumstance. For example, a junior member of the team may need extra training and support to replace the exchange of knowledge they would usually be exposed to in the office environment. Meanwhile, a busy parent could be offered flexible start and finish times to suit childcare needs. Managers should start by talking to their employees individually and trusting that they know what will be best for their own situation. The bottom line is, if you can't trust your own team, you've hired the wrong people. You might also identify groups of individuals who collectively share similar experiences. This could take the form of an external coaching session, aimed at, for example, accelerating women into leadership positions. Or it could be a training seminar on the psychology of business for sales teams. No matter the subject, recognising and investing in the development of your team on both a personal and professional level, plays a critical role in overall satisfaction at work, as well as driving engagement and retention, by furthering career progression. Many businesses have put their training and development temporarily on hold during this crisis, but there is no excuse for under-investment in people, not even a global pandemic.

Considering the values and culture frameworks - a code of conduct for employees to work towards - should be replicated in the virtual world. A set of guidelines for how to behave online can be a huge help in setting boundaries and reducing burnout and fatigue and should include limiting out-of-hours contact, establishing specific protocols for meetings and designating specific times for virtual performance

management. The aim here is not to be prescriptive, but rather to provide a framework that can be used for benchmarking and ensuring that everyone is on the same page. Whilst there will always need to be a degree of flexibility, having set rules can reduce confusion and anxiety, and give your team a clear goal for achieving success. Of course, alongside these day-to-day changes, many businesses will be reassessing whether a full return to the office is even viable, let alone desirable. This brings into play visions of what a hybrid office model would consist of, in combining the structure and sociability of the office, with the independence and flexibility of home working. It allows employees to fit work around their personal lives as opposed to the traditional nine-to-five. Here, a recent Gartner survey lends weight to an inevitable outcome, which found that, 82 percent of employers plan to allow staff to work remotely at least some of the time post-pandemic, with 47 percent allowing fulltime remote work.

With nearly a year of remote work under our belts, we're now in a much better position to understand exactly what works and what doesn't. It may be that certain tasks, such as brainstorming or team socials, need to take place in the office, whilst admin, writing, and data jobs can continue at home. But the nature of work aside, providing a good balance of flexibility is vital to maintaining engagement and providing security, particularly when individuals will all have varying levels of concern around the return to the office. Ultimately, maintaining a successful remote workforce involves many of the same methods as an in-person operation. Compassionate and empathetic leadership is vital, and despite the physical separation, leaders must strive to retain as much of the human element in their operations as possible. Opportunities to redefine the workplace in such a radical way are few and far between, and businesses that take advantage of this chance to listen to staff, implement feedback, and reassess their priorities will be the best placed to thrive. ●



THE COST OF  
DISENGAGEMENT  
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GLOBALLY, WE  
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SIZE TO THE CURRENT  
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# CALIBRATE TO COLLABORATE

*Now, the traditional employment setting is past tense and creating a culture of collaboration will be an essential element in the success of the new world of work. One wonders, is this the new norm? Will the office become a relic of the past? Only time will tell.*



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ARTICLE BY ARTICLE BY WILLIAM S. HUBBARTT, HR CONSULTANT & AUTHOR - *ACHIEVING PERFORMANCE RESULTS - BOOSTING PERFORMANCE IN THE VIRTUAL WORKPLACE*

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Early indications suggest that many employers and employees are embracing a more diversified and decentralised workforce arrangement, altering significantly the employee daily commute to a traditional centralised office environment. Whether the pendulum swings towards making the office obsolete - creating a workforce that remains remote - or settles back to some new hybrid model, consisting of a central office along with smaller more fluid work areas and a mix of remote workers, remains to be seen. In any employment setting, there remains one common element, people and HR must be a leader in forging the way, guiding and creating a culture of collaboration. There is light, but we are not yet out of the dark tunnel that is COVID-19 and so the endeavours to maintain enterprise continuity, productivity and profitability must continue. Now is the time to fine-tune the process of managing a diverse and remote workforce, learn from our mistakes and smooth out the bumps in the road.

Because we are now managing a substantially higher percentage of remote workers, there is a greater challenge for managers and team leaders to keep off-site workers engaged. Innovative leaders will find ways to build a culture of corroboration - there are a variety of collaborative techniques of course - and it is possible that your firm may already be using some. Firms in some industry sectors are already utilising employee and management committees, to share ideas, problem-solve and come up with recommended actions to address workplace issues. In healthcare, a common example includes the use of committees, to consider matters such as; quality and patient care, financial management and analysis, audit and compliance concerns, governance and regulatory issues. Hospital committees play an important role in management and decision making and consist of people in different roles and with different expertise, to collectively consider management issues and make recommendations or take action to deal with problems. Of course, a significant portion of employers are unionised - ten percent in the US and an average of 24 percent in the UK and Euro market - and while labour negotiations are often seen as adversarial, there is a collaborative element to the relationship. The process of periodic re-negotiation of the labour agreement often includes input from union members and

management, as the sides discuss the issues and reach an agreement for the coming contract term. Safety committees too are a common loss control management process in the manufacturing and transportation industries as well as in healthcare. These committees may consist of a select group of hourly paid production employees and some floor supervisors, often led by a safety or human resources specialist, to identify safety concerns and recommend measures to promote safe work practices.

## EMPLOYEES WILL STILL RESIGN BECAUSE OF BAD BOSSES, WHETHER THEY'RE IN THE FLESH OR VIRTUAL AND SO TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT IN COLLABORATIVE TECHNIQUES IS A MUST

To create a culture of collaboration, management must continually look for opportunities to seek employee input for planning or implementing work processes, procedures, new products or services. So perhaps a collaboration coordinator can be identified to facilitate the process. When employees are invited to provide input and are permitted to participate in decisions affecting the workgroup or entity, there is a greater feeling of ownership of the process and an enhanced commitment to the organisation. The coordinator may possess unique organisational skills in drafting surveys, stimulating interest, creating contests, inviting participation and coordinating the details needed to generate employee input, both tabulating findings and recommending outcomes. Of course, communication tools, such as surveys or questionnaires, are stalwarts when input is required from a large cross-section and data can be tabulated and considered as a basis for planned action, on a particular issue, with feedback given to acknowledge employee input. When specialised knowledge is needed, the use of committees or project workgroups can be used and so the selection of participants should be based on an individual's knowledge or experience in the topic at hand. Such groups may assign member tasks and implement new work processes.

Greater use of virtual and gig workers will inevitably increase diversity in the workgroup, drawing participants from different cultures,

perspectives and work ideas. A 2017 survey of 1372 business respondents from eighty different countries reported that 85 percent worked on virtual teams and 48 percent reported that work team members were from different cultures. But with the absence of face-to-face interactions and meetings, there is a clear need for awareness and respect of different cultures and beliefs. Recent protest movements such as; #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, LGBT rights and others, have heightened sensitivities towards racial, ethnic and gender divides. But care must

be taken to avoid pitfalls from inadvertent or accidental missteps in communication that may be offensive. Needless to say, for a collaborative culture to succeed, the C-suite must fully embrace the concept and demonstrate its own collaborative interaction within the various operating and support elements of the employing unit.

So, what will be HR's role? While there are many tech issues associated with connecting workers and their employers in the remote work environment, there is an equally significant need for the HR function to stand ready and to lead with collaborative processes, in order to address the people issues of such transition. Of course, a key role in recruitment remains an HR staple - albeit with a sharpened emphasis of finding individuals with a bent towards collaboration - but also a necessity to focus on retention. Employees will still resign because of bad bosses, whether they're in the flesh or virtual and so training and development in collaborative techniques is a must to provide managers and leaders with the capacity for collaborative oriented performance management policies and rewards across the business. Innovative HR departments are moving in this direction already. The bottom line is, for a collaborative culture to succeed, top management must fully and authentically embrace the concept and demonstrate its own collaborative interaction within the various operating and support elements of the employing unit. Here, actions will speak louder than words.

The role of the team leader is the new "on-the-firing-line" position as they can make or break the success of developing a collaborative culture in an organisation. Leading effective virtual teams requires a skillset that balances people skills with tech skills and an awareness of the subject matter and industry. In the absence of the traditional face-to-face interaction with on-site employees, team leaders must find other ways to promote team engagement, build trust and motivate remote workers. HR can design and present such skills training, to newly-assigned team leaders and team members can be given a task leadership assignment, which provides an opportunity to gain experience in leading fellow team members. All organisations tend to adopt some basic mores of conduct, to maintain cooperative working relationships. Taking a look at some common etiquette guidelines, they include; actively participating to offer ideas, acknowledging the ideas and suggestions of others and listening without making judgment or criticism. In the course of collaboration, avoid dominating the discussion, allow others to participate and build on other's ideas. Ask questions or seek clarification, if more information is needed and carefully consider each proposal. Make a serious effort to resolve problems. Also important is to attend all work-group meetings as scheduled, log in on time and comply with requested deadlines. Meantime, peer trust builds if, even under these unprecedented times, that work assignments are completed, there is cooperation and communication with fellow team members - and all comply with operating rules and maintaining regular job responsibilities. While some may lament that the current turmoil is an obstacle to success, I submit that HR professionals now stand at a newly opened door, with an opportunity to take the lead in organisational development, to implement a collaborative culture in the virtual workplace. ●

William S. Hubbart, is the author of *Achieving Performance Results - Boosting Performance in the Virtual Workplace*

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# AUTONOMY IS THE FUEL OF ENGAGEMENT

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*Workplace culture is a key differentiator between businesses that are able to embrace change and the benefits it has to offer and those holding on to more outmoded ways of working. That this seismic shift presents a unique opportunity to harness the value of enabling employee autonomy cannot be underestimated. Those businesses that find it hard to keep pace with these shifts could see challenging times ahead and will struggle to survive.*



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ARTICLE BY DAVID WILLIAMS, CEO & FOUNDER - IMPACT

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Micromanagement and command-and-control leadership models lie dormant like concrete military silos in some battle-scarred wasteland. Those businesses willing and able to flex their organisational agility during the current pressures, face a golden opportunity that will enable employees and the business in turn to prosper, by cultivating new ideas and having the confidence and space to run with them. It's curious that it has taken a global pandemic for some businesses to begin to really assess the scope and value of increased employee autonomy. It's important to note that employee autonomy doesn't begin and end with working flexibly from home. In fact, just because an individual is working from home, doesn't necessarily mean that they are working more autonomously at all. In some cases, the exact

opposite may happen, with leaders exhibiting less trust. This behaviour stems from the existing culture prior to lockdown, specifically hinging on whether or not the organisation was operating in an agile way to start with. But with work, a more progressive culture can be cultivated.

Organisational agility, of course, is that ability to flex in the moment and respond positively to things as they happen and this is, understandably, the aspiration of many in such turbulent times. More sophisticated and mature businesses will likely have already been operating in an agile way and will therefore have volunteered great employee autonomy prior to the pandemic. Agility simply cannot work in a traditional, hierarchical, command-and-control style environment. Autonomy starts with trusting people to react in the most appropriate way and

trusting people to do their best. But this trust has to be a two-way street - if an organisation wants to liberate the brilliance of its people. There is a common temptation, as people climb through their careers into leadership positions, to be seen to be constantly 'present', or feel the need to micromanage. The reality is that effective leadership is about stepping out of the way in order to let people shine.

A critical step towards enabling a more autonomous culture to thrive is to first and foremost agree on what autonomy means within the organisation. Understanding and expectations can vary wildly here and need to be pinned down in order to make the process meaningful. A simple way of doing this is to set out 'tramlines' for the individual organisation. In essence, this means setting out what your

organisation always does, versus what they never do. By creating these boundaries, the organisation opens up huge swathes of space in between, for individuals and teams, to fulfil the company's requirements in a way that is mainly governed by them. This, critically, gives them the freedom to operate in a way that works best for them to achieve their goals.

Encouraging autonomy requires managers to have the confidence to accept that individuals could work in a diametrically opposing way to their own, whilst still possessing the shared values that the organisation needs to prosper. The most effective and successful organisations do this by recruiting people who can add something they don't already have, specifically, looking for criteria beyond qualifications and including attributes, values and behaviours. Micromanagement is rendered obsolete when organisations employ a diverse group of talented, creative and passionate people, who are clear about the mission and purpose... the 'what', not the 'how'.

All successful organisations need systems that enable data flow and information capture to make sure every voice is heard. This is a key part of ensuring that every individual understands that they have a role in the future success of the business. However, if the communication channels and feedback loops aren't there to do this, both people management and the overall management of the business, become inherently more difficult. These issues are common, but whilst they are definitely exacerbated by largely operating in the virtual space, they are not insurmountable. HR Directors have a key role in tackling this, by leading from the top to encourage two-way communication, effective systems and taking time to review and reflect. This is not a switch that can be made overnight, especially for those whose culture is dominated by daily KPIs, micromanagement, spoon-feeding and presenteeism. In fact, to attempt to do so in traditionally managed businesses, would most likely be met negatively and could have detrimental consequences. A sharp shift in management style could see staff falter, underperform or lose focus. Therefore, transformation in such organisations needs baby steps, beginning with setting up an effective listening and feedback loop.

The first steps on this journey are listening and more listening - and, when there is a temptation to start to respond - it's time to listen again! This can take courage and can be challenging, especially as there is always some degree of fear present in any culture, whether that be fear of failure, fear of speaking up or fear of making a mistake. Being direct and having hard conversations is tough, but essential. It works in everyone's best interests if we are authentic and honest. To allow people to truly take the kind of risks necessary to enable them to be autonomous, these barriers need to be understood and removed. This will make way for new ways of working, negating the need for people to feel fearful, however that may manifest itself. Having strong feedback loops will enable autonomy, allowing the

  
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 IS RENDERED  
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 PURPOSE...  
 THE 'WHAT',  
 NOT THE 'HOW'



Do you think employee autonomy is a positive influence on performance?



business to change and grow. People can easily be encouraged to set their own agendas and review their own performance, relationships, successes and challenges and managers can drive this further, by taking a facilitative approach, using time with their line reports to focus on listening, asking more questions than providing answers and offering support rather than making demands. True management is the act of helping those around you to be at their best.

Managers can also take ownership of establishing 'set pieces' in the virtual space, in order to bring people together. These can be a combination of formal meetings and informal social get-togethers, which are key opportunities to provide connection and communication about how the business and each other are doing. In today's primarily virtual world, organisations are finding new ways to catalyse the creative, collaborative culture once gained from informal so-called 'water-cooler' conversations. Even outside of a non-pandemic world, offering meaningful support to direct reports can be challenging. Amplified by the current backdrop of uncertainty, where very few are untouched by increased pressures and challenges, it is more crucial than ever for leaders and managers to ensure they are continuously building trust. Seemingly small things can make big differences, such as starting every engagement with a sincere 'how are you?' This also means being prepared to offer support or signposting when needed, placing wellbeing at the top of the business agenda. Prioritising wellbeing throughout every level of an organisation is essential in order to cultivate an autonomous workforce that feels truly supported.

There is a likelihood that some individuals, if not entire organisations, will struggle with what can be big, systemic changes required to shift the working culture towards increased autonomy. HR has a prime opportunity to lead the change and be the champions of innovation. This can start with understanding where in the business there may be a skills deficit that requires training and development to facilitate a more autonomous and agile culture. Unsurprisingly, businesses that already have a culture of learning and development, are much more equipped for agility and autonomous working than those that take a step-by-step approach. People own what they create and when they are given the right conditions to create their own way forward, they take infinitely more responsibility and ownership. Rather than presenting someone else's transcript of how things should be done, provide clarity of mission, purpose and empower people to decide on how. This trust will be repaid in a multitude of ways, from organisational effectiveness and efficiency to an individual's job satisfaction. ●

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# THE SINGULAR ACT OF SURVIVING THE RAT RACE

CONSIDERING THE HECTIC PACE OF LIFE AND BUSINESS PRE-PANDEMIC, WHEN COULD ANY ORGANISATION HAVE AFFORDED THE TIME TO THOROUGHLY BENCH-TEST AUTONOMY RIGHT ACROSS THE WORKFORCE? REGARDLESS OF POST OR DISCIPLINE, WE WERE ALL HARDWIRED TO CONSTANTLY DELIVER THE TASK, TO THE LETTER... NO QUESTIONS ASKED.

ARTICLE BY NICOLAS SPEECKAERT, CO-FOUNDER & MANAGING PARTNER - SKEELED HR

*“The pandemic has changed entrenched attitudes. Prior to this crisis, many employers feared flexibility, because they did not trust their staff to work productively from home”*

Granting employees choice over how and when they work would have had monocles popping out of eyes in gentlemen’s clubs of yore. Even today, it comes more easily to some organisations than others. Those that embrace autonomous working culture understand that what is achieved is more important than *how*. Meantime, there are plenty other companies that cannot wait to revert to the rigidity of command-and-control at the first signs of normality. However, firms that do reverse back into the familiar old rut will look like Stephenson’s Rocket next to Elon Musk’s reusable rocket. Unquestionably, the notion that people thrive in autonomous cultures may well have captains of industry turning in their mausoleums, but in this day and age, no one likes to be micromanaged. If employees are trusted to take greater ownership of projects and work independently, within a clear support structure, they are likely to be; more motivated and have higher job satisfaction, be more creative, feel valued, happier and more engaged and critically, they will be less likely to look for another job.

A 2019 survey from Harvard Business School and Boston Consulting Group<sup>1</sup> found that among the developments most urgently affecting businesses were employee expectations for flexible, autonomous work, better work-life balance and remote working. However, only 30 percent of the 11,000 workers and 6,500 business leaders who responded to the survey said they were prepared to deliver. The pandemic has changed entrenched attitudes. Prior to this crisis, many employers feared flexibility,

because they did not trust their staff to work productively from home. But many have since changed their opinions and research from Mercer highlights this monumental change, with 94 percent of employers stating that their company productivity was the same or higher than before the pandemic<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, companies are becoming more trusting and recognise that people work well independently and now many want to encourage greater autonomy and self-responsibility. Businesses doing this well realise that working autonomously does not mean working without boundaries or clear leadership. They establish clear metrics and goals for their people and support them with technology and processes that deliver.

Hiring people with the right mindset and attitude can shift an organisation’s culture away from command-and-control and towards autonomy. With the right talent acquisition technology, companies can now hire talent from anywhere in the world and access a diverse set of skills and experience that could help them innovate, become more creative and grow. The pandemic has accelerated the use of technology for talent acquisition and it is benefitting companies, by widening their talent pool and streamlining recruitment processes, making it easier for employers to both manage recruitment effectively and identify the right people. Cielo published a report in June<sup>3</sup> which highlighted that most employers are now comfortable using technology for talent acquisition, with 82 percent of hiring managers, saying they will continue to interview using video post pandemic. Using predictive talent acquisition software companies can reach more diverse

candidates from different geographies. It can also remove some of the administrative burden in the early stages of recruitment when employers can become overwhelmed by the number of CVs and applications. In today’s world, soft skills and personality are what makes people thrive in a role. Here, predictive AI software, can not only deliver the automation of the screening of CVs, but also make recommendations of best-fit candidates, taking into consideration the results of the predictive assessments. Candidates can be ranked in terms of their ability to succeed and to thrive in a specific role, as well as by their affinity and traits to be autonomous and their capacity to work with managers in a way that isn’t micromanaged. Like anything, it’s about striking the right balance, between giving people greater ownership of their work and trust, but also ensuring they have clear goals, boundaries, technology and support to succeed. ●

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# AUTONOMY WITH CAVEATS

IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE CURRENT ACCELERATED RISE OF EMPLOYEE AUTONOMY WILL BE A PEAK FOLLOWED BY A DECLINE, ONCE A VACCINE ARRESTS AND REVERSES THE CRISIS. WHAT IS CERTAIN IS THAT INCREASED LEVELS OF AUTONOMY HAVE CREATED NEW RISKS AND EXAGGERATED EXISTING ONES.

ARTICLE BY ADAM PENMAN, ASSOCIATE IN THE LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT LAW DEPARTMENT – MCGUIREWOODS

*“Too much unmanaged employee autonomy could potentially be disastrous - lose control and excessive employee freedom may yield a lack of business cohesion”*

Data security, which became a nuclear subject for almost every business with the advent of the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation adopted in 2018, is now high on the list of employers’ risks. Indeed, remote working and more autonomous decision making may impact the management of personal data, potentially exposing employers to increased risk, which should be of concern, given the punitive might of supervisory bodies, such as the Information Commissioner’s Office in the UK, which can apply fines of, up to, EUR 20 million or four percent of annual global turnover for the most egregious data breaches. Employers will want to troubleshoot potential data-related risks by revisiting data security policies, as far as possible ensure autonomous employees use only the employer’s computer equipment and ensure that robust virus protection is in place.

Turning to health & safety, a perennial and changing area of risk for employers to navigate as the COVID-19-related mass home working has changed the assessments of these risks. Where more employees work more autonomously, what is required of an employer to discharge its health and safety obligations will obviously change, but greater autonomy will not absolve employers of their health & safety responsibilities. Employers must still be alive to the H&S risks associated with autonomous working, for example greater autonomy may mean greater employee responsibility, less direct employer support and, perhaps greater or at least different risks to the mental health of employees. Employers should conduct thorough risk assessments and adopt measures

to troubleshoot these risks, for example, offering confidential support to higher risk employees or comprehensive health cover which makes provision for mental health.

Greater employee freedom can also yield rewards for both employees and employers. Indeed, empowered, freer employees may be loyal, happier, more engaged and more profitable. But with greater autonomy, people are inevitably likely to feel a sense of intrinsic ownership over their work. Indeed, employee ownership has in recent years caught the attention of many employers and has been used as a tool to generate employee buy-in and motivate those employees to drive their businesses. But, as a consequence, the rise of employee ownership trusts EOTs - introduced by the Finance Act 2014 - have built on employee autonomy as a concept.

Market expectation means that some employees, particularly those with unique skills who can work anywhere, will go to those businesses that cater for all their needs. Therefore, employee autonomy, in its various forms, will draw in the best employees and can be as good a retention tool as any bonus or share option. On the flip side, too much unmanaged employee autonomy could potentially be disastrous - lose control and excessive employee freedom may yield a lack of business cohesion. For autonomous employees to work successfully, employers should set clear parameters and limits to the realms of autonomy and set quantifiable objectives for their employees to meet. Accordingly, effective management and clear communication is key to extracting the most value from autonomous arrangements and

driving overall business strategy. Employers should review their management structures, reporting lines and internal policies to ensure that they create a culture which harnesses the best of autonomous working and mitigates the downsides. The traditional workforce framework, where people are monitored and even micromanaged, will increasingly lose out to business models which have adopted progressive policies and culture, which supports employees to make their own choices about how they manage their responsibilities. Whether this greater freedom will be the panacea to the vexing issues of productivity, engagement and wellbeing beyond the era of COVID-19, only time will tell, as employee autonomy develops. Whether this “employee spring” leads to successful, productive people, increases engagement and loyalty, attracts skills and talent and slows down attrition, will be down to employer courage and an acceptance that command-and-control is as outmoded as clocking-in and clocking-out. ●



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# TRUST MAKES US VULNERABLE... BROKEN TRUST MAKES US ANGRY

*You only have to look at the headlines to see that trust is breaking down all around us. Trust in those once relied upon institutions of state, church and justice system is undermined by scandal, inconsistency and often incoherent policy making and institutionalised levels of discrimination. This crisis time is, not surprisingly, aggravating divisions and schisms, as the pandemic and Brexit juxtapose.*

ARTICLE BY DAVID LIDDLE, CEO & FOUNDER - THE TCM GROUP

The world of work is far from exempt from this pervading culture of doubt and suspicion. It is no coincidence that, in this mix, we are seeing increased employee activism and a rise in trade union membership. Trust is at the heart of good work and is fundamental to the psychological contract that exists between organisations and their employees. If people are to perform at their best, they need to be confident that the organisation will treat them fairly and equitably, will support them when times are tough and will help them learn and grow. On the other side of the equation, the organisation needs to be assured that people will do the job they are being paid to do, will uphold the values of the business and act ethically in its best interests. The pandemic has brought the issue of trust in the workplace into pin-sharp focus, catapulting unimagined levels of virtual and flexible working and testing the resilience and creativity of both managers and employees to the limit. People have had more freedom than ever before, but for many managers, it has been a tough call and many have regressed into micro-management mode, looking over employee shoulders and, from a distance, monitoring their every move. This has had the effect of disrupting that all-important trust dynamic. If employees don't feel trusted, they feel vulnerable, lose confidence in their abilities and can become paralysed by uncertainty. If people feel they are constantly being monitored, they will start to doubt their capability to do the job and will spend more time worrying about their future than carrying out their responsibilities.

An over-reliance on formal HR policies and management processes has exacerbated this breakdown in trust even further. With any form of certainty crumbling around them, managers have reached for the safety net of the employee handbook to guide their decisions and actions, plunging already stressed people into damaging, bureaucratic processes, instead of treating them with



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PROCESSES



compassion, at a time of crisis. If organisations are to rebuild trust and create positive, people centred working environments, HR needs to intervene. Before it can start to make a difference, however, the HR profession needs to put its own house in order. The way conflicts, complaints and concerns are typically handled is a prime example. When faced with a problem, instead of trying to sort the situation out through constructive dialogue, HR often reach for the disciplinary and grievance or bullying and harassment policy - the GBH policy as I call it - pushing people down a divisive, formal route. These processes offer a mirage of justice and an illusion of fairness and the outcome is never good.

This inability to handle issues through informal, respectful dialogue is seeding the rapid breakdown of trust we are seeing in so many organisations. It is posing a threat to the very nature and function of HR. The paradox is that the very people in the business who are the custodians of procedural fairness, justice and reason, are in fact the facilitators of division, discord and distress. The HR profession needs to ask itself some hard questions. Even better, when the questions are asked in conjunction with senior managers, union colleagues and other stakeholders. Is the business putting policies, processes and procedures before people and values? Does the employee handbook reflect the values of the organisation? Are line managers being trained to support resolution, to act empathetically and to promote collaboration, or was the 'soft skills' training budget cut back in 1976 and has never been replaced? These are key questions that should be asked right now to help reduce the trust deficit, which is rapidly forming within our society and across organisations. ●

David Liddle is the author of *Managing Conflict*, published by Kogan Page/CIPD

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# “THAT’LL PUT THE CAT IN THE CHINA SHOP”\*

“You *think* you want a ten-year people plan... but you don’t!” I may have followed that statement up with a theatrical wink... I hope I didn’t! That was my opening gambit at my first one-to-one with my new CEO, sat at a conference table the size of an aircraft carrier.



ARTICLE BY  
GRAHAM WHITE  
HR DIRECTOR - PUBLIC SECTOR  
(RETIRED)

Life in HR, never changes, I’m convinced of that. From my very first tentative steps into Human Resources, right up to the pinnacle of my career, one thing and one thing only has remained constant. After forty years of supporting, facilitating - and, at times, coercing organisations to embrace their workforces as positive partners - I still cannot provide my leaders with the thing they seek most from Human Resources. Henry Ford is attributed with defining the problem when he said; “why is it every time I ask for a pair of hands, they come with a brain attached?” No matter how hard we try and I have witnessed some HR teams trying extremely hard, we cannot hold back the rapidly evolving world of work. Whilst the aforementioned CEO - and every CEO I have known - presumed that HR could produce with absolute certainty, the perfect cloned worker, inherently obedient and compliant in equal measure, they were right to expect a plan, that could assist managers to identify and understand the basic social, economic and technological changes that will affect their workforces in future. The paradox we are facing, however, is that the decades old search by HR for worker obedience, has hidden in plain sight a national workforce, screaming for the opportunity to show their employers what can be delivered through greater employee autonomy.

Too many HR leaders continue to obediently produce long-term people plans, designed to dampen employee innovation and contribution, so now we are facing a workforce revolution that is demanding immediate engagement, interaction and shared solution building. Today’s employee does not see themselves as just workers, they also see themselves as activists. This is not new since the 1970s, organisations like Patagonia and, more recently, Zappos have stolen the hearts of their empowered and autonomous workforces. However, the reason HR does not need a crystal ball to look a decade ahead and shed light on this potential life-changing future is, we are so loaded down with past cultural baggage that we are not even looking around the corner. With life changing at a pace never before experienced, businesses are no longer the sole creator of their brand and values. Whether we like it or not, line managers are grappling to hold onto absolute control, when our businesses are being increasingly co-created by our workforces, through shared experiences and defined by the images presented to the world, through millions of social media touch points.

Unfortunately, far too many organisations are seeking an evolving long-term solution to a feared problem that is already impacting on their business performance today. Organisations across the UK are faithfully following practices they can’t explain rationally. Why is it that work must start at 9am and end at 5pm? Why does what I wear matter? Why do meetings start on the hour and last an hour? There is absolutely no evidence these habits produce better output. Instead we follow these practices religiously - and many more besides - because we always have and always will. Over time, HR has allowed them to become integrated into the organisational language, in a manner that has ensured they become so natural to us, we have forgotten they were simply the inventions of the leaders in place at the time. I am also certain that a cursory look at general employment contracts and employee handbooks across the UK will reveal HR is a worthy accomplice in this organisational sabotage. With policies that simply do not reflect the rapidly evolving world of work, the need for a ten-year solution is overshadowed by the need for a ten-minute answer.

When I was the HR Director for a large haulage organisation, I was told that the weekly delivery plan was modelled around the distance from the depot. In other words, the longest deliveries always

took place in the first half of the week and the shorter journeys in the latter part of the week. The reason for this, I soon discovered, was that originally there was only one local PSV testing station available to the company and it only tested articulated vehicles on Thursday and Fridays and so we needed to bring the vehicles back early on those days. However, things changed in time and eventually, there were numerous testing stations that opened six days a week and yet the old operating model continued. Likewise, the traditional UK workforce framework is completely out-of-step, in this instance with the expectations of today's employee. A world where people need to be monitored and micromanaged in a panoptical working environment is not just at odds with reality, it is an anathema to the thinking of the next generation of workers.

As we look to a time soon when we will come out of the shadow of the pandemic it is, with absolute certainty, that I say any business that attempts to return to an old order of micromanagement - no matter how positively it is branded - is destined to find itself on the scrapheap of pre-pandemic traditionalists, still wondering why their ten year plan didn't deliver the results they had hoped. One of the most recent employee surveys for a national newspaper, declared that over 60 percent of UK employees say, that as a direct consequence of COVID-19, they now believe the traditional nine-to-five on-site working model, no longer works for them. The outcomes of the survey were emphatic in their declaration that work as we know it has changed forever. The concept of being employed and the action of "going to work" are forever transformed. Whilst it may not be every manager's intention to return to that notorious style of fear-based leadership, they liked to inappropriately call paternalistic, many will find it hard to release their grip, or will struggle to grant full employee autonomy. However, failure to do so, for whatever the reason, will certainly ensure an unmotivated and disengaged workforce.

In simple terms, employee autonomy does not just empower people to do a good job, it taps into a deeper, more meaningful relationship, based on advocacy, which goes far beyond external rewards like money can offer. Reaching much higher levels in Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*, employee autonomy creates the perfect growth environment for the creation of passionate employees that are more innovative, engaging and productive, which naturally leads to increased output and hopefully organisational success. But for those employers that struggle with the concept of employee autonomy, this will increasingly become the elephant in the room. We have striven to be stalwart stewards over several decades of change in the workplace, caused by multifarious influences such as an intensifying level of competition in marketplaces, developments in digital disruption, increasing forces of globalisation and certain aspects of demographic changes. Now heaped on top of this is the fallout from a global pandemic and we cannot avoid the realisation

that it has never been more critical for organisations than it is now, to stay fiercely attuned to early warning signals and to be able to respond fast when clarity emerges. All this means that leadership and decision making cannot reside solely at the top of the organisation. A highly networked and autonomous workforce where information and insight travel fast, without hindrance and multi-directional, is the only coherent response to a world whose business conditions can now change literally overnight. The kind of business that has an autonomous workforce will see early and respond fast.

I am already convinced of the benefits of empowering self-determination in a workforce, but I also accept that failing to implement autonomy effectively can and will be used as the rationale for not doing it, so I add these words of advice. Autonomy does not remove the need for clear direction. Allowing employees a free rein, without clear direction, is essentially sending them on a journey without a map and is likely to cause more damage than good. Offering employees the freedom to choose how they handle their responsibilities, may sound scary at first, but when implemented correctly, it will positively impact on the overall employee experience. So, it is essential to ensure you have an effective, well understood and clear path of communication from the outset. For me, I found weekly group check-ins and fortnightly one-to-one's was the most effective way of staying up-to-date with my team. I felt this gave me enough confidence to step back or step in, as and when required. In support of this, I also relied upon Objectives and Key Results, to ensure everyone remained focused on what was important. OKRs are a statement of intent for any autonomous team, announcing what the team is going to work on and who will be accountable for its success or failure. Lastly and most importantly, with an autonomous workforce regularly engaging with their manager and measuring their contribution with effective OKR's, there is no need for an annual review... so dump it! Employee autonomy is not the absence of management, it is the creation of an environment, where employees are trusted to do the job they were hired to do and do it well. ●

\*CJ - *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin*

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WHY MUST  
 WORK START AT  
 9:00AM AND END  
 AT 5 PM? WHY  
 DOES WHAT I WEAR  
 MATTER? WHY DO  
 MEETINGS START ON  
 THE HOUR AND LAST  
 AN HOUR? THERE  
 IS ABSOLUTELY NO  
 EVIDENCE THESE  
 HABITS PRODUCE  
 BETTER OUTPUT





## BULLYING HASN'T GONE AWAY

We may not all be facing each other across our desks at the moment, but bullying is still rife and systemic and cyber bullying, in particular, is on the increase.

Article by Thom Dennis, CEO - Serenity in Leadership

**C** HROs have so much to deal with today and it's easy to lose sight of perennial problems, such as bullying and harassment in the midst of so many people being either asked to work from home or in highly separated environments in the workplace. Yet bullying is still very much a problem and it is vital to bring deeper understanding, shine a harsh spotlight and take systemic action to tackle this rise. In a recent research study for a Government organisation with 100,000 people, bullying came out as the predominant theme of concern and it hasn't diminished in any way since the virus struck. Indeed, a manager who was a bully before COVID-19 remains so now - but perhaps now with an altered modus operandi - because some or all of their people are working from home. What has been part of their relationship will still be

part of their relationship and it's easy to see how it might be worse today, as the manager no longer can physically intimidate people with their physical presence, like standing over them while they are at their desk or cornering them in a room. So they may resort to more covert micro aggressions than they typically used before.

Bullying in the workplace can take many forms including verbal abuse, offensive behaviours, unjustified criticism, singling someone out for the wrong reasons, excluding employees, embarrassing or humiliating people and much more. Fundamentally, it's an abuse of power and the effects can be anxiety, depression, low self-worth, feeling intimidated, low morale and stress to the employee or employees, amongst others. In addition, bullying can impact the business in creating poor performance, high levels of sick leave, valuable employees quitting and a hostile environment, which can trickle down throughout the workplace, becoming visible to customers and business associates, thereby damaging brand and company reputation.

Bullying is difficult to deal with at an official level. In early 2020 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found in a survey that, a quarter of employees think their company turns a blind eye to workplace bullying and harassment. Dealing with it involves confrontation and needs corroboration by the person being bullied. It is so much better if dealt with in the moment and for that it requires the courage of witnesses, if there are any, to call it out in the first place and a strength of the subject which may be lacking and which encourages the bully in the first place. In addition, reporting

systems, however sophisticated, are rarely fully used because employees shun them for lack of trust. It's not for nothing that there is an Instagram hashtag #whyldidntreport. The reporter so often becomes the accused and thus statistics are unreliable. However, business leaders should beware of any reassuring feelings they may have when looking at low to non-existent statistics on bullying and harassment.

Bullying is a systemic issue that requires copious amounts of communication and training, as well as a demonstrably neutral and safe system for those impacted to report it. Putting it bluntly, this is HR responsibility and necessary action must be taken. Research has also shown that teams function best when there is an atmosphere of psychological safety and bullying creates the absolute opposite, so it really is worth addressing. The world is forcing us to pay attention to business problems more urgently than ever before. It cannot just be about making our way through the pandemic. Real change on the issues of dignity, justice and mental health are long overdue and these are urgent problems that are too important to earn only a moment of our attention, regardless of other important issues going on in the world today. Businesses need to keep attending to and identifying bullying and inequality problems, in order to make the changes that will benefit both our people and our businesses. ●



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## NEXT MONTH ISSUE 196



### INTERVIEW

Neil Morrison, Group HR Director - Severn Trent plc

### BUILDING BACK BETTER

There is promise for regeneration, an opportunity to reimagine what work and business operations represent.

### HEALTH & WELLBEING

The disruption caused by the pandemic reaches far beyond the virus. Line managers need to be even more aware of the signs of stress and mental health concerns.

### EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION - THE NEW LANDSCAPE

The EVP must align with newly-formed mindsets and expectations of employees and radiate entirely different messages to the much-coveted talent.

### EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

HR needs to revisit organisational values, to ensure there is a true appreciation of the changing nature of diversity, including real purpose and a focusing on tangible improvement.

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## 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.



MURAD S. MIRZA



RICK KERSHAW



MATT NAPILTONIA

Murad is an innovative thinker and an astute practitioner of areas within and associated with the field of Organisational Development, Talent Management & Business Transformation. He has a rich history of delivering desired results for progressive organisations. His scholastic accomplishments have been affirmed by induction into Beta Gamma Sigma.

Rick Kershaw is the Chief People Officer at employee analytics and people management firm, Peakon. Rick has more than 20 years of HR experience at businesses such as Pepsi, Mitsubishi and Expedia Group. He now heads up Peakon's People team and is passionate about supporting talented people to do their best work.

Matt Napiltonia is a former pilot and Senior Manager in Global Rescue's US-based Operations Center. He was a Platoon Leader and Medical Services Officer in the 101st Airborne Division and a US Navy SEAL. Mr. Napiltonia is a graduate of Middlebury College. He earned his Juris Doctorate from the University of Florida College of Law.



### FIVE FOCUSES FOR DIFFERENT STAGES OF A MEANINGFUL PROFESSIONAL CAREER

The Digital Age is impacting conventional careers in a number of demanding ways and one of the most significant in the respective context is the fragility of seemingly-secure professions that are facing marginalisation/obsolescence as organisations gravitate towards the lure of efficiency-focused gains provided by AI-driven solutions. Consequently, today's multi-generational workforce is facing existential challenges that are more pronounced and transformative than for earlier professionals.



### COULD THIS PANDEMIC HOLD A SMALL SILVER LINING FOR EMPLOYEES?

In March this year, the COVID-19 pandemic turned the world of work upside down. As our typical schedules fell to dust, employees globally looked to their organisations for support, reassurance and information. But what were they met with? According to the reports that followed, some employers were quick to adopt new ways of working and to introduce measures to support staff, while others struggled to adapt. What are we now seeing? Join Rick for an explorative article that shines a telling light into the cracks and crevices in the deep recesses of organisations.



### FLYING? BREATHE EASY

As more people return to the airways, questions are being raised about the risk of COVID-19 infection from flying in an enclosed aircraft with a cabin full of strangers. In-flight air filtration is fast and effective against bacteria and viruses, including COVID-19. A new study revealed the chances of becoming infected with COVID-19 while wearing a mask and flying on a modern, commercial airline is about the same as being struck by lightning, about one chance in half-a-million. Indeed, the statistics speak for themselves, but that will not stop people from worrying, because of the constant barrage of pandemic related stories.



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