

HRD

The only independent strategic HR publication

the **HRDIRECTOR**

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SPECIAL REPORTS

EMBRACING UNKNOWING
IS NOT THE SAME AS
CELEBRATING IGNORANCE.
PLUS, CHANGEMAKERS
CAN LEARN FROM THE
IMAGINAL CELLS OF
CATERPILLARS

HELEN WEBB, CHIEF PEOPLE & SERVICES OFFICER - THE CO-OP

{ THE ESSENTIALS }

“WE HAVE AN UNBREAKABLE THREAD BETWEEN OUR
CORE FOUNDATIONS AND FUTURE VISION”

ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

DEVELOPING TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Reskilling is critical now skills have just a two year shelf-life, impacting 50 percent of employees by 2025

SUCCESSION PLANNING

The new model, emphasises leaders at all levels, not the heroic individual senior or the slick central initiative

HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

We still need a mix of exceptional “people people” and laser-sharp analytical thinkers, to track tangible insights

HR & DATA SCIENCE

The C-suite now demands, data through a relevant lens rather than blithely following data-lite assumptions

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ON THE COVER

In this issue, we interview Helen Webb, Chief People & Services Officer - The Co-op. When scandal at the top of leadership exploded back in 2013, it sent the company reeling. But a determined return to its founding ethics, redefined its place in the most competitive of markets. During the pandemic the Co-op has maintained a reassuring presence has exemplified the spirit that we have all witnessed from people on the frontline.



Helen Webb shot exclusively for **THE HRDIRECTOR**
Cover & Interview photography by Stuart Thomas

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EDITOR'S WELCOME

Welcome to **theHRDIRECTOR** - the only independent publication dedicated to Senior People Leaders.



For generations, developing skills and knowledge was narrowly focused on specific job competency, supported by workforce frameworks, which kept people in their fields of expertise, often pigeon-holing them for life.

Company mindsets cemented and union rigidities gave rise to the phrase "more than my job's worth" when related to an employee being asked to take on the role of a colleague in another department. This model, however rigid, was at least predictable, but computerisation changed everything. Suddenly, skills and capability that took years to accrue, could be made redundant overnight. Today, in a mercurial world, change is fast and constant and the onus is not responding to change, but anticipating it... or, better still, causing it.

Quality of leadership will define this crisis, good and bad stewardship and how people were treated and supported, will linger long in the memory. The future of leadership is no longer predicated on length of tenure or technical prowess, it now patently is the capacity to be authentic, empathetic, capable of taking criticism and supportive of diversity. Vulnerability is no longer a weakness, it is a critical strength that courts opinion and embraces guidance and support from all quarters.

Businesses were already grappling with unprecedented change and rationalisation and then the COVID-19 demolition ball swung through. Now, it's a new time and a new world that is full of paradoxes. Corporates are struggling with seemingly conflicting objectives of propagating start-up cultures, with the old markers and stalwarts of corporate dominance such as, mass, market share and shareholder profit. It's little wonder the cultural DNA in many businesses is a swirling, confused helix. Change is an irresistible force, constantly re-shaping HCM, as it counters; technology

disruption, changing workforce composition, a re-assessment of performance appraisal and a necessity for agile organisational design.

The new working normal looks set to be remote - moving gradually to a hybrid workforce - and so qualitative data and scientific interrogation will be even more central to workforce planning and business decision making. Using data science, the possibilities and advantages for HR and business are unquestionable, but it's important to ascertain from the outset; what is the business case for requiring data science in the first place? What do you want to discover, what is critical and how will it be used? This applies right across the HR piece from wellbeing, engagement and retention, to recruitment, talent analytics and workforce planning.

JASON SPILLER - EDITOR
EDITOR@THEHRDIRECTOR.COM



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CONTACTS

Founder & Managing Director
Peter Banks

EDITORIAL

Jason Spiller
editor@thehrdirector.com

ADVERTISING

01454 292 063

Tracy Campbell
tracy@thehrdirector.com

ADMINISTRATION

Sonja Grimes
sonja@thehrdirector.com

DIGITAL MEDIA

Hady Elsayed
online@thehrdirector.com

GRAPHIC DESIGN

www.8foot3.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHY

www.stuthomas.com

For more information please call us on

01454 292 060

EDITORIAL PANELLISTS

Ravi Chand

Chief People Officer,
Department for International Development (DfID)

Gemma Dale

HR Consultant

Harvey Francis

Executive Vice President
Skanska UK Plc

Dr Anthony Hesketh

Department of Management Learning & Leadership
Lancaster University Management School

Makbool Javaid

Partner
Simons Muirhead & Burton

Michael Kerr

Former VP & Chief Officer
Aston Martin Lagonda

Brian Newman

Vice President Human Resources
Live Nation Entertainment

Jo Mosley

HR Director
Salvation Army

Hayley Tatum

Chief People Officer
Asda

Graham White

Former NHS Director of HR

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LEGAL UPDATES

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



1 In the case of *Ms K Moth v The Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall*, Barnstaple-based Detective Constable Kerry Moth, who has fibromyalgia - was told by her boss that she would earn the respect of her colleagues if she tried to lose some weight, that she needed to "take more responsibility over her diet" and that "she might feel better if she stopped drinking gallons of Coke". The tribunal heard that in February 2019 Professor John Harrison from the force's Occupational Health department delivered a report on how the illness affected DC Moth's ability to do her job. He explained that Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition that requires people to learn to live with the condition and modify their lifestyle. However, he added that she was not fit to undergo a fitness test and therefore could not undergo officer safety training. After further issues arose over how DC Moth would be able to carry on her work, it was eventually decided there should be an 'unsatisfactory performance procedure' meeting. Employment Judge Alastair Smail concluded that Ms Moth was "harassed" by Marvelly's comments about her weight and diet. He said the force had "failed to make reasonable adjustments to attendance management targets to take into account [DC Moth's] disability". He added that it had also breached the Equality Act by subjecting Ms Moth to unfavourable treatment related to fitness training.

2 In the case of *Mallon v AECOM Ltd* an appeal was allowed against the ET's decision striking out the Claimant's claim of disability discrimination on the ground that it had no reasonable prospect of success. The Claimant, who has dyspraxia, brought a claim against the Respondent of disability discrimination for failure to make reasonable adjustments to its job application process. The Claimant, a litigant in person, contended that the Respondent applied a provision, criterion or practice (PCP) by requiring submission of an online application form, which put him at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with a person who is not disabled. The ET considered that it was plain and obvious that the Claimant would be unable to maintain that there was a PCP, of an online form, applied by the Respondent that placed him at a substantial disadvantage, and it struck out the claim. The Claimant appealed. The EAT held that the ET had erred in striking out the claim since, on the material that was before the ET and on the basis of the arguments advanced and the ET's analysis of them, it could not properly be said that the claim had no reasonable prospect of success. Further, the EAT stated that the ET did not consider the possibility that this should be analysed as a third requirement (auxiliary aid) case; this claim was only considered as a first requirement (PCP) case. Accordingly, the matter would be remitted to a fresh ET for reconsideration.

3 Uber is to guarantee its 70,000 UK drivers a minimum hourly wage, holiday pay and pensions after a landmark supreme court ruling. The ride-hailing app said drivers would start benefiting from the changes imminently, as it accepted they were classed as workers in line with the ruling. Uber, like many delivery companies, has argued that its drivers are independent self-employed "partners" not entitled to basic rights enjoyed by workers, which include the legally enforceable minimum hourly wage and workplace pension.

To see full updates, movers & shakers and much more, please visit our website www.thehrdirector.com

MOVERS & SHAKERS

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

SOPHIE WILLIS

Director of People - Eville & Jones

Eville & Jones, Europe's largest independent provider of official veterinary inspection services for meat production premises, has appointed experienced HR and change management authority, Sophie Willis, as Director of People. Sophie will develop and lead an ambitious range of employee engagement schemes and personal development programmes including; enriched L&D, PM, R&R.

DOROTA PIOTROWSKA

VP of People and Organisation Development - HCM Deck

Dorota Piotrowska joins the executive team of HCM Deck as VP of People and Organisation Development. Previously Head of People at Netguru, throughout her career, Dorota has helped enterprises, start-ups and scale-ups grow and professionalise their people experience function. She has been working as HR Manager and HR Director for over 15 years, in both global enterprises and smaller companies including hyper-growth, tech scale-ups.

GEOFF CAWLEY

Head of HR Operations - HS2

Geoff Cawley has been appointed to the position of Head of HR Operations, reporting into Neil Hayward, HR Director at HS2 and will be a part of the senior leadership team. Geoff is a highly qualified and experienced HR professional, having held a number of senior roles with companies including; Arup, AstraZeneca and the Royal Bank of Scotland. His role will see him taking on overall responsibility for HR Shared Services.

SMITHA RAO

HR Director - HireRight (EMEA and Asia-Pacific)

HireRight, has appointed Smitha Rao as its HR Director for EMEA and Asia-Pacific. At this important and challenging time, Smitha will be responsible for supporting the company's human resource talent and teamwork agenda, while managing the workforce across its EMEA and Asia-Pacific offices.

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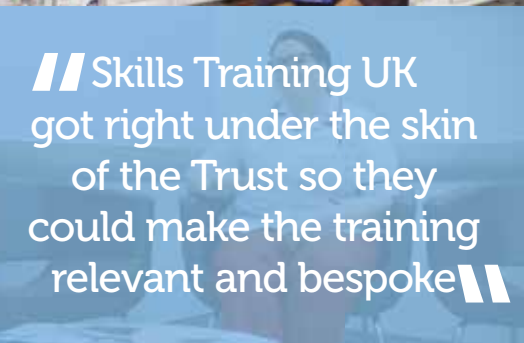
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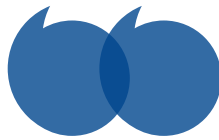
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THE ESSENTIALS

When scandal at the top of Co-op's leadership exploded in the tabloids back in 2013, it sent the company reeling, but a determined return to its founding ethics and values, redefined its place in the most competitive of markets. During the pandemic the Co-op has maintained a reassuring presence in neighbourhoods and has exemplified the spirit that we have all witnessed and relied upon from people on the frontline.



HELEN WEBB

CHIEF PEOPLE & SERVICES OFFICER - THE CO-OP

INTERVIEWED BY JASON SPILLER & PHOTOGRAPHED BY STUART THOMAS

Helen, take us back to your early life and what inspired you to pursue a career in HR? I don't think there was a point where I thought: "I'd love to be an HR Director!" In fact, all early aspirations were focused on becoming a journalist. I studied politics at university and in between lectures, managed to find my way into a sort of internship at a local newspaper. But I found journalism to be quite a lonely existence, which was at odds with my extrovert character and, being a real "people person", I quickly decided that it was not for me. I graduated with no definite plans and joined a graduate scheme with Morrisons - which I have to say proved to be a great decision - albeit by luck - because it opened up a really vibrant world of career choice and great training. I joined just as the company was setting its sights on expansion, in order to take some market share from its much bigger competitors. By contrast to "the big four", Morrisons was a small northern company with just 35 stores, but the plans were for rapid growth and, as I was in general management, I regularly found myself seconded to opening new stores. On one occasion, the personnel officer called in sick and I was kind of thrown in at the deep end, because we had just started with a big recruitment drive, onboarding and training programmes. I felt totally comfortable with the role, thoroughly enjoyed it and later, the Head of Personnel at HQ called to thank me for a job well done and suggested that I apply to join the personnel team at the Bradford HQ. I jumped at the chance and it proved to be the best career decision. Tons of enthusiasm almost made up for next to no experience and I learnt as I went. I was also studying for my IPM training - now CIPD, of course - and, as the business expanded, so did my horizons.

Supermarkets were way ahead of other sectors in the importance and sophistication of HR, it seems. Well, when you consider that some stores have a working population the size of a small town and customer satisfaction is reliant on people being in place, 24/seven, with the right skills and knowledge, nothing can be left to chance. Also, early on, the sector was great

at offering people a variety of career paths, rather than pigeon-holing them. In fact, it's always baffled me that retail has suffered a reputation as a dead-end job, because an always-on, customer-facing environment is a full-on responsibility, where you have to be on your game. Even junior colleagues are accountable and can quickly go on to lead small teams and even move onto being department manager. I was - with limited experience - developing policies for tens of thousands of people, so if you're interested and prepared to put in the hard graft, there is no better sector for L&D on the go. I spent seven years with Morrisons and absolutely loved it. I then had my first child and, while there was rudimentary support in place at Morrisons at the time, as I wanted to combine continuing my career and parenting, it simply didn't work for me. However, I was very lucky to be approached by ASDA, just at the start of the era of Allan Leighton and Archie Norman turning the business around. The first and most important aspect for me as a new mum was that the support was much more comprehensive, accessible and flexible - the difference was amazing! I joined as an HR Adviser and could work as many hours as I needed, around my childcare needs and it was a revelation of how providing really good support can make all the difference to people's lives. But it was when they said they were really keen on my experience and skillset that I realised I had made great progress at Morrisons and so I will always be grateful for that early start. My time at ASDA was a continuation of my personal development, with new experiences coming thick and fast. This was the point when US giant Walmart was acquiring ASDA and I was seconded to Arkansas as HR representative, to be part of the integration team. Our mantra was that our people came first and we were strident in making that point known and so it was a big part of our assessments in the due diligence, making sure that there was a synergy of values and culture. Post-merger, after the dust had settled, Allan and Archie stood down and I decided it was a good time to move on

too. This was when the financial services market was white hot with M&As and, in Yorkshire, if you weren't in retail, the next place to be was financial services and I found myself at Aviva HQ in the role of Head of Employee Relations & Engagement. It was a highly-energised and hectic environment, with Aviva engaged in unprecedented levels of M&A activity. I worked at the new Life business headquarters in York, where I stayed for two years, trying to maintain a semblance of HR in this fast-moving business. If there were any gaps in my practitioner's portfolio before, they were rapidly being filled. I was then asked to move to a post in corporate headquarters in London, to take the lead on a global diversity strategy and this fuelled a passion for equality, which has since been my guiding star in everything I do.

D&I can be, paradoxically, a divisive issue. If the approach you take isn't carefully calibrated, good can be undone. You have to make the case in the strongest terms, you cannot sugarcoat the issues and you have to be brave. If you have to bring it down to commercial terms, to say to a Board; "you will lose customers if they do not believe that you include them" in order to move perceptions and shift mindsets, then so be it. If your organisation only reflects a proportion of the customers you're trying to reach, then they will be the only customers you ever have. Authenticity is also essential because, everywhere - in the brand, on the high street and online - people pick up all of the signals from advertising, customer-facing colleagues, the way the business connects with people, the language that it uses, all of those elements are pulses, constantly radiating out.

These days, outright discrimination is illegal, but as ex-footballer John Barnes said, the racist chants in the terraces may have stopped, but prejudice cannot be heard in hearts and minds. Indeed, it's the drip, drip subconscious feed and discrimination has been driven out of the public forum to a large degree, but that doesn't irradiate it, it just makes it more nuanced, subtle... insidious. Making real and sustainable



change is a long, hard road, but it's a journey that has to be made. It's not a campaign or some carefully calibrated soundbites, it's about living it every day, bringing it to life in every part of your organisation and, nowadays, business systems too. It has to be lived in full in the colleague lifecycle too. It's not just about the big issues such as, who is promoted over whom and why? It's the everyday; "do I feel included in this meeting? Is somebody taking account of me as an individual?" That's what real inclusion is.

up in the stores from HR admin, so that they could focus more on the produce and customer care and less on the hugely absorbing rudiments of hiring & firing and payroll. So, plans began for the huge task of implementing one centralised system and introducing a whole new set of processes for recruitment. Because of the scale, we ended up with two systems, but that was far better than the original 25 and the operation and roll out was a great success. Sainsbury's represents an important part of my career

MOST CHANGE IS ABOUT LEAVING LEGACY TO THE HISTORY BOOKS, BUT WE COULD SEE AN UNBREAKABLE THREAD BETWEEN OUR FUTURE VISION AND THE BASIC CORE FOUNDATIONS THAT WERE LAID DOWN AT THE CO-OP'S FORMATION, THE ETHICS AT THE HEART OF CO-OPERATION

Tell us about the next stage of your career journey.

I worked with Justin King at ASDA and then again with him at M&S, until he moved to be the CEO at Sainsbury's. About a year later, Justin rang me and said: "I think I've got an issue in HR, will you come and help?" I was loving my time at M&S, but it sounded like a really exciting prospect, so I applied, was accepted and started at Sainsbury's as Retail HR Director. I joined what was a very traditional looking personnel administration function, with well over a thousand people in the department and something in the region of 25 HR systems. So, my first priority was to overhaul, streamline and modernise the retail HR function, introducing new systems, technology and staff with the right skills. I then started to look at specific areas in more detail, from an operational perspective and clearly, field management capability was lacking and you cannot achieve any turnaround without the right management and leadership in place. So, to build up the management framework, we looked across the organisation for people with the talent and experience, who had shown loyalty, but perhaps had been overlooked for promotion in the past and brought them through quickly. We analysed the skills gaps and recruited people with the skills we needed and we also looked to bring people in with different perspectives, so we targeted competitor firms such as ASDA, who have great colleague values. We also looked outside the sector and hired from the likes of Disney and Toys R Us and that diversity of thought paid off instantly, from an operational perspective. Then a very important part of the plan was to free people

and in the eight years I was there, I moved on from HR into the central Retail Director's role which was so pivotal to the operation and this cemented my experience set to be incredibly operationally and commercially focused. Then mid-2013, out of the blue, I had a call from a headhunter who said: "There's a role at Co-op which I think you should try for." I laughed and said; "are you serious?" Co-op was in the midst of its banking crisis; however, the headhunter was insistent and, more through intrigue than anything, on a very hot, sunny Friday, I drove across to Cheshire and met the new Retail CEO, Steve Murrells. Over a sandwich and a cup of tea, he completely changed my perception of what this opportunity represented and on the drive home, I decided that if I was offered the role, I'd take it.

What changed your mind? Steve talked of his vision to turn the business around and fundamentally change the culture and values to reflect what the Co-op really represents. The keystone of this was to be inclusion, equality & diversity and Steve wanted to build a team that was very different to him. I challenged him on that and said: "To really succeed in doing this, in turning Co-op's food business around, we're going to have to make some really tough decisions." I joined and we promoted some great people from within the organisation, brought in some new skills and talent and there was this palpable sigh of relief, that an important time in this organisation's history was beginning.

It brings into sharp relief that values and culture aren't just important, they're everything. As is the importance of leadership

and the changing of the top level was like the sun emerging from behind the clouds and suddenly, the future vision looked eminently achievable. These days, most change is about leaving legacy to the history books, but we could see an unbreakable thread between our future vision and the basic core foundations that were laid down at the Co-op's formation, the ethics at the heart of co-operation. Right now, this disruptive time has highlighted the importance of equality, being mindful of vulnerabilities, the importance of sharing knowledge and collective effort and responsibility. Unquestionably, there is a place for that in this time and it is in the DNA of the Co-op, that links the local communities of our customers and members, with the communities that bring product to the shelves. One of my colleagues, Breige Donaghy, has the best job title, Director of Delicious Food and she has been instrumental in finding the winning combinations in product that is quality and convenient. That was the dual mission that propelled Co-op's recovery and quite literally set out its stall.

What would you say are the intrinsic differences that your HR plan has made to the organisation?

First and foremost, our focus was to bring in some real rigor around leadership capability and promotional processes, so that the talent within the organisation could really flourish. That cannot happen in isolation, there are many dimensions to achieving this from; supporting real equality, to the stories that the marketing teams tell about the brand and the organisation behind it. Two important aspects informed on the direction of travel; first was how easily it could all go wrong - as was experienced in the previous leadership - and also that this business is big, but it's not a PLC, it's owned by more than four million members. For me, that is the most important driver and differentiator. You can change the logo and redesign the stores and people will either say they like it or not. But what lies behind brand and façade is far more important. You can tick the boxes for what it means to be an effective purveyor of convenience shopping, but what it means to be a community retailer is more about being really clear about sustainability standards and supporting our local communities through membership... all of those things make such a difference.

At its zenith, could Tesco have ever envisaged that people would go back to shopping like "housewives" in the 1950s? Or that disruptors like ALDI and Lidl would pose such massive questions? Changing times, shifting demographics and consumer habits present a complex model, but a big part of having an

inspirational leadership is that capacity to listen across the business and beyond, never be complacent and always assume that change is a constant inevitability.

What has been the priorities of the HR strategy and in managing through the pandemic and staying operational what are the important issues that have been raised? You have to balance the corporate mindset strategy with mindfulness and think about the challenges of individual people and how you can best support them. We have many colleagues who are parents and have been struggling with home schooling and that's not a scenario that any business will have had broad policies for. So, these real-life issues pose important questions about rigid work conventions and

CHANGING TIMES, SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS AND CONSUMER HABITS PRESENT A COMPLEX MODEL, BUT A BIG PART OF HAVING AN INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP IS THAT CAPACITY TO LISTEN ACROSS THE BUSINESS AND BEYOND, NEVER BE COMPLACENT AND ALWAYS ASSUME THAT CHANGE IS A CONSTANT INEVITABILITY

the employee experience has been part of a journey. When we started, rates of pay weren't in the right place, learning & development was hit-and-miss, there was a lack of clarity around leadership standards and there was no HR system. It was, to all intents and purposes, a blank sheet of paper. But above all of the work that we have carried out, it was the connection from our leadership to our 62,000 colleagues and our customers that was imperative. From the beginning, we had all of our colleagues in mind when we were founding our new leadership behaviours and the values that guide the business. The pandemic has, of course, raised the importance of wellbeing even more and the measures that we've been piloting for the past couple of years, are now being presented as Co-op Care, directing people to the support they might need, whether that be; mental health support, colleagues providing care for loved ones or parents struggling with home-schooling. Recognising that such a broad range of people require an equally wide range of options makes the difference between saying and doing wellbeing. We're looking beyond our organisation too, for example, younger people - particularly students in and leaving education - have been so badly impacted by the pandemic and we're planning to help this hard hit cohort into work. We currently have a thousand apprentices in our organisation and it's disappointing that apprenticeship numbers are down in the UK now, for a variety of different reasons, but

we're currently exploring a number of ways in which we can use our levy to support small businesses, including startups run by BAME individuals. We've already seen the Kickstart scheme come out and we're certainly part of that and encouragingly, lots of organisations have signed up to it. But I think businesses must work more with Government to address this problem, before it really becomes a big crisis. We are creating a levy matching service, where levy paying employers can donate up to 25 percent of their levy to support apprenticeships in under-represented areas. We've been very clear about what our people priorities are and even clearer about what inclusion means to us. The messages that radiate out from the business are authentic, consistent and have clarity of purpose.

What has been your main learning during this challenging time? There's a long list, but perhaps at the top of it is the necessity for co-operatives and co-operation and we represent that across all of our businesses. We talk about the Co-op movement, because it's our main guiding principle and we believe that it really matters, especially in tough times. We donate over £15 million a year to local communities and we also give our time and one of our current initiatives is to involve more young people in that conversation, about how they can become involved in volunteering in community projects. We have supported Marcus Rashford in his campaign for free school meals and we support the Co-op Academies Trust and across 27 schools, we have already committed to providing free school meals. Last, but by no means least, I would like to thank all of our front-line colleagues who have kept our business going and maintained a high level of safety for our customers. We have been very vocal and in making our environments safe and bringing to the Government's attention to what has been needed by essential shops. We've taken a strong stance throughout this crisis and have continued to provide services and support to our customers and communities. It has been a tough time, but I really believe that we will emerge in the post pandemic, even stronger.

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HRD

WE INTERRUPT THIS PROGRAMME...

ARTICLE BY PHILIPPA HARDMAN & CHRIS NICHOLS, FOUNDING PARTNERS - GAMESHIFT

Most of us will have a strong sense that there are a lot of powerful and important shifts going on in the world, ones that are filled with threats, but also opportunities. This is the stuff of the 'horizon scanning' that business planners and strategy gurus want us all to focus on. They're right, it's worth taking a look at just some changes that are - or should be - on the agenda.

The current and all-pervading virus pandemic is the most visible of these factors right now. But coronavirus is just the latest manifestation of failure in a complex inter-connected tangle of systems in crisis. It may be the most immediate difficulty we all have to deal with, but it will not be the last and it isn't separate from many of the other huge challenges that are looming on our shared horizons. Given that it's obvious that everyone needs to become better at working with the unknown in a world of perpetual disruption, won't this change 'just happen'? Well, maybe and maybe not. There's a lot of imposed change just waiting to spring back into deep patterns (the world can't afford that) and there is a lot of inertia coiled and waiting to preserve those patterns. Inertia must not be allowed to win the day.

Organisations can become stuck, sooner than they think. They have structures, identities, processes, ways of being, ways of doing and ways of learning. These give rise to how the people within them see, hear and experience the world - not the world as it is - but as how these ways allow them to see. They give rise to how people develop positions about all kinds of things, including; strategies, campaigns, initiatives, stakeholder relationships, products, brands, systems, profit margins, organisational

identity, culture, go-to markets and must-win battles. Organisations become big, powerful and successful. They become known for being great at this or for having an unrivalled capacity for that. People want to join them. People in the organisation pour their energy into supporting and reinforcing these things. They fit in, are promoted, earn more money and acquire fancy titles. All of this can work brilliantly, right up to the moment when the world becomes critically different to the world as it was. At this point, which occurs before anyone thinks there is any kind of crisis, the organisation needs to see those changes and respond. There is a moment - we call it a 'knife edge' - where all the great components of past success become threats to future flourishing. They start to entice the leader, the team and the whole organisation into not seeing, into not changing.

The very richest one percent now own over 50 percent of the world's wealth and the gap between rich and poor is growing. An economic model that drives such inequality may turn out to have limited political support. What does this mean for the type of companies we have? Where are they based, how do they structure themselves and how do they trade and pay their taxes? All of these questions are looming in boardrooms around the world and they

are a long way from being resolved. It is an intriguing thought that, with the rise of nationalist governments - many of whom seem determined to ignore international political bodies and to be unconcerned with transnational issues like climate change, multi-national companies (and NGOs) - may end up as the only organisations with a combination of real power and a genuinely global perspective. These companies will be forced to take action on the big issues because, despite complaints about corporate short-termism, they have a longer view than that of ratings-chasing, populist politicians. Climate catastrophe would be disastrous for business - and for everything else.

The challenges are huge - and this is only a sample of the issues facing us in the future. We prefer to see them as huge opportunities - but almost no-one in any organisation that we know is really on top of this. Don't they care? We know people who do, passionately. But their organisations get in the way. Why? One argument used by those unwilling to deal with these issues is that they are simply 'too difficult'. They are shut away in drawers, often labelled 'VUCA'. The VUCA label has a lot of criticism, often being seen as a bit of a fad. That may be right. But it does remind us to take a close look at some things that do really matter. We are particularly concerned with two of the four VUCA factors, uncertainty and complexity. Uncertainty is nothing new, everything in the world lies on a continuum between the known and the unknown and always has. However, there is a lot of pressure in organisations to pretend that uncertainty doesn't exist and to create false certainties instead. Investors demand forecasts, the corporate centre calls for detailed plans; the capital allocation process requires estimates of market share and profit margin before a product even exists. It can be very hard to say, "I don't know." Power in organisations plays heavily into this. Many false certainties are created because someone in power requires certainty, or at least the illusion of it. By contrast, uncertainty invites everyone to ask, "how do we know this is the

case?" It invites us all to find out what we do know and to be brutal in our honesty about what we don't know. It invites us to make rigorous exploration of the unknowns. Some things are unknown, but potentially knowable. Other things are more intrinsically unknown; a more rigorous knowledge of them cannot become available with the level of analysis that is available to us. So, we must find better ways of investigating them, rather than falling back on helplessness or false ideas.

*Embracing unknowing
is not the same as
celebrating ignorance
- it's a frank admission
that there are some
things we just don't
know yet*

Positive disruptors embrace unknowing - embracing unknowing is not the same as celebrating ignorance - it's a frank admission that there are some things we just don't know yet. Unknowing provides an anvil against which to break down the hyperbole and the blind-sight of common assumptions and motivates us to be serious about finding out some new things. Complexity describes a state where cause and influence are interconnected and non-linear and thus to some extent, unknown or unpredictable because the pattern, direction and magnitude of the causation is continually in flux. But complexity is often confused with complication and these are not the same at all and confusion over this lies at the heart of much that is awry in organisations. One of the most common ways in which organisations address complex issues is to create complicated structures. But you can't do this - it's the wrong level of analysis. You might have the temporary comfort of thinking that you've

contained the complex situation, but the reality is that you haven't. It's a false security, creating an illusion of imagining you are more certain of something than you really can be. It's a comfort blanket. Nearly all of the challenges and opportunities highlighted here have some of the characteristics of VUCA challenges, but this does not make them impossible. They are invitations to do better work in system-shifting ways. The rewards could be huge. Business and work life is - and will continue to be - deeply affected by the impact of these chaotic times and by the reorganisations and reinventions forced on society. It seems that a reluctant world has just taken a deep dive into a massive digital shift. People who had never used an app are suddenly part of webs of virtual communities; from online Buddhist centres to doctors doing video consultation as a standard offer; from instant global sharing of expertise among clinical teams to open source patents for 3D printed ventilators. Suddenly, everyone seems fully bought in to the digital reinvention of the future.

When the virus crisis is over, will things 'ping' back to conditions as they once were? We think not. Many people have felt the huge relief of a different way of working and will want more of it and will be sceptical about the hyper-mobility of jetting around the world to team up with colleagues face-to-face. We sense there has been a catalytic moment in the realisation of the digital age, but where does it go from here? What will business look like after this immediate crisis passes? That is all to be created and everyone will be involved in the process. The identities of every organisation and the people within them, will have to shift in response to these challenges. Are we ready? The world needs a whole new passion for constant re-learning everywhere and always in organisational life. This is not about telling people what the digital future is - no one knows yet - it is more like Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's notion: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up men to gather wood and give orders ... instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea." In just about every kind of organisational work, it is really important to acknowledge that some things are more certain and

predictable than others. We draw on a simple analogy to help make this thinking clearer. We call it the 'Navigate-Explore' framework. It has two zones: The Navigation zone is when things are relatively stable and familiar, when you're dealing with technical issues (even demanding ones) and your existing experience and expertise is a good guide for action. We call it Navigation, because you already have a good enough 'map' to guide the actions you need to take. Navigation tasks may be lengthy and complicated, but they will feel familiar -

This is not about telling people what the digital future is - no one knows yet - it is more like Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's notion: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up men to gather wood and give orders ... instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea"

the tasks of 'business as usual', project management, resource allocation - all to deliver specified outcomes. The Exploration zone is when things are more unfamiliar, for example when in times of significant change, when you're innovating and when you want different behaviours to achieve new outcomes. These times will all tend to have some elements of being 'beyond the known map'. In this type of activity, your existing experience and expertise may or may not be quite so useful, and may, at times, even be a false friend.

So how can understanding about Navigation and Exploration help disrupt

organisations in positive ways? The main clue to spotting you're in the Navigation zone is very straightforward, it'll be familiar. The navigating world is one where your existing experience and expertise gives you a reliable sense of what is happening and what to expect. You are likely to be entering the Exploration zone whenever people start talking about facing new problems. These can be genuinely totally new (such as the current virus), or new twists on familiar themes, like entering new markets, finding new ways to achieve growth, creating a different way of connecting to customers and meeting their needs. What they have in common is that all these demand that you develop fresh ways to see, act and organise, to achieve a new way of working. In this zone, you are creating maps, not just following them.

It's extremely common when talking about strategy or change to use the metaphor of a journey with a destination: "We're here and we are headed for the sunlit uplands over there..." nobody ever heads for the drizzly lowlands. Our advice is to be very cautious about using 'destination' language at any time where you are uncertain and want others genuinely to join in exploring with you. Think about explorers and expedition leaders of old. They had no maps, but were prepared for their process of exploration. They had the right team, they had the right equipment and they were fit. Focus on all these things in how you position the work to be done. Those explorers also had one other important ingredient, a purpose. Notice that a purpose and a destination are different. Destination assumes you know the outcome, that you can describe the end point. Purpose doesn't do this, it says that the journey itself is important, that the reason for the exploration matters.

This is not a story of certainty. Perhaps another metaphor will help here - the knight on a white charger, who rides to the rescue heroically revealing a glorious plan. "Follow me, I've got the answer!" We saw this at a business school, where a new CEO rode in with a clear plan. In the future the focus would solely be on

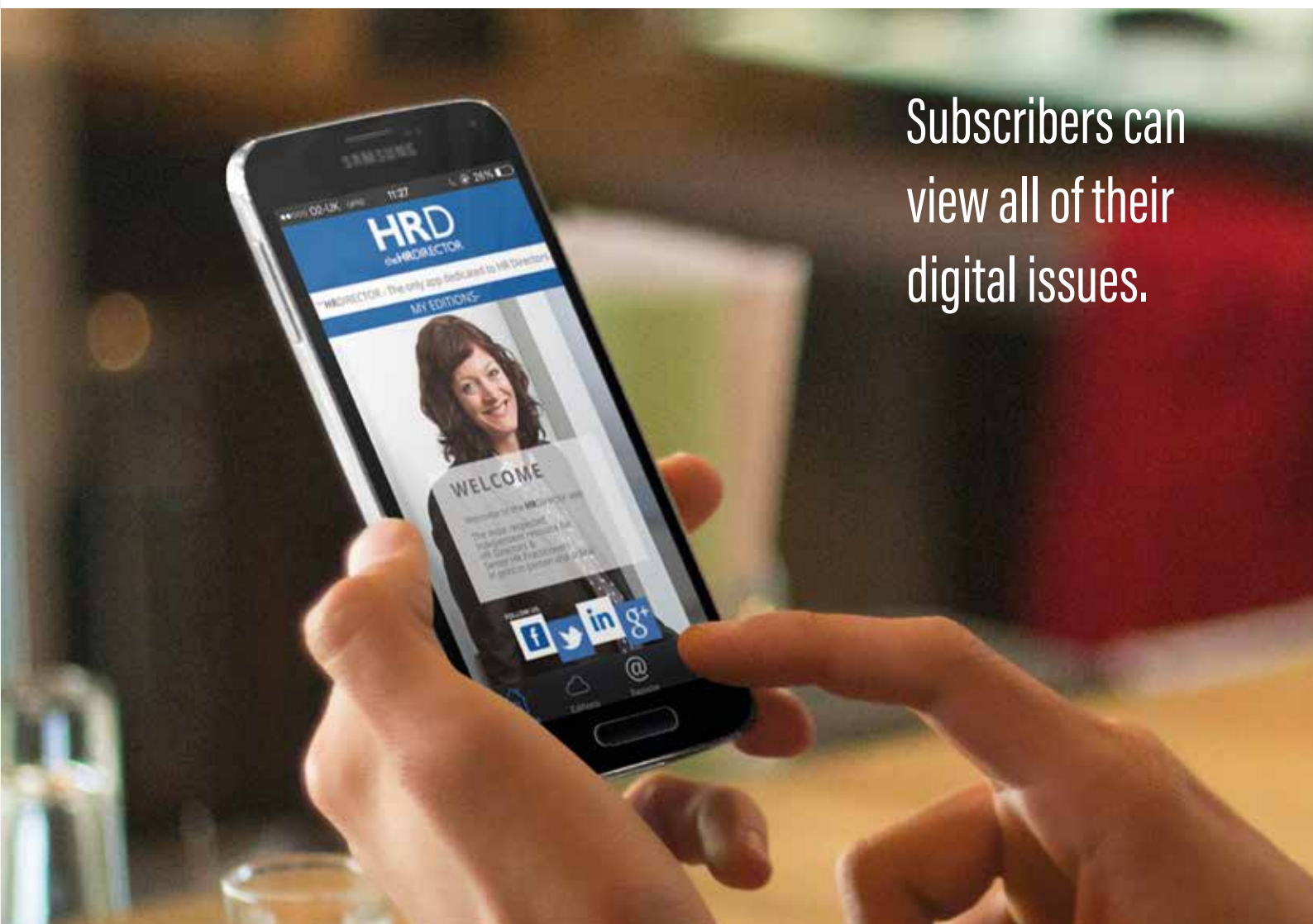
large corporates, with the intention of maximising profit from each of them. Business development was no longer the responsibility of faculty but of large teams whose competencies included 'having the killer instinct'. The role of faculty was to turn up and teach people in their allotted programme. Staff were told: "This is what will make the business successful again". The story was clear, the boundaries extremely well defined. It was then simply a choice whether to follow the knight or not. By comparison, explorers invite people to join in the creation of the map, sharing with them the possibilities for the future. Explorers tell a story about their purpose and about the potential that lies over the horizon. The story invites others to come with them. Crafting and telling such a story is probably the most vital skill. ●

This article is an edited extract from *Disrupted! How to create the Future when the Old Rules are Broken*, by Philippa Hardman and Chris Nichols.



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THE CATERPILLAR EFFECT

ARTICLE BY AIDAN MCCULLEN, AUTHOR & HOST OF THE INNOVATION SHOW PODCAST
& WORKSHOP FACILITATOR - EDGE BEHAVIOUR

HR professionals, L&D leaders, corporate innovators or change agents of any kind, understand that the hardest thing about change is human resistance to change. Everyone wants “change”, but nobody wants “to change”. As a result, it becomes easier to implement the mechanics of change - the processes, procedures and protocols - than to instigate the “humanics” of change, the restructuring of departments, the recalibration of roles and the rewiring of mindsets.

Change work is emotionally draining, challenges your mental health and requires resilience and perseverance to succeed. But employee resistance is a milestone not a millstone and it is very helpful to understand that such resistance to change is perfectly natural. This understanding helps us realise that seventy-five percent of change programmes fail for the same reason that eighty percent of new year’s resolutions fail; you cannot change what people do until we change how people think. In my opinion, you cannot change business models until you first change mental models. In any transformational experience, resistance is natural. We can anticipate pushback, but if we don’t experience it, well then, maybe we are not pushing the boundaries quite far enough. While it is a real struggle when we are in the midst of experiencing such resistance, we can reframe resistance as a necessary step. This step in the change process generates a great energy from the tension of opposites, from the old and the new. When two counterforces meet they create energy, the counterforces transfer energy between them. When you consider resistance in this manner, you can see that it is not only a natural part of any transformation process, but that it produces a necessary energy that powers change.

According to the Swiss physicist Heinrich Rohrer: “Science means constantly walking a tightrope between blind faith and curiosity; between expertise and creativity; between bias and openness; between experience and epiphany; between ambition and passion; and between arrogance and conviction - in short, between an old today and a new tomorrow.” Rohrer’s quote encapsulates this tension of opposites. While Rohrer was referring to science, this tension exists in every aspect of life; life and death, spring and summer, male and female, new and old. Rohrer’s tightrope provides a useful metaphor for transformational energy. Imagine a tightrope between two buildings, if the rope was slack, you would not want to walk across it. We need tension between the opposing ends of the tightrope to make it effective. When we embark on any change initiative, we walk such a tightrope; on one side is the status quo or stasis, on the other is change and evolution. A useful way to visualise the tension of opposites is that of a bow and arrow. When the string of the bow is taut, it provides adequate tension to propel the arrow. Without such a tension the arrow will not travel very far, it will only flop forward. An understanding of this natural tension is useful because we can anticipate

resistance and then harness the resulting energy, to thrust a new vision into reality. In transformation, we require this tension between old and new, certain and uncertain, order and chaos. Transformation lives at the intersection of these tensions.

Resistance to change is present in every aspect of life from the largest organisation to the smallest organism. One such organism is the well-known symbol of great transformation, the butterfly. When you dive deeper into the sacrifices made by the caterpillar to become the butterfly it reveals some truths about organisational transformation. As Nobel laureate, author and poet; Maya Angelou put it, "We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty." In the same manner, when it comes to organisational change, we delight in the end product of a change initiative, but we rarely recognise the great sacrifice it took to achieve progress. Let's look closer at this transformation and the parallels it provides for organisational and personal change.

After hatching, a caterpillar often eats its own shell to power future transformation. This using of the former self to fuel the future is an interesting phenomena to observe. Caterpillars outgrow their exoskeleton several times as they mature, before something deep within them signals that it is time for a bigger change. This signal starts with a deep impulse, an inkling at a cellular level. The cells that initiate the change are called imaginal discs. Imaginal discs begin life as single-celled organisms and remain dormant until they suddenly awaken when it is time for metamorphosis. The word metamorphosis comes from the Greek (metamórphōsis), from (metá) "change" + (morph) "form", a change of form. Imaginal cells are so foreign to the cells of the caterpillar, that the caterpillar's immune system attacks them as invaders. Despite being rejected by the organism, imaginal cells persevere, multiplying within the caterpillar. These new cells all resonate at the same frequency, eventually communicating

and coordinating to overwhelm the caterpillar's immune system. The caterpillar is induced to find a twig and harden its skin, which will act as a cocoon. This is when a caterpillar becomes a chrysalis. Then, the caterpillar goes through a beautiful transformation, by dissolving into a nutritious liquid that fuels the metamorphosis into a butterfly. Just as the caterpillar used its eggshell as fuel, the butterfly now uses the caterpillar to fuel its future. For the new being to emerge, it does not destroy the old, but rather builds upon what was already there. The old plays a noble role to enable the new.

Changemakers can learn from the imaginal cells of the caterpillar. If they create an army of imaginal cells, an army which resonates at a different frequency, an army of the willing, they can attract those who resonate at the same frequency as them

In personal and organisational transformation, we often forget that becoming something new involves letting go of something old. That may sound easy, but it can mean letting go of an outdated business model, or it may mean a change in status and compensation for the people in your organisation. None of these changes are easy. By its very nature the status quo does not give up without a fight, much like the cells of the caterpillar resisting the imaginal cells. This battle, this tension is the hallmark of transformational change. Incremental change is a cakewalk in comparison, like the caterpillar growing larger as it eats. Incremental change is characterised by

minor improvements such as a new digital strategy or implementing a new IT system. Transformation involves psychological warfare between the existing and the emergent. In your organisations, you will have witnessed the tension between those who seek change and those who resist it. Often, you keep a watchful eye on this tension, but more for behaviours by the individuals, rather than zooming out to consider the bigger picture. Are these tensions individual battles or do they reflect rumbles of evolutionary warfare? I am sure you have heard some of your change-maker colleagues criticise their legacy organisations and label other colleagues as blockers of progress, who are 'stuck in their ways'. While it is understandable that those who drive change become frustrated with those who resist it, we must recognise that it is the legacy organisation that fuels the emergent one. Apart from funding, we may eventually need any mix of logistics, marketing, institutional knowledge, personnel and other supports from the old, to fuel the new.

Just as imaginal cells are different from the caterpillar's cells, changemakers within large organisations have different mindsets. Corporate innovators think differently, have a greater risk tolerance and see opportunities and threats, where others may not. If you are an innovator, interactions with those in positions of power from the legacy organisation, are draining and feel like a battle. Well, that's because it is a battle and one that changemakers will lose, unless they gain support from other imaginal cells within the corporate body. However, we must realise that, in their defence, the custodians of the status quo are also playing their role, as corporate antibodies. To them, the changemaker represents a threat; foreign DNA is perceived as an attack on the existing entity and triggers an immune response. When a changemaker reaches this point, they should reframe it as a mark of progress. If they do not reach this point of resistance, it might be a sign that they are not pushing the boundaries far enough. Thereby, they reframe such resistance as milestones and not millstones. This is where changemakers

can learn from the imaginal cells of the caterpillar. If they create an army of imaginal cells, an army which resonates at a different frequency, an army of the willing, they can then attract those who resonate at the same frequency as them.

Deep down, we feel the need to change - an inkling deep within us. Alas, very few of us listen for the impulse, instead, we drown it out with 'busyness', alcohol or Netflix binges

Organisations who expect change to happen after a corporate retreat with some flip charts and Post-it notes are confusing real change with cosmetic change. Such initiatives are like a splash, while transformation creates a ripple that spreads and persists over time. Creating a ripple is a slower and much more frustrating process, especially for the changemaker, but it is the only way to create a lasting transformation. In time, habits will change and so too will mindsets. Eventually, enough cells will fuse to overpower the legacy organisation and you will experience a metamorphosis. HR leaders know this is the only way for change to “stick”, slow and sustained over time. It is natural for organisational change to take so much time, because personal change needs to also occur. Personal change is slow and often painful. When we encounter transformation at a personal level, we undergo a process similar to the caterpillar and the organisation. Deep down, we feel the need to change - an inkling deep within us. Alas, very few of us listen for the impulse, instead, we drown it out with ‘busyness’, alcohol or Netflix binges. Often unknowingly, we battle change, just like the caterpillar’s

immune system battles the imaginal cells. This is a perfectly natural part of the change process. The bigger the change, the greater the resistance. Even in the face of a devastating crisis, we still resist change.

For organisations, crisis may come in the form of a declining industry, a disruptive competitor or a recession resulting from a pandemic. For individuals, it might be a redundancy, the death of a loved one or an unexpected health issue. Whatever the case, when such crises arrive, many of us cannot or will not adapt. “If you look at people after coronary-artery bypass grafting two years later, 90 percent of them have not changed their lifestyle”. (Edward Miller, former CEO of Johns Hopkins Medicine). Cardiovascular disease accounts for almost 50,000 of the 150,000 daily deaths worldwide. Despite such a high death rate, considerable research shows that ninety percent of cardiovascular-related patients will not make the lifestyle changes required to reduce the chances of another event. Even when faced with such life-or-death situations, only ten percent can adapt. When confronted with such figures, is it any wonder that seventy-five percent of organisational transformation efforts fail? Organisations are but a mass of people and, if we resist such vital change in our personal lives, is it any surprise that we resist change in our work lives? Peter Medawar is regarded as the ‘father of transplantation’. His work on graft rejection and immune tolerance is fundamental to the medical practice of tissue and organ transplants. Amidst all his work on our physiological immune responses, it is Medawar’s remark about the human mind that speaks volumes. He said: “The human mind treats a new idea the same way the body treats a strange protein; it rejects it.” In the same way, personal and organisational change encounter constant resistance and rejection.

So how can a HR Leader help? Understand the difference between incremental improvements and transformational change. Treat them differently and measure progress accordingly. When you encounter resistance, understand where the

resistance is coming from. Create a set of questions to consider: Is resistance due to a threat to status? Is potential change a threat to compensation? Are those who are resisting, hiding a lack of knowledge or strategy? Find the “imaginal cells” within your organisation, you can identify them as the people who are writing articles, starting projects, gathering groups and pushing boundaries. They may be labelled as troublemakers, they may be called naysayers, but realise the difference between naysayer and gainsayer. A gainsayer is spotting threats and suggests solutions, a naysayer shuts down solutions. When you identify your imaginal cells, bring them together, listen to them, empower them and protect them. Brainstorm with your imaginal cells; what needs to happen for transformation to begin? Realise that the way you change organisations is to change how the people in the organisations think. This is why training and access to new information is vital, because new information feeds new thoughts, new thoughts power imagination and imagination powers new realities. ●

This article is from edited extracts from the book *Undisruptable: A Mindset of Permanent Reinvention for Organisations, Individuals and Life*. Author, Aidan McCullen (Published by Wiley 2021).



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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.¹ 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
Email us at workandcancer@macmillan.org.uk
Or call us on 020 7840 4725

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT
RIGHT THERE WITH YOU

¹ 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).

DEVELOPING
TRANSFERABLE
SKILLS

TAKE A CHANCE ON ME

With great risk, they say, often comes great reward. Yet many business leaders have traditionally shied away from applying this to the workforce, instead looking to candidates that tick boxes. We now face one of the most challenging job markets, in which transferrable skills will be the most vital currency for individuals and business competitiveness and it is time to shift thinking away from merely plugging skills gaps, in these fast moving times.



ARTICLE BY BY AL SMITH, CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER - ICIMS

We need to broaden our definitions of education and experience and take a deeper look at potential. There are plenty of examples of business leaders - Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, to name a few - that built wildly successful companies. There could be hidden gems in our talent pools and our workforces, if only we looked a little deeper. Finding the right talent begins with pinpointing the skills needed to address business priorities and challenges. Not surprisingly, most businesses have coveted tech skills for some time in this technological evolution, but the last year was a catalyst, in which four out of five organisations expanded or accelerated digital transformation plans, due to the impact of COVID-19. In fact, according to McKinsey, the pandemic accelerated internal digital operations by three-to-four years and the share of digital products in their portfolios


nearly twice that. This momentum has created additional demand for tech talent, a space already facing labour shortages, to the extent that it is now taking, on average, 61 days to fill an in-demand tech role. Most firms are struggling with this time and effort and they need to leverage all of the tools at their disposal to find these essential skills consistently and quickly.

There is a huge opportunity to leverage AI to recognise transferrable skills and potential in existing talent, as well as proactively solving talent gaps down the line. AI tools enable hiring teams to define the best candidate and then look at all available talent, internally and externally, to find that person. When used correctly, this technology can help remove unintentional bias and help to uncover talent that may have not been previously considered, due to non-traditional backgrounds, experience, education


and more. Recruiting is no longer a stop-and-go process, it is a constant, dynamic cycle and technology must be able to support this always-on talent acquisition approach, or run the risk of business operations going awry, due to unfilled positions. With AI-informed technology like candidate matching, a pipeline will always be at the ready, helping recruiters more efficiently scan existing workforce and talent pools, to surface best-fit talent and build winning teams, as and when required. With predictive insights, candidate preferences and job search behaviours can be mapped and then used to create dynamic talent pools, based on specific skillsets, to serve up job recommendations and nurture talent intelligently. Future state AI technology can enable the search for talent in the pipeline that is based on a high-performing employee skill profile.

While AI is working in the background, technology - like video assessments and interviewing - helps narrow in on character traits like; curiosity, confidence and optimism. As work becomes more decentralised and virtual, video is integral in assessing these qualities, to help build a culture of continuous innovation and success. It is critical that AI supports explainability and is able to reveal the level of bias present, so that it supports goals for diversity and builds a platform for developing transferable skills that are so essential to agility and adapting to change. Time becomes more of a challenge when hire specific skills for short-term roles. In many cases, it makes sense to implement internal realignment strategies to cover staffing deficiencies before making other moves. Project and gig work is, of course, not new, but it has become more prevalent in this new era of work, especially in areas like tech and where the pandemic has created intense demand. A case in point is that 72 percent of HR professionals report that up to half of their department has been internally redeployed. IT workers, in particular, had to rapidly adjust to address the sudden disruption. Indeed, those in IT are significantly more likely than those in banking, finance, healthcare and manufacturing to have over half their workforce internally redeployed. Here lies opportunity in building those all-important transferable skills, whereby shifting talent resources for short-term work provides an opportunity to evaluate existing talent that has expressed interest in a change, or that you've identified as having the potential for a new role. Gigs also provide a foundation for entry-level workers and students to gain their first footing, without having direct experience.

As workforce arrangements change, hiring internally for positions requires a mindset and culture shift, along with technological support to meet internal growth goals. Indeed, the vast majority of employees (94 percent according to LinkedIn) would stay at a company longer, if it invested in their career. Yet, more than 50 percent of respondents from a recent *Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends* survey shared that they believe their employees would have an easier time finding a new job with a new employer, rather than within their current organisation. That is why empowering employees with the right tools makes it easier for them to stay, particularly when there is a hiring mindset that supports internal mobility. Partnering with recruitment technology can create dynamic profiles to help track the different experience an employee racks up during their tenure in an organisation. This is a powerful extension to a traditional résumé and provides a living record of history and the valuable and variable skills accrued from projects and gigs. These profiles can then be easily searched by recruiters and hiring managers when they need to fill an in-demand role. Having a robust internal career site is also critical to supporting diverse skills development, showcasing all available long and short-term positions. Treating existing employees similarly to external candidates - offering, for example, video employee testimonials



TREATING
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THIS MAKES
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BUILDING
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MANY LEVELS



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Does the L&D in your organisation enable people with transferable skills?

25% Yes

75% No

and rich job descriptions - provides them with the means to truly gain a feel for potential openings and opportunities. This makes sense because building a cadre of transferable skills works on many levels.

While women have made great gains in the labour force and the gender gap has closed substantially, the pandemic has seen a setback and there are lessons to be learned from this disruption, with impacts across the demographic. Just as women were the non-traditional candidate in years past, so are the alternatively educated candidates today. With the pandemic and other societal issues at play, there is varied interest in attending university and achieving a four-year degree dependent on geography. Data from the University and College Admissions Service shows a record number of admissions to UK universities, despite warnings that the pandemic would reduce demand. Conversely, the National Student Clearinghouse found that fewer U.S. high school seniors are going to college, with fall 2020 university enrollments at American universities down more than 20 percent. While interest in traditional education is fluctuating, programmes that offer alternative credential opportunities are accelerating. At the onset of the pandemic, traffic surged to these skills-based online types of programmes and it is still above the baseline. While AI is not a silver bullet, it can help find the candidate who has the skills, but may not come from a traditional career path. This is critical to addressing diversity in the workforce, as well as the development of diversity of thought and transferable skills.

Candidates with non-traditional educational backgrounds likely have the same demonstrable aptitudes as those with a traditional degree. Tapping into talent with experience gained from programmes like *Girls Who Code*, STEM and STEAM workshops and other professional development coursework and certificate platforms, have the potential to help us close skills gaps. Several high-profile tech companies are already scrapping educational requirements in favour of these skill-based programmes. Likewise, soft skills have proved essential during these times and considering customer care sectors, such as travel and hospitality, have been so hard hit during the pandemic, there will be a steady stream of very viable candidates coming from those industries, who are great communicators, problem-solvers and have an agile and flexible mindset. There is little doubt that change will continue and so must the way we think about our workforce and their skills. There is a great source of potential talent at our fingertips, but we must shift our thinking, work smarter and tap into the often not-so obvious potential out there. ●

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ONE FLEW OVER THE PIGEONHOLE

Skills are bigger than the job that needs to be done right now and impact on wide ranging decisions from; global footprint to real-estate space, organisation design and entering new markets.

A block to opening up sources of skills is that traditional methodologies, like job analysis and evaluation, are tactics used to build a role for a person to do.

ARTICLE BY ALISON ETTRIDGE, MANAGING DIRECTOR - TALENT INTUITION

Today, conventional and formulaic thinking will disadvantage organisations that need to tap into new, emerging and rapidly changing skills to maintain competitiveness. In the new ecosystem of work, it is unrealistic to rely on outdated models to define work, but in some forms, they persist. Since the 1950s, organisations have used job analysis, job evaluation and job families to define roles. Legacy frameworks are entrenched into major organisations and are manifest in 'copy and paste' job descriptions and 'person specifications', in adverts for open roles. Tapping into skills where and when needed, requires a decoupling of an individual from a job, but that is easier said than done. The answer might not be the simple recruitment of a person, so the questions that invariably follow are, 'is it a skill that you already have elsewhere in-house, or an opportunity for internal mobility or a cross-functional project? Is it a skill best accessed remotely or physically, or a skill best carried out by a permanent employee or procured from a contractor? The final question that is perhaps the most pertinent now is, in what other companies and industries does this skill exist? Building up from a foundation on skills will enable better work design, role design and ultimately organisation design. This change in mindset, to thinking skills-first, is the key to vast untapped pools of talent. It not only enables the breaking down of traditional roles, it unearths an array of transferable skills that simply would not be recognised through the tunnel vision of person specifications.

One of the first challenges to adopting the skills-first mindset is the vast array of information available. The appetite for breaking out of CV-led or job description-led thinking is often tempered, when presented with the enormity of skills data that needs to be sorted through. Data about skills is noisy and it's described differently by individuals and companies all over the world, which makes it difficult to gain a really clear picture of skills and



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the potential of skills transferability. Technology has a role to play in sorting through and making sense of this data and can expand the horizons beyond traditional job-title thinking, by rationalising and visualising the fast-moving and disruptive nature of skills supply and demand. For organisations that are ready to make the change in mindset, there are practical steps that can be taken to evidence a new way of thinking. They include; building an understanding of where skills are coming from and focusing on opening up the talent pool via these sources. Understanding the industries which hold similar skills and targeting these for future skills and finally, bringing diversity data into workforce planning, with an understanding of early years talent and analysing predictions of where talent will flow to.

Old, rigid frameworks risk posing an obstacle to the future. For generations, developing skills and knowledge was narrowly focused on specific job competency, supported by workforce frameworks, which kept people in their fields of expertise, often pigeon-holing them for life. Now, we are striving for businesses to be more agile, more flexible and more resilient. Skills-first thinking is the foundation for this and, as people have become more empowered, new networks have developed and barriers broken down due to the pandemic. Individuals too are looking for more agility and flexibility and many do not want to be corralled into a traditional job role. In a future in which skills will be decoupled from the person doing a job, it's essential that we understand the work that needs to be done and the skills required to carry it out - without bundling it up into a traditional job profile. Movement towards hybrid working is bringing the two streams of people empowerment and corporate strategy into confluence. Skills are global and a 'work-from-anywhere' charter is revolutionising where people and organisations meet, both physically and psychologically, to achieve mutual gains. ●

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A VIEW TO A SKILL

Effectively reskilling and upskilling a workforce to outpace the demands of the post-pandemic world is going to be challenge enough. But by 2025, it is predicted that 50 percent of all employees will need reskilling, as technology adoption increases, according to the World Economic Forum. The research also identified that 94 percent of business leaders now expect employees to pick up new skills on the job, up from 65 percent in 2018.



ARTICLE BY SIMON LYLE, MANAGING DIRECTOR - RANDSTAD RISESMART, UK

Keeping skills throughout the workforce up-to-date, is being billed as mission critical. Amazon raised eyebrows at the announcement that it was devoting \$700 million to reskilling a third of its US workforce by 2025 - only to be trumped by PwC, which announced that it would be spending an eye-watering \$3 billion in upskilling, over the next three to four years. The scale of the retraining challenge is daunting and not all businesses have the budgets of the biggest corps, so how should organisations plan to meet the challenge to re-equip people, to perform in a digital-first, post-pandemic world? Bringing remote teams together for classroom training is impractical and self-directed e-learning has little accountability, so there are two stalwarts from the old ways of learning and developing, that now look retrograde. Clearly, this requires more than a workforce plan or an L&D strategy, it requires a skilling strategy. Encouragingly, globally, 51 percent of employees think the responsibility for keeping skills and competencies up-to-date sits with both the employer and employee. So this joint responsibility will be a key part of what has come to be termed as 'the employee relationship economy', which refers to the emerging market employers and employees now operate in. The rise of the gig economy, more boomeranging and constant interconnectedness, have all given rise to a new model for the labour market, in which careers are now more matrixed than linear. As a result, conventional thinking on providing learning opportunities to develop employees' skills, solely for the duration of their time with you, needs to change. If a current employee is now more likely to return to your organisation at some point - as a contractor, supplier, consultant or even to do another stint as an employee - it's in everyone's best interest to develop a capacity to continually adapt and learn new skills.

In Q4 2020, over 2,000 HR professionals and employees were surveyed* globally to understand the current state of skilling activities for those individuals and companies that took part. The top three skills that were most important for the future were; adaptability, communication and problem-solving. All three are almost universally transferable between sectors and roles and, while demand for these skills is currently outstripping supply, the good news is that they

can all be developed in an agile way, using stretch assignments, project work, secondments or redeployment. Valuable learning naturally happens with these new opportunities, but a skilling strategy is not just about creating opportunities for on-the-job learning. Nor is it sufficient to only provide self-directed e-learning. Research shows that, only nine percent of employers felt confident that their employees were able to guide their own learning journeys effectively. A skills gap analysis helps employers to understand what skills currently exist within the workforce and where the relevant learning opportunities are. This enables employers to guide their employees to make better decisions about which skills to pursue.

THE RISE OF THE GIG ECONOMY, MORE BOOMERANGING AND CONSTANT INTERCONNECTEDNESS, HAVE ALL GIVEN RISE TO A NEW MODEL FOR THE LABOUR MARKET, IN WHICH CAREERS ARE NOW MORE MATRIXED THAN LINEAR

Without insights like; which skills are in demand, a broad view of the learning landscape and advice on how to put together a learning plan, it's easy for employees to become entangled in the thousands of available online courses and different avenues for building skills. Ideally, a skilling strategy will combine technology to make sense of available online courses and market data about in-demand skills, with tailored and personal guidance. This guidance is best provided by a team that might include a career coach, a resourcing specialist who can identify the right roles or assignments in an organisation to develop required skills and a learning advisor to navigate all the different paths to acquiring new skills. However, the success of such a 'tech and touch' skilling strategy also requires a deliberate approach to smoothing internal transitions and enabling your talent to become more mobile. A strong culture of internal mobility goes beyond posting open positions on an internal job board. To be a truly agile organisation, it's important to make internal talent mobility a priority, by developing a culture that encourages talent sharing across all levels and departments. Often, the biggest blocker to this is line managers, because some managers may be protective of their top

performers and key workers, but holding them back from developing their careers only increases the risk that they will leave and take their in-demand skills to another employer who will let them flourish. So, encouraging a talent sharing mindset across the business, is in everyone's best interest. Setting expectations with managers that their teams are not permanent and helping them recognise the value of making talent visible and mobile throughout the organisation is key to this working and is critical to agility. The best managers recognise that being open to more internal mobility has more benefits than maintaining the status quo, because it increases diversity and different perspectives on solving long-standing issues, it expands internal

networks to tap into new skills and experience, it fosters greater internal collaboration, drives innovation and it reduces turnover, recruitment costs and disengagement.

To thrive in the post-pandemic world, organisations need to be more agile than ever. Any existing workforce has latent potential which can be embraced to respond quickly to change if agility and adaptability are part of the L&D. One way to hold managers accountable for meeting these expectations is to reconsider managers' KPIs. For example, rather than only rewarding managers for producing business results, success can also be measured based on promoting internal mobility and developing team skills. It also pays to remind managers who might be anxious about 'losing' good people, that fostering a culture of talent sharing enables them to access talent with relevant skills they might not have otherwise known was available. Formal or informal peer reviews can allow more proactive managers to persuade colleagues who are less forthcoming with promoting their team's talents, to engage a bit more and, if it's measured on the manager's performance review, it should be something they are paying attention to.

It is high time that rigid job descriptions were history! Even when more visibility is given to internal moves, the traditional job description is often off-putting to many potential candidates from other parts of the business who don't possess all the knowledge and experience listed. Publishing a long list of requirements can also harm any gender diversity goals you have because women are less likely to apply unless they meet 100 percent of the requirements. A conventional job description will typically call for all the attributes the ideal post holder needs right now. Instead, list a few, essential requirements of the role and highlight that you are prioritising candidates that are willing to collaborate, learn and can demonstrate high-level communication skills. That will attract a more diverse mix of candidates from across the organisation and bring in someone with the characteristics that will be more valuable in future. The pandemic upended our lives and our homes now also serve as our offices, classrooms and fitness centres. Plenty of employees have had to start working more flexibly, as they oversee home schooling or run errands for at-risk relatives. Rather than requiring employees to attend scheduled learning and development sessions, an effective skilling strategy enables employees to learn on their own time. This approach might include offering longer-term projects and stretch assignments - rather than those with tight deadlines - and encouraging employees to take courses focused on new skills that are both relevant to the business and their career passions. Another critical part of all of our futures is what flexible working will go on to represent. Flexible skilling opportunities will enable employees to fit career development into their busy personal and work schedules, which can also boost engagement and retention. The rise of the much-heralded 'internal talent marketplace' promises a solution to the challenge of keeping your employees at the cutting edge of the skills needed to thrive. But without addressing the three areas above, as part of a comprehensive skilling strategy, a technology platform alone cannot deliver the support and capabilities that will be required to outpace the demands of our new reality. ●

*Randstad's latest Workmonitor Report

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“NEW BALLS PLEASE...”

Being a professional tennis player has little to do with drinking Pimms apres tournament with celebrities, it's about hitting tennis balls again and again and again - harder and faster, harder and faster - again and again and again. The crushing repetition epitomises the extremes of learning by doing, so when a player slams a shot in the net, the dismay is painfully palpable.

ARTICLE BY AMANDA NIMON-PETERS, PROFESSOR & RESEARCH FELLOW - HULT INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL

If a particular approach or presentation style results in success in the workplace, you become more likely to take the same approach again. Conversely, if a particular solution results in disaster, you become less likely to use that solution again. This pattern is crucially important in skill development, ensuring we become good at our jobs and do not have to constantly re-learn basic skills. However, learning by doing is essential for workplace competence, it is necessarily accompanied by a significant and generally invisible risk - that of not learning by doing. This is the paradigm that takes over when the learning curve flattens: Once we feel we have sufficient capability to meet our end goals, we stop working on improving our skills and instead just rely on the tools we have to deliver our results.

While learning by doing acts to help us avoid failure, not learning by doing, acts to hold us back from excellence. When we fail to achieve an outcome we want, that failure is usually obvious, which presents the chance to learn what went wrong and look for a better way next time. But here is the contrast, while failure might be obvious, lack of success is not obvious, especially when you are performing at a reasonable level. To illustrate, imagine that you go to a networking event. You have a generally pleasant time, chat to a few interesting people and maybe hand out some business cards. At the end of the day, nothing went wrong, so what is there to learn from the experience? It is almost impossible to see that you could have been more successful, if you had done something differently.

There are circumstances that worsen not learning by doing and here are two examples: Mild to moderate success, where when there is no evident disaster, the behavioural patterns and tools we use on a regular basis are unlikely to change much. Secondly, a high-pressure work environment; when we are under constant pressure to deliver results, where we are most likely to stick with



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the approaches that have worked in the past, rather than experiment with anything new. For the individual, not learning by doing results in the unmeasured opportunity cost of outcomes that could have been achieved. For the organisation, the hidden costs derive from the fact that employees growing in experience, are not necessarily growing in expertise. Indeed, research on the development of workplace expertise, by Dr. Anders Ericsson and colleagues, proposes an approach called Deliberate Practice. This methodology begins with breaking a complex skill into smaller components, identifying the components with the greatest potential for improvement and then systematically and repetitively working on those specific components to produce an improvement in the overall skill. The approach is akin to taking a break from winning tennis matches and returning to improving that weak backhand.

Ericsson and team have successfully applied two main approaches: Firstly, advocate time away from the Performance Zone. In order to safely and effectively work on skill development, employees need time away from the pressure and risk of delivering results. The Learning Zone is a safe space; a situation that mimics the Performance Zone, but without the consequences of failure, much like a flight simulator enables pilots to practice skill development without putting lives at risk. Secondly, advocate L&D programmes that improve skills from 'good' to 'excellent' as being equally important as those that develop skills from 'zero' to 'good'. Often, managers think of training and development mostly as a remedy for poor performance. In contrast, working on presentations skill development should be as important for people who 'know how to present' as for those who do not. The bottom line of Not Learning by Doing is this: Unless employees are required to actively improve their skillset in an ongoing manner, we cannot assume that they are improving with experience. ●

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SUCCESSION PLANNING

THE NEW FACES

During this time, we've come to realise that the pandemic has not been the "great leveller" that some predicted. COVID-19 laid bare the stark inequalities within society, with many of these playing out in the world of work. The lack of diversity and equal opportunities has long existed across all industries and, despite many organisations taking initial steps towards positive change in recent years, we now risk seeing a large part of this progress coming undone.



ARTICLE BY CAROLINE NOUBLANCHE, CEO & CO-FOUNDER - APRICITY

The current climate of uncertainty, coupled with reduced face-to-face time, fuels our tendency to cling to familiarity and retreat into our comfort zones, inadvertently encouraging our unconscious biases. The effects of this are already becoming apparent and we must all be aware that, familiarity and reverting to the tried and tested are not always positive approaches, particularly around diversity and inclusion and, in this instance, succession planning. In its report, McKinsey announced findings that diverse employees are struggling the most as a result of the pandemic and data from LinkedIn has also shown that, for women in the UK, the pandemic has negatively affected hiring and job confidence, with the hiring of female employees dropping significantly at the height of the crisis. This will surely impact on the diversity of candidates for succession planning

in the future. When it comes to succession planning, the process ideally needs to begin as soon as the incumbent leader is comfortable within their role. With this in mind, businesses need to urgently take stock of how they plan to nurture and support diverse talent now, if they want to enjoy the fruits of these endeavours in the future and the benefits that a truly diverse leadership can yield. In addition to recruiting external candidates from a diverse talent pool, DEI initiatives also need to address and prioritise identifying and developing future leaders within an organisation. While there is a clear business case for diverse leadership teams, which tend to outperform less diverse counterparts, the lack of representation tends to become more apparent the higher you climb within an organisation. The uncertainty of the pandemic and urgent need to maintain

business continuity means that effective succession planning is now more important than ever.

To ensure that an organisation thrives in a post-pandemic world and continues on a trajectory towards greater diversity and inclusion, it's essential to build a focus on DEI into the strategy for identifying and developing your future leaders. At the beginning of lockdown, business leaders found themselves faced with several immediate challenges. In our firm, the immediate response began with identifying three key priorities that would guide a response to the pandemic in the short-term. These were; taking care of employees, taking care of patients and ensuring we had adequate funds to continue operations. In terms of taking care of employees, the obvious first step was to ensure that the team was successfully set up for

remote working. Being a digital company in the first place helped, but beyond this, it was essential to maintain regular lines of communication, to ensure team members could express any concerns, while feeling that they were being kept abreast of developments in the situation. This crisis showed how crucial it is for leaders to avoid isolating themselves in an ivory tower and to instead be seen and engaging with different teams and areas of the business.

A high level of transparency and visibility from the senior leadership team is essential, particularly when it comes to outlining the decision-making process. Not only does this help engender trust and support from team members, but it is also critical to ensure that business values and culture permeate every layer of the company. For many businesses, the pandemic has illustrated the importance of having a set of clearly defined company values. These values serve to instill confidence and purpose in decision-making, allowing an organisation to successfully weather periods of instability and structural re-shaping. These should be clearly communicated and fostered by everyone in the business, from senior leadership all the way to junior staff members. When it comes to succession planning, instilling company values in the team is, of course, vital to creating a strong pool of talent to choose from when assessing candidates for progression. Holding regular senior management planning sessions helps refine views and ensures that all actions are driven by core values of empowerment, care and excellence. We held a series of management coaching seminars over six weeks aimed at aligning the vision and used project boards to maintain a 360-degree view of the business, to avoid creating silos of information within the company. When building a DEI focus into succession planning, it's important to consider the different types of diversity that exist within your organisation and how specific groups might be experiencing the pandemic differently. It's a significant part of the role of leader to consider the situation from every angle and maintain group cohesion, by ensuring different groups understand each other and individuals are supported. In our firm, 80 percent of the C-suite is composed of women and, where possible, we strive to nurture and promote diverse talent as one of the core values.

Leaders need to take a holistic approach to achieving greater equity and examine all areas of the business, to identify where diversity is lacking and what measures can be implemented to ensure a pipeline of diverse hires in future. Throughout the course of the pandemic, we needed to adapt in order to provide full support to staff, which included; providing flexible hours to those with childcare needs and scheduling regular check-ins with staff to ensure we are meeting their expectations and providing a high standard of care. Diversity needs to be intrinsically woven into every level of the business, especially in STEM sectors where representation has historically been sorely lacking. One example includes, providing employee benefits that cater to



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NEXT



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Do you think the succession planning in your organisation is bringing the best candidates into leadership roles?



women's health and wellbeing in the workplace, to create a culture in which women can experience the same opportunities for career progression as men. Too often, taboos around women's health mean that valued members of staff must suffer in silence at work and are unable to achieve their best. Many businesses won't realise the impact this ultimately has on the diversity of their leadership. Fortunately, businesses are increasingly seeing the value in expanding their employee benefit offerings. While unfortunately McKinsey's recent report revealed that only one-in-six diverse employees feel their level of support has improved in the pandemic, those companies which do offer enhanced support will be better placed to drive sustainable business performance in the future. Throughout the course of the pandemic, it became clear that departments were approaching issues from very different angles. An example of this in our organisation was that, the medical team naturally opted for patient safety and a highly cautious approach towards the pandemic, whereas our tech team were enthused and energised by the opportunities the pandemic granted for innovation and development. A strong leader needs to bridge this disconnect and have courageous, open conversations with staff. It's a difficult process, but by taking stock of the varying views, experiences and learnings within the team and incorporating these views into future plans, the business will remain an inclusive workplace that's both competitive and profitable. Training and development courses form an important part of the succession process and should be used to make sure that both current and future leaders are skilled in all areas of the business. This prevents skills gaps from forming whilst allowing top talent to develop and thrive.

We are now seeing the light at the end of the tunnel and, as businesses prepare for life post-pandemic, the challenge will be to sustain the positive changes they've made, avoid complacency and build and support diversity and inclusion in career mobility, to provide the widest possible opportunity to the widest possible demographic. What's clear is that, the pandemic has shone a light on underlying problems and inequalities in our workplaces, that have bubbled away under the surface for far too long. We now find ourselves faced not only with the challenges of rebuilding our businesses, but of creating a fairer, more inclusive world of work in the long term. Putting diversity and inclusion at the heart of the strategy for developing future leaders, builds not only better places to work, but more successful, more resilient companies that can withstand whatever life throws at us next. ●

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THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIFFERENCE IS NOW CLOSED

Leadership has changed in the pandemic - now, we're all leaders and none of us are bystanders - and suddenly, everyone is exercising leadership, in all the many different walks of life, sectors and organisations. Talk is all about familiar issues; trust, learning from frontline workers, unfamiliar new roles, experimenting with new processes, shortages, inequalities, assuaging anxieties, dealing with loss and supporting our communities.

ARTICLE BY KEITH LESLIE, CHAIR OF SAMARITANS (UK & IRELAND) & CHAIR OF MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK CIC

This transitional stage of the pandemic forces a rethink of how we plan leadership for the much hoped for "change to the new better". Change used to be manageable, because it came in two versions: Up close and personal, but episodic and isolated, is when businesses embark on change and the impact on people is often direct and significant. For some, there is an upside and opportunities, for others it results in losses, both economic or emotional. Crucially, unless you are inside the organisation, you are merely a bystander. Then there is change that is incremental and impersonal - but continuous and relentless. For example, society continually changes with economic, social, technological trends and, for a few, these trends will have an immediate and often negative impact. Notably, unless you are unlucky enough to be singularly vulnerable, you have time and resources to manage and adjust. These manageable versions of change meant leaders within organisations could cope. Change was a managed project and didn't affect everyone at the same time, or for an extended period.

When it comes to succession planning, now and for the future, leaders face different challenges, because change is simultaneously up close and personal and also continuous and relentless. The economic and social consequences of the pandemic are working through our organisations, societies and families. Future leaders will be carrying new experiences into their roles and we will expect leaders to empathically apply that experience. The future will see no bystanders and many more leaders of change in more diverse organisations. Learning from effective leadership of change is vital - traditional leadership models have already failed. During the crisis, we observed careless, rushed statements and initiatives by governments and businesses, that assumed "business



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as usual" and relied upon their leaders' past experience, even where it was rapidly overtaken by the new situation. Consequently, future leaders have absorbed their own lessons and organisations are shaping their new leadership model, one that emphasises leadership at all levels, not the heroic individual senior leader or the slick central initiative. The pandemic and its aftermath call for leaders who are open about gaps in their plans, who learn from the front line and guide organisation-wide change. This is new for many organisations and it shifts leadership development and planning.

We don't need more leaders - we need more leadership at all levels - and that means broader succession planning. Leadership during a crisis, isn't helped by relying on personal experience, over-promising, brushing aside frontline experience and using inappropriate military and sporting metaphors. Everything we know about effective leadership is that leaders should not pretend to have all the answers - instead they should be asking powerful questions: Where are we already succeeding with a new approach? What is it that keeps you putting in this extra effort? What will it take to adapt to these new behaviours? What should I do because only I can do it - and what do I need to engage others in doing, because only they bring the perspective and capacity? Effective leaders help their people adapt their behaviour in response to major change - providing time and support to change at the pace they can - while providing clarity and structure so people start their journey with confidence, learning as they go. ●

Keith Leslie is the author of *A Question of Leadership: Leading Organizational Change in Times of Crisis* (Bloomsbury Business).

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THE HUMAN LEAGUERS ARE THE NEW BIG HITTERS

Leadership has been scrutinised closely throughout the pandemic, at global, community and company level. The narrative has been consistent - there has been little (if any) room for the alpha leader - and those that demonstrated empathy, humility and vulnerability, are the leaders who have weathered the storm well. So, will a post pandemic world finally be the one where leaders are recruited on human talent rather than tasks?



ARTICLE BY
JANE SPARROW
FOUNDER & DIRECTOR
THE CULTURE BUILDERS

Disruption, confusion and disarray, we have all needed a plan to navigate along the COVID-19 journey but, moreover, what we all yearned for was leaders that we felt connected to and whom we believed really cared and were genuine and honest. Leaders admitting that they are vulnerable, has been the standout volte face of what leadership traditionally represents and has garnered more trust. As we cautiously move through the next stages of the pandemic and we are experiencing a growing shift in how leaders and future talent are being recruited, so are we finally moving away from a world of leadership skills being matched to tasks? Could we be seeing the green shoots of a world where leaders are recruited far more on the person they are, the attitude they have, the emotional intelligence they exude and, ultimately, their human talent? Are these the attributes - over technical capability and experience - that should be identified, nurtured, supported and developed, in the context of future succession planning?

The pandemic has forced people outside of the boundaries of office hours and closed environments like no other time in modern history and, the lines between work and life, have been blurred in a way that could never have been envisaged before. The most progressive leaders have not only anecdotally shared their home lives with their people - I think most of us probably read about the CEO who took his whole company on a tour of his child's bedroom from where he was working - they have also shared their own personal challenges, which straddle both work and home and show the personal difficulties in juggling all of the balls of professional responsibility, whilst ensuring all family and friends are provided for. In this wonderfully candid expression of transparency, leaders that have role modelled authenticity - being known for who they are - have demonstrated and normalised that they are part of multiple complex human systems. This has encouraged an openness around the challenges associated with that and is sending a clear message that being an integral part of an organisation is a more effective position, than an isolated and elevated platform from which leaders are disconnected on a human level and merely observe. Surely, this feeling of collective responsibility and equality are key staples of developing leaders in a constantly disrupted environment.

Leaders need to lead themselves first, their people second and their organisation third, but the pandemic has brutally exacerbated issues where one of these is not in sync, due to the dynamism and adaptability needed for a multi-environment workplace. Leaders who clearly - and publicly - put their own oxygen mask on first, pandemic or no pandemic, are a non-negotiable ingredient in organisational cultures that want to breed wellbeing and self-care. Many readers will have seen the story about UK KPMG boss, Bill Michael, who was forced to step aside after he told consultants on a group call to "stop moaning" about the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on people's lives and to stop "playing the victim card". This is a clear example of self, people and organisation not working in sync. The notion of servant leadership is something the world has been talking about for a long time, but the pandemic has created the perfect conditions for servant leadership to shine. We have seen leaders around the globe explicitly demonstrate "others-focused" leadership styles and we have seen them put their people's needs above their own and, in doing so, have enabled and empowered. The pandemic has accelerated an already evolving definition of leadership talent, characterised by the cornerstones of values and beliefs, diversity of thought, empowerment and authenticity - and all underpinned by complete humanity and humility. It is becoming the only leadership talent formula progressive organisations are looking for. For

leadership talent themselves, we're seeing a big shift in what motivates them, with a move away from a traditional corporate world. In many cases, this means organisations without a vision and clear purpose, but it also includes businesses that don't work in a flexible and agile way, both will struggle to attract and develop leaders with the attributes that will be crucial to the future. This has driven a real mixing of talent across sectors and industries, as well as talent actively seeking and taking on even more flexible project roles. Retention is front and centre, as the leaders who are standing out from the crowd on human talent through the pandemic are headhunted relentlessly.

With the continuation of the pandemic has arrived the true age of purpose and a leadership talent pool, looking for deep-rooted alignment of their own personal purpose and values and that of the organisation for which they work. There's also a whole community of disenfranchised, up and coming leadership talent for whom the pandemic has found their companies - and their apparent purpose - wanting. Strong leaders with the human talent described herein, want to be authentic, in fact, they *need* to be authentic. This means having the opportunity to talk about their own values and beliefs and where they fit into the direction of travel for the business. If this can't happen, they're out. For some organisations, where a lack of embedding around their purpose and values have been exposed, there has been a real wakeup call and things will change. They may have lost some of their leadership talent already but, where they haven't - or where they have recognised the transformation required across a large part of their leadership and high potential community - a new breed of leadership development is already appearing to support their journey. Of course, developing leaders for human talent, rather than just task performance at any cost, may never be a reality for some firms, who will continue to measure first and foremost on financial performance.

The other key wake-up call is one around investment. Although everyone reading this article understands the critical need to invest in future talent and succession planning, not all business owners and leaders out there do. The pandemic has provided possibly the biggest stress test in history for our leaders and those organisations that invested consistently in their leaders and future leaders, will have been rewarded during this challenging time. Going forward, there is likely to be an increase in investment levels for both growing the leader and future leader talent pool, as well as supporting that talent pool more consistently, to support them transition into a very different working model and also to cultivate these more human aspects of leadership. The virtual nature of the pandemic impact has juxtaposed the most extreme leadership requirement, with an almost wholesale move to remote, virtual and distanced working. People have increasingly wanted to feel a sense of belonging to a team, when

they don't have a sense of belonging in a physical space. Here, strong leaders have helped them to do this through the ability to connect in the most human of ways and empathy has been vital and will continue to be so throughout the transition period, as will tolerance. These skills will be important for the transition and an ongoing attitude of being mindful of self - as well as the emotions of others - will become critical for great leaders of the future.

The pandemic has been a catalyst for unprecedented transformation, prompting leaders to review their values and value systems and, in many cases, redefine what it even means to be a leader. Leaders have been forced to be more flexible and open in order to build virtual relationships across their organisations. Some, with high emotional intelligence and empathy, adapted quickly, supporting people to juggle multiple roles and competing priorities. They showed their own vulnerability too and, for some teams, the bonds post pandemic are stronger than ever before. With high engagement and a differentiated EVP, leaders who have put people first have a unique opportunity to retain talent and build commitment to growth. The leaders needed to achieve this want to be in companies with vision and purpose and where a culture of agile and flexible working is the norm. This growing breed of leaders will be measured, not on competency assessments and a 'fit for task' mindset, but on their human talent. Attracting, retaining and developing these 'human leaders' will be the priority. ●



LEADERS WHO
CLEARLY - AND
PUBLICLY - PUT
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WELLBEING AND
SELF-CARE



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COMPETENCE IS DESIRABLE... CHARACTER IS CRUCIAL*

IN UNPRECEDENTED TIME, WE HAVE LEARNT MUCH ABOUT THE KIND OF LEADERSHIP NEEDED FOR FUTURE SUCCESS AND RESILIENCE. LEADERSHIP IS KEY TO DETERMINING HOW SWIFTLY AND EFFECTIVELY ORGANISATIONS ADAPT TO REFLECT THE CHANGES IN OPERATIONS, MARKETS AND IN THE ATTITUDES OF THE PEOPLE WHO WORK WITHIN THEM.

ARTICLE BY EMILY HUTCHINSON, OCCUPATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST & CAROLINE BROWN, COACH PRACTITIONER - APPLY PSYCHOLOGY

*"When it comes to the essence of what defines great leadership
and what marks somebody out for future leadership potential,
competence is only a part of the whole story"*

People are adaptable, which is encouraging because businesses and economies will be dependent on this, to adjust and flex to changing world contexts. One thing the pandemic has shown amply, is just how unpredictable the world can be when the balance of normality is upended and, no question, our natural adaptability and resilience has been rigorously bench-tested during the course of this time. A million articles before have, I know, reminded us of the fact that VUCA times were upon us, long before coronavirus became the dreaded focus for all but the epidemiologist fraternity. As for the future, organisations will have to be inherently flexible and will have to change, in order to become environments where all can contribute their best, with the psychological safety to foster creativity and the courage to challenge and be innovative across the business. This is particularly so in leadership succession, where a strengths-based approach is fundamental to developing leaders for succession planning.

A strength is defined as something that, when well applied, energises and sustains good performance that can build capability and confidence for future leadership roles. This approach is compelling, because it focuses on how people can apply what they naturally enjoy doing in order to perform at their best. The reason it works in developing people for leadership succession is that it is automatically inclusive as an approach and based on the premise that everyone is different - not just some - and that we all contribute at our best if we celebrate and use our difference. This is because it is about engaging with positive

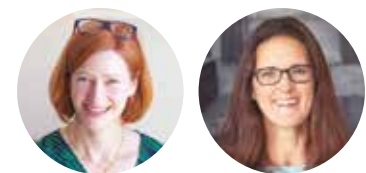
emotions and leads to wellbeing and, in turn, sustainable high performance. Why this is a game changer in succession planning is that people are defined, in a conventional context, by their competence, capability, technical competence and length of service - surely a recipe for a succession plan where everyone looks, thinks and walks the same way. Yet, when it comes to the essence of what defines great leadership and what marks somebody out for future leadership potential, competence is only a part of the whole story. People are not just driven by what they can do - especially when pre-defined into a competency matrix - they are driven by what they enjoy, what resonates with them, what they are curious about and what engages their emotions and that has infinite variety. As we all know, emotions have come to the fore in the past year.

Increasingly, people are really aware of their personal growth, thinking about their viability in a changing world environment and questioning their choices, careers and what constitutes an ambition to become a leader. Here, the strengths approach provides a clear and accessible path to doing just this. Strengths-based leaders don't try to be well-rounded, they know what energises them and what their natural strengths are and they also know what they are capable and competent in, but don't feel energised by. They know what drains them, what they really dislike doing and what is totally against their nature. In short, there has never been any point trying to hammer a square peg into a round hole and that goes for future leaders too. Through a strengths-based framework, people can

apply that understanding in their career journey and the best leaders are those with the ability to own their weaknesses and develop strategies.

Potential leaders are rising to prominence through demonstrating a capacity to be adaptive, innovative and creative and having the right leadership mentorship. This allows them the freedom to think and contribute as themselves - a radical shift from convention - as opposed to leaders development from the past, which was in the rigid frame of micro-management and control. The strengths approach shifts leadership from people who look the same and act the same, to those who know themselves and bring their best. Succession is no longer looking for people that "fit the mould", it's about looking for people who possess an energy and excitement to make a shared vision a reality and have the self-awareness and courage to do so in their own unique way. It can result in personal revelations, a sense of freedom and leads to different conversations than the rigid frames of conventional succession planning. ●

*Hrishikesh Agnihotri - author



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HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

A VIRTUAL GRIP ON A NEW REALITY

Expectations of HR were already changing before the pandemic, but we are now witnessing a perfect storm where emerging technologies are shaping how organisations function. The half-life of some skills is approaching just two years and couple this with the necessity to plan for a longer working lifetime - probably exceeding half a century - and Human Capital Management at once looks like a primary focal point in the future world of work.



ARTICLE BY EMMA CROWE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR HUMAN CAPITAL, EMEA - TTEC

The pandemic normalised working from home as if the static workplace hub had always been an easily dispensable old convention and a more flexible approach to working hours and endless video calls readily filled the void left by the commute. To state the obvious, work has changed, communication has changed and just about everything we used to take for granted in our working life has changed too, irreversibly, forever. It is clear that HR leaders need to think clearly about how the post-pandemic “new normal” will look, because we will not see a return to the practices and norms of pre-COVID, that much at least is certain. When the *Financial Times* called several major companies based in the UK, to ask about working from home, all the companies indicated that their future is hybrid. But what does that really mean in practical

terms and what are the key issues we need to consider? To answer these questions, we have to take into consideration the many elements and dynamics within the modern workforce framework.

When KPMG asked 1,362 HR professionals in 55 countries about their biggest challenge, 56 percent responded, ‘preparing the workforce for AI. It is clear that some HR leaders are embracing this change and are shaping the workforce of the future, by focusing on culture, employee experience and improved insights. But AI will require a significant adjustment and a focus on upskilling. The same body of research also indicates that 80 percent of HR functions are not ready to identify how their future workforce should be composed and yet 76 percent believe that HR should now be

defining what is bought, what is built and what is automated. In short, HR should be leading this conversation. Looking at other dynamics, some of the leading companies have made their focus employee experience, handily anagrammed to EX - in a similar way to their focus on customer experience, or CX. EX, they say, should mirror and support CX, but it must be measured more effectively and here, the options available are only limited by what technology is capable of, as wearable devices and sentiment analysis are becoming increasingly normalised and rather make the annual engagement survey look like a medieval census. *Harvard Business Review* published a list of 21 jobs that its authors believed will become commonplace inside HR teams. These included roles such as a Director of Wellbeing and Distraction Prevention Coach, that sound


fairly self-explanatory, alongside others such as a Genetic Diversity Officer and VR Immersion Counselor. It is clear that the pandemic compressed time. Many organisations were forced to change just to survive, but even those with more resilience found that an acceleration of digital transformation was desirable, to embrace the new business environment and to insure against future shocks by creating a more flexible organisation. So what steps need to be explored to allow HR leaders to adapt to this new business environment? Clearly this is a multidimensional challenge that comprises culture, technology and people, so it is difficult to reduce it down to a series of recommendations. But in summary, there are five key areas of focus.

Change in the contingent nature of work: With the normalisation of working from home there is also a dramatic increase in the number of jobs being recategorised as tasks. Tasks exist within the gig economy and though it's difficult to know exactly how many people now work primarily on gigs, rather than a single steady job, some analysts estimate that around 40 percent of adults now work this way.


HR requires upskilling: There are two distinct areas where AI professionals need to upskill - to manage automation and AI. Tools such as Robotic Process Automation (RPA) can eliminate repetitive tasks and are therefore extremely useful for scanning large amounts of data - such as candidate applications - and making logical decisions based on the data.

AI can be used to identify patterns in data and more productively select and screen candidates, or manage employee benefits. As a matter of context, 67 percent of HR executives polled by LinkedIn said that AI helps them to save time. Tech partnerships and new platforms: It is highly likely that the platforms we all know and use will be challenged by new market entrants, so it is important to create an agile and flexible approach to HR systems.

Microsoft, Google, IBM, Salesforce and Facebook, have all entered the HR market to differing degrees in recent years and new platforms built on technologies, such as blockchain, could disrupt the market for traditional incumbents. Danger of AI: AI saves time when scanning job candidates, but there is very little transparency. In fact, as a machine learning algorithm continuously improves the selection process, the user is forced to trust the judgement of the AI without ever being able to understand how these choices are being made. Candidates are becoming increasingly aware that their social digital footprint is increasingly being scanned by HR professionals, so every photo, like or swipe can influence the algorithm that a potential future employer is using to filter applicants. Culture and EX: Every organisation wants a start-up culture that allows them to move fast and break things, but then HR stands in the way. However, in the post-pandemic era, culture will be critical for success. HR needs to be an enabler - along with the IT team - of an employee experience that helps to attract new talent and develops existing talent. This emphasis on



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Do you believe that the people in your organisation have been well supported during the pandemic?



EX and culture was a feature of professional life in 2019, but the pandemic emphasised just how flexible modern organisations and teams need to be. Managers used to 'management by walking about' have found their ability to control priorities severely restricted as distributed teams naturally require a different approach.

In their report titled *The future of enterprise demands a new future of HR*, Deloitte positions the challenge of changing HR priorities along four themes: Mindset: From doing digital to being digital. Focus: From center-driven to human-centered solutions. Lens: From compliance and control to trust and empowerment. Enablers: From integrated systems to a unified engagement platform. The first mindset shift is the key change - from doing digital to being digital. It is no longer enough to believe that HR can be managed with a good platform and a team that understands how to hire, train and develop employees. HR is helping to define and curate the culture of organisations and HR leaders need to look around and ask, "do we have the right people?" The future of HR will be led by technological advances, but will remain a profession that requires the ability to understand people. Practitioners will need to embrace a mindset that encourages continuous improvement. The road ahead will be influenced by several specific drivers, including demographics. An ageing workforce retiring later alongside younger generations with different skills and expectations, means work-life balance expectations are very different across different generations.

The Gig Economy will see an increase in the use of temporary jobs that transform into tasks and this will require careful planning for tax and employment law compliance in addition to how these workers contribute to the work of core employees. Data is key and employee experience can be far more effectively judged through sentiment analysis and wearable technology, but it requires employees to feel that their willingness to contribute this data automatically all lead to an improvement in how they view their job. All the core fundamentals of HCM are impacted by the changes we can see. Core HR, such as benefits administration and payroll, talent management, workforce management, scheduling and HR service delivery all need to be reimagined for an age where employee expectations are higher than ever before. Of course, this is a fast-moving area. It might be rare to see an Algorithm-bias Auditor in our present-day HR teams, but this will quickly change. AI is about to transform HR globally and those who want to lead in their industry will need to embrace this digital future if they want to succeed post-pandemic. ●

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“TIME TO KICK SOME ASTEROID...”*

A colleague expressed it well: “I used to think that if a meteorite was hurtling to Earth, NASA would have it covered... they might send Bruce Willis. But now, I’m not so sure, when a simple virus can send the world into such chaos.” Boardrooms across the country are echoing similar doubts, are we sure our organisation will survive?

ARTICLE BY BLAIR MCPHERSON, EX-DIRECTOR, AUTHOR & BLOGGER

Should we assume that governments and scientists “have it covered” and that everything will return to normal, or should we rethink the future? If things are not going to be as they were before, how can we make our organisation sufficiently agile and resilient enough to bounce back? The pandemic is speeding up change and is bringing about a realisation that we will not be going back to the way things were. Let others speculate over the impacts of; AI, the advantages of big data or the pit falls of algorithms, the extent of the shift to home working or the shape of future organisations, the change in employee expectations and the consequences of a greater awareness of the mental health of employees. HR should focus on the need for excellent people skills. Whatever the changes and however rapidly they arrive, there will always be a need for managers who can manage their Human Resources effectively. In fact, experience has shown us that the key difference managers make is in the management of change.

If we want organisations to be agile and resilient, so that they can bounce back to whatever the new normal looks like, then we need our people to be agile and resilient and this has implications for recruitment and development. Agile organisations are characterised by their recruitment and development of agile and adaptive managers/leaders. Agile, adaptive leaders are able to move quickly and easily, from one area of management to another and they’re able to manage a diverse range of complex services and quickly and smoothly adapt to a fast-changing business environment. Such managers are able to move seamlessly out of their professional comfort zones, which will be an essential ability in the new normal. The philosophy underpinning this approach is that, management skills are transferable whether that be; managing budgets, information, equipment, buildings or people - managing people being the most significant when it comes to managing change.



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Agile and adaptive leadership and management is a good start, but the fact is there will be setbacks and failings. If anything is predictable in these uncertain times, it’s that we can expect to live with increased unpredictability. As a result, agile organisations also need to be resilient organisations. Resilience is the ability to cope with setbacks and bounce back, but a resilient organisation is not measured by the strength of its structures, its history or its rating on the stock exchange, but by the strength of its commitment to a style of leadership and a way of managing people. This style is sometimes referred to as a no blame culture, but this does not mean managers and employees are not held accountable, or that there is a lax attitude to performance targets and budgets. What it does mean is that employees feel their experience and knowledge is valued, they are heard and able to influence and they feel they are treated fairly when it comes to; rewards, appraisals, development opportunities and promotions and, hardest of all to achieve, that they trust senior managers. Such a culture encourages cooperation between teams and sees senior managers helping each other out, rather than protecting their patches.

In my view, an organisation cannot consider itself truly agile and resilient, if it does not go out of its way to uncover talent and potential. This means going beyond traditional recruitment practices and to have an evangelical commitment to developing employees, especially managers. The result will be a diverse workforce with people in management posts, that do not have a traditional background, people more open to moving out of their comfort zone, people who believe their management skills are transferable and managers who recognise the importance of their Human Resources. ●

* *Armageddon* (1998) Starring Bruce Willis

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WITHOUT CUSTOMERS, THERE IS NO COMPANY

Workforce expectations and the commercial landscape have, of course, irrevocably shifted and, to stay in business in a post-COVID-19 world, HR's approach to human capital management needs to harness a customer-service mindset. Holding on to old mindsets about resource efficiencies, above all else, is pointless. The new HCM ethos has to reflect the best in customer service, internally and externally. As they say, "make a customer, not a sale".



ARTICLE BY SHANDEL MCAULIFFE, HEAD OF CONTENT - CEZANNE HR

HR business partners have sought to be the relationship builders in the past - delivering HR expertise straight to the organisation as needed. But all-too often, HRBPs are stretched to the max, embroiled in disciplinary procedures and other legal HR matters, leaving little time for anything else. With other members of HR previously bogged down in day-to-day admin, resources have typically been stretched to the max and that's where "customer standard" relationships cannot be met. Working strategically right alongside the business is HR's proverbial holy grail and, in recent times, the introduction of HR technology to manage HR admin and streamline engagement processes has provided the opportunity elevate HR work, with impactful projects that improve employee experience. So, with technology propelling HR's strategic work forward, it's time for practice leaders to look very critically at what skills they have within their department, to be equipped to deliver a high degree of service to the business. Without the right people in place, plans to increase HR's customer service levels will fail. HR teams will need a mix of exceptionally strong "people people", to really connect with the wider workforce and laser-sharp analytical thinkers to keep the HR department focused and on track with tangible insights.

HR needs to be mindful that every employee is HR's customer. All-too often, senior HR professionals spend time with managers over general staff, which means they are not truly connecting with the whole workforce. Successful human capital management should be underpinned by meaningful relationships, that branch out across the whole organisation, from interns to the CEO. Working collaboratively with all seniority levels and disciplines, HR can build a broader trust base and create interventions that better reflect the needs of the whole workforce. But it won't be enough to simply want to work with the wider workforce, HR will need skills and knowledge to manage human capital that go beyond traditional capabilities. Academic backgrounds in; psychology, sociology, anthropology and data analysis for example, will be coveted expertise as businesses seek new perspectives to elevate their HR strategies. Some argue that HR teams and, indeed the profession as a whole, may have been operating in an echo chamber for too long. Recruiting HR professionals that

understand how human beings interact through a different lens, will help build HR's capability and credibility. For example, HR that is powered by psychology, joins up what business leaders want and need with a deep understanding of how people think and behave. Performance management can be lifted from a tired appraisal that the business has been using for years, into a far more effective, people-focused process. Likewise, reward management can be significantly improved and better targeted, so the business and staff are supported with what they want and need and employee motivation, engagement and attendance can be understood on a much deeper level and preemptive solutions put in place. If acquiring academic skills necessitates buying in new staff, customer service skills should largely be trainable, for HR and the wider workforce alike. Businesses could even look to trainers outside the UK, to bring a different perspective on what customer service skills they need to build. While a customer service expert from the US for instance, might have some ideas that may feel incongruous for a UK business, this could be exactly the shakeup the organisation needs, to elevate their customer service skills. Just as other skills and

different sexes, sexual orientation and cultural background, can all contribute unique ways of relating to people, that their teammates can, in turn, learn from. Being inclusive in how you think about customer service - and allowing everyone to equally contribute to improving customer interactions - will increase satisfaction in HR across the business. In tandem with a service-first approach to HR, HR teams also need strong analytical thinkers, who are adept with HR software and interested in harnessing future technological solutions. The two disciplines might be developed as separate teams within HR, attracting very different skillsets, but they should work together, each strengthening the other. A widely diverse HR team, of professionals sitting on both sides of the people people and analytics people fence, should work together to improve how HR addresses inequalities, within the business. Gender pay gap reporting should be embraced by all businesses, whether it's their legal obligation or not and diversity reporting should be a natural continuation of that. Working closely with the workforce, and delving as far into the data as possible, HR can collaborate with staff on future bespoke solutions, to improve DEI within the organisation.

that's automation too. HR people-facing professionals, need to use their customer relationships to identify where to focus automation efforts. They might discover pain points - that they were previously unaware of - by talking to managers and employees alike about their biggest bugbears. With their workforce's gripes in mind, HR can begin configuring technology to make life easier and better for staff. Aligned with the customer-service approach, rolling out HR software solutions that enhance employee experience and improve engagement with the business, should be a priority. It can promote better teamwork through the use of online workspaces, make regular performance conversations and goal tracking easier and develop strong career and succession plans, indeed so much more than a simple admin tool. AI is a step up from automation and AI HR experts will be at the cutting edge of HR advancements, but it is by no means an easy job. AI has a lot of potential and could become a valued member of the HR team and a key element of HCM, but it needs to be closely managed.

In the movie, *Jurassic Park*, Ian Malcolm - played by Jeff Goldblum - famously said, "your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, that they didn't stop to think if they should!" There are already concerns around AI, with experiments showing just how susceptible the technology is to corruption, based on the information fed into it. So, even though HR professionals can use and develop AI, they need to carefully set out exactly what they want to achieve and what measures they will put in place, to keep an eye on its intelligence. HR will want to make sure the results of using AI are positive, for HR and the business. Now is the time for HR to realise its future potential - directly off the back of an increase in activity and reliance, resulting from the COVID-19 crisis and, when we are able, that face-to-face work will always be essential to building relationships, through a compelling combination of strong customer service skills and sophisticated HR tech. ●

HR TEAMS WILL NEED A MIX OF EXCEPTIONALLY STRONG "PEOPLE PEOPLE", TO REALLY CONNECT WITH THE WIDER WORKFORCE AND LASER-SHARP ANALYTICAL THINKERS TO KEEP THE HR DEPARTMENT FOCUSED AND ON TRACK WITH TANGIBLE INSIGHTS

focus areas are incentivised through targeted rewards, the customer service skills that HR needs in HCM to succeed, should be reinforced too. Businesses often measure customer satisfaction with external clients, but there is rarely an internal mechanism to measure what in-house customers think and, because of this, it's hard to assign a monetary value to it. If HR leaders were to take the 360-degree performance review model to a new level, by asking for internal customer feedback more often, they could improve on customer service in real-time and reward HR staff accordingly.

HR's service levels will also be enriched by diversifying the HR talent pool whereby,

Analytical HR specialists will be the champions of HR tech - including AI and automation - and they will know that, although AI and automation are often spoken of in the same breath, they are vastly different solutions. Automation has been around for many years, with HR taking advantage of this technology to streamline and manage processes and administration. When an employee updates their address or bank details in an HR system, that's part of an automated process and, most likely, used to be managed via email, or on a paper form, back in the day. When a new starter is sent all of their joiner documentation from an HR system and e-signs their contract for instance,

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MIDDLE LAYER OF A HYBRID CAKE

As businesses plan to restructure a new hybrid workplace, there is no reference point for what needs to happen next, as there is nothing to compare to in modern times. But what is abundantly clear is that line and department managers will still be integral and fundamental in ensuring changes are successful.



ARTICLE BY
BIRGITTA SJÖSTRAND
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
INRE STYRKA AB
& LEADERSHIP TRAINER

The disruption of the pandemic has placed increased pressure on middle managers, but during this crisis, they have proved their value as communicators, role models and have provided vital links between leadership levels. There are still many challenges ahead for middle managers in supporting teams and individuals, but they have the ability to influence both above and below them during this restructuring process. With so much to do and resources depleted, management team efficiency is central to hybrid structures that work and as with all HCM, synergy in messaging and actions needs to emanate from middle managers and facilitated through team development exercises. These should have an internal focus with discussion points like; what is the purpose of our group? To what rules do we hold ourselves accountable? What expectations do we have of ourselves and our manager - at both middle manager or C-level - and what is our ambition as a team? Discussion should also have an external focus, for example, define who the stakeholders are and what standard do we want to show to them? How do we achieve our operational goals for our stakeholders? Having everyone on the same page before communicating this down the organisation will create clarity and confidence, which is important because change is emotional. Consistency is important too and so carrying out these exercises in all teams should be relatively straightforward, as it will be familiar ground. In addition, middle managers are going to be important in making sure that no divide arises, especially in virtual teams. The bottom line is, the quicker the units move on with their group development, the more efficient they will become and having everyone on the same page will make new operating processes more likely to succeed.

It pays to be wary of dormant conflicts, for example, if a particular team was in stage two - conflict and fight stage - when going into lockdown, some unresolved conflicts might remain within the group. Similarly, some people may have chosen to not raise negative feedback or small conflicts when working from home, because it is harder to have these discussions virtually and these could resurface when colleagues are brought back together. Here, it will be the responsibility of middle managers to try to address these issues, before they escalate. Sure enough, old behaviour patterns will start to creep back, if left unattended and so when restarting a team within the new parameters, one of the first activities should be to talk about the "rules we play by", what expectations we have as individuals and of the manager, how everyone wants to work as a team and how everyone should conduct themselves in the workplace. Invite the group to agree upon their own behaviour rules, because it works better coming from the group itself, rather than if the manager tells the employees a set of rules. The team must agree on how essential it is to keep to the rules and give feedback if someone breaks one. Ultimately, for the new normal of hybrid working to succeed, everyone needs to accept, not just the majority and again, remote employees should always be included in the discussions.

During the extensive period people have worked from home, there is the possibility that subgroups might have emerged and formed. For example, colleagues might have become estranged from others and are now in a position where they might feel outside the group. This could be further amplified by a hybrid culture, with some people working at home, while other colleagues are in the office or there is potential conflict between previously furloughed and non-furloughed employees. Subgroups form in different ways and feeling excluded can be a complex issue. Keeping everyone united and feeling a sense of belonging is not going to be an easy task, but

middle managers are ideally placed to prevent exclusion and division by linking groups together, opening varied communication channels and facilitating group and non-work discussions to build rapport. An idea might be to start the day with some fun and celebration and give space for people to just share how they have found the last year. This space for stories and vulnerability can be a great unifier and cathartic for those who may have suffered without social interaction. There are, of course, many ideas to build engagement and inclusivity going forward, but ultimately, this change back to the new normal is significant and it's all about mindset. If people think they are coming back to work, expecting it will be as before, they could be in for quite a shock. Now is the chance to let employees share what they have learnt and what can be improved and here, a survey would yield some useful insight into communication channels that have worked, what people have found challenging and what they think the role of managers should be in the move to a hybrid framework.

When it comes to challenges for middle managers at an individual level, during the pandemic, many will have reported that consistent L&D within the workforce has been challenging when employees are scattered, regardless of the technology and platforms in place. There has been a tendency for people to just go through the motions and neglect personal and organisational development while working from home, particularly as there is less opportunity for spontaneous ideas. The more "kicking around ideas" in informal meetings people have, the more improvements come to the fore. With this in mind, middle managers could open up the floor for these informal discussions and use the survey to kickstart them then, because input from employees, because if people are involved in initiating change, they will be more likely buy into it. This should always then be backed up with regular employee reviews, to ensure development continues and that the same opportunities are inclusive to all.

Employee wellbeing during the pandemic has created an interesting case story, whereby more extroverted people might have found working from home more challenging, as they gain energy by connecting with people and perhaps the remote and isolated environment has been preferable for introverts. So it is clear that it will have impacted everyone differently and there has been intense pressure felt by many. Perhaps one of the positives of the past year has been the increased spotlight on mental health and it is clear middle managers need to be aware more than ever of their team's mental wellbeing. Sometimes there is a delay before symptoms present themselves and it may be the idea of going back to the office that is unsettling for some. Middle managers will certainly need to be checking in with staff more often and making sure there are active links with professionals who can step in and work with any employees that might be struggling. Everyone has experienced different levels of stress and uncertainty over the past

year and fatigue can emerge after extended periods of tension. Middle managers will be essential in supporting employees through this fatigue and remaining vigilant over the wellbeing of staff in all locations. Consideration also must be given to the changes in the onboarding of new employees during the pandemic. Of course, bonding with new colleagues has been more challenging and some who joined earlier on in the pandemic will have already been working a year or more and still not met team mates in the flesh. So in line with the return to the office, an option worth considering is to do onboarding again for all the people who started during the lockdown, to reintroduce them and show them where everything is in the workplace, which will recreate an important feeling of belonging.

As we look to progress into the post-pandemic workplace, middle managers are going to play a hugely important role at both a team level, creating team synergy, mitigating conflicts and avoiding division, and an individual level, ensuring continued development, protecting wellbeing and onboarding successfully. These areas will present challenges when trying to navigate the new hybrid working culture, but by working alongside leaders and employees, middle managers will provide an essential link between groups to communicate and implement new processes. Senior leaders need to be empowering their middle managers to perform this function. It is clear that middle managers have been invaluable in managing the changing landscape and dealing with ongoing concerns. Consequently, they are well equipped to work with everyone in the organisation to build for the future and directly address the pain points of employees from the past year. Middle managers will continue to be an essential role model for all the reporting managers and employees and by working in partnership with HR, they can facilitate a future that supports all employees working in the office and remotely. ●

Birgitta Sjöstrand is the author of *Outstanding in the Middle*.



OLD BEHAVIOUR
PATTERNS WILL
START TO CREEP
BACK, IF LEFT
UNATTENDED
AND SO WHEN
RESTARTING
A TEAM WITHIN THE
NEW PARAMETERS,
ONE OF THE FIRST
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THE "RULES WE
PLAY BY"



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DATA WITH DESTINY

Love it or loathe it, data is everywhere and its constant generation and movement is defining needs, wants, choice, movement, thoughts and beliefs. Conspiracy theorists fear it, whilst most love how it has transformed their way of life. One thing is for certain, although data splits opinion, its future is being heralded as the panacea to engaging the future world of work.



ARTICLE BY PETER BYRNE, FOUNDER & MANAGING DIRECTOR - ESPHR

Before delving into the specifics of data science within the employment landscape, it is firstly crucial to understand the four dimensions - or Vs - of data, for which IBM has been widely credited. The sheer volume of data that now exists, naturally presents endless opportunities to better understand a given situation. However, on the flipside, it risks feeling overwhelming if there is not a manageable way to handle it. Even in an SME, the wealth of data surrounding every employee, every team's performance, every customer record, every human interaction, every milestone accomplished... and so on, is colossal. Data also exists in multiple forms, and this variety often means no two pieces are the same. This multifaceted 'shape' of data - from emails and social media posts, through to attendance records, phone call logs, training certificates and personal development plans - compounds potential data

analysis difficulties. Then there is the velocity - or ever-changing pace of updates - to the data, which jeopardises its relevance if the data handler doesn't have the ability or agility to manage and interpret it in real-time. Lastly the veracity - or quality - of data is imperative, because it needs to present a true, accurate and current picture of the scenario at hand. As the world's use of data continues to evolve, so too do attitudes towards it. Some modern data thinkers therefore believe that consideration should also be given to the value that can be harnessed from a data set, or data variability, which may be influenced by subjective interpretation and the visualisation, or ease with which data can be visibly depicted. With such a complex picture seemingly forming, it is understandable why many organisations continue to bury their heads in the sand, avoiding the need to conduct deep data

analysis at all costs. But we all know that a virtual filing cabinet simply won't cut it anymore.

The expertise of a data scientist - someone confident in the many data 'Vs' outlined above - has never been so crucial. A CIPD article highlighted, for example, that while almost 71 percent of global HR professionals have access to people data, only 42 percent acknowledge that they do. Clearly, there is a gap that needs to be bridged, as quickly as possible. However, while the world may be becoming increasingly excited about data, the role of a data scientist remains niche and even large organisations with impressive talent budgets may struggle to justify the creation of this position. Organisations should therefore ask themselves, whether it is right that a single person - or a team - 'owns' this data approach, or whether a data 'champion' is arguably more valuable, than someone who assumes entire responsibility for the BI potential

that lies at a company's fingertips. For example, if that champion can instil a hunger for data throughout an entire department - or better still, the whole business - informed, data-driven decision making stands a far greater chance of becoming a mindset, a culture and a cornerstone. It is then not the sole concern of one person, who may not be best positioned to interpret the data, as context is important, after all. Every piece of data should be thought of as a single, standalone 'nugget', which must be put into context, so that information can be derived.

Every colleague in an organisation has hundreds of pieces of data associated with their; employment status, wellbeing, performance and development. But only when someone introduces context - such as the make-up of their team, the behaviour and leadership of their manager, their career history, skill-sets and even their personal circumstances - does the data have any real meaning. Armed with such context, an ER team can start to ask specific questions, such as: Is this person disengaged? Are they a flight risk? Are they being ineffectively managed? Is a worrying trend emerging? What is the problem 'costing' the business? This is the knowledge the C-suite is looking for, analysis of the data through a relevant lens, rather than blindly following what data-related assumptions could otherwise imply. A data scientist could, of course, take organisations on this journey, but thought leaders such as, Gartner, shine a further crucial light on the topic. In thinking about business intelligence - and BI tools more specifically - they explore the notion of "a self-contained architecture that enables nontechnical users to autonomously execute full-spectrum analytic workflows and the collaborative sharing of insights." Herein lies an important point, ER leaders may not be data scientists, but in an era of innovation and automation, they shouldn't need to be. They are experts in their own domain - bringing the best out of people - and it is this intellect that we need to leverage, not their data literacy. We must therefore consider the role that technology can play, in conducting the deep dive analysis that a growing number of ER leaders wish to undertake. Intuitive software now exists across every realm of business - including the people landscape - to process, organise, structure and present data in such a way that information can be uncovered with relative ease. Such tools can effortlessly tackle the 'Vs' outlined above, to present ER leaders with insight that, when overlaid with their own knowledge, enables them to derive maximum value from metrics, at pace. This isn't a case of ER, or indeed HR, being behind the curve, as the headlines would sometimes suggest. On the contrary, it is about the business community on the whole stepping into the realms of what's possible, when it comes to data deep dives.

This is not another scenario which sees people roles being overtaken by 'robots', because human intellect is more important in this field than ever. But this is the chance for the profession to utilise the data at its fingertips, to become a true powerhouse capable of revolutionising the future of work. Take



THIS IS THE
KNOWLEDGE
THE C-SUITE IS
LOOKING FOR.
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A RELEVANT
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THAN BLINDLY
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Do you think that data science is improving the employee experience in your organisation?



employment tribunals for instance, claims have risen by 27 percent in the past year, linked indisputably to the remote working, furlough and redundancy pressures catalysed by COVID-19. But with the economic recovery predicted to be slow and painful and a hybrid workplace now a permanent fixture for many, the risk of disputes between employer and employee will remain extremely high for some time. ER teams could, therefore, utilise data science to interrogate their management of disputes to date - and pre-empt the likelihood of a claim escalating to tribunal level in future. For example, have workforce decisions been made fairly and in compliance with the law? Have line managers demonstrated discriminatory behaviours? Is there a training gap? This more proactive approach to understanding the 'lie of the land' internally won't just help to avoid costly, reactive legal fees and reputational damage. It will also better protect employee morale, team camaraderie, retention, performance and so much more. The business case for such an 'investment' in data, should quickly become clear as a result. The same could be said of so many scenarios across the entire Human Resources piece.

Data can now be pulled from so many previously unlikely sources, to give a more enriched picture of the real goings-on inside a workplace. For example, to an uninformed eye, analytics from communication tools, such as Microsoft Teams, could highlight how productive a colleague has been throughout the day... or not. But deeper analysis of their working patterns, could also form the starting point for better understanding, whether they are working too many hours, struggling to switch off because working from home has encroached upon their personal time, are experiencing technical difficulties due to a lack of training, not receiving the support they need from their manager, demonstrating absenteeism or presenteeism because of an underlying health concern, or even being the victims of bullying. Just because the mass adoption of a communications channel is new, doesn't mean its data should be disregarded. ER and HR teams are not being asked to trust in bleeding-edge technology that hasn't already been tried-and-tested. The fact of the matter is that other business functions - from sales and marketing to finance and operations - are already relying heavily on data science and BI tools to drive that data consumption. But the areas where data could be a real game changer are, as yet, relatively untapped. With a finite set of resources, the ability to supercharge the efficiency and capabilities of the profession, therefore, needs to be leveraged and quickly. ●

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AN ALLIANCE WITH SCIENCE

The recent innovation that has turned data into data science refers to the scale and type of data available. Most firms will have bought into AI-driven or data-driven solutions, for the likes of team management and recruitment, but investment in the science aside, the critical ingredient of efficacy in DS algorithms, is the quality of the data they leverage.

ARTICLE BY JOE D'ALESSANDRO, CO-FOUNDER & CTO - INNERWORKS

All-new technology is initially made by geeks for geeks, but as technology hits the market, it naturally becomes user-friendly, allowing non-specialist usage - as with the old adage that to drive a car, you don't need to know how it works. Nevertheless, there are decisions to be made as to how to progress with data science - with the usual avenues of third-party, outsourced consultants to provide DS input - and, of course, there are numerous cost-to-benefit considerations of outsourcing, against the potential for firms to grow their own internal DS capability. Either way, companies must weigh the cost and benefits of being an early adopter of more innovative DS techniques, against waiting for an easier-to-use version to come onto the market. As we all know, there are many laws and regulations as well as ethical questions to be addressed as to what is acceptable for employers to know and collect, what is surveillance or genuine insight and who owns the data. It seems intuitive that the generator of the data - not the gatherer - owns it and it is a strong argument that the individual is sovereign when it comes to their own data. They must also know what is being collected about them, what it is being used for and how it affects them. Of course, this raises big questions surrounding the covert surveillance of individuals and clandestine data-gathering - surveillance capitalism - which is the big tech norm. Looking at Data from another perspective, it is a commercial asset and companies internally generate large amounts of data, with almost free access to external information, both of which need DS techniques to extract the relevant content, to help uncover information in previously obscured large datasets.

HR-generated data too can be incorporated with external data, to gain insights about how the organisation is likely to function, such as data from employees, potential candidates and key stakeholders, as well as benchmarking data against competitive peers. While data gathered by HR is objective - such as most psychometric



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assessments and candidate qualifications for example - a vast amount of subjective data isn't collected, because it is difficult to measure. One critical flaw with a lot of subjective data is the over-dependence on self-assessment. Most market dominant products, only produce subjective reports on how an individual sees themselves; whereas, far more insightful is the measure of how an individual's behaviour is experienced by others. This brings into focus expanding assessments to capture data on a network of interactions, to increase the informational content and provide dynamic, higher quality insights. Indeed, there is strong evidence that personality has been either undervalued or mis-measured in all aspects of the corporate sphere and here, incorporating DS can help us gain a more useful assessment of personality in an ethical way.

Taking a look at the key metrics and data that an organisation might want to collect on employees the headlines are undoubtedly: Performance - how effective is the employee at their role? Wellbeing - how well is the employee mentally? Job satisfaction/NPS (Net Promoter Scores) - does the employee rate the organisation? Role suitability - is the employee the most effective or is the candidate the most suitable for the role? Evidence-based management - what data can help to make management decisions and predict likely performance, turnover rates, etc and likely staff turnover. Meanwhile, a somewhat different top list will be relevant for other areas, take the recruitment process as an example, which will include: Initial candidate screening - which initial CVs should proceed to the next stage? Analysis of the potential candidate pool - which potential candidates should be approached for the role? Potential candidate performance - which candidates will 'fit'/perform the best in the organisation? As businesses rely increasingly on predictive analysis and DS, clearly, HR must become the provider of insight, rather than just the collector of data. ●

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“COME ON IN, THE DATA'S FINE...”

HR teams often find themselves in an all-too-common scenario, where they propose a change to drive employee productivity, but struggle to build a solid business case. Finance adds up the cost and will report that there is little or no data to show return on investment. HR may then make a case by referencing employee retention or employee engagement, but in the age of big data, this is unlikely to be compelling.



ARTICLE BY GEOFFREY KUHN, CHIEF ACTUARY & ANALYTICS LEADER,
EMEA HEALTH PRACTICE - AON

HR is keenly aware of the lack of connection between employee data and measuring business outcomes, but the question is, what can be done to change this? We all know beliefs aren't enough, data needs to show links between proposals and business outcomes and the result often boils down to the executive team beliefs. But throughout the pandemic, one aspect of the employer/employee relationship and proposition was brought into sharp relief in the shape of employee health and wellbeing. Up to this point, employee health was a divisive point and posed the question as to whether HR was seen as a cost centre or an advocate of employee interest. But in the wake of this challenging time, what has changed in employee wellbeing and what has been learnt? General data shows the link between employee wellbeing and positive business outcomes.

However, companies frequently want and need to go beyond these general connections to understand the impact that specific programmes are having on the workforce. While it is not easy to prove the business impact of investments in employee health and wellbeing programmes, it can increasingly be shown through; data, judgement, models and explicit assumptions. Using these means HR can make a strong case for their programmes, not least because it's likely that HR has more data than anyone in the organisation. In many cases, HR struggles to build a solid business case for people programmes because they know so little about their exact impact and how they are directly contributing to positive outcomes. For example, the costs of paying employees more is known, as is understanding the price of increasing health care coverage, but it's often difficult to quantify - with any accuracy - the results of this and exactly how it impacts the workforce. Yet analytics helps to provide a more solid understanding of the cause and effect in HR strategies - paving the way for more informed decisions for HR - and the ability to build a stronger business case.

Unquestionably, it is data science that is leading to a greater understanding of the people factors that are most important to driving business outcomes. Indeed, there may be countless metrics to use to track complex concepts and outcomes, but by using analytics and critical thinking, they can be narrowed down to provide a practical, but meaningful set

of measures. When looking at the vast amount of information available, it is often helpful to think through the data available to HR in the following categories: Claims and benefits data, which is information on employee claims, benefit elections, and spending patterns and these can be key indicators of current health risks. Also, lifestyle risk data, which refers to information on behaviours and risk factors that can be used to gain a broader understanding of employee wellbeing. This information includes physical health, mental health, nutrition and movement, as well as financial wellbeing. Data may come from a traditional health risk assessment, but more often, this information comes from digital platforms and wellbeing apps. Then there is performance data and this body of information is a focus on employee performance and how it is impacting on business results. This would typically include information such as; performance ratings and bonus payment relative to target, amongst other productivity measures. Finally, employee mindset data, is a burgeoning area of information, drawn from how employees view their own wellbeing, the value of benefits offered, their perception of employee support

MORE COMPLEX DATA SCIENCE APPROACHES WILL REQUIRE MORE GRANULAR DATA, BUT WHEN THAT IS LACKING, IT IS OFTEN USEFUL TO START BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH HIGHER-LEVEL DATA. THIS CAN POINT TO DIRECTIONAL RESULTS AND CONNECTIONS, PROVIDING A GOOD FOUNDATION THAT CAN BE BUILT ON, OVER TIME

and their overall level of engagement. When best practice is in play, capturing this type of data provides an additional lens into population risks - how many of my employees are struggling with stress. Then, by combining these data sources, an employer can leverage data science to understand the connection between benefits, employee lifestyle risks, employer programmes and employee mindset on business outcomes.

Taking a closer look at specifics, one case study shows a life sciences company that wanted to quantify the impact of health and wellness programmes on performance, providing insights that people analytics can uncover.

Following the framework described, the company looked at input factors that included: Overall health claims for each employee; a measure of the overall health risk of each employee - developed by looking at the chronic condition burden for each employee - as well as employee participation in different wellbeing programmes; employee lifestyle risks around key factors, including; stress, physical activity, nutrition, tobacco, alcohol, life satisfaction, blood pressure and body mass index. Business outcomes were then measured using two additional variables, individual performance ratings and bonus payments relative to target. Machine learning approaches were utilised to explore the relationship between the input variables and the performance metrics. This then allowed the business to go beyond basic correlations and control for interactions between factors and build a model that related employee performance to wellbeing and lifestyle risks. The results of this analysis were encouraging; there was a strong connection between lifestyle risks, health metrics, wellbeing participation and performance. The employer was then able to estimate that moderate improvements in

health and wellness could result in a potential productivity gain of five percent per employee, with about half of this being driven by wellbeing programme participation and management of lifestyle risks. It is also possible to add neuroscience into this data mix, which enables employers to also fully understand employee mindset. By understanding employee thinking and combining this with core metrics, employers can better predict outcomes. In other words, they can lift the lid on what employees are actually thinking to optimise their people decisions.

Whilst employee mindset data is critical, it can be complicated to capture in a traditional

way. Listening surveys are a common way to understand employee views, capturing rational, considered, influenced and effortful answers. But these approaches can have limitations, as they require conscious thinking, which introduces a level of bias. Employees may respond the way they feel HR wants them to respond, or they may be nervous about what they share. Ultimately, they can fall short in capturing employee feelings, intuitions, instincts and emotions, leading to data that may not create a solid basis for decision making.

New approaches that combine neuroscience and technology provide a more robust framework for capturing mindset data. Neurotech surveys are based on an understanding of how the brain works and measure employees' automatic, non-conscious responses. These bypass conscious bias, allowing employers to gain quantitative data and true understanding. The differences between insights gained from neurotech surveys and traditional surveys can be significant. For instance, it is not uncommon to find that 60 percent of factors are explicitly overstated with respondents themselves reporting higher scores than are implicit. On top of this, in more than 80 percent of traditional surveys, respondents self-report that they are positive about a factor when actually they feel negative about it. The implication is that if the respondent is inclined to moderate their answer, it will be towards positive. The issue for organisations is that they act on insights that don't reflect realities. One early struggle is often around the complexity of data available. This varies by organisation, but rarely is full and complete data available across all factors and in some cases, only higher-level summary data may be available. The general approach here is straightforward - start simple. More complex data science approaches will require more granular data, but when that is lacking, it is often useful for employers to start building connections with higher-level data. This can point to directional results and connections, providing a good foundation that can be built on, over time. ●

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THE HUMAN BEAN COUNTERS

HR's evolution is intimately linked to technology and, with each great new innovation comes challenges and opportunities for the profession. We're in the midst of a great revolution, turbocharged by events resulting from the pandemic - and the cultural reckoning of the BLM protests - presenting a confluence of powerful factors to profoundly change the face of work.



ARTICLE BY
NATALIE CRAMP
CEO
PROFUSION

Data science could become the sat-nav for the uncertain road ahead. The stakes for sticking to the map are high - as they say, to err is human - and expecting people to deal with uncertainty and complexity without the support of DS insight could easily result in poor judgements. While in a marketing function, this may lead to slightly less profit, a bad HR decision can have profound impacts on people's lives. This is why HR professionals constantly look for improved ways to do things, to remove bias, to train people to better understand how to make these decisions. Whether we like it or not, everyone has unconscious biases and we can see the results of these biases writ large in how different groups are shockingly underrepresented or marginalised in organisations. There is a lot of detailed research exploring how prevalent bias is in decision making and the outsized effect it has on diversity and inclusion. Indeed, it is so common, that each type of bias has its own name; confirmation, beauty, affinity, similarity, the halo and horn effects - and many, many more. Unconscious bias is of course not the only problem, there are many elements which influence decisions and they are incredibly hard to quantify. This means directly comparing employees or recruitment candidates will never be perfect or fair and it also means that it is nearly impossible to be fully transparent on how decisions are made or policies enforced. This opaqueness will always be a point of contention within any company. So, what if we could create safeguards that can prevent this bias from playing a role and provide a more uniform, transparent and fair way for important decision making?

One of the great virtues of data science is that it deals with both structured and unstructured data. That means it is equally at ease crunching the numbers in a 360 review as it is in analysing and scoring sources such as; text, audio and video. The next important factor is the bespoke nature of DS: Algorithms can be tailored to take into account all the factors you deem necessary and answer your specific question and, what's more, thanks to machine learning, an algorithm can 'learn' as it goes to become more and more accurate. Think about how your Netflix recommendations seem to evolve as you watch certain shows - that's a little bit of data science in action. By working with data scientists, a series of algorithms could be created that helps to inform HR professionals as they and the business make decisions. Now, I'm not saying that these algorithms can remove all bias from the process - almost everything has some form of bias - but they can reduce it by offering a much more rounded view of what is happening, based on all the data points. This enables HR professionals and the business leaders they support, to make better judgement calls as you strive towards building a more inclusive organisation. A really good example of this is progression in larger organisations where data will be able to identify high performing talent that perhaps is less prominent, due to being less visible in their achievements. As such, it may broaden the range of people who are then in the discussions for promotion.

When it comes to creating a data-driven HR function, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The solution is naturally going to be dictated by an organisation's resources. However, there are a few key considerations: Always start with data education, in order for people to gain a grip on the basics of data analysis and also the fundamentals of data science. This should equip the HR team to fully realise what information streams are available, what technology platforms it will need to make use of its data and gain an understanding of what is possible through working with data scientists. Next, talk to the marketing team - firstly as both departments are trying to attract, engage and retain core skills people - but also because marketing

teams have typically been faster to use the predictive benefits of data science. So there a conversation to be had see where the shared learnings and tools are - remembering to be cautious on bias and appropriateness, of course. A case in point, marketing will be looking for more customers who 'look like' their highest performing customers and, if you applied that to employees, you could reintroduce the bias that was so tough to remove in the first place. For data led businesses to thrive, of course, data skills should form a part of all roles you recruit for as well as building opportunities to develop data skills in the recruitment and induction processes. Diversity in data is also important and so it makes total sense to have diversity across the data team, because diverse minds help reduce the likelihood that your data work or algorithms will reinforce systemic bias. Identify one area in the HR processes where there are real pain points that need solving and kick-off a pilot project to see how data science could reduce those pain points.

Data professionals will only be able to produce value to the organisation, if everyone understands how to put the work into practice in their everyday role. Do they understand how to use data to take the next best action in their role? Can they see the opportunities and the pitfalls with data? Do they know how to be demanding of your data team so that their work is consistently focused on the business strategy? Driving data literacy across the workforce is a critical role for HR to play in this transformation to ensure a confident engaged workforce and a business that truly realises its investment in data. Similarly, HR has a role to play in data ethics - determining how this is being addressed in your organisation and where that ownership lies - you cannot have the data team marking their own homework. But here is a word of caution - keep the humanity in HR. Although a basic understanding of data is crucial - HR cannot function without humans.

A data driven approach does not mean that the decision making and operation of HR is given over to algorithms. Quite the opposite, data science should be there to support and illuminate, not dictate terms.

Data science as a profession is also not immune from unconscious bias. Both data scientists and the data they use can be biased. This means a poorly conceived and unchecked algorithm can do more harm than good in tackling issues such as diversity. Many of you will be aware of the issues Amazon had with its AI-driven recruitment policy which was designed to close the gender gap but instead perpetuated the problem by actively discriminating against women. To safeguard against this, it is very important that data scientists work hand in glove with HR representatives to test the results of the algorithm and also whether there could be bias, or simply gaps in the data used. Good data scientists, if made aware of the potential pitfalls, can correct for these problems and work with data to remove bias, or ensure anyone who is using it to inform their decisions is aware of its limitations. We know that remote and flexible working is

likely to become an enduring trend. With people out of the office many of the sources of information traditionally used in assessment, monitoring and progression are now gone. For a data-driven HR function this is not a huge challenge, as algorithms and models can be amended to weigh factors differently, or take into account new unstructured data streams such as Zoom calls. This adaptability makes data science a must in a rapidly evolving workplace. After all, twelve months ago, who in their wildest dreams could have predicted how everything has changed? Data science is not a silver bullet that will end workplace discrimination, close the gender pay gap or completely solve a host of other systemic issues. What it will do, if used well, is help to create a new, more scientific HR function which can enable a more inclusive business. It will equip HR professionals with cutting-edge techniques that will help them see bias, better understand their workers and enable the organisation to make more objective, insightful decisions. ●



DATA SCIENCE IS
NOT IMMUNE FROM
UNCONSCIOUS
BIAS, BOTH DATA
SCIENTISTS AND
THE DATA THEY USE
CAN BE BIASED.
THIS MEANS A
POORLY CONCEIVED
AND UNCHECKED
ALGORITHM CAN DO
MORE HARM THAN
GOOD IN TACKLING
ISSUES SUCH AS
DIVERSITY



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TO THE POINT

WHY DOES UPWARD INFLUENCE MATTER?

Growing up with strict Chinese parents, I did not have a voice. My mother once took me shoe shopping when I was in high school and rejected every option that I chose, instead choosing a pair of shoes that I was embarrassed to wear.

Article by Professor Connson Locke, Professorial Lecturer in Management – London School of Economics

Although, in my mother's defence, I never told her how I felt about the shoes, I am not sure it would have made much difference. Coming home from my first year at university, I decided it was time to find my voice. I asked my sister, who was three years younger, to help me organise a family meeting, where we explained to our parents that we wanted to make our own decisions. The meeting did not go well. They said they would be failing in their duty as parents if they let us make our own decisions,

since we were likely to make mistakes as a result. Nothing we said could convince them and we finally gave up in frustration. Many years later, I realised the mistake I had made: I had failed to consider the cultural difference between my Chinese immigrant parents and my American-born self.

As I grew up, I found myself struggling to find my voice in many other situations; at work, with friends and even with my husband in the early years of our relationship. One night, [we had agreed to sit down and discuss the plans for our wedding. But when I was ready to do so, I noticed he was in the middle of watching a movie on TV. I waited for the movie to finish but by then it was late and he said he was too tired. When I expressed my frustration he replied, "why didn't you tell me you were waiting for me? I would have turned off the movie - I've seen it before." Only when he said that did I realise how much I had stifled my own voice. When I recognised that other people also struggled with making themselves heard, I was eager to learn more about it. But I couldn't find much research on what I called 'upward influence'.

There was plenty of research on influence, but nothing that specifically looked at how to influence people who have more power than you do. Instead, I discovered related topics such as; employee voice - understanding when and why employees raise issues with management, issue selling - middle managers promoting issues of personal and strategic importance to upper management and whistleblowing - employees' attempts to halt illegal or immoral practices, none of which were exactly what I wanted to study. They looked at why people might speak up but did not focus on how to do

so successfully, with the exception of issue selling. I did, however, find research confirming the benefits of upward influence. Organisations benefit from employees bringing their ideas and concerns to management, since the employees are closer to their customers and daily operations. Conversely, organisations suffer if they stifle the voices of their employees.

Dissatisfied employees who feel unable to express their concerns to management wind up becoming disengaged or quitting, leaving management wondering what happened. At the extreme, if employees hesitate to challenge their managers, the consequences can be life-threatening - over 80 percent of aeroplane accidents investigated were found to involve the failure of the First Officer to speak up and correct the Captain's mistake. As risky as it may seem, it appears there is more to gain than lose from engaging in upward influence. However, the outcome can differ depending on the influence strategy. People who use aggressive or manipulative tactics (for example, threats or excessive flattery) do not always reap the benefits and can sometimes encounter resistance and poorer performance appraisals. In other words, simply speaking up is not enough, you must know how to do it effectively. ●

This article is an edited extract of *Making Your Voice Heard* by Connson Chou Locke, published by Endeavour.



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NEXT MONTH
ISSUE 200

INTERVIEW

Kerry Dryburgh - Executive Vice President, People & Culture - BP

ROUNDTABLE

How can technology enhance employee experience?
Partnered with Microsoft

EMPLOYMENT LAW

The wash of the pandemic will stir up mass employment litigation, at a time when businesses need to be weathering choppy waters

HR STRATEGY & PLANNING

Like never before, HR is expected to show cohesion, vision and capacity, as well as values and guiding principles

REWARD & REMUNERATION

In the R&R firmament, what constitutes "building back better" is unquestionably at odds with the old priorities of remunerating already well remunerated shareholders

HR TECHNOLOGY

Ahead for HR is a most rigorous, real-time bench-test of its much-criticised Fey grip on technology

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THE BLOG

INTRODUCING THE BLOG

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



RYAN LITTLEJOHN

Ryan is Associate & Leadership Development, Re-Training Strategy, L&D at Honda of the UK Manufacturing Ltd. He is an adventurous people specialist, practitioner, and leader. Ryan has over 20 years' experience in HR working across multiple sectors, more recently within the aerospace and automotive industries, delivering people initiatives.



LOUISA WEINSTEIN

Louisa is the author of *The 7 Principles of Conflict Resolution* & Mediator & Trainer at The Conflict Resolution Centre. She is passionate about mediation since over 20 years ago where, as a corporate lawyer, she saw how mediation provided solutions where law fell short. She has over 15 years' experience in mediation.



RICHARD PEACHEY

Richard is Workplace Relationships Consultant - CMP and combines many years' experience of client relationship management, project delivery and sales & marketing with expert knowledge of workplace conflict and resolution. He's ideally placed to work as a trusted advisor to clients on their issues and developing the best solutions.



6 C'S FOR LEADING TEAMS REMOTELY

Over one year on, we are starting to emerge from the pandemic but remote working is here to stay, at least in some form. There is an expectation that particularly SME's will look to cut overheads and with evidence that productivity does not suffer when working from home, we might find many businesses offloading large, expensive central office space in favour of a more blended approach of home working and keeping some physical space for larger meetings and collaboration.

All this leads to a more permanent switch to remote working. Many leaders have had to step into remote leadership blindly.

A CALL TO ACTION:
5 STEPS TO POST PANDEMIC
RE-ENGAGEMENT

The world and business in particular has been rocked not just by the pandemic but by issues of race, gender, diversity and equality. It is almost as if we are being asked to do and even see everything differently - not just operate differently but also to think differently challenging all sorts of "norms". For some this will be an evolution, for others a shock. This creates obvious opportunities for creativity and change. It also requires sensitivity, emotional intelligence and a widescale capacity to have different and more complex conversations.



WHY ARE LGBT+ EMPLOYEES MORE LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN WORKPLACE CONFLICT?

New CIPD research suggests that more than four-in-ten LGBT+ employees have experienced workplace conflict in the past year.

This compares with a figure of 29 percent for heterosexual employees also taking part in the CIPD's UK Working Lives survey. In general, LGBT+ workers were found to have experienced higher levels of conflict, lower levels of feelings of psychological safety and lower job satisfaction. Perhaps worse of all for HR, around 50 percent said the conflicts that had occurred still remained unresolved.



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NEW St John Ambulance mental health workplace first aid qualifications

We are launching two new mental health workplace first aid qualifications.

We have worked with FutureQuals to develop two accredited mental health workplace qualifications. We have created these qualifications based on the needs of our customers, **50% of which feel their employer should be doing more to support mental health at work.***

Both qualifications provide solid building blocks to create a positive mental health culture in the workplace by focusing on developing skills which are then assessed to ensure people leave competent in their new role. With Mental Health Awareness Week taking place during the 10-16 May 2021 now is the perfect time to take our new qualifications.

98% of people think that it is important to recognise mental health in the workplace*

61% say that their organisation do not provide line managers with support in managing their team's mental health*

57% work for organisations that do not have a trained Mental Health First Aider*

Mental Health Workplace Responder

- Level 2 Award in Mental Health: Workplace Responder qualification
- Gain an understanding of mental health issues that can affect individuals at work
- Learn about key policies and best practice frameworks for managing mental health in the workplace.

Mental Health Workplace First Aider

- Level 3 Award in Mental Health: Workplace First Aider qualification
- Be able to respond to a mental health incident including where physical first aid is needed.
- Be equipped with the skills and confidence to identify those who require mental health support and offer assistance.

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