

# HRD

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EXCLUSIVE EXTRACTS:

*HOW THE FUTURE WORKS  
COMPASSIONATE LEADER*

RECRUITMENT REDEFINED

ORGANISATIONAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION

TALENT MANAGEMENT

# DRIVE

“AS LEADERS, WE SHOULD NEVER BE AFRAID TO IMPLEMENT AND TRIAL CHANGE AND TO FAIL FAST IF THINGS DON'T WORK”

MARK TAYLOR  
PEOPLE DIRECTOR  
PART OF CONSTELLATION AUTOMOTIVE GROUP  
(COVERING cinch, BCA UK, BCA LOGISTICS, ELMO,  
GROUP COMMERCIAL & SUPPORT FUNCTIONS)

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## November 2022 / Issue 217

WHEN COVID TURNED A STARK AND UNREMITTING SPOTLIGHT ON THE WHOLE WORK CONVENTION - WHICH HAD BEEN BLITHELY TAKEN AS READ FOR DECADES - IT REVEALED A LITANY OF DILAPIDATED POLICIES, ARCHAIC PROCESSES AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORKS THAT WERE LARGELY UNCHANGED FOR A CENTURY. EMPLOYEES BECAME ACCUSTOMED TO A BOLT-ON, MAKE-DO-AND-MEND CULTURE.



JASON SPILLER, EDITOR

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Employee skills and knowledge have disappeared in the rear-view mirror, leading to a damaging skills crisis, stress, burnout, diminishing performance and dwindling engagement. To coin two phrases at once, the penny drop moment that the cart had been put before the horse, was when businesses realised that they had the tech, but not the skilled resources to drive and manage it. Employees are in inertia - rather than in sustainable transition - and it's too slow to keep up with the speed of change.

Like intractable muscle memory, old office conventions such as presenteeism are back post-pandemic and are exposing inequalities between those who primarily work onsite and those who work remotely. This is jeopardising the new dynamics and crucial opportunities that hybrid working promises. In the past, it may have been parents, carers and disabled workers that were discriminated against, as they sought flexibility at the detriment of their career progression. But now a much wider demographic is exposed to inequality and the ramifications are potentially crippling. Hybrid working is a paradox, a cause célèbre for some and a dangerous precedent for others. There is no clarion call for an en masse charge back to the office, it's more like a damp kazoo in a hokey old vaudeville act.

Hybrid working is here by default and, whilst it divides opinion on just about everything else, for businesses which acknowledge that geography and time are no barrier to talent, recruitment is entering an exciting and competitive new era, with a

veritable world of potential. But recruitment must be redefined to capitalise on this and businesses must accept that it is dealing with a talent-driven market and must truly, authentically and emphatically embrace the full meaning of hybrid working, think global and change the conventional framework of the employer/employee model, relationship and contract. The humiliating digital Squid Game elimination processes have become a massive turnoff for candidates, gifted with more choice than ever before.

Back when a desk diary, telephone and ashtray represented a fully-functioning workstation, employees played pass-the-parcel or paperchase with information that travelled from inbox to outbox across businesses, collecting signatures and stamps of approval. If there was a query or a blame to apportion, it was possible to retrace the process. Nowadays, a superfluidity of relentless data and information travels digitally, silently and unstopably, 24/seven, which has necessitated the introduction of Organisational Network Analysis. What ONA potentially represents for HR is the capacity to measure every key entry and communication continuously, providing the opportunity to level the playing field.

## LEGAL UPDATES

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THE WORLD OF EMPLOYMENT LEGISLATION CONTINUES TO EVOLVE AND REACT TO THE FAST CHANGING WORLD OF WORK. HERE IS THE LATEST ROUND UP OF VERDICTS FROM THE COURT, PLUS NEW AND ADAPTED LEGISLATION.

### COURT CASE REPORT

In the case of *Mrs B Knight v Havant & South Downs College*, Betty Knight, an English teacher, was accused of not doing enough to promote equality and diversity and was put on an improvement plan after being monitored for just 25 minutes at Havant and South Downs College in Hampshire. She claimed she was 'berated, humiliated and racially stereotyped' by feedback from the assessment and believed she was harassed out of her job, an employment tribunal ruled. Her assessor, a senior learning manager for

teaching, sent an email to a colleague complaining Mrs Knight was 'now throwing the E&D Black comment at me too'. Mrs Knight, who is black British, launched a grievance case and resigned after seeing the email.

Mrs Knight told an employment tribunal the email between her assessors 'insinuated' she was 'playing the race card' after being criticised for not 'promoting' equality and diversity in her lessons. She said she had found the remark to be 'quite offensive, very

unprofessional and evidence of victimisation and discrimination.' The panel agreed that putting a teacher on a performance improvement programme was entirely acceptable to maintain standards. However, Havant and South Downs College had not followed their own guidelines, as teachers are supposed to be assessed for at least 30 minutes. The tribunal ruled that the email constituted 'unwanted conduct related to race' which 'violated' Ms Knight's dignity and created an 'intimidating, hostile and offensive' working environment.

### EMPLOYMENT LAW

#### NATIONAL INSURANCE INCREASE REVERSED

The Government has announced that the 1.25 percentage point rise in National Insurance will be reversed from 6 November. The Government will also cancel the planned Health and Social Care Levy - a separate tax which was coming into force in April 2023 to replace this year's National Insurance rise. 920,000 businesses will see a cut in National Insurance bills, with 20,000 taken out of paying National Insurance entirely due to the Employment Allowance, which rose in April 2022 from £4,000 to £5,000. In particular, many small and medium businesses (SMEs) - who employ over 13 million people in the UK - will see a cut to their National Insurance bills. Next year this will be worth £4,200 on average for small businesses and £21,700 for medium sized firms who pay National Insurance.

### TACKLING BIAS IN AI

There is emerging evidence that bias built into algorithms can lead to less favourable treatment of people with protected characteristics such as race and sex. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has made tackling discrimination in AI a major strand of its new three-year strategy. It is publishing new guidance to help organisations avoid breaches of equality law, including the public sector equality duty (PSED). The guidance gives practical examples of how AI systems may be causing discriminatory outcomes. The EHRC is also exploring how best to use its powers to examine how organisations are using facial recognition technology, following concerns that the software may be disproportionately affecting people from ethnic minorities. These interventions will encourage public bodies to take action to address any negative equality and human rights impacts.

### LEGAL DIARY

- *Q1 2023*: Government intends to introduce a Data Reform Bill in parliament next year, which will introduce wide-ranging proposals, including matters relating to AI, accountability requirements, cookies, and even the governance model of the Information Commissioners Office.
- *April 2023*: The Government update the compensation limits to be imposed by employment tribunals every year.
- *April 2023*: The Government update the Statutory Payments every year.
- *TBC 2023*: A private member's bill introduced to allow women to take time off work for fertility treatment whilst also protect women who seek fertility treatment from any discrimination they may face in the workplace when pursuing fertility treatments such as IVF.



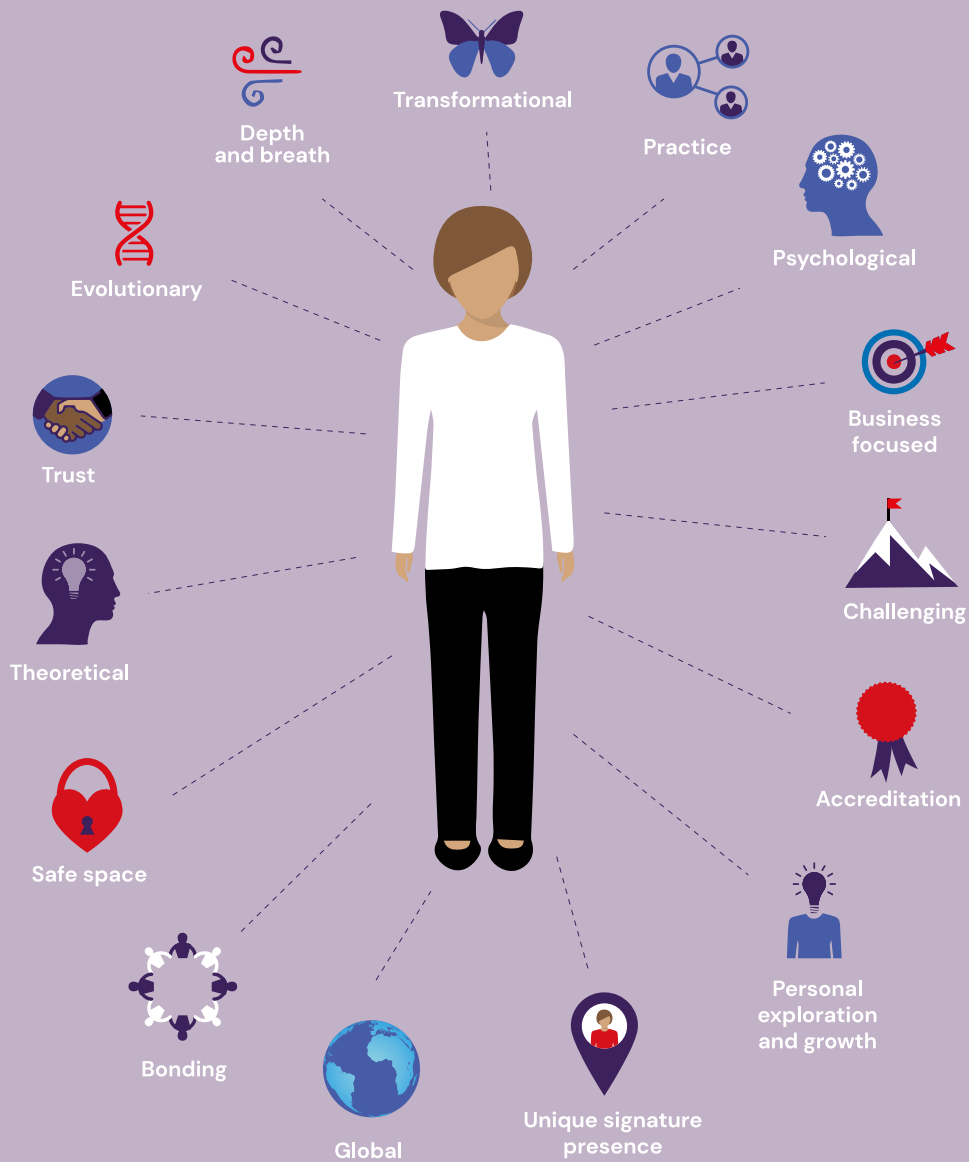
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# MARK TAYLOR

## PEOPLE DIRECTOR

### PART OF CONSTELLATION AUTOMOTIVE GROUP

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GROUP COMMERCIAL & SUPPORT FUNCTIONS)

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INTERVIEW BY JASON SPILLER  
& PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM LEE

WORKING ON FORD'S FIRST COMBUSTION ENGINE IN 1888, HENRY FORD FAMOUSLY SAID: "IF I ASKED WHAT PEOPLE WANT, THEY WOULD SAY 'FASTER HORSES.'" THE AUTO INDUSTRY HAS ALWAYS BEEN PIONEERING AND EVEN THE WAY CARS ARE BROUGHT TO MARKET HAS CHANGED BEYOND RECOGNITION. BY FAR, ONE OF THE BIGGEST BUSINESSES THAT IS PART OF THE DISRUPTION IN THE USED VEHICLE MARKET IS CONSTELLATION AUTOMOTIVE GROUP AND ITS INNOVATIVE PLATFORMS.

"WORK FLEXIBILITY BOUNDARIES WEREN'T JUST STRETCHED, THEY WERE SMASHED OPEN AND IT'S IMPORTANT NOW THAT WE ENSURE PEOPLE REMAIN CONNECTED AND PRODUCTIVE"

*MARK, TELL US ABOUT YOUR EARLY LIFE AND HOW YOU FOUND THE PATH TO A CAREER IN HR.* I grew up in a small village called Ingleton in the Yorkshire Dales where I still love returning to visit family and friends. Despite strong early expectations, I chose not to enter our 19th century-established family business that is based in the area - opting instead to progress my education through to university at Lancaster. I embarked on three years' study there with some apprehension - given the big family business decision I'd made - and without a clear alternative career path in mind. Initially I studied economics, as it was a broad subject, but even the diamond water paradox failed to inspire me! As part of my first year, I also took an HR-related module called "behaviour in organisations" which was about leadership, people and business, which

really fascinated me and has ever since. So, I decided to switch my studies and ended up attaining a very good HR degree, but there remained an expectation for me to join the family business, after my studies were completed. However, I was really determined to follow my own ambitions and I secured a position on a graduate scheme for a European logistics company called Arvin Meritor. Although it wasn't specifically HR, it was a very good graduate scheme in a big, commercial, private-sector organisation and it gave me a brilliant grounding in the wider world of business and exposure to real-life people challenges.

These first experiences chimed with what I'd learnt from my parents and grandparents in the family business, that trust and respect are crucial to working effectively with people. After a year at

Arvin, an opportunity arose to join the retailer Matalan - a junior HR recruitment role - a graduate placement and I just knew this was the start that I'd been looking for. I progressed really well at Matalan and it was a great time to join the company because the business was changing quickly, fueled by a newly-appointed executive team, led by; Paul Mason as CEO, Andy Clarke as Retail Director and Roger Burnley - who is now leading Asda - as Logistics Director. There was a clear growth and investment plan for the business, with one of the main beneficiaries of focus and funding being the whole people and HR infrastructure. The HR team and agenda rose quickly - as did my learning curve - and I was part of shaping and delivering significant new initiatives such as; a new learning and development strategy, a recruitment model and a different approach to reward

- effectively what we'd know today as our wider employee value proposition. The great thing about the changes HR was driving was that they were clearly integral to improving the business. Matalan was then and is today, a very successful market-leading retail business. I developed hugely in the six years there and I also achieved my CIPD qualification. My final role was a Regional HR Manager, leading a team of six HR Managers, covering over 3,000 people in the biggest region in retail operations. However, I knew I needed to broaden my horizons and I subsequently secured two external HR job offers; one to join the then retail giant Arcadia and the other with the Co-op. I chose the latter, as it represented a wholesale change in environment, a multi-sector business with 110,000 employees, a turnover of £13 billion and a different business model.

*THIS SEEMS LIKE A FAST-DEVELOPING CAREER. WHAT ARE YOUR OUTSTANDING MEMORIES?* The Co-op role was a true HR Business Partner, working with the compliance function in the financial services business. The new business and HR function required me to learn and adapt rapidly, as I was now working in a much bigger, corporate, regulated business - partnering professional lawyers, risk management and compliance experts - and in a much larger, HR matrix structure too. It was worlds apart from my previous business and role and it was working in a mature "Ulrich" HR operating model consisting of 160 people with a range of people specialisms, experts and roles. The business was also heavily unionised. At its peak, four trade unions were recognised, two national and two staff ones, which exposed me to all sorts of new complexities, particularly in delivering change. I also learnt a lot about culture, talent and leadership development - all of which the Co-op heavily invested in. Later, I also studied for an externally accredited executive coaching qualification and it's great to say I remain qualified today and I still use all the key skills I developed. The Co-op, including the financial services business, was a very well respected and established

organisation and it was a brilliant place to work and develop for the majority of my seven years there.

*THIS WAS ALSO A DISRUPTED TIME FOR THE FINANCIAL SECTOR AS A WHOLE.* There was also an intense focus on the changing customer relationship and a lot of disruption in the industry, as it moved to being truly customer focused, with regulation fundamentally changing to enforce that. The major shift was that financial services businesses were no longer assumed to be treating customers

"AS LEADERS, WE SHOULD NEVER BE AFRAID TO IMPLEMENT AND TRIAL CHANGE AND TO FAIL FAST IF THINGS DON'T WORK"

fairly. They now had to clearly prove and evidence they were - and if they couldn't - it was assumed they weren't. The FSA regulatory body completely restructured to drive this change, new regulations and scrutiny were also implemented, along with more governance - much of which was enabled through a more intensive spotlight on culture, values, professional people competence and credibility. The most interesting element for me was culture, which heightened my understanding about the importance of having an aligned customer and people focus and how to drive business commerciality with this as a priority. Throughout my time at the Co-op, we carried out a lot of work around culture and how to meaningfully change it to improve the business operation and be genuinely customer-orientated. I learnt so much about changing and influencing culture, which is multi-faceted and involves a clear purpose, vision, values, leadership behaviour and role modelling - together with integrated people policies, procedures and measures. Without question, the biggest influencing factor of culture is leadership behaviour.

*TELL US ABOUT YOUR PROGRESSION TO THE NEXT STAGE OF YOUR CAREER.* It was clear very early on that I was outgrowing the scope of my HRBP role and, in a matter of months, I was asked to move onto one of the biggest transformation programmes in the Co-op Group. It was a large, professional, transformation programme enabled by Deloitte's, another new experience for me and I was out of my comfort zone again. After that, I took on several secondment roles - one leading a strategic review of our overall business recruitment strategy - and others such as being part of project leadership teams implementing a new HR system and a Group-wide HR operating model. Ultimately, I was offered two Head of HR roles, one in the new Co-op legal services division and the other heading up Business Partnering in the financial services business. I took the latter, which was my last role in my final two years at the Co-op. My personal circumstances then changed significantly and, ideally, I needed to find a role which had a dual North West and Midlands base and I came across the lead HR role at Topps Tiles. This really intrigued me as it was and is, a market leading specialist retailer in the UK and in fact, the world.

*WHAT MARKED TOPPS TILES OUT AS DIFFERENT TO WHAT YOU HAD EXPERIENCED SO FAR IN YOUR CAREER?* It's a fantastic business and it was perfect for me, as it was hugely innovative, tech and digitally focused and the sort of scale where I thought I could really make my mark at that stage in my career. This was my first HR leader role, responsible for the company-wide function and I felt that I was ready for it. Topps was a very successful business to be involved with, steeped in traditional values, a true customer obsession, along with a clear business goal, strategy and culture, whilst also being incredibly commercial too. Very quickly, I learnt a great deal about PLC businesses, attending leadership meetings in the city and understanding how the analysts officially report on PLC business performance, in context with director and exec level responsibilities. The business was moving rapidly and my

confidence in driving change was growing. As leaders, we should never be afraid to implement and trial change and to 'fail fast' if things don't work. Topps's clear business goal and well-planned strategy saw it successfully grow into the commercial market, whilst maintaining and growing its number one UK domestic market position too. My time there was integral in my personal leadership development and with the team, we really enabled the business to progress even further on all fronts. I was understanding a new level of business and functional leadership and a broader mindset, recognising that I was running a key enabling function. I was mindful too that, what makes you successful at one leadership level, doesn't make you successful at another and you need to be pragmatic and adaptable.

*IT'S INTERESTING THAT SOME PRACTITIONERS ARE COMPELLED TO MAKE THIS STEP, BUT OTHERS DECIDE TO STAY BACK IN A MORE TRANSACTIONAL ROLE.* That definition is clear, when you acknowledge that you are a business leader first and a functional leader second. It's a state of psychological recognition that you're there to really understand, challenge and push the business and leaders forward and to drive the right change. At this level, the stakeholders you need to consider are no longer just senior internal leaders, employees and your team, they are customers, shareholders and a board of directors too. Topps had real momentum, but after four years and with proven delivery of positive change, I just felt my personal runway was shortening and I'd progressed as far as I could. So, when I received the call from - what was then BCA Marketplace (now Constellation Automotive Group) - about an HR Director role, with a big people transformation agenda, I knew I needed to take a closer look. I was compelled by the size and scale of the business and its ambition and I was highly impressed by the senior leaders I met. Automotive was an entirely different sector for me and it was going through colossal change - not least the switch from combustion

powered to electric powered vehicles - but also the way people buy and own cars too. Unquestionably, it was a sector transforming, which appealed to me, as well as the challenge to take the HR function to a new level of maturity.

"WE'RE STRONGER NOW TOGETHER ACROSS ALL OF OUR PLATFORMS AND WE FULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT OUR COMPETITION IS DEFINITELY EXTERNAL"

*EXPLAIN HOW THE BUSINESS HAS MOVED TO MEET THE CHANGES IN THE MARKET.*

The overall business has grown to be Europe's largest digital used car marketplace. It has a number of exciting brands such as webuyanycar, BCA, cinch, Marshall Motor Group and Elmo, which operate across C2B, B2B and B2C markets, with the overall business selling approximately 2.5 million vehicles annually. One of the key market changes that intensified during the pandemic has been how customers have moved to buy more vehicles online. We responded by developing the cinch brand, to be an online retail sales platform that B2B customers could use to continue to trade with retail customers online, recognising that several customers didn't have the scale or capability to do that in-house. The traditional BCA remarketing business, which has historically facilitated the wholesale of vehicles through physical auctions, also moved to transact predominantly online - giving customers more choice and the ability to operate more efficiently. To make both of these changes, we've invested in our infrastructure, developed a host of innovative digital products and also improved data and intelligence to really support customers as well. Another key market change has been the provision of new stocks and services. As an example, we've evolved our vehicle refurbishment

capability to produce the option of retail ready vehicles for our B2B customers and have changed many of our operational sites to be multi-functional and more efficient. To support the growth of electric vehicles sales, we've continually looked to provide our customers with the widest range of stock through various sourcing avenues and new and existing business relationships. We've improved our transport services by investing in our logistics infrastructure and we now have more trucks to give our customers an even better service. The other market change has been how people own vehicles - and how that may change as the transition to electric ensues - so we acquired Elmo, which is an electric car subscription service, that is focused on being the easiest way for customers to make the electric choice.

*WHAT HAVE BEEN THE KEY PEOPLE CHALLENGES FOR AN AUTOMOTIVE BUSINESS OF THIS SCALE AND COMPLEXITY?* Three spring to mind: Because of our business growth and developing a more diverse business model over recent years, we've had to significantly increase and improve our people capability and experience. We are also focused on attracting, retaining and developing a more diverse range of people, with the right and different skills, mindsets and behaviours. Our second challenge has been how to continue to drive, adapt and be energised by change together. We've all experienced incredible change in the last few years and our experience has been that we have generated even better team working and connectivity, which has allowed us to capitalise on opportunities to benefit everyone. It has also reinforced the understanding that we're stronger now together across all of our platforms and we fully acknowledge that our competition is definitely external. The last challenge has been to improve and leverage all of our people infrastructure. By that I mean the right modern people technology, policies, processes and governance to best support the business both now and in the future. What is really encouraging is, the majority of the

"YOU HAVE TO  
ACKNOWLEDGE WHERE  
YOU REALLY ARE AND NOT  
OPERATE IN HOPE, DENIAL  
OR THE PROVERBIAL  
BUBBLE"



changes and improvements, all stemmed from our people vision and approach. We've accelerated recruitment, particularly apprentices, improved our end-to-end recruitment and on-boarding approach and processes and, for the first time ever, we've developed clear employee value propositions for our key brands. We've implemented a new L&D approach, developed new, modern manager upskilling programmes, improved our graduate scheme and launched a new approach to optimising people performance. Our reward package has evolved, our wellbeing approach and support is enhanced and we've implemented flexible working, where we can, to give people more flexibility, allowing us to attract people from wider talent pools, whilst ensuring people remain connected and productive. In terms of infrastructure, our existing people technology is being updated and added new technology introduced, where possible. We have even implemented a new people service delivery model, a host of core people processes and better people data and analytics. Add to that, improved people governance and risk management has been introduced too. So, as you can imagine, it has not been a quiet period.

*HOW WARY DO YOU HAVE TO BE OF POTENTIAL RIVALS?* As a whole business, we don't have one overall competitor, as we're relatively unique. But each of our businesses have individual competitors, which we keep a very close eye on. We tend to have the mentality of leading and trying to give our competitors the problem of being wary of us. But you can never be complacent and we constantly talk internally about having a 'healthy paranoia', particularly important when you are the market leader. So, a strong level of curiosity has to be a good thing, questioning what we do, how we do it and why. A big challenge comes from our success; if I look at vehicle refurbishment for example, that requires high levels of technically skilled people. Those skills are in a defined and limited talent pool, so it's becoming harder to recruit them. There is no doubt that Brexit has impacted here, because in the past, we've relied on some

of these skills coming from a transient Europe market. We're now developing a brand new academy, so we can really grow 'more of our own' and we're working hard to put the right proposition together to ensure we retain our talent. We have to compete strongly for other key skills too - such as tech, product, engineering, data and cyber and infosec security - and we're continually looking to source these skills from a much broader, diverse range of sectors and locations now.

"PEOPLE ENTERING THE WORLD OF WORK ARE MORE INTERESTED IN PURPOSE, BEYOND COMMERCIAL PERFORMANCE. IT CANNOT BE A BINARY CHOICE OF PROFIT OR PEOPLE, PLANET OR RESULTS"

*WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BUSINESS PROSPECTS ARE, IN TERMS OF GROWTH AND REACH?* There are approximately seven and a half million used vehicle transactions in the UK each year. We expect to do over one and a half million of that number, so there is plenty of market share still to be taken. But that relies on us continuing to provide outstanding customer propositions, services and all-round excellence. Behind any exciting brand, you have to have the best service - because there's always fierce competition - so a clear strategy, the right people, great operational delivery and an innovative, customer-focused culture are paramount. Market conditions are tougher for sure right now - the five big European used car markets have contracted in the first half of this year - and that's down to the macroeconomic factors that we all know about; the war in Ukraine, chip issues, COVID and the Brexit aftermath. However, we remain optimistic and ambitious, but mindful that we have to manage that ambition at all times, to deliver our longer term objectives and sustainability.

*THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM, I GUESS, IS ELECTRIC CARS.* That's of course one of the major changes that's transforming the automotive sector. It's only really scratching the surface right now when you look at the number of electric vehicles on the road, compared to vehicles with traditional combustion engines. That said, like-for-like electric vehicles sales are the biggest growth area and so the direction of travel, as it were, appears well set. It's important for us that we're prepared and ready to adapt and transition internally. So, for example, we're considering how we will develop our own site and business infrastructure to accommodate the ongoing management of greater levels of electric vehicle stock. It's a challenge, because although 2030 sounds a long way off, it's a deadline looming large for everyone. As with anything in business, timing is everything and I'm pleased to say that we've been proactive again with the acquisition of Elmo and the fact that we've recruited some real electric vehicles experts and graduates to develop the plan, to meet all the challenges and opportunities coming our way.

*WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS YOU NEED IN A BUSINESS IN THESE TUMULTUOUS TIMES?* There are several: Quality leaders focused on people and ensuring they're aligned behind the right direction, priorities and they're all pulling in the same direction is the big one for me. As I said before, you have to keep the competition external. Resilience and pragmatism are up there too - you have to acknowledge where you really are and not operate in hope, denial or the proverbial bubble. Although it has become a buzzword - agility as well is absolutely crucial. We have a natural continuous improvement, innovative culture and a relatively flat structure, with limited red tape which all helps us adapt quickly. Then remaining laser focused on our customers goes without saying and the other element that stands out in our business is our scale and diversity. That really helps in tougher times as you can scale and flex different parts of our business model when needed too. There's

lots of essential elements and we don't take anything for granted. We've a clear direction and plans and we're not afraid to make changes to those plans. The pandemic taught us that you still need clear direction, but the days of defined, long-term, rigid operational plans are a thing of the past.

*IN TERMS OF HYBRID AND AUTONOMOUS WORKING CHECKS AND BALANCES ARE SURELY ESSENTIAL, THE PENDULUM CAN SWING TOO FAR.* I think this links to the different generations and the changing world of work. For me the employment relationship between employees and employers was already changing, COVID just accelerated it. As we all know, there are multiple generations in the workplace now, all with hugely different expectations and needs. People entering the world of work are more interested in purpose, beyond commercial performance. It cannot be a binary choice of profit or people, planet or results. The younger generations certainly keep your learning and your thinking fresh - which is really positive and energising. In terms of how they work, I'm seeing that they tend to expect more inherent flexibility, want some influence on broader decisions and regularly question why they should work for a particular business and stay there. They have limited fear of changing sectors, professions or careers, which is liberating and exciting for them and challenging for businesses congruently. All the signs and insights suggest they're likely to have multiple careers and non-linear career paths and they just see far more choice than many previous generations ever did. Therefore, it's crucial to continually develop leaders to be flexible, relevant and rounded, so they can continue to predict, create and retain the roles, skills and talent businesses need.

It is a strange paradox that from something so disruptive and debilitating can come positive changes. Businesses innovated like never before and new levels of resilience and unity surfaced. The intensity of change was legendary, with massive changes being implemented at breakneck speed. It was something that

most of had never seen and many of us would have probably thought impossible before. When lockdown hit, business had no time for inertia or perfection, it was exhilarating and exhausting at the same time and I'm hugely proud of how we came through when the going got tough. People were trusted and roles that couldn't be done remotely, somehow were. Work flexibility boundaries weren't just stretched, they were smashed open and it's important now that we ensure people remain connected to the business, each other and they continue to be productive too. People took responsibilities for things that often

"WHEN LOCKDOWN HIT, THERE WAS NO TIME FOR INERTIA OR PERFECTION, IT WAS EXHILARATING AND EXHAUSTING AT THE SAME TIME AND I'M HUGELY PROUD OF HOW WE CAME THROUGH, WHEN THE GOING GOT TOUGH"

they had little or no experience of and delivered what needed to be done. They just adapted. I recall on one business-wide Teams call one of our leaders simply, and instinctively stating; "leave your job title at the door", which instantly galvanised everyone and drove even more diversity, equality and inclusion. I look forward to telling my children about the historic impact of that challenging time in the future and how many people not only came through it, but actually grew and developed exponentially. It sounds coy, but true leaders emerged and were born. The challenge for all organisations now is to work out and retain all the pandemic-accelerated changes and learnings that are right for their market, sector, business and current and future workforce. To coin the cliché, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' formula.

*WHAT ARE THE OUTSTANDING BUSINESS AND HR CHALLENGES AND OBJECTIVES?*

A recession can force businesses to 'batten down the hatches' immediately, meaning they can lose sight of medium to longer term goals and opportunities. For me, the key business objective is therefore to effectively manage that balance between the short and medium to long term. In other words, focusing on delivering short-term business performance, while continuing to focus and invest in key medium to long-term capabilities and goals, so that the business is ready to capitalise when market conditions improve. That's a very awkward balance to strike. Retaining a healthy cash flow position is also very important in tough periods too. From a HR perspective, the key people challenges are the classics of retention and attraction which is arguably becoming harder in challenging times and with greater workforce diversity and the more ways of working that we have today. For me, we have an even bigger accountability to lead the employee value proposition - continually reminding new and existing people why they should work in the business and ensuring that the actual experience lives up to the words of intent and keeps evolving. We also need to ensure that there is focus on the key practical factors too, such as effective wellbeing support and 'cost of living' help. The other crucial HR role is to challenge and support business leaders to own and lead their people through the change and ensure they have the right business operating models and capabilities. We need to remind and coach leaders to have the right perspective, give clear and regular direction and to create a sense of ongoing belonging for their people - who'll look to them even more in challenging periods. Finally, we also need to ensure we're driving a focus on critical capabilities, roles and talent and having the right plans in place to manage these specific risks too.

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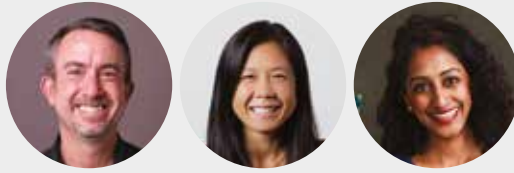


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STRICTLY FOR SENIOR HR & PEOPLE PRACTITIONERS



ARTICLE BY BRIAN ELLIOTT, EXECUTIVE LEADER - FUTURE FORUM AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT - SLACK, SHEELA SUBRAMANIAN, VICE PRESIDENT & CO-FOUNDER - FUTURE FORUM & HELEN KUPP, SENIOR DIRECTOR & CO-FOUNDER - FUTURE FORUM

*This is an edited extract from the book *How the Future Works: Leading Flexible Teams to do the Best Work of Their Lives*, by Brian Elliott, Sheela Subramanian and Helen Kupp. Published by [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)*

# UNCOMMON BOND

Feeling a sense of connection and belonging are basic human needs. When people feel connected to something bigger than themselves, they are more satisfied and perform better at work. It's not surprising then, that one of the most common concerns we hear about flexible work is that it will erode a company's culture and its employees' ability to connect with one another.

There is a fear shared by some, that without the office as the central hub for work, people's sense of connection and belonging will falter and they will be more likely to leave. Forging a sense of connection and belonging is a legitimate concern, but the notion that needs to be challenged is this: Is gathering in an office really what forges those connections? Research suggests the opposite: Flexible work is a critical tool in improving a sense of connection and belonging. In surveys conducted by Future Forum, Slack's research consortium, people on teams that have flexible work arrangements actually have ten percent higher sense of belonging scores than those full time in the office. Employees with time flexibility also reported an overall higher satisfaction with work (plus 50 percent). This was especially true for those in historically discriminated groups. Black employees in the US, in particular, have continued

to see improvements in belonging quarter over quarter, as organisations have settled into more flexible, distributed work.

As for the related concern that creativity and innovation will suffer if we're not together in the office, that too is a bit of conventional wisdom that isn't universally true. The reality is that where someone works has little bearing on how creative the team feels. What does have an impact on creativity is psychological safety, whether a person feels like their team is willing to take risks and whether that person feels comfortable asking the team for help. Crucially, neither of those elements of psychological safety have anything to do with where people are located or whether they are working on flexible schedules. What's more, the assumption that being in an office together builds our sense of connection ignores an important fact: Traditional

office culture was never the right fit for everyone. Despite the preference some people have for it, office culture never really fostered connection and creativity for everyone in the same way. Connection and belonging are important, but if companies really believe these are essential elements of their culture, then they need much more than just office space to make sure that they are, they need a more fundamental redesign of not only physical space, but around all the ways in which connection can be built. What we have found generally happens is that people - especially those who have been around for a while and have already succeeded in office culture - tend to default to offices because it's how things have always been done. They often do this without asking whether it was really better. Part of the reluctance to let go of the idea that physical office space is the place to gather and do work stems from



people's inability to imagine an alternative. They've simply never seen it happen before, so how can they know it will work? It's now time to take an honest and fresh look at how we're crafting truly connected experiences for our people, ones that invite everyone to participate and contribute, no matter where, when or how they're working.

One of the fringe benefits of moving to flexible work is that it requires us to disrupt old habits and behaviours that may never have worked as well as we thought they did. But change is hard for everyone and so acknowledging that challenge and asking people to take an experimentation and iteration mindset, is an important first step. Once disrupted, we can move forward with more intentionality about what we want to replace them with. People want greater flexibility and according to the latest Future Forum research, 94 percent of knowledge workers want more flexibility in when they work and 80 percent want flexibility in where they work. But this does not mean that people never want to come together to connect in person. Flexibility means having choices and that includes choices about when, where and how often to come together, as well as for what purposes. People want to be able to make these kinds of choices with their teams, rather than just gathering at the office every morning at 9:00am.

The data tells us that people still want to come together in person, but not for all aspects of work. Instead, most want it for the specific purpose of building relationships and making connections. Future Forum's research further shows that for every person who wants office space for quiet, focused work, there are four people who want it for team or coworker collaboration and camaraderie. Too often, people make the assumption that flexible work doesn't allow for in-person connection, but that's only true if companies decide to make it that way. The reality is, "digital-first" doesn't mean "never in person." Even companies that have adopted digital-first or fully remote

strategies, still consciously create ways to bring their people together for full company retreats and team building excursions. When thinking about building connection in a flexible environment, it's important to remember that the office and offsites are still forums where that can happen. They just aren't the only forums.

*"THE REALITY IS THAT WHERE SOMEONE WORKS HAS LITTLE BEARING ON HOW CREATIVE THE TEAM FEELS. WHAT DOES HAVE AN IMPACT ON CREATIVITY IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY"*

Flexible work requires companies to reconceptualise the "workplace." Over the past two decades, we've already shifted most of the ways we communicate from offices, posters and memos to emails, video meetings and messaging platforms. The Slack project channel - that brings together functions across floors, buildings and cities - is more central than the conference room. Jotting down ideas individually and putting them in a shared, collaborative document or digital whiteboard for group conversation, is more effective than the traditional whiteboard at unlocking new ideas. Communication now happens via communication platforms, emails, videoconference, chats, phone calls, huddles, direct messaging, social media or in person and people can engage in those communications from home, their car, while walking down the street, sitting in a cafe, traveling or in an office building. The place and the method matter much less than the quality of interaction taking place. Think about how much time was spent in the past on considerations about office real estate, decor and seating assignments. Office space is just one dimension. Leaders need to focus on

providing the forums and tools to support work and connection by whatever means and from whatever place makes the most sense for the people actually carrying out the the work. That means thinking about digital with the same level of intentionality and investment as office space has had in the past. This switch in focus is overdue.

Consider that during the pandemic, the office largely went away and yet most knowledge work continued without significant disruption. But imagine if our digital tools and software went away? It's hard to see how work could continue without them. The best way to break old habits and reconceptualise the workplace in this way, is to make digital space your new headquarters. A digital HQ means that digital space, rather than a physical office building, is the primary place where people can access information, opportunity and each other. The main benefit of that is that people can access those things, no matter where or when they're working. Making this shift means that leaders need to be intentional about the digital tools their company uses. In fact, digital investments can significantly impact employee experience. Turning to Future Forum's survey once again, employees who perceive their company to be an early adopter of technology report scores 50 percent higher for productivity and twice as high for sense of belonging, compared with those at organisations perceived to be late adopters, in addition to other benefits. Some ways in which companies can promote the idea that digital is their new HQ include: Company-wide digital forums to build alignment - global communication channels. These can help anchor the organisation around shared purpose and goals. Make them the primary place for communicating about the company's mission, vision and priorities and for sharing important metrics, news and announcements. *Create a digital home for every team and project:* Project and team-specific spaces make it easier for teams to collaborate. They should have spaces they can count on to share work, give

feedback, access information and connect with one another about their work. *Share online what happens offline:* Record as many meetings as possible and post videos and transcripts so everyone can access the information, regardless of whether they present. Make digital channels a repository for everyone - meeting recordings or leader presentation materials - and a place for people to ask questions. This is a great way to build a common base of knowledge across your organisation. *Create space to socialise:* Social channels can form around shared interests (like favourite TV shows, fitness groups, or hobbies). Host drop-in coffee breaks via video conference. Headquarters is about more than just where work is done. It should also be a place to connect and build relationships. *Support Employee Resource Groups:* ERGs (LGBTQ+, Abilities, Women, Black, Hispanic/Latinx, etc.) have grown in importance for many people and digital platforms allow groups to come together across geographies to meet and find allies.

For every one person who wants office space for quiet, focused work, four people prefer using office space for team or coworker interactions. This means organisations need to think differently about how they utilise their space and prioritise areas where those interactions can take place. Office spaces, in fact, can be designed to enhance connection and belonging. Research by MillerKnoll and Leesman shows that a sense of belonging among employees can increase by as much as five percentage points in thoughtfully designed spaces, like social commons that include some of the following elements. *Perks:* Cultural touchstones like product prototypes or photos of employee events, as well as amenities like coffee and snacks can be a way to draw people in. *Choices:* Different areas and seating arrangements - like a comfy couch area, versus a small cafe table and chairs - can give people options that suit different needs. They might gather to socialise or retreat to a nook for quieter, one-on-one conversations. *Vistas:* Open views

increase the likelihood of chance encounters and encourage interaction. *Engagement:* Digital displays can provide a reason for people to gather for news updates or to digest timely content.

*“CONNECTION AND BELONGING ARE IMPORTANT, BUT IF COMPANIES REALLY BELIEVE THESE ARE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THEIR CULTURE, THEN THEY NEED MUCH MORE THAN JUST OFFICE SPACE TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY ARE”*

As we've seen with even all-remote companies, there is value in coming together in-person, but the frequency and cadence of those gatherings will vary greatly from team to team and organisation to organisation. Instead of focusing on top-down mandates - like how many days, or on which days, people should come into the office - businesses should allow teams to decide for themselves what works best. For example, a product design and engineering team might find value in coming together for a longer period (three-to-four days) each quarter to reconnect, talk product strategy and plan their collective roadmap for the next quarter. Planning, especially for a large department, can be a complex and interconnected effort, making a longer offsite or onsite meeting highly valuable. By contrast, a sales or business development team is typically more regionally focused, since sales organisations tend to map people to accounts within a territory. These teams might prefer to be together in-person two or three times a week to allow for day-to-day camaraderie (especially when they are being rejected regularly on cold calls or outreaches), competition and

sharing of outreach strategies. Each team should discuss the options and make the decision as a group and team members should consider their collective function, circumstances and the personalities of each individual in order to strike a balance. What matters most is that team leaders refrain from making these decisions in a vacuum.

The behaviour of leadership shapes culture, even unintentionally. In fact, perhaps the greatest risk to a connected, flexible workplace is executive behaviour. Companies that create policies that look flexible, but allow executives to recentralise in one building, every day, risk creating a second-class experience for those who are working more flexibly. The shift to this new way of working has to start at the top, but also engage people across the organisation. Leaders need to be intentional about building an organisation-wide culture that champions connection and belonging in a flexible work environment. That means continuing to communicate about the advantages and expectations around a connected and flexible work strategy. If anything, leaders should err on the side of over-communicating, talking about this regularly and through all available communications channels, in order to reach as many people as possible. They also need to model the behaviour, within their own teams, as well as more publicly. This is why at Slack, we made a point of disassembling our C-Suite. No more corner offices and no more executive floor - perks that many top leaders see as symbols of their success - because in a flexible environment where people aren't coming into the office every day, we simply don't need them. Flexible work is a critical tool in improving a sense of connection and belonging, encouraging leaders to rethink when and where work happens. Through a combination of rethinking digital tools and shared workspaces, as well as leading by example, companies can truly build a culture of connection from anywhere.



# Streamline your onboarding process and enhance employee engagement

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ARTICLE BY  
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*This is an edited extract from the newly-revised and updated edition of  
Compassionate Leadership by Manley Hopkinson  
Published by Piatkus*

# THREE COINS IN THE WATER FOUNTAIN

So much has changed over the past couple of years that will have a lasting impact on how we work, collaborate and lead. There was no single global plan for the pandemic, so governments across the world applied their own solutions - essentially restricting freedoms to meet, interact and collaborate - which locked us in our houses and out of our working spaces.

Where once we rubbed shoulders, exchanged pleasantries and casually shared ideas over a cup of coffee, suddenly we had to work from makeshift offices or the kitchen table and, more than ever before, on our own. The video conference platforms we rarely and reluctantly used, became our primary method to connect. Zoom, Teams, Chime, Skype and more, once rare platforms for the then minority group of remote workers rapidly became mainstream. Where once the most common phrase was, “morning, how are you”? We grew accustomed to being told... or telling others, “you’re on mute”! Many businesses and organisations fell into the lazy trap of just trying to operate in the same way, but through a video conference call - and eight-hour physical meetings, became eight-hour virtual marathon video calls. Indeed, for far too many, the two-day annual conference

transferred to became two back-to-back eight-hour video calls! Aaargh... inefficient, ineffective, lazy lunacy! But in reality, this shift to remote teams started many years ago, as the world moved toward a more globalised economy, one that demanded collaborating with competitors and supply partners to offer solutions that one organisation could not offer alone. COVID accelerated a drift that was happening anyway and may well have been the wakeup call we all needed, by brutally exposing the fallacy of our reluctance to change our engagement methods, as teams spanned the globe and cross continent collaboration was fast becoming the norm. Where our ineffectiveness would not have been noticed and so there would be no urgency to change, the pandemic shone a bright light on our errors and provided the burning platform to prompt a swift and potentially permanent shift in our

methods of communication and collaboration.

So, we know the scene and, as we face the winter of 2022, COVID is still holding a dominant space in our minds and our lives. But even without the acceleration that it brought, as a leader, you were always going to have to lead teams of people, geographically dispersed across respective home nations and across many time zones globally. We must then press on, accept and embrace this reality and focus on becoming the best remote leader that we possibly can be. I would argue that means the philosophy of compassionate leadership is more important than ever before, consciously acting with positive intent from a foundation of understanding. It’s clear that we cannot just continue our old and comfortable working practices. We will need to change how we lead and the focus of time together and time

apart. But what change, what new focus? How big a leadership shift is it? Can I do it? Yes, you can actually, because you are already doing it! You already have all the skills and, all we have to do is to raise our awareness of how best to apply these skills in this new world and focus on the outcome we are trying to achieve - which is, I believe, unchanged - gaining commitment, while leadership in itself has not changed. We are still trying to gain commitment, to build legacy to enable people to be the best version of themselves, to enable organisational performance. None of that has changed - leadership is still leadership - but now there are a few barriers that are in our way.

Who was it who said, “insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different result?” Albert Einstein of course - but in this context, the expression should be, “insanity is doing the same thing and expecting the same result”! The circumstances have changed so we need to change too. In retrospect it all seemed much easier when we were in the office. People were there and they generally got along and communication was easy. You could call a meeting without too much notice and, stuff happened. Leadership was easy... wasn't it? I disagree, I believe that there were some lazy assumptions. We assumed that team dynamic would just happen, we assumed that what was being done was what was needed to be done, so long as everyone was busy, all was ok, yes? Well, no! These were incorrect assumptions, that meant the leadership aspect of a manager's job was not fulfilled. There is not a linear connection between activity and outcome. So, what is the problem and what can we do about it? I see the new added complexities as being: The lack of casual conversations impacting innovation, understanding the emotional context of communications, feelings of detachment and isolation, difficulties in sharing information and maintaining focus particularly on video calls. Disciplined delegation - moving from activity focus to outcome focus and making decisions - and these fall into

two broad categories; communication & connection and empowerment & performance.

Let's look at the communication and connection part first: There is the human side of it and then the practical side of sharing information in such a way that it is embedded. We are struggling to connect at a human level and we are missing all the normal spoken and unspoken emotional signals of being in the same space together. Recalling the work of Albert Mehrabian on communication, 55 percent of the emotional context is understood through body language alone - the eyes, hands,

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PRESENT”*

posture and movement. Even though I may be able to see your head and shoulders on a video call, I cannot see your eyes clearly. I cannot see your posture, your hands or any movement. My brain is aching to try and understand the emotions, but it is just not receiving the signals. I am not “seeing” you. We are not rubbing shoulders or even shaking hands. Where once my brain might struggle to block out the hum and noise of many conversations in the office, now it is crying out for them. Part of our new normal then is to somehow create mechanisms that enable human connection and also to recognise that this element will be missing when we are on our video calls.

Remember casual conversations? Oh, how we miss them - they are so important and yet so underestimated in their value - a corridor conversation provides contact and allows the sharing of ideas, concerns and solutions in an informal manner and are a key element of organisational innovation. We connect at a natural and human level when we come together without just a task focused agenda. We allow the brain to make its subconscious connections and links that the more logical conscious brain would not create, “Oh, I just thought, how about ...?”, “Ah, of course, brilliant... I hadn't thought of that”! All of these unstructured revelations and insights are powerfully revealed when the limitations of a fixed agenda are removed and the expectation of resolution or attention is not present.

Unscheduled, no agenda, open-ended and free flowing... what a privilege. But how do we recreate them when the corridor, canteen and coffee machine are gone? Both of those elements of connection are now more difficult and can lead to a sense of isolation and detachment. How can you “feel” part of the team if you never meet in the flesh? Traditionally, we called a meeting, people assembled and sat comfortably at the table, laptop and phone in front of them with notifications permanently on and then we blew their brains out with a dire Powerpoint presentation, with each slide crammed with small text and elaborate tables and stats that we diligently read verbatim. Slide after slide, our soporific voice washes over them like a gentle sea, lulling them into a gentle stupor, their eyes glaze over and their brains are numb. A short ripple of applause as we conclude and then the next person stands up and does the same. Worse, at the annual January kick-off meeting we do that for two days and with the whole room reeling and reeking from a killer hang over, we expect it all to land, be remembered and then acted upon. Unbelievably, we've tried to replicate that on a video call. Even with the cameras off you know that they are typing away on their emails, potentially

watching a different channel and struggling to manage the dog, the builder and the toddler, all taking turn to demand their attention. This is no way to share information, to discuss and debate its importance or credibility and then make a collective decision, stick to it and act! It's a shambles - and we all know it is - and yet, we still continue in the same vein! The bottom line is, back-to-back virtual calls all day long is inhuman. Not even the Spanish Inquisition could have conjured up such efficient and relentless torture! As you can possibly tell, I believe that we have shared information in the most ineffective way possible - long before COVID or globalisation kept us apart - and we continue to do so. But the irrefutable truth is, we have been given a priceless opportunity to challenge the norm and create a much better way of sharing and debating information.

Now let's turn to the new added difficulty of effective empowerment and performance. How do I know what my team are actually doing? How can I track their performance? How can I ensure that they stay on track? I used to be able to look over their shoulder or start the day with a chat. I could see they were at their desks. I knew what time they came in and what time they left. I could check if anyone was late or, even worse, left before I did. Now I just don't know. What if they are walking the dog instead of working? What if they've gone shopping or playing with the kids? One of the saddest insights from a McKinsey survey early in the pandemic was the difference between the concerns of management and the concerns of the workforce. Whereas the management were concerned about staff not working, the workforce was more concerned about how they could work with so many distractions. I see the problem and the movement required: Activity focus moves to outcome focus. Suspicion must move to trust. Being busy becomes working smart. "Your life is mine" becomes "how do we grow together?" "You cannot work, you're distracted," turns to, "how can I help set you up

with a great workspace at home?" In short, it's a significant shift to compassionate leadership, enabling brilliant delegation.

*"SLIDE AFTER SLIDE, OUR  
SOPORIFIC VOICE WASHES  
OVER THEM LIKE A GENTLE  
SEA, LULLING THEM INTO A  
GENTLE STUPOR, THEIR  
EYES GLAZE OVER AND  
THEIR BRAINS ARE NUMB"*

Finally - for this article at least - we turn to decision-making and delegation, which is yet another factor of leadership that is not necessarily made easier in the new frame, unless we adopt a specific and compassionate mindset. The tendency is that decisions are made at the top of an organisation and that people are broadly not empowered to make their own decisions and need to "check with the boss first". When the boss was in the office next door, then that would work, sort of. But now it takes either a detailed email or a scheduled video call for anything to move and that destroys agility, innovation and productivity. Modern technology allows leadership to be permanently on and available and this is perceived to be a positive - "I'm always here for you team, just ask anytime" - but in reality, it stifles ownership, accountability, growth and legacy. As we move deeper into the world of remote leadership, the need to delegate correctly and to allow decisions to be made at the right level - ergo, where the information and expertise lies - will become more important. This will need excellent and disciplined delegation, to include the delegated authority to actually make the decisions as well. So, to conclude for now, we need to challenge assumptions and tackle all of these added complications from the new way of working.

This is a new chapter of thought, observation and experience, prompted and caused by recent global events. But I also see this was always a subject of increasing importance, over quite a number of years now, whether a pandemic happened or not. Making the right calls and taking the right actions has to be propelled by a growing common conversation amongst business and community leaders. Unquestionably, there are challenges ahead of us, but the issues are not insurmountable, if we communicate and innovate. It just requires us all not to try to apply modus operandi from the past, because many are not a good fit. Clearly what is required to meet challenge and capitalise on the undoubted opportunities ahead, is a radical rethink of approach and operation and I think it's well within our grasp to move forward with positivity and confidence.

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# I RECRUITMENT REDEFINED

THOSE PROTRACTED AND HUMILIATING *SQUID GAME* ELIMINATION PROCESSES HAVE BECOME A MASSIVE TURNOFF FOR CANDIDATES, GIFTED WITH MORE CHOICE THAN EVER BEFORE. NOBODY SHOULD BE MADE TO FILL OUT QUESTIONS SUCH AS EDUCATION AND WORK EXPERIENCE, AFTER UPLOADING A CV. HYBRID WORKING IS HERE BY DEFAULT AND WHILST IT DIVIDES OPINION ON JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING ELSE, FOR BUSINESSES THAT ACKNOWLEDGE THAT GEOGRAPHY AND TIME ARE NO BARRIER TO TALENT, RECRUITMENT IS ENTERING AN EXCITING AND COMPETITIVE NEW ERA. BUT IN AN ULTRA-COMPETITIVE MARKET.

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ARTICLE BY TONY MACHIN, CEO - TRUSTID

## ENIGMA CODE

COMPETITION FOR SKILLS IS NO LONGER A 'LIKE-FOR-LIKE' BATTLE WITH PEER FIRMS IN SIMILAR MARKETS. PEOPLE WITH THE MOST DESIRED TALENT CAN WORK ANYWHERE, FOR COMPANIES THAT ARE BASED EVERYWHERE AND, WHILE THIS PRESENTS RECRUITMENT OPPORTUNITY, EMPLOYERS MUST ADJUST AND BE CRYSTAL CLEAR AND UNCOMPLICATED AT EVERY STAGE OF THE CANDIDATE PROCESS.

There is no value in being an enigma in today's recruitment market. The heat is on, the competition is gladiatorial and, at the same time, recruiters are having to face a whole new set of candidate expectations around different work/life requirements and lifestyle preferences. What is more, with unprecedented freedom of choice, trying to win over candidates' emotions and perceptions about applying to work for one employer over another, is infinitely more complex and nuanced. The inescapable reality is, if the recruitment experience does not reflect or match true, hard-won company culture and values, candidates simply walking away before they complete the process at any stage is an existential threat.

Candidate experience starts from their first interaction with an organisation and, if that's not good, bad news travels fast and there is no control over how far an applicant could share a negative experience. Predictably, they may turn to social media or publish their experience on LinkedIn or Glassdoor and brand damage to some degree, is inevitable. But even if an applicant does accept an offer - in spite of a poor recruitment process - they may then carry those negative perceptions with them into the early days of their employment and take longer to start delivering value. So, cutting to the chase - and apologies if this sounds an obvious statement - but it is an irrefutable fact - putting the candidate first at every

stage of the whole recruitment process, is what puts an employer brand on a competitive footing. Candidates will feel good about their choice and start in the most positive way possible.

"IF THE RECRUITMENT EXPERIENCE DOES NOT REFLECT OR MATCH TRUE, HARD-WON COMPANY CULTURE AND VALUES, CANDIDATES SIMPLY WALKING AWAY BEFORE THEY COMPLETE THE PROCESS AT ANY STAGE, IS AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT"

When it comes to remote recruitment, online systems naturally bring enormous benefits to an employer, removing time and cost from the process. But they too must put the candidate first or they will become a barrier. Indeed, offering a great candidate experience online starts with career sites that promote and highlight values, because more than ever, today's candidates want to know what a business stands for and whether principles align. This needs clear, honest and unambiguous online job

adverts, because candidates shouldn't have to second guess what their potential employer is looking for. This means a fresh approach to application forms that are candidate-friendly and calibrated to provide different aspects of a candidate, beyond the traditional parameters of the CV. Why this is so important is that, if you request a CV and then ask the candidate to fill in a form detailing every job they've ever had, don't be surprised when the candidate drop-off escalates.

The value of online application systems is not a one-way street. Well designed and managed, they can benefit the candidate every bit as much as the employer and will appeal to digital-savvy applicants, who want the fastest, smoothest experience possible, without needing to submit paper-based material or sign countless forms. This positive candidate experience should extend right through to final onboarding checks for right to work too. As a final step in an applicant's process, it should be a straightforward, quick and well-supported process. Making this step as streamlined and frictionless as possible shows that you are investing in their experience, even before they start.

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ARTICLE BY TED KINNEY, VICE PRESIDENT OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT - TALOGY

# BACK TO THE FUTURE

"IN THAT OLD 1997 BENCHMARKING STUDY, THERE IS NOT A SINGLE MENTION ON ANY DOT-MATRIX PRINTED PAGE, RELATING TO THE CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE. CANDIDATE REACTIONS WERE JUST NOT A TOPIC OF CONSIDERATION"

*Was 1997 a long time ago? It sounds like a long time ago, but I clearly remember talking about the same recruitment issues then as I do now. The importance of using job-related selection procedures, the criticality of fairness in hiring practices and the importance of pre-employment assessment to build a productive and engaged culture. It is interesting to look back at where assessment practices were then, but what increasingly occupies my thoughts now is, where is it heading now?*

I would like to take you back a quarter of a century ago to one of my first applied client projects, working as a graduate student in an Occupational Psychology PhD programme at Penn State University. My peers and I were contracted by a global aerospace company to conduct a benchmarking study on the use of pre-employment assessments by Fortune 100 companies. The results are eye-popping to me, as I now peruse that report for the first time in years. In this study, only one organisation used any sort of computer-based testing. No companies used any internet-based testing. No companies allowed testing without an invigilator. It was the days of paper and pencil, scheduled testing sessions, bubble sheets and almost no concern whatsoever about

the candidate experience. How far we have come in that time and our rate of change is not slowing at all. In fact, the rate of innovation in the area of recruitment and selection is at an all-time high and I'm excited about the direction we are heading.

Based on current research carried out on HR Directors from companies around the globe, most organisations look likely to return to pre-pandemic levels of talent assessment usage over the next 12 months. But these assessments are not going to look like those 1997 solutions, they are already dramatically more advanced than they were just a few short years ago before COVID. Remote working ubiquity and other dynamic shifts have changed the world of work and how we think about

talent. The rapid change in how organisations recruit and select talent is evolving so quickly, because of the availability of exponential advancements in HR technology, coupled with pervasive challenges impacting organisations. These challenges range from, low unemployment rates and dynamic and unpredictable fluctuations in candidate flow, to the Great Resignation/Reshuffle and changing workplace dynamics. Many organisations have become permanently hybrid or fully remote or, even more recently, contemplate a return to the office. These pressures will continue in the foreseeable future and they will continue to push talent acquisition leaders to be more innovative and creative with their recruitment and selection procedures.

There are three such areas where rapid evolution is redefining the space faster than at any point over the last 25 years.

*Organisation-specific configuration:* Until very recently, organisations implementing assessments had to make a sacrifice - either use off-the-shelf assessments which have a history of psychometric data driving them - but also could be used by a competitor in the local labour market down the road. Or build a custom solution which is unique to the organisation but requires lengthy implementation time and cost. In fact, in that 1997 research project in the Fortune 100 sample, about a third of companies used off-the-shelf testing, a third used custom testing and the remainder used both. This situation has not changed much, but we will see dramatic shifts in this mix in the years to come. This trade-off between off-the-shelf for speed and custom for quality is no longer acceptable. Progressive organisations need the advantages of both. To answer this need, new innovations in the assessment industry are starting to shift paradigms in assessment science, related to how tools are developed and designed. Modular assessment configuration will change the way organisations think about assessments. This approach to configuring scientifically credible components together with unique scoring, to create solutions designed specifically for a particular organisation, is quite complex. Very few assessment providers have the technology flexibility, data and vast content portfolio required to create these powerful modular assessment design capabilities and therefore the process can take time to develop. Organisations leveraging these modular assessment strategies can, for the first time, reap the benefits of both off-the-shelf and custom testing, with none of the drawbacks associated with either one. They provide fast implementation times, bespoke solutions and excellent candidate experience, all backed by psychometrically sound measures, based on extensive data collection, in a tool unique to a specific organisation. Checking all these boxes was simply

impossible just a few short years ago and continued advancement is expected in the years to come. *Innovative data collection and scoring methods:* Unlike the companies in my 1997 study, organisations today are leveraging powerful technology to deliver assessments. The data collected by these technology-enabled assessments has been rather conventional. Meanwhile, enhancements to how we score assessments have not changed much over the last couple of decades... until recently.

"CONCEPTS LIKE  
VALIDITY, RELIABILITY,  
LEGAL COMPLIANCE  
AND FAIRNESS REMAIN  
THE HEART AND SOUL  
OF A WELL-DEVELOPED  
SELECTION SYSTEM.  
BUT THIS IS WHERE THE  
SIMILARITIES END"

Innovative assessment providers are now partnering closer than ever with software engineers and data scientists. These multidisciplinary collaborations are leading to advancements in approaches to capturing trace data and leveraging advanced statistical procedures, such as machine learning, to create theoretically meaningful and predictive scoring for these tech-enabled solutions. As the need to leverage shorter and shorter assessment experiences, using trace data and machine-learning-derived scoring is allowing for comprehensive data collection, while still providing short candidate-centric experiences. With these advanced techniques, assessments can collect hundreds of job-related data points, whereas traditional assessments might only collect ten or 20 responses to assessment items. Then, leveraging advanced data science techniques, assessment providers can derive construct-

relevant scoring for these solutions.

Resulting in tools that are more predictive and have less bias and increased fairness to all groups. While these innovations seem like they are on the "back end", they result in powerful improvements in prediction, fairness and candidate experience.

*Candidate experience:* This area is perhaps the most rapidly changing in recruitment and selection. In that old 1997 benchmarking study, there is not a single mention on any dot-matrix printed page relating to the candidate experience. Candidate reactions were just not a topic of consideration in recruitment and selection. Today, candidate experience is often the most important consideration when choosing assessment technology. In these days of low unemployment rates and a sparsity of candidates, engagement is a critical consideration. As such, there is a rise in innovation in how organisations approach candidate experience. For the first time, not only the "in-assessment candidate experience," but also the process experience - and the reporting experience - are coming into focus. Assessment providers are focusing on mobile first design and, even more importantly, equivalent measurement across devices. Innovative assessment providers are achieving interactive and engaging assessment experiences, with in-assessment journeys, tailored specifically to communicate an organisation's culture. For the first time, assessments acknowledge that selection decisions go two ways, candidates make decisions about organisations, not just vice versa. Consequently, assessment innovations are emerging to not only collect data, but also to provide data to candidates, so they too can make the most accurate selection decisions. These engaging assessment experiences are allowing for the first time, selection procedures to serve as multipurpose tools for attraction, selection and onboarding, while truly strengthening the relationship between the job candidate and the recruiting organisation.

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## FACE THE MUSIC

*In good times or bad, the quest to achieve great recruitment starts with taking a long, hard look in the business mirror and being honest about how the organisation really looks to existing employees and the outside world. Do people really feel looked after? Is an employer brand attractive, agile, flexible, relevant and future-ready? Is the Employee Value Proposition competitive? The inescapable reality is, without these basic features in place, that face in the mirror could reveal some ugly truths.*

"CREATING AN EVP IS NOT AS EASY AS FLICKING A SWITCH, BUT IT CAN BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ATTRACTING CANDIDATES WHO FIT YOUR CULTURE VERSUS THOSE WHO COULD DO THE JOB"



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ARTICLE BY JODY ROBIE, SVP FOR NORTH AMERICA -  
TALENT WORKS INTERNATIONAL

Unflinching answers are needed from some hard, unremitting questions: How scalable is your recruitment? Do you have the traditional on-off approach, or do you have something more creative and flexible? Should you outsource to control your budget and HR headcount? Let us dissect strategies for the unpredictable 2023 business landscape and outline how businesses can turbocharge their recruitment from good to great.

*How you look - and act - matters:* In a working world now dominated by social media streams, how companies showcase their qualities to current and future markets is often the make or break in recruitment. This is employer brand. The new wave of talent, for example, is often prioritising social and environmental outlook over salary and this includes how they are navigating the world, the support they are providing to their employees and healthy work/life balances. If this isn't visible, then they are less likely to give that employer the time of day. Employer Brand can often be taken for granted, even though it can be the missing link for growth and attraction. Of course, measuring a company's salary, benefits and flexible working policies will continue. But now is the time to be sure you are positioning the reasons for someone to join. Are you giving current and future employees "meaningful work?" It's why the employer brand has to run deeper than just looking and sounding good. It's about being good too.

*Company health and fundamentals will be more important to candidates than ever before:* This is where the employer brand meets Employer Value Proposition (EVP). Beyond the people, what is it that makes a company the dream place to work? How are employees empowered to bring their best selves to work? An EVP is the sum of all the things to attract or retain talent. It's more than just the 'typical' benefits of an opportunity - it encapsulates culture, the working environment and social purpose. A great EVP must reflect what it's like to work for an organisation. Employees now expect real flexibility, putting the onus on businesses to offer a hybrid approach.

For example, implementing innovative policies such as the four-day week - currently undergoing trials in the UK and the US - could be a way of leapfrogging the crowd. There are no 'set rules' when it comes to how often you refresh the EVP. But in uncertain times, constant evaluation is crucial to optimising its impact. Creating an EVP is not as easy as flicking a switch, but it can be the difference between attracting candidates who fit a culture versus those who could do the job, but just aren't the right fit.

"RATHER THAN JUST HOLDING  
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*Unpredictability must be met with scalability:* This represents a twofold strategy, firstly, assessing how teams class the pedigree of candidates and broadening what is valued. Secondly, a change in how teams measure talent - harnessing potential and transferable skills - not just experience and education. It is a reset that has been augmented by post-pandemic working and digitisation. Rather than just holding out on traditional metrics of assessment and background for a role, managers need to be innovative in their approach as to what traits make up that role. For example, someone who has great determination, agility and resilience could have the potential to be re-skilled.

*Businesses will look to more flexible outsourced recruitment options:* In today's climate, scalable recruitment is an imperative. With so much unpredictability, stop-starting recruitment is going to put a strain on resources. By having scalable recruitment, you can adapt to market changes and avoid

putting jobs at risk. That's why some organisations are considering alternative solutions such as outsourcing, mainly because it offers a flexible approach to changing times. More specifically, some companies may want to adopt Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO). This gains in-depth insights into company ethos and culture, providing both the personal support and the technology with which to cultivate an EVP, market it and recruit tailored talent.

*Recruiting when you're not and being smart:* Even if hiring has been paused, this strategy involves recruiters pipelining top talent in the field, conveying their messages and gaining an insight into the market. Instead of being susceptible to changing market winds, talent mapping creates a solid base to be able to manage any sudden hiring situations. It's also important to take stock internally, identify potential talent from within and reach out proactively with internal movement opportunities. It is often much easier for an employee to respond to an exciting opportunity from an external recruiter, than it is to hear about roles within their own company. By adopting both approaches, companies can form flexible short, medium and long-term strategies that can cushion an organisation against market unpredictability.

*Smart employers will learn how to use automation tools in a complementary way to human recruiting:* Alongside this proactive approach, a new, smarter employer will emerge, one that adopts a HR model that reaps the benefits of automation to enhance human recruiting. Employers need to reskill and train themselves in managing automation tools. One of the main benefits of automation is that it frees up time for the HR team to focus on recruitment and alignment with business aims. This is crucial for keeping tabs on ever-changing trends and managing influxes of applications. These new AI tools can't replace a good, smart recruiter, but they can certainly make the function more efficient.

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# II

## ORGANISATIONAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

BACK IN THE DAY, THE DESK TELEPHONE WAS THE MAIN MEANS OF COMMUNICATION AND EMPLOYEES PLAYED PASS-THE-PARCEL OR PAPERCHASE WITH INFORMATION THAT TRAVELLED FROM INBOX TO OUTBOX ACROSS BUSINESSES. TODAY DATA AND INFORMATION TRAVELS DIGITALLY, SILENTLY AND UNSTOPPABLY, 24/SEVEN, WHICH HAS NECESSITATED THE INTRODUCTION OF ONA, TO VISUALISE HOW COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION AND DECISIONS FLOW THROUGH A BUSINESS.

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ARTICLE BY GUY OSMOND, MANAGING DIRECTOR - OSMOND ERGONOMICS

## TIME & SPACE CONTINUUM

IT HAS BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE INFORMATION TRAVELLED ACROSS A BUSINESS VIA PAPER, FROM INBOX TO OUTBOX, COLLECTING SIGNATURES ALONG THE WAY, ENTIRELY VISIBLE AND ENTIRELY TRACEABLE. NOW, WITH DATA AND INFORMATION ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY TRAVELLING DIGITALLY IN MOST ORGANISATIONS, IT IS FAR HARDER TO IDENTIFY THE KEY PLAYERS AND THE BOTTLENECKS.

In recent years, Organisational Network Analysis (ONA) has provided a structured way to measure and map the formal and informal relationships, connections and collaborations between people and groups within a business. This process makes visible how and where communications, information and decisions flow through a business, whether employees are in the office or elsewhere. ONA network maps identify the most influential members of the team, the subject matter experts and those who are underused, for example. By doing so, they allow businesses to take steps to enhance the flow of information, make best use of personnel and recognise and reward individuals and teams more fairly. One aspect ONA highlights above all else, is the value of social capital, making explicit how important relationships between team members are in driving productivity, innovation and success. Businesses will often seek to optimise opportunities for colleagues to develop their social relationships and share information. If you consider that “space is a strategic tool” - as Dutch architect Stephanie Akkaoui Hughes puts it - an office enables both planned and formal communications and those all-important informal, organic interactions.

In recent times we've seen office space designated to 'social zones' - screened off seating areas and pods - providing places

for conversations and informal meetings, while open and relaxed seating is an ideal location to gather for a chat. An illustrative example was the placing of sofas at a corridor intersection, where

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- MOMENTS VITAL TO  
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colleagues from two teams often passed each other. Savvy leadership at that business saw the benefit of the catch-up conversations that so often took place there, then took steps to encourage them. Notably, the new era of hybrid and homeworking has inevitably had a cooling effect on social interactions - moments vital to network expansion and ideas shared outside normal business channels, often sparking innovation. While meetings can be moved online, replicating these now clichéd 'water cooler moments' digitally, is difficult. Some businesses have tried, but success has been limited.

If we consider the four core working behaviours as the 4Cs - Contemplation, Concentration, Communication and Collaboration - all are important, but the latter two have come to the fore in offices since the pandemic. While contemplation and concentration are often - but not always - easier at home, collaboration and communication are best suited to the office. With fewer people in the office at any one time, the temptation is to cut down the workplace floor plate, but there is an argument for more open spaces and casual seating, improved kitchens and canteens, to maximise opportunities to develop that vital social capital. ONA makes clear the function and value of the networks and relationships within an organisation and in the light of that, the office space can be understood as a means of developing and sustaining them. Now the aim of the physical workplace is to be a magnet, a place where people are drawn to rather than compelled to be and where relationship-building is prioritised. In the best examples, it provides a setting which sparks creativity, supports communication, optimises collaboration and helps team members build the positive, trusting relationships which underpin a business' success.

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ARTICLE BY MIKE VILIMEK, VP MARKETING SOLUTIONS &amp; ALLIANCES - FIRSTUP

# ASPECTS

"UNDERSTANDING THE STRUCTURE OF AN ORGANISATION - RELATIONSHIPS AND INFLUENCES - BUSINESSES CAN ENSURE THAT THE RIGHT PEOPLE ARE TALKING AND THAT VITAL INFORMATION IS NOT SILOED AWAY"

*Understanding hidden dynamics through insight into patterns of relationships of employees can be a game changer for employee communications. As hybrid workforces become the norm, gaining an insight into employee morale and being able to react to changing needs and proactively engage in the employee journey, has never been more critical. Organisational Network Analysis (ONA) is becoming more valuable as we embark on a more dispersed way of working and will be a critical tool for communicators in the coming years ahead.*

ONA offers insights that provide organisations with a way to visualise and analyse all the formal and informal relationships in the business. It can sit at the very heart of an organisation and has been a pivotal tool in recent years, to help steer business strategy and maximise exchanges of information, creating businesses that can become more sustainable and effective. The Cranfield School of Management describes it as an approach for examining "the patterns of relationships that arise among interacting individuals or groups within and across organisations." The aim is to understand how these patterns affect how information flows and decisions are made. In its simplest form, ONA is a way of mapping relationships. It can be used to understand how best to communicate with different parts of an organisation, who the key

decision-makers are and where the potential risks and rewards lie. It can also show how different departments or teams interact with each other and help identify potential areas of conflict. ONA is based on the premise that organisations are networks of people and that the patterns of relationships between these people have a significant impact on the way information flows and decisions are made. By understanding these patterns, businesses can improve how they communicate and make decisions.

The benefits of using ONA are many, but the idea of better communication is at its heart. By understanding the structure of an organisation - relationships and influences - firms can ensure that the right people are talking and that vital information is not siloed away. This improved communication can

lead to all sorts of benefits, from better decision-making to increased creativity and innovation. In a world where the speed of business is increasing, ONA provides a way for organisations to keep up. But communication is not only about exchanging information between people, it is also about engagement - encouraging employees to buy into the organisation's goals and strategy - and to feel like they are part of something larger. Employee experiences are comprised of millions of individual moments. It could be a major one, such as a promotion, a relatively minor one, like their response to the most recent CEO email or even a cursory reaction to a co-worker in the digital environment. ONA takes a sophisticated - and some would say scientific approach - by mapping out these moments, anything; from the number of times staff



interact with each other, to how often they discuss specific topics or the level of positivity or negativity in their interactions.

There are several different ways to collect data for an ONA study, the most common being through surveys, which can be used to ask employees about their experiences and interactions. However, it is also possible to collect data automatically, through systems such as email and social media, or by recording face-to-face interactions. One of the most common ways to carry out ONA is through social network analysis (SNA), which is a technique that uses graph theory to map out relationships between individuals. It is often used to understand how information flows through social networks, but it can also be used to understand the relationships between employees in an organisation. SNA can map out relationships between employees in many different ways. The most common method is to use email data to construct a network of who is talking to whom, for example by looking at the “To:,” “From:,” and “CC:” fields in email headers. Another common method is to use data from instant messaging (IM) or chat applications. This data can be used to construct a network of who is talking to whom and when.

Once the data has been collected, it can be visualised in several different ways. The most common method is to use a graph, with employees represented as nodes and the relationships between them represented as edges. Whilst ONA can be a complex process, the benefits of undertaking such a study are clear. By understanding the organisation from the bottom up, it is possible to make more informed decisions that have a real impact on employee productivity and satisfaction. In any case, with every moment - big or small - ONA is an opportunity for the organisation to create a positive experience that furthers its brand. By understanding how these moments are connected and their effect on employees’ overall experience, organisations can start to improve upon them. For HR, understanding how the

workforce is engaging - or not - with communications and critical initiatives across all of their employee moments, can reveal a level of insight that is previously unseen in the enterprise. Today, analytics is instrumental in providing a real-time finger on the pulse of the workforce. For example, if analytics reveal that in the Leeds factory, the most recent cohort of trainees on the shop floor is engaging in safety training far less than the success benchmark of the previous cohorts, instantly, the organisation has identified a potential future problem, with the capability to remediate and pre-empt a situation.

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Analysing the workforce in this way can also help to build a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how an organisation functions, who the key influencers are and where there may be potential issues or improvements that can be made. Additionally, by understanding how employees communicate with each other, HR can identify potential training and development needs. For example, if it is found that employees in a particular department are not interacting with each other as much as they could be, it may be necessary to provide training on team working or communication skills. Ultimately, ONA provides HR with a powerful tool for understanding the

workforce and for making decisions that can improve employee productivity and satisfaction.

Intelligent Communication Platforms (ICP) sit at the core of ONA and are the solution that can help make all of this possible. By connecting ONA with ICP, organisations can start to gain a better understanding of how a workforce is interacting with communications and where there may be issues or improvements that can be made. ICP can help provide the insights that are needed to understand employee behaviour and they can also help to improve employee communications by providing a more personalised and targeted experience. They work by collecting data from a variety of sources, including email, mobile apps, intranets, SMS, employee surveys and behavioural analysis. This data is then analysed to provide insights into employee engagement and the overall employee experience. They also enable HR to see a richer view of the employee journey so they can make actionable and impactful decisions faster and drive to better outcomes. The feeling of disconnection that many have felt as a result of hybrid working, plus the sheer digital noise, means providing a nuanced experience for employees has never been more important. Prioritising content, making it relevant and providing people with what they need when they need it, will allow them to feel empowered to do the role they have been employed to do. Intelligent communication platforms in tandem with ONA will be critical in driving employee communications and engagement in the right direction.

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# NAVIGATE

DYNAMIC TIMES REQUIRE CONSTANT ADJUSTMENT AND THIS IS WHERE NETWORK MAPPING - THE STUDY OF THE INFORMAL RELATIONSHIPS IN A COMPANY - CAN FORM A MORE ROUNDED UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN AN ORGANISATION. MAPPING CAN ALSO INFORM ON HOW TO ADAPT, WHEN AN ORGANISATION UNDERPERFORMS OR WHEN ITS GOALS CHANGE AND HOW ITS FORM SHOULD ADJUST TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES.

ARTICLE BY ANTOINE VERNET, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR - UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

Organisations take many forms to achieve their goals - some are well known, such as functional and divisional arrangements - while others are less common, such as holacracies and their self-managed teams. The form of the organisation is a means to an end, it helps it achieve its goals whatever they may be. But how to maintain alignment between goals and structure, is the challenge. One framework - designed by Richard Burton, Børge Obel and Dorthe Døjbak Håkonsson - suggests a five-step model to assess an organisation in view of redesigning it. The five steps refer to the goals and scope of the organisation's, strategy, structure, process and people and finally modes of coordination, control and the way incentives are set. Within such a framework, network mapping is particularly useful for the analysis of modes of coordination. Traditionally, consultants focus on formalisation and decentralisation and on the nature of the information that needs to flow between members of the organisation, to design structures and systems to support coordination. Network mapping is an additional tool in consultants' toolboxes, to not only diagnose, but also to provide ongoing monitoring.

Social network mapping is the application of social network analysis, to map the informal communication networks between members of the organisation vital decision-making data. The good news is that most firms collect data on these networks in the process of doing business. This is often referred to as trace data and, in the case of communication networks, can be found in the metadata of emails, instant messages and schedules. Many organisations, however, do not capitalise on this data to make better decisions. Broader awareness and deployment of network analysis

techniques have the potential to deliver significant value for companies. For example, mapping the flows of information within the firm can help compare informal and formal structure. In well-structured parts of an organisation, there is typically more communication within departments - with some interfaces between them - most likely via managers, whose work is to coordinate activities with other departments, upstream or downstream. This suggests areas in which social network mapping might deliver improvements, internal reorganisation and make or buy decisions. Where internal structural changes are concerned, social network mapping will help identify loosely coupled departments, in which members have most of their interactions with members of other departments. In cases like this, it might be best to break down the department and assign its members to the departments they already support with their work. Monitoring information flows within the organisation will help decide when the best time is to implement structural changes.

Social network mapping can also help refine the scope of the organisation. When manufacturing physical goods, it is possible to figure out how to divide tasks into clusters that can be assigned to a department. This, in turn, offers clues to what part of the production process can be contracted out. In service businesses, there often isn't an obvious way to cluster tasks. Finally, mapping the informal structure can help form decisions in how to adapt a formal structure to maximise collaboration and minimise the administrative burden imposed on the various parts of the organisation.

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# III

## WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION

WHILE DIGITAL WAS DEEMED THE ESSENTIAL INVESTMENT, EMPLOYEES BECAME ACCUSTOMED TO A BOLT-ON, MAKE-DO-AND-MEND CULTURE, MADE OBVIOUS WHEN DIGITAL CHANGE ACCELERATED AND EMPLOYEE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE DISAPPEARED IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR. WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION HAS BEEN FIXATED WITH DIGITAL RECALIBRATION, BUT WHEN THE PANDEMIC TURNED AN UNREMITTING SPOTLIGHT ON THE WHOLE WORK CONVENTION. IT REVEALED A LITANY OF DILAPIDATED POLICIES, ARCHAIC PROCESSES AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORKS THAT WERE LARGELY UNCHANGED FOR A CENTURY.

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ARTICLE BY RICHARD TOWNSEND, CEO AND CO-FOUNDER - CIRCUS STREET

## BLINDED BY SCIENCE

AS BUSINESSES ADAPTED AT SPEED TO THE RIGOURS OF THE PANDEMIC, LESSONS WERE LEARNT, NOT LEAST, THE IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL SKILLS. THE UNPREPARED STRUGGLED BADLY, UNDERSTANDABLY AS MANY HAD NEVER INVESTED IN INFRASTRUCTURE OR TEAMS TO FULLY OPERATE DIGITALLY. FOR SOME THAT HAD INVESTED IN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROJECTS, THERE WAS SHOCK ON DISCOVERING THAT WHAT WAS IN PLACE WAS NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE.

Many businesses will be tempted to scale back workforce transformation projects to cut costs. But, as we have experienced during the pandemic, a highly trained team in a range of cutting-edge skills can make all the difference. Take just one example - a data-driven HR function - there has been plenty of discussion recently about the value data plays in generating important insights. It stands to reason that knowing as much about your business and its clients as possible, will better inform decision-making. It was the likes of marketing and product development departments that were the first adopters, but now attention - especially in light of the growth of remote working - is turning to HR functions. But the issue is that having the technological means to collect and store data is one thing, using it in the right way is quite another.

Employing data scientists to do the analysis work is not the complete answer, they will only be able to produce insights based on the data and scope of work they are given. If your HR team does not have any data training or knowledge, they will not fully understand what they can and cannot ask of the data. Crucially, they will not have the skills needed to interrogate or challenge results and they can be completely led by experts who are not HR specialists. This approach is fraught with risk - as we have seen with

recent examples of recruitment algorithms designed to tackle discrimination - achieving the exact opposite result, due to a lack of skilled oversight. This example is a microcosm

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of why workforce transformation projects are so important. Every team member needs to be trained in a plurality of skills outside their core remit. This may mean marketers learn webdev skills or customer service reps take on agile working practices. By upskilling, each team member is able to use the latest innovations, like data, in a way that is most effective for them and the business. Naturally, this increases efficiency, flexibility and also business resilience - critical factors for companies looking to weather an economic crisis.

Remember, many digital transformation projects failed due to nearly all the focus being on the tech and not the skills of the people who needed to use it. This is why HR leaders can play such an important role in these upskilling programmes. It starts with knowing what skills you have - both being used and 'hidden' - what your business needs now and in the future, plus what your team has the ability and will to learn. From there, creating an upskilling project is often very intuitive. The key to remember is training must be tailored to the individual - both in terms of how and what they learn. The final piece that is often neglected is ensuring new expertise is bedded in. Again, this is where HR can take the lead in ensuring the right policies are in place to enable employees to apply their training to real work situations. Long term workforce transformation projects often live or die on whether clear ROI can be shown and this is even more important during a downturn. Monitoring results to show impact and refining the approach accordingly is fundamental. Which brings me neatly back to data skills in HR. Without having the ability to uncover these insights and properly understand them, HR specialists risk being sidelined.

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ARTICLE BY TONY STEWART, HEAD OF DIGITAL - SCARLETTABBOTT

# SYNERGISE

"IF WE JUST SPENT SOME TLC ON THE DIGITAL SOLUTIONS ALREADY INCUMBENT IN THE BUSINESS - RATHER THAN EXPECTING AI TO BE SOME SILVER BULLET - WE COULD SEE IMPROVEMENTS IN OUR EFFICIENCIES"

*Digital is so deliciously slick and sexy, it's hard not to be captivated by the allure of what it can do. But put humans and digital together - without the right framework - and the potential for collaboration chaos is enormous, because people are vulnerable and complex. We often feel the fear of exposure when we don't know enough about something. To make the digital transition land, organisations must stop worrying about employees embracing AI and start focusing on access and capability.*

There's always the next 'big thing' in business, influencing workforce transformation - the zeitgeist or the latest mindset obsessing the Managing Director - that will, "change how we work forever". No question, the biggest 'big thing' right now is digital transition to artificial intelligence, which promises far-reaching benefits, but also hidden pain points. AI is a core part of the world and, when paired with the right tasks, it can be incredibly useful, scything through reams of data to give insights and taking the repetitive tasks away from humans so we can focus on using our superpowers, like empathy, leadership and creativity. But in a world where sustainability matters more than ever, we also need to make sure we don't use AI unnecessarily, such as creating superfluous data centres that require more energy and carbon. We also

have to keep an eye on AI's ethics - bias can be rife in machine coding - reinforcing social stereotypes that belong in the history books.

If we just spent some TLC on the digital solutions already incumbent in the business - rather than expecting AI to be some silver bullet - we could see improvements in our efficiencies, engagement and profits now, not in some undetermined future. However, companies cannot blithely chuck digital solutions at people and hope for the best. AI isn't ever something that consumers or end-users ever have to worry about - we don't need to know how Siri works to use it. But when it comes to strategy, two things need to be considered - how will customers interact and employees respectively interact with the business? For the sake of future talent, knowing its

limitations and the desired direction of travel are key. Equally, understanding the capabilities of the digital tools available are fundamental and a sobering reality here is, many now would refuse to join a company that was email first. From access to information to notifications and acceptable response rates, it's as much about culture as it is about the tools themselves and digital strategy needs to know those distinctions, as well as make it easy for people. When we're hearing more about burnout and fatigue, or the fact that so-called 'quiet quitting' - doing the amount of work you're paid for - even exists, we need to consider whether colleagues knowing or caring too much about digital transition is really a priority? Is it not more about using digital to help us streamline and be efficient? If that is the case, how can we ask them to be

efficient when they are struggling with access and capability? To help answer this question, here are three colleague personas, to explore the diversity of talent in any one business and why they might struggle with the different digital tools we're firing at them, along with some sensible suggestions for what might actually work. Let's break it down.

*Dave the foreman (helhim):* "I've got 28 years' experience in the building trade and I know everything I need to know about construction sites. I use my mobile so much, I've even got one of those souped-up battery packs to stop it dying on me by lunch. I'm on it all day long, taking and making calls from site. Fundamentally, what I need is up-to-date information about the project. If plans change, I need to know now. I might need to order more bricks, or even call in more resource. I want push notifications for when someone changes the plan and I want to access one version of the truth. Accuracy is everything. Why is that so hard?" Dave probably doesn't even know what SharePoint is - maybe IT never told him - but if he did know it existed, that would be the single source of the truth he's seeking - as long as he's shown how to use it. Education is key. Direct messaging is available on platforms like Teams and Slack too, so there is no reason why Dave should have to wade through his personal WhatsApp messages to gain an immediate update on a toilet plumbed incorrectly that he needs to assign someone to.

*Mandeep the marketer (shelher):* "My day job is a little manic. I'm drowning in a sea of notifications, trying to keep up with the external press on our brand, as well as keeping my eye on socials for company mentions and planning the next series of events we have going on into a programme calendar. This currently involves 20 emails a day, keeping me up to date with the latest minutiae... it's my own personal hell! But as the marketing team's wellbeing champion, I've got a little side-of-desk project to keep us all zen and relaxed when we're pushing hard on some late-night campaign delivery. That doesn't just mean Deliverooing pizza

and beer, I'm much more about promoting positive ways we can keep our wellbeing in check." Mandeep's challenge is information overload. She needs the tools to manage her own time and energy. That starts with her calendar and extends to nifty tricks like status notifications and Do Not Disturb periods. Digital Kanban boards could help too. But she also needs her team to help her out with some wellbeing-oriented digital etiquette, back to basics with meeting agendas, respecting gaps in people's diaries and following up with notes and actions.

"WE NEED TO CONSIDER WHETHER COLLEAGUES KNOWING OR CARING TOO MUCH ABOUT DIGITAL TRANSITION IS REALLY A PRIORITY? IS IT NOT MORE ABOUT USING DIGITAL TO HELP US STREAMLINE AND BE EFFICIENT?"

*Bunty the sales assistant (they/them):* My job is all about the customer experience and making them feel special and exclusive. I like to be up to date with the stock we've got coming into store because my customers love newness and feeling like part of the 'in' crowd. What that means is being able to get in touch with other store colleagues and our buyers at head office without a load of rigmarole ringing round other branches to see what they've had in the latest fashion 'drop'." Bunty needs a forum to tap into the collective intelligence of the organisation. There can be so many amazing insights from colleagues shared in inspirational ways through the power of Slack, Yammer or Workplace. From product reviews, sneak peek photographs of fabric samples or new season prints, secret or quirky features and benefits or top selling tips, it's everyone's insights in

a shared place. The message to colleagues is: we're a company that collaborates out loud. Don't just sit on your ideas, put them here.

So, what have we learned from Dave, Mandeep and Bunty? Don't try to shoehorn in expensive products and platforms before you've understood the problem. As with any HR challenge, it starts with listening. Those fancy off-the-shelf solutions aren't necessarily the right tool for the job, you may in fact have them in your business already. Tackle the behaviour alongside the technology. One without the other will not go anywhere.

# S M O K E & M I R R O R S

*The need to properly utilise data to identify what needs to change has become more urgent and it has been made clear that it is more logical for HR to take the lead in data collation and analysis, in order to identify the challenges that need to be overcome for successful transformation. Until the recent seismic changes, workforce transformation was focused on digitalisation, while employees became accustomed to an ad hoc approach to change, with new systems bolted onto old.*

"IS DATA AND ANALYSIS INFORMING DECISIONS IN A WAY THAT WILL WORK FOR EMPLOYEES AND THE BUSINESS, OR IS IT INSTINCT FORMED ON THE BACK OF MISTRUST OR PAST EXPERIENCE?"



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ARTICLE BY EMMA LEONIS-HUGHES, CLIENT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR -  
TRANSFORMATION - LACE PARTNERS



Obscured by the smoke and mirrors is a skills and knowledge issue that is not only damaging for employees, but also to the very future of the business. After all, what's the point of new tech if its use is hampered by a lack of understanding of what it can achieve? The basis of any transformation is proper knowledge on both a macro and micro level of what needs to change. Research\* shows a worrying mismatch between data and any useful ability to analyse and utilise it at C-suite level. While one might reasonably expect the CEO of a business to have the most overarching understanding of data and related statistical concepts, the research shows that, on average, CEOs have the least understanding, when compared with managers and their leadership team. Further analysis shows that the majority of CEOs appear to make decisions based on gut feeling, tradition and belief, rather than statistical analysis. This is coming across loud and clear in the ongoing conversation regarding remote working, with some business leaders saying that remote work is unsustainable or unproductive.

Whatever the stance or opinion, the vital question for HR must be, on what basis are these statements being made? Is data and analysis informing decisions in a way that will work for employees and the business, or is it instinct formed on the back of mistrust or past experience? The study of 300 professionals covered all aspects of data and statistics, including how to interpret data. CEOs were the worst performers, averaging a 30 percent score, with senior management scoring 34 percent and director level at 39 percent. Scores were categorised as anything over 35 percent demonstrating a basic understanding of statistical analysis and data science, with 40-50 percent indicating an intermediate understanding. From this, we can extrapolate that those making the most profound transformative decisions about a business may have the least understanding of data analysis. In other words, they are simply not as well equipped to assess the future strategy of their organisation. But they could be if data was sufficiently understood. This analysis goes on to show us other results

that may come as a surprise. For example, one could assume that younger members of the workforce are better able to utilise data and statistical analysis, given they are part of the digital generation. In fact, it's the workforce that is 45-plus years, that have higher data skills on average, which could be evidence of proactive upskilling being focused on that demographic.

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Data analysis within the workforce should be a team sport - as it relies on every key function understanding and using it appropriately - and it should be officiated by HR. It is HR that is ideally situated to lead these disparate strands of uneven data literacy spread across an organisation. By not only harnessing it, as well as plugging the data skills gap and ensuring it is used to make key decisions, data can drive a workforce transformation in a truly meaningful way. Based on research of some of the UK's largest organisations, the three biggest people challenges in the next three years are: Developing critical skills, attracting and retaining talent and optimising the way work is performed and unsurprisingly, data insight is at the heart of helping solve these challenges. Although few would argue with this, the issue is more about ensuring HR can lead disparate strands of uneven data literacy. Encouragingly, research shows that 90 percent of HR Directors are clear that data and analytics is an essential part of the HR strategy. But do they have the right tools, skills and mindsets to drive value from data and insight? It would appear not, because in the same body of

research, just 17 percent are using advanced, bespoke analytical tools, while insight is consistently cited as one of the biggest skills and mindset gaps in HR, particularly in the HRBP population. This is set against the reality that just 33 percent of HR functions have any strategic learning intervention in place for their HR teams. But it's not about turning every HRBP, team leader or director into a data scientist, it's about taking control of the different parts of the business and upskilling people to the necessary level. Clearly, a data upskilling programme for the HR team is essential and HR should also take the lead in communicating the necessity of gathering the right kind of data that will answer the right questions.

So, where to start? Firstly, when shaping a people analytics and data strategy, it's critical to know business outcomes. Be sure to understand what adds most value to the bottom line and which functions have the largest people challenges and successes. It will also help to frame questions around a business problem statement that defines a particular issue and a potential solution, working with inhouse analytics teams to determine the data that will help highlight the problem or test a hypothesis. What other data sources, besides people information, will help answer the questions? Will external data enhance the insight? Keep an open mind to the data you may need, assumptions have no part in this. Marry the quantitative with the qualitative data to gain insights. It's then possible for HR to add the context, tone and colour to the numbers based on what is known about the business. Finally, it's vital to keep a check on fairness. Is there any bias in the information based on personal opinion? At the end of the day, experience, anecdotes and gut feelings add important context to data and analytics. For HR, it's about leading the company-wide teams to help make evidence-based workplace transformation decisions right for both employer and employees.

REFERENCES

\*Research from Profusion

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[LACEPARTNERS.CO.UK](http://LACEPARTNERS.CO.UK)

# STATE OF FLUX

IN TERMS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS THAT EMPLOYERS NEED ACROSS THE WORKFORCE. THE ACTIVITY TO INSPIRE CHANGE AT THE FRONT END OF THE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FUNNEL IS HAPPENING SIGNIFICANTLY MORE SLOWLY THAN THE ACTION AT THE END OF THAT FUNNEL. THIS CALLS FOR A NEW APPROACH TO WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION IN ORDER TO COMPETE GLOBALLY AND MEET FUTURE CHANGE AND CHALLENGE.

ARTICLE BY KATRINA HUTCHINSON-O'NEILL - JOIN TALENT

How much of a journey do we have to go on to address the skills gap? The challenge that we have in many western countries, is that other countries - particularly some in the East - are doing a better job at this than we are. This is not a blip, it has been a long-standing issue that, at the moment, is worsening. So how do we solve the challenge? Clearly, there is a growing mismatch and I do not yet know of anybody that has been able to properly model when those lines converge and when we close that gap. While we can easily focus on what the education system is doing and can do, we need to broaden our perspective to tackle the shortage of skills across the workforce. We need to move away from 'oven-ready' candidates and think differently about skills and talent. For some organisations, particularly startups and scale-ups or in some bigger corporates, where they are creating new teams or functions within their company, in digital, transformation or other areas, it is hard because you need investment and experienced individuals in situ, to be able to have a strategy for developing talent. For small companies with only 20 employees, it's not affordable to have one of those 20 team members spending half of their time coaching and developing juniors - it's more straightforward to hire another senior - and that is the trade-off that people are making.

In my opinion, larger organisations should be taking more of the burden on leading the way on this. They are also the companies who are more likely to be able to access the Apprenticeship Levy, which is something that is much more difficult for smaller organisations to effectively leverage. There are, for example, a lot of great examples of companies that have already started this work and we saw this with the news that Code First Girls,

which works with companies like Goldman Sachs, Skyscanner and BT, has raised £4.5m to provide one million free opportunities for women to learn code in the next five years. Opening up the market to a wider demographic in key skills has to be fundamental to workforce transformation.

The burning issue now is remote v hybrid v in-office working. I think hybrid is the worst of both worlds at the moment. If you have a workforce in which some people are fully remote and some are in the office for the majority, or even some of their time, it is almost impossible to build an equitable workforce. This is because those people who are in the office will end up achieving opportunities and engagement in ways that remote workers do not. We are simply not at the point where we can, in an equitable way, do true hybrid, sustainably for the long-term. With that in mind, organisations have to make a decision one way or another - remote or office-based - with or without some flexible working. For remote workers, the workforce transformation focus is much more about people networks and people engagement, with people at the centre of it all. For office-based workers, however, it is much more about the spatial design, built around the people, that enables them to engage with their colleagues. For hybrid models, this is more complex - how do you ensure equity of access to community, networks, information and opportunity, when dealing with some team members who may be in the office and some who rarely or never will be? This is a current challenge and I'm not sure anyone has truly cracked it yet.

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# IV

## TALENT MANAGEMENT

COULD THE JOURNEY TO THE NEW ERA OF WORK TAKE US BACK TO THE BAD OLD DAYS? LIKE INTRACTABLE MUSCLE MEMORY, OLD OFFICE CONVENTIONS SUCH AS PRESENTEEISM ARE BACK POST-PANDEMIC AND ARE EXPOSING INEQUALITIES BETWEEN THOSE WHO PRIMARILY WORK ONSITE AND THOSE WHO WORK REMOTELY. THIS IS JEOPARDISING THE NEW DYNAMICS AND CRUCIAL OPPORTUNITIES THAT HYBRID WORKING PROMISES. IN THE PAST, IT MAY HAVE BEEN PARENTS, CARERS AND DISABLED WORKERS THAT WERE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, BUT NOW A MUCH WIDER DEMOGRAPHIC IS EXPOSED TO INEQUALITY.

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ARTICLE BY DR. DAVID LENIHAN, PRESIDENT - PONCE HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

## "LET THEM QUIT..."

I RECENTLY WROTE AN ARTICLE EXPLAINING HOW I RETAIN TOP TALENT. MY "UNCONVENTIONAL PHILOSOPHY" - TO "PAY THEM WELL, EDUCATE AND MENTOR THEM, THEN LET THEM QUIT" - GARNERED POSITIVE RESPONSES, WITH FACEBOOK SHARES, LINKEDIN MESSAGES AND MEDIA INTEREST. BUT COMMUNICATIONS FROM SOME PEERS WERE, LET'S JUST SAY, DUBIOUS ABOUT MY POV.

I didn't set out to cause a kerfuffle: "Do you realise how expensive that is?" "It's impossible to operate a business profitably using this roadmap." "Lenihan, you're nuts! The exit door should be shut tight, not wide open." "You've invested too much into your team's training to let them go without a fight." It's apparent that, by sharing my ideas about employee retention - which included compensating them well - I unintentionally challenged the policies that other CEOs follow.

I see two general philosophies of how to keep your team - especially top execs - the Defensive/Retaliatory School (DRS) and the Proactive/Supportive School (PSS). DRS is rooted in fear and insecurity and executives that embrace it are petrified that their productivity will be hampered by employee defections, that such defections are purposeful signs of disrespect and that upper management - and/or subordinates - will lose confidence in their ability to successfully run their organisations. The DRS tools that are used to confront team members who wish to take their careers elsewhere are threats, guilt and outrage. As you can imagine, such tactics by management rarely change the mind of someone who is ready to move on. In fact, they make the departing employee even more confident that they have made the correct choice. They also tarnish the reputation of the manager in question and may have a detrimental effect on

the company's ability to attract someone to fill the open role.

PSS is driven by a simple philosophy, make it enticing, rewarding and irresistible for team members to join and stay with your firm. Then improve their skills, expand their understanding and experience, challenge them to become better individuals and professionals and,

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if or when they seek new opportunities, wish them well and let them go. That last bit is what makes executives that follow the DRS alternative to become very twitchy. They seem unable to see an employee's departure as anything but a personal attack and their reflex is to react vengefully. While taking the DRS path may feel justified or satisfying in the moment, it delivers zero long-term business benefits. In fact, I believe that it's detrimental to the profitability, efficiency and marketplace perception of your organisation. But don't take my word for

it, look at the employee reviews of your company on Glassdoor. They will likely detail some embarrassing revelations.

PSS, by comparison, delivers enduring and limitless business benefits to the organizations that support it. It's particularly valuable when a high-ranking exec leaves for a new job at another firm. These departing executives will be eager to boost the marketplace perception of your company when they share the positive experiences that they had when they worked with you. They will circle back with you to create mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations, they will refer capable and highly-vetted applicants to you and help with the onboarding process for their replacements, which would bring significant efficiency and cost savings. While intellectually all business leaders understand the concept of PSS - and would absolutely want to be on the receiving end of it in their own careers - it is easily forgotten when a valued team member gears up to make an exit. Empathy would help these executives to be more supportive of their teams' endeavors and so would better training. But perhaps a mass exodus of employees, exhausted by a dysfunctional DRS dynamic, would correct the internal work culture?

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ARTICLE BY CIJI DUNCAN, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER - XDESIGN

# THE GREAT EXCUSE

"MOVING AWAY FROM THE ALMOST DICKENSIAN CULTURE OF YESTERYEAR, FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, IT SEEMS THAT THE MORE ENLIGHTENED EMPLOYERS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MEET PEOPLE ON THE SAME PLAYING FIELD"

*The UK tabloid media sure loves to coin a phrase. But could it be that the current headline favourite, the 'Great Resignation', has become a convenient excuse for those that haven't adapted to a new working culture? In just two and a half years, work culture as we once knew it, has been abruptly turned on its head. Those organisations that quickly adapted to it have thrived, while those that haven't are still potentially missing out on talent and growth.*

The jury may still be out about hybrid working, but I believe that organisations need to embrace these new ways of working and use them to shape authentic cultures that every person can engage and thrive in. The 'Great Resignation' has unquestionably gone from tabloid phrase, to convenient red herring for some leaders, to conceal their own inability to adapt to a new culture of work. Clinging to the aforementioned slogans to paper over deep-seated cultural issues will only see companies lose pace in a vastly more competitive market for growth and talent. Without wanting to give a history lesson, the pandemic has probably been the single biggest thing to happen to work culture in the UK since the Industrial

Revolution. Yes, the changes we endured two and a half years ago were seismic, but for those companies that were willing to put in the hard yards, it's been a thoroughly rewarding experience to date. Moving away from the almost Dickensian culture of yesteryear, for the first time ever, it seems that the more enlightened employers have been able to meet people on the same playing field. Companies have gone from enforcing a parent/child dynamic to actually forging a peer-to-peer relationship where employees are, quite rightly, empowered and treated like adults. This is particularly the case when it comes to the implementation of hybrid/flexible working arrangements that suit individual needs.

In the tech sector particularly, we've also had to adapt to a psychological shift in our people. Although we're far from the so-called 'coding sweatshops' of the late 1980s and early 1990s, as talent managers working in tech, we now have to do so much more to bring greater purpose to the roles of the people we employ. After all, they need to know that they are making a difference - particularly in our vastly altered societies which are dealing with new challenges even beyond those left by the pandemic. Put simply, people in the post-pandemic era are driven by more than monetary remuneration and companies need to be doing more to keep people interested, engaged and happy. As a result, successful

organisations not only need to be more forensic about the pastoral care and career progression they offer, but they also have to be better at articulating and communicating this to the outside world in order to attract the very best talent. This is certainly an extra string to the bow of the talent management sector.

But does embracing a new way and culture of work actually help the bottom line? After all, the bills still need paying, so do those firms still correlating productivity with presenteeism actually have a point? According to a recent study from the CIPD, over two-fifths (41 percent) of employers say that, homeworking has increased their organisation's productivity and this is up from 33 percent back in December 2020. Only just under a fifth (18 percent) said that productivity had actually decreased as a result of new ways of working. Interestingly, the same research actually shows a marked mismatch between employees and employers when it comes to hybrid working. One in four (25 percent) employers want their employees to be in the office/on-site all the time, while 39 percent of employees would like to work from home all or most of the time going forward. This is peculiar given the supposed productivity gains reported by employers in the first instance.

Is this a question of control? I believe that it is, or rather a perceived lack of it, that underlies much of the resistance to new ways of working. A new European research study from Ricoh Europe highlights this point, with the findings showing that as many as two-thirds of employers don't trust their staff to work remotely. Given the rapid sea change in how we now work, it's not surprising - and only to be expected - that there will be some reluctance by company leaders. However, the point is that bemoaning the 'Great Resignation' is not a tactic that is going to work forever - particularly when it comes to talent acquisition. In the immortal words of Morgan Freeman, companies in this new era have to "get busy living or get busy dying". Fortunately, there is the means to monitor, support and grow teams of

people in the new hybrid world of work we find ourselves in. Like most things, technology is on hand to make things more cohesive and manageable for people professionals like myself. Also, if we really are living through the 'Great Resignation', then surely everyone in the 'people game' should be deploying what tech they can, to understand their people a lot better than before? In our own organisation, we have really embraced change and invested in the people function over the last two years - often augmenting new approaches to people acquisition and retention with technology - perhaps not unsurprisingly for a tech company. We've used a number of tech-driven approaches to great effect when it comes to rebuilding a solid company culture - whether it be with quick-fire satisfaction surveys or via the sophisticated performance review software we use. Our interactions with each other across the business - even if working remotely - have been equally effective and engaging via Slack and conferencing platforms.

"I ADMIT THAT GREAT CULTURES ARE NOT BUILT ON TECH ALONE. TECH CAN ONLY GIVE YOU THE INSIGHT NEEDED TO ACT. FUNDAMENTALLY YOU MUST TAKE ACTION TO IGNITE POSITIVE CHANGE"

I admit that great cultures are not built on tech alone. Tech can only give you the insight needed to act. Fundamentally, you must take action to ignite positive change. However, hybrid working has only enhanced how we operate as a company and meant that we can support our people in doing their best work in the environments that best suit their needs. As a people team, we're all about using our initial digital interactions with people to better inform

our personal interactions. In essence, we use the data and insight we gather from the tech, to enhance the value and effectiveness of the conversations we have with people in the real world. After all, tech can never replace good old human interaction. For any doubters out there, our hybrid strategy is paying off too, even in these times of doom-laden headlines. The biggest boon we've had is in our own attrition rates, which we've kept extremely low at just four percent, in an industry that has a churn rate of around 23 percent and higher. We also recently gained Great Place to Work certification again with a 97 percent rating from our people. To borrow another term coined by the media; the 'great reset', unfortunately hasn't happened for some businesses when it comes to their people and culture. Instead of seeing the turbulence of the last couple of years as an opportunity to do things better, they've become indifferent, even apathetic to change. Fortunately, it's never too late to make the necessary change. It's up to people professionals to bin misguided badges like the 'Great Resignation' and 'Quietly Quitting' and actively seek out solutions to the problems they are experiencing, by deploying the right mindset and tools to turn a negative situation into a resoundingly positive one. Empowering people to be the best *they* can be is empowering the company to be the best *it* can be.

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## PARADISE FOUND?

*Hybrid working is a bone of contention, where employees expect it, but not many organisations have figured out how to make it work for everyone. Press stories that equate working from home with 'skiving' don't help and even with a ferocious talent shortage raging, there are still only five-to-eight per cent of jobs that are truly remote. The irrefutable reality is, employers that don't offer remote or hybrid working are needlessly limiting their talent pool, but still the reluctance persists.*

"WHERE HYBRID WORKING IS SIMPLY A BOLT-ON, WITHOUT ITS EXECUTION BEING CAREFULLY CONSIDERED, IT CAN CREATE A DESTRUCTIVE DYNAMIC"



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ARTICLE BY IFTY NASIR, FOUNDER AND CEO - VESTD



It's important to remember that no model is inherently 'good' or 'bad'. Poorly-managed, remote working can leave people feeling frustrated - often with the technology they are provided with - and isolated from both colleagues and the company's mission and values. What is key is that employers are intentional about the model they choose. Unlike the early days of the pandemic, there is now a wealth of data and anecdotes from employers and employees to help organisations move forward with purpose. They don't have to edit their existing processes and systems into a new model but can instead reshape them to suit everyone, regardless of where they are based. Where hybrid working is simply a bolt-on, without its execution being carefully considered, it can create a destructive dynamic in the team. Those who live closest to the office go in more regularly and become the 'in-crowd', leaving everyone else feeling like they don't belong.

Given the huge talent shortages in many sectors, employers might well find they have no choice but to widen their net to recruit. Once again, they'll need to be intentional in their approach. Particularly for those who struggled to implement remote working successfully during the pandemic, it's worth looking at what the remote-first companies are doing. Remote working is well-established in the tech industry, although it's true that not every company is fully realising its potential. We know there has been a shift in people's expectations for their jobs and more so since the pandemic. Constant communication, even if it is carried out virtually, can help new employees feel welcome and avoid feeling abandoned as they find their own way in their role. It is paramount for a company to promote their ethos and positive culture in order to inspire and encourage new staff to stay from the very first instance. Carried out correctly, onboarding can be a great asset for staff retention and set a benchmark for talent management in the future. But done incorrectly, it can lead to dissatisfaction and cause a disconnect between employees and the company's culture. This is where it pays to keep

morale within a work environment high and offer employees incentives to stay on. Remote working doesn't mean that employees are distanced from the business and its progression. One pertinent question facing employers is how to reward a remote workforce in a meaningful way. Of course, there are many types of rewards - ranging from vouchers for people who have gone the extra mile, to yearly salary rises and bonuses and benefits.

"THE GREAT RESIGNATION  
IS A TIDAL WAVE OF A  
MOVEMENT AND IT'S RE-  
SCULPTING EVERYTHING  
ABOUT HOW BUSINESSES  
ARE RUN"

Needless to say, for remote-first employers without significant overheads, any savings can be channelled into these rewards. Every reward needs to be driven by a clear purpose. Companies that have established a strong culture, using the communication methods outlined above, are well-placed to identify the individuals who demonstrate their core values. The recognition employees receive, not just from senior managers but their peers too, provides a real boost. Of course, financial rewards are always welcome but another more powerful approach is to align everyone's interest in the success of the enterprise in the form of equity. I'm a strong believer of 'the Ownership Effect', which is the phenomenon where people place more value on the things that they own, no matter how small. There are different ways to offer employees a stake in a company including: Traditional share schemes sometimes lack visibility. Unless someone works for a PLC and closely tracks share prices on the stock exchange, they probably don't associate their work with a reward they may or may not see in the future. Giving employees options in a company has been more common among

US tech startups and scaleups for some time but now there's a growing interest from UK firms in a range of sectors.

Equity changes the relationship people have with their employer. It gives them a feeling of increased loyalty and they see longer term benefits being part of a company's vision and goals. This, in turn, provides a clear incentive for them to contribute a little more, knowing their collective efforts could be rewarded. It's an effective recruitment tool too, since talented candidates are often drawn to companies that recognise the valuable contribution they make. It doesn't have to be limited to current employees either. A more modern equity scheme recognises the people who played a part in creating a company's story in the early days, who took a risk in leaving their previous role and who provided capital to help it grow. It could also include the wider team, such as consultants and other stakeholders, who have played their part. The good thing about share schemes - when implemented correctly - is that they naturally encourage collaboration. Equity transcends physical location: team members will embrace the raft of communications tools available to them to forge closer links with their colleagues, because they cannot drive up performance alone. Success is a team game, after all. Lockdown, the 'Great Resignation' and a critical talent shortage mean that employers will have to radically reimagine their existing working models and rewards. What once might have seemed like radical approaches are anything but when the technology is available to not only implement new ways of working and improve on existing practices. The 'Great Resignation' is a tidal wave of a movement and it's re-sculpting everything about how businesses are run. People are demanding better working conditions, better rewards and more respect - and companies should be able to offer their workers that in order to retain them. Because frankly, without that, you risk losing them.

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

# LEAP IN THE DARK

ARGUABLY THE MOST DIFFICULT STAGE OF LEADER DEVELOPMENT IS THE JUMP FROM MANAGEMENT POSITION TO EXECUTIVE LEVEL. DESPITE PREVIOUS STELLAR PERFORMANCE, NEW EXPECTATIONS ARE VASTLY DIFFERENT AND TO THRIVE IN THE COMPLEXITY OF AN EVER-SHIFTING LANDSCAPE, HIGH ACHIEVERS MUST RAPIDLY TRANSFORM WAYS OF THINKING AND BEHAVING AND LET GO OF MANY OF THE TRAITS AND ABILITIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THEIR ERSTWHILE SUCCESS.

ARTICLE BY BARBARA WALSH, MANAGING PARTNER - SUPRALIMINA

A recent global research study titled *Mind the Gap* aimed to uncover the most critical challenges for newly appointed executives and the most common gaps in their preparation for the position ahead. They also asked about the impact of these gaps on these new senior leaders and their organisations and the types and forms of executive learning that could bring the most systemic value. In the first part of the study, most respondents spoke of similar key challenges faced by new executives. These were divided into two main categories: The first focuses on improved personal mastery and interpersonal awareness skills, while the second represents the more advanced mental processes necessary to transition from a tactical focus to a perspective that is strategic, systemic and capable of dealing with complexity. The second stage of the investigation sparked intense feelings in responders, who emphasised from personal experience how much is at stake when new appointments to the executive team are not sufficiently prepared.

Executives candidly described their struggles with excessive stress, the emotional and behavioural implications and its toll on those with whom they interact in the workplace and at home. They shared experiences of their struggles, including feelings of anxiety, being overwhelmed, uncertainty and imposter syndrome - which they could not admit to anybody. Employee retention and disengagement were major issues when considering the organisational impact. Respondents described rising levels of frustration and mistrust among their teams and throughout the system. As a result, top performers depart to work for rival organisations, productivity declines due to apathy and "Quiet Quitting" and creativity is curtailed. Interestingly, lack of time was cited as the top barrier to properly

training new executives, with respondents reflecting on the disproportionately greater time waste the consequences entail. On several levels, this can be a costly and risky omission.

The last component of the research looked at the measures currently undertaken by companies to prepare their leaders for an executive role. There were many positive aspects to the most popular developmental approaches, but the investigation also revealed significant shortcomings in each. The identified deficiencies were in the 'power skills,' which included personal mastery and interpersonal connection, emotional and social intelligence development and learning to think systemically in collaborative, diverse and creative ways.

Coaching is effective for building personal mastery and interpersonal skills. But coaching has shortcomings too, especially as many coaching approaches are individualistic and rooted in past leadership paradigms. Furthermore, it is debatable how many coaches have taken the initiative to develop an advanced aptitude for systemic complexity thinking. Similarly, there is no guarantee that a new executive will successfully transition with the help of mentoring or pairing with an experienced executive in the organisation. Executives from the Baby Boomer generation often demonstrate outdated command and control behaviours. The expectations of the next generations of mid-level Gen X and Millennial managers are different and the 'it's always worked for us this way before' mentality contributes heavily to the Quiet Quitting and Great Resignation trends. No doubt, this study shows how important it is for companies to pay more attention to executive development.

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## TO THE POINT

# H . A . P . P . Y .

IN APRIL 2005, INVESTOR JEROME DODSON CREATED “A FUND THAT ONLY INVESTED IN ORGANISATIONS WHERE EMPLOYEES WERE REALLY HAPPY”. OVER TEN YEARS, THE PARNASSUS ENDEAVOR FUND SHOWED ANNUAL GROWTH OF 12.3 PERCENT, PUTTING IT IN THE TOP ONE PERCENT OF U.S. MUTUAL FUNDS. THE PHILOSOPHY WAS, COMPANIES WHOSE EMPLOYEES LOVE GOING TO WORK DO BETTER THAN COMPANIES WITH POOR WORKPLACES.



ARTICLE BY HENRY STEWART, FOUNDER AND CHIEF HAPPINESS OFFICER - HAPPY LTD

*Written by Henry Stewart as part of Philosophy@Work: Reflections  
from the world's leading business thinkers  
Published by Unbound*

The key focus of leadership in an organisation should be to create an environment in which people are able to feel good about themselves. When I ask audiences how many of them work in organisations where that is the case, I am lucky to see more than one-in-fifty raise their hands. I asked that question while on a panel with the chair of one of the UK's biggest retail companies. He instantly raised his hand and stated that was indeed the main focus of leadership in his 85,000-strong organisation. The company was John Lewis and Charlie Mayfield went on to explain that, at their last board meeting, they spent twenty minutes discussing the numbers and three hours discussing people and how to help them feel valued and motivated.

Some companies delegate an individual to 'make people happy'. I once had a client who tasked a happiness co-ordinator to do such a thing. The co-ordinator brought in hula-hoops and games and made people have fun. He measured happiness before and after and discovered that levels had actually gone down - the reasons are perhaps obvious -

people do not like being made to have fun. What do we even mean by 'happiness at work'? Happiness literature draws a big distinction between hedonism, happiness in the moment and eudemonism, which is more about long-term fulfilment. The latter is what we should all be aiming for in our organisations and will not be achieved by a quick fix or by dressing up and playing silly games, but rather through assessing and promoting long-term goals.

One key factor is playing to people's strengths, as well as making them feel positively challenged and trusting in them to make their own decisions. To enable that trust, one key factor is pre-approval. It is common in most organisations for an individual or team to be asked to find a solution to a problem or to come up with a new service idea and report back for approval. If you take away this critical aspect and approve the solution before they have thought it, it can produce a motivating effect, compelling individuals to take responsibility and produce their best. What people don't like is being told what

to do and neither do they appreciate micro-management or blame culture. What makes people happy at work is to be doing something they are good at, having the freedom to make their own judgements and having managers who coach rather than dictate; to feel listened to and valued.

Many workplaces are full of people who are very busy, but often not that productive. The employees are overloaded with email, constantly interrupted and spend vast amounts of time in unproductive meetings. If we slow down and take time to think, productivity can soar. Mindfulness and meditation have scientifically proven benefits. We need a time in our day when the brain is stilled. But we also need to take time in our day to step back and reflect. If we can find time to meditate and reflect, we can both be less stressed and more effective at work. If we can create happy workplaces, they will not only be better places for people to work, but more effective too.

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WELCOME TO THIS ISSUE'S ROUND UP OF THE PEOPLE AT THE TOP OF THE HR & PEOPLE MANAGEMENT PROFESSION, WHO HAVE MOVED TO NEW JOB ROLES



## Heather Reynolds

**ROLE** CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER  
**COMPANY** SCURRI

Retail delivery management platform and eCommerce software provider Scurri, has appointed Heather Reynolds as Chief People Officer, as part of scaling ambitions in the UK.

Heather Reynolds has over 25 years of experience in directing service delivery, incorporating operational excellence, people leadership and strategy development. Prior to her appointment at Scurri, she previously held the role of CEO and Co-founder at Eishtec DAC, which was acquired by Infosys BPM. Heather has also been heavily involved as a Lead Mentor over the last ten years in Enterprise Ireland initiatives, supporting entrepreneurship in Ireland across the Going for Growth, Acorns and Back for Business programmes. She will play an important part as Scurri continues with scaling goals for 2022 and beyond.

## Debbie Gregory

**ROLE** CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER  
**COMPANY** ARCUS FM

Arcus FM has strengthened its senior structure by announcing the

appointment of Debbie Gregory as the company's first ever Chief People Officer to join the Board.

Debbie's appointment is in response to the significant year-on-year growth that the business has enjoyed since its inception in 2009. She will lead the People Team to create an overarching people strategy in support of Arcus FM's business plan and growth ambitions. Debbie brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise over her 25-year career in HR, with broad sector experience from public, private and consultancy settings. Prior to joining Arcus, she held a number of leadership roles including at: London Underground, Metropolitan Police and Canada Life.

## Jill Michael

**ROLE** HR DIRECTOR  
**COMPANY** FSCOM

Belfast-based, award-winning, specialist business consulting firm, FSCOM has announced the appointment of Jill Michael as its new HR Director.

Jill Michael will take on the responsibility for the strategic leadership of people and talent at FSCOM. Jill is a passionate advocate of diversity and inclusion and is part of the independent assessor panel for the Diversity Mark in Northern Ireland. She is also winner of the *Women in Business - Advancing Diversity in the Workplace Award*. A senior HR professional, Jill was previously Head of Talent within a

leading law firm and brings almost two decades of HR experience to the role to developing an HR approach that embeds people, diversity and inclusion at its core and underpins the firm's wider business strategy and objectives.

## Ben Hooper

**ROLE** CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER  
**COMPANY** DONCASTERS GROUP

International manufacturer of superalloys, Doncasters Group has announced the appointment of Ben Hooper as Chief People Officer.

Ben Hooper joins Doncasters as CPO, after spending six years with Signature Aviation, most recently as Chief HR Officer. He led the people agenda, supporting 5,000 colleagues globally, splitting his time between the UK and US, and was responsible for all aspects of the HR Function. Prior to Signature, Ben spent seven years with Univar, the global leader in specialty chemicals and ingredients, where he was responsible for HR in Northern Europe. Beginning his career in technology, Ben then moved to retail with Argos and Asda, where he spent nine years supporting distribution. He joins Doncasters at an exciting and busy time as this company with, with its long history and revered reputation, sets its sights on huge global growth and potential.

### FOR FURTHER UPDATES

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NEWLY APPOINTED



## NEXT MONTH ISSUE 218

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[www.linkedin.com/company/thehrdirector](http://www.linkedin.com/company/thehrdirector)

### INTERVIEW

This issue we interview Kate Price, HR Director - Wilko.

### ROUNDTABLE

What will it take to get Wellbeing taken seriously?

### OUTSOURCING - A NEW ERA

The two main forces behind the rise in outsourcing are the widespread adoption of remote working and the acceleration of digital transformation in the fast changing world of work.

### LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

What is the future of L&D in the hybrid working era?

### LEAVERS & GRADUATES

Student joiners have experienced more disruption than any generation since World War II.

### RESILIENCE & AGILITY

Above all else, agility and resilience are the fundamental business components for to gain traction and momentum.



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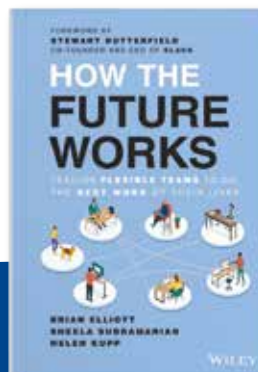
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