

# HRD

The only independent strategic HR publication

the **HRDIRECTOR** AUGUST 2020 | ISSUE 190

## ROUNDTABLE

THE NEXT NORMAL -  
PREPARING FOR THE  
RETURNING - RE-IMAGINING  
A FUTURE WITH PEOPLE  
AT ITS HEART

JOE PARKES, CHIEF HR OFFICER - ERIKS INDUSTRIAL SERVICES LTD

## { STEM SELL }

“IMAGES OF BEING KNEE DEEP IN ENGINE OIL ARE DIMINISHING,  
DIVERSITY IN ENGINEERING IS FINALLY HAPPENING”

### ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

**HR VALUE PROPOSITION** HR is strapped to the helpdesk like a captain to a ship's wheel. How will it look post pandemic?

**LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT** Usually the hapless victim of cuts and compromise, L&D became a beacon, a digital lifeline in lockdown

**ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK** The quasi human/machine relationship will determine the biggest changes since the Industrial Revolution

**MANAGING DIVERSE WORKFORCES** Well into the 21st Century, revealing your sexual identity in the workplace still carries risk



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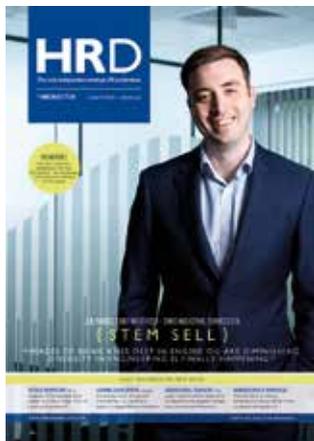


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## ON THE COVER

This issue we interview Joe Parkes, Chief HR Officer - ERIKS Industrial Services Ltd. Founded in 1940, ERIKS is a leading-edge, innovative multi-product specialist and solutions provider to general industry. There is no place for complacency and a critical focus is on an ageing workforce and when it comes to attracting the next generation into STEM and engineering, progress is slow. Solutions must be found fast.



Joe Parkes shot exclusively for **theHRDIRECTOR** Cover & Interview photography by Stuart Thomas

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## EDITOR'S WELCOME

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



Where HR should be positioned, what it represents and what it serves were existential questions for the profession to tackle. But now this perennial argument is drawn into sharp relief, as we face the gravest challenge, where the value proposition is patently "human".

All thoughts of efficiencies, ROI and war for talent have taken a step down the agenda as we face a future of complete disruption. HR's role in supporting the needs of people remains clear, whilst at the same time maintaining a level of operation and preparedness for the waves of returns to normality. As usual, it seems HR has two fronts to contend with, the ongoing wellbeing of people and a business in limbo. Before the crisis that has completely recalibrated reality, there was a dichotomy, marked by a shortage of critical skills - a pressing need to upskill, reskill and diversify skills - set against a lack of time, resources and a decline in L&D spend. In the current climate, here is an opportunity to turn a bad situation into positive momentum, bringing virtual learning to a wider audience and creating and supporting a culture for self-development that is aligned with business needs, career aspiration and future relevance.

In normal circumstances, when organisations are constantly changing, the greatest challenge is often to achieve the cultural and behavioural shifts that are essential to momentum towards planned change. When - as with the current crisis - change is unavoidable, the focus has to be on clear lines of communication, consistent messaging, supporting a platform for self-responsibility and, above all else, empathy and understanding. Behavioural change is also fundamental to success and will only occur if there is momentum, direction, leadership and very clear goals for all stakeholders. Vision and coherent strategy are key, giving people the clear

indicators for step changes towards the new better. Change is not the goal, it is a means to an end and that has to be indicated by improvement, benefit and a clear picture of the future.

There has never been a greater need for empathy, understanding and thought leadership, to reach out and support employees in the diverse workforce. Each and every employee is faced with difficulty and hardship; the vulnerable and isolated, the disabled colleagues who rely on support, parents with children unable to attend school, those unable to visit elderly relatives, young people in cramped living conditions, separated from their wider family - there is no doubt that this crisis is impacting everyone.

JASON SPILLER - EDITOR  
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**ISSN 1754 0224**

theHRDIRECTOR is published by Pure Strategic Media Ltd  
Registered in England & Wales No. 7878098



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## LEGAL UPDATES

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



**1** In a redundancy situation, employers sometimes decide to conduct an interview process for the jobs that will be available, be they the same, or new jobs, rather than selecting individuals from a redundancy pool to be retained or who will be dismissed. In *Gwynedd Council v Barratt & Other*, the EAT have reminded employers that it may still be appropriate conduct consultation with the individuals concerned and a failure to do so could result in a finding of unfair redundancy dismissal for failure to follow a fair procedure. In this case, the employees were required to apply for either an identical job or a substantially similar job (in effect their own jobs) in a new school after their old school closed. The EAT held that where recruitment is to the same or substantially the same role as one which the employee was doing, then the exercise may not involve "forward-looking" criteria at all, but be more akin to selection from within a pool, where consultation is appropriate. Here the claimants could have been consulted about the adoption of a procedure for dismissing staff at the school to be closed and the recruitment process for positions in the new school, but no consultation took place. Therefore, the ET was entitled to find (among other procedural shortcomings) that the employer's approach to alternative employment, of simply requiring the claimants to apply for their own jobs, was unfair.

**2** In *Giwa-Amu v Department for Work and Pensions*, GA who describes herself as being of Nigerian-Welsh origin and who is 59, succeeded with direct race and age discrimination and harassment claims. The ET found, among other matters, that a DWP colleague, Cartwright, had: (i) violated GA's dignity by using the term "Paki-lover" in her presence; (ii) sprayed body spray on herself, whilst sat next to GA and had purposefully spun on her chair to be next to GA after she had said it was making her feel sick; (iii) repeatedly accused GA of stealing ice-cream; and, (iv) directed offensive gestures towards GA in a training session. Another colleague, Lewis, told the group during a training session that he had "touched her [GA's] bum" and made a nasty dig about doubting whether she would return to work which underlined the message "we don't like you". The ET awarded GA £233,000 including £42,800 for injury to feelings.

**3** As lockdown restrictions start to ease and businesses begin to reopen, the ICO has set out the key steps organisations need to consider around the use of personal information. The six data protection steps for organisations addresses questions about the rules around organisations collecting additional personal information to provide a safe environment for their staff. The ICO point out that data protection does not stop employers asking employees whether they are experiencing any Covid-19 symptoms or introducing appropriate testing, as long as the principles of the law - transparency, fairness and proportionality - are applied. The six key data protection steps covered in the guidance are: (a) Only collect and use what's necessary; (b) Keep it to a minimum by collecting only the information needed to implement their measures appropriately and effectively; (c) Be clear, open and honest with staff about their data; (d) Treat people fairly; (e) Keep people's information secure; and (f) Staff must be able to exercise their information rights.

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

## MOVERS & SHAKERS

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

### EMMA ROSE

HR Director - Travis Perkins

Travis Perkins announces the appointment of Emma Rose as the Group's new HR Director. Emma joins the business from Kerry Foods, where she was HR Director. Travis Perkins CEO, Nick Roberts, said: "Over the past weeks and months we have demonstrated that we have a key role to play in the economic recovery of the country. The commitment of our colleagues across the Group - in terms of adapting our business models and adjusting to new ways of working during this time - has simply been extraordinary." Emma has a distinguished HR career that spans a range of companies and industries, from; InterContinental Hotels Group, to Mondelez International, Cadbury, Coca-Cola and M&S.

### LOUISE ROGERS

HR Director - CJ Lang

Scottish SPAR wholesaler, CJ Lang, has appointed Louise Rogers as HR Director and she will take over from outgoing HR Director John Connolly, who retires following 15 years at the business. Louise has previously worked as HR Director at Alliance Trust Savings, where she was a member of the executive team, responsible for leading the business, with specific ownership of people, culture, facilities & internal communications. CJ Lang is Scotland's largest independent retailing and distribution company.

### CARITA HIMBERG

Senior Vice-President of HR - Metso Outotec

Carita Himberg is appointed as new Senior Vice-President to head up the Human Resources department at Metso Outotec and will be a member of the future Metso Outotec executive team. Carita will commence her new role before the end of the year at the latest and joins from Stora Enso, where she currently holds the post as Senior Vice-President of HR in the Packaging Materials Division. Prior to that, she held global HR leadership positions with Microsoft, Nokia and Outokumpu in Finland, as well as several HR Director and management roles at Microsoft and Novartis in Switzerland.

At this challenging time, HR strategy, solutions and insights are critical to help you navigate back to **'the new better'**.

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**12**  
**ISSUES**  
PA



**Take a look at the Topics we are covering in the next 3 months where we are looking at solutions, insight, best practice and strategies post the impact of Covid-19:**

- Business & HR transformation - Equality, diversity and inclusion - Managing a diverse workforce
- Corporate strategic alliance - Managing business growth - The changing role of line management
- Developing a more collaborative HR - Talent management - Health & Wellbeing - The performance management revolution - Flexible & agile working

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# STEM SELL

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*Founded in 1940, ERIKS has developed over the years into a leading-edge, innovative multi-product specialist and solutions provider to general industry and with many sectors under intense pressure, there is no place for complacency. Now a critical focus too is on a sector-wide ageing workforce and when it comes to attracting the next generation into STEM and engineering, progress is slow. Solutions must be found and fast.*



## JOE PARKES

### CHIEF HR OFFICER - ERIKS INDUSTRIAL SERVICES LTD

INTERVIEWED BY JASON SPILLER & PHOTOGRAPHED BY STUART THOMAS

**Joe, take us back to your early life and how you came across HR as a potential career?** I went to University in Bristol with the plan to study law, started the degree and when we covered employment law, something clicked. For me it was by far the most interesting aspect of the course and it made me consider that perhaps rather than general law, I should specialise in employment law. I attended a couple of careers seminars that the University held and, by chance, talked with an HR Manager from the MOD. I explained my situation and he suggested that I take a look at Human Resources, so after some research I asked to switch courses to the HR Management Business course. It included a placement year, which I completed with Hays Recruitment, who invested in some in-depth training, helped me gain new skills and confidence, but primarily the training really aligned with a strong business development focus... they let me deal with real customers! It was great and so I went back to Uni for my final year whilst Hays helped with several temporary assignments. During one, I was seconded to an assignment at Network Rail in the HR department. I overheard that they were interviewing for an HR Administrator role and so, rather cheekily, I asked if I could apply, and after an interview they offered me the job.

I was based in Bristol at the time and I worked alongside a team that looked after the south-west, roughly Reading to Plymouth and up to Cardiff, working within track maintenance - and I was involved in a very large transformation programme which, unfortunately, included cutting the workforce back. I was exposed to redundancy, transformation and worked closely with the unions and so, if there was any doubt in my mind about a career in HR, this would have found it out. But, if anything, it made me more determined. The way that Network Rail had teams set up, they had business partners that covered certain geographies and my role changed to be more an advisory officer. I was traveling around covering the core elements;

absence management, disciplinary and grievance, interacting directly with the unions, attending redundancy consultations and managing that process and communication flow. It was a short stint but very intense, in the eye of the change storm and, after completion, there was another restructure within HR itself and this came just at the time, when I was looking to move back to the Midlands, to my hometown of Birmingham. I applied for some roles closer to home and said goodbye to Network Rail.

**Tell us about your next move.** One of the companies I applied for was a commercial property firm called GVA - now Avison Young - and a completely different environment. My new role was a national one, covering 12 offices across the country, working with professional surveyors. The beauty of a career in HR is the transferable skills, so the sector or size of a firm doesn't matter. This role was more strategic - with a greater focus on leadership development, people development, engagement - and a lot less of the reactive employee relations work that I'd been used to at Network Rail. But again, it was a great experience, because it allowed me to adapt in a different environment and age demographic. Now I was supporting graduates - as graduate places in surveying are in really high demand. From a personal learning perspective, I also learnt a lot about senior stakeholder management too and had a closer affinity and contact with the directors. This was a very sales-targeted culture and so a very competitive and dynamic environment, which I really adapted well to.

**So, tell us about your mindset, at this stage of your career.** This was probably the first time I realised I had ambition and I was pushing for new opportunities, I wanted challenges and I also began to wish that I had my own trainset, to coin the cliché, rather than just carrying out HR staples. I probably came across as a bit of a pain, but I wanted to demonstrate value and they kindly responded and increasingly gave me

opportunities to work alongside some great HR business partners. I could really see that role as strategic and business focused, which is where I wanted to be and the business really supported me, but it was clear that I needed another step change, into another environment, with more of a challenge to really test myself. I wanted to progress, but more than anything, I wanted to lead... "something"!

**There's always that career stage where you've outgrown one role, but step into a new job that's potentially beyond you're experience and competence.** That's certainly true and, at this stage, I was approached about a start-up business called First Utility, which was a new player in the burgeoning and increasingly complex energy sector. This was a real challenger brand and they were championing that "the big six" had enjoyed something of a monopoly and so they were marketing more affordable tariffs and educating the public that they could move about suppliers to find cheaper tariffs. This was the brave new world in a market with different dynamics of interactions with customers and it was the right type of business model at the right time. The consumer had become completely disenfranchised with price hikes and not a huge difference between services, so along came First Utility who were very much a disruptor, young, ambitious - altruistic might be too strong - but there was a rebellious swagger and I was really keen to be part of it, so I applied and joined as HR Manager, tasked literally with creating an HR function, so the proverbial trainset I had been coveting. The existing team was lean and the task ahead was to recruit and start putting more structure and to professionalise the department. Meantime, commercially, things were moving very fast and so it really was a case of hitting the boards running, as the business was onboarding thousands of new customers each month. It was just phenomenal growth and that meant having to scale up the business really quickly. It wasn't unusual to take part in daily conversations like "we need to build a training



and development function, NOW!" "We need another contact centre, yesterday!" There was a certain element of flying by the seat of our pants, but it was exhilarating. So, there was much more besides setting up an HR department to occupy my time, before I could even consider things like what the employee value proposition was. Then the Government very kindly introduced pensions auto enrolment, so my first year was, to say the least, a packed agenda. There was just an awful lot happening at the same time and the business grew phenomenally - headcount tripled in a year.

***It sounds incredibly dynamic and volatile, was there a point where you thought, time for me to get off this ride?*** In such a fast-moving environment there's always friction, but we achieved what we set out to do. In answer to

The entire customer experience had been their focus for years and they trailblazed, consequently dominating the burgeoning B2C market through the service it provided. It was a brilliant experience and every HR initiative was linked to an organisational goal so there was real connection. The HR Business Partner role was deliberately disassociated with transactional activity and the focus was on projects, engagement, development, every element that could drive better service and customer experience. Personally, I was challenged and supported in equal measure, moved onto to be an HR Manager and then took over responsibility for managing HR Business Partners, a role that I had been working alongside. In truth, I felt a greater affinity for the Business Partnering role and stepping away from some of that was difficult at first.

GREATER EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING WILL BE THE MARK OF A GREAT EMPLOYER AND SUPPORTING PEOPLE IN THEIR LIVES AND HAVING THE KIND OF RELATIONSHIP THAT TRUSTS AND PUTS PEOPLE FIRST WILL BE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE CONTRACT GOING FORWARD

your question, there were relationship issues that began to clash and I guess it was a typical scenario of conflict in the working relationship and it didn't quite feel right and so I made the decision to leave. It was the first time in my career where I wasn't sure what to do next. I took some time off, did some HR interim work and had a good think about my next career move, because I felt that the next position was going to be key in my career. I joined TNT as an interim, to help manage a transformation project - a move to outsource their IT function - which was about 800 people strong. I was one of a team of people that went in to support and lead on some of those work streams. As the assignment at TNT came to a close, I was approached by DPD, another parcel delivery company - the UK's largest in that space - and such an innovative, forward-thinking organisation, with a strong track record of performance. I joined as HR Business Partner - in its truest sense - and really connected to the operational area that I was responsible for. I had just over 3000 employees in my remit, it was highly autonomous and HR was really valued by the organisation as a strategic partner. It was a business that was on a great journey, they were the first to move to app-based technology, were able to give guaranteed delivery slots, something we take for granted now but pioneering then.

Then, quite by chance, I was approached by ERIKS and they were purposefully looking for a new HR Director that hadn't yet operated on a board, had experience within logistics and had bags of ambition. Sometimes, a job comes along which has "you" written through it. But I was 31 years old... would I seriously be considered experienced enough to make HR Director? It was a stretch, but I went along for the interview and, the fact they took me on, tells you a lot about ERIKS as a company - not fixated in legacy or pre-conceived ideas, or taking the path of least resistance.

***Tell us about ERIKS the business and its ambitions in these unpredictable and fast-changing times.*** At its core, this is a specialist distributor of engineering products and services. We work very closely with a wide range of industries and manufacturers within the UK and Ireland - which is the area I am responsible for - and it operates globally. It is the diversity of the business, reflected in its customer portfolio, that is really compelling; automotive, food & beverage and aerospace and many well-known brands in each of the sectors. It's definitely a more complex organisation than I've worked for before and, while the focus is on distribution, there's also specialism and know-how within the organisation - which is highly-regarded - in

particular within our product groups and we apply that specialism to our customer support. It is that intricate understanding that sets the business apart in the sector as it straddles logistics and an engineering environment. Just as I joined the company, the board had put together an ambitious transformation plan, so I was coming into a high performing organisation strategy, including operational excellence, sales excellence and digital transformation. It was clear that this business was about to go on a fascinating journey and the HR and people side of this was ripe for innovation and creativity... this really was right time right place for my ambitions.

## THE INCREASE IN STUDENTS GOING TO UNIVERSITY LOOKED GREAT FOR INCLUSION, BUT IT MUST HAVE BEEN TO THE DETRIMENT OF STEM-RELATED CAREERS. HOWEVER, IT DOES FINALLY LOOK LIKE THE TABLES ARE BEGINNING TO SLOWLY TURN

The HR team had been very well led for a number of years by the outgoing HR Director, so I had big shoes to fill and confidences to gain, but together we set out the plans to restructure and guide them towards a more strategically-orientated department, focusing on centres of excellence around learning & development and business partnering. From that we assessed the business needs and started to put together a blueprint. We have some typical issues, an ageing population challenge, many could retire within the next five years and they will take some important specialist skills with them. Trying to attract new people into an engineering environment is not easy, because of the much-discussed dribbling pipeline and the competition is also a challenge, particularly when you want to drive diversity and inclusion. The number of women coming into engineering is still far too low and we have a shared commitment to improve that outlook. In other areas, we also have important elements to consider, such as a very ambitious salesforce that are very vocal about career progression and increasing earning potential and so it is very much 360 degree and companywide in the need to be competitive and meet the ambitions of the company and our people. There is no room for complacency right now and we're designing creative reward and recognition strategies to support that particular area of the business. Undoubtedly, one of the most fascinating challenges is engagement in the culture, where we have 1700 employees, operating in 230 different locations - predominantly teams on sites with customers - and so it comes down to trying to

foster a culture within a culture, in a bid to engage people across a wide geography. We recently went through a large transformation programme to try and eradicate an increasing problem of siloed divisions, which for us were ultimately counterproductive and had been limiting our ability to grow. We've gone through that change exercise now and we're promoting what we call "One ERIKS" which supports a much more collaborative way of working and more inclusive culture.

***You've talked about the ageing demographic in your business and expressed concerns about the loss of essential skills. What are you doing to***

***mitigate against this inevitability?*** We're tackling this on many levels, investing heavily in our apprenticeship programmes and concurrently supporting our managers and leaders through extensive coaching qualifications, to pass on the skills and expertise to the apprentices. But there is a balance, you can't just flood the business with apprentices, because it can impact your productivity and it raises safety concerns, a significant focus within ERIKS. So, we have been introducing apprentices into the right areas and supporting them with the right coaching, to ensure they receive a world class experience. For sure, it's been one of our biggest investments from a learning and development perspective and something we are proud to have restarted within the organisation.

***How actively do you liaise with local schools and colleges to garner their interest in the business and influence the curriculum?*** We're part of an industry-wide drive to build STEM profile careers. We regularly attend national and localised careers fairs and we keep close to local schools and we have partners that support us with that. But students going on to study STEM are still a rarity and the few engineering graduates that do come through with the right skills are considered hot property. We've invested in our talent acquisition over the last two years, bringing in specialist resources to understand the market and we're increasingly building effective connections with some of the key schools. This year, some of my team have started working more closely with

local schools, governors and education bodies, to influence and encourage students to consider careers in engineering. In fact, the feedback and data we've gained has been very useful, enabling us to develop a deeper understanding of ambitions and employee expectations. We're also very much focused on equality and inclusion, deliberately going for some of the underperforming schools and academies to offer them the same opportunities. It's just one initiative that we're launching this year, to really drive diversity and inclusion through the business.

***The dribbling STEM pipeline has vexed related sectors for years, is there any sign of improvement?*** Since last year we've definitely experienced an increase in the number of people applying for apprenticeships and opportunities across the business, which is a clear sign that our collective efforts to promote STEM is finally paying off and the grimy grease stained image is no longer the distraction that it was, evidenced by the increase in female applicants. Of course, role-modelling is essential and increasingly we're able to demonstrate a wider demographic working in really smart environments, as opposed to the old image of being knee deep in engine oil. I'm of the generation where going on to University was increasingly the norm, as opposed to students going to tech colleges or vocational training. On paper, the increase in students going to university looked great for inclusion, but it must have been to the detriment of STEM-related careers. However, it does finally look like the tables are beginning to slowly turn, but for sure there's still work to be done in this space.

***The pandemic has forced another step change in the employer/employee relationship, and with it, employee expectation. How do you think that will be reflected going forward?*** Unquestionably, Coronavirus has amplified a number of issues, take for example inequality, inasmuch as the ease that some have been able to access flexible working and others have not. As this has gone on, there is no question that expectations for flexible working will increase, either through desire or necessity, but also mobility in terms of career progression and greater flexibility to reflect people's lives. Either way, for many businesses, a greater empathy and understanding will be the mark of a great employer and supporting people in their lives and having the kind of relationship that trusts and puts people first will be an essential part of the contract going forward.



CHAired BY JASON SPILLER

28 MAY 2020 - VIRTUAL DEBATE

# THE NEXT NORMAL – PREPARING FOR THE RETURNING

*The Covid-19 pandemic has had more impact on the world than any event since World War II. The lives lost to this dreadful virus are a tragedy, the impact on economies incalculable, and almost every aspect of life will change as a result.*

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DELEGATES

CHARMYN HALL, HR DIRECTOR - OXFORD INSTRUMENTS PLASMA TECHNOLOGY  
JULIA LITCHFIELD, DIRECTOR - CHAMELEON TALENT SOLUTIONS  
GEMMA MCGRATTAN, MANAGING DIRECTOR - MCCANN SYNERGY  
ANDREA METCALF, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND CULTURE - ACTIONAID UK  
BRIAN NEWMAN, VICE PRESIDENT - HUMAN RESOURCES - LIVE NATION ENTERTAINMENT  
EMMA NICHOLLS, PEOPLE INSIGHTS & EXPERIENCE DIRECTOR - CITY & GUILDS GROUP  
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JANE WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR - PEOPLE INNOVATION LTD

In the midst of this omnipresent crisis, we're seeing incredible human acts of duty, loyalty and kindness, as well as astonishing stoicism and inventiveness. There is also much to be learned and applied to the way we all come out of this difficult time and prepare for a brighter future. Never before have organisations collectively had to be so focused on their people. It's not just about working from home; the current pandemic shines a light on an organisation's entire culture, employee journey and people experience. Businesses are having to listen, learn and adapt. There is an opportunity here for leaders to redefine and re-imagine the future with their people at its heart.

**HOW ARE YOU PLANNING FOR THE REBUILDING OF YOUR WORKFORCES WITH BOTH SAFETY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT FRONT OF MIND?**

*David Blackburn:* We made a really big investment last year: a complete rethink of our workplace environment. It was a big piece of work around our workplace vision and so when the lockdown started, that definitely impacted on how quickly the organisation was able to click into a new way of working. We've been carrying out pulse surveys during the lockdown and hosting live chats. The big discussion was around when should we start to come back to work in the office and, encouragingly, we had a really good response. But the general overarching theme is, understandably, anxiety. People have said: "I completely trust you as the employer, I can trust that you are going to do social distancing and that you're going to spray the office. But there is no way I'm travelling on public transport until there's a vaccine". Others have said they want to come back as soon as possible. We've kept the office open one day a week during the crisis and we are going to continue this way until September at the earliest.

*Brian Newman:* I echo the sentiment over anxieties. In theory, social distancing is a way of managing the return with some people staying at home but, in practice, this is very difficult. It would be potentially frustrating to have a group in the office dialling out to those at home who are not on the rota to be in. There has to be purpose behind who is in and who is not, in order to make that more practical. I also think that the psychological issue is compounded in London, because of the public transport situation: the tube is an exception when compared to other parts of the country, and for many in London offices, using public transport is the only commuting option. I think we can realistically make offices very clean and safe places, but this is much harder to control on the commute to the office. I think demographics may also play a part here with parts of the workforce - maybe those who are younger and healthier - more tolerant to risk. Offices may

transform post-crisis to become real collaboration hubs, and this should pose very practical questions now about whether we want to fill them with desks and just race to return back to 'normal', versus seeing the opportunities for really pushing on the flexible working transition and all that brings. The future of work, whilst slightly unnerving at this moment, is still one we can dare to be excited about.

**IS THIS MANDATORY SPANNER IN THE WORKS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BRING IN THE CHANGES THAT HAVE BEEN PUT ON THE BACK BURNER, BECAUSE EVERYONE WAS TOO BUSY?**

*Julia Litchfield:* While it's a whole new world, a new environment, before the current crisis, there was change happening anyway: digitalisation, a more agile workforce, smarter ways of working than the traditional office environment and increased focus on mental health. Agreed, this crisis has created opportunity for accelerating change, as it gives businesses a unique point in time where the world is almost crying out for change. Typically, there's resistance, but everyone is looking to define the "new better". There's a difficult balance between the short and medium term. The immediate focus today needs to be on prioritising the physical and psychological safety of colleagues and a safe return to work. However, there's a big question around how and when the balance shifts from what absolutely must happen right now, to the more medium- to long-term strategic imperatives, which will help organisations gain a competitive advantage.

*Charmyn Hall:* The impact of the pandemic forced us to develop a hybrid workforce model. We have full and partial homeworking, furloughed people and our team on site manufacturing customer orders, more so as Asia opens up. Our operations team have been working throughout lockdown and, like many companies, have had to become inventive about how we organise our building to keep us all safe. One of the challenges of this hybrid working model happening so fast is that not everyone has been able to appreciate the challenges of their colleagues in different situations. For example, staff on furlough are concerned about the future, some of the people based on site feel resentful that they have to keep commuting and home workers feel tied to Teams or Skype all day. Having listened to these different conversations going on, we have focused on three pillars. The first of these is health and wellbeing - many of the activities we are doing, other companies will recognise - and one positive coming out of this sad situation is that mental health conversations are now much more open and visible. The second pillar is all about continuously improving our health and safety. We are making a concerted effort to listen to ideas, act on them and then publish it

so people know what has been done - a 'you said, we did' approach. Every Covid-19-related suggestion is recorded as a "hazard", so everyone knows that we will take action. We show videos of our site online and share pictures to give people the reassurance that they can influence their environment, to help them cope. The third pillar is communication in every form that we can and, at a time like this, we appreciate we can never do enough. We utilise formal company meetings, 'ask any question' webinars without a set agenda, socially distanced walking around our site by Directors to answer questions and listen to ideas. What we have reinforced is the criticality of Line Managers in a hybrid model as a key link in the communication chain, and this is a skills area that we will invest even more in.

**THIS CRISIS HAS CREATED OPPORTUNITY FOR ACCELERATING CHANGE, A UNIQUE POINT IN TIME WHERE THE WORLD IS ALMOST CRYING OUT FOR CHANGE. TYPICALLY, THERE'S RESISTANCE, BUT EVERYONE IS LOOKING TO DEFINE THE "NEW BETTER"**

*Andrea Metcalf:* We've sent a survey to our staff and have been talking to them about how they view coming back to the office, both in and outside of London. We have two sites: one is in Somerset and we already have people in that environment, because they can't work from home as it's partly a fulfilment centre. So, in order for us to continue fundraising and be financially sustainable, in the short, medium, and long term, we needed that work to continue. Due to the small numbers in the office, we've been using it as a pilot space, looking at what we can do, how we might approach social distancing, how we might review how things operate from a practical perspective - toilets and kitchens for example - so we can put in the right measures. We have a lot of resistance from people regarding coming back into the office and we've also had quite a number of people also saying; "why come into the office when I can work from home effectively?" Some managers in the past haven't encouraged flexible working, although as an organisation, we do. So, this has been an opportunity for those fixed views to be challenged and changed and we will have a lot more people looking to work more flexibly in the future. Because this is a global pandemic and we are mobilising fast, we've been able to make decisions in a quicker way and we've been able to innovate in ways that we wouldn't have done before. On the plus side, virtual meetings have been a real leveller, because people's voices can be heard in a very different way; this has removed some of the power imbalances and created a different kind of feel to the organisation.

*Emma Nicholls:* There are a lot of different kinds of cultures across our Group. We were talking about how we want to move to a different culture pre-crisis, and we have a real opportunity to do that more quickly now. Our Corporate Learning businesses can work from home with minimal issues, but we also have more traditionally-minded workers who historically think 'being chained to a desk' is the best way of working, and then we have trainers who miss working with learners or clients and that face-to face-interaction. What I think most of our colleagues are saying is, they want more flexibility and so there's a need for us to take more of an individualised approach, while also thinking through a principle of fairness. Another key factor is: how do we make this future more inclusive? At the moment, everyone working from

home is a leveller. So how do you make sure you don't become exclusive moving out of this experience? How do you ensure that you don't create an even bigger socio-economic or cultural divide between those who can work from home and those that can't, or negatively impact certain groups over others. We want to make sure we are considering new models for job swapping, upskilling and recruitment processes that a different way of working presents. We have the critical opportunity to ask ourselves how and why we use workspaces in the future.

*Jane Williams:* My thinking is that we are not returning to the life we knew, at least until there is a vaccine or effective treatment. I am Acting Chair of the Riding Centre Membership Organisation, which is an organisation in transition. To help members run their riding centres, we have recommended safe operating processes for exiting lockdown, as used by the military and in manufacturing, to accredit centres and train staff to reassure their clients about their safe working. We developed a tailored equine industry risk assessment and we have worked with them to come up with ideas to keep their customer base close and remain viable. Eighty-five percent from a survey of 1,300 were worried about viability. A frightening figure. The fear is that clients will be made redundant or work reduced hours.

*Fiona Orchard:* We already had a range of tools designed for remote working and transitioned very easily. Equally, our culture has always been at the

heart of everything that we do and our employees are bright, kind and motivated by challenge. We saw a real peak in our culture showing up in our daily interactions, through adoption of Zoom and other connection opportunities. Compared to other organisations, we had it easy, but personally I now have a hypothesis that, while people can be change resistant, they are also energised by novelty. So, now that working from home is normalised and not a novelty, we could see engagement dip. We'll have Zoom fatigue, virtual happy hours will feel harder and maintaining the sense of community could become more challenging going forward. The default then becomes, "let's go back to normal"; we have this real craving for coming back to what we are used to. But there isn't going to be a return to 'normal', so let's reset expectations and really ground in what the future might look like. Something I have learned is that there is value in being in an office with people, being together, face-to-face. We will achieve that, eventually, but for now, how can we take that magic and find a different way of using it? For me, it feels like a distant shimmer of light that I can't seem to grab hold of yet. There are so many unknowns.

*Gemma McGrattan:* It boils down to: what are your people's needs? There is an opportunity here to re-board everyone and focus again on purpose, strategy and values. Not surprisingly, some clients are having to change their whole strategy, because they're in survival mode. They need innovation. They need the energy for that innovation, and the trial and error that comes with it. There's the health and safety theme - many people are already focusing on this - and there is also the support theme around wellbeing. That support needs to extend to your leaders, too, because managing in this way, in this crisis, is very different. Due to the virtual nature of remote working, we need to focus on managing outcomes, and use this opportunity to reunite everyone. Some businesses will have people on furlough and, by contrast, other people are feeling burnt out, so we must avoid that 'us and them' situation creeping in. Also, in reuniting, it's important to promote your values and maintain purpose. Then there's the practical and logistical considerations, the support mechanisms and how to keep people innovating. Finally, it's important to remember that while a number of sectors can change, there are some which still have to go back to a physical space - for example, the very hard-hit hotels or airlines markets - and some sectors like this might not recover until 2023.

*Nicky Clark:* It's not necessarily about if and when people might be returning to a physical space, what is important is how you retain your culture, because culture comes through your day-to-day interactions with people. We have a communal kitchen at McCann Synergy, and a set of interactions throughout the day that really helped

to reinforce our culture and all the fun things we do together as a group. It's going to be a really interesting challenge for those that do continue to work from home: how you keep those levels of engagement and how do we put a plan in place to substitute that? On the flip side, this is a huge opportunity if your organisation is going through big transformation programmes, whether that be

**WE'LL HAVE ZOOM FATIGUE, VIRTUAL HAPPY HOURS WILL FEEL HARDER AND MAINTAINING THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY COULD BECOME MORE CHALLENGING. THE DEFAULT THEN BECOMES, "LET'S GO BACK TO NORMAL"; WE HAVE THIS REAL CRAVING FOR COMING BACK**

HR or digital, as for most, this crisis will have been a catalyst to bring this change to bear during this disruption. So, expect a really big shift in HR and self-service and encouraging people to go online. Then there are some of the qualities that have been seen from people who are showing much greater compassion and synergy in these dark times. These are brilliant behaviours that we must take forward.

*Brian Newman:* The 'new normal' way of working today is very difficult - if not bordering on the slightly ridiculous at times - what with partners and children at home and no way to get out of the office. But this isn't the way we should think of the future opportunities that working flexibly could bring. Currently, the pleasures of reducing the commute and what that time could be used for are questionable. Really, we should see the future as much more of an ultimate combination of flexibility, where collaboration with colleagues in shared spaces is possible and encouraged when needed, bringing people to the office for good reasons and enabling home working to be part of how we work, not the only way we work.

*Gemma McGrattan:* When you're thinking about performance, and where the business needs to get back up to in terms of level of productivity and revenue generation, you have to consider what it's going to take for us to ensure we unlock the potential of all our people to deliver under these new circumstances. There are businesses that have reduced revenues of 30-50 percent, so the focus has to be: how do we think differently, change strategy and ultimately survive? It's a very commercial view, but critical for many businesses and you will need your people to help you deliver this.

*Jane Williams:* If you look at Tesco UK and Ireland, some of what they achieved is amazing, with 40,000 temporary staff recruited in two weeks to support the online business and revenue has tripled. It took several years for their online

business to arrive at six percent of their total volume in the UK and Ireland; now it accounts for around 35 percent. The challenge for them is how to sustain this, as people have changed their behaviour during this crisis - they now shop once a week. The ability to respond quickly is key to success. Tesco have the capability to do that and the business model allows it.

**HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS STAY TRUE TO PURPOSE AND BE CONSISTENT?**

*David Blackburn:* I read a good article last year before any of this happened, about brands. They said your organisation used to be a glass box and your brand was what your marketing comms people decided to project on the outside. Now it's your brand that is what's inside and so, it is your internal culture that matters. I really like what that analogy is saying - it's not what you're projecting on the outside anymore, it is what's going on inside your box. So, your culture and how you're treating people says more about the organisation than anything.

**DARE WE COMPARE THIS WITH WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FINANCIAL CRISIS, A RADICAL CHANGE IN CULTURE, POLICIES AND PROCEDURE?**

*Julia Litchfield:* There's been a very gradual shift over the years from the time of the banking crisis to where we are now. Organisations have been more focused on corporate social responsibility before the current crisis, than they ever had been. With the millennial generation becoming a bigger part of the workforce, I have seen a shift to a less financially driven mindset. Some organisations have been pivoting towards corporate and social responsibility, their purpose having a greater role in society and a real care for employees mental health and wellbeing. There's now a massive business case to drive people-related change forward at pace. I think we will see an adjustment, but whilst sound and expedient short-term decisions are needed, to stay competitive, organisations should take a long-term view.

*Gemma McGrattan:* I think the balance of opinion is that you always have to lead with and live by your purpose. Actions speak louder than words. There is a balance between focusing on the values

SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO AND WE SURE NEED IT!

# ANNUAL HRDRINKS

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and behaviours, the character of the business and honesty when leading through uncertainty. You need to share the honest facts and truths, but then move very quickly to hope, purpose and values. Then, make any decisions with your values in mind - that's definitely the way to go. The Airbnb CEO's redundancy letter is a great example of honesty with humanity. So, always lead with purpose, but you have to actually live it. Employer brand is in the spotlight right now. What you say and do will be remembered.

*Nicky Clark:* Once the job retention scheme is over and things start to change, we'll be faced with some really tough decisions across organisations. I think it's not what you have to do, it is how you do it. We've heard of some horror stories on what some companies have done, like turning cameras off during redundancy conversations. This is just horrendous. Now is the ultimate test of purpose-driven leaders; remain true to your purpose and people will understand.

**IT'S A TIME WHERE REALLY LISTENING TO PEOPLE IS HUGE AND MAKING SURE THAT THERE IS A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION.**

*Andrea Metcalf:* We've been doing weekly staff briefings and normally we would schedule them on a monthly basis. But now, we have our CEO every week talking to staff and we use technology e.g. Slido for questions, so people can ask whatever they want - and we have FAQ's that are updated and weekly communications. We have a staff newsletter that we send and we have been much more intentional around that in terms of themes and information exchange, with people able to put in stories that they want everybody else to hear about. We've always been quite inclusive, but I think we're being more intentional about it in a lot of ways. What that has led to is people feeling like they're still connected to us and I think they really welcome, including people who are furloughed. In fact, we have a newsletter and hub purely for our furloughed staff - importantly, we take out all the links so that it can't be seen as work - but they still feel like there's that connection. We've also instigated a Coronavirus communications team, as well as our crisis management team and what that group does is talk about what matters to people. Within the group are people from both sites, we have union representation and every Friday, we have a general update.

*Charmyn Hall:* One of the additional steps we took was to make an early decision to form a Coronavirus Consultation Group. While one objective was to respond early to any challenges that arose as a result of the crisis, the critical objective was to make sure we continuously learn from this experience and decide how we want to

work in the future. This team promotes discussions on how we want our working lives to be different now and when lockdown eases. Initially, there was understandable nervousness about why we were taking a formal approach, but the level of engagement from the representatives has been incredible. They have actively engaged with their constituents to make sure that people have felt their views were heard. While I have been personally impressed by the depth of debate and thought about what we want our future work to look like, the representatives have also provided a level of pastoral care and they have picked up on issues that we may have missed so we can offer support early.

*Emma Nicholls:* We already had an Employee Forum in place, with representatives across the Group and, likewise, we ask them for feedback and insight and we'll be working with our colleagues as we think about the phasing of return to, or change in, workspace. We've also run a survey too and so we are gaining insight into the 'feeling compass' for our organisation, at this point in time and what we want to keep for the future. We run regular webinars that are very open and honest and Q & A's with colleagues. We've seen lots of engagement but, to be honest, we have quite an engaged workforce anyway - typically we have 80 percent upwards response rates on any of our engagement surveys with strong engagement scores. In fact, we're doing pretty much the same things that we already had in place, but more of them and with a lot more transparency.

*Brian Newman:* We've been extremely fortunate and have had the opportunity to have some of our artists talk directly to our employees, about how they see the challenges and the ways they want to overcome this. Reminding them of our core business and the real drive for a full return to live - this is a mission that we have kept all our people focused on and helps navigate the uncertainty we have had to deal with as a result of this virus. Traditional thinking around leadership has been challenged a little, for so long it has centred on clarity of direction and vision and, in some industries - and in the world right now - this is very hard to provide. Leaders and politicians cannot answer the questions that people want to know which is, when will we return back to normal? We have rallied our people to innovate and be at the forefront of the safety initiatives that are going to help people feel comfortable returning to their lives, as soon as this is deemed medically safe by the science. We've seen some amazing ideas coming from our employee population, like drive-in events in Denmark and exclusive content creation.

*Gemma McGrattan:* I think a lot of good ideas are developed on the front line, so if you can actively

listen, there are lots of opportunities here. This links nicely with ongoing coaching conversations - an area performance management is keen to embrace - and there's the opportunity to put this into practice. It requires leaders to know how to really, actively, listen. If you can, support your people with the best way to have those conversations, act on the results and tie that in with innovation, trial and failing fast. We're seeing clients want to take this approach, asking questions such as: what do we need to do to activate and innovate quickly?

#### IS THIS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REINVENT YOUR EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE STRATEGY AND TRANSFORM YOUR CULTURE?

*Gemma McGrattan:* Marketeers have always studied customer experience - looking at every element of that journey and improving each step. Now, we can do that for our people experience. From hire to retire, you want to be mapping the employee journey and identifying what elements can be improved. This is a good opportunity to look at your people processes again. What will the expectation be from potential candidates going forward? What areas do we need to shine a spotlight on and perhaps try a new approach towards? Gallup tells us that, if you're in the top quartile for engagement, then it's proven you can achieve 21 percent more profits - that's a great incentive. Other areas we must focus on are wellbeing and learning. Learning is huge at the moment and many of our clients have focused on learning for people that are on furlough, but also learning mindsets, which ties in nicely with innovation. Recognition is hugely important, especially when people are going through all this turmoil and you're not seeing them so much every day. In short, it's vital to stop and take a look at your people experience, map this and check it's still fit for purpose.

*David Blackburn:* The question about what would you do differently is always key, whatever the situation. I think there is something about what the crises has unlocked in terms of people's connection to the purpose. Our strategy over the last few years has been to really bring the story of our customers to life. So, we've really changed our language; we used to talk about claimants not customers, we used to refer to the amount of compensation we paid as opposed to the number of people we helped. I think that we saw a big increase in engagement last year, because we are really clear about that new message. We have an amazingly simple employee value proposition, that this we're an organisation that makes a difference in which "you" can make a difference. What we're moving into is this world of ever-increasing personalisation, because people want responses to their own circumstances.

*Gemma McGrattan:* I was talking to a Chief People Officer the other week and she was telling me how we instinctively self-serve as consumers. With tech supporting us, we can move towards this in HR. Now is another opportunity to create a new model - embrace those self-service moments - but it does mean we'll have to consider the role of the manager and that this relationship will be the one that delivers those very special moments and connections with colleagues. In future, colleagues will have more of a connection with the brand, so it's important to think about who will create those special connections. Here is where you have to really think through the people experience and at which points do you deliver those moments of magic.

**YOU NEED TO SHARE THE HONEST FACTS AND TRUTHS, BUT THEN MOVE VERY QUICKLY TO HOPE, PURPOSE AND VALUES. THEN, MAKE ANY DECISIONS WITH YOUR VALUES IN MIND - THAT'S DEFINITELY THE WAY TO GO**

*Nicky Clark:* Something that we do a lot of with clients is employee experience mapping - the hire to retire - and what has become apparent in the past year or so is its alignment to the customer experience. I think it's so important to become aware of employee needs, employee expectations and preferences. Right now, needs and expectations have shifted completely overnight, including all of the things that we've been speaking about for some time now: flexible working, working from home and bringing your whole self to work. All of that has now been kind of thrust upon us very quickly and that's a huge opportunity, because I think now, by taking all of that on board and mapping out our complete end-to-end employee experience, we can really start to think about what we do. We need to ensure we're true to our purpose and understand where the gaps are. Where are we falling down, and how do we address those areas? Looking at each area of the employee journey will create a really special experience for your people. We talk about moments of truth - not just for attraction and recruitment. It's about spreading that through every part of the experience.

#### ARE YOU PLANNING TO USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO RESET AND RE-IMAGINE YOUR ORGANISATION? WHAT FUTURE STRATEGIES ARE YOU EXPLORING?

*Fiona Orchard:* Like everyone, we're thinking about what that new normal looks like, but I don't foresee a significant shift in the way we work. What this is showing for me is that we actually have a lot of it right - we are already pretty progressive in terms of

flexibility and leading through values, which will be key for the future. There's room for improvement, of course and we will likely have a different physical way of working for some time and will continue to listen to our employees, regarding further opportunities in how we work together. We are fortunate that we don't have some of the challenges other organisations are facing, that have been established for a long time and worked in more 'traditional' settings with ingrained behaviours to change and influence. It may be a pertinent point to make that we are one year old as a business, so no lagging legacy to worry about.

*Brian Newman:* From a pure HR perspective, it's a good time to question whether something was

useful and whether it should continue - for example how fit-for-purpose was the talent system when you most needed to know where your talent was? Or the data system to help mobilise people to work remotely, in some cases overnight? Previous conversations about flexible working, have not been successful and now I wonder why - this has been an opportunity to re-engineer the pipework a little and rethink the future of work. It certainly wasn't ideal the way it has happened, but certainly the learnings and opportunities must not be lost in a race to return to normality. Another example is the value of e-learning - having heard many reasons why it doesn't work or doesn't provide same experience - I have learnt that it is a brilliant way of connecting people in activity and this will take a much more prominent role in future learning activities. Also, we've learnt the amazing agility of our people to approach blockers by going around, or under or over - and this is something we must always encourage.

*Julia Litchfield:* Lockdown is opening doors that some would not have otherwise considered. For example, organisations have been looking at digitalising their platforms for some time, but some customers who would have preferred to consume through traditional methods are now being forced to adapt. While some companies may have been shifting to more flexible workforces and agile approaches, those companies who didn't think it worked with their model have been forced to try it. While it isn't going to work everywhere, it changes people's perspectives. Consider learning; classrooms have traditionally been the preferred



approach, but I've recently been rolling out programmes at scale on a global basis and classroom training just isn't an option. My experience is that, as the learning has to be a series of short interventions with practical applications in between, over a longer period of time, the approach is even more "blended". It surprises leaders - who would naturally favour traditional blended approaches, where classroom remains a

environmental impact. The way people will work in the future is now firmly on our senior Level agenda, in a way it was not before. We are discussing the culture we need to support our growth and deciding upon how the way we work will support this new culture. We will need to help managers understand the best ways to measure output, not input and how to help teams connect and then work remotely.

**IT'S A HUGE OPPORTUNITY FOR ORGANISATIONS TO EMBRACE OR ACCELERATE THE POTENTIAL OF A NEW OPERATING MODEL AND CONSIDER CHANGE FROM THE APPROACH TO MARKET, TO THE EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION.**

large element - that this approach can have so much impact. So, I see that it is making people more prepared to embrace and fully explore interaction through technology. Learning is just one example, the way we work and the way we lead are other areas that needed new approaches. In times of such extreme change, a more fluid leadership mindset is critical, doing things that were successful in the past is not necessarily going to work today and in future. It's a huge opportunity for organisations to embrace or accelerate the potential of a new operating model and consider change from the approach to market, to the employee value proposition. The way organisations operate including; digitalisation, agile and smart ways of working, involving virtual collaboration and collaboration between organisations, are just a few of the key areas to review. Even if we can all interact in person tomorrow, people's mindsets are different, people think differently about working from home, whether it's in a positive way or not. We can't change the fact that everyone is thinking differently now about psychological and physical safety, personal and financial well-being. These perspectives are much higher on people's agendas than ever before and organisations need to account for mindset shifts on multiple levels, in their adapted strategy, purpose and operating models.

*Nicky Clark:* Now is an opportunity to innovate and change. Speed and tapping into the power of your people and what they can deliver are key. They know your customers best; now is the time to take that on board and really drive those decisions forward, quickly. We've seen some brilliant moments of genius during this pandemic and it's been in the public eye. People are more than capable of doing that within your organisation. We see this inside companies when we do any activation with colleagues. They come up with brilliant ideas of what the business can do and what they can change. It is really important to act on that energy.

*Gemma McGrattan:* One of the takeaways for me is certainly around personalisation and how you hit the sweet spot between personalising employee needs and having more of a consumer experience internally. Going forward, there will be a balancing act between what government needs us to do, what our people need, what our customers need and what our business needs. Achieving balance here will be an achievement for everyone.

*Charmyn Hall:* We used to benefit from industry trade shows, conferences and targeted marketing events around the world, to demonstrate our capability and value to existing and potential customers. Now we need to go through different channels. Reduced travel means more time to work directly for customers, with more immediate response times. In the future, I can see this giving our staff more time at home and a better work/life balance, that is harder to achieve in customer-facing roles. It will also be popular with many of our staff who focus on reducing our

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HR VALUE  
PROPOSITION

# TURN ON YOUR HEARTLIGHT

*During such unprecedented operational and workforce disruption caused by the pandemic, where HR and PR has a cohesive relationship, HR has been far more affective at achieving its critical role in smoothing the transition for colleagues, embedding new protocols and guiding the workforce towards behaviour that will sustain the business through and beyond Covid-19. Relentless and sonorous, the disruption is not only within organisations, it impacts customers, supply chains and communities.*



ARTICLE BY SARAH BRYARS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE - TARGET

More than ever before, now is the time for multi-disciplinary teams to come together and, in particular, an alliance between HR and PR colleagues is perfectly suited to addressing the cultural reverberations of change taking place across all stakeholder groups. In many ways, internal and external communications are two sides of the same coin. Great internal communication is integral to employee engagement, which we know lifts performance, morale and reflects in the positive interactions staff have with customers. This in turn impacts the experience of all those who come into contact with the organisation; whether that's a super-helpful person on the end of the phone, delivering their goods or replying promptly to their query on social

media. We could call this the 'real' brand experience, because if it aligns with the way the company is talking about itself to its customers and communities. That's a positive, memorable and authentic brand, rewarded with loyalty, trust and purchase. It works the other way too, how many employees feel frustrated, disillusioned, or perhaps even alienated by hearing 'company news' first, from those outside the firm? Or maybe they struggle to recognise the company culture they experience every day, from the hyperbole of the latest brand PR campaign? There's no two ways about it, the yin and yang of internal and external communications can only be truly effective when it is in harmony and that requires a joined-up approach by all those

involved; from HR teams and colleagues in PR and marketing, whether they are inhouse or external partners. Add into the mix the most exceptional period of rapid, widespread and relentless change over recent months and this phase of Covid-19 recovery presents a unique opportunity to recalibrate the inside-out alignment of communications.

There is no question that this is the sternest challenge of our times and, in response to the pandemic, working practices have had to change dramatically and fast. With this has come a huge shift in the tools and processes deployed to manage and support people. With degrees of social distancing likely to remain a feature of daily life for months to come, there is a risk of workforces becoming fragmented.

Those who can, may continue to work from home - at least some of the time - while those who cannot work remotely may find themselves working in smaller teams, on different shifts. While consistency of message is paramount, a one-size-fits-all approach to communicating with individuals will not be effective when everyone's circumstances are likely to be very different. It's also important to consider what channels can be used? What types of information will staff require? What opportunities are there for people to ask questions and share their ideas and suggestions? How can we re-create the cultural glue of incidental comms in the communal kitchen, or during the tea round, when we cannot be together? These are common challenges, magnified by the current situation, which HR teams are responding to imaginatively, from intranet forums for remote-working mums of toddlers; to a customised guide to help team leaders feel confident about supporting their colleagues backed up by a Facebook group sharing mindfulness techniques and streams of user-generated video content on engagement platforms.

Meanwhile, PR and marketing teams are grappling with similar questions in relation to engagement with customers and other external stakeholders. How much communication is enough? What tone is appropriate? Is anyone - who matters - actually listening? This is where experience in effective PR and social media planning kicks in. So, how can organisations align their inside-out communications and address the challenges we face in the next phase of Covid-19 recovery? More specifically, how can HR teams capitalise upon the communication skills and experience of their PR colleagues? Whether talking to internal or external groups of people, clarity is key. Businesses need to be able to switch between communicating to inform - answering the who, what, why, where, when and how - and communicating to inspire. There's skill in doing each successfully and it is undoubtedly an area where HR and PR teams can help each other. Let us take a look at three practical projects which will benefit from closer working between HR and PR, as firms adapt their communication strategies and practices in the weeks ahead.

Working together, it would be possible to develop a stakeholder communications plan that applies the same rigour to identifying the needs and interests of internal stakeholders, as to those externally. PR and communications professionals are adept at developing carefully segmented plans for engaging with the varying interests of stakeholders. HR teams understand deeply the nuances of groups within their organisation - not just formal divisional structures - but the informal interest groups and influencers. In marketing terms, 'segments' are groups of people whose needs have something in common and it's about looking beyond the obvious ways they are categorised - not just by sector, in the case of businesses - but by department, when considering internal audiences. Thinking laterally and considering all the different groups with common



THE YIN AND YANG OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS CAN ONLY BE TRULY EFFECTIVE WHEN IT IS IN HARMONY AND THAT REQUIRES A JOINED-UP APPROACH BY ALL THOSE INVOLVED; FROM HR TEAMS AND COLLEAGUES IN PR AND MARKETING



Do you think the perception of HR's value and contribution has improved?



interests is key such as; young parents, environmentalists, those with long commutes and so on. Information-giving messages - while needing accuracy and timeliness - will largely look after themselves, as these are the clear, unequivocal practices of everyday operations. In contrast, messaging to inspire confidence, loyalty and motivation will benefit from some communications expertise. Try refocusing a few key message themes towards the current needs of the business and then tailor the detailed messaging for each theme towards the needs of each stakeholder group. For example, as you build your recovery plan, this is an opportunity to encourage innovation, with the positive face of change. Concurrently, refresh the vision and re-articulate a sense of purpose, acknowledging the importance of finding meaning in what people do. Having established your stakeholder groups and identified a few key message themes, involve your PR and marketing colleagues in developing an internal communications campaign. Try an approach that incorporates storytelling, shared voices and creativity and use this to create momentum and employee engagement. Every campaign needs clear intent, a beginning, middle and end and a catchy name helps too. Once you have a plan, give it the same energy - if not the budget - that is dedicated to external campaigns. Post-lockdown, this could mean decorating the office and creating a campaign launch event. In a remote-working world, it may involve virtual team meetings, personalised mailers to people's homes, or hosting your own live webinar. Either way, don't forget to make it compelling and entertaining.

As senior managers lead their businesses out of crisis and into recovery, there will always be some internal stakeholders who are slower to climb on board with change than others. A launch draws a line in the sand, a fresh start which signals to those who feel wary that this is a permanent change and a new chapter, in which they have a part to play. There is much to be gained through a stronger alliance between the two disciplines of HR and PR. The crashing forces of all-encompassing change have been felt in every organisation in every sector, from large employers to small and micro businesses. It's required innovative thinking, tough decisions and a vast amount of cooperation. In so many ways, the experience of the pandemic has been a great leveller within organisations. We've faced the same anxieties and restrictions. Now, as we move forward again, there's an opportunity to break out of the silos that can so easily develop over time. A greater alliance between HR and PR professionals can be instrumental in helping people come to terms with the cultural reverberations of change. ●

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# STORMS RUTHLESSLY EXPLOIT LACK OF PREPAREDNESS

*The pandemic and its impacts on employment has HR strapped to the helpdesk like a captain to a ship's wheel in a storm. It raises key questions about what employees will expect from HR beyond Covid-19. There are choppy seas ahead, but while we're managing through and planning beyond, we're also faced with an opportunity to redefine and recalibrate.*

ARTICLE BY LINDSAY KOHLER, LEAD BEHAVIOURAL SCIENTIST - SCARLETTABBOTT

We need to really open our minds and innovate to meet the challenges of the changing needs of employees in these testing times. Plans need to set for a future that turns the EVP from an also-ran to a dead cert - in the shape of a compelling and sustainable advantage, that does what it's supposed to do, stimulate performance - and keep talent and skills compelled to stay. As we all know only too well, engagement cannot be demanded, but it can be motivated, through an EVP that is created with true empathy and an understanding of employee needs. The pandemic is a game changer and HR's strategy needs to evolve and fast. The first and fundamental question is, what new benefits will people want, as we move back to normality? Onsite gyms might have tempted people in the past, but increasingly, demand is for more practical, brass-tacks support such as; childcare, healthcare and flexible schedules. Meanwhile, telehealth technology can enable real-time collaboration and a commitment for supporting mental health. There is no doubt that mental health has been thrust into the limelight and, in context with the pandemic, the lockdown and growing anxiety, this is a hotspot that cannot be side-stepped. So how can businesses support these vital needs empathetically, what can we offer beyond the Employee Assistance Programme and what new schemes will emerge in response? Increasingly, it's a case of imagining what will happen in the new normal and how employers should meet the changes appropriately.

There are other issues, for example, recognition for great performance, when the dynamics of the workplace remove the usual line to sight. Even under normal circumstances, employers are unsure about how to recognise employees, or mistakenly believe that recognition takes too much time, energy and money. Yet, a quick acknowledgment at the start of a team meeting or a casual compliment can do wonders and, incidentally,



ENGAGEMENT CANNOT BE DEMANDED, BUT IT CAN BE MOTIVATED, THROUGH AN EVP THAT IS CREATED WITH TRUE EMPATHY AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF EMPLOYEE NEEDS. THE PANDEMIC IS A GAME CHANGER AND HR'S STRATEGY NEEDS TO EVOLVE AND FAST



reviews of studies investigating if financial incentives are tied to performance, generally show no connection between the two. So it will pay to consider what can be taken forward from your recognition and communication during lockdown, in terms of activities, to incorporate into an evolved EVP? Santander, as an example, created a microsite to offer uplifting wellbeing support for colleagues in branch, working from home and on furlough. This included a mechanism for colleague shoutouts which helped to make the site hugely popular with colleagues at all levels and looks likely to have a life beyond lockdown. But you don't need to create a new channel, many collaboration platforms have "praise features" that can be used informally, on top of more structured programmes.

Trust, of course is an imperative and notably, with the remote working cat out of the bag, it's going to be difficult to use that as a differentiating perk. At some companies, this shift has churned up trust issues - particularly but not surprisingly, in cultures soaked in a 'physically visible = performance' mindset - which has resulted in strained relationships between employees and managers. Colleagues may feel more pressure than ever to be constantly 'on', to the detriment of performance and so it's high time to critically evaluate performance management criteria and decide whether to introduce different metrics. Trust also extends to keeping employees physically safe. As some businesses rush back to office life, there is a subset of employees who will feel reticent to return. They may have legitimate questions. Clearly, how firms manage and support the health risk-averse who don't want to return to work, will be significant to outcome. These are hard questions, but ones HR professionals must bring to the table. The ability to figure out what employees will value most and bring that to life at work, will become the true differentiator. ●

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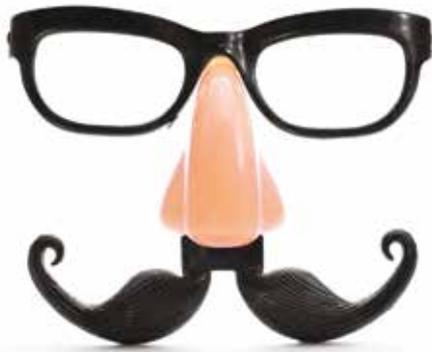
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# THE PROFESSION THAT HAUNTED ITSELF

*Impostor syndrome is an accusation regularly thrown at HR Directors, but whether it really is the profession's bogeyman surely became open to conjecture, as we were plunged into this global crisis. Leaders in the profession were first to call the ensuing impact of this pandemic, as predictably, the plight of people became the lightning rod of the crisis. If HR ever had the opportunity to exorcise its demons, it is now.*



ARTICLE BY PETER RYDING, CEO - YOUR VIRTUAL INTERACTIVE COACH (VIC)  
& FOUNDER OF THE HRD PATHFINDER CLUB

It's now that HR Directors' work really begins, dealing with the passage left to travel, the aftermath and the new world at the other side. A future in which the architecture of work is being redesigned, lock, stock and barrel. Whilst driven initially out of necessity, there is widespread recognition that many of the new working practices hastily engineered to support agility and flexibility, derive from HR. Beyond this, HR must put forward bold vision for sustainable organisations, in which all stakeholders flourish and develop and where leaders focus on the engagement and wellbeing of employees. They say that, with crisis comes opportunity and this one had demanded that working practices change dramatically - almost overnight - and HR has been at the forefront of facilitating this remarkable revolution in organisational and leadership agility. This change has also necessitated heightened levels of contact with the CEO, ensuring the HR Director's strategic profile has never been greater. Now the drama of the pandemic presents an opportunity for HR to enter stage right, command a leading role and hog the limelight in the centre of the proscenium arch. Alongside transforming working constructs and cultures, HR leaders must grasp the opportunity to also transform how they are seen by boards and, crucially, how they see themselves. For sure, it's a not unsurprising certainty that, how employees regard their employers post-pandemic, will be testament to how organisations have treated them in hard times. Concurrently, How CEOs and boards regard their HR Directors, has fuelled febrile forums, but it is now a potential catalyst that could turn HR Directorship into the trusted co-pilot, flanking the CEO and coveting that seat more readily. Given the current and future, strategic imperative for people and talent, this should not be some pipedream. Indeed, recently there was an eye-catching article by Jeremy Brecheisen for Gallup entitled *Why HR Directors never become the CEO, but should*, which says it all.

So, do HR Directors simply not aspire to become CEO or is there more to it? Research suggests that the reticence to take the top job is not about desire - two-thirds expressed an interest in the role of CEO or MD. For those that had expressed an interest, the reasons given for holding back include; lack of broader experience, particularly financial, opportunity and crucially confidence.

Although cited that a lack of broader experience might be a perceived reason in explaining why HR Directors are reticent to take the top job, in practice a lack of leadership ability doesn't appear to account for the stalling. Given how few do make CEO, findings by Professor David Ulrich of the University of Michigan and Ellie Filler - a Partner at Korn Ferry - found, counter-intuitively, way back in 2015, that HR Directors share very similar executive traits with CEOs. They examined 14 aspects of leadership across three categories - leadership style, thinking style and emotional competency - and HR Directors demonstrated the most of these executive traits of all functions after COOs, whose responsibilities often overlap with CEOs. From their research, Ulrich and Filler concluded that more high-performing HR Directors should be considered for CEO roles and this is only magnified in this era of unprecedented disruption. For whilst skills in finance might historically have given CFOs an advantage, the imperative to place people at the heart of strategy now places HR Directors at the strategic core.

their success and accomplishments despite strong evidence to the contrary. They have an internalised fear of being exposed as a fraud, plus you may recognise one or more of these other indicators; being a workaholic, a perfectionist who is never satisfied, struggling to delegate or micromanaging. Then there is the propensity for never asking for help, being too self-reliant or being the expert - needing to know everything yet never knowing enough.

Impostor syndrome negatively impacts peoples' work and personal lives in many ways: It instils self-doubt and low self-esteem - people reject praise and downplay achievements, often putting it down to luck. It can impede career growth - a fear of being found out stops people moving outside their comfort zone to take more challenging roles and projects and it can hamper leadership and management, with perfectionism and risk aversion impeding decision making and obstruct inspiring leadership. The consequences are that it can restrict innovation and risk taking and ultimately lead to stress and burn out. Whilst both men and

senior leaders who lack that feedback - importantly too, individuals should give themselves credit and recognise their own worth and value, internalise positive feedback and not fixate on the negative. Another important consideration is that everyone has good and bad luck and so attributing success to luck undermines ability and confidence.

A body of research looked at the top factors cited by those who had moved from an HR background to CEO and it included; the ability to understand team dynamics and build a strong leadership team, a drive to lead others and hold leadership roles, along with cross functional experience and commercial acumen. But for these attributes to be cultivated, change needs to happen across two levels. Yes, impostor syndrome needs to be addressed on an individual level, but boards and management teams must also play their part. I have championed HR Directors in many of the organisations I have run and ensured their seat on the executive board and I encourage companies to require high potential HR executives to take strategic project responsibility. It is so important to stretch roles in other functional areas to develop their commercial awareness and confidence, ready for senior and board positions.

On that note, I recently ran a financial skills webinar, focussed on upskilling and equipping HR Directors with the understanding and knowledge to confidently challenge other CXOs, especially the CFO. It attracted a huge interest, clearly demonstrating that HR Directors recognise this development need. Without this experience, skillset and language, despite the underlying executive traits described earlier - it is unlikely that HR Directors will fulfil their potential, at significant loss to the organisation. We should expect to see 20 percent of CEOs who were ex-HR Directors in the very near future and I believe the time is right and the challenge is there to be taken. There is nothing stopping HR Directors becoming the CEO's most trusted advisor, leading to a natural succession, as this will accelerate that prospect. But the most important question for ambitious HR Directors is, "who must you stop being so that you can be the person you want to be?" ●

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## HOW CEOs AND BOARDS REGARD THEIR HR DIRECTORS, HAS FUELLED FEBRILE FORUMS, BUT IT IS NOW A POTENTIAL CATALYST THAT COULD TURN HR DIRECTORSHIP INTO THE TRUSTED CO-PILOT, FLANKING THE CEO AND COVETING THAT SEAT MORE READILY

For this to happen, boards need to give broader development opportunities to high potential HR executives, place the correct value on their HR Directors' skillset and, crucially, support them to build commercial confidence, in order that they can bring about necessary radical change and maximise their own strategic input. The lack of confidence has triggered the impostor syndrome label, visited in the introduction. In its general medical terminology, it represents the surreptitious sapping of self-confidence and self-esteem and many senior people live in fear of being exposed despite outer confidence and significant functional career success. So, why doesn't external evidence of success always translate to inner confidence? It's a destructive pattern of behaviour, where people doubt

women experience impostor syndrome, women suffer more than men. Returning to the Ulrich and Filler research, 42 percent of high-performing HR Directors are female, far more than any other functional heads. A beneficial implication of empowering female HR Directors to take the CEO role, is that it would dramatically increase the ratio of female CEOs. Thankfully, impostor syndrome can be successfully addressed, once people affected realise its common and that just because someone feels they are an impostor, doesn't mean that they are. We all feel like we are winging it at times and, accepting that perfection is unattainable and mistakes are how we learn, best enables us recalibrate and move on. At the core of it is, that people thrive on credit and recognition and often, it is



# BACK TO THE FUTURE

*I just watched a webinar about what HR Directors need to do for the big return to work. For the last few months, delegates had been working from home and Zooming each other and it was like a parallel dimension, reflecting a new and fragmented reality of the furloughed, the front-line key workers, the home based and the redundant.*

ARTICLE BY MARTIN KIRKE, NED, COACH AND CONSULTANT - MARTIN KIRKE LTD

There's tension building because many have had to work even harder, with some risking their lives, while others have been paid not to work. Home working is also polarising, from the younger demographic, typically sharing cramped flats, with all the household working from home, through to the more senior colleagues, blessed with idyllic rural settings, which used to be only seen at weekends after a week of long commuting. So "one-size-fits-all", to coin the cliché, is not going to carry HR plans very far this time. The HR value proposition must be built on bringing the organisation together around its purpose and HR itself needs to help heal the divisions and bridge the fissures in the workforce. We are uniquely placed to do this because we see the whole organisation and understand culture and behaviours.

It is also time to move away from the narrow definition of HR being only about those on an employment contract. The modern workforce has a diverse range of arrangements for contracting with people to deliver the purpose. If we the trust gig economy - the "self-employed" - to serve our customers and provide key services, we need to include them in our culture and OD work. Flexible working decisions normally start with the job and whether or not it can be carried out from home, but now it needs to be more about the individual than the job. If work has a big social purpose for someone and their housing is poor, they may welcome the return to the office, but others in the same job can be more productive from home. HR will need to guard against creeping back to presenteeism where those who are in the office more are favoured for opportunities.

On the downside, at the time of writing, it looks terrible for restaurants, bars, hotels and airlines because social distancing makes them not viable businesses. They all rely on the economics of the crowd, by which I mean most only make money when we are crowded in. Tables too close together, queuing for a drink or lining up



THE HR VALUE PROPOSITION MUST BE BUILT ON BRINGING THE ORGANISATION TOGETHER AROUND ITS PURPOSE AND HR ITSELF NEEDS TO HELP HEAL THE DIVISIONS AND BRIDGE THE FISSURES IN THE WORKFORCE. WE ARE UNIQUELY PLACED TO DO THIS



for breakfast, are all at odds with social distancing and staying safe. Sadly, this will result in both job losses and downward pressure on wages. Crowds clearly played a part in the speed of Covid-19 spreading, with New York and London standing out because they have built upwards for offices and apartments to save on the high cost of land. Public transport then becomes even more crowded as do the fast food places for lunch and so on. Safety and health are our most fundamental needs and the pandemic has reminded us of our vulnerability. I see more people moving out of city centres, particularly if there is less need to commute each day.

HR needs to lead the work on rethinking the social aspects of work. We were seeing reduced social interaction in offices - wearing headphones with music in open plan offices was once taboo. Canteens or staff restaurants have largely disappeared and breaks shortened or removed - the social time spent talking with each other has been declining for years. There are of course organisations where nothing much has changed. Many of the big tech players have fared relatively well and some have enough cash to weather the storm. For HR, it's still the same battle to attract and retain talent and managers will have to be more empowering, with a focus on the *what* is delivered not the *how* to do it. In more traditional businesses, front-line workers have carried on, while their managers have been furloughed or home working. The last thing they need now is managers coming back and micromanaging them, because the manager feels insecure. There's a mood shift towards the community or the collective, with the media evoking the Blitz spirit. Nearly a million people volunteered for the NHS alone and heroic fund raising hit the headlines. We had already seen a move in performance management and reward away from individual performance to more team-based reward. So, I think this will increase as many organisations try to push through this crisis and beyond. ●

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# “ANYONE WHO KEEPS LEARNING STAYS YOUNG”\*

*In the late 1980s, the Ford Motor Company funded an employee development and assistance programme (EDAP). First year, 30 percent of the 43,000 workforce took the opportunity to do some voluntary study and they could engage in any sort of learning and Ford would pay the course fees, although individuals studied in their own time. Importantly, this was not vocational training; what underpinned the offer was that it was about learning... any learning.*



ARTICLE BY KATE COOPER, HEAD OF RESEARCH, POLICY AND STANDARDS - THE INSTITUTE OF LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

Notably, take-up of Ford’s L&D initiative was greatest among semi-skilled grades and the variety of learning ambitions ranged from flower arranging to hand-gliding. I heard, anecdotally, that the only application that was turned down was for somebody who wanted the Ford Motor Company to fund them to be an around the world yachtsman. When we look back to those days, just prior to the internet revolution, learning was much more formal - who remembers correspondence courses, night school, the *Learn how to* series of books? As we have all experienced in 2020, Covid-19 has necessitated that people use the internet for all sorts of activities, that many might have resisted taking online, pre-pandemic. It was assumed, wrongly, that certain activities simply would not work, either

because of a lack of awareness of the technology solutions that existed or, more pertinently, a lack of time to learn how to use them. Many people have had that time available recently, whether that be saving on commuting time or because they’ve been furloughed, so opportunities to develop yourself have become very attractive and very available. The result of lockdown and so many employees working in isolation remotely, has created millions of people with new online capabilities and it doesn’t take a great leap of faith to correlate this phenomena with the plethora of offers for online learning, to appreciate how popular learning online has become and how so many people have taken advantage of lockdown, to acquire a host of new skills.

Before we consider the impact of this recent enthusiasm for learning at an organisational level, the increased capability of so many L&D professionals to deliver digital learning and the attractiveness of these cost-effective online learning solutions, let’s consider what Ford was tapping into, all those years ago, based on the underlying premise that all learning is good. Let us begin with some basic questions: Has anybody learned anything and said afterwards, “I wish I hadn’t learned that... I wish I hadn’t acquired that skill or capability?” Probably very few. Learning is rarely wasted, in the sense that it leads to any sort of regret. We might have followed a career path that we regretted, but do we regret the knowledge and experience that we acquired while we were on that path? Learning is

recognised almost universally as a good thing to do and if we select our own learning, it engages our imagination, it taps into something that we believe about ourselves or want for ourselves, providing a motivation that is essentially intrinsic.

When we look at the multi-generational workforce, with people increasingly working beyond pension age, it is clear that learning is good for health, Dementia and Alzheimer societies really do encourage daily exercising of the brain, because there is robust evidence that staying mentally active is linked to a lower risk of memory and thinking problems. It's also a great builder of self-confidence and self-belief, especially if it includes evidence of achievement. The famous Maslow's hierarchy of needs, identified the need for esteem, confidence, achievement and the respect of one's peers, as the penultimate need before that of self-actualisation. Maslow's focus on the positive - the normal rather than abnormal behaviours - make his insights particularly relevant and useful when we are talking about the motivation to learn for large groups of people. Learning broadens horizons, not least providing new topics of conversation, even when the learning activities are undertaken alone. Perhaps those who didn't engage with the school system terribly well, recollecting didactic learning experiences, will frequently associate learning with boredom. But once it's appreciated how broad the learning offer out there is, how much choice and how much control over what is learned, genuine interest-driven learning is the best antidote to negativity. We are also living through an era of increasing stress, made worse of course by the current pandemic crisis and again, learning can provide the distraction and the promise of so much opportunity which can be a hugely effective stress reducer. Often this is because stress builds when there appears to be no options and no choice which results in a lack of autonomy. But once subjects of interest are identified, there are so many options and so many micro-opportunities.

A campaign-driven approach to learning in organisations that focuses on learning for learning's sake, develops - as the Ford Motor Company exemplifies - a workforce that is good at learning. Therefore, when there is a need for work-related learning, such as the introduction of and familiarisation with new processes or mandatory compliance training, there is a group of people who understand what learning is, why it's important and, even more importantly, how to do it. Proficient learners are, by their very nature, adaptable. Predictions about the growth of robotic process automation (RPA) and artificial intelligence (AI) vary in their magnitude, but if trends continue, many jobs will be automated to a greater or lesser extent. This provokes anxiety about whether our knowledge and skills, along with the realisation that we are all going to experience longer working lives. This will require a higher level of adaptability and resilience to change and a workforce that is change

and future ready. There is no doubt that learning new skills and capabilities provides the difference between falling behind the curve to obsolescence, or being part of the future drive, capable of capitalising on opportunities to come.

There are many theories about the future of L&D, but one that struck me as being very relevant for our times was from the learning and development consultant, Jane Hart and what she calls the '4 Ds' of learning. This comprises of: Traditional Didactics, that is formal learning being taught. Discourse that is social, organised learning such as networking events, conferences, interactive training sessions and the famous 'coffee break' - when so many delegates at formal events claim to learn the most. Learning by Doing is another D; this is learning on the job, when we ask colleagues to explain something, we watch them perform at work. This could also be a coach or mentor, who helps with the learning, or a manager who is not only interested in our development, but sets stretch assignments that necessitate learning. Hart's fourth D is Discovery; this is when, through need, necessity or curiosity we find things out for ourselves, because we are interested. It was this drive for discovery that Ford managed to identify and nurture 30 years ago.

We must not take things for granted and there is a need revisit and critically review L&D strategies in the light of this newly-developed digital capability. The pandemic and lockdown have caused a mandatory catalyst for change, firmly placing online learning at the centre of L&D and that will require a reboot of approaches from many more traditional organisations. The critical success factors associated with online learning are the inclusion of; diagnostics, personalised learning journeys, being available on all devices and recognition of success and achievement. Critically, we need to put this "variety of learning assets", right at the heart of our online offering to suit the YouTube watcher, the Google reader, the podcast listener, the doer, the talker, the didactic fan, the didactic refuser and the coffee break learner. If we encourage learners rather than specific learning, we will help enable people to be ready for the post Covid-19 future, because they are confident, not only that they are able to learn, but that learning mitigates uncertainty and makes change more of an opportunity and less of a threat. ●

\*Henry Ford: "Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young."



HAS ANYBODY  
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TO ANY SORT OF  
REGRET



Has your organisation increased its spend on L&D in the past year?



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# CURIOSITY KILLED THE CUTS

LOCKDOWN DEMANDED THE SWITCH TO DIGITAL WORKING, WITH NO TIME FOR “UMS AND AHS”. UNPREPARED, THE RUSH CAME TO MOVE ALL TO DIGITAL, BUT MANY DID NOT KNOW HOW. CRUCIALLY, L&D - THE USUAL VICTIM OF CUTS AND COMPROMISE - BECAME A LIFELINE.

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

*“Digital learning strategies and training initiatives must now be as much push from HR, as they are pull from employees, creating a true thirst for learning and an employee mindset of curiosity”*

With many businesses having to go fully online during lockdown and employees having to make the transition to remote home working, there was no option but to train up and learn how to deal with this shift. Digital learning became the vital thread, tying businesses together and enabling employees to journey through the unknown together. There was a ‘lockdown wave’ with almost half of companies moving in-person training to a virtual format in the month of March. The change in company processes and operations prompted a surge in employees upskilling and reskilling to adjust to their new working situation and to support their organisation and its new needs. However, as some employees start to make their way back into the physical workplace and some companies bring back furloughed employees, there may be a feeling or temptation to push learning back into the background... this would be a mistake.

Now, more than ever, companies need to maintain this learning momentum, especially those firms having to re-build and transform to stay afloat, in a much-changed economic reality. Even for those businesses less affected, employee skills and learning will still be the means to navigate through this strange territory and to continue to thrive. After all, we do not know what other changes and after-effects this crisis may still bring, so businesses need to be ready and to prepare their people to adapt. Not only HR, the whole company must put learning at the forefront of business recovery and approaches to learning and development - which may have held up before this crisis - will no longer cut it. Digital learning strategies and training initiatives must

now be as much push from HR, as they are pull from employees, creating a true thirst for learning and an employee mindset of curiosity. The feverous enthusiasm and demand for learning invoked by lockdown needs to become an ingrained part of company culture. The question is, how?

Personalisation seems to be the new HR buzzword, but how some currently understand and interpret this may not go far enough - this needs to be more than having the odd bit of training, tailored to different roles or functions. Learning tools and platforms must be hyper-personalised, catering towards each single individual, their needs, interests and career plans, suggesting precisely the right learning and training just for them. Long-gone are the days of having development plans or training for specific groups of employees, based on perceived generational differences. There will likely be more employees looking to make lateral moves and many may be forced to make unplanned career moves or changes, even rather late into their careers. Old approaches and thinking will have to be completely turned on their head. Firms like Aviva, have already adjusted to this mindset with its ‘mid-life MOT’, aiming to empower and develop the careers of older employees in order to retain key skills. Other businesses will need to follow suit.

For employees to truly take on this new attitude to learning, it also needs to seem effortless. In lockdown, it may have been a must, perhaps still seen as a chore for some, but now it needs to be a wish. Many organisations have already made the switch to

digital learning, but to ensure real effectiveness and its upkeep amongst employees, this will likely have to be taken a step further. More than streamlining processes and admin, HR technology needs to become an integrated part of employees’ day-to-day, fitting seamlessly into their flow of work. For example, through HR technology being driven by AI at every stage, learning does not even need to be an activity that employees remind themselves to undertake, rather it will naturally be incorporated into their workday. No doubt there will be yet more twist and turns as we slowly emerge out of this crisis and we still may not see the full extent of the implications this crisis has incurred and the consequent impact on the world of HR. One certainty is the need for resilience and agility; organisations need to transform into unbound businesses to handle any further changes. This ability lies with companies embracing and embodying a culture of continuous learning and, once and for all, putting learning and development at the heart of business strategy. ●



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# THE PENNY DROPPED

As the sonorous impacts of Covid-19 continue to pound, the spike in digital L&D has been seen as a catalyst. That it took a mandatory shift to remote working, forced by lockdown, to realise a fundamental solution to a workforce revolution, will go down in history as the point when the necessity met the obvious. This was always the direction of travel for L&D, but the pandemic has acted as an accelerant.



ARTICLE BY  
PATRICIA MCEVOY  
EY UK&I TALENT  
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR  
EY

Investing in workforce skills that are market differentiators in an increasingly competitive business landscape, has long been on the minds of many businesses, especially with technology and automation changing the nature and purpose of many roles. As Covid-19 continues to disrupt the labour market, it remains critical that people have relevant skills to help businesses transition out of the crisis and flourish in the post pandemic world. There's a notable shift from developing competencies so employees can "do something", to developing capabilities that enable people to adapt and thrive in multiple contexts, including the unknown and unpredictable. Accordingly, L&D teams should focus on equipping their workforces with skills such as; curiosity, creative thinking, agility, social collaboration, empathy and enabling leaders to inspire, build trust and foster a sense of belonging in others. As we look at the evolution of L&D, many of the changes and new ideas that have been implemented or accelerated during the pandemic, will still have a place on the skills and workforce development agenda for many businesses.

Online and virtual learning, available as facilitated classrooms or on-demand, is a shift that is here to stay, allowing for long-term sustainable L&D delivery that can be easily scaled up, accessed from multiple locations and time efficient, by removing the need to travel. It also means content can be packaged into bite-sized chunks, providing greater flexibility when it comes to offering bespoke learning or skills training. Crucially too, this move to increased virtual offerings, does not mean learning in isolation. It is important to build human connection into the design of training, capitalising on social learning through mentoring, shared experiences or experiments and collaborations that bring learners together, sometimes from multiple organisations. Of course, the value of in-person classroom training and face-to-face interactions in learning environments, will still exist post-pandemic. But there's an opportunity for many businesses to consider a blended approach, that combines the positive takeaways of virtualising materials with the benefits of traditional physical L&D sessions. Curated inter-modular learning 'nudges' and ongoing conversations via social learning platforms, will enable the continuous upskilling that is a future requirement for many businesses. This could help companies flex their response in a changing and unpredictable working world.

Virtualising L&D also provides an opportunity to shift away from the culture of passive learning to one of proactive learning, where self-directed and self-paced learners have more options, variety, flexibility and mobility to develop their own personal learning agenda - essentially, more choice about what, where and when they learn. This enables employees to continue their personal development, stay relevant, upskill to meet future business needs and take charge of their career development. In our own organisation, we have "EY Badges", which are self-driven accreditations at; Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum levels, across a range of topics that require individuals to undertake a blend of formal curated online learning, experiential learning in their 'day job' and make a tangible contribution to the organisation. The Badges act as portable credentials and powerful CV builders that help individuals shape their careers and enable learners to show others how they are upskilling, deliver a tangible and measurable acquisition of skills and create an element of competition that is motivational, as learners seek to keep their skillsets up-to-date. In addition to lockdown providing an opportunity for many businesses to review and rethink their L&D offering, for some talent teams, it has also been a chance to experiment with virtual options to find out how this approach can be most effective.

We've found that creating on-demand content and running regular webinars, has seen improved engagement and learning progress in some areas.

For businesses who may not have tried a more virtual approach yet, one way to tackle this could be for talent teams to identify a handful of programmes that can be deployed via a webinar or online platform, undertake pilot delivery, collate feedback and incorporate changes to improve the experience. This design thinking approach enables rapid prototyping of the learning product, test and re-test of its effectiveness and refinement of the offering in a short period of time. Puts the learner at the heart of identifying what learning objectives are most relevant and what delivery channels are most effective. A similar approach has been taken with programmes provided by our EY Foundation, an independent charity that seeks to improve social mobility. As learning programmes have been rolled out, it's been important to continue reviewing, refining and improving. This is key to developing a better understanding of how to successfully deliver sessions away from a classroom setting and to ensure that virtual learning doesn't compromise on quality. Leveraging additional insights from external providers, including technology solution suppliers, can also add real value on how training can be delivered in a new format.

Coaching and mentoring, a key pillar of learning & development, will likely have been impacted by Covid-19; not just how it is delivered, but what coaching topics have become relevant to the work and lives of those being coached. As we move into the 'what next' stage of the changing world, it's important for talent teams to consider how relationship building by coaches and mentors with those they interact with, can continue in a virtual format, taking into consideration changes in circumstances that individuals might be experiencing. For example, resources may need to be adapted to include guidance on how best to support individuals with additional responsibilities or new pressures that many people may be facing in their personal and professional lives. As conversations between mentees and mentors move online, equipping mentors with resources to help guide these conversations is an important consideration. Striking a balance between showing empathy and supporting the resolution of personal challenges, while also effectively managing the career development of their mentee, will be key.

For those looking to enter the job market, virtualised onboarding presents a most interesting challenge. How do you enable a new hire to experience the values, culture and 'fabric' of the organisation and to integrate with new colleagues, when most work is undertaken remotely? It takes real creativity to consider the learning and induction needs of new hires, especially school and university leavers, who are entirely new to the world of work and to deliver learning solutions that meet the needs of these individuals. Virtualising programmes, providing study buddies or coaches and moving content to online platforms -

many of which can be accessed in advance of the start date - can help this talent pool to continue to develop and gain the skills or qualifications required to access job opportunities. For example, our apprenticeship and graduate programmes are continuing in full, adapted where necessary for virtual working, including professional qualifications study and exams.

The pandemic will likely encourage talent teams and businesses to take a closer look at the capabilities they need in the short and long-term and how learning and development can be adapted to meet the changing demands for different skills. In some cases, there has been greater motivation and attention from employees to invest time and effort into their personal development and subsequently take a more proactive approach to building their insights and knowledge in a mass remote working environment. Business should also consider how they can leverage this appetite to strengthen their workforce. For L&D teams, the skillset they are requiring post-pandemic is also changing. Coming to the fore are the skills to design and deliver virtual content, curation of online resources, design thinking, digital and technology fluency, the capacity and connectedness to generate insights and human-centered design where learners are actively involved in diagnosing and creating their own real-time solutions. L&D teams are no longer predicting and planning for every type of learning need for spoon-fed delivery via a large, static curriculum. Instead L&D specialists increasingly recognise their role in continuously adapting to and fine-tuning what is most relevant to learners in direct collaboration with their customer base. With the country putting the wheels in motion for recovery, implementing a robust and sustainable virtual L&D infrastructure, that plays to the strengths of an online approach and that considers the longer term combination of in-person L&D, will be key to ensuring that businesses are able to emerge in an agile way. ●



THERE'S A NOTABLE  
SHIFT FROM  
DEVELOPING  
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CAPABILITIES THAT  
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MULTIPLE CONTEXTS,  
INCLUDING THE  
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UNPREDICTABLE



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# OF ROBOTS & HUMANS

*One of the core challenges that L&D has been trying to address over the past five or so years, has been how to keep employee skills relevant against the rising tide of automation. Hard, technical skills are becoming less valuable, as technology automates them and soft skills, such as empathy and emotional intelligence become the essential, future human skills.*

ARTICLE BY ALAN HIDDLESTON, DIRECTOR CORPORATE LEARNING EMEA - D2L

People in work have adapted well to the current crisis situation, but if this is indeed the tremors of a seismic shift, they will need to relearn how to approach their workday and how to communicate and collaborate in the future. L&D practitioners will of course play a role here, but they too will need to rethink how they deliver. Gartner is predicting that, by 2024 - driven by remote work and changing workforce demographics - in-person meetings will account for just 25 percent of enterprise meetings, a drop from 60 percent prior to the pandemic. If in-person meetings become the exception rather than the rule, businesses will need to equip their staff with the skills to not only lead meetings and presentations in real-life, but also how to manage them virtually, when the ability to 'read the room' is largely absent.

Clear and concise communication is, of course, a key skill for leaders and if we're transitioning to largely digital channels for our communications, leaders will need to learn to focus more on how they foster communication with people, both at the individual and the collective level. With a digital barrier, it will be even more important to ensure they are coming across as authentic, human and open. Employees need to feel that they are able to understand who they are as a person - and are more comfortable expressing their views - particularly if they have difficult questions or dissenting views. It's also important that leaders learn to state transparently and authentically the principles that underpin their decisions, especially for hard decisions, because in the absence of explanation, people will form their own, potentially negative conclusions. To add to the challenges that L&D will face when equipping employees with these more digital soft skillsets, will be an increase in flexible working. Whilst in the past this has largely meant shifting the eight-hour working day forward or backwards an hour or two, the current remote working situation - where, for example, many are working around home



WHILST THE NEED FOR INCREASED SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WITHIN BUSINESSES WILL PERSIST, THERE IS AN ADDED WRINKLE FOR L&D, TEACHING A NEW ASPECT OF SOFT SKILLS THAT CAN BE APPLIED FOR DIGITAL CHANNELS, BUT ALSO THROUGH DIGITAL CHANNELS



schooling our children - has softened reliance on the old nine-to-five model. As children begin to return to school, many workers may wish to return to the traditional working model, whilst others may not. Either way, the groundwork for a more flexible approach to the working day has been prepared.

If companies embrace the idea that flexible working does not impact productivity, just as work hours are flexible, so will training have to be asynchronous, allowing employees to learn when they have the time. Delivering training materials that can be consumed at an individual's leisure is simple enough, but going by the tried and tested 70:20:10 rule. Remote learning, particularly asynchronous, can lack that crucial 20 percent of knowledge gained through interaction. So the L&D function will have to rely more heavily on collaboration tools that emulate these usual interpersonal conversations, which form a significant part of how we learn. This is a more significant shift than it may at first seem and, as L&D begins to shift in this direction and challenges deep-seated notions of how training is delivered, it will have to train employees how to engage effectively with these new learning models. Although post-Covid-19, working practices are still uncertain, there is a good chance they will look profoundly different to what came before. Whilst the need for increased soft skills development within businesses will persist, there is an added wrinkle for L&D, teaching a new aspect of soft skills that can be applied for digital channels, but also through digital channels. This will be a challenge for L&D and there will be emphasis on online platforms to achieve it. Meanwhile, suppliers of these platforms, will need to work more closely with organisations than ever before, furnishing L&D practitioners with the knowledge they'll need to take advantage of the technology to its fullest and developing platforms to accommodate these new learning needs. ●

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# MACMILLAN AT WORK

## Helping people with cancer back to work

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

## Reasonable adjustments

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

## Keep the conversation going

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

## Support for employers

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

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

Sign up at [macmillan.org.uk/atwork](https://macmillan.org.uk/atwork)

Email us at [workandcancer@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:workandcancer@macmillan.org.uk)

Or call us on 020 7840 4725

**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT**  
RIGHT THERE WITH YOU

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



ORGANISATIONAL  
FRAMEWORK

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# THE GOLDEN THREAD

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*Resilience has been a much-used word and held as an essential value during the pandemic, organisationally, financially and psychologically. But an equally important element, indeed part of the fabric through which the golden thread runs within the organisational framework, is that of career. Through all the turmoil, it is so important that this is not overlooked, as businesses attempt to regain momentum and mitigate against the strain and impact of the ongoing crisis.*



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ARTICLE BY OWEN MORGAN, MANAGING DIRECTOR - INTOO UK & IRELAND

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It may seem counter-intuitive to draw attention to careers when so many people are being impacted by furlough, re-deployment or even job loss, but the frame of career is fundamental to this next stage of return to “normality”, as career is the driver of self-confidence, personal belief and the glue between people and organisation. So how employers support careers during these stormy times will determine whether organisational, financial and psychological resilience can be sustained. Fundamentally, the Covid-19 pandemic has acted as an agent of unexpected, external disruption and has caused us to think carefully about how we maintain personal and organisational resilience. Maintaining a focus on career and ensuring that, as employers, we don't lose sight of its importance during these

difficult times, is a big part of how we respond, both now and in what is sure to be a very different, 'new normal'.

Many of us will have been thinking about what the future will hold and have been reflecting on our own objectives as we sat at home in lockdown, connecting with colleagues via video-conference and wondering if things will ever be the same again... it's unlikely they will. We know the paternalistic corporate vision of careers is long dead and rarely now do companies determine “what's best” for an employee and then provide them with a mapped out career plan stretching over several years. Not only does it simply not work in the 21st century, it's impractical, given how rapidly jobs change and evolve and how some technical skills quickly become redundant. Just

in case we forget, people don't really want that approach anymore anyway - what is the point of crafting a 15-year journey to the top when the average company lifespan is down from 50 years in the 1970s to ten years in the 2020s. There is more democracy in accessing the workplace now, while freelancing and the gig economy gain ever greater credence as long-term and realistic alternatives to a corporate career. That is not to say that career planning is of no value anymore, on the contrary, having clearly defined aims and an understanding of how these align with the changing world of work is probably more important now than ever before. People are increasingly taking control of their careers and employers must create an environment that facilitates the direction of travel and there are multiple possible directions.

So how should organisations calibrate to support these seismic changes and enable people to optimise their career potential in this changeable and unpredictable future? What will be increasingly key is looking outside our areas of expertise and our functional specialisms and supplementing with a good dose of generalism, along with a 'change ready' mindset. Not surprisingly, becoming 'tech-aware' is essential for continuity and long-term relevance and those that gain a reputation for being ahead of the curve will be highly coveted. Part and parcel of this is embracing life-long learning, as an extensive skillset opens up greater options. Soft skills are important too and that includes understanding what motivates and, finally in this much abridged version of a very long list, it's important to be a doer, not just a thinker, knowing is not enough. Clearly, this list is not exhaustive, but as a platform for change and a way of developing longer term 'readiness' for a successful career, it's this primary knowledge and capability that will pay dividends moving forward. For some, this is new, for others it is expected, for all it is necessary.

The rate at which 'work' undergoes change is accelerating. It may seem crazy to say so, given how fast we are already travelling at the moment, but it's true and a consequent reappraisal of how and why employees interact with employers is needed. In the case of the adoption of technology, it is not unrealistic to state that the last three months have propelled us forward to a point that may have potentially taken five years or more to arrive at, had lockdown not occurred. Around 85 percent of those who have transferred to working from home over recent months, would like to retain this flexibility - either in whole or in part - as the future work environment unfolds. With health concerns likely to be with us for some time to come - the benefits of a reduced commuting, as well as the increased flexibility that working from home provides - it's easy to see how this will form part of a new and beneficial contract between employer and employee. One with more time afforded to productivity than commuting, reduced office costs, more motivated and engaged workers, retention and potentially increases in productivity rates, a potential win-win all round.

Remember Herzberg? We're now seeing the hygiene and motivation factors of old, morph increasingly into a single holistic approach to worker satisfaction. Employers must now strive to accommodate workers who, in many cases, demand a different relationship with, not just their employer, but with 'work' as a whole. In parallel, recent years have seen 'work' become increasingly fragmented - partly due to positive personal choice - taking time out for increased leisure opportunity, personal development and improved 'wellness' - as well as circumstances such as caring roles or having to juggle multiple jobs to make ends meet. Those most likely to drive this approach are often in their 20s and 30s, so it's not unreasonable to expect this demographic to carry these ideas forward, as they move into managerial and leadership roles. It may be not

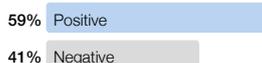


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STRETCHING  
OVER SEVERAL  
YEARS



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Do you think the flatter, less hierarchical framework is a positive or negative influence on the workplace?



applicable in all cases, organisations which are slow to flex their approach, or who resist the demands of an increasingly flexible workplace, will quickly find themselves out of favour with the best that the talent pool has to offer. Reward structures are also evolving quickly, as forward-thinking employers move away from standardised pay grades and bandings towards a more focussed, person-centric compensation model. Likewise, corporate culture has never been more important - employers have to not only create, but practice a genuine democratic, equitable, diverse and inclusive environment to which people are drawn and want to stay in for a mutually beneficial period of time.

Respect too is increasingly seen as another key differentiating factor within the workplace. If employees believe their leaders genuinely respect, not only their views and opinions, but also their sense of 'self' then, in general, the overall engagement within the business will be higher and employee loyalty and productivity will be ratcheted up a notch - all good news for building a career. Seems obvious, but a quick look at any of the platforms that allow individuals to rate ex-employers shows that 'respect' would appear to be missing in many instances. Clearly, there are two sides to every story, but it is increasingly important that, as business leaders, we need to translate our well-meaning 'policy' into genuine support and understanding. As ever, the line management community is critical to making this happen so coaching and developing these individuals around managing changing career expectations is important. With hopes of a rapid economic recovery receding, those who find themselves evaluating their future career steps may find it difficult to reinstate their career back on track, in the way they might have hoped. For some without a job, the short-term focus will be moving back into employment as quickly as possible, whilst for others, this current juncture will act as a catalyst for longer term consideration of career direction and what a new employer of choice might look like, particularly if internal opportunities for career development are no longer available. Most motivated UK workers are unlikely to face long-term unemployment and it's important to remember that support is available for those who have been made redundant - whether that be company sponsored outplacement provision or government-based assistance. Whilst in no way seeking to minimise the impact of job-loss on individuals, the economy will recover and opportunities will return. As it does, we can expect progressive organisations to learn from this challenging time and incorporate these learnings into their treatment of employees. ●

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# “ HERE ARE SOME WORDS... YOU WORK IT OUT ”

IT HAS BEEN A HARD ROAD THROUGH THE PANDEMIC AND FURTHER BUMPS, TWISTS AND TURNS ARE INEVITABLE. IT'S BEEN A TEST LIKE NO OTHER AND WHAT IS IMPORTANT NOW IS TO ILLUMINATE THE JOURNEY AHEAD AND TO COMMUNICATE THE DIRECTION OF TRAVEL, TO BRING PEOPLE ON BOARD AND READY TO PLAY THEIR PART.

ARTICLE BY CHARLOTTE STOEL, GROUP CLIENT SERVICES DIRECTOR - FIREFLY COMMUNICATIONS

*“Lessons can be learnt from Boris Johnson’s address as lockdown eased, a directive that was alarmingly vague, woolly and very much open to interpretation. What went wrong? It was too long and too confusing”*

During this global pandemic, many firms have had their true culture revealed for all to see - for some it's been great and for others it has revealed underlying issues. Regardless, understanding what situation you face is paramount to shaping the culture here on in. What is key at the first step, is to have the communication on point, before creating any kind of communications strategy and to gauge the current thoughts and feelings of people in the organisation. Once an audit of how the workforce thinks and feels has been completed, next up is to formalise a strategy to communicate change and then establish a cohesive communications plan so that HR, line managers and the executive team are all messaging consistently and effectively.

As the pandemic swept in, the first main directive was the Prime Minister addressing the nation with clear instructions; “stay home, wash your hands, protect our NHS”. It evoked a stoic, wartime sentiment around resilience and everyone having a part to play. Then followed the Queen, similarly linking to wartime, but talking about British character and empathising. Think of the Queen as a CEO and Boris Johnson as Managing Director and, as information trickles down from the top, it takes different forms. In this scenario, the Queen showed understanding and used emotive language to unite the nation. Meanwhile, the PM gave clear instruction, he was impassioned and sought behavioural change. The flow of communication and whom this is from, is important, in order to prompt the required action. That said, equally as many lessons can be learnt from Boris Johnson’s address as

lockdown eased, a directive that was alarmingly vague, woolly and very much open to interpretation. What went wrong? It was too long and too confusing, because of the number of specifics that needed to be outlined. If, as a leader, the message cannot be delivered succinctly and with impact, then it is best communicated by line managers, who have the time to go into depth, address personal concerns and also answer questions - something the leadership team simply do not have the capacity to do at scale.

As communications trickle down further, this is where the next in command, the line managers, must be given clear guidance so that the conversations they take part in are authentic and not a ‘line’ from HR. You can achieve this by developing a live FAQ - added to when more questions arise - so that line managers have a clear reference point. With a process wrapped around this, it will ensure all employees have a chance to speak up and feel listened to, while the live FAQ will surface concerns employees are having in real-time. HR must also help line managers see problems from their team’s point of view and ensure they are capable of handling conflict and disagreement - showing empathy couldn’t be more important at this stage. It is tempting for leaders and HR teams to keep the tone positive, whilst instilling an attitude of soldiering on.

People must be levelled with, as well as having that clarity and reassurance, balance is key. It is important to judge carefully what could be demotivating to people, but also remember that complete surprises can be equally damaging and the wrong

communication move won’t lead to the required behavioural change and may even backfire. The quote from Maya Angelou, could not be more pertinent right now: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Making people feel like they are “in this together” is critical during times of organisational change - particularly when it moves at speed - and HR must have a clear handle on any negativity, as understanding general discontent around progression can help address it head on and reduce the risk of losing momentum and message. The pandemic may have slowed and paused progression plans, but one statement at one point on this subject is not enough. People want to feel safe, supported and heard and the dialogue must be about them and not just the business and its future plans, delivered with balance, authenticity, transparency and steadiness. ●



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## WHO'S ZOOMIN' WHO?

*Organisations that will emerge from this crisis in the best shape will be people-centric, empathic and supporting their employees flexibly. They will have been agile and swift to introduce new ways of working, that prioritise people before performance.*

*That is not to suggest that performance is not important, just that by valuing people first, they are more likely to achieve it. Any firm paying lip service, will have been found out very quickly.*



ARTICLE BY LUCINDA CARNEY, CEO & FOUNDER OF ACTUS SOFTWARE - ACTUS

Such unprecedented times have brought the importance of humanity into pin-sharp relief, showing how vitally important it is to focus on the person, rather than just the job that they do. The hard question now is, how to impact, re-mould and re-calibrate a new and better way of operating out of the pandemic and onto a better future? The impact and tragedy for many can never be forgotten, but dark times can lead to greater illumination and forward-thinking organisations are capitalising on this opportunity, seeing a catalyst to reinvent their cultural norms and determine a completely new perspective on how to work and operate. Cultural norms are deeply seated as they have evolved from the business framework, hierarchy, historic processes and management style. Whether it is working in structured departments and teams, formalised decision making or sign off processes, for better or worse, everyone knows “how things work” in the business. As said, they are long established, tend to be deeply embedded and are very rarely torn down and rebuilt. But the changes that have rocked us now are almost a ground zero scenario and it would be a huge missed opportunity if we just slot back into the old grooves.

A spot survey of 100 HR professionals carried out in May 2020, found that 62 percent of respondents felt that the pandemic had provided an opportunity for the workplace to change for the better. Less than ten percent thought it had changed for the worse and the rest were not sure. It was clear from the comments that those who felt frustrated or less positive, were those whose organisations had no plans to use this experience as an opportunity to modernisation, instead pushing hard to revert back to the ‘old normal’ as soon as possible. From a leadership point of view, this sort of mindset could easily alienate staff who have derived benefit from the new ways of working. Holding resolutely onto the old, without stopping to consider what could be gained from a fresh, is a wide-ranging risk leading to increased attrition and mental health issues as two key examples. Conversely, businesses that grab this potential cultural revolution and turn it into an opportunity will gain a significant market advantage over competitors.

When it comes to this ongoing crisis, one of the most notable changes to cultural norms is

the dramatic evolution in the way we have had to switch from face-to-face communication to virtual. Yet interactions have found their digital way, relatively seamlessly and information sharing, team meetings and even one-to-ones and appraisals are being successfully carried out with the right attitude, interpersonal skills and technology. However, there are some potential losses that go beyond 'Zoom fatigue' and poor bandwidth. Now, more than ever, regular, informal conversation is vital to keep operations communicative and collaborative. Without the workforce operating within their usual four walls, we've lost the watercooler conversations and the chats over a pint after work - these spontaneous moments often result in some of the most fruitful conversations and bring out the best ideas. We have to find ways to accommodate and replace these. Moving forwards, we need to find new ways of developing social work relationships - albeit virtually - as being physically distant does not have to mean being socially distant. However, we have to find a balance because meetings, virtual or otherwise, can also be huge timewasters providing visibility rather than productivity. 'Zoom overload' is likely to make us less likely to interact socially

this lack of face-to-face contact can create a narrow or one-way communication vacuum. They have been taking the time to proactively search out and listen to the views of remote staff, outside of their direct line, as well as ensuring that informal and formal feedback and recognition systems are brought to life in this new way of working.

This has been one of the most challenging and stressful times to be in HR, with pressures to support the leadership and the workforce, interpret new legislation and juggle our own work life challenges. It has never been more important for professionals to prioritise their own development and wellbeing in order to be given the respect they deserve for the outstanding way that so many have handled this crisis. This could be the ideal opportunity to deservedly blow the HR trumpet and point out just how vital this profession has been recently and will continue to be. In fact, the responsibility of the HR department may begin to extend beyond the professional workplace and into the personal sphere. With our office and homes becoming one and the same, the lines between work-life and personal life may well blur further. But

These people-centric behaviours provide the foundation for effective virtual performance management by establishing the baseline of trust. Managers should then build on this by agreeing clear goals and outcomes and recognising performance against them. Many managers lacked these skills in a face-to-face environment which should surely make this a strategic priority for many businesses. As we recalibrate various business structures, supporting employee wellbeing in order to keep their physical and mental health on track should be a top priority, along with virtual people and performance management skills.

Do we really want the old "normal" back? It's important that we don't lose the people focus and empathy that we've cultivated recently, as this is a positive change many organisations have undergone during lockdown. Restrictions may be gradually lifting, but work circumstances are still going to be challenging for many, particularly those with children or those with long distances to commute. Change takes time and will be stressful both personally and professionally and it is a process that each of us will respond to differently. So, just like recovering from the virus, it's important not to expect business to return to normal immediately. The process will be gradual and enlightened businesses will continue to support flexibility and remote working. This needs to be disseminated throughout the organisation with a real focus on management capability in this new world. Let's stop the engagement lip service and recognise that this is our opportunity to make it a reality. However, to make this happen, our exhausted HR profession needs to be able to recharge and reset away from the reactivity of recent months. It is essential that we challenge the leaders who are trying to force us back to the bad old days and shine a light on the possibilities of new cultural norms. By persuading our organisations to pause and capture what has been gained from these strange times, we can rethink the old frameworks. Not only would this help us to navigate our way through this continued uncertainty safely, we could thrive, grow and reinvent the future. ●

INTERACTIONS HAVE FOUND THEIR DIGITAL WAY, RELATIVELY SEAMLESSLY AND, FOR MANY, BEING FREED FROM THE TIME, EXPENSE AND HASSLE OF COMMUTING, MORE THAN MAKES UP FOR THE LACK OF PHYSICAL CONTACT

online, reducing our capacity for more refreshing interactions. Setting a culture where conversation channels ebb and flow naturally, should ensure that productivity is maximised and new ideas are cultivated without being too exhausting. Some creative employers have set up buddying networks and telephone tag teams to build new, informal relationships which have the additional benefit of avoiding isolation. Others have introduced 'virtual coffee breaks'; after work beers at the 'Nobody Inn', quizzes and even escape rooms, so a lot is possible, if we are prepared to make the effort. This is all well and good for group interaction, however truly emotionally intelligent leaders take things a step further. They appreciate that

HR can lead the way in encouraging healthy leadership behaviours and challenging unhelpful cultural norms like presenteeism. However, the responsibility shouldn't all sit with HR, it's never been more important for managers to be emotionally invested in their employees. New management behaviours that were introduced during lockdown such as checking in on the wellbeing of their teams or their family members, kicking off calls by asking how people are coping and encouraging people to take breaks or daily exercise all need to continue. This will ensure that the workforce feels valued both as employees and as human beings and, in turn, be more organically productive.

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# FUTURE PERFECT TENSE

The pandemic journey has changed us and our relationship with work forever. The time weary staples of employment, such as the commute and the nine-to-five, are no longer fuel for debate and procrastination, they are history. This mandatory need to adapt is nothing short of revolutionary.



ARTICLE BY  
ALISON ETTRIDGE  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
TALENT INTUITION

For the many who have become the remote workforce, the notion of a return to a physical place of work looks and feels alien. Months of forced isolation, compelled by lockdown has provided time for thought and reflection and in terms of why, how and where that contract between employers and employees now resides, is open for reimagining, as all businesses, great and small assess their organisational frameworks to forge ahead into a future that nobody could have envisaged. The burning questions are, what will the organisational framework look like and how can it support business operations and employee needs? The obvious place to assess first is, how have people changed? How many of our new daily habits will we choose to retain? Childcare; time with family; the way we eat; our exercise regime; personalisation of work hours. We've recalibrated to the new normal such that a return to the pre-COVID-19 life just isn't feasible for many. An evolution that was emerging already in the world of work has been accelerated. This brings to light the need to be local as well as global, remote as well as having a physical presence. We are heading at breakneck speed to a world where work will be performed in decentralised teams and networks, which will lead to a more innovative, flexible and resilient organisation. Never has the ability of businesses to be flexible, agile and yet resilient been so tested. Companies acted quickly to put the health and wellbeing of their workforces first, by rapidly moving to virtual working and digital environments.

Throughout this crisis, the role of the HR Director/Chief People Officer has been tested as never before and their profile has been elevated... at last. They're focussed on the health of employees, they've been keeping teams engaged, leaders on track and motivated, they're driving the biggest remote working experiment we have ever seen and they are trying to determine the size and shape of the workforce to get through this critical time without destroying the lifeblood and future opportunity for the business. Some businesses were unprepared and gaps in business continuity meant disruption for many. Some organisations have been forced to furlough employees or even the entire business. Others have experienced a massive increase in demand and are faced with leading recruitment drives to get key workers in place without the possibility of meeting candidates face to face for interviews or assessment centres. A few haven't skipped a beat. For them, this is business as usual - the greatest impact they've seen is in their supply chain - not their operations. The majority have been forced into new practices for which business and talent strategies were not designed. The changes we're experiencing now have far-reaching implications for employers, employees and even commercial and residential real estate as people question their relationship with work. Now that we're transitioning from crisis to control, it's time to take stock of how well prepared we were and take time to explore how resilience planning now can prepare us better for future disruption on a global scale.

Staying competitive in a volatile environment requires organisations to constantly optimise their workforce. This means optimising the supply of critical skills and workforce locations. Understanding the power of combining workforce and workplace data will support not only strategic decision making but business continuity and resilience too. In the new ecosystem of work, people strategy will have a new set of rules. People strategy must now be dynamic, in real-time and focused on priming the business for the future. A shift to more agile capability will allow businesses to ensure the fulfilment of critical tasks through a blend of virtual workers and those in physical locations. The goal is the 'zero-vacancy organisation', in which business can quickly respond to changes in

skills supply and demand. The zero-vacancy organisation can navigate successfully through fast-paced and highly unpredictable environments, making use of a flexible skills-based model to optimise their workforce and workplace. These organisations will plan their workforce strategy around new factors such as:

Location of skills - first and foremost, you need to know where people are that have the skills that you need.

Connectivity - access to good connectivity allows businesses to unlock agility and collaboration, regardless of where or how people work.

Average commute time and business travel - are empty tube platforms and quieter roads part of the future of work? Of course, some travel will resume but for health and lifestyle reasons, employees will no doubt be revisiting their life choices.

Cost of living - the value of corporate real estate already being questioned. Do businesses need to have offices in prime commercial centres if the workforce is more distributed? Ease of doing business - some locations look ideal on the surface but tariffs, local labour laws and rules around import and export may exist that would alter the commercial view.

Risk - factors such as the level of unionisation, laws around sick pay and expectations of healthcare matter when you're planning to become an employer.

Workforce composition and workflow - organisations are increasingly looking at how they access skills as opposed to how they recruit and retain permanent employees.

Infrastructure - Infrastructure makes a huge difference to life at work and life outside work. For potential employees, access to key services significantly influences the attractiveness of a workplace.

WHO status. Health and healthcare have never been in the limelight as they are now.

Business continuity planning in the past included mitigating the risk of flood or fire or an IT infrastructure shutdown. Now, the exposure to the knowledge and skills supply chain has been tested. And finally, how attractive is a place to live and work? This is an overall measure of how likely it is that your target talent population will want to live and work in a particular location.

We are moving into a complex, uncertain and changing world of business particularly around work, labour and skills. With the notion of adaptive and agile organisations becoming more and more common, business models and attitudes towards work location are evolving from the traditional. As the organisational model and mindset mature, talent strategy becomes skills driven. Leading and visionary organisations will plan their workplace and workforce around the work being done rather than individuals. Despite becoming more task oriented, we are already seeing a mass personalisation of work as a result of enforced home working for millions of people during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the near future, organisations will look at individuals and tasks and realise that productivity hasn't dropped during the global pandemic. They'll ask themselves what went well during this period and why? How can you think differently about talent and workplace strategy in the new ecosystem of work? Some

work will always be driven by location, some perhaps doesn't need to be. Workplace and real estate strategy will be influenced by the total cost of labour and commercial property and desk space, the tax incentives in play and the way that a workplace is adopted.

We are entering a new ecosystem of work and the pace of change is faster than anyone could have imagined in January 2020. To make decisions this quickly, and for them to be right, businesses need data and insight like never before. Organisations have seen the business benefits of more flexible working and will no doubt question the cost of business premises and business travel. Digital tools have enabled distributed communication and connections have formed across departments, business units, locations and geographies that simply were not there before. We've become more personal and in future, businesses will arrange work differently and in a more collaborative fashion. HR has been catapulted into the limelight. Their reactions in the last few weeks, and their response now, will make or break their businesses. They have become business leaders and many have realised - too late - how poor and disorganised their HR systems are. Leadership behaviours, values and cultures have changed. Those that have changed for the better will be remembered. Teams too have changed - we've seen real strength, collaboration and a workforce with a purpose. A workforce asking their leaders what they can do to help. A feeling of trust is emerging in businesses where leaders have been honest and shown humility. This will impact on retention of key skills as individuals remember how their leaders behaved. Also, we've seen a change in our teams and the personalisation of work around our lifestyles and our families is here to stay. Intriguingly to, there is entrepreneurship in the way many have juggled and managed in these times - and yet productivity has not fallen. None of us had ever experienced anything like this before. We will reinvent business models. We will re-deploy our teams. We will assess how work is done. The way we view workforce and workplace has changed for ever, and there is no going back. ●

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MAKE DECISIONS  
THIS QUICKLY, AND  
FOR THEM TO BE  
RIGHT, BUSINESSES  
NEED DATA AND  
INSIGHT LIKE NEVER  
BEFORE





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# BENEATH THE DIVERSITY VENEER

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*We have all had to adjust to the way we work and live our lives, in ways that would have seemed unbelievable just a few months ago. But the pandemic has presented particular issues for the disabled workforce. Disabled people - and people in other protected groups - have experienced particular disadvantage and have had to navigate a sea of new and uncharted obstacles, balancing working, alongside staying safe and managing pre-existing health conditions.*



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ARTICLE BY DIANE LIGHTFOOT, CEO - BUSINESS DISABILITY FORUM

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As we look to the future, one thing is certain, our view of what a 'normal' day at work looks like, will never be the same again. The workplace has changed and so has our approach to diversity, but not all change is bad and, although we are living through difficult times, there are some positive lessons for the future. We have all had to adapt the way we work and at pace - what with shifting to working remotely, difficult decisions around furloughing employees and the cloud of a recession down the line - all together create a heady cocktail for businesses and, with people the largest cost base and the complex dynamic in the big picture - HR Directors have their work cut out. One of the early mantras of the pandemic was, "we're all in it together" but, as time has gone by, it has become evident that different and

diverse groups are not impacted equally. To name but a few from a very long list, we have seen the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on; the BAME community and in care homes, working age people with learning disabilities and complex needs, as well as the plight of older people. The Lists of 'vulnerable people' have really not helped as much as hoped, because while there is undoubtedly overlap between some groups, people who are particularly vulnerable to Coronavirus are not the same as those who are 'vulnerable' in society more generally.

We often talk about unintended consequences in policy making and this is, understandably, more prevalent when policy is made on the gallop. But the importance of equality impact analyses has been overlooked in

the rush, leaving some disabled people without the support they need - the furloughing of D&I staff, with a responsibility for adjustments, is a case in point. Going forward, we need to develop more useable equality impact procedures, which can be implemented at speed. There are subtle impacts too on ways of working because, while advances in technology have enabled businesses to function in ways they could perhaps not have imagined, it has its limitations. Different platforms offer different accessibility functions and these are improving all the time, but they cannot yet match face-to-face communication and the nuances of expression and body language, that give such important visual cues to support understanding. This impacts on people, not only those with sensory impairments, but also people who are

neurodivergent and who may struggle with ambiguity, as well as disruption to their routine. The cognitive load of learning different virtual platforms is also worth remembering, as is the very real issue of isolation - for many people, the camaraderie of social interaction is key to a rewarding work life. The term skin hunger has been coined for those who are denied physical touch whilst in isolation and perhaps face hunger is its workplace equivalent.

Other impacts are more direct, take the relaxing of the Care Act 2014 as an emergency measure, which has seen working age disabled people left without the social care support they need to work - in some cases, people need this to be up and ready, to take medication and to travel. With equality for disabled people in the workforce a long way off - pre-pandemic, the employment rates for disabled people were 50 percent, as compared to 80 percent of the UK population over all - any gains are hard won and losses even more keenly felt. We know that disabled people have been disproportionately impacted in previous financial downturns and, with a recession looming, we need to act to prevent disabled people from falling out of the workplace. It is 2020 after all - a quarter of a century since the Disability Discrimination Act and a decade since the Equality Act. We need to fight the narrative that all-too often arises during times of economic downturn and continue to promote awareness about the value disabled people bring to the workforce and the workplace. Businesses are likely to see the long-term effect of isolation, lock down and social distancing on workplace mental health and musculoskeletal issues. Working one day a week at the kitchen table may be fine, but full-time for months on end may not. For those who work with physical kit adjustments in the office, such as a sit-stand desk, ergonomic chair or adapted keyboard, the impact may well be greater and businesses which can support employees to bring these adjustments home will reap wellbeing dividends.

There are tough choices for leaders to make but, equally, there are practical steps that leaders can take to keep their workforce engaged, whilst finding new ways to deliver their business strategy and inclusion agenda. These include; great communication - information abhors a vacuum and so the more regular, transparent and, if possible, positive communications the better. Recognising and supporting mental wellbeing is also evermore important, as the stress of uncertainty is constant for all of us. Spotting the signs that someone isn't coping, at a distance, is critical, as is equipping people managers at all levels with the skills and confidence to support their teams. It's also about recognising and remembering the privilege that many of us have as leaders - not all homeworking is created equal and not everyone has a dedicated working space or optimum bandwidth. It's interesting too that, in a very short space of time, working from home has moved from being seen as a privilege for the few to the reality for the many and with it, the realisation that it has its down sides.



THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUALITY IMPACT ANALYSES HAS BEEN OVERLOOKED IN THE RUSH. LEAVING SOME DISABLED PEOPLE WITHOUT THE SUPPORT THEY NEED - THE FURLOUGHING OF D&I STAFF, WITH A RESPONSIBILITY FOR ADJUSTMENTS, IS A CASE IN POINT



 @theHRDIRECTOR  
TWITTER POLL

Would you say your organisation lacks diversity?



There are positives to be drawn from our experiences too, acceptance of flexible working and working from home - which are different things - greater use of technology and different working styles and ultimately, a long overdue and very welcome move to focusing on outcomes and outputs rather than presenteeism. These are all learnings we need to hold onto as and when we move closer to "business as usual". Working differently and a lasting mixed economy of office and home-based working also has a positive environmental impact, as well as supporting people who struggle with commuting to work, because of the logistics or anxiety around travel or from fatigue. There is also the potential for a lasting legacy around a kinder approach to leadership as we show more of ourselves. Letting people see inside our homes on video calls, losing what I have called our workplace "armour", is allowing ourselves to be a bit vulnerable and a bit more human. Huge businesses have pivoted overnight to mass home working and the active involvement of senior leaders in driving this change is very welcome. In our survey, 83 percent of respondents said that, how the business has responded to Covid-19 - including arranging internal communications, home working and ensuring staff have the adjustments they need - was being led by the Chief Operating Officer or Chief Executive. The figure for the same question, when applied to ensuring staff with disabilities and long-term conditions specifically, can move to home working was much lower - 31 percent said this was the direct responsibility of the COO or CEO, as compared to 69 percent for HR - this is still encouraging. CEOs and senior leaders are pivotal in driving change in this space and those who have a deeper knowledge through direct visibility of the issues facing their disabled employees, are better positioned to make a lasting and positive impact. Ninety percent of the organisations surveyed agreed that responses to Covid-19, will result in a lasting change in attitudes to flexible and home working. HR has a key role in driving this change by learning and implementing the positive lessons around working differently and, not only resisting the urge to fall back into the 'old' ways, but also taking the opportunity to champion the cause of the disabled workforce and to make the case at senior leadership level. We have made progress and we must not go back. We all have a duty to keep disability firmly on the inclusion agenda within our own organisations and we call on Government to continue to drive forward its plans to close the disability employment gap and to publish a new National Disability Strategy. The pandemic could be used as an excuse to put disability on the back burner. Instead, let's make sure it's a catalyst for lasting change. ●

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# HOW THE OTHER HALF SWEAT

*Cranfield University recently reported<sup>1</sup> that there are 10.9 percent female executives in the FTSE 100 and 8.4 percent in FTSE 250 companies. We have spent considerable time discussing its opacity and thickness, but it would seem, that the elephant in the room is not even being mentioned, yet it affects 100 percent of women.*

ARTICLE BY KATE USHER, MENOPAUSE AND RELATIONSHIPS COACH & AUTHOR OF *YOUR SECOND PHASE - SECOND PHASE*

This is of course the menopause, which potentially lasts over a decade and occurs just at the point women are pushing to move into senior roles. Many organisations are not talking about it, or are simply paying lip-service to it and checking it off their wellbeing list. Much has been spoken about the glass ceiling, but women have a complex path to seniority, much more so than men. We bear children and, in the majority, manage childcare. For some, this means taking a career break or working part-time, which impacts our ability to return to a comparable level of seniority. The time subsequently lost in retracing known activities or ‘refreshing’ skills ultimately impedes our ability to rise through the ranks. Then there are other battles through juggling work, ambition and guilt and there is no happy medium.

Women, as with men, reach their peak as they pass through their mid-forties. Unlike men however, women then have a further hurdle, one which they don’t choose. Every woman will have a menopause, it is a fact of life and the core time they will experience symptoms is between the ages of 45 and 55. It can last for over a decade and, for many, it will be life changing. Menopausal women struggle with a wide array of symptoms - a list of 40 in total - of which they can experience any combination with varying severity. The manifestation of these symptoms often leads to women being labelled ‘difficult’, which is derogatory. It suggests a conscious choice in behaviour and demeanour. Women do not choose their symptoms... nobody would.

The pandemic crisis has forced a level of activity and reflection which is driven by adversity and its partner, necessity. This is a time to transform the way we employ, retain and promote staff and ask some important questions: Are there unconscious biases established through existing and previously unchallenged processes? Are there gender preferences in certain areas or at certain levels? The best talent is simply that, their skills



THE MANIFESTATION OF THESE SYMPTOMS OFTEN LEADS TO WOMEN BEING LABELLED ‘DIFFICULT’, WHICH IS DEROGATORY. IT SUGGESTS A CONSCIOUS CHOICE IN BEHAVIOUR AND Demeanour. WOMEN DO NOT CHOOSE THEIR SYMPTOMS... NOBODY WOULD



are not defined by gender or by life phase and so excluding women from the fast track to the executive team for any reason, let alone biology, is extremely short-sighted and outdated. There are clear areas we can address. The first step for every organisation is education, from the post room to the board room, for men and women, without exception. Openness about what the menopause is and how it affects women, will engender empathy and acceptance and it should be ongoing and reviewed regularly. It should also be included as part of the onboarding and compliance process, as well as management training.

Organisations must start to recognise the need for a flexible and intelligent approach to their female employees and offer a variable support package which can be accessed as and when women need it. This is more than a desk fan, as helpful as this is for hot flushes, it is utterly useless for anxiety or loss of verbal recall, it’s a starting point only. Flexible working hours are a must for those with insomnia, sleep issues and anxiety, but post this crisis and lockdown, there are no excuses anymore for barring the gate to flexible working. A quiet place to retreat too is necessary, when managing mood swings, anxiety or panic attacks. This is not the basement amongst dusty dog-eared files or the medical room. It needs to be fit for purpose. Also, suitable locker space is important for a range of symptoms, where women need a change of clothes and ready access to washing facilities and sanitary ware is vital. Where women need to wear uniforms, they should be readily available, breathable and easy to clean and this also means more than the standard two sets. Organisations must start to insist that employee medical packages include menopause support and these days, it’s scandalous if they don’t. ●

Kate Usher, is the author of *Your Second Phase* (LID Publishing, 2020)

1. Female FTSE Board report 2019 - Cranfield University

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# BONE OF CONTENTION

*Imagine an employee who goes to work every day having to hide the fact that they love dogs? Some days it does not matter - loving dogs has nothing to do with completing their spreadsheet - but on other days, it requires them to stay silent, change their behaviour, how they interact and even lie to protect their "secret". What would that feel like? How would it impact their psychology?*



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

Think of John, a fictional gay man, who works as an investment banker in London's financial district. The bank has a long tradition of servicing London's social elite. John does not feel comfortable being himself at work, because he feels he may be judged and passed over for promotions. So how is John's learning impacted when his interactions are focussed on protecting his esteem? How is his happiness impacted when this internal discourse denigrates his self-worth? Not being able to express his true feelings and live openly at work means John's wellbeing and work performance will likely suffer. Living transparently brings rewards beyond feeling more authentic at work. Being open about who you are, will help you succeed as an authentic leader. The stark reality is, more than 50 percent of LGBTQI+ people do not disclose their sexuality at work<sup>1</sup>. Frustratingly, well into the 21st Century, revealing your sexual identity in the workplace still carries risk in more traditional organisations, where self-awareness and individualism may not be valued. Surely, being authentic and comfortable in your own skin is a basic human right?

Authenticity is a product of knowing who you are and being your true self and any LGBTQI+ people carry the shame associated with growing up different and trying to fit in - and this is true for many minorities - whereby people feel they need to conform to a conventional lifestyle, in order to fit in. But surely, in the true meaning of the phrase diversity & inclusion, minorities should be highly appreciated for the true value they bring in not conforming and equally, appreciated for their differences. An individual's struggle to come to terms with who they are is a valuable leadership insight, when reassuring employees that they are in a safe place. Appreciating a whole lifetime of experiences, actions, decisions and learning defines our capability and indeed our identity. Once we are self-aware and we understand what fulfills us - what we like and what we dislike - we can direct our capability objectively, by setting big audacious goals. The more we are genuine and trust in who we are, the more we learn to be true to ourselves and to deliver on our purpose. We have only one version of ourselves, so why not present our whole unique selves? This process of self-acceptance, deconstructing the ego and bringing understanding to our inner child,

resolves our unconscious bias and the need to protect our self-worth<sup>2</sup>. A transformed sense of self allows us to be more accepting and respecting of others and coming to terms with who we are equips us with the life skills to help deal with adversity. If we grew up thinking we were too short, we would develop complementary skills to deal with it and, when we understand how our strengths and weaknesses define us, we are more positive, which allows us to focus on the future.

LGBTQ leaders have several options for how they control their stories; they can be artificial or authentic, private or transparent. For instance, someone might choose to be private at work, but out among friends. Embracing our unique qualities, values, learnt experiences and expressing our true feelings as a leader is authenticity and, as an authentic leader, you are a "servant first" - you focus on the needs of others before you consider your own. Authentic leaders are generalists and build

decision to come out and to live more authentically. Some industries and organisations may be less open and accepting as others, but how open a culture is to accepting minorities will determine whether employees can bring their whole unique selves to the workplace. Living transparently reduces the psychological trauma of having to mask your identity or having to conform to other values and ideals. Therefore, as a minority, if you cannot influence a more respectful culture, then find an organisation that values your openness and diverse perspectives. Indeed, having a voice is an absolute requirement for developing leadership qualities. For organisations, there is one simple truth to retaining authentic leadership potential: "Continue to meet my needs and I'll stay. Keep seeking ways to enhance our relationships and I'll not only stay, but I'll bring others to you too and I'll do more, willingly. But if my needs are taken for granted, I'll be off!"

unconscious awareness and cultural perspectives. Marginalisation of minorities expresses the social inability (intolerance) and unresolved childhood insecurities of the beholder - racism is most prevalent in countries where social development is denied or feared. The truth is every life should matter and be valued - however power, privilege and partisanship - one upmanship built on childhood insecurities and pre-judgement - prevents the development of our adult social skills. For as long as we classify inequality as externalities like; gender, race and sexuality - we are missing the point. Conventional attitudes and mindsets need to change.

It is self-awareness that allows us to be more trusting, compassionate and understanding and to manage our emotions appropriately. These positive Ei skills, also equip a leader with observation and listening skills, to coach for employee self-value, to reason through complexity by instinct and to encourage social engagement. Developing self-awareness is the key to developing cultural awareness or environmental understanding and a by-product of developing deeper relationships is learning more about ourselves. Social skills and cultural awareness go hand-in-hand and social connection is how we humans move beyond limiting beliefs to find security. Organisations must appreciate a meaningful life is bound in long-term social objectives but all too often we are distracted by materialism, instant gratitude and short-term profit motives. We are seeing a systemic shift in the way businesses are organised, so every employee has an opportunity to contribute collectively. In this rapidly unfolding new world order - genuine, authentic leadership who are simply true to themselves and can employ storytelling and wisdom are leading a new social paradigm. Where social development is valued for bringing out the best in people and where diversity and inclusion is genuinely respected. ●

Tony Holmwood is the author of the awarded book *Best Behaviour*

1. Authenticity Can Help LGBTQ Leaders Be More Effective, October 4, 2016 | by Katherine Conrad, Stanford GSB
2. Don't Allow Your Past to Control Your Future, Leon F Seltzer Ph.D. Psychology Today, Jul 2019

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## DEVELOPING SELF-AWARENESS IS THE KEY TO DEVELOPING CULTURAL AWARENESS OR ENVIRONMENTAL UNDERSTANDING AND A BY-PRODUCT OF DEVELOPING DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS IS LEARNING MORE ABOUT OURSELVES

competence in relationships with people who, together with the leader, produce the results and conditions. Together they continually strive for both personal and organisational potential. The bottom line is, we will continue to find difficulty in fulfilling our leadership potential until we really desire to learn to be true to ourselves and to serve others. Yet desire alone is not enough, you need to genuinely commit to wanting to lead in this way and adapt an adult sharing mindset and there must be a determination to change attitudes. Finally, there must be development in utilising the principles of authentic leadership.

Because members of the LGBTQI+ grow up feeling different and may have struggled for acceptance, they tend to be more open minded and adaptive to change. The choice to develop the characteristics of an authentic leader may not be too dissimilar to the

So how can we support authentic leadership in the workplace? The best way to create authenticity in an organisation is to remove the vertical authority and hierarchy that creates silos and compartments in the mind. HR departments must also question why instilling HR practices, standards and compliance in organisations, has seen no associated increase in productivity. In fact, employee productivity has been declining in the OECD since the 1970's. Regulation, technology, outsourcing and now the digitisation of workplaces has confounded capability and growth. So, how can we make workplaces more organic and human centred? Allowing people to partner and work collaboratively in purpose defined environments with mutual responsibility and accountability and promoting purposeful social causes deepens our relationship and social skills. Supporting meaningful relationships both inside and outside of work, develops our



# TOKENISM MERELY WIDENS DIVISION

Rachael Down, in her 2019 article wrote: “Contrary to what some HR specialists are led to believe, studies demonstrate that the most profitable companies are not actually the most profit-focused.” The irrefutable truth is, it is culture that will either impede or drive corporate endeavour.



ARTICLE BY  
TOBY MILDON  
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION ARCHITECT  
MILDON

That it is in the interests of organisation to develop “the right culture” is surely taken as read. But as to what “the right culture” actually is, has proved to be stubbornly evasive for many. Perhaps this is because the equation; culture plus diversity equals bottom line, is too simplistic. Or, concerningly, perhaps it is that diversity is perceived as weakness and, If a business sees the diversity quota just as a mandatory tickbox, then all it will ever really represent is tokenism. For example, when a leader highlights that “we have an ageing workforce”, it is invariably conveyed with concern and foreboding. Surely this is observing a situation from a negative perspective when, in reality, that same firm probably has a multi-generational workforce, with each generation bringing diversity of thought, life experiences and social influences. So, in this instance, employers have to be inclusive of all generations - not because it’s the right thing to do - but because they represent a multi-experienced and highly-skilled workforce. We need to leverage all their experiences and skills, right across the demographic, to capitalise on the full potential of shared knowledge, creative ideas and experiences.

In creating inclusive cultures, organisations need to make targeted interventions where change is most needed, which is part-and-parcel of managing a diverse workforce. However, businesses need to be careful that these interventions are not simply short-term or box-ticking measures, that merely look good and win awards, crucially, they must create meaningful change in the organisation. Current interventions tend to be designed for specific groups - organisations might run a leadership development programme for women, another for people from an ethnic minority background, or they might offer a course on flexible working for parents. But without opening it up to anyone else in the organisation and making it fully inclusive, the intention can be lost and it can even lead to more division. A firm might sponsor the local Pride march or organise an event for Black History month and it can all-too easily smack of boxes being ticked. Bear in mind that interventions designed by organisations are usually about fixing people and not necessarily about fixing the organisation, its culture or its systems. Case in point, a “women in leadership” programme doesn’t take account of the deep-rooted and systemic issues that might hold women back in their careers - in fact, if anything, it’s just a distraction.

The big concern is that, here we are well into the 21st Century and many believe that diversity is going backwards. So, we have to stop and ask ourselves what the facts are telling us. Are the actions we’ve taken actually making an impact? Do we need a completely different approach to implementing more diverse or inclusive workplaces? Successful implementation of diversity and inclusion changes should be based on a human-centred approach. Diversity & Inclusion managers and HR practitioners, tend to think about cohorts of people. What do they need to do for the disabled? What do they need to do for people of an ethnic minority background? What do they need to do for aspiring female leaders? This runs the risk of making assumptions and stereotyping people. We need to start from the perspective of the individual, so you avoid the risk of thinking in silos. Think intersectionality and, to do this within a diversity and inclusion context, we need to think about the journeys that an individual goes on in an organisation. What are the speed humps and roadblocks they might encounter and what is slowing them down or preventing them from completing a particular journey? Employees go through many different journeys during their lifecycle from; entering the organisation, developing and remaining in the company, perhaps taking breaks for parental leave, sideways moves,

promotions, other changes and finally, leaving. Some think that taking a human-centred approach and designing programmes for the specific needs of individuals, might risk not meeting the needs of everyone else. However, in my view, this is a false assumption. What you find is that if you design for a specific person in mind, someone you can name and describe in detail, by default and you end up improving the working life for everybody because, as human beings, we all share similar needs and desires.

The design agency IDEO is a leading authority on human-centred design and its mantra is: "Human-centred design is all about building a deep empathy with the people you're designing for, generating tonnes of ideas, building a bunch of prototypes, sharing what you've made with people you're designing for and eventually putting your innovative new solution out to the world". The value is in the implementation and you can implement quicker by gaining feedback and adjusting your course of action as you progress. Indeed, by using prototypes, testing and feedback, you implement what works. Contrast this with spending weeks, months and even years analysing, designing and building, only to realise that by the time you implement the solution, the goalposts have moved and the solution is no longer fit for purpose.

There are some practical ways that organisations can take a human-centred approach to implementing diversity and inclusion: Identify non-inclusive journeys - data and insights will help you prioritise the journeys to tackle first. If an organisation is going through rapid growth, it makes sense to focus on the recruitment processes. This is the best opportunity to attract diversity through the door and have your early adopters on board, firing up people's interest and involving them in implementing these changes. Next, always talk to people, conduct surveys, interviews, send out questionnaires and create focus groups, so that you fully understand people's needs. This means finding out how they feel about their workplace environment and day-to-day work life. Another powerful tool is to put yourself in the position of a colleague who uses a wheelchair and empathise how they might feel about their different journeys. Once this information and insight is gathered, you can then begin to create scenarios in the shape of fictional day-in-the-life stories of users, each relaying specific user journeys and describing their best-case scenario, rather than dwelling on the negatives. Here it's important to include emotions to bring the story to life.

When it's time to design and build the solutions, ideally adopt a flexible and agile approach, so that anything can be recalibrated, then select a widely diverse group of people to work on the project. Nominate a senior person to remove obstacles and act as a champion and a project manager who will keep the project on track so that it maintains momentum. A mixed range of colleagues will contribute to how the project should be designed and delivered. This step is about co-design, not about the HR department coming

up with its own plans and then presenting them as the solution to employees. It needs a company-wide approach, where you roll up your sleeves and work with colleagues to co-design and create together. This is an iterative approach, where you can test and deliver each step before moving on to the next. Although there might be a core team working on this - ideally multi-disciplinary - this is all about involving and engaging with employees wherever and whenever possible.

Next is implementation - but keep on testing, to make sure that it remains relevant - because the world of work is rapidly changing and there is no place for complacency and accepting the status quo no matter what, so you have to keep reviewing and adjusting. Diversity and inclusion is a living breathing thing and needs to be hardwired into an organisation and you need to constantly review, adapt and adjust. The objective is to reach a point where diversity and inclusion is no longer seen as a series of interventions, but just part of the way that things are done. Then it's in the DNA of the organisation and diversity doesn't have to be managed so much. ●

Toby Mildon is the author of *Inclusive Growth: Future proof your business by creating a diverse workplace*.

Down, R (Feb 2019) *What is Company Culture and Why is it Important?*, [www.breathehr.com/blog/what-is-company-culture-and-why-is-it-important](http://www.breathehr.com/blog/what-is-company-culture-and-why-is-it-important)

*McGregor-Smith Review*, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-in-the-workplace-the-mcgregor-smith-review](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-in-the-workplace-the-mcgregor-smith-review)



A "WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP" PROGRAMME DOESN'T TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE DEEP ROOTED AND SYSTEMIC ISSUES THAT MIGHT HOLD WOMEN BACK IN THEIR CAREERS, IN FACT, IF ANYTHING, IT'S JUST A DISTRACTION



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## ETHICS AND PANDEMIC... THE DUEL OF THE DOUBLE BIND

*Investopedia* describes business ethics as “the study of appropriate business policies and practices regarding potentially controversial subjects including corporate governance.

Article by Barbara Walsh, MD & Co-founder - Metaco

**E**thical studies are included in most academic business programmes and can loosely be translated into what is legally ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, socially ‘acceptable’ or ‘unacceptable’. Yet when we look around at the world today, I would argue that these terms are simply subjective constructs, which leaves me wondering, what it takes for us to show up at our best.

In the world of complexity, change and challenge in which we now exist, in any given situation today, simple solutions do not exist. Ethical arguments can be provided to substantiate almost any direction forward, notwithstanding varying contexts, the systemic impact or the degree to which lives are affected. Positions have been

taken around socio-political situations like Brexit, global financial structures, the appropriate use of social media, all of which attract sound arguments for, against and anything in between... and that was before the pandemic appeared and added its dynamic. In terms of governments, was Sweden wrong in their approach to a free and common-sense approach to Covid-19 given the reports of deaths in Sweden being the highest in Europe per capita in a rolling seven-day average between 12 and 19 May? *Guardian*. How accurate are the statistics provided? Is it true that there are economic incentives in declaring a death under Coronavirus, even if the actual cause of death was by some other means? If so, what are the ethical implications for doctors? *USA Today*. What are the implications of forcing individuals to stay at home or go back to work, based on statistics which are influenced by testing ability and accuracy?

Then there are the ethics surrounding the utilisation of technology and greater authoritarian control. For instance, once there is a vaccine, what are the ethical implications regarding privacy, if everyone who’s had the vaccine needs to be tracked in some way or another, via digital footprint? (Lexalytics). What about environmental sustainability during a pandemic? The World Economic Forum warns of the impact of changing policies regarding plastic production and disposal, as a result of the massive amount needed to help protect the global population. From an organisational perspective, what are the ethical implications of remote working and mental health for organisations and their teams? What about organisations who opportunistically use Covid-19

as an excuse to reduce human capital costs? *BusinessLive*. Then what of poverty and the ethical questions surrounding lockdown? “The series of ethical dilemmas prompted by the onslaught of the novel Coronavirus take on their own dimensions when looked at through the lens of a poor country.” *Forbes*.

We find ourselves in a classical double bind. A ‘double bind’ is a psychological predicament in which one is confronted with two or more conflicting and irreconcilable demands. The double bind occurs because the inherent dilemma cannot be confronted, and therefore cannot be resolved or ignored. So, what does one person, company or government, who genuinely wants to take the best course of action do? Thinking about this led me to consider more closely the difference between two terms that are similar, very different, and often used interchangeably, ‘ethics’ and ‘morals’.

Whilst ethics are generally advocated in business, this can often be more about expediency. In today’s world however, the point is that we can no longer ignore the importance - and even the absolute necessity - of the moral discussion. We have to take into account in our decision making the systemic impact and consequences to people, our organisations, the environment and every aspect of our lives today and in the post-Coronavirus future. ●



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## NEXT MONTH ISSUE 191



### INTERVIEW

Joanne Regan-Iles - Executive HR Director Europe, Middle East and Africa

### WHAT CORPORATES CAN LEARN FROM DISRUPTORS

If corporates look stuffy, disruptors seem jerky and unruly. Does the emerging world provide a unique opportunity for collaboration?

### CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

That this enforced spanner-in-the-works of “normality” is providing the world with a breather, is like we are torturers giving our victim a moment to recuperate.

### ATTRACTION & RETENTION

Data can interrogate internal rhythms, but futile navel gazing misses the bigger picture and leaves too much to chance.

### INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

There was a determined resolve to seize momentum and capitalise on international opportunity. But in the grip of pandemic, what now?

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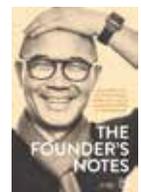
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## INTRODUCING THE BLOG

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



LUCY THOMPSON



CLAIRE BURROWS



MURAD S. MIRZA

An accredited GCologist, she is a Gamechanger and Strategist and specialises in people transformation and organisation effectiveness. Fascinated by organisation systems and cultures, she is proud to be deliberately different - having taken an unconventional career path to HRD with significant experience in Executive Coaching and Team Coaching.

Claire is a specialist regulatory compliance lawyer with particular expertise in health and safety, environmental, food safety, medical device regulation, Coronial Law and anti-bribery legislation. Claire regularly acts in complex regulatory investigations and her notable instructions come from major clients in the construction, manufacturing, demolition and health care sectors.

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



### LIVING THE JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION IN AN SME DURING COVID-19

I had a light-bulb moment a few years ago when I was training to be an Executive Coach. Imagine, if you will, looking at yourself in the mirror with your wardrobe open to the left of you. Change is when you decide to update that wardrobe to the latest colours, styles, fabrics and accessories - you might do this each season as fashions change. Transformation is when you donate the whole wardrobe to charity and start again giving lots of thought to what you want to be known for and how your style should be reflective of your personal brand.



### MIND THE GAP

To demonstrate working practices are objectively reasonable and evidence compliance with health and safety guidelines, a carefully considered and specific Covid-19 risk assessment will be key. This should identify essential vs non-essential activities and appropriate risk mitigation measures - activities identified as non-essential or high-risk, should be avoided when possible. Here Claire provides us with a Risk Assessment practical guide. Calling upon her specialist regulatory compliance legal knowledge to guide upon the many and varied implications that the pandemic will continue to have on our lives and work.



### ARE TRADE UNIONS STILL RELEVANT IN THE DIGITAL AGE?

Trade unions have largely been portrayed as a negative influence in the Digital Age, especially, with the encroachment of AI-driven entities in the workplace that is leading to diminishing need for conventional job performers. This article takes a peek into the historical reasons for the formation of Trade Unions in the 19th century and their persistence throughout the 20th century within some of the key developed countries, i.e. USA, Britain and Australia. Subsequently, it leads into arguments exploring the rationale for contemporary and future relations.



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