HRD

The only independent strategic HR publication

SPECIAL REPORT
AUTOMATED FOR THE PEOPLE: WITH AI, BEYOND THE RUDIMENTS OF TAKING GRUNT WORK OUT OF REPETITIOUS TASKS, IS REVOLUTION

COLLEEN MCKNIGHT, VICE PRESIDENT HR UK&I - SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC

{ E L E C T R I C   D R E A M S }

"THIS NEW MANTRA, "LISTEN TO YOUR EMPLOYEES" IS MIND-BOGGLING... AS IF THIS IS A NEW THING"

ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

APPRENTICES & GRADUATES It's not a 'skills' gap, it's a 'value' gap. We're churning out leavers who are often too one-dimensional

DIGITALISATION OF HR The "forgetting curve" causes frustration and an influx of support tickets, things you were trying to avoid

BUSINESS ETHICS Culture is what people do when no one is looking. What has been revealed in pin-sharp relief is why it matters

REMOTE WORKING REDEFINED It's a one-off chance to build the new way and solve the problems from when the office was king

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ON THE COVER

In this issue, we interview Colleen McKnight, Vice President of HR UK&I - Schneider Electric. Technology enabled the dispersed workforce to carry on. Without electricity, the human race would be stopped in its tracks. The price of this endeavour is high but innovating to bring better efficiencies and ways of working, could mean we live in harmony with our planet.

Colleen McKnight shot exclusively for the**HR**DIRECTOR Cover & Interview photography by Stuart Thomas

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EDITOR'S WELCOME

Welcome to the**HR**DIRECTOR - the only independent publication dedicated to Senior HR Leaders.

In the surge of a work revolution - albeit accelerated by a crisis - HR has been able to support WFH, plug gaps left by conventional collapse, cohesively connect people and avail them of the essentials

Coronavirus has, unintentionally and paradoxically, enabled HR to shrug off its hair shirt and now there is the momentum to redirect more human input into health and wellbeing support, as well as creative and strategic thinking. This is the catalyst that could unlock technology to generate data insights that provide strategic advice on countless people initiatives and not just rudiment and day-to-day hygiene issues. Indeed, as AI has the capacity to carry recruitment, resource management and workforce planning into a new era, the accrual of data aligned with HR's humanist interpretation, could be irresistible.

Students have, unquestionably, felt the brunt of this disruptive time and their futures depend on how employers assess their place in the future corporate prerogative. That we see a return to the dreaded NEETS acronym that typified the Cameron years, would be a bitter pill in the aftermath and must act as a focal point to support the next generation… a tough call when pandemic and Brexit impacts are all-consuming distractions. Nevertheless, apprentices and graduates are the future, but change is essential to realise that. What has definitely emerged from this unprecedented time is that not much can be salvaged from convention.

In this time of stark spotlights and gossamer thin transparency, incalculable corporate and reputational damage can be wrought from bad ethics and toxic cultures, while attempts to cover up and showing a lack of public contrition, only serves to pour petrol on the fire. The next evolution of business ethics is about transcending the moral, political and social dimensions and this requires a complete change of mindset, away from; avoidance, damage limitation and protecting shareholder dividends, to a strategy of moral prerogative.

The WFH revolution, in response to the pandemic, has been broadly an operational success. Now there is great hope for optimism and promise for the future. However, what must be avoided is a return to the old normal, which will require new mindsets, cultures and values to support the future, build for resilience not efficiency and ring in a different way of managing performance and contribution, that is not based just on hitting or missing targets or exceeding or falling short of performance expectation.

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LEGAL UPDATES

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

1 In the case of *Miss J Panahian-Jand v Barts Health NHS Trust* a paediatric nurse who complained about alleged racial discrimination and was banned from booking shifts as a result has been awarded £26,000 in compensation by an employment tribunal. Miss Panahian-Jand, a bank nurse at Whipps Cross Hospital in East London, was "unlawfully victimised" by staff at Barts Health NHS Trust after she suggested that shifts and work tasks were divided along racial lines. The tribunal found that her complaint had amounted to a protected disclosure and that she had suffered detrimental treatment after raising the issue. Employment judge Samantha Moor said: "We consider that by restricting her ability to book shifts on Acorn ward the Trust both subject the claimant to a detriment and… treated her less favourably than other bank staff by not making available to her offers of that work. But for the restriction she would have been offered work. "In our judgment this is a classic case of an employer treating far too severely a person who had raised allegations because they had done so. This is contrary to the expressed aims of its own whistleblowing policy."

2 In the case held in the Court of Appeal in *Page v Lord Chancellor*, a lay magistrate in Kent, Mr Page, who is also a Christian and has a strong belief that it is in the best interests of every child to be brought up by a mother and a father had opposed an adoption application by a same sex couple in 2014 because of his private views and had been reprimanded following a complaint by his fellow magistrates. He then participated in media interviews around the matter which led to his removal from the bench in March 2016. The Court of Appeal followed the tribunal and the EAT in finding that this decision was not discriminatory. Mr Page was not removed from the magistracy because of his religious beliefs or because he had complained of discrimination. The decision had instead been taken because he made it clear that he was not prepared to carry out his judicial responsibilities in a non-biased manner and in accordance with the law and had done so publicly.

3 Research conducted by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has revealed that 7.5 million employees started this year with no protection against unfair dismissal because they had not accumulated the required two years' service. This amounts to a quarter of UK employees. TUC figures also highlighted that the employees in the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic were the most vulnerable with 45 percent of employees in the hospitality sector and 32 percent of those working in retail being left without any protection. Similarly, BAME and young employees were found to be most at risk of not having any protection with 56 percent of employees between the ages of 20 and 24, 40 percent of employees aged between 25 and 29 and a third of BAME employees lacking eligibility for unfair dismissal protection. In light of this, the TUC has called on the government to make protection from unfair dismissal a day one right. Despite this, we consider it unlikely that the current two year qualifying period for ordinary unfair dismissal claims will be reduced, at least while the current UK Government is in place.

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

MOVERS & SHAKERS

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

IAN WRIGHT
Director of Human Resources - Sheffield University

Sheffield University announces that Ian Wright has been appointed Director of Human Resources. Ian is a highly experienced professional with a career in HR spanning over 25 years, across a wide range of private and public sector organisations including; in the software industry, catering and food production, law firms, local authority and in higher education.

MANDY HAMERLA
Chief People Officer - Beelivery

Beelivery, the large on demand grocery delivery service, has announced a major expansion of its senior executive team with the addition of a new Chief People Officer, Mandy Hamerla. Mandy is a strategic HR professional and will be providing expert solutions to help transform the firm's 50,000 drivers from a 'network' to a 'community'. With a background in corporate HR, Mandy will add invaluable experience.

SOPHIE METCALF
Head of HR - Expect Distribution

Expect Distribution has appointed Sophie Metcalf to the new role of Head of HR. The appointment signals a strategic focus on celebrating the people at the heart the business, as it readies for growth in 2021 and beyond. In her new role as Head of HR, Sophie will carve out strategic short, medium and long-term plans to develop the firm's people and practices, creating and fostering brand advocacy from within.

GRANT ELDRED
Chief People Officer - Clifford Chance

Law firm Clifford Chance has announced the appointment of Grant Eldred as Chief People Officer. Grant, who was previously Global Head of HR Transformation at Goldman Sachs, will sit on the executive operations group. The law firm's global people strategy includes significant industry leading commitments and Grant will be calling upon his extensive HR leadership experience to help set new standards of excellence.

ELECTRIC
DREAMS

Technology enabled the dispersed workforce to sit out the pandemic and carry on, raising even more questions about our total reliance on energy - without electricity, the human race would be stopped in its tracks. The price of this endeavour is high and this is where Schneider Electric is positioned, acknowledging that the world cannot operate without electricity, but innovating to bring better efficiencies that could mean we live in harmony with our planet.

COLLEEN MCKNIGHT

VICE PRESIDENT OF HR UK&I - SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC

INTERVIEWED BY JASON SPILLER & PHOTOGRAPHED BY STUART THOMAS

Colleen, tell us about your early life and how you found the path to a career in HR. Well today, I'd like to think that my colleagues would describe me as driven, strategic and action-oriented. But it wasn't always like that and during my twenties, I moved from job to job every couple of years, without much of a career plan. Then it came to a point when working as an office manager, in a small privately-owned research consultancy, I decided I needed to figure out what I wanted to do long-term, what I was passionate about and what would keep me engaged. So I literally wrote a list of what I most liked and disliked about my current role, what I thought I was good and not so good at and I worked out that it was the people aspects that I was really passionate about and energised me. I carried out further research and decided that the best thing for me would be to go back to education and gain some business school qualifications, to set myself up for a career in HR. I really wasn't relishing the prospect of studying again - I'm not a natural studier - so I dipped my toe in tentatively, starting with a foundation course, supported by my employer, which I was extremely grateful for. To my surprise, I exceeded my expectations, gaining top marks and then decided that perhaps I could go on to complete the two-year CIPD qualification. I found the subject matter fascinating and I was particularly interested in the dynamic of the employer/employee relationship. After fulfilling my promise to the firm of staying a year after I finished my studies, new opportunities began to present themselves and I was thrilled to be accepted in a more prominent role, at an American IT consultancy. However, it was during the dot.com boom when company mergers were as frequent as they were unexpected and just as I was settling in, my role disappeared, literally overnight, due to an M&A. It was a shock, but also a valuable lesson for any HR person, being on the other side of a redundancy situation and understanding first-hand the impact of it. Like anyone, I had bills to pay, so I had to move quickly and I decided the quickest way back to work was to temp and found myself standing in

Canary Wharf, craning my neck skyward at the enormous Morgan Stanley building.

Starting at Morgan Stanley in a temporary admin role in the Chairman's office, I took every opportunity that came my way, until the COO suggested that it was time for me to have a permanent role. I was handed a fantastic opportunity, the much-coveted "blank sheet of paper", to build an early talent programme, to create the leaders of the future. I remember asking about my budget and was told to spend whatever I needed to, so we set about building a small team of brilliant people and worked hard on the programme design, with the emphasis on it being compelling, inclusive, and fun. If I can claim any legacy, we created a programme built around the "Life of a Trade", which actually became a blueprint for the organisation worldwide, supplying and supporting graduates through their intensive entrance into the banking world. That team is still one of the best I've ever worked with and I'm immensely proud of what we managed to achieve together. I couldn't have hoped for a better experience, but it was tough too, as expectations were very high and you were only as good as your last project. I witnessed the value of investing in people and the importance of genuinely diverse teams.

One of my passions in life is horses and I remember having a conversation with my mum, when I was a teenager, about what I wanted to do for a job and I said, with passion and conviction: "I want to work with horses". Instantly, my mum retorted, "that's not a job… it's a hobby!" University certainly hadn't been an option for me, but during my time at Morgan Stanley, listening to all the stories from the new graduates about their gap years, I felt that perhaps I'd missed out and maybe I should think about doing some travelling myself. This also coincided with a dear friend who has passed, who was one of my first friends at Morgan Stanley. I remember thinking if I died tomorrow, would I be happy with my lot? The answer was clearly no! So you

could say the grads and my friend inspired me to go out and see a bit of the world. I'd put some money aside and I thought that if I didn't act now, I never would. So I set out to Botswana, to do a horseback safari in the Okavango Delta. I then went to Montana and learned to be a cowgirl and that led to working with horses in Andalusia… there was definitely a horse theme! During my final week in Andalusia, I met some women who introduced me to a ranch owner in California and this led me to work on a ranch with 60 horses and on Monday mornings, I still sometimes wish I was riding on Ten Mile Beach in Fort Bragg, with not a soul around.

While the whole experience was incredible, I started thinking about my professional career again and how I had missed the intellectual challenge of my corporate life. So, I decided to try and combine the two, whereby the winter months, I would work in banks in London and the summers would be spent in California, working on the ranch. Sadly, on one of my trips back for the winter, my younger brother passed away. We were very close and as both my parents were long gone, I felt that I really needed to be around people who knew me and who could support me and I decided not to go back to California. At the time, I was working on various HR projects on an interim basis in the Investment Banking/Financial Services space, but the accrual of my skillset in HR had built up and I confidently applied for a permanent senior HR role and was successful in becoming HR Director of a technology company, which had just acquired an electronic trading company and were looking to take it global.

It must have been a tough decision to give up on your passion. I think my childhood - which had been challenging at times - made me realise I wanted something different from my parents' lives. My career up to that point had also taught me how quickly things can change. The moment I became an HR Director was a pivotal point of my life. I recalled thinking back

to a conversation I'd had in a bar years earlier, with my fellow CIPD students, talking about whether we'd ever 'make it' as HR Directors? Also, I had come to a point where I realised it wasn't really about me anymore, it was about my teams and how I could develop them. When you become a leader, your focus transitions away from personal ambition alone and focuses on lifting others up and for me, it brought greater satisfaction to see people develop. It's that point where the individual becomes a team player.

best of worlds, you understand the organisation, agree on the objectives and plan the schedule. That's all well and good in an environment that doesn't change, but Schneider has grown quickly through strategic acquisitions made across the globe and when that happens, you have to remain agile and move rapidly in HR, to ensure the right, mainstream company culture propagates. In the UK and Ireland, we're just over 4,000 people across 39 various sites, including ten manufacturing and two

THE PEOPLE-FIRST MINDSET NEEDS A CAVEAT - UNLESS A BUSINESS HAS STRONG FOUNDATIONS AND HEALTHY COMMERCIAL IMPERATIVES, JOBS WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE. HR DOES NOT DRIVE THE COMMERCIAL AGENDA, IT FACILITATES, ENABLES AND SUPPORTS IT

Tell us about your move to Schneider Electric. After a full-on, hectic five years at Colt Technology Services/Marketprizm, one of the female executives I had supported had become CEO of Schneider Electric UK&I. We'd kept in touch and then, one day out of the blue, she called me. I was open to working with her again, we made a great team, so I went to meet some of the Executive team and was impressed. I connected with their values and what they were trying to do around sustainability and their people story and vision. Schneider's business and every service we provide, is focused on sustainability, providing safe, reliable access to energy, saving energy, transforming, electrifying and decarbonising energy. It is multifaceted, covering engineering, manufacturing, digitisation and process automation. What they were trying to do was impressive, new to me and I was interested in finding out how I could help. Schneider uses its own technology to set the example on reaching Net Zero targets and all 17 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. It has long been a champion of a more fair and equal society seeing access to energy and a better life as a basic human right and it has been involved in global initiatives like HeForShe, since its beginning. At first, I was a bit daunted by its size; 137,000 people - twice the headcount of Morgan Stanley - in over 100 countries. I had never had the ambition to join such a vast organisation, but it was really compelling and I was curious to see what I could achieve.

I'm always fascinated by HR on a vast scale. How do you set out your stall and roll out initiatives in a company of this size? In the

logistics sites. We are a highly matrixed organisation with some UK-and-Ireland-based people reporting to people in other territories across the globe, so to some degree, there are micro-cultures united by similar values, mission and vision. While diversity in all its forms is important, it must be empowered and routed through effective company structures and clear reporting lines. We spend a lot of time aligning the organisation and understanding the direction we are heading in. The aim is to have an umbrella strategy and shared values, that connect everything together, but also allow for a workable level of autonomy and independence. Trying to apply a universal approach is a big mistake in such a complex organisation as ours. Like most companies, we've adapted to new ways of working, accelerated by the pandemic. I believe this has put a light on the importance of treating people fairly and equally and that everyone should be an individual and have the flexibility to discuss what works best in each situation.

The pandemic had certainly raised many issues, the people-first mantra being one of many. Yes, but the people-first mindset needs a caveat, we must accept that unless a business has strong foundations and healthy commercial imperatives, jobs will not be available. HR does not drive the commercial agenda, it facilitates, enables and supports it and everything we discuss, plan and implement is based on supporting and adding value and, importantly, making it more efficient and capable of optimising the commercial opportunities, both in terms of cost and resource. However, there is also

a lot of ambiguity that must be overcome in HR. We are problem solvers. As we support through the pandemic and look beyond, the workplace landscape has changed indefinitely. It will redefine the relationship with work which will require some redefinition from HR. Remote working has raised employee autonomy, self-responsibility and the necessity for mutual trust and the mindset of presenteeism doesn't exist anymore. Then there is the whole digitalisation story - accelerated by the pandemic - we see that digital redefines what we do and how we do it. This is a significant transition that we need to be fully prepared for.

There are fundamental questions to answer, but it must be an exciting time to be involved in HR, as you could almost tear up the rule book and start again. Yes, there are big changes and fundamental questions to both ask and find answers to; what does work and the workplace itself represent? What is the psychological and physical contract as we go forward? Only time will tell how it will all play out. If in 2019, my boss had said, "Right, Colleen, we need to move three thousand people to work from home next week," I would have thought he'd lost his mind! But out of this dreadful time, we have an opportunity that must not be squandered, to look at the fundamentals of work and re-evaluate what is possible and come out stronger. It is amazing what you can achieve when you all pull in the same direction and yes, we did transition three thousand people to work from home in a week. The new mantra, "really listening to your employees", is mind-boggling… as if this is a new thing? I think the emphasis is on the "really" and locks into that notable change in leadership values and skills. The draconian, command-and-control leadership of yore is rapidly being replaced. Leaders are no longer afraid to show that they need help and don't have all the answers, but together "we" can find them. That's where the most remarkable change lies and it will definitely resonate in this next complex transitionary stage of events in the pandemic. We need to understand that we will never go back to how it was before, there's no point deluding ourselves on that. In terms of a general practical and sustainable working framework, the hybrid model makes sense, but such change cannot be left to its own devices. There will be a need for a change in mindsets, supporting policies and coordinated training. Greater employee autonomy and trust are essential and we will be recruiting for different skills and capabilities with resilience and self-motivation high on the agenda. We support equality and inclusion because diversity of thought is an essential requirement for the unpredictable road ahead. As with everything,

it's easier said than done. In our business, we have so many different markets and countless types of jobs. Inevitably some of our employees simply cannot work from home in the same way as some of their colleagues. They must be accommodated in an agile framework that makes sense for their type of work to ensure that everyone is treated equally. What is so pivotal to success is the relationship between employees and managers and people and their colleagues. As the workplace flattens, silos are filled in and people are increasingly working across the borders and boundaries that once compartmentalised organisations. Knowledge-share, resilience and agility will be the main drivers now, as we are moving to a more deliverables-performance type model.

I would say don't underestimate people… we have seen many do some incredible things during this time. If anything, values, empathy and the mindset for compassion have shone through, meaning that the importance of people and HR has ascended. The pandemic challenges have not dimmed our commitment to ensuring our organisation is a diverse, inclusive, and supportive place to work. We have continued to drive forward with initiatives to attract and recruit talent from a diverse range of backgrounds. We have invested in early-stage career recruitment and looked to hire from places we may not have looked before. We have assessed candidates for their potential - not just their existing skills - and hired more females than males to diversify our

THE NEW MANTRA, "REALLY LISTENING TO YOUR EMPLOYEES", IS MIND-BOGGLING… AS IF THIS IS A NEW THING? I THINK THE EMPHASIS IS ON THE "REALLY" AND LOCKS INTO THAT NOTABLE CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP VALUES AND SKILLS

What do you think you've learned from this challenging and testing time, and are you optimistic for the future? For myself and my HR team, it has been a gruelling year. For a huge part of last year, we were working around the clock, six, sometimes seven days a week and, for a time, it was only COVID-related activity. I'm personally a "glass half full" person, so yes, I'm always optimistic for the future and what it may hold. As a business, we moved at pace to ensure customers' needs were fulfilled and business continuity and flexibility were in place. Especially considering that Schneider's been powering and maintaining the nation's most critical assets 24/7, such as electrical grids, water networks, hospitals, and data centres as the pandemic set in. The KPIs and the targets didn't go away. But the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees was also our number one priority. It became our primary focus at the pandemic's onset in the broadest sense; physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing and, without doubt, this testing time has shone a light on the many different pressures people face in their lives. We must support them if we expect reliable, sustainable performance and retention. As leaders, we need to be mindful of the stress that people are under and not be complacent. Everyone's circumstances are different and we have to think much more on an individual level. Support needs to be available and easy to access and that will require an increase in self-service, but it must be combined with human empathy and understanding. In terms of what has been learned from this time,

workforce. There is an excellent opportunity for this generation and those coming into the world of work, to make radical improvements, to shape the future.

What do you hope to achieve that when you look back at your career, you will be most proud of? As a senior leader from an untypical background, my hope is that there must be a level-playing field for anyone with an ambition that is willing to work hard. It must not matter what their demographic is, what university they may or may not have attended, their colour, their gender or sexuality. It doesn't make sense when organisations still fail to represent the society we live in or their diverse customers. We have a real opportunity in front of us to finally put this right. None of us have a crystal ball, we never saw the pandemic coming and you never know what is around the corner. Still, one thing is certain, if a business continues with a rigid mindset and inflexibility, it will not survive. The significant learning for me is that we have to listen and understand with empathy and pragmatism. To coin that cliché of our time, I think we can build back better. Finally and importantly, I would like to dedicate this interview to my mentor/coach/D+ … Peter Cunningham, whom I met through the CIPD community board almost ten years ago. Without his guidance, honesty, patience and caring, I would not be the leader I hope I am today.

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AUTOMATED FOR THE PEOPLE

ARTICLE BY WAS RAHMAN, ETHICAL AI EXPERT - AI PRESCIENCE

HR has been digitalised in virtually all organisations and like most 21st century business functions, now resides in computer technology and data. The benefits so far have been mostly found in efficiencies or scale, as a lot of digitalised activity is an automated version of tasks that were previously carried out manually. But beyond the rudiments of taking grunt work out of repetitious tasks, sits possibility that could be revolutionary.

Digitalisation for efficiency is often a precursor to more fundamental changes to the nature of the work itself and there are plenty of indications that HR will follow a similar path, with new ways of approaching HR activities being created with technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), social media and even virtual reality. Digitalisation is essentially the use of digital computer technologies to change the way a business function is performed, a deceptively simple description of a term that covers a wide spectrum. At one end are simple tools that allow tasks to be performed faster or more cost-effectively. Electronic employee records and computerised timesheets are examples of this and were the first experience of digitalised HR for many employees and HR professionals. At the other extreme of digitalisation is the creation of new business models and practices, fundamentally different ways of approaching an activity that replace or transform teams and processes. Examples outside HR include; online selling to supplement (and even replace) telephone ordering and using smart meters or customer self-service websites to replace human meter readers visiting homes. ATS and automated CV screening are familiar examples in HR, changing the essence of some recruitment team activities.

A pre-requisite of digitalisation is digitisation - the conversion of information into digital form - so it can be stored and processed electronically. The more information that is available in digital form, the more scope there is to do useful things with it, to improve business. In HR, this was initially about moving information from paper to computer records, but technology advances have taken this far beyond what we might expect to be stored in traditional computer systems, to include, for example, images, speech and fingerprints. Computers can also extract meaning from these in a way that was previously thought to require human intelligence. Coaching, counselling and interviewing may instinctively appear impossible to automate, because they rely on human judgement that seems beyond computers. However, advances in technology, like Natural Language Processing (NLP being a subset of AI) means that human sentiment can now be recognised by computers and represented as digital data. This means business activities that involve understanding emotion can theoretically be supported by computers and potentially automated. It's still early days and computers can't yet replace people in these activities, but digital support is already available for people performing this kind of work.

With this in mind, let us look now at some of the HR functions most affected by digitalisation - in particular what is already realistic today - and where digital technology is taking them. Recruitment is the HR function that is most significantly affected by digitalisation, unrecognisable from the way it operated just a few years ago. The key elements of digitalised recruitment are; open position descriptions, candidate CVs or applications and mechanisms to match and assess. Technology is advancing in each piece significantly, shifting the role of human recruiters. Indeed, in the early days, matching technology was relatively crude, relying on key words or phrases to identify potential matches. Another limitation was a dependency on candidates submitting their details for consideration, so quality and quantity of applicants depended on how well jobs were advertised. HR teams had a new role, reviewing and shortlisting matches submitted by the technology and they also had to learn how to administer the submission of online job postings. There was also a new skill, crafting job posts and candidate guidance, to avoid generating too many unsuitable applications, without excluding suitable candidates. Since then, two of the biggest developments in recruitment technology have been AI to match and assess and the evolution of the Internet to reach candidates. There are others, but these two illustrate how HR activities are being transformed by digitalisation.

AI functionality is now routinely included in recruitment and application tracking systems, allowing sophisticated matching of jobs to applicants. A key development is NLP, which allows relevant details to be extracted from anywhere in a candidate's profile, even if not phrased exactly as in the job description. This is leading to less dependence on how candidate profiles are written or formatted and should hopefully despatch the challenge of writing applications to find a way past a computer. Internet developments mean that candidates with online career histories can be notified automatically of jobs they match and be invited to apply. In many cases, applications and covering

letters are prepared automatically. With these developments, the role of human recruiters has changed again, with less emphasis on writing job descriptions or evaluating candidates and more on managing the technology. Where this goes next isn't clear, but there are clues from outside HR. For example, technology in digital advertising and web design can automatically optimise the language and placement of digital adverts and content, using data like number of clicks and average read time to improve engagement. As a result, the role of copywriting skills in digital advertising and content creation has reduced significantly. This use of technology is not yet commonplace in recruitment, but it illustrates some features digitalised recruitment shares with business activities, which have already been changed significantly by

Is there a place for "star ratings" of candidates, in the same way data providers, like Glassdoor, have already started to show about prospective employers?

digital technology. One early HR example is the use of AI to ensure job postings use inclusive language and another is the sophistication of online marketplaces, that match "buyers" and "sellers" in domains outside HR, such as property, dating and transportation. This is another area where artificial intelligence has changed the emphasis of what people in a process do, for example estate agents. There are, of course, obvious differences between recruitment and such marketplaces, but nevertheless, HR leaders may wish to consider the analogies and implications of how technology has affected comparable "matchmaking" functions in other

sectors. For example, is there a place for "star ratings" of candidates, in the same way data providers, like Glassdoor, have already started to show about prospective employers?

Addressing workplace discrimination and diversity issues is, of course, a business priority that often falls to HR digitalisation and has been a double-edged sword. Ubiquitous HR data makes diversity monitoring possible as never before, along with analysis of symptoms and potential causes. However, artificial intelligence has also been known to introduce inadvertent race or gender |bias into recruitment and digitalised HR brings with it a new source of potential discrimination, known as "data bias". Before digitalised HR, diversity monitoring was often a separate exercise, reliant on tools, such as surveys. Alternatively, it might have been an extra section on paper forms, to be processed separately. Now, every screen that captures employee or applicant data is a potential opportunity to gather anonymised diversity data, with minimal overhead. As this is digital data, it is a trivial technical exercise to extract that diversity information for analysis and reporting. This is captured at the same time as other details, so it is easy to show diversity trends and patterns, including progress or gaps to address. Data bias is the existence of patterns in organisational data that reflect discriminatory behaviour, usually historic. An example often cited is gender skewed, historic employee data, in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as engineering. AI systems are vulnerable to the effects of data bias if they are "trained" on historic data. For example, CV screening systems may use AI to assess candidates for organisational fit, as well as role requirements. The AI infers what makes a good fit by analysing historic employee data, so may come up with discriminatory screening logic, if there is bias in the historic data. Inadvertent discrimination may also arise in AI systems because of poor or careless articulation of business rules. For example, if local education qualifications are treated differently to foreign qualifications in candidate assessment rules, this could become

a proxy for race bias. This kind of skew - in AI logic rather than data - is known as "algorithm bias". Both data and algorithm bias are addressed in the same way - by using statistical techniques to identify and remove bias during development of AI systems. Data scientists and engineers are trained in these techniques, but may not have as strong an appreciation of the importance of removing bias or the business knowledge to identify subtle or indirect bias factors. HR leaders can help prevent data and algorithm bias in HR technology, by ensuring technology teams receive sufficient education on this.

Every screen that captures employee or applicant data is a potential opportunity to gather anonymised diversity data, with minimal overhead. As this is digital data, it is a trivial technical exercise to extract

Moving on to another key HR function, developing employee skills and capabilities. This has been transformed by digital technology, with the widespread use of computer-based education - amplified by the effect of COVID - on classroom training. "MOOCs" (Massive Open Online Courses) allow many people to access training courses simultaneously, relying on relatively simple technology such as; digital distribution of lecture videos and online submission of tests. More advanced technology is used to automatically grade assignments and to provide student support through digital channels such as, chatrooms and social media groups. There is also increasing

use of digital applications to map employee career paths to capability needs and learning goals and automatically generate basic personal development plans. Technology used in education and other sectors, may offer more to HR L&D in the future. For example, AI can be used to deliver more interactive and personalised classes, including multiple paths through a syllabus. Customer service technology such as chatbots and customer self-serve portals can be repurposed for the digital classroom, to provide different forms of teaching support, some of which could be fully or partially automated. However, the business case for such investments may be less compelling than other forms of HR digitalisation, because the urgency of any problem this kind of technology could solve, is less apparent than other HR priorities. However, another aspect of L&D that relates to digitalised HR is the need to prepare workforces for new forms of work that digitalisation of business brings. This applies as much to new skills needed by HR teams as any other set of employees. For example, relatively advanced digital literacy is now a core competence in a field which used to be considered - at least from the outside - mainly about people skills. So, L&D programmes for those working in digitalised HR include previously unheard-of elements, such as technology management. In this regard, HR is just another function and the digitalisation of business generally is affecting skills requirements across organisations. In other words, the most significant impact of digitalised HR on L&D is in the content and aims of programmes that build new skills, rather than the effect of technology on the L&D function.

Moving on to communication, ensuring employees receive relevant information about their organisation and have appropriate ways to engage with it is, of course, key. Traditionally, this has involved mechanisms such as; newsletters, town halls, employee portals and communication cascades. But with mobile phones ubiquitous, HR digitalisation is about shifting employee communications towards more appropriate ways of sharing information with employees, so that communication

is effective in today's "always-on" environment. This of course means digital channels such as WhatsApp groups and Twitter feeds. However, in a world suffering from information overload, it's also about applying lessons from areas such as, sales and marketing, to deliver targeted, personalised HR content that employees will find relevant.

This is not just about technology, it's about understanding how employees prefer to receive information and engage in discussion and the implications of trying to accommodate those preferences for employee communication. Another effect of digitalised HR on employee communications is making information such as, policies, procedures and staff directories available online, usually through an employee portal. However, information can be difficult to find easily from such portals and they often compare poorly to more modern information retrieval systems. Notably, employee portals are starting to include intelligent search technology to generate more useful results and allow the use of natural language to describe what is required. To conclude, this article has looked at just four of the most useful illustrations of what digitalised HR means in practice and the kind of changes to expect it to lead to. There are many other examples of how it is changing the nature of the HR function, often by adopting the experience of other business functions and industries. This illustrates how AI is edging its way into day-to-day business and is well on the way to becoming an integral part of the HR function. ●

Was Rahman is the author of *AI and Machine Learning* - Published by Sage Publications

FOR FURTHER INFO
WWW.WASRAHMAN.COM

APPRENTICES & GRADUATES

FIELD OF DREAMS NOT CHITTY-CHITTY BANG BANG

With 750,000 young people estimated to be out of work and a need for three million skilled people in the next five years in the tech sector alone, now is the time to look at the role of apprenticeships and the Government's intensive bootcamp training schemes, with the dual purpose of protecting this generation against long-term unemployment and to close the growing skills gap.

ARTICLE BY ANDREW ERWICH, HEAD OF APPRENTICESHIP SOLUTIONS - QA LTD

Acting now to develop flexible, employer-led apprenticeship programmes is critical to reversing youth unemployment. The pandemic forced many organisations to restructure and redundancies reached a record high in the three months leading to November 2020, as unemployment increased to five percent[1]. Sadly, under-25s have been particularly badly hit, with the Resolution Foundation estimating that three quarters of a million of 18-24-year olds, were out of work in September 2020[2]. This level of disruption comes at a time of unprecedented change in the skills required in the workforce. The Open University expects 12 million workers to be affected by emerging technologies in the next five years[3], while Microsoft anticipates the need for three million

more skilled people in the same period[4]. So now is the time for organisations to instigate change, as here is an opportunity to recruit and transition displaced young workers, based on potential. Using apprenticeships and other more intensive vocational training programmes, we can build the talent required and avoid a generation lost to long-term unemployment.

The Apprenticeship Levy was designed to encourage investment in training and skills, which has achieved some pockets of success. However, a closer look at the data reveals that new starts were down 4.7 percent in the first quarter of the 2019/20 academic year and there is also the question of just who is benefiting from the Levy? Apprenticeship starts by over-25s have increased by 44.8 percent

since 2017/18, while starts by those under 19, have fallen by 12.8 percent[5]. At a national level, the Levy has not driven the anticipated change in behaviour. Despite Government and employers working hard to extoll the value of apprenticeships, awareness among schools, students and parents of the opportunities is still low. Government-sponsored campaigns have focused on encouraging organisations to take on apprentices, leaving providers to explain the mechanics of how programmes should be put in place. Clearly, education is required, alongside incentivisation, to create a more positive impact. Similarly, there is still inertia among some employers, with a tendency to stick to traditional recruitment approaches. For HR - or perhaps the graduate programme

manager, tasked with setting up an apprenticeship programme - this is understandable. HR is already bearing the burden of safeguarding employee wellbeing during lockdown, as well as sourcing the digital skills required for organisations to thrive post-COVID. All too often, the focus for implementation is cost-saving, with levy utilisation being the primary objective and talent development coming second. Collectively, we need to shift the focus to recruiting on more diverse pipelines and maximising use of programmes, including non-traditional higher education sources, taking into account part-time students, as well as those in apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships.

Three years ago, the view of apprenticeships may still have been tainted by poor experiences but today's programmes provide a very different picture for both employers and young people. As well as introducing a culture of learning, apprenticeships are also proven to improve retention rates. The National Apprenticeship Service[6] reports that 69 percent of companies investing in apprentices see a significant increase in staff retention and 73 percent experience improved staff morale. Apprenticeships are also more flexible and, therefore, easier to incorporate into today's talent building strategies. For example, programmes can now start at almost any time of the year enabling apprenticeships to be more easily integrated into hiring activity. Equally, training methodologies have changed with the restrictions on classroom delivery - leading to an industrywide increase - in quality and quantity - of digital content and removing the need for all off-the-job training to be completed in a classroom. As a result, we are beginning to see a change in attitude whereby, 20 percent off-the-job-training is no longer viewed as a burden, but more a positive investment and commitment from employer to employee. The result is a pragmatic, employer-led skills programme, ensuring positive ROI in relation to salary costs, productivity, efficiency and creativity. Once organisations make the commitment to 'recruit to train', it also enables the necessary shift in focus to the broader aspiration of creating a learning culture. While apprenticeships deliver cost-effective and capable employees who add value from day one, they are still reliant on an individual being in an appropriate job role and having a clear understanding of the subject matter needed to succeed. There are, however, occasions when a programme of work needs to happen faster and this is where digital bootcamps come in.

The Government has recognised the power of shorter, more intensive training courses. Indeed, the 2020 *Autumn Spending Review* included a £138m commitment to fund in-demand, technical courses for adults and to expand the employer-led bootcamp training model. This announcement followed a number of pilot bootcamps that ran across the country where providers worked with local agencies and employers, to develop much-needed digital talent and provide long-term careers for

> JUST WHO IS BENEFITING FROM THE LEVY? APPRENTICESHIP STARTS BY OVER-25S HAVE INCREASED BY 44.8 PERCENT SINCE 2017/18, WHILE STARTS BY THOSE UNDER 19, HAVE FALLEN BY 12.8 PERCENT

disadvantaged individuals struggling to access employment. The key here is to identify candidates based on underlying aptitude and attitude, rather than formal qualifications and experience, in order to develop latent talent and unlock ambition. One way of achieving this is to eliminate traditional criteria from the recruitment process. For example, the act of removing STEM degrees - or even Maths and Science A Levels, as a requirement for tech programmes - creates a far wider pool of applicants.

To avoid the risk of a generation lost to long-term unemployment, we must all commit to new ways of building the future workforce and create a national culture of learning. There are a number of ways that HR Directors can lead this change. Firstly, look at more creative ways of resourcing, whereby instead of employing a single experienced and expensive resource, use structured teams to bring in early careers talent, to work alongside experienced staff. This frees up experts to innovate and drives forward essential digital transformation programmes. It pays too to evaluate potential by testing for aptitude, not categorising based on their current skills. For some parts of the organisation, an 18-month apprenticeship may not deliver full realisation of the desired skills immediately, but critical needs can often be addressed in the early stages of the programme and apprenticeships can always be 'enhanced' with learning interventions, around specific tools, technologies or ways of working. Often, conventions need to be challenged - for example, don't let hiring managers take the easy route of "must be a grad". So introduce a funded-first approach, consider an intensive bootcamp approach and, only when all these routes have been exhausted, let the hiring manager take the traditional recruitment approach. It's also worth looking at transferring unused funds, to allow other employers to take on apprentices. Thought about carefully, this can be used to improve the quality of talent in the communities surrounding existing offices, or across a partner ecosystem. As employers, we cannot lose sight of our responsibility to level up opportunities for the already disadvantaged individuals that COVID-19 has displaced. We must all work hard to attract a more diverse range of candidates and apprenticeships can support this, but a programme will not create diversity on its own, a commitment to train and develop people will. ●

1. ONS, 2020
2. Resolution Foundation, Jobs, Jobs, Jobs, October 2020
3. The Open University, Bridging the Digital Divide, June 2019
4. Kristel to add Microsoft and Goldsmiths research reference
5. Department for Education, Apprenticeships and Trainees, January 2020
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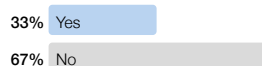www.linkedin.com/company/thehrdirector

BUILD IT AND THEY MIGHT NOT TURN UP

The Skills for Jobs white paper published in January evidenced government intent to close the gap between vocational and university education. It outlines plans to give employers a more central role in designing the curriculum, supported by the introduction of newly-approved vocational qualifications with a government-backed brand and quality mark. Now it is time for businesses to play their part.

ARTICLE BY RACHEL CREDIDIO, GROUP PEOPLE AND TRANSFORMATION DIRECTOR - ASTER GROUP UK

The introduction of 'degree apprenticeships' under David Cameron had gone some way in helping to change public perception of vocational training. However there still remains an imbalance in both perception and the opportunities presented to those with a degree and those with vocational qualifications. Businesses that employ people in trade roles such as, builders or engineers, should already appreciate the value apprenticeships have in developing vocational skills. But actually, the model has far wider applications. Apprenticeships are a great way of bringing people into jobs that have usually been associated with university education, for example; HR, finance and marketing - and businesses should consider using them to fill these types of positions, rather than just looking for people who have a degree. By restricting access to such roles, businesses narrow the talent pool that they are selecting from and in industries where groups are vastly underrepresented, as women are in construction and tech for example, this only makes the problem worse.

Vocational training programmes don't only provide business with enthusiastic, dedicated employees, but also gives them an opportunity to shape their talent pipeline for the future. Indeed, a good apprenticeship scheme, that caters for a wide range of job roles, also enables businesses to be more proactive in how they recruit new talent. They are an opportunity for businesses to reach out to parts of the community that don't naturally gravitate towards them. For example, construction and engineering businesses will know they have a real challenge with bringing women interested in their sectors and apprenticeships can help with this. Encouragingly, the Skills for Jobs white paper has helped to level the playing field even further and keep things moving in the right direction, but it is now down to the business community to drive the effectiveness of the policies it presents. The chance of a closer partnership between

> A 'BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME' ATTITUDE ISN'T ENOUGH ANYMORE. INSTEAD, MORE PROACTIVITY IS NEEDED, IN ORDER TO FIND THE NEXT GENERATION OF BUILDERS, ELECTRICIANS, AND ENGINEERS

business and education offered by this white paper could help to equip young people with the skills the UK needs, while providing a wider range of inspiring career options for those who have faced significant disruption to their education, as a result of the pandemic. It's not just about providing pathways for those who have just left education at 16, but for the country's workforce as a whole. This in-turn will bolster the pipeline of talent in industries like, construction and engineering, where a lack of skills threatens those sectors' viability.

Everyone who leaves education at age 16 should have access to necessary skills training to ensure they are work ready. But vocational and educational qualifications will never be viewed equally unless employers create an environment where that can happen. A 'build it and they will come' attitude isn't enough anymore. Instead, more proactivity is needed, in order to find the next generation of builders, electricians and engineers. Companies need to engage with prospective job candidates from a variety of backgrounds and understand what they need from their business - and what their business needs from them, creating the right training courses that will provide workers with the skills required to flourish in their respective industries.

There is no reality where the education system alone will turn out enough ready-to-go workers for industries like construction and engineering. Companies in these sectors must be willing to take on ambitious young workers or retrain people who have lost jobs because of the pandemic. Without a willingness to retrain the workforce and support individual development, there is little chance that we will be able to 'build back better', as Mr Williamson declared we should. With unemployment levels rising steadily, and the furlough scheme which ran out in March, this could be the turning point the country's workforce needs. We need to ensure the opportunity is seized with both hands. ●

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EDUCATION IS LIFE ITSELF

Even before the pandemic threatened a crisis of student and teacher burnout and learning disruption, our education models were under pressure and scrutiny. But as we teeter on the brink of a global educational and jobs crisis, employers and educational institutions must come together, to find long-term solutions to resolve existing gaps and prevent new ones from forming. Clearly, there needs to be a rethink to meet future needs and demands.

ARTICLE BY DR ALEX GAPUD, CONSULTANT - SCARLETTABBOTT

Diverse learning styles aren't intrinsically supported by the UK's educational system with its largely linear and prescriptive pathway. This leads to risks of alienating swathes of talented young people, that fail to meet the prescriptive criteria that educational standardisation metes out. As funding and budgets dwindle and the focus on academia and grading continues to dwarf the vital need for real-life experience, the gap between education and the world of work widens, leaving young people ill-prepared and facing a culture shock as they enter employment. Put simply, as educational institutions don't prioritise or value the wider skill sets employers desire, they aren't teaching them. Universities, charging upwards of £9,000 in fees, market the experience as a 'personal investment'. But the bottom line is, training and education have become commodities instead of a necessity for individual fulfilment and shared prosperity.

Since Covid has upended so many of our institutions' normal operations and patterns, we have an opportunity to rethink training and education in the UK and place focus where it's sorely needed, on humans. Now is a crucial time for both educators and employers to consider how they can best prepare learners for a new world of work. Both parties must come together to imagine what a progressive and productive future really looks like. Not everyone needs a university degree and, indeed, university isn't the best option for everyone - and policy-makers have begun to recognise this. More money has rightly been diverted to further education colleges and apprenticeships, but although this has widened access to training, the educational model used by these institutions faces the same fundamental flaw that leaves young people unprepared for the workplace. Both models are too focused and too narrow on skills training. They operate by assessing a candidate's competence against a specific skillset - whether it's sociology or plumbing - rather than holistically preparing them for the world of work, with a blend of hard and soft skills. Whether it's at university or an apprenticeship, none of the current regimes teaches how to adapt, or how to deal with customers, clients and colleagues. Those are essential soft skills that employees desperately need and that employers value, but are relegated as extracurriculars, rather

than intentionally developing them in the core curriculum.

That's the real nature of the problem, the root challenge is not actually a 'skills' gap, but a 'value' gap. Employers are looking for holistically capable candidates, while our education system is churning out leavers, apprentices and graduates, who are often too one-dimensional to fulfil employers' well-rounded needs. In practice, the two parties have different aims and interests and therefore different value priorities. Higher education often tends to reproduce itself and graduates have similar knowledge and skills to their lecturers, rather than a wide range of skills for the workplace. Apprenticeships function similarly, that despite Government intervention, it seems developing students fit for the complexities of the workplace is not a top priority. So, who exactly is looking out for young people's best interests? Perhaps now is a good moment to ask; "what are our educational and training institutions actually for? Going back to the origins of universities, their initial aim was not to give someone

in its wake is the realisation that institutions often choose to replicate and sustain their own existence, rather than cooperating to prepare people for different paths. Investment often goes into the most promising students for academic careers and postgraduate degrees and this focus of attention all too often comes at the expense of supporting other students to develop confidence and skills, or more precisely, helping them to pursue careers beyond the academy. Indeed, exam-marking and degree classifications assess how well a student knows a particular concept, theory or subject, but fundamentally, that leaves important personal and workplace skills such as; teamwork, communication and time management, by the wayside. Indeed, high-profile suicide cases have cited neglect around the distress caused by presenting in front of peers, which prevents academics from factoring in these soft skills for more than ten percent of a student's mark in a module. Many academics choose not to mark these at all, leaving students to seek extracurriculars or additional support to gain the skills development they actually need.

educational and training curriculum would create its own problems. Rather, we need to incorporate soft skills training as an essential part of the core curriculum, in addition to the subject or vocational knowledge that universities, colleges and apprenticeships provide.

Clearly, the gap between education and the world of work needs to be bridged. Traditionally, Internships have been marketed as an attempt to fill that role, but they have often left young people exposed and exploited. In these models, young people's wellbeing and development is often sacrificed for cheap or free labour. This is a diversity and inclusion issue - at all levels and fundamentally, this needs to be recognised as such. Part of the problem starts with a lack of diversity of thought and experience, in the places where our educational models are formulated in the first place. Of course, as it stands, an overwhelming amount of our government and parliamentarians are university educated, specifically with Oxbridge PPEs (Philosophy, Politics and Economics degrees). Equally, academic curricula are set by disproportionately white, middle-to-upper class scholars, all of whom have postgraduate qualifications and various degrees of experience in the workplace. Although these groups have the best intentions, a lack of diversity in thought, policy-making and curriculum design is based on a range of assumptions that don't necessarily serve young people, especially those in communities that the educational and training system is already failing. The end result are structures that reproduce exclusion and marginalisation, rather than inclusion and development and surely this has to change. By engaging in honest, collaborative dialogue - and including and representing people who historically haven't been at the table for these conversations - we can more readily understand what young people need and create a better world of work for all. ●

> THE ROOT CHALLENGE IS NOT ACTUALLY A 'SKILLS' GAP, BUT A 'VALUE' GAP. EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR HOLISTICALLY CAPABLE CANDIDATES, WHILE OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM IS CHURNING OUT LEAVERS WHO ARE OFTEN TOO ONE-DIMENSIONAL TO FULFIL EMPLOYERS' WELL-ROUNDED NEEDS

a specific set of knowledge and skills to land them in a well-paid job. Nor was it about the development and furthering of knowledge alone. Rather, it was that the ancient higher faculties of theology, law and medicine sought to cultivate a certain kind of person fit for these roles. So, in essence, that is less about a narrow set of skills and knowledge, but rather, the making of a whole person. At its heart, it points to a different, human-centric model of education that reflected the needs of those prestigious vocations - and that still reflects the needs of our modern workplace.

This begs the question, are institutional priorities just too narrowly focused? It seems that, unfortunately, we've shifted away from this human-centric model and trailing along

So how should we be preparing young people for the future, particularly in these challenging and changeable times? What is very clear is that educational institutions and employers need to put the holistic development of young people at the heart of their agenda. That means giving students both the soft, general and the hard, specific skills they need to thrive and understanding what they need from us. Ultimately, our educational and training institutions must broaden their focus to develop rounded people, so they are in the very best position to join the world of work and have a fulfilling career. We need to provide better solutions and acknowledge our current training and educational models are flawed in their narrow scope. Going to the extreme of letting employers design

THIS IS NOT ROCKET SCIENCE, IT'S SOCIAL SCIENCE

For a decade, there has been a lot of rhetoric and hyperbole from Westminster, surrounding apprenticeship policy, but very little real progress. So it was somewhat expected that the Government's recent skills white paper, compiled to "put rocket boosters under our recovery" and enable us to "build back better" after the pandemic, could well fall short of its intended target.

ARTICLE BY TRISTRAM HOOLEY, CHIEF RESEARCH OFFICER - INSTITUTE OF STUDENT EMPLOYERS

The new white paper, entitled *Skills for Jobs* is supposed to offer a paradigm shift, rebalancing the education system away from higher education and towards vocational education and apprenticeships. The promise is to put business at the heart of the education system and to ensure that the country has the skills it needs for post-COVID reconstruction and post-Brexit global competitiveness. Businesses could be forgiven for thinking that they have heard a lot of this before - it is hardly revolutionary for incumbent cabinet ministers to say that they are going to sort out the skills system and do more to reinvigorate apprenticeships. In reality though, the new white paper contains relatively few promises on apprenticeships and nothing that is likely to give them the much-needed boost required in consideration of the dual challenges of the pandemic and Brexit.

Ever since Tony Blair stated that 'education, education, education' was at the heart of his government's policy, there has been a debate about the future direction of the education system. On one side, there are those who favour driving up the number of people going into conventional higher education, but on the other are those who argue that we don't need everyone to go to university and that what we actually need more opportunities for people to earn while they learn and to develop skills that are closely aligned with those that businesses need. Except that this debate has been conclusively won already… at least on paper. Apart from the most ardent members of the university-or-nothing lobby, pretty much everyone - including all the main parties - agree that vocational education and apprenticeships are a good thing and need to grow in number and esteem. The problem has always been trying to make this happen.

It would be impossible to list all the reports, speeches and policies that have tried to drive apprenticeships forward over the last few years and yet the number of apprentices has been steadily falling. What is more,

> ONE OF THE MOST IRONIC THINGS IS THAT, THE MOST SUBSTANTIAL POLICY INTRODUCED BY GOVERNMENT IN RECENT YEARS TO ENGAGE BUSINESSES WITH APPRENTICESHIPS - NAMELY, THE LEVY - RESULTED IN THE SHARPEST DECLINE OF ALL

while the popular understanding of apprentices is school leavers, most are much older, with many already existing employees within organisations pursuing an apprenticeship. None of this was really what the politicians planned or wanted. One of the most ironic things is that, the most substantial policy introduced in recent years to engage businesses with apprenticeships - namely, the levy - resulted in the sharpest decline of all. This is not to say that governments shouldn't try and support the growth of apprenticeships, but just to point out that when it does so without consulting business, or thinking about the choices of young people, sometimes things can go badly wrong. There are many examples of excellent programmes and hugely successful apprentices, but the current picture is a challenging one.

If Government is going to drive engagement with apprenticeships and use them to drive economic recovery, it is going to have to think bigger and think about the wider picture. For example, cutting national insurance contributions for new hires who are under 24 to drive the youth labour market, plus there is also a need to provide some wage subsidies, perhaps by Government covering the costs of the 20 percent off-the-job time that organisations have to agree to for all apprentices they employ. They should also increase the flexibility that employers have to spend the apprenticeship levy and extend the 'expiry date' on apprenticeship levy money, to allow employers more time. Such incentives would help to drive employer hiring and increase the demand for apprentices during challenging times. This then needs to be matched with initiatives, to increase the supply of apprentices - running information campaigns, making applying for apprenticeships easier and re-invigorating career guidance for young people - through the injection of new funding. Ultimately, young people must choose to do apprenticeships and, in order to do this, they need to be much more informed. ●

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MACMILLAN AT WORK

Helping people with cancer back to work

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

Reasonable adjustments

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

Keep the conversation going

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

Support for employers

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

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

Sign up at **macmillan.org.uk/atwork**
Email us at **workandcancer@macmillan.org.uk**
Or call us on **020 7840 4725**

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

MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT
RIGHT THERE WITH YOU

GAPS, BRIDGES & LEVEL PLAYING FIELDS

It's no surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted both the ability of graduates to find jobs and employers to recruit graduate employees. Budgets are tight, internship opportunities are limited, face-to-face career fairs are cancelled and the job market has become increasingly challenging.

ARTICLE BY
DAVID SHULL
UK COUNTRY FOUNDER
& HEAD OF OPERATIONS
HANDSHAKE

Graduates are the entrepreneurs of the future and by studying through a pandemic, this generation is uniquely placed to help build an economy that can better withstand events like COVID-19. Indeed, by fuelling the world of work with new ideas and approaches, graduates can be at the forefront of pervasive change. The question is, with many students feeling disillusioned with their career prospects and business facing an uncertain period too, how do we revitalise the graduate recruitment market? Importantly too, how do we harness the best of technology to help graduates, employers and universities forge better and more fruitful connections? To determine the extent of the challenge, we need to look closer at the current university landscape. Where are students now? How have they responded to the challenges of 2020? What are they looking for and what's holding them back?

Unquestionably, it's a changing world for students, but equally concerning, it's also a very uneven playing field, typified by a pervasive digital divide, where not all students and graduates have the same access to opportunities. Disadvantaged students from working class backgrounds, who are less likely to have digital professional networks consisting of family, friends and prestigious schools, are more likely to be left behind. Inevitably, this decreases chances of quality employment and puts a handbrake on social mobility. Meanwhile, traditional professional networking sites are often geared towards people already in careers, leaving students and young graduates feeling disconnected. What's more, the dissemination of opportunities across multiple, fragmented university career management systems inhibits graduate recruitment as a whole. Of course, we know that it's not just students who are affected by the digital divide, indeed digital exclusion is prevalent across the demographic. Even employers themselves lack access to tools like applicant tracking systems, email marketing and video conferencing licenses, which more digitally-capable businesses take for granted. So, across the board, there is significant disadvantage and inequality which will inevitably impact on opportunities.

This lack of access to employees exacerbates a skills crisis which was already prevalent before the pandemic for UK businesses. While the recent turmoil in the jobs market means an increase in the number of candidates - particularly with the challenging environment for recent graduates - employers are still struggling to find candidates with the right long-term skill sets. The Open University's *Business Barometer*, published during the pandemic, found that businesses had spent £6.6bn on plugging skills gaps over a year, with £1.2bn going to temporary staff. These figures bring home the size of the issue and the prizes available to businesses, for broadening out their networks in a way that reduces the current cost of recruitment at scale. The typically large corporate employer spends £2,778 for every student they recruit and has four people on their recruitment team - according to a report from the ISE. While this kind of cost may be manageable for bigger companies, it creates a kind of recruitment "tax" on smaller firms, looking to access top student and graduate talent. All this leads to the huge sums of money being spent to plug gaps in the short term. So, improving access is an absolute imperative, allowing businesses to invest their money in tackling skills gaps long-term, while offering graduates and students entering the job market more of a chance for on-the-job skills development too. So, we know that students, employers and university careers services face immense challenges in the year ahead. To tackle these issues requires an urgent review of existing university systems which, in failing to evolve, have created barriers to students and employers connecting. Indeed,

the facilitation of peer-to-peer connections and improved access for digitally disadvantaged students, all need to be taken into consideration when helping graduates build their career prospects with businesses across sectors.

The reality is, this is by no means a new problem. Back in 2012, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills discussed policy options to support the process. With progress still sluggish, technology providers have more recently stepped in with the aim of making a difference, by democratising access to opportunity and ensuring any student can build a great career no matter who they know, where they live, or what school they attend. The changing role of careers fairs could prove to be a key component too. In-person fairs have almost entirely been replaced in the past year and where these were bound by geographical and budget constraints, virtual fairs have no geographical borders. During this time, many virtual fairs have consisted of text-based chat, virtual booths, PDF brochures and webinars and here is real potential to go even further, to take this unexpected opportunity and run with it, to create a model that uses insight on the students and employers attending to create meaningful connections.

The adoption of networked solutions that allow for organic connections between employer and candidate is also a necessity and technology clearly has a key role in boosting the graduate jobs market, providing for more efficient and effective ways connecting candidates with employers. This has the potential of enabling career services to direct resources towards the areas of work that matter most for students, institutions and the strategic partners they work with. For employers, there is potential for a recruitment process which will inevitably become more digitised and automated. However, very few companies believe that carrying out entirely remote application processes is viable in the long-term and it's likely that a blended approach will evolve. Of course, online recruitment will remain a great solution to speed up processes and improve the talent experience, but meeting candidates in real life will be hard to replace.

When it comes to applications, HR professionals expect graduates to be amongst a bigger wave of applicants in the near future. Finding top talent will therefore require more effort, highlighting the importance of efficient and effective selection processes. One approach gaining traction, in the context of an ever-increasing number of applications, is directly sourcing early talent. This helps businesses to avoid massively scaling up their response systems to cope and by extension, spend the money and hours required to do so. The current alternative is a significant negative impact on graduates in the long-term, if it remains cheaper or easier to plug gaps in skills or staffing with short-term hires. While unemployment is a clear threat, due to the economic turmoil post-COVID-19, the risk of already stubborn rates of underemployment amongst graduates rising,

is another major issue. The most recent ONS figures on graduate underemployment came out well before the pandemic, but even back in 2019, it showed that around a third of all graduates were overqualified for their current role. This figure is likely to increase as soon as the Government furlough scheme ends and the sad reality of further redundancies means increased competition. Furthermore, with businesses in survival mode, the path of least resistance - and lowest short-term cost - will be evermore tempting. This is why it is essential to do everything possible to connect suitable candidates with employers and carefully build on the recent shift to a digital recruitment process and the potential it has to democratise hiring. The alternative is a generation of young people being forced to wait years for a suitable job to come along after leaving university or equally damaging, to accept underemployment.

Clearly, the current uncertain economic climate means that professional connections and career support are more important than ever for students and graduates and the positive business case for hiring from a more diverse base of candidates is hard to ignore too. All in all, the key to tackling social injustice and levelling the playing field is improving social capital, or in other words, helping young people from all backgrounds forge meaningful connections. While the list of issues presented by the pandemic is a long one, it should be a priority for the early careers sector to engage head on with the obstacles faced by recent graduates and students about to enter the jobs market. The scale of these challenges means that technology must be a cornerstone of the university response, or the outcome will be a further widening of the divide between social groups and more young people left behind. Many routes to solving recruitment challenges lie in looking to institutes to adopt new technologies and prioritising building long-term relationships with businesses. But the real beneficiaries will undoubtedly be a dynamic new generation of talent, fuelling business growth and development and contributing to economic recovery after a very challenging period. ●

WITH BUSINESSES IN SURVIVAL MODE, THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE - AND LOWEST SHORT-TERM COST - WILL BE EVERMORE TEMPTING. THIS IS WHY IT IS ESSENTIAL TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO CONNECT SUITABLE CANDIDATES WITH EMPLOYERS

THE END OF JOB SNOBBERY?

THE PANDEMIC SPED UP DECISIONS ON SOME BIG QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SKILLS CRISIS. NO LONGER IS IT JUST ABOUT BUYING IN NEW TALENT OR BORROWING SKILLS FROM FREELANCERS, IT'S ABOUT BUILDING THE TALENT FROM WITHIN THE EXISTING WORKFORCE AND BRIDGING PEOPLE FROM ONE ROLE TO THE NEXT.

ARTICLE BY JASON GREAVES, BRAND LEADER AND OPERATIONS DIRECTOR - MANPOWER UK

"Apprenticeships should be on the agenda for all - regardless of age, career stage, or existing qualifications. If 2020 was the end for job snobbery, let's make the year of the 'new normal' the year for 'new skills'?"

The past year has forced many workers to put traditional career paths to one side and find different sectors to apply their skills. At no time was this more apparent than in the early days of the pandemic, where workers and employers alike quickly reorganised to pause certain areas of the economy and fill key worker roles such as ambulance driving, call centre manning and logistics & warehousing. Almost a full year on, a growing number of skills shortages - many of which existed before the crisis - have been exacerbated due the realities of the pandemic. Digital capabilities have been one noticeable area where employers are vying for skilled talent to enable remote work. In many ways, this has intensified the war on talent for people with in-demand skills, creating new challenges for employers on how to access the people they need. The pandemic sped up the decisions on some of the big questions organisations had been asking themselves: questions around flexible and remote working and the traditional office space. Many are also questioning traditional hiring practices - no longer is it just about buying in new talent or borrowing skills from freelancers, it's about building the talent from within the existing workforce and bridging people from one role to the next.

Even before the health crisis of 2020, apprenticeship schemes were a great way to address skills shortages. These programmes actively look to provide solutions to correct the skills mismatches the UK labour market faces. It would be a mistake to assume that apprenticeship schemes are only available to young people, straight out of school. The reality is, there are apprentices across all ages and many with existing qualifications who are looking to upskill and develop their careers further. Fundamentally, offering an apprenticeship programme within your business is an invaluable way to mould your teams from within, building the rights skills amongst the current employee base and developing people to plug skills gaps. In a fast-changing world of work, these programmes are increasingly being pursued by those currently working. Workers are waking up to the fact that they need to continuously stay relevant in the jobs market. Many large employers will already be contributing to the Apprenticeship Levy, so it's worth putting these funds to proper use.

The pandemic has sadly already had an impact on young people entering the labour market for the first time and unemployment numbers are climbing. It's well-known that it's harder to find employment the longer you are without. To battle a generation of workers becoming disenfranchised with the labour market it's the job of employers to encourage young people to upskill and enter the workforce. The government's Kickstart scheme offers a fantastic opportunity to take 16-24 year olds on universal credit into the working world, and at low-cost to employers. Many young people are 'digital natives,' and have a baseline of tech skills inherently due to their generation which makes them great candidates for upskilling during this crisis as these skills mean they can easily adapt to virtual roles. Knowledge of technology platforms, social media expertise and other digital marketing skills have all be increasingly in-demand over the health crisis, as firms seek to make more of an impact in the virtual working world. This backdrop provides a strong footing to take on young recruits, work with them to develop wider skillsets, and cultivate teams that employers are looking for through tailored development plans.

Upskilling is one of the defining workplace issues of our time, as workers need to ensure they are not just gaining experience but actively building their skillsets. This works best when associates that work on assignments are offered opportunities to upskill on the job, along with a tailored development plan, to build the capabilities they need to reach the next stage in their careers. The momentum for apprenticeships in the past five years has been encouraging, but more action is needed from employers to make progress on overcoming today's skills shortages. Apprenticeships should be higher on the agenda for all workers - regardless of age, career stage, or existing qualifications - and need to be higher on the boardroom agenda also. If 2020 was the end for job snobbery, why not make 2021 - the year of the 'new normal' - the year for new skills? ●

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DIGITALISATION OF HR

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

Unsurprisingly, businesses with digital processes in place at the start of the pandemic, adapted more fluidly. For them, technology kept them afloat, allowing hundreds of thousands of employees to carry on remotely. Many achieved a top-to-bottom overhaul of operations in a matter of weeks, enabling HR the momentum to really solve the digital skills shortfalls, digitalise HR processes and onboard new tech and skills for the changing workplace challenges.

ARTICLE BY ROD FLAVELL, CEO - FDM GROUP

This crisis time has been a catalyst moment and a severe test of future fitness, with technology adoption and capability the big differentiator. Indeed, businesses which were stubborn to change soon realised that its previous laggard approach to digitalisation was now posing an immediate threat to survival and many clammer to implement a cloud-first IT infrastructure to support remote working. This sudden rush to action is reflected in the share prices of IT companies, which surged as demand for services went white hot. The role of people-facing teams during COVID-19 and remote working should not be underestimated, injecting humanity into automated processes and remote operations, sustaining company culture and keeping tabs on the wellbeing, during this bleak period. At its best, a synergy

was founded, whereby the digitalisation enabled HR to reach and manage distributed teams, rollout key technology to enable remote working and support employees with mental and physical health outreach and initiatives. In short, digitalisation has enabled HR to be more human. However, digitalisation has not yet reached panacea status, there are still considerable challenges facing the digital provisions of businesses and a lot more that can be done from a HR perspective. Whilst technology has been the driving force behind the survival of many, there is still a long way to go and many more challenges on the horizon will need to be overcome.

The digital skills gap has been a hot topic for so long, it's taken on almost cliché status. But for business leaders who are having to

dealing with surges in digital demand in data, computing and security, the situation is a very real concern. This issue is likely to be exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, as applications for University have decreased and the vast working population has missed out on vital digital skills training, due to furlough and companies have abandoned digital skills initiatives to focus budget on more immediate pressing issues. Meanwhile, technology marches on and changes constantly, leaving digital skills in the workforce trailing further behind. Meanwhile, remote working has developed new stresses, as the much-desired work-life balance has been buried beneath isolation issues and higher demands from work - along with home-schooling and caregiving for many - taking precedence and piling on even more pressure.

However, despite the disruption, the relentless pace of digitalisation continues unabated and this means, inevitably, that the demand for digital skills just keeps going up. In fact, hard pushed workers are expressing concerns that they need to urgently upskill and reskill, for fear that they will not be able to fulfil their job roles, as digital changes processes.

This has all the hallmarks of a deepening crisis and, as firms recoil from the impacts of the pandemic, even those in lag are waking up to the widening skills gap and its ongoing implications. A recent poll* revealed a substantial two-thirds (65 percent) of British companies, see an oncoming digital skills shortfall as one of the most significant challenges facing their company in 2021 and beyond. The survey also revealed that 77 percent of decision makers, already have plans to increase digital skills training budgets this year, to support continued remote working. Additionally, 70 percent plan to offer existing workers reskilling or refresher tech and IT courses, to help improve digital skills over the course of this year. This is promising news, but these figures do not take into account the aforementioned stresses and logistical issues associated with remote working. This is where HR has to make the difference. By connecting with employees on a regular basis, businesses can be provided with a transparent overview and, for example, can support mental and physical health as we all transition out of the pandemic. With qualitative information provided through digitalisation, HR resources can then be tuned into employee sentiment, gaining a humanistic level feel for the attitudes towards re-training and upskilling and, where required, subcategorising employees with positivity and confidence, into new areas, be that a simple refresh of basic software usage which they have struggled to grasp, or a more advanced course, which could enable them to gain qualifications and new skills, whilst working in their current positions. This tailored approach will be far more welcomed in businesses that decide to continue operations from a home environment for the foreseeable future, as it reminds employees that they are not just statistics on a graph. It also ensures that tech-savvy employees are not left feeling frustrated by a compulsory 'digital skills 101' course, which does little more than waste time, or conversely where less technology able users are left bewildered by an advanced course, when they are struggling to grip the basics.

The continued future digitalisation of HR is key if this level of company connection is to be maintained. Company social platforms have allowed teams to connect in more dynamic ways than the cold faced email and has, to varying degrees, substituted for face-to-face human interaction. Equally, time-consuming, 'mundane' tasks, such as resource management, workforce planning and data analysis are now becoming increasingly automated by AI-enabled and machine learning tools and the headline here is that HR teams do have more time, effort and resources to invest in actual people management.

DIGITAL TRANSITION IS UNVEILING ADVANTAGES THAT WERE HITHERTO UNFORESEEN, SUCH AS THE MOVE TO REMOTE HIRING, WHICH IS INADVERTENTLY PRESENTING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR HR TO BRING EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND SOCIAL BALANCE TO THE WORKFORCE

This means that mental health and wellbeing will benefit on a more humanistic and individual level than perhaps was billed, as the digital era rolls out before us. There are opportunities and difficulties ahead, that is taken as read, as the real impacts of the pandemic manifest. On a HR level, redundancy, furlough and mass unemployment, marks the human element. But after this trying period, there is now the opportunity to invest in new technology, because it's important to anticipate and be prepared for all possible outcomes for the future. Not surprisingly, the economy looks stressed for some time to come, as we claw back to a more normal status. Although all businesses will be recalibrating, when furlough and other governmental support schemes end, it is possible that many will have to lay off large proportions of its workforce in order to stay afloat, resulting in high-levels of unemployment across the country. As a consequence of this threat, HR teams must become reliant on data driven information to make decisions, which will allow companies to anticipate revenue decline and adapt accordingly. However, the economy will rebound eventually and strong economic growth will return, bringing with it mass employment and profitability for companies. Here digitalisation will enable more accurate, longer term prediction, which will equip businesses with greater prescience in forward-planning and agility. On a HR level, it's taken as read that, even when strong economic growth returns, remote - or at least hybrid working - will be a significant part of of the new working framework and a far cry from the rigid nine-to-five that kept people's wings clipped for generations. Therefore, it is imperative that businesses continue to onboard modern software platforms, such as cloud and security, in order to survive the impending new era of post-COVID business operations, which will continue to be characterised by remote hiring, remote training and remote support.

The direction of travel is clear, but it requires full cooperation from all stakeholders to invest, at a time when many businesses are staring at the existential consequences that have resulted from these recent events. Encouragingly, the digital transition is unveiling advantages that were hitherto unforeseen, such as the move to remote hiring, which is inadvertently presenting the opportunity for HR to bring equality, inclusion and social balance to the workforce. At last, candidates from across the country - from all socio-economic and educational backgrounds and diverse ethnicities, should have the same opportunity as the middle and upper classes, who have previously been benefitted by location, class and existing wealth. Such possibilities are there to be realised and capitalised upon. ●

BRAVE
NEW
WORLD

WELCOME TO THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF HR AND, WHILE WE ARE NOT LIVING IN ANYTHING CLOSE TO ALDOUS HUXLEY'S BLEAK, DYSTOPIAN SOCIETY, THIS TIME HAS BROUGHT AN ALTERNATE REALITY FOR MOST OF US, WITH RADICAL SHIFTS IN THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS AND HOW WE WORK.

ARTICLE BY AL SMITH, CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER – ICIMS

"HR should strengthen its ability to drive diversity with tech and regularly carry out workforce and talent pool analysis, looking out for biases across people, processes and systems"

That the pandemic forced an experiment that has changed deeply entrenched workplace regimes, bears testament to this tumultuous time. Around half of organisation are loosening or removing location, to be replaced by the dispersed workforce, in a remote framework and saying that they are providing stipends or hiring bonuses for home office setups. A mindset and culture must be forged to see this time as a catalyst for change, as a once in a lifetime opportunity to recalibrate the world of work. HR leaders can build on this foundation, moving to a flexible hybrid model, but it needs a thoughtful approach to create a consistent culture, while also balancing the different needs of in-person and virtual work. Businesses have mostly adopted new digital tools to substitute the traditional office environment, but what must also be considered are the elements that are aligned with remote working and consider; ease-of-use, cohesion and employee experience, for people who are, for the majority of their working day, in isolation. Also, each individual and their role needs to be considered separately. For example, someone in talent acquisition, would require integration between collaboration and talent acquisition tools - to help keep hiring teams in their workflow - while also being able to schedule meetings, conduct interviews and provide feedback on candidates.

When thinking about the in-person experience, it's important to be mindful not to over-schedule virtual meetings or micromanage and monitor and, in line with the transition to the hybrid workforce, that balancing between virtual and human connection will be a vital one. For this to work, it requires a comprehensive communication strategy, with HR teams thinking about all of their stakeholders and delivering consistent news and updates across all channels. At the onset of the pandemic, mass communication challenges plagued many organisations, understandably, with many just not set up to cope with such scale. Here, a potential solution is staring us in the face, texting, - which, of course is not revolutionary - but is surprisingly overlooked as a simple, cost effective mode of communication. During this pandemic, as we've transitioned in and out of lockdown, many organisations of course, went full steam ahead with video tools. But as we move to the new normal of work, we must consider what a hybrid video approach would constitute. In addition to the obvious, video can help HR teams foster culture and create authentic connections across a decentralised workforce. But the possibilities are numerous,compelling and dynamic, with the ability to showcase screens and video content. Video can also be broadened out and into different areas of the business, a case in point being recruitment, which can help increase hiring efficiencies, with teams able to streamline the evaluation process, use video tools for initial interviews and assessments and bringing only final candidates in-person.

What has been noticeable during this time is that the workforce has shifted demographically in response to the pandemic. Some working parents have had to make tough decisions to leave, while older workers are staying on the job and even applying for new roles. Indeed, the events of the pandemic have unquestionably sparked a renewed focus on DEI, causing a shift from a compliance mindset to a more strategic emphasis on attracting and hiring diverse talent, which has resulted in some surprising changes, for example, racially and ethnically diverse women made up the largest portion of hires in 2020, but many organisations have been concerned that they lack the tools to reach diverse talent as we head into the new world of work. As workforce dynamics change, it is more critical than ever to take a holistic approach and work harder to support staff and candidates of all demographics. HR should strengthen its ability to drive diversity with tech and regularly carry out workforce and talent pool analysis, looking out for biases across people, processes and systems. We must foundationally change our thinking and ways of working, or risk inevitable failure. From where we work, to how we communicate and work together, HR must undergo a transformation - a strong sentiment perhaps - but now is the time to take stock in what has worked or not in the past year and operationalise those processes and tools more effectively to adapt for the future. ●

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SMOOTH OPERATOR

An HR system should function as the end-to-end platform for all HR processes, act as a single source of truth, capturing and updating all employee information, supporting strategic HR initiatives and increasing overall company efficiency. It is often the case that HCM implementation is far more complex, but if you can nail the process, it can unlock real potential.

ARTICLE BY RAFAEL SWEARY, PRESIDENT & CO-FOUNDER - WALKME

No matter if you're undergoing a complete digital overhaul, or simply upgrading to a better system to meet your HR needs, it's imperative to understand what a successful deployment requires. There is no margin for error, being underprepared will have a knock-on effect, slowing the adoption process and undermining your potential for success. It is crucial to ensure that everyone involved in the implementation is on the same page and following best practice and the first step is, of course, to make sure all decision-makers are fully aligned. HCM implementation demands dedicated leadership and a qualified project team. This is no easy feat, as people bring their opinions to the table and, if left unstructured, multiple stakeholders with divergent opinions will disrupt the process.

The project team should be comprised of representatives from all stakeholder groups and that includes active digital transformation participation of senior leaders. However, while it's important to represent each stakeholder interest, a large but unfocused team will not be equipped to drive the project to completion. The process needs to be simplified and as smooth as it can be and stakeholders need to be engaged and remain accessible, to ensure that everyone knows their core function and can collaborate together. HCM systems are typically very robust and feature seemingly endless options for creating and customising processes. However, just because you have countless options, this doesn't mean you should actually take them. Instead, you should take the time to identify the five-to-ten most important processes and spend time to define how you'd like them to work in advance. You may need to adjust your processes when you progress further in your journey, but if you have defined the most important in advance, you'll arrive at the meeting with a clear idea of how things should work - instead of being overwhelmed from the outset.

> THE SO-CALLED "FORGETTING CURVE" ACTUALLY DAMAGES PRODUCTIVITY AND IT ADDS TO EMPLOYEE FRUSTRATION AS WELL AS LEADING TO AN INFLUX OF SUPPORT TICKETS - THE VERY THING YOU WERE TRYING TO AVOID

People hate change and learning something new and changing processes inevitably causes headaches. Like any switch, it's challenging and infuriating, until suddenly, one day, it's not. So, making sure people adapt and adopt simultaneously is very important. Here, transparency is a core value in clearly communicating the need for the change, explaining what will be different and the benefits it will bring, so that all stakeholders understand the benefits and how their workflows will be positively impacted from the change. The key to achieving this lies in removing usage barriers that contribute to user frustration and a negative onboarding experience.

User training too is of course most important to ensuring high adoption rates of any platform or system, to onboard with efficiency, but providing effective training for a platform of this scope is no easy task. When people don't perform a process regularly, they often forget how to complete all the steps in the process before the next time they need to implement it. This is only human, but the so-called "forgetting curve" actually damages productivity and it adds to employee frustration as well as leading to an influx of support tickets - the very thing you were trying to avoid. In this frame, contextual learning is integral and digital solutions that enable contextual learning and provide up-to-the-minute direction and support, ensures that all users are able to complete processes efficiently and with ease. Then the need for time-consuming training courses, training manuals, webinars and other learning and training mechanisms, disappears. All digital processes should be simple and efficient and the challenge is always to taking a process which is important for your company goals, yet seemingly disconnected from the daily workflow and making it a top priority for all employees. All-too often, employees are expected to adapt themselves to technology, rather than the technology adapting to them, but staying focused and consistent on the human factor will support implementation. ●

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THE
WILL TO
CHANGE

EVERYONE WANTS "CHANGE", BUT NOBODY WANTS "TO CHANGE". AS A RESULT, IT BECOMES EASIER FOR YOU TO IMPLEMENT THE MECHANICS OF CHANGE; THE PROCESSES, PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOLS THAN TO INSTIGATE THE "HUMANICS" OF CHANGE, THE RESTRUCTURING OF DEPARTMENTS, THE RECALIBRATION OF ROLES AND THE REWIRING OF MINDSETS.

ARTICLE BY AIDAN MCCULLEN, HOST OF THE INNOVATION SHOW & CORPORATE COACH

"HR leaders know this is the only way for change to 'stick'… slow and sustained over time. It is natural for organisational change to take time, because personal change is also slow and often painful"

Digitalisation in work processes stands for disruption and transformation and, in any transformational experience, resistance is natural. Employee resistance is a milestone not a millstone. We can anticipate pushback; if we don't experience it, well then, maybe we are not pushing the boundaries quite far enough. While it is a real struggle when we are in the midst of experiencing such resistance, we can reframe resistance as a necessary step. This step in the change process generates a great energy from the tension of opposites, from the old and the new. When two counterforces meet, they create energy, the counterforces transfer energy between them. When you consider resistance in this manner, you can see that it is not only a natural part of any transformation process, but that it produces a necessary energy that powers change.

A useful way to visualise the tension of opposites is that of a bow and arrow. When the string of the bow is taut, it provides adequate tension to propel the arrow. Without such a tension, the arrow will not travel very far, it will only flop forward. An understanding of this natural tension is useful because we can anticipate resistance and then harness the resulting energy to thrust a new vision into reality. In transformation, we require this tension between old and new, certain and uncertain, order and chaos. Transformation lives at the intersection of these tensions. Resistance to change is present in every aspect of life from the largest organisation to the smallest organism. One such organism is the well-known symbol of great transformation: the butterfly. When you dive deeper into the sacrifices made by the caterpillar to become

the butterfly it reveals some truths about organisational transformation. As Nobel laureate, author and poet Maya Angelou put it, "We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty." In the same manner, when it comes to organisational change, we delight in the end product of a change initiative, but we rarely recognise the great sacrifice it took to achieve progress. Let's look closer at this transformation and the parallels it provides for organisational and personal change.

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

Organisations who expect change to happen after a corporate retreat with some flip charts and Post-it notes are confusing real change with cosmetic change. Such initiatives are like a splash, while transformation creates a ripple that spreads and persists over time. Creating a ripple is a slower and much more frustrating process, especially for the change-maker, but it is the only way to create a lasting transformation. In time, habits will change and so too will mindsets. Eventually, enough cells will fuse to overpower the legacy organisation and |you will experience a metamorphosis. HR leaders know this is the only way for change to 'stick'… slow and sustained over time. It is natural for organisational change to take time, because personal change needs to also occur and personal change is slow and often painful. ●

Aidan McCullen is host of The Innovation Show podcast and workshop facilitator, corporate coach and author of *Undisruptable: A Mindset of Permanent Reinvention for Organisations, Individuals and Life* (Wiley 2021).

TOO MUCH INFORMATION…

It could be argued that the more information HR has about its people, the better it can support them. But how much is too much? Data won't solve human problems, but it can help set strategies, enable leaders to know their employees, recognise the signs, talk to them and be there to offer support and trust. That is the true strength.

ARTICLE BY JAMES MALIA, DIRECTOR – MYEVA (WEALTH WIZARDS)

Technology is so compelling, providing us with simplicity, ownership, knowledge and now, more than ever, connectivity and it moves the world at such incredible pace. I'm still in my forties and it doesn't seem that long ago that I was issued with a phone card as a company 'perk' so I could call my manager. My kids whinge about 'glitching' in a game because there was a microsecond break, that I can't even see, whereas when I was their age, my favourite game, Chuckie Egg, would take an hour to load… and often didn't! While all this is happening, we're also becoming more open about our emotions and feelings, ironically, often prompted by wellbeing technology to allow it to happen. But don't for a minute think that we've sold our soul to technology, it's still the personal approach that trumps all. I work in Fintech and specifically in financial wellbeing and, by definition, we connect with thousands of users each year on devices and use AI to understand their personal situation and offer guidance and advice. However, for both the user and the employer all of that data can only achieve so much. For example, when we talk about goals and aspirations, the tech often needs support, so the 'action' bit becomes more personal. For instance, speaking to a real-life adviser for more guidance or expertise or, as an employer, delivering support, webinars or tutorials with real people, gives it the personal touch.

We've all made a purchase or decision based on liking someone or a gut feeling and not just what the tech is telling us. Data will never 'understand', it won't know that, when an employee says "I'm fine" that they don't always mean it. It won't realise that "not bad" isn't necessarily good, it's just "not bad." I know that we need data and I know that, for any organisation, it's a vital ingredient in employee engagement, wellbeing and satisfaction. However, it's still just that, an ingredient, it's what you do with it that matters. Give the same ingredients to three people and you will have three

> ## GIVE THE SAME INGREDIENTS TO THREE PEOPLE AND YOU WILL HAVE THREE DIFFERENT MEALS AND IT'S THE SAME WITH DATA. IF USED POORLY, OR NOT AT ALL - AND YES, THAT DOES HAPPEN - THEN IT'S WORTHLESS

different meals and it's the same with data. If used poorly, or not at all - and yes, that does happen - then it's worthless. I once insisted our MI reports were discussed in person, by my account managers with their clients. MI is a chance to celebrate what's being done well, but also a chance to highlight where we need more human interaction, or a training need, an education session for different demographics or even a shift in culture.

As leaders, managers and co-workers, we all need to connect with people. We need to read our people and we need to watch out for them. I know it's easier when we are face-to-face, so you can see body language, catch up over a coffee or read the room. However, even on Zoom or Teams you can read people - the one whose smile normally lights up the Zoom, with not even a grin today, or the quiet one looking distracted or leaving the camera off. One-to-one chats, just for the sake of it, can make all the difference - not formulaic, but more impromptu - and if you ask how someone is, mean it, listen and discuss. Letting someone know they are valued and appreciated is human and how it makes them feel most certainly is and, right now, we all need a bit of that. It's not rocket science; it could even be as simple as the difference between sending an email or a handwritten letter. It's not for the routine, everyday stuff but receiving a letter that you know someone has taken the time to think about, write and post is fabulous. Even when I used to send round bonus letters to my teams - a positive moment for all - I personalised each of them and thanked them for something specific they had achieved. It took a day, but I hope it made it personal and certainly wasn't just results and data driven. So yes, data and technology are huge as they provide us with information to allow us to act, with human, measured and considered action. But make sure the tech is simple, relevant and fabulous, as well as detailed, insightful and actionable. But please don't tell me that all you need is the data. ●

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BUSINESS
ETHICS

CULTURE IS WHAT PEOPLE DO WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING

The pandemic shone an intense, unremitting and, in some cases, unflattering spotlight on culture and ethical practice in organisations. We observed how organisations responded - and, more specifically, how they treated their people - as the media dialled it up by in the headlines, the worst inevitably attaining prominence over the best. But what has been revealed in pin-sharp relief, is why it matters and how it will reframe the future.

ARTICLE BY LEANNE HAMLEY, DIRECTOR - CULTURE CREATOR

Much has been dragged out into the open and how businesses assess and react will speak volumes about organisational culture. There will be firms that are honest - however painful it is to admit it - and they will want to make really important changes to redress issues, pivot to the times and embrace change. Then there will be those that will slip straight back into old grooves and hope to carry on as normal, with a focus on damage limitation. The latter, unquestionably, shows that even a spanner in the works of the magnitude of a global pandemic, will not derail a train driven by poor leaders, championing rigid, out-of-step cultures. For so many reasons, this will be a time that

lingers long in the memory. Our lives, our civil rights and our health and well-being have been rocked - and now it is up to us to collectively make this a landmark in time that will go down in history as a catalyst for good and positive change. The crisis has heightened our thinking, informed us about the real breadth and depth of inequality - not just the headliners of Black Lives Matter and the Me Too movement - but the vast range of experiences and outcomes for all during these testing times and this must inform the decisions we make hereon in. Every piece of information absorbed will form subconscious choices, about how we want to live our lives, the quality of work/life balance,

who we want to spend our money with and whether we want to continue employment with our existing employer.

Views are polarised as to whether organisations are truly leading a diversity and equality agenda and it's a subject that just keeps gaining momentum. With laser-like focus now being applied, whether from a consumer's perspective or an employee's, we have now become observers of the social behaviours of business, informed and aware of a gamut of ethical shortcomings that can no longer be accepted. This is also the time where businesses should consciously reflect on how employee behaviours and actions demonstrated

in this time, pose critical questions about the culture that leaders believed they had and how they have weathered a decade's worth of change in just one year. Pre-pandemic, business ethics would have included defining the behaviours expected around areas such as; corporate governance, anti-bribery, policies and practice, lawfulness and corporate social responsibility. But arguably, these are now mere staples of best practice, that should be expected without question or debate. The new wave of ethics will need to go much wider and, not just because of the impact on humanity and the economy, but because the landscape of innovation and technology has changed. Creativity and speed of innovation has been clearly demonstrated, as has the dominating factor that our approach to employee wellbeing needs to be a major component in the performance and success of the business.

So, let us take a look of what now defines the new wave of business ethics, beginning with, artificial intelligence. AI ethics is a hot topic of debate now, accelerated by the events of recent times. It of course relates to the automation of repetitive tasks, to reduce costs long term, drive efficiencies and provide organisations with protection of reduced labour. This does, however, impose the ethical issue of replacing people with technology, resulting in further job losses. The Government's economic watchdog estimates that UK unemployment could reach 2.6 million by the middle of 2021, along with reports already stating that heightened automation will cost 20 million in manufacturing job losses (7.5 percent of the working age population). There is no doubt that the future of automation will have a considerable impact on people and the economy and presents huge decisions, such as; is it time to look at reducing the working week to minimise further job losses? How can we maintain people, but upskill their development and reduce their hours? Along with AI and the impact on jobs, we must also consider the philosophical questions that have long been debated.

The YouGov survey, *The Ethical Business*, found that more than one-quarter (27 percent) of British managers would accept a salary reduction for a purposeful job that goes above and beyond simply making profit. Being able to define purpose and to align employees will be the key differentiator and this statistic will have undoubtedly increased since the pandemic. Going forward, the ethical practice of organisations will only become more scrutinised and with generations who want to work with purpose beginning to dominate the workplace. Glassdoor's *Mission & Culture Survey* found that more than 79 percent of adults across the UK, United States, France and Germany, would consider an organisation's mission and purpose before applying. Perhaps this isn't revelatory, but it points to the fact that ethical practice is fundamental to attracting skills and that the impact of actions causes ripples. This matters, as it goes much wider than top-line corporate and social responsibility. Organisations that define their purpose have an aligned workforce that

AS OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEES LESSENED AND THE ROLE OF REMOTE LEADER EMERGED, WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE EXTREMITIES OF THIS IMPACT - CHRONIC LONELINESS AT ONE END OF THE SCALE AND 'ALWAYS ON' CULTURE AT THE OTHER
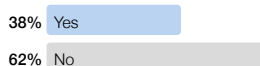
can diversify when needed and where purpose is at the heart, exists the capacity to change and mobilise people with speed.

The remote workforce points to a prospect that will see the end of the war for talent. Overnight, the doors to accessing talent globally have opened and the attraction strategy of the future has to pay considerable attention to how and who we employ. This should be a strategic endeavour to rebalance equality and to capitalise on 'new' accessible talent, building a better business with a collective workforce who have the skills and capabilities aligned to the organisations purpose. Whilst the benefits of a wider talent pool can be reaped, the remodelling of the future workforce has to take into consideration the composition of new roles; the remote worker, the flexible shift worker, the time zones and liquid roles. This remodelling must include an impact review of the new work/lifestyle we have come to know. What we have seen so far has been of mutual value to employer and employee, but what once was seen as a temporary 'fix', is now having a deeper impact.

The collective displacement we have endured isn't just the physical impact, it is also the emotional impact that needs a recovery plan. A year where opportunities to support employees lessened and the role of remote leader emerged, we have to acknowledge the extremities of this impact - chronic loneliness at one end of the scale and 'always on' culture at the other. The recovery plan and the organisational design of the future must have ethical consideration for physical, mental, spiritual and emotional wellbeing, to ensure a fully functioning organisation. In design, it must be considered how businesses can maximise accessible global talent, whilst protecting the boundaries of the employee and their health. The wellbeing strategy is no longer a nice to do, it is a critical enabler of business performance and an ethical necessity.

The role of leader has and will continue to change to conscious leadership, with the skills required of a leader ten years ago no longer the skills needed today. The rise in remote leadership, requires: empathy, agility and the ability to story tell. Leadership development needs to be stretched, as the conscious leader must have the skills and ethical practice of the organisation shaped to deliver the future culture of the business. This can then be built into the core skill frameworks around; decision making, stakeholder management, communication and core skills, that will either signify whether the leaders are aligned or not. The organisations that have already embraced the new wave of ethics are already setting out their future ambitions to be a net positive business, relating to impact on people, planet and purpose. ●

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WILL YOU BE ON
THE RIGHT SIDE
OF HISTORY?

IT IS IN TIMES OF CRISIS THAT REAL MORAL AND ETHICAL VALUE SYSTEMS COME TO THE FORE. GLOBAL ISSUES, FROM OVERCHARGING FOR PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) TO LEADERS WITHHOLDING GOVERNMENT FUNDING FROM THEIR CITIZENS, BROUGHT SHAME ON TOP OF SADNESS. TRUST HAS BEEN BROKEN AND MUST BE REBUILT.

ARTICLE BY ANNELIZE VAN RENSBURG, DIRECTOR, EXECUTIVE SEARCH - SIGNIUM AFRICA

"While leadership must be living examples of a culture of responsibility, the concept will fail with the first person who is unable to draw a line in the sand and stand by it"

The old adage "a fish rots from the head down" is often bandied about, but it isn't entirely true, because it takes more than one leader, board member or employee in an organisation, to cross the line between good corporate governance and an unethical focus that is purely on profit. The overarching effect of questionable ethics is the creation of a toxic culture that seeps into all areas of an organisation. Examples that made global headlines are plentiful, from oil spills that decimated once-pristine waters, to dangerous design faults that exacerbated fires in buildings to vehicle manufacturers claiming to be within mandated emission rates. The list is as long and as it is damning.

When cases of corporate misappropriation are exposed, the CEO and fellow members of the C-suite, set to work with lawyers and reputation managers, to mitigate damage to the brand. But even with profuse apologies, the damage may already well be done in their industry and, almost certainly, in the court of public opinion. Then the ripple effect continues until in the worst cases, the brand becomes synonymous with incident alone. Trust leaves and often doesn't return and other business leaders look on thinking, "I'm glad that isn't me." But what are the lessons that we can take from these incidents, especially where further investigation highlights suggestions that the people charged with upholding an organisation's governance and transparency, have fallen short?

Here's the missing link, where business leaders are complicit in so-called "dirty dealings", moral courage is either insufficient or absent altogether and the burning questions

are; "where are the ethics that should be seated around the table at every board meeting? Where is the courage of a manager who knowingly "tweaks" the system? Which individual would refuse to put his personal reputation on the line for the sake of his company's bottom line?" In order to create and maintain a culture of courage, where employees and associates choose ethics over profit, a strong moral code has to be seen as a business imperative. It requires a support structure that is built largely on an expectation of individuals doing the right thing, even when nobody is watching, to ensure that the organisation's efforts are pointed towards working towards the greater good of society at large.

Where business operations are devoid of accountability, moral decay sets in and irresponsible behaviour results. While leadership must be living examples of a culture of responsibility, the concept will fail with the first person who is unable to draw a line in the sand and stand by it. Unless every member of an organisation is held accountable to someone for their actions and there are consequences attached to those actions, what really happens is the birth of tolerance for the sin of omission and acceptance of deceit and ultimately corruption. Board members and the C-suite, are charged with steering their organisation towards a sustainable future, through the adoption of robust ethical and legal governance and financial management policies.

This brings us to The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach to uphold the concept of sustainable performance through the

concurrent management of profit, people and planet. Across this structure of economy, people and the environment, it is the duty of business leaders to encourage ethics, morals and integrity and to uphold standards of honesty and reliability. This is even more important in times of crisis and one of the reasons an independent board is vital. The right leaders in any organisation comprise the diversity of mindsets and values, that ensures that one or more hands are raised in commitment to courage, that silver thread of moral fibre that must run through everything. As we have watched COVID-19 unfold, we must understand that when dealing with a novel virus, we are building the airplane while we're flying it and striking a balance - however financially uncomfortable it may be - between fiscal fitness and the wellbeing of employees. Importantly, it is incumbent upon the C-suite to provide daily, visible leadership at both a company and a community level. While we applaud our frontline and essential workers, we applaud too those businesses that may have been offered an "easier" way to maintain profits, but walked away from it… even while nobody was watching. ●

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SAILING INTO THE WINDS OF CHANGE

The pandemic forced the world to take stock of corporate objective and operation. It highlighted how fundamental leadership and culture is in playing a significant role in the moral principles and ethical beliefs of a company, which will be the new determinators of business performance, as opposed to market share and bottom-line profits. A new era dawns and organisations that continue to harbour a toxic culture with negative ethical values, are unlikely to survive.

ARTICLE BY CLIVE LEWIS OBE DL, FOUNDER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE - GLOBIS MEDIATION GROUP

The dark ages, during which the corporate cover-up was perceived a legitimate tactic and contrition was an admittance of guilt, are over. How business is conducted, what relationships and communication between employees and employers represent and corporate & social responsibility, have never been so important. Collectively, they will contribute to how future business ethics within individual companies will evolve. One thing is certain, allowing a toxic culture to perpetuate will result in incalculable corporate and reputational damage. This is often discernible by a lack of transparency, together with a culture of bribery and bullish behaviour and it is the fastest way to send a company to the grave. Whilst good leadership is the gold-plated commodity, which will enforce and sustain positive principles to be applied, the next evolution of business ethics is about transcending the moral, political and social dimensions. This will not only promote goodwill, but enhance brand equity. But for this to be effective, it requires a complete change of mindset. For a business to develop and survive post-pandemic, there needs to be a firm drive away from avoidance, damage limitation and protecting shareholder dividends. Business ethics in all fields must promote a moral prerogative and culture.

During the pandemic, we have witnessed many surprising acts of humanity, along with justice, generosity and public spirit achieve remarkable things, by people from different backgrounds, brought together in a collective time of trial and difficulty. In a similar parallel, business and ethics cannot exist as separate entities - they are, by default, linked - and it is imperative that organisations take stock now and view their moral values in a different light. During this unprecedented crisis, how employers responded has been a litmus test for future ethics and survival. Those that have led with strong ethical behaviour, upholding moral responsibility with purpose, will emerge as the front runners. For there is no doubt that the post-pandemic recovery will be a tough and telling time, the terrain has shifted and for some, this will be uncomfortable. But as the future unfolds and business begins to regenerate, purpose will be fundamental to outcome. The profits-at-all-costs approach will no longer be viable or acceptable and thought must accompany action. Altruism must be aligned with best practice and purposeful, corporate endeavour must embrace company

philosophy. This is vital to find solutions to both the existential problems of humanity and the under-the-radar inequalities which have propagated imbalance and shaky ground in the modern world. After all, it is not trust and value, it's the cornerstones of ethical business, that have changed, it is simply that unethical behaviour is now impossible to conceal. Trust can only be cultivated through strong corporate values which combine; honesty, integrity and cultures committed to purpose.

It is imperative that organisations pinpoint the areas that need to be addressed and take action to abolish the poison of toxicity. A toxic line manager, for example, lacks the competence required to fulfil their role. Their ethical deficit is characterised by a pattern of behaviour, which includes a demonstrable lack of regard and compassion for the well-being of team members. When incapable line managers work hard to preserve their status at all costs, the working atmosphere bears the brunt and it can be a heavy load. Low levels of trust seep through the workforce, the

employees and this has exposed certain areas in organisations that need to be addressed as a priority. Communication underpins everything and managers are now finding themselves thrown into a mêlée of difficult conversations in the frame of change and transition. The success of this communication will set the patterns of behaviour amongst employees going forward and it will determine whether further toxicity arises, taking the company downhill into a quagmire of conflict and stress. Some managers may view a difficult conversation as a problem to skirt around in an awkward manner, in the hope it will go away. Others may dive in headfirst, like a rugby tackle. Both methods are likely to worsen a fermenting atmosphere of underachievement and unhappiness. The correct manner of approach is directly relevant to organisations intent on addressing cultural issues, whilst creating a fair and inclusive working environment. Workplaces do not have to be toxic, all that is needed is for them to become more respectful and tolerant.

support. This will ensure that individuals are able to function to the best of their ability and any areas that need development can have the appropriate resources directed to them. This fuels positive thinking, the power of which cannot be discounted as a mental attitude to boost performance. Indeed, it's taken as read that a confident outlook on work and life in general, reduces stress levels and builds strengths to face tough situations. Conversely, nothing depletes positive thought more than low self-esteem or self-doubt - the influence of other people's criticism, a lack of flexibility - or an intolerance of other people or situations. Therefore, implementing strategies to encourage positive thinking will benefit all.

The use of psychometric tools is the fourth area on which to give focus and an example, Lumina Spark, allows consideration of personalities at their norm, at work and under pressure. When the shift between these is examined, support can be directed where it is needed. Team profiles are a vital element to consider in understanding areas of development and understanding where conflict might occur between psychological opposites. Accurate psychometric profiling enables enhanced self-awareness, which leads to greater understanding and ultimately higher levels of respect between colleagues. Injustice is the fifth area for organisations to consider. Two key ingredients for a congenial workplace are civility and respect, which along with a focus on inclusion and relationships, two ethical principles which have been eroded in recent years. Managers need to ensure that employees are fully informed in appropriate behaviour and this includes; speaking up, bystander apathy and how vital it is to ensure that the organisation is a psychologically safe place to work, for all employees. There is no doubt that ethical leadership will prevent toxic environments in the workplace and by using a pragmatic approach that combines the five critical areas highlighted, businesses will be well-placed to succeed in an extremely challenging future, with managers capable of demonstrating empathetic and sound communication, with positive reinforcement to successfully embrace the post-pandemic world with a rich store of transformational thinking. ●

> THERE NEEDS TO BE A FIRM DRIVE AWAY FROM AVOIDANCE, DAMAGE LIMITATION AND PROTECTING SHAREHOLDER DIVIDENDS. BUSINESS ETHICS MUST PROMOTE A STRATEGY OF MORAL PREROGATIVE, CODE, AND CULTURE

organisation veers into misalignment, systems become muddled and the fall-out is employees who are unwilling or fearful to take responsibility for their actions. Who can blame them when they are following the example set by their manager? Being an ethical leader means leading with moral principles, offering emotional support, reinforced by positive thinking and with a sensitive understanding of how different employees handle conflict. However, it is not all about leaders. A toxic employee is prone to seek opportunities to sow the seeds of discord and division. They can be characteristically uncivil and are more likely to pursue retribution rather than offer forgiveness. Their delivery of results can be questionable and their actions against fellow colleagues may be done in a secretive way to avoid being noticed.

The pandemic, as we have all experienced, dramatically changed the working environment for millions of

Frequent changes - such as technological advancements and organisational structures or work processes - create fluctuation and apprehension. Most people do not cope well with uncertainty and on top of this, there are increasing demands from customers, clients and other stakeholders, who expect the same level of service, often from fewer resources. Naturally, if customer expectations are not met, this leads to increased pressure on the workforce. This is where resilience is so important in times of disruption and change and it has self-development at its core. This is essential to withstanding adversity and preparing for future events. But resilience is a state rather than a trait, which means it is possible to develop and organisations adapting to the new post pandemic world need to ensure that resilience is an area that is taken seriously. By ascertaining levels of individual and team resilience, energy and effort can be steered in the right direction, to provide the right

AS ANNUS' GO, THAT WAS HORRIBILIS

The worst is almost behind us, this time of extraordinary collective struggle is ending and much-needed optimism is gradually emerging into the world and into the global economy. With a message that is still only a whisper we can all breath a small sigh of relief.

ARTICLE BY
GRAHAM WHITE
HR DIRECTOR
(RETIRED)

B arring a delayed opening of the portal of Hades that we were promised by those who attempted to interpret the 2020 Grand Conjunction, we've made it through. Don't get me wrong, there is much still to be overcome and much still to be experienced, but the potential of widespread vaccination to restore normal economic activity has brought worldwide relief to worried businesses large and small. The next big question we face is, what does a return to healthy profits in a post-pandemic business world really look like for those that have survived? For many, they are already tub-thumping a need for business ethics, as if they have never existed before. For others, they are seeking to orchestrate or even regulate business ethics, as if business leaders don't already know the eminent economic sense they make. Since the 1960's when the concept of business ethics first emerged onto the corporate scene, they have been evolving and changing to meet the needs of the time. Consequently, the real challenge is not to regulate ethics, but rather to determine what a post-COVID, ethical business really looks like.

Two governing principles I personally believe remain true for all aspects of any ethical debate are firstly; whatever you may want to believe businesses and ethics are not binary opposites, but in fact necessary partners. The current crisis has solidified the need to finally put to bed the failed logic of Milton Friedman, the American economist, who asserted in the early 1970s that the sole responsibility of business was to increase its profits. This mantra, with its focus on the short-term, has gained a strong hold on much of business practice for the last fifty years and has continued to negatively influence too many leadership decisions, even during the early days of the pandemic. I still shiver when I recall a previous CEO from the 1980s describing his approach to his business, by telling me that, "he would rather have a bad conscience than a bad reputation". I still wish I had been brave enough in my youth to say I would rather he had neither. Secondly, there are not multiple sets of ethics in the world, we don't have societal ethics, professional ethics and business ethics, we just have ethics, which are applied in equal measure to how people make decisions and lead their lives. Whether it is how to live a good life, our rights and responsibilities, the principles of right and wrong or basic moral decisions, they all fall under the umbrella of ethics, business or otherwise. Whilst this pandemic has forced the world to abruptly stop and take stock of corporate objectives and standard operating procedures, the last sixty years have already been pointing us in this direction. If COVID has shone a Super Trouper sized spotlight on how fundamental leadership and culture is in a time of crises, then the last six decades have been gradually redirecting us - as a natural consequence of the downward trajectory - into Friedman's provocative theory where "greed is good".

The 1960s brought the first major wave of changes in business ethics. Cultural values were shifting, individualism was coming into vogue and concern about the environment was slowly starting to appear in media and youth culture. However, at the same time as these emerging generations were claiming a new idealism, there was also a growing disrespect for authority, with many capitals experiencing the early signs of protests about social responsibility. Meantime, many employers claimed they saw a marked difference in work ethic from previous generations and a worryingly growing drug problem that was creeping into the workplace. Into this maelstrom, we can already see the positive influence of some forward-thinking Personnel Managers who responded to the changing times and began establishing mission statements and outlining codes of

conduct, whilst motivating their leadership teams to step up and embrace some social responsibility at a level not previously seen.

As the focus on evolving ethics continued throughout the 1970s and 80s, Britain witnessed further significant heightening of tension between employers and employees, resulting in numerous significant industrial relations issues. Into this environment, I found myself plunged into my first HR leadership role and hastily having to coerce my organisation's senior leadership, to look again at our ethical stance. Whilst I was still the lone voice of HR, crying a little in the wilderness, we did start to engage and work with unions and staff to revamp contracts to focus less on rigid compliance and more on values and contribution. These times saw HR leaders develop new management philosophies, that shifted from pure authoritarianism to more collaborative working both in the businesses they worked in and the environments where their businesses were based. I still recall in the early 1980s, as a personnel manager for a large manufacturing site, I saw my initiative "we care about our community" creating a host of new ways for us to give back to the local area, including managers and staff taking roles as school governors, health board members and local councillors.

The turn of the century has seen an acceleration of all of this with a rebirth of environmentalism, new heights in social responsibility and graver legal ramifications for notorious white-collar culprits. It still rankles me that our professional body and other leading influencers awarded one such individual the highest HR accolade available at the time, despite being an HR player in the heart of the financial crisis. At the same time oil companies, tobacco producers, junk food manufacturers and all things social media, have faced heightened scrutiny and public pressure to answer for Equality, Public Health, Human Rights and Environmental damage. So, as we weather this latest crisis, I believe HR has reached a watershed where we can no longer tinker at the edges of influencing ethical behaviour. We need to embrace this new purpose for HR, as we drive ethical living into every aspect of the world of work, ensuring it moves from the "desirable" to the "essential" part of every job specification we design. If the COVID-19 storm has one small cloud bearing a silver lining, it is that ethical behaviour and the values and purposes that underpin them, are well and truly dragged from the HR filing cabinet and sitting squarely in the centre of the boardroom table, ensuring every leader of business, commerce and government understands them to be a fundamental requirement for any organisation that aspires to be an employer of choice. As HR grabs this opportunity to build a new organisational ecosystem, founded on meaning that will be the pathfinder for businesses, to guide them through the years of uncertainty and disruption that wait just around the corner, we have the opportunity to provide our employers and employees with solutions for the most challenging crisis facing us in recent memory.

The world of work will never return to what it was and the historic concepts and principles that HR have relied upon up until now, to build the structures and foundations of recruitment, engagement, development and advocacy, are all destined for the shredder, as we reset the employment relationship and redefine the ethics that determine the values our organisations stand for.

Lest we forget, employees - current and prospective - all have long memories. How companies behaved during and after this crisis and how they have learned and evolved going forward, will be remembered and monitored. As many career decisions are made in 2021, especially those delayed by COVID, those seeking new employment opportunities will be looking for employers who both survived and adapted during 2020, to ensure they remained honourable, viable and sustainable. I am sure, like me, you have great admiration for the vaccine producers who have worked so hard to accelerate the production process that has brought us to this point, but let US also not forget, those organisations that moved production from car parts to ventilators, fashion to PPE and alcohol to hand sanitisers. The uncertain future we all face will need organisations and workers who excel in a values-based environment that supports everyone to, not only cope with uncertainty, but thrive in it. To build lasting and resilient organisations, the starting point is to build with purpose that goes well beyond either profit or output. The next evolution of business ethics needs to instill an inspiring purpose in every employee, that captures a broader ambition than just measured output. The foundations of ethical business have not changed, trust and values remain, but what has changed is the expectations of the workforce as they seek ethics founded upon purpose. Armed with this information, HR has the potential to make it happen, we just need to do it. ●

ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR AND THE VALUES AND PURPOSES THAT UNDERPIN THEM, ARE NOW IN THIS IMPENDING POST-PANDEMIC WORLD, WELL AND TRULY DRAGGED FROM THE HR FILING CABINET AND SITTING SQUARELY IN THE CENTRE OF THE BOARDROOM TABLE

REMOTE
WORKING
REDEFINED

ROAM WASN'T BUILT IN A DAY

When mobile became the dominant way the internet was consumed, it led to a new software development approach that was known as "mobile first". Previous to this, companies would design their websites primarily to be displayed on a desktop screen and only afterwards would they adapt that website into a workable version that could be displayed on mobile. This approach often led to a reduced experience on mobile devices.

ARTICLE BY MATT CASEY, MANAGEMENT EXPERT - DOTHINGS.IO

The shift to mobile first, led to a recognition that the mobile experience had become more important than the desktop. So the approach was reversed and the mobile experience was designed first, with the desktop experience considered later. The desktop experience was still important - it couldn't be discarded in favour of mobile - but mobile was now considered more important and it would no longer be acceptable for things to be possible on desktop that weren't possible on mobile. I think the way we approach remote working is about to see the same kind of approach shift. In the past, work was built around the office experience. Most companies offered a work from home experience as well, but the primary one was to be found in the office and employees were required to be there for many things. This was a perfectly acceptable solution

to working from home for almost every business, but that has to change now. We're going to have to design our working practices with a new "Remote First" approach. I think the office will still play an important role in work, but it will no longer be the thing we build our working practices around. Being in the office will no longer be a requirement and, as such, the way we work will be predicated on the fact that we will not be in the same location. Employers are going to have to build the way we work around being remote and then consider the office experience afterwards.

I suspect that the biggest adaptation will be in how we manage people. Managers will no longer be able to assume to have the access they had previously. They will not be able to glean incidental information simply from observing how their team interoperates during

the day. They will only have glimpses and those glimpses will be over Zoom calls, when guards are up and behaviour is moderated. They are going to have to adapt to a way of working that by default gives them far less control and far less information. I think many of the pillars of modern management will be rendered obsolete by the remote first revolution. Performance reviews, for example, can surely no longer be manager led, because we can't possibly have one individual responsible for evaluating the performance of someone they will have had so little access to. These will instead have to become more community-led, where each employee is regularly giving and receiving feedback from all the people they work with on a daily basis. To my mind, the only way for us to meet this new challenge is to adopt technology in much smarter ways, to

help managers fill in the gaps that will arise as a result of this reduced access. But in making this adjustment, one thing to avoid at all costs is a swing towards monitoring. I know several people, who since they began working from home, have been working no more than two hours per day. The reason they're getting away with this is that, when they were in the office, this was pretty much all they were doing anyway. Once you factored in the random conversations, the coffee breaks, the pointless meetings and the various pieces of internet-based procrastination, a day in the office typically only involved around two hours of actual work. Now they're working from home and avoiding all those other things, they are able to match their previous output in very little time. I understand the temptation managers might have to implement systems that monitor people to ensure this kind of thing isn't going on, but the simple fact is, this problem has nothing to do with working from home. The employees might be enjoying that other six hours much more than they did when they were in the office, but those hours weren't being used for working then either. Management was failing already, it's not where the employees are that's the problem. Instead of immediately seeking to monitor staff to ensure they are always at their computers and available to us, I think we need to use technology to decentralise a lot of what managers have previously done.

Instead of implementing systems that monitor how much, or when, employees are working, we have to make sure we understand what their output actually is, how much effort that really takes and what kind of impact they are having on the people they work with. If we know all this information, we don't need to concern ourselves with how many hours a day a given employee might spend logged in. Using technology effectively, we can provide tools that ask employees for information about what they're working on, that matches them up to people who might have work for them to do and that allows them to give and receive feedback. We can reduce the friction of the management layer but also gather more information, so we can gain an accurate picture of what impact each employee really makes. As an example of how I see the remote first approach replacing a current management activity, let us consider talent mapping for a moment. With the office first approach, a manager is responsible for carrying out this activity for all their staff, on the assumption that the manager knows the employee well enough to make that assessment. In a remote first approach, it's unlikely that whey would have had enough access to this employee, to really gain a fair reading on that. Instead, what if the employee could self-evaluate and handle the talent mapping themselves and we were able to use technology to have this self-evaluation validated by all the people the employee has actually worked with. This approach would assume that no single person really knows any one individual particularly well. Instead,

WE ARE PRESENTED WITH A ONE-OFF CHANCE TO BUILD OUR NEW WAY OF WORKING IN A WAY THAT SOLVES A LOT OF PROBLEMS WE EXPERIENCED WHEN THE OFFICE WAS KING, BUT WE WILL NEED TO REIMAGINE ALMOST EVERYTHING WE DO, WITH A REMOTE FIRST MINDSET, IF THAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN

everyone can just have a small say about a small area of a co-worker's skillset, that they did have exposure to. These small pieces of information can be gathered together to form a complete picture and this can be used by the manager to make decisions and plan for the future. None of this requires monitoring, only the active gathering of opinions from all the people we each work with. This kind of thinking is going to be crucial in a world where our work is carried out in private and no one person is able to fully evaluate our contribution.

Managers have historically - whether they've realised it or not - formed a lot of their opinions through monitoring. They are able to observe things, because the people that work for them are in the same office most days. With this dynamic changed, this casual observation will no longer be possible and the alternative - explicit monitoring using technology - is a road I think we should avoid at all costs. Measuring has always been a far better management tool than monitoring, so when we design our work based on the remote first approach, we shouldn't be building that with monitoring as a central pillar. I hope that the office will come back into our lives in one way or another. I miss the camaraderie and social interaction that it brought to my life. But I think we all have to accept that if it does come back, it will not be coming back as the primary work experience. At best, the office will be relegated to an afterthought. We are presented with a one-off chance to build our new way of working in a way that solves a lot of problems we experienced when the office was king, but we will need to reimagine almost everything we do, with a remote first mindset, if that's going to happen. ●

Matt Casey is the author of *The Management Delusion: What If We're Doing it All Wrong*
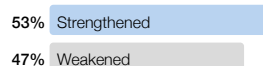
OUT OF SIGHT, NOT OUT OF REACH

The mass-exodus from the office to remote working was always bound to have impacts and one particular concern that has gained momentum in health and wellbeing discussions is "virtual presenteeism". With the psychological and physical employer/employee contract rewritten, the onus is on employees to exercise self-responsibility to maintain a healthy work-life balance. But that doesn't absolve employers from all responsibility.

ARTICLE BY NATALIE ROGERS, HR DIRECTOR - UNUM UK

Pre-pandemic, the *Stevenson/Farmer Review* called for the Government to focus on equipping organisations with the tools they need to address and prevent mental ill health in the workplace, by helping employees to access the support they need. This is something that will be crucial as we move into the recovery phase of COVID-19. These days, with the UK's workforce continuing to work from home for the foreseeable future, it can feel increasingly difficult to step away from tasks for regular breaks. But keeping separate personal and professional lives - without allowing one to encroach upon the other - is vital to maintain optimum productivity and preserve overall mental and physical wellbeing. When stress turns to burnout, there is the risk of jeopardising more than just relationships with others, it also impacts mental and physical health too. Taking a step back from work and doing things for yourself is critical for long-term success and ensuring regular breaks help keep stress levels to a minimum.

Listening to people and ensuring they feel safe, supported and have the correct equipment, does not depend on location. More than ever, it's vitally important to regularly check in on employees and not take the basics for granted. This has been a stressful time for all and people will have been effected in many different ways and many will be feeling mentally and physically vulnerable. It's tempting to think that people don't want to be bothered, but most appreciate the occasional reminders and suggestions for going outside for a lunch break, encouraging people to just take time away from their desks, including doing some form of exercise. A good way to gain insights into how remote workers are feeling, is to create pulse surveys, to gauge their thoughts and understand their needs and enable them to access the resources and tools they need in order for them to work more comfortably at home. Furthermore, they

> BY BUILDING CONFIDENCES THAT IT'S OK FOR PEOPLE TO FLAG UP ANY PROBLEMS REALLY WILL HELP TO PREVENT BURNOUT, STRESS AND ANXIETY FROM BECOMING LONG-TERM CONDITIONS THAT CAUSE PROLONGED TIME OFF WORK

should be listening to the needs of their employees and direct them to available resources, if professional support is required. Businesses that gain a good reputation of encouraging work/life balance are those who retain and attract talent.

Although it has become more difficult for employees to have casual social interactions throughout the day, it's important to encourage virtual coffee break with colleagues, to help break up the day and make people feel less lonely. The aim of this is to combat isolation and help them through the day when working from home. This is a good morale booster, as teams can stay better connected. Moving forward from COVID-19, flexible working is likely to be adopted by many UK businesses and although a lot of people have enjoyed the freedom of working from home, it's important to not forget about the mental health of employees. Every employee will be experiencing different home environment and so it's an obligation to check in and see how each person is coping. Indeed, encouraging open conversations about mental health between employees and their employer, will galvanise the relationship and keep people informed with the support that is available, to support a healthy work-life balance. With one-in-four people experiencing a mental health problem of some kind each year in the UK, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) really can make the difference, guiding people to a range of work/life and mental health resources. It's taken as read that a supported workforce will respond positively and with business recovery being so reliant on performance and engagement, the fact that well supported wellbeing increases productivity by up to 12 percent, cannot be ignored. By building confidences that it's OK for people to flag up any problems really will help to prevent burnout, stress and anxiety from becoming long-term conditions that cause prolonged time off work. ●

FOR FURTHER INFO WWW.UNUM.CO.UK

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"IT'S LIFE JIM... BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT"

This time of fundamental shift to remote and the disruption of separation, has inevitably caused a change in human connection. Elements of life - that we all took for granted, but now miss like crazy - have been absent and, while virtual has enabled us to carry on, the never-ending stream of virtual meetings can never replace normality. With the fundamental conventions of work changed forever, what will the future look like?

ARTICLE BY IMKE SCHULLER, GLOBAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INNOVATION & SARAH THOMAS, GLOBAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CULTURE & ENGAGEMENT - LANDOR & FITCH

The pandemic has put many cultures under the microscope as we have witnessed how business leadership has responded and whether a company's values truly manifest in its actions. We expect many of the new traits and behaviours that have been adopted will be here to stay, with a blend of working from the office and working from home. But this now called hybrid workforce model, will severely test an organisation's culture like nothing else before. Conversely, this time of change presents opportunities. Indeed, it has been a time of reflection and an inflexion point for corporate culture, where business leaders can now (re)shape, cement and leverage their company cultures, to create the greatest impact for their organisations. So how do we plan to support an engaged and motivated workforce from a distance? As we look towards the future, the challenge is how to create a sense of belonging and an emotional connection amongst a workforce that is partially working remotely and partially working in the office.

Purpose-led businesses are proven to perform better and purpose drives growth, but there must be a common vision and ambition, driven out of the central brand purpose, because employees need to not only know what they are doing, but why they are doing it and how to translate values into actions. Leaders can talk about culture and further clarify their organisation's values and what makes them distinctive, by clearly spelling out why they matter. Clarity has never been so important, to take your teams on a journey of how the brand came to be and what the company stands for, to better contextualise and affirm what role they play today. It will help everyone to reset, as well as segueing into why values are values, so that teams can engage better. Having that sense of purpose connects employees with leaders and fosters a sense of belonging. This will help to make workplace culture decisions that will enable the company to learn, adapt and accelerate post-crisis - it's the brand lens that everything needs to be viewed through.

You don't really manage a culture per se, instead, focus on the behaviours that shape it. Encouraging and celebrating the behaviours and rituals - "the way we do things" - demonstrates the values and norms you want to strengthen. Studies have shown that just

completing the acts of a normal working day can have a positive impact on employee mental health and productivity. With research pointing to the fact that we are working increasingly longer hours when working from home, this has never been more important to encourage. Even cross-company get-togethers and activities can be reimagined virtually with a little creativity. For example, personal finance company Quicken hosted a virtual tropical company retreat complete with a box of goodies for each person. Leaders at global digital intelligence company ABBYY marked Oktoberfest by sending treats and gifts to Munich employees. At Talend, a data integration and data integrity company, employees had access to a range of weekly activities ranging from bread-making classes to fitness tutorials. In the absence of 'buffer moments' during the working day within the workplace, colleagues are missing out on the advantages of relationship building with teams they might not work directly with or who are new joiners. Global manufacturer of polymers, Covestro, recently introduced a new company-wide ritual called 'Covestro Speed Dating', randomly matching employees online to meet with others across the network for a chat. In an uncertain world, or where remote or hybrid working are the norm, daily

a driver of performance. Unicorns, by virtue of their fast-paced growth, constantly operate in "crisis mode" and Unicorn leaders are very present communicators, which in turn ensures that everyone stays vested in the success of the business. Transparent communication is also not a core corporate value publicly declared but, in a time of crisis, it is central to how employees experience and evaluate corporate culture. Business leaders should commit to communicating with regular cadence, with honesty and transparency and that includes providing answers to some of the tough questions - for example, on job security - and how the business is doing financially. This is backed up in sentiment analysis of 1.4m employee-written Glassdoor reviews - from April to August 2020 - which identified topics that were most discussed and if they were mentioned positively or negatively. Here, quality of communication by business leaders, was a standout… in particular, honest communications and transparency. It's not all about talking, you have to listen too, because communication needs to be a two-way-street, not a one-way broadcast. With this in mind, it pays to provide opportunities and mechanisms, to actively listen to and take the organisational pulse and then proactively and openly address concerns.

and exciting ways of working across digital platforms, to engage teams and enhance creativity and efficiency, on global projects, under tight deadlines. In our business, we created the '25th Hour' - where a project brief starts in Tokyo or Sydney and then, following the sun, is handed over across studios, until it ends up in San Francisco or LA. This approach leverages the diversity of talent, ideas and input of the global network and also delivers outcomes faster. Another advantage of the digital employee experience is the ability to scale - it could be a townhall or broadcast to hundreds or thousands of employees - or a brand-led, virtual conference for the entire network, via an app. Whatever the nature or scale, technology is enabling businesses to continue to function and communicate effectively, but also to innovate, presenting an important platform for business leaders to concentrate time and investment in.

Now, more than ever, teams need business leaders who can be open and empathetic and who not only deliver results, but also create a working environment where people feel valued and supported. Leader personality can be instrumental in shaping employee perception and engagement and, in many cases, become a single source of truth for employees. There is so much information coming from different angles that employees look to leaders to make sense of what's happening and put situations in the context of their particular company and make it relevant. So, no wonder that empathy, compassion and listening skills are exemplified as essential for business leaders in the support and engagement of employees. Looking back to the Unicorn study, we found CEOs of these companies to be an example for how their culture is lived; taking on the role of influential internal brand ambassadors, who really inspire change. Being comfortable with showing a human and authentic side to your leadership helps to engage, but also underpins trust. Culture is having its moment and it matters. In an organisational context, it is one of the most important differentiators a company possesses and it is guided by brand purpose and values and driven by the day-to-day behaviours of employees. Clearly, it's imperative for business leaders to plan for the hybrid working model of the future to meaningfully engage in all the right ways. ●

FOR FURTHER INFO
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> UNICORNS, BY VIRTUE OF THEIR FAST-PACED GROWTH, CONSTANTLY OPERATE IN "CRISIS MODE" AND UNICORN LEADERS ARE VERY PRESENT COMMUNICATORS, WHICH IN TURN ENSURES THAT EVERYONE STAYS VESTED IN THE SUCCESS OF THE BUSINESS

routines and rituals create a sense of structure and really drive belonging and are therefore critical to maintain. It goes without saying that good communication is fundamental for business leaders - no matter the size of the organisation they lead. Great leaders are those who are clear about the reality and that are present, visible and authentic in their communication with employees.

In our organisation, we interviewed ten unicorns - former start-ups that have cracked the $1bn valuation mark - to understand how fast-moving organisations use culture as

The pandemic thrust most businesses into the digital age - whether they were ready or not - and now cloud-based and digital tools for communication, learning and knowledge-sharing are the norm. So the employee experience is now, largely, a digital experience for a large number of people. Teams, fragmented in terms of physical proximity, have the unprecedented opportunity to collaborate, share information and innovate across organisational or geographic divides, where the only real challenge is robust internet connectivity and time-zone coordination. Business leaders can also drive forward new

"WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT SECURITY..."

The homeworking honeymoon has gone on long enough to see whether people and remote are a marriage made in heaven or hell. On the whole, it's been a relatively sanguine affair, leading to an outcome that even the staunchest of critics could hardly describe as dysfunctional.

ARTICLE BY
MICHAEL LEFTLEY
PARTNER, HEAD OF EMPLOYMENT,
INCENTIVES & IMMIGRATION GROUP

& NATALIE MORENO
PARTNER, COMMERCIAL SERVICES
ADDLESHAW GODDARD

W ith the vaccination programme in full flow, a return to the office is now at least, a realistic prospect. Assuming we are likely to see businesses adopting a hybrid office/ home model for the foreseeable future - either because pandemic management necessitates that model or because it is adopted as the "new normal" going forwards - this poses challenges. Homeworking is relatively democratic at the moment, since those that can work from home must. But if you cast your mind back pre-pandemic, those who worked from home were often forgotten, or an assumption was made that they didn't want to be disturbed and very little was put in place to make the experience in any way comparable to being in the office. Looking forward to managing a hybrid model, the set up needs to ensure, insofar as possible, equality between the homeworking and in-office experiences and this is an entire topic in its own right and will require careful consideration. Another challenge is setting up an approach to homeworking that can function for the longer term. A year into mass, long-term homeworking, few businesses have really responded to the challenges posed, whether that be health and safety, home office set ups, mental health and wellbeing, information security or confidentiality. These are all issues that employers need to grasp and develop appropriate strategies and policies to manage. It is a very broad subject, so for the purpose of this article, let us focus on how to approach the security and confidentiality of information and data in a home working environment.

It's important to point out at the very beginning, that working from home arrangements have always presented a unique set of cybersecurity challenges for organisations, but these have never been put to such a rigorous test than during the pandemic. From a cybersecurity and data protection perspective, there are some major issues to consider for employees working remotely in order to mitigate the associated risks. Looking at best practice, on a basic level, the Information Commissioner's Office recommends some general principles be followed by organisations implementing work from home arrangements. They include; having clear policies, procedures and guidance for staff who are remote working. These should include topics such as; accessing, handling and disposing of personal data. Next, use the most up-to-date version of your remote access solution, remind staff to use unique and complex passwords and check if multi-factor authentication is available and configured where possible. In addition to these steps, the National Cyber Security Centre recommends; producing written guidance for employees who need to use different software than usual, or to use existing software in a new way. Consider producing a series of 'How do I?' guides, so that already-stretched support teams are not overwhelmed with requests for help. For example, you might produce a 'How to log into and use an online collaboration tool' guide. It is also very worthwhile to schedule regular checks, to see how staff are coping - not just in terms of how to use new technologies - but also how they are adapting to having to work in very different ways and consider what protection might be built into devices. Staff are more likely to have their devices stolen, or lose them, when they are away from the office or home, so make sure devices encrypt data whilst at rest, which will protect data on the device, if this happens. Most modern devices have encryption built in, but it may still need to be turned on and configured.

Cloud storage and remote desktop arrangements are of course a necessity when facilitating home working. But care must be taken to ensure that all cloud services are not publicly accessible, without some form of authentication and that staff are only given access to

appropriate areas within the cloud. Remote desktop services should also be checked to ensure that their access is strictly controlled and only used when absolutely necessary. The use of company email, while commonplace in ordinary circumstances, becomes more of a focus during remote working and so any existing policies regarding emails to third parties, phishing prevention and blocking of personal web-based mailing should be emphasised in the current circumstances. Businesses are well advised to carry out a Data Protection Impact Assessment. This will not only flag any outstanding issues internally, but also serve as a demonstrable step, should any cyber-related incident occur, or questions are asked about the working from home arrangements. An assessment of whether the existing policies cover all the relevant risks should also be carried out and this could range from; IT and communications systems policies, data security policies, or data breach policies, to Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies and specific remote working policies. Training staff to understand and implement these policies is key. To achieve these objectives from a practical perspective, it is important that HR and IT departments collaborate, to ensure staff policies and practices align with the technology being deployed to staff members. Ensuring working arrangements and contracts reflect these practices will help companies shield themselves from any IT-related negligence. In order to ensure continuity of these work-from-home practices, it is also vital that staff training is regularly carried out. This is likely to be a significant undertaking, depending on the number of new measures that were introduced as a consequence of the pandemic. However, it is a key step in ensuring compliance and safe working practices. In addition to the data protection requirements discussed above, there may be additional sector-specific cybersecurity requirements to factor in for businesses operating in, for example, financial services, healthcare, energy or defence. Working remotely with particularly sensitive confidential data obviously carries additional risks and these will need to be woven into any existing cybersecurity policies or practices.

As well as taking the steps outlined to protect data and information, long-term homeworking is also going to require behavioural change. The biggest risk to the loss of data and confidential information is people and so in addition to training on specific policies and processes, employers will also need to establish a set of behavioural norms for a homeworking environment. This will differ between organisations and sectors but, for example, companies might need to ask some of the following questions: Is it acceptable for your employees to work at home in the same room as a flatmate or family member who works for another organisation? What if a flatmate works for a competitor? What expectations do you have around the physical security of company equipment in the home? These and similar questions, have been put on the backburner during the pandemic, but will need addressing for the longer term.

There is a risk that organisational connection wanes through homeworking unless steps are taken to maintain it. During the pandemic we have seen, for example, an increase in team moves and the theft of confidential information by employees. Partly this is because the set-up costs of establishing a competitive business are lower without the immediate need to invest in bricks and mortar. However, the principal issues are a loss of organisational connection and the increased insider threat from homeworking. Planning a team move or using confidential information to prepare to compete is much easier out of the office than in it. Some of this can be addressed through policies and procedures, but it also needs managers to be equipped with the right skills to manage remotely and the willingness to put those skills into practice. In simple terms we need to work a lot harder to manage remotely than we do in the office. Informal connections don't happen at home, which means we need to create them remotely in different ways. It is very hard to predict the future amid the complete uncertainty the pandemic has created. However, it seems likely that homeworking will continue in a more significant way than it did pre-pandemic. As highlighted, there are many aspects for employers to focus on if they are to make a success of homeworking in the longer term. But having the approach security and promoting and supporting employee behaviours associated with it, will be two of the cornerstones of effective homeworking. ●

> THE BIGGEST RISK TO THE LOSS OF DATA AND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION IS PEOPLE AND SO IN ADDITION TO TRAINING ON SPECIFIC POLICIES AND PROCESSES, EMPLOYERS WILL ALSO NEED TO ESTABLISH A SET OF BEHAVIOURAL NORMS FOR A HOMEWORKING ENVIRONMENT

TO THE POINT

THE ROAD BACK

What sort of scar will the effects of the past 12 months leave on the world's psyche? The journey of mental healing has not yet begun.

Article by Dr Nerina Ramlakhan, Author, Physiologist, Sleep Expert and Workshop Facilitator

F ear, anxiety, loneliness and despair have been felt widely throughout the pandemic. At unprecedented levels? No. We are not the only generation to have experienced hardship on a global scale and we will not be the last. Many millions of people lived through inconceivable horrors during WW1 and WW2, but still managed to emerge with resilience. One of the biggest lessons we can take away from a crisis is that we cannot control the uncontrollable, what we can do is master our response to it. "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves," said Viktor Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning*. The Austrian psychiatrist lost his wife and daughters in Auschwitz during the Nazi holocaust. He himself survived the concentration camp and went on to do his best work, which changed the course of positive psychology. Frankl's main premise was that, those who are able to find meaning, hope and optimism, even in the face of the worst tragedies, are more likely to survive and even thrive.

Right now, the public mood is polarised and if we look at the average person on the street at the moment, they fall into two distinct camps. There are those who will talk about how bad everything is and how we're all just surviving and then there are those who are cautiously and realistically optimistic about the future, even though none of us really knows what it holds. These are the ones who might choose to notice that even in isolation and lockdown, some small positives are emerging. Some of our key relationships are being strengthened and relationships that have not served (and were not serving) us, may have died off or become less important.

Life has become very pared down and simple. We are having to dig deeper to find joy and happiness, but it is there if we choose to look for it. Those who have done the work on themselves might have found deeper inner psychological safety and resilience. My personal belief and philosophy, is one of hope and cautious optimism. I feel we will emerge stronger and I am already seeing signs of this. I am confident we will bounce back. We all have here the opportunity to grow from this chapter.

We need to see a top-down approach. If there are enough people and leaders, who are prepared to fight for the right to thrive in these times - by making conscious choices - then we will all emerge stronger and more evolved human beings. We need a critical mass of thrivers and I believe we will achieve this. In recent months, all my work has been about challenging choices and behaviours and inviting leaders to step up so that they can thrive and exude the kind of extraordinary and inspirational energy that their employees will be looking to them for. As Viktor Frankl put it so poignantly: "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

We are at the beginning of a big wave of social change. How we choose to respond to that change is down to us. I believe it will be a few years before we are able to breathe a collective sigh of relief, look back on this time and say: 'That was tough as hell, but look at what good has emerged'. Pre-pandemic, mental health problems and burnout were becoming increasingly commonplace. Now the COVID-19 crisis has given us the opportunity to reassess outdated approaches and put wellbeing at the top of the agenda. ●

Dr Nerina Ramlakhan is author of *Tired But Wired* (Souvenir Press, 2010), *Fast Asleep, Wide Awake* (Thorsons, 2016), and *The Little Book of Sleep: The Art of Natural Sleep* (Gaia, 2018).

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THE BLOG

INTRODUCING THE BLOG

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

SIMON BRADBURY

Simon Bradbury is the founder and a Payroll Implementation Consultant at Global HRIS. He'd worked in payroll and HR for a number of years, specialising in global programme implementations. He's supported on the payroll and HR transformation for global outsourcing leaders, including NGA HR, SD Worx, Ceridian and Safeguard Global.

LUCY GORDON

Lucy Gordon is Director Employment Team at Walker Morris. She has over 15 years of experience in advising national and international businesses on employment law. Lucy has particular expertise in advising on group restructures, TUPE and multi-jurisdictional redundancy programmes. She is highly regarded by clients for her commercial, pragmatic approach and clear advice.

JUDE JENNISON

Jude Jennison is Founder Director of Leaders by Nature Ltd helps senior leadership teams align through disruptive change. She specialises in leading through uncertainty and works with a herd of horses to uncover non-verbal patterns of behaviour. She combines 17 years senior leadership experience in a global IT organisation with extensive coaching.

FUTURE OF THE OFFICE: THE 'HYBRID' WAY OF WORKING

Every business has had its operational framework thrown into question over the year. A national crisis required fast responses and an experimentation with a new working style, so it's no surprise that working from home (and during a global pandemic) hasn't been without challenges. But that doesn't mean it isn't here to stay. Flexible working hours, remote working options and collaborative workspaces aren't anything new. COVID-19 has simply accelerated what changes were already in place. Employers saw the value of a flexible working model that prioritised wellbeing.

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BALANCING COVID-19 COMPLIANCE AND EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

There has been a wealth of commentary and advice for employers about how to deal with employee anxiety surrounding a return to the workplace in the 'post-COVID' world. However, one issue has been overlooked: what about employees who want to return to the workplace, contrary to Government guidance? While many have enjoyed the experience of working from home, the novelty has well and truly worn off for some. Recent studies on mental health and wellbeing have been damning: ONS data shows the number of people suffering from depression has doubled.

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WHAT IS THE UNDERLYING ENERGY OF YOUR TEAM?

Using your energy is one of the most effective leadership tools you can use, yet leaders are rarely trained in how to use it. Everyone in the team contributes to the energy, and you often feed off each other, often unconsciously. When you learn to use your energy consciously, you can use it to align a team and find a state of flow. Often people think about energy in terms of high energy - enthusiasm, commitment, a fast pace, excitement, joy - but energy comes in many different forms. theHRDIRECTOR blogs have become an institution, enabling people with great expertise and knowledge within the HR space, to provide insight.

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