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The only independent strategic HR publication

JUSTINE DINTER, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER - BREAKING WAVE (DB LTD.)

{ B A N K   R O L L E R }

"THIS PEOPLE PROFESSION DEMANDS THAT WE'RE ON OUR A-GAME, PREPARING FOR WHATEVER MAY COME"

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ON THE COVER

In this issue, we interview Justine Dinter, Chief People Officer - Breaking Wave (DB Ltd.). The world of banking conjures images of monolithic supertankers. "The crash" shocked and forced captains to turn into the storm. Then Fintech was a game changer, navigating uncharted waters and, presciently, in response to the tides of change, Deutsche Bank set up Breaking Wave

Justine Dinter shot exclusively for theHRDIRECTOR
Cover & Interview photography by Stuart Thomas

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EDITOR'S WELCOME

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

This time will be remembered for the re-definition of health & wellbeing. The "nice-to-have" transitioned first to an imperative concern and then on to a matter of life and death.

As the terrible taboo that kept mental health a private battle was lifted, it was revealed that an "always on" culture was fueling a shocking level of mental health illness. Employers responded, promising heightened empathy and a series of measures to alleviate the rigueur of modern life and, begrudgingly in some quarters, a nod to flexible working. Then everything took a sinister turn for the worse, as the shroud of coronavirus descended. Whether culture, authenticity, integrity and trust can radiate between organisations - through laptop screens - to their people remains to be seen.

Although the COVID-19 demolition ball is swinging wildly at traditional old mindsets and frameworks - that should have been deconstructed long ago - it is also accelerating the direction of travel, in how businesses should be managing talent, whilst exposing the true reality behind the skills shortage. In the grip of this crisis, nine million workers were furloughed in the UK - many will not return to their old jobs - and 700,000 have been made redundant, many unable to retire - taking decades of skills and experience into the gig economy. What is patently clear is, talent must now be managed like a supply chain, not as a commodity to possess.

The workforce is split between those that miss the cliché "watercooler moments" and drinks after work, while others have found working remotely liberating and have expressed that they are in no hurry to return, either fearing for safety or the rigmarole and expense of commuting. How that eventually pans out, only time will tell. The death of the office has been predicted for years, but its demise was drawn out, because it was difficult and many feared the loss of control and face-to-face accountability would descend into chaos. However, it took no time at all in lockdown to demonstrate that what was suggested, could be, by and large, realised.

The dreaded annual performance review has no place in the present and future frame and arguably, was never fit for purpose. Few would argue that performance reviews were anything other than an anathema to the spirit of creativity and collaboration. But by far the most thuggish blunt instrument was either financial rewards for positive or punitive action for negative. In the evolving world of collaborative effort and knowledge share, the reality is that contribution is far more complex, nuanced and discretionary.

Jason Spiller

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HM Government

From 1 January 2021

The way you hire from the EU is changing

Free movement is ending, and the new points-based immigration system will introduce job, salary and language requirements that will change the way you hire from the EU.

You will need to be a licensed sponsor to hire eligible employees from outside the UK. Becoming a sponsor normally takes 8 weeks and fees apply.

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

Find out more at GOV.UK/HiringFromTheEU

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 *Tan v Copthorne Hotels Ltd* an ET ordered T to pay £432,001.85 costs to Copthorne Hotels after it rejected all of his claims. The costs judgment does not indicate why the amount was ordered but it appears that it stems from the frivolous nature of T's case and the unreasonable way it was presented. For example: (i) the only act of alleged racial harassment was that a colleague, Dr Wu, told T to be more like Chinese, but the comment was made in the context of their close friendship in a telephone call and was part of their familiar friendly dialogue; (ii) given T's concession in oral evidence that the dismissing officer did not know about his protected acts (allegations of discrimination) when he made the decision to dismiss, then the victimisation claim had no foundation; (iii) even though the ET found T was fairly dismissed for redundancy, it would have found that T would have been dismissed in any event as soon as the employer found out about the making of his covert recordings, as this was duplicitous and undermining of the relationship of trust and confidence between the parties. Finally, the weakness of T's evidence meant that the burden of proof did not pass to the respondent in the age, race, sexual orientation victimisation and harassment claims.

2 In *Jackson v Great Britain Ltd* an ET had to decide whether Stoicism qualifies as a protected philosophical belief under S.10 of the Equality Act 2010 in accordance with the principles set out by the EAT in *Grainger plc and ors v Nicholson*. J believes in a particular philosophical belief system known as Stoicism, i.e. there is an objective moral reality to which we are subject and there are several ethical "values" to which he must adhere as a consequence of this belief which he identifies as wisdom, courage, moderation and justice. When considering whether an act he performs is a permissible one, the act itself and its adherence to principles and virtues is the subject which must be considered, as opposed to determining the ethical nature of an act in a utilitarian or consequentialist manner. The realisation that the consequence of what he says would cause offence would not stop him from saying it. The ET found that Stoicism is a protected belief. Stoicism as a philosophical belief system has been with us for about 2,300 years and J's belief is genuinely held because he is serious in his views and applies them consistently and with a single-minded logic. Stoicism concerns a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour, it attains a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance, and is worthy of respect in a democratic society, not incompatible with human dignity and not in conflict with the fundamental rights of others.

3 In *Sullivan v Bury Street Capital Limited*, from about July 2013, following a split with a Ukrainian girlfriend, S suffered paranoid delusions that he was being followed and stalked by a Russian gang. These delusions affected his timekeeping, attendance and record-keeping. However, things improved after September 2013. But in April 2017 that there was a worsening of the effect of the paranoid delusions on his day-to-day activities. S's employment was terminated on 8 September 2017, ostensibly for reasons to do with capability and attitude. An ET upheld S's unfair dismissal claim but rejected his disability discrimination claims because he did not have a disability within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010.

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.

DARREN LITTLEBOY
Group HR Director - DS Smith

DS Smith announced the appointment of Darren Littleboy as Group HR Director. Darren has a demonstrable record of building high performing HR teams and delivering business transformation within publicly listed businesses. He joins the FTSE 100 multinational - which employs over 30,000 people across its Paper, Recycling and Packaging divisions - to lead on a number of strategic priorities for the Group.

LAURA TOSCANO
HR Director - Navico

Laura Toscano has been announced as HR Director of UK, Europe and Russia territories for Navico, a marine electronics company providing navigation, marine instruments and fish finding equipment to both the recreational and commercial marine sectors. Laura has more than 20 years of experience in HR, working as HR Business Partner and, most recently, as HR Director at Moog Industrial Group.

MAHMOOD NOMAN
People Director - Bradfield College

Bradfield College is delighted to announce the arrival of Mahmood Noman as its new People Director. The College is embarking on the development of a wide-ranging five-year strategy with a People Strategy featuring as a core component. One of the key areas of focus is to raise the profile of HR, through the creation of a new governance oversight committee and the appointment of Mahmood as People Director.

NICOLA WARING
Director or People - ArrowXL

Nicola Waring has been appointed Director of People Services at two-person delivery company ArrowXL. In her role, one of Nicola's primary focuses will be on the attraction and retention of the best people, by driving engagement and colleague development. This appointment comes at a time when the business is experiencing strong growth and is determined to ingrain a strong people culture throughout.

RE-SCHEDULED - BUT STILL SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO AND WE SURE NEED IT!

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If you are an **HR Director** or **Senior HR Practitioner** and would like to attend, please **REGISTER** your interest soonest as we have only 60 places available:

www.thehrdirector.com/hrdrinks-registration

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Think of the world of banking and the mind conjures images of monolithic supertankers, bossed by bridges that didn't get the diversity memo, plotting courses along predictable sea lanes. "The crash" forced captains to turn into the storm. Then Fintech was a game changer, navigating uncharted waters and, presciently, in response to the tides of change, Deutsche Bank set up Breaking Wave.

JUSTINE DINTER
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER - BREAKING WAVE (DB LTD.)

INTERVIEWED BY JASON SPILLER & PHOTOGRAPHED BY STUART THOMAS

Justine take us back to your early life and how you found the path to a career in HR. I completed my degree in Business at Oxford Brookes and after graduating, I landed a grad placement at Sainsbury's head office in London, in food buying and it was a great start in the commercial world of business. I was of course one of many graduate joiners and we took advantage of all that London had to offer, the work hard/play hard ethic. This was the time when supply chains were becoming more sophisticated and technical and introduced me to data and analytics and, as I progressed, I began to realise that the missing jigsaw piece was the lack of 'people' aspects in the role. So I took the somewhat bold decision to leave and half my base salary to join RHR, a big retail recruitment consultancy that was hiring for all the big multiple retailers' head offices. Sainsbury's was great, but often the roles can be quite narrow in a large organisation and what I wanted was a variety of experiences in different sized companies, to find out how businesses and the people within them tick. Recruitment really exposes you to the crux of organisations and your success depends on understanding the client, the commercials and the cultures. Good recruiters have an inquiring mind - looking beyond face-value, honing those questioning skills and really understanding the client's brief is paramount. What turned out to be a five-year tenure, this role taught me so much and equipped me with those foundational skills, particularly relationship-building.

Tell us about your next career move. One of the firms I was working with was really doing things differently at the time - a completely different proposition - new to Europe, very ambitious and fast-growing. That was TK Maxx and I applied for a role to head up the new resourcing team. This was a different operating model and the proposition was so attractive to candidates who had almost complete autonomy to go out, make decisions on product and seal deals, without having to keep going back for sign off. The growth was rapid to scale the business in Europe and the role was much broader than

I had experienced before and I began to lean towards the talent and leadership development side. So, by a sort of process of experiential osmosis, I began to form a broader knowledge of general HR. Then very sadly, my father became terminally ill and I needed to relocate back to the Midlands, to provide what support I could. I took a role at Rolls Royce and then TNT nearby - about as different to retail as you can have and a step down - but any new experience, particularly in different sectors - is valuable and the work/life balance helped with the personal situation. TNT was a very different business of course, whereas TK Maxx was about rapid growth, TNT wanted to professionalise the talent offer, whether that was looking at the capability of the sales function or the volumes needed for the management positions and, with a big focus on training, the in-house recruitment team launched talent completely from scratch. So, although a long-established legacy business, this was a real turning point, particularly for HR operations. Time passed and a few years onwards, it was time to come back down south and I think this was an important point, as my experience set and CV was beginning to gain real interest and it came to a point where I had offers from eBay and Tesco - retail called louder and so I joined Tesco as Head of Resourcing for Commercial. This was big scale, some 600 direct hires a year and it turned out to be a more generalist HR role too. Tesco was hugely successful at the time and there was a great deal of learning & development and culture work as the business rapidly expanded. In terms of people management, there was a definite onus on culture and leadership skills and generally a more sophisticated style of HR, in a sector previously known for being commercially-led and cut and thrust. I was also involved in a good deal of succession work and here, diversity & inclusion was a key focus in the future vision.

At the time, as you say, Tesco was indomitable. But protecting that position is in itself, a massive challenge. As we came to see, even giants fall. Yes,

during my time there, Tesco was at its most successful and was number one of the big four. So, the question of what could possibly go wrong always had to be on the agenda and must dictate business sense - it's no good operating as if you're immune to pain. During my time as the Head of HR for Food, the horsemeat problem was a catalyst and then came the disruptors in the shape of Lidl and Aldi. In 2014, Dave Lewis joined as the new Group CEO and he was very much a brand and customer expert, from Unilever. This was a critical time for Tesco having fallen for some sucker punches and was suddenly in the position of having to reinvent itself, thanks to some bad publicity and changing markets. This is where Tesco proved to be brilliant, in terms of its resilience, speed of reaction and execution capability at scale. It was a tough challenge and for all the "what if?" planning, somewhat out-of-the-blue. But such times call for great leadership and engaged, capable people across the board and that steadied the ship as it changed course. It taught me the importance of supportive leadership, making sure that we are communicating to the teams as often as possible and being authentic and transparent. If it's bad, tell people, be open, don't try and hide the truth, but lay out the plans at the same time.

What happened next on your career path? Tesco tends to move you around a fair bit for all sorts of reasons - mainly so that you stay up-to-date and keep developing - and, next for me was another change, to a role in marketing and digital. The digital team had its own new offices in Farringdon, to attract tech talent in London and Michelle McEttrick started as the new Group Brand Director, so it was an exciting time to join brand and to work on the transformation and my experience in the commercial team really came into play. Digital was just a whole different ballgame, balancing the demands of tech talent with the existing retail business. This obviously called for the best talent in software engineers, UX and data scientists and Tesco was just another

organisation competing in a very competitive market which was vying for this talent. I was part of a big change in the business and scaled the Digital team. After this hectic time, it was a time for reflection for me, from a career perspective. In my branding and digital role, I watched as Natasha Adams became UK HR Director (and subsequently Group HRD) and formed her team and I felt compelled to try for the Group Talent role, which had an international remit. The appeal of strategising for the Group, creating the talent strategy, working with the executive committee on succession planning, senior development plans and defining the diversity & inclusion strategy was compelling. Career-wise, this was a step up, working at group and regional strategy level. When work is this intense and absorbing, you blink and five years goes by - it's always a bit of a career milestone - should I stay or should I go? By chance, my colleague - Thomas Nielsen, Tesco's Digital Product Officer - had recently moved to Deutsche Bank and we met up and he explained why he had moved and would I consider financial services as another sector change? He outlined a number of change possibilities, one option being a new, but small entity in this

proposed here was a very pure focus on executing on new concepts quickly and either moving projects along to the next stage - i.e. finding the right talent to develop it - and launch or kill without delay. Very quickly, we found a great proposition, "with the bank, for the bank" and Breaking Wave became this pure, 'air gapped' software engineering capability, that can enable teams to build and ship quickly. When I say air gap, I mean we have a governance framework applicable to a technology business, which is hugely liberating. Two years in and we have developed an agile partnership with the bigger organisation, which is proving to be a winning formula. To all intents and purposes, we're an inhouse fintech, capable of enabling execution at speed and all the benefits that brings. We're also very independent from an HR policies perspective and have our own values, benefits and compensation framework, plus we have our brand and identity and I think we are gaining traction and confidence across the bank. I do think the will was there from the start, which was a great launch platform, but we needed a real partnership with Compliance, in order to be really established.

> YOU CANNOT IGNORE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND IT HAS DEMONSTRATED IN TOO MANY WAYS THE NEED FOR; COMMUNITY, COLLABORATION, EMPATHY AND HAVING A CARING CULTURE THAT IS GENUINELY CONCERNED ABOUT PEOPLE'S WELLBEING

massive financial institution. I joined as Change and Culture Director and, after setting out the plans ahead - the operating model and governance framework amongst other things - we wrote the blueprint which quickly became Breaking Wave.

Tell us about Breaking Wave and was it a challenge to convince this massive and long-established monolith to back this venture?
To Deutsche Bank's credit, they are by culture brave and receptive to new concepts and, at this level, they almost immediately saw the advantages of the business model and reasons for forming it. They agreed to invest and take it from plan to fruition. There is no shortage of great ideas in Deutsche Bank and the business case was around extending our execution capability. Typically, in big corporates you can easily come to grief by delay and tripping over red tape, but in this fast-moving digital landscape, delay is of course fatal. So for the bank, what was

One of the big culture elements of Breaking Wave is to knowledge share, collaborate and "demo through doing". It provides the environment to trial, experiment, fail fast and move on and we developed this very beautiful collaborative office space, where teams could ideate and brainstorm together. Of course, the pandemic means that this cannot happen there at the moment, so we're making more use of tools like Miro and we've adapted the operating model, which required us to agree with Compliance that this was safe and secure and would not cause any additional risk for the bank. We've adjusted the business model so anybody across the organisation globally can gain access to the remote Breaking Wave environment and, because this is a digital platform, it's actually creating even more of a community proposition. It will now scale through either internal Deutsche Bank or partnerships with vendors - and even across the gig economy - as part of what has

become the Breaking Wave community. This is the at-scale proposition now, which I think is really in line with the changes in work for the future. This pandemic has forced the proposition that people can work from anywhere and we're just experimenting with what that might look like, ensuring the fully-remote product is not inferior in any way.

There's obvious advantages in having a really splendid HQ hub, but remote working has now been trialed on the big stage and people like it. That is going to hugely impact on what we consider the traditional workplace to be. We have been reimagining what our purpose of face-to-face time is most beneficial for and it won't necessarily be the same as before. Like any big and impactful event, situations, people and priorities change. There are businesses that are fully remote, but with Breaking Wave, we have one customer in Deutsche Bank and we have taken a lot of time being very deliberate about the culture we want and ensuring our values are relevant and lived. I believe if you have those elements in a strong position, you can withstand a shock. Sure, an extended period of time not seeing each other face-to-face is going to cause changes, perhaps some that we cannot even contemplate right now, but values are values, wherever you're working from. There's a certain amount of - let's just call it cultural credit - and as we go along, we have to consider both the good and the bad and react to it accordingly. Right now, we are considering what the key events for team building are and an element of this is how we can best and most beneficially use our office space, plus how can other teams across the bank make use of the space for their benefit.

Where there have been atrocities such as terror attacks, it's remarkable how people walk by the spot so soon afterwards. There's something about the human spirit that cannot be crushed. Indeed, but something like a terrorist attack is designed to happen in a flash, whereas this pandemic has been a long, drawn-out and slow-motion event, with just unimaginable trauma for those that have lost loved ones or suffered in other ways. But there is something about the collective spirit, where we've all been affected, isolated - often alone, but together. I don't think we can ever forget what this represents and we must not waste an opportunity to use the experience. As for the Government's directive for a return to work, what we won't do is force anybody into doing something that they don't want to do, particularly those who have vulnerable friends and relatives. We've witnessed the impacts and it's too great a risk in such volatile times to force that decision on anyone, such directives are not aligned with our culture. We moved to people

working remotely two weeks before the Government shut everything down and we had everything in place. We also made sure that if anyone was isolated or in danger at home, that they could talk to us.

THIS IS A PEOPLE PROFESSION AND WE REALLY HAVE TO BE ON OUR A-GAME, SUPPORTING OUR CULTURE AND VALUES, INNOVATING, PREPARING FOR WHATEVER MAY COME AND WHEREVER WE MAY EVENTUALLY ARRIVE AT

Has this changed your business plans to any great degree? Yes, because I think we were so well set up and had started to prove our worth, with more and more requests coming through the business for us to collaborate on projects. Our original suite of tools included; Microsoft Teams, Slack and Miro, which is our virtual whiteboarding platform, so we didn't need to rush to add anything new, it was already live and operational. So, if anything, we're busier than ever and galvanising relationships right across the business, making sure that our proposition is fit for the scale of demand. Consequently, we've more project demands now and, in some cases, we have gone into overdrive to keep up with demands. I really think we have managed to start to build up respect and trust.

A big element in building confidence in capability and awareness is that show is better than tell. You can prove change projects more effectively through reality rather than theory and how we're positioned now fits nicely across all the different innovation streams in the bank. Whether that's our innovation labs who partner with external Fintechs, creating connections, obviously the internal technology teams and we also have entrepreneur programmes, so a wide variety of diverse platforms. It's a rich combination of entrepreneurship and internal consulting and Breaking Wave is placed to enable and execute on plans with a sort of internal Fintech build capability. I believe that, in the longer term, it will prove to be a game changer in the sector. It is good to have something internal, fulfilling this imperative of change, within the existing governance framework and risk appetite of the bank. That's also why we were very deliberate about how we positioned ourselves and what our culture and values represent.

Looking forward, what is the next stage from an HR perspective and also in terms of objectives, what's next for Breaking Wave? You cannot ignore the impact of COVID-19 and it has

demonstrated in too many ways the need for; community, collaboration, empathy and having a caring culture that is genuinely concerned about people's wellbeing. It has set a precedent, a benchmark about how organisations have supported and looked after their employees, which I believe will have long-term implications on how an employer is perceived, both internally and externally. So those are values that we intend to continue to build upon and I think the big one is community. From a business planning point of view, scaling and economies of scale are a critical balance for us going forward - if resources are too flat then that could jeopardise delivery, too heavy and you lose agility and it's also how we operate both internally and externally with vendors. For sure, we're still evolving the operating models, but in the immediate future, as the pandemic continues to grip for the foreseeable future, it's about supporting the safety and wellbeing of employees. Whenever that first month is that we trial coming back into the office, we need to be correctly calibrated and ready.

How optimistic are you that we can return to something that is, perhaps not exactly what we remember, but just better? Well, it's going to be different… back to work, the new normal? I don't think you can simply label it or call it, it will fundamentally change the world of work and a neat little soundbite just doesn't seem appropriate. However, despite the ambiguity of the times and the volatility of the global situation, I genuinely am optimistic for the future. Business leaders keep putting the ball into the long grass and talk is of January 2021 - meantime, there's a tough autumn and winter to work through! This is a people profession and we really have to be on our A-game, supporting our culture and values, innovating, preparing for whatever may come and wherever we may eventually arrive at.

HRD

DANCES WITH PAVLOV'S DOGS

ARTICLE BY MINDY GIBBINS KLEIN, FOUNDER - PANOMA PRESS AND AUTHOR OF THE THOUGHTFUL LEADER

Before you reach the heady levels of success, you want to be seen and heard. Everyone tells you that's the goal. Be seen and heard. Be visible and vocal. Be the thought leader. However, the quest to achieve thought leadership requires you to stand out. But there is a paradox between wanting to be special and unique and, at the same time, wanting to fit in with a community and be accepted.

We do like to feel special and unique, but very few people want to be so different from everyone else that they have no one to whom they can relate, or with whom they can build trusted relationships. So, we seek common ground. We don't want to lose those connections, so the thoughtful leader spends time balancing these two aspirations and often teeters on the continuum. The same goes for the continuum between contentment and discontentment. There is nothing wrong with being discontent with the way things are and striving to change and improve your situation, your results and even the world. Discontentment creates a starting point for change, it is the grit that can start to form the pearl in the oyster. There is one more interesting dichotomy for leaders today, which involves the internal battle between our selfish, self-centred tendencies and our desire to be more collaborative and abundant. One of the best ways to achieve both is to look for ways to collaborate that benefit you or your business. Referring non-competitive business to other colleagues puts you in a great position - the position of "giver" - and creates a desire in the other person's mind to pay you back in some way. Having been a director of BNI, the world's largest referral organisation, I am a big believer in actively looking out for and giving referrals to other people.

I am not going to elaborate on referral techniques here. What I do want to stress here is that you need to be seen as a helpful referrer or introducer. Really look for the best person or company to serve your client, if you can't be the one to gain the business. Only refer one person or business to meet the need, because there is nothing worse than receiving a referral, where you are immediately competing with another person or business, simply because the introducer named both of you, as if you were equal (which you are not). When referring business, the thoughtful leader takes the extra time and care to refer only one company, the best one for the client.

The word thoughtful has two meanings; one has to do with putting thought into something and the other has more to do with caring. I happen to be a fluent speaker of Spanish, it is my second language and I sometimes call myself bilingual. Why am I bringing this up now? Because in Spanish, there are two separate words for the word thoughtful - many other languages make the distinction also. It's only English that tries to use the same word for these very different concepts. However, in this case, it works in our favour since leaders today can achieve a blend of both, for an even more successful outcome. With the amount of noise in the form of

millions of blogs, videos, articles, posts and even books, what is needed now, more than ever, is good quality thoughts and ideas... real thoughts. Ironically, real thoughts are often the missing component in what is called "thought leadership". No real thought goes into it. Does the thoughtful leader always call it right? No. But they have the right intention and are willing to try again and improve the quality. You can teach people to think - you may think this happens at school - but I am talking about real analytical thinking, philosophical thinking, critical thinking. Up until recently, I thought the Internet and the ease with which you can find information and answers was a good thing. I mean, it is good, but it can also be a curse, a time and energy drain, a rat hole and a depressing, endless obsession. If you are trying to build your business, you do need to be actively marketing it, and that includes social media activity. However, some people have addictive personalities and they can be distracted and lose a lot of time reading irrelevant information or end up caught in others' news and dramas. If it doesn't lead to any new insights or ideas that can enhance your own thinking and content, then it has very little value.

The more you focus on others, the more you may doubt yourself and slow your own progress. I love this comment from prominent thought leader James Altucher, as it sums up the issue perfectly: "Your competition is not other people, but the time you kill, the ill you will create, the knowledge you neglect to learn, the connections you fail to build, the health you sacrifice along the path, your inability to generate ideas, the people around you who don't support and love your efforts and whatever god you curse for your bad luck." Be careful about being influenced by others' thoughts and ideas, you will always be exposed to outside influences but you don't have to be a pinball in a machine, being moved by external forces outside your control. You are not one of Pavlov's dogs. To be an expert in something, you have to know a lot about it. It is important to read others' ideas on your topic, watch videos and listen to other speakers on the subject, but you also

have to do it, experience it, practice it and refine it. Whether you need 10,000 hours of experience and practice to become an expert, or whether it is a different measure, there is certainly a way to assess people's expertise and thought leadership by depth of thinking, and original thinking.

You will always be exposed to outside influences, but you don't have to be a pinball in a machine, being moved by external forces outside your control. You are not one of Pavlov's dogs

There are dangers in reading and absorbing too much on your topic: You begin to regurgitate others' thoughts and ideas, so you don't sound original. You risk accidentally plagiarising others and their work, which is usually unintentional, but still very dangerous. I have seen books taken out of print due to issues like this. You become so impressed with the ideas you are reading that a nagging thought begins to enter your mind. It sounds something like this: "Wow, that is so good. They know so much. They've said it all. It's all been said and done. I don't have anything new to add to this..." The other insidious influence on your thinking and your self-esteem is social media. I love social media for what it has brought to entrepreneurs and people in general. It has never been easier to spread ideas fast, connect with long-lost friends or simply feel you are not alone. But when some people spend excessive amounts of time online, they risk a few things. The first is FOMO which stands for Fear of Missing Out. This is a new 21st century problem, which occurs when you see people you know posting about the

amazing nights out, they've had or holidays they've been on. Or other posts about deals being won, new clients and successful business ventures. Whether or not those posts are absolutely accurate or possibly misleading or exaggerated, the effect is the same. It causes people to feel inadequate, like they are missing out on something and their own lives and achievements are not good enough. Do you see how it often comes down to that worry or concern about not being good enough?

I have two friends who always forward me emails and articles written by people who are doing similar things to me. They think they are being helpful. They usually include a note that says "so you know what they're up to." Thanks, but no thanks. I don't really want to know what those so-called competitors are up to. Not only does it take precious time away from my own creative activities, but it churns me up inside, makes me doubt my beautiful business, brand, product and secure proposition and even myself. That might sound crazy to people who know me to be very self-confident. Well, one of the ways in which I remain confident is to actively avoid or even ignore information about others in my industry. Competition seems to be increasing exponentially these days. Or maybe it is simply the RAS (reticular activating system) kicking in. The RAS is a part of your brain that helps you notice more of what you are focused on. This means that when you think of something, like a particular brand, you begin to see more and more of it everywhere you go. Whether it is real or imagined, when you are reacting to things and not being a thoughtful leader, it can seem like you are constantly trying to deal with new threats and competitors' actions. In a meeting of professional speakers last year, we agreed that handling the seemingly exponential growth in copycat content and even outright stealing, was becoming a bit like the Whack-a-Mole game - you know the one where you have to hit the mole on the head, sorry to my pacifist and vegetarian friends - and every time you hit the mole, another one pops up? It can feel a bit like that if you are in a competitive sort of industry.

A business owner I know fairly well shared something really interesting with me recently. She said she hated seeing all the great things everyone else was doing, that they seemed to be doing better and achieving more success than her. I was touched by her honesty and vulnerability, but I was saddened that she was allowing these feelings to hijack her emotions and sabotage all her excellent efforts in business. The feeling of inadequacy made her want to give up, just when success was within reach. It didn't matter how good her last month or quarter had been; she was comparing herself to other people and feeling like she didn't measure up. What astounded me - and I have seen other people do

I have two friends who always forward me emails and articles written by people who are doing similar things to me. They think they are being helpful. They usually include a note that says, "so you know what they're up to." Thanks, but no thanks

this - is that she wasn't even working with any facts or figures, but rather a perception that the others were doing well, or doing better than she was. This lady became tearful when she shared this story with me, so I knew it really hurt. I told her what I'm about to tell you: My nephew, when he was about a year old, was at the zoo with his grandparents (my parents) when they stopped next to the elephant enclosure. The big beasts scared him, so he put his blanket over his eyes. My mother thought that was clever of him - I thought maybe it would have

been easier if he had just closed his eyes instead - but he was only one and didn't think of that! Anyway, he instinctively knew something that perhaps we all need to re-learn; if you don't like watching something and it doesn't make you feel good, don't watch! Why would you do things that make you feel bad? You may know someone who picks at a scab until it bleeds. It hurts! Why would they do that? Is it masochism? Do they actually like to feel pain? I don't think so.

When I was a teenager, I used to have a lot of sore throats. Sometimes my throat was so painful it felt like I was swallowing burning lava and I remember swallowing every few minutes to see if my throat was still sore. I knew it was going to be sore and I knew it was going to hurt, but something inside me made me do it over and over. If you have ever had a sore tooth, you may know what I'm talking about. Did you find yourself poking that tooth regularly to see if it still hurt? Of course it is still going to hurt, if it hurt when you poked it ten minutes earlier, but you keep checking, just in case. Partly, it is habit or even addiction. I believe many of us do quite a few things on a regular basis that don't make us feel very good. For example, I know coffee really affects me and causes me to wake up early, and salt causes me to feel bloated, but I often consume both of these things. There is also a fear that you will miss something if you do not check Facebook or other platforms on a regular basis. As I mentioned earlier, FOMO has entered our vocabulary as a real fear. There has been much written on this phenomenon, which has always been there, but occurs so much faster and more regularly with the speed of social media and the quantity of content being shared. We have become, as well as an egoistic culture, a voyeuristic one. Half of our time is spent promoting ourselves, showing off, worrying about how others will view us, while the other half of the time we are listening, watching and making judgments about others, in more detail than ever before. This happens because people are sharing more and more intimate details about themselves than ever before. The noisiness of the online world is matched only by the

nosiness of people online! Stop looking, stop torturing yourself. Stop poking that tooth. Focus on something else if you can. Hopefully, you will have plenty of other things to focus on - things that can get you closer to your leadership and life goals. Unplug and see what happens. I am pretty sure the world won't end if you are offline for a few hours or even a few days. ●

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ALGORITHM N' BLUES

ARTICLE BY SUDHI SINHA, TECHNOLOGY AND BUSINESS LEADER & CO-AUTHOR OF *REIMAGINING BUSINESSES WITH AI*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has increasingly taken center stage in the evolving digital space. Simulating human cognition in machines has been seen as an enabler for achieving greater productivity and is driving the imperative to be digitally competitive. While this has roots going back more than 60 years, the technological advancements in the last decade have made AI possible at scale, as we slowly, but surely, shift to the Algorithmic Age.

AI has become pervasive in our daily lives, sometimes even without us realising it. Targeted ad campaigns on social media, the immersive video games, chatbots, voice-interactive systems and facial recognition driven systems, are just some examples of AI in our daily lives. A Forbes study suggests that the impact of AI on the economy already exceeds $2 trillion and, in the next ten years, this impact is expected to increase six-fold. As the workplace of the future, the workforce of the future and work of the future mutate, HR has a pivotal role to play in this transformation. Business leaders expect HR to be a valuable partner in driving the future of the organisation and this will assist efforts towards that objective, understanding the business, demonstrating strong business acumen and earning credibility and trust from various stakeholders. This will require effective communication, collaboration and the ability to be courageous and bold in challenging the business, when necessary. But the practice is often held back by limitations of infrastructure, resources, funds and, most importantly, enabling technologies.

Advancements in AI and digital technologies can help mitigate many of these limitations. There are a number of areas where AI can be applied to help HR improve its value contribution: Performance enhancement and moving from learning to active performance management. Leadership development, building the bench for next-generation technology stewardship and HR Ops, simplifying and streamlining HR services delivery. High-performance organisations find learning to be a key enabler for their performance. Learning and performance management coupled tightly together is the driver for better business outcomes. In most organisations, the present learning effectiveness measurement techniques are based on participation and sometimes canned tests. While easy from an administrative perspective, these are universally acknowledged to be deficient in sustained learning. On rare occasions, companies have used engagement measures collected in surveys and retention metrics, as proxies for learning effectiveness. But in a survey by Brandon Hall Group, 69 percent of the companies said that an inability to measure learning's impact is a significant challenge to achieving their learning outcomes that are usually linked to business results. The idea of linking learning and performance has been around for more than 25 years; Balanced Scorecard (BSC) promoted by Kaplan and Norton linked strategy, business goals, human capital objectives and learning goals, altogether in a neat framework. However,

implementing a learning-performance linkage is challenging, because of the multitude of variations and nuances that exist in any organisation. But it is difficult to maintain them in a codified manner over time and still be reflective of current-day business realities.

Learning is a complex neuroscience endeavour, deeply involving the brain and its retraining to new stimuli. Learning involves receiving new information, having the motivation and ability to store and process it and being able to contextualise and apply it to new scenarios. Insights are derived when one can observe an environment or reflect on recent experiences and draw upon past learning to reach a set of potential conclusions for the future. Performance enhancement happens when learning and insights lead to actions and this is a space where AI is immensely useful. Gamification is a good starting point for such pursuits, because games have been used to aid learning for thousands of years. Since gamification and game-based learnings are focused on results, incredibly fun and engaging, their impact is very high and lasts for a long time. Nearly all games today are developed and delivered on digital platforms and have advanced AI algorithms to execute the game while in play. A lot of learning still happens through textual content, a trend that will continue well into the coming years. Such information is not usually well-indexed or well-organised. Natural language analysis of unstructured social data in the context of education is another area of application of AI techniques. Social media is not limited to our personal lives only, they are pervasive in our professional worlds as well. For example, tools like Slack and GitHub, which mimic a lot of the social media and collaboration capabilities, are the base tools for most software development organisations these days. But the new trend in the education space is lifelong learning and the artificial neural network (ANN), where algorithms are very tuned to the needs of lifelong learning, because they mimic the human brain and help improve performance.

Digital transformation is not just another technology hype, it is a complete rethinking of the business. While the previous technology hype cycles were focused on new improvements, digital is about disruption. Of course, most organisations have used analytics for decades, but using AI to transform is

Gut feel and expertise are being replaced by data-driven outcome possibilities. Data and its context do not even require human interpretation today

a very different paradigm. Now you are not just reacting optimally, but anticipating a future state and tuning systems to maximise the potential for that future state and digital and AI require the long game or, indeed, the infinite game. One of the biggest gap areas in the greater adoption of AI in corporates, is the lack of adequate appreciation of the space at the senior-most executive levels. Of course, they hold the purse strings and have the biggest impact on any change so clearly, education and awareness are key at all levels. Many universities and professional organisations have started offering capsule courses around AI, however they are largely focused on math, science and some programming exposure around AI. Consequently, executives are not able to develop a holistic view of how to approach transforming their business with AI. The problem is, many present-day leadership practices are still rooted in the industrial and information age, making them less relevant for the algorithmic age. Businesses are looking up to their HR leaders to help with this reframing and this demands; curiosity, metacognition, adaptive strategic orientation, agility, social leadership, domain excellence, systems thinking and technical literacy.

The traditional roles of Chief Information Officer (CIO) focused on internal IT infrastructure, Chief Technology Officer (CTO) focused on product and services development and the newer role of Chief Digital Officer (CDO), focused on the intersection of technology and business, are morphing. No one design fits all scenarios, it can and should vary significantly, based on organisational context, culture, goals and maturity in the digital journey. Deciding the right operating model and organisational structure requires deep thinking, consensus building and most importantly strategic road-mapping. HR along with the Chief Executive of the business has the biggest role to play in this design and its subsequent deployment. Once the fundamental design decisions are made, HR will have to help sort through other important organisation design questions like whether to centralise or federate the AI teams; where and when to build-buy-partner capabilities; how to attract, retain and motivate these differently skilled data science teams and so on.

The right executive-level programme will help business leaders and emerging senior management staff be savvier in the opportunities presented by the digital revolution and how to take advantage of it for driving growth in their businesses. HR leaders need to work with academia, leading thinkers in the space, other successful - and some not so - companies and internal stakeholders to design and deploy such a programme. A lot of companies have been successful in undertaking pilot initiatives and stimulating initial excitement, however, very few companies have been successful in building long-term scaled capabilities for such initiatives. The difference between the two resides in the efficacy of the operating model, leadership expectation and development model are the most critical components of such an operating model. HR will have to lead the way in building an analytical DNA in the business that is deeply rooted in today's digital realities and aligned with the changing workforce. As with many other support functions, while business leaders recognise the value of HR, they also put HR under tremendous pressure

for optimising its cost and improving service delivery.

Data is one of the big issues that HR needs to deal with. People related data is not always stored in very structured databases and systems. Sometimes there is unstructured data from legacy systems or other company sources like paper files and in-system notes. Additionally, these

Now we need new skills around analytics. Changes brought by technology are often rapid. Changes brought by AI when it gains more momentum in mainstream businesses, will be at lightning speeds

days, companies sometimes capture streaming employee data from their usage of social media. The volume, variety and veracity of these data can become quite extensive. AI techniques around Natural Language Processing and image recognition can help address most of the data management issues. HR is also an interaction-intensive function. HR professionals end up spending considerable time helping employees seek information and understand policies. A lot of these interactions in today's technology spectrum can be classified as routine. A lot of these repetitive routinised activities are now being performed by chatbots, another implementation of AI. AI is changing businesses in many ways and impacting how companies operate, organise and orient people's capabilities. More data can be processed now and used to predict the most likely possibilities without causal analysis. This reduces the importance of static historical knowledge. Gut feel and expertise are being replaced by data-

driven outcome possibilities. Data and its context do not even require human interpretation today.

One interesting example in this context is how online advertising is changing. Google started this transformation with Adsense. When online advertising started was introduced, an online platform used to push content based on some pre-arrangements with sponsor companies. So, all of us visiting a particular site would get to see the same advertisement. Leading-edge companies in this space take a very different approach now. As soon as they see a user loading a page, they do real-time analytics on the user profile, reference it to past activity and create preference profiles. On a real-time basis, they auction these preferences for ad push to sponsoring content providers or brokers. The participants respond to the auctions. The successful bidder's advertisements are shown by the time the user has loaded the page, all happening in less than a second. There are very sophisticated AI engines running in the background that is making sense of all this streaming data on a real-time basis and deciding which advertisements users might be interested in. Previously such decisions were made by people who were considered gurus who understand consumer behaviours, trends and user preferences. So now we need new skills around analytics. Changes brought by technology are often rapid and changes brought by AI when it gains more momentum in mainstream businesses, will be at lightning speeds.

Paradigms around risks and ethics are changing dramatically. Data has become an asset. With more information about people coming out in the open and recorded, privacy issues have reached a new paradigm. In the middle of this emerging and evolving complexity, HR plays a critical role in partnering with the business and technology functions to drive change management. Failing to manage the changes effectively will either put organisations at risk because traditional competition, adjacent players, or non-traditional competitors who use AI more effectively can put the organisations' business model and long-

term viability at risk. Changes have to be identified and dealt with in the context of people, organisation structures and operating processes concerning skills and incentives. HR can facilitate this change management for companies and enable people and businesses to transform into this new world.

While AI has a lot of promise, it also has a lot of pitfalls. We have studied hundreds of projects and scores of companies implementing AI. Through this exercise, we have found some best practices that lead to a higher probability of success with the AI initiatives and missing them usually leads to disappointing results. Here are some of the key ones: The problem should be big but well-defined. First figure out the business value of solving the problem before unleashing the data scientists. Quality and quantity of data over time is essential to successfully modeling scenarios and applying AI. Choosing the right algorithm matters a lot. Involve partners, but keep control over the data and algorithms. Change management is critical. The famous futurist Ray Kurzweil predicted, "Artificial intelligence will reach human levels by around 2029." We will continue to see massive advancements in the technology and transformations in the business fabric rapidly. Every business and every function has to develop an agenda around AI, HR is no different. This is the momentous time in history for HR to reinvent itself and be the glue to pull the future-forward. ●

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TALENT
MANAGEMENT

RAINBOW FISH CANNOT SWIM ON DRY LAND

The year 2020 will be known as the year of change, overcoming adversity and finding new ways to solve challenges in a decentralised, remote work environment for most. This is also the year we more completely illuminated the lack of diversity within our industries and organisations worldwide. Leaders have been forced to look in the proverbial mirror and ask themselves, why we haven't made more progress in hiring and retaining diverse talent.

ARTICLE BY BERTA ALDRICH, MANAGING DIRECTOR - PRIVATE ADVISOR GROUP & AUTHOR

While 39 percent of Fortune 500 companies currently employ a diversity executive, double the amount since 2015, representation from women in the C-suite has only risen slightly from 17 percent to 21 percent during the same time period. Black CEOs only represent one percent of CEOs in the Fortune 500. There is no question about the benefits of women in leadership positions or diverse perspectives, creating innovative, out of the box solutions to old problems. So why have so few companies made progress if the empirical evidence is there? In 2013, the book *Lean In* burst onto the corporate scene, encouraging women, who now make up over 55 percent of college graduates in both the U.S. and UK and 39 percent of the global workforce, to stay in the corporate game. As more women and diverse employees have been added to the workforce, bringing with

them new ways of leading and identifying opportunities, the already entrenched workplace has proven it wasn't ready. Companies responded by training and encouraging employees to understand each other's unique backgrounds and perspectives. In return, many workplaces responded to this monumental change by becoming more combative, competitive and toxic. While a recent Harvard Law School survey reported that 96 percent of board directors believe their management teams are fostering a culture of inclusion and diversity, the reality is that 40 percent of boards are not even measuring these trends. Although some directors believe talent discussions belong with human resources and not at the board level, other directors argue that a generational shift is taking place and the transformation of the traditional employer-employee relationship

is becoming a key strategic enabler. They believe that a well-thought-out and executed talent strategy, can serve as a competitive differentiator, thus giving human capital matters relevance in the boardroom. Yet aspiration and discussion are not the same as execution. In today's workplaces, we have the right idea, but the wrong execution. HR executive hands have been tied when strategically identifying the changes that need to occur in our workplaces to create an environment where true diversity in talent is leveraged and can be fully-maximised to make an indelible impact as a competitive advantage and on the bottom line.

Piles of books have been written about flawless execution in the business world and its overarching importance in organisations. Yet *Harvard Business Review* reports that only eight percent of executives have mastered the

art of combining business strategy and flawless execution. There are many great ideas manufactured at the highest levels of our organisations, but very few are executed to expectations. The same is true for optimising the potential of diversity in talent. Instead of managing top-down, companies are using a bottom-up strategy, of simply adding more diverse individuals to an entrenched monolithic system of expectations, based upon old-world resourcing and talent management. Adding more diverse individuals, or even the new high-performing leaders who inspire, engage and leverage all team members' talents and provide different perspectives and unique insights, is a step.

The most alarming impediment I uncovered in my research is that the architects of new ideas, innovations and leadership are being mitigated by the very companies who are encouraging diversity… yes, mitigated. The people we are hiring - diverse candidates, women in particular - cannot demonstrate the potential of their diverse talent and bring their best to work, because of old-world cultures that favour old-world leaders and systems. Leaders, you cannot expect Rainbow Fish to swim on dry land. If companies want to truly embrace diversity, they must focus on top-down execution, hire diverse talent at all levels of the organisation at once and the most imperative and immediate change? Integrate them into a safe, energising environment in which they can lead and thrive. As more women and diverse employees have entered the workplace, entrenched individuals and leaders under the existing old-world systems have pushed back, creating increased competition, toxicity and political plays to maintain their reverence within organisations. Women, people of colour and some men are the casualties. The result? Women are now "Leaning In" and pushing back. With the #metoo movement alone, record numbers of payouts for illegal activities in the workplace have hit an all-time high in the U.S. We are now beginning to see just how widespread these barriers to diversity are within our companies across all industries. No better data confirms this point than statistics from the Bullying Institute, an organisation dedicated to eradicating bullying in the workplace. Today, over 70 percent of women have reportedly been bullied or abused in the workplace. Among those, 70 percent are men who target women 65 percent of the time and 30 percent are women who target other women 67 percent of the time. So women, the very people we are hiring to bring increased engagement, industry-leading leadership, empathy and strategic insight to our workplaces, are being bullied or abused by both men and women in the workplace, at an alarming rate.

Here is the key to successfully talent manage diversity throughout your organisation that has been completely missed up to this point in the transformation: HR executives must instill protections for diverse talent, because they being targeted by entrenched individuals - the bullies and abusers in organisations - who have less impact and are at higher

> COMPANIES ARE USING A BOTTOM-UP STRATEGY, OF SIMPLY ADDING MORE DIVERSE INDIVIDUALS TO AN ENTRENCHED MONOLITHIC SYSTEM OF EXPECTATIONS, BASED UPON OLD-WORLD RESOURCING AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

@theHRDIRECTOR
TWITTER POLL

Is talent well managed in your organisation?

30% Yes

70% No

levels. I call them imposter leaders and they target high performers - especially diverse talent - taking their credit, knocking them off their upward trajectory, creating conflict where none existed and using unethical tactics to remove them from companies. Imposter leaders are a staple in almost every organisation. They are the individuals that you receive complaints about, have poor reputations, are over-driven to succeed and will leave carnage behind to reach their personal goals. These individuals have also proven repeatedly that they use companies as well as people, for their own personal gain. They are experts at navigating through an organisation, yet rarely perform the actual duties necessary to be accomplished in their job. In contrast, high performers are individuals who are the ones driving organisations forward. First and foremost, they have great character, are team builders and inspire others to greatness. They instill a sense of purpose and establish common goals with their teams and with their peers. They also are strong representatives of the brand externally, they have a win/win mentality - and in the worst of situations, they will always do the right thing. Ironically, these are the very individuals targeted by your imposter leaders. Why? Because high-performers make imposter leaders look bad. Today's corporate rules benefit the side of the bully or abuser in the workplace. To create the high-performing, diverse company of the future, will require a new, centralised HR ecosystem that offers coaching, guidance, support and protection to high-performers, women and diverse candidates, so they can avoid the career derailing barriers of imposter leaders and entrenched norms. If companies truly want to successfully embrace diversity, they must start by removing these imposter leaders so that your diverse employees and high-performers can operate at their highest potential. It will also require HR to lead organisations through a successful transformation. For companies to move the dial on diversity, they need to create a new high-performance infrastructure led by a strategic senior executive from Human Resources. Like every other goal in the organisation, diversity and human performance should be a strategic imperative and key differentiator. What gets measured gets done and boards that establish goals around diversity are more likely to achieve them. They become the new expectations of employees and leaders. As Katie Mehnert argues in the Sloan *MIT Management Review*, diversity must be a value that is baked into every decision, not just a priority. ●

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MACHINE, HUMANS
& THE PRECISION/
AMBIGUITY BALANCE

HOWEVER THEY DIFFER IN PRODUCT, SERVICES, CLIENTS, VALUES AND PURPOSE, EVERY ORGANISATIONS HAS A SHARED MISSION, TO BE FUTURE-READY. THE COMMON DENOMINATOR IS A STRATEGY THAT CAN NOT ONLY ATTRACT THE BEST TALENT, BUT ALSO UPSKILL AND RESKILL THE EXISTING WORKFORCE, TO SUPPORT VALUE-CREATING ROLES.

ARTICLE BY PIYUSH MEHTA, CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES EXECUTIVE - GENPACT

"A global workforce needs skills that AI cannot replicate, behavioural attributes of humility and inclusiveness, risk appetite, intellectual agility and the ability to deal with ambiguity"

As organisations - and customer and client needs - become increasingly complex, there is a need to throw out the established yet outdated definition of the talent lifecycle. We now need a fluid and agile ecosystem, where adaptability is vital. A global workforce needs skills that AI cannot replicate, behavioural attributes of humility and inclusiveness, risk appetite, intellectual agility and the ability to deal with ambiguity. Often, companies find themselves in need of a ready pool of digitally-savvy leaders, to take on expanded roles and successfully drive digital-led innovation. An effective way to rewire a leadership DNA is by infusing top talent into the most critical functions. In our own organisation, we identified 500, granular skills we wanted our people to have and to find talent that would fit the bill. We then went to 26 leading MBA schools across the world and employed 66 of the best people available, through a gamified hiring process. We then added another 30 or so of our emerging leaders and then we put them all into 100, fast-track leadership roles across the business.

Today, these high-potential, young leaders drive digital transformation to solve real-world business problems and lead the way, with their trailblazing ideas and collaboration. Our learning has been, we were right in taking big bets on our people and the success rate of programme participants has far exceeded that of conventional hires. The disruption caused by the pandemic has taught us that building a future-ready organisation is critical. However, skill shortages will continue to be a defining factor of enterprise competitiveness in the years to come. The world is changing so fast that the half-life of

relevant skills is merely four or five years. The new world has also altered the way people learn - one-size-fits-all training programmes don't cut it - organisations need to give their employees access to customised learning paths. Work carried out at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Center for Collective Intelligence inspired us and Genome - our internal learning platform - enables all of our 100 thousand employees, to learn skills that are highly relevant to their current roles and future aspirations. We also took it further by creating a mass upskilling movement, led by the CHRO and our Chief Innovation Officer. Today, more than 96 percent of our employees are investing time in self-learning. The most effective way to make a workforce prioritise learning is to make it a leading C-Suite agenda. Investing in people's growth and providing opportunities for exposure always pays off, but it needs to be modeled right from the top. Our CEO oversees talent initiatives for each of our business areas and our global business leaders support employees, by helping them add to their knowledge of the industry.

The people who build the programmes that help the workforce upskill need to be empowered as well and the talent development team should be able to engage in more substantive ways. A noticeable difference in large-scale learning outcomes will follow as they transform from being designers of learning solutions, to strategic talent advisors. Technology is a great enabler to capture employee sentiment. Messaging metadata - data about the messages, not the messages themselves - can help analyse communication

patterns, to predict emerging super-performers and flag attrition risks well in time. An AI-based culture assistant and employee experience platform can be programmed to use a hyper-personalised approach and enable interactive, unbiased and judgement-free conversations with employees at milestone moments. Keeping a regular pulse on individual employee sentiment can identify unhappy employees, jump into action to fix the problem and even predict rockstar performers with 74 percent accuracy. Our organisational network analysis programme interrogates communications patterns, to continually flag attrition risks and identify high performers, rather than wait for the annual process. Effective, efficient and timely retention discussions between leaders and demotivated employees empower companies to enable succession planning, before attrition hits. Even with the current pace of change that our world is witness to, the one constant is that it is only happy, motivated people that make for satisfied clients and successful companies. I'm confident that thinking deeply about and investing in building better experiences for our workforces is the way we will all not just survive, but also thrive. ●

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THE RISE AND RISE OF ME PLC.

Indulge me, for like many in recent times, I borrow from Heraclitus who said; "change is the only constant". He worked that one out 2,500 years ago, so you would think that by now we would be nimble enough to move with the times, flexing and adapting our approach to talent management. But right now, flexible access to talent is as elusive as the Holy Grail, highly-desired, but tantalisingly out of reach.

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

Despite some great initiatives around talent management and a range of genuinely forward-thinking innovations, it's the pace of change that keeps catching us out. Just when we think we've nailed it for a few years, so something else crops up and we're forced to change gear and swing the wheel in a different direction. Whether it is generational differences driving a contrarian approach to 'big business' or a virus that wreaks havoc on our established patterns of activity, something always challenges our thinking. Considering the component parts, we can see that, as ever, there continues to be a real shortage of the skills our organisations need. Whether it's the sales rainmakers, the inspirational leaders, the IT whizz-kids, or those individuals - who may be less lauded - but who turn up on time, are loyal, do a good job on a consistent basis and keep the wheels turning… there is simply never enough of them. We know that developing people is a long-term and expensive game, but for those ready to hire now and willing to take a leap of faith in respect of a new approach to contracting with employees, there might just be a great window of opportunity opening up.

Portfolio working, the gig economy, interims, freelancers - categorise them as you will - the number of individuals reluctant to engage in a fulltime, salaried role is growing rapidly. In addition, the situation brought about by COVID-19, has created a new influx of workers into this flexible and ever-changing workforce. Millennials, Gen Z and other early adopters, have already established a solid foundation on which others can ply their trade. Add to these groups; the recently redundant - some of whom will, out of necessity, be investigating self-employment options - the early retirees, or those simply enjoying the improved work-life balance that, for many, has been an unexpected benefit of lockdown, a throng is joining this cohort, just as the conventional corporate career ladder is being pulled away. For many, this shift of emphasis is due to the 'pull' factors of improved work-life balance, autonomy and the desire to branch out on one's own. However, for a significant and growing minority, there is a 'push' factor at work also, driven by poor leadership, toxic corporate cultures, constant change initiatives and a focus on short-term financial objectives. It may ever have been thus and show me an older worker who has

not developed a bit of a cynical streak after 30-to-40 years in employment. Nonetheless, once we peel away the veneer of the 21st century, many of the component constituents of what makes up 'work' remain and, increasingly, these no longer appeal to workers across multiple generations in a way that they once did. It has never been easier to set up a business - the plethora of kitchen table start-up and multi-million-dollar disruptors, attest to this fact. Alternatives abound and people are becoming increasingly aware of the options available to them.

even be the case as a 'talent marketplace' will soon find a natural level for the skills and capabilities it is able to offer.

With the realisation that there will be some form of exodus of workers from the perceived constraints of city living, allied to the catalytic effect of the pandemic - in respect of slicker work-from-home set-ups - access to such a diverse pool of talent has never been easier. Businesses won't be restricted to their national workforce when an increasingly capable international one is only a click away. What's

comprises a group of individuals engaged in continuing the common purpose, then that cohesion is critical. Will a contractor or temporary worker, no matter how skilled, go the 'extra mile' in a way in which a permanent member of staff might do so? Zero-hours contracts or the idea that the self-employed might need to 'bid' against each other and deliver their efforts at the 'lowest price' hardly engenders goodwill. Will individuals who identify value in their own knowledge and understanding be as willing to share this knowledge corporately, if this could lead to a reduction in future work? Will people share and collaborate in the way in which we have become used to? Some will, but some won't, so we will need to find ways to tap into that discretionary effort and encourage the dissemination of knowledge.

Our world, as ever, is changing and its incumbent on us as HR leaders to change with it. In some ways that change may be forced upon us, by a revolutionary approach to work, orchestrated by existing or potential employees. However, it is nonetheless real and business needs to respond. As such, we need to challenge our received wisdom, cross some of our lines in the sand and create a talent architecture which may appear to be wildly different from what we have had in the past. Our continuing ability to manage the 'people resources' will be critical as the knowledge economy and all that that entails, takes centre stage in our lives. Businesses will need to cast their net wider than ever before, to attract the right people. Reward structures will need to become increasingly individualised and will need to offer a wider range of benefits than ever before and the relationship between 'leaders' and 'workers' is likely to become more fragmented. We have the skillsets to address these issues and create environments where people will choose to work, we simply need to become used to the idea that the balance of power is shifting ever further in favour of the employee, as opposed to the employer. ●

COULD HR TEAMS BECOME 'TALENT WRANGLERS', SEEKING AND DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE BEST THE MARKET HAS TO OFFER, WHILST SIMULTANEOUSLY SHEDDING THE DULL, BUMP-AND-GRIND ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE MANAGEMENT OF A THOUSANDS-STRONG FULLTIME WORKFORCE?"

Bad news for our big businesses? Possibly, but the opportunity lies in the fact that these people will need to work, they will need to sell their services, earn an income and pay their bills. Despite removing themselves from the corporate structure, they remain very much "in the workforce". For ambitious organisations willing to engage in a different way of contracting with workers, this really is an opportunity. Creating an environment that allows a 'flow' of talent in, through and out of the organisation - whilst seamlessly integrating with permanent workers and achieving the set objectives - won't be easy within established business hierarchies. However, there are parallels and existing methodologies that could be used as a starting point. Adopting a 'just-in-time' mentality or approaching the acquisition of talent using supply-chain principles could be beneficial. Employing workers as and when needed minimises, indeed removes, much of the costly downtime that exists within many businesses. Why employ 'specialists' only to have them undertake 'generalist' work for much of the week? Of course, that is never the intention, but is often the reality. Paying a premium for 'top talent' is affordable, if their engagement is limited. Indeed, given the breadth of the talent pool, that may not

more, in a quest to make themselves stand out from the crowd, we're already seeing people take more interest in ongoing learning and development - thereby, in some ways, removing that obligation from employers. Could HR teams become 'talent wranglers', seeking and developing relationships with the best the market has to offer, whilst simultaneously shedding the dull, bump-and-grind activities associated with the management of a thousands-strong fulltime workforce? So, access to a huge pool of talented people - constantly investing in their own development to become agile and innovative thinkers - readily available and willing and motivated to work… surely this is the panacea to the talent conundrum, right here! Well, this sounds great in theory, but putting it into practice will throw up some real challenges. For example, transient workers need to engage with the aims of the organisation and align with values and direction. Moving to a temporary workforce or accessing the skills of individuals who are remote from colleagues are big enough challenges in themselves, but when combined with the lack of connectivity to the mothership, it becomes very real, very quickly. This is where this brave new world can start to unravel. If an organisation

WHEN WORKING FROM HOME BECOMES LIVING AT WORK

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a stark light on the critical need for organisations to attract, retain, engage and develop talent for an inspired workforce. But with a whole host of new challenges, considerations and expectations, what impact has the pandemic had on talent in general, on talent management and what can organisations do to ensure they keep pace with rapid change?

ARTICLE BY DR. CHRIS MULLEN, PH.D., SHRM-SCP, SPHR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE WORKFORCE INSTITUTE – UKG

Whether currently employed or searching for their next role, there's no doubt that there has been a shift in the way that talent views the working world. For those who are currently employed, there is certainly a feeling of relief and gratefulness for their job, which is resulting in a culture of employees putting up with more from their companies and managers. Throughout the pandemic, we've seen stories of increased burnout at work and people no longer feeling as though they work from home, but that they live at work. This is evidenced in recent research which found that over half of UK workers (51 percent) stated that they've been working either the same or more hours regularly since the start of the pandemic, with 47 percent of UK workers not agreeing that their organisation took steps to guard against fatigue/burnout. This is a dangerous and slippery slope and it's crucial that employers do all that they can to alleviate these issues, in order to keep the workforce engaged, inspired and ultimately, happy. On the flipside, those currently out of work are facing the difficulty of searching, when there are fewer opportunities and more competition and they are anxious about supporting themselves and their families. These are people looking at alternative ways to stand out and are turning to the likes of social media to network, in place of physical networking.

Recently, we have seen a Government directive for a return to return work, to kickstart the so-called "Pret economy", quickly followed by a subsequent call to work from home… if possible. So, a staggered return to work across various industries has ensued and, as such, employers have had to turn their attention to reboarding, which has involved enhanced safety training. For those working from home, this period has continued longer than we anticipated and organisations now have a whole host of concerns, not least the mental wellbeing of

> **THE SHIFT IN TALENT SENTIMENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT MEANS THAT ORGANISATIONS NEED TO BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT HOW THEY ARE ADAPTING. PROACTIVITY IS IMPORTANT HERE AND LEADERS NEED TO CONSIDER THEIR APPROACH**

employees as a result of isolation, additional life dynamic stressors, amongst other mitigating factors. Alongside this, employee physical health is a concern, as a result of inactivity as well as inadequate home setups. What is encouraging is that two-thirds of employees globally (63 percent) say changes were eventually made at their organisation to address both physical and emotional wellbeing during the pandemic.

With increased unemployment, there is now a pool of workers out there for organisations to choose from. Recruiters need to make the decisions about whether they can, should or have to bring back workers that were made redundant, or open a position and hire someone entirely new. There are pros and cons for both, but the pros of hiring a laid off worker is that they know you as a company and they know their job. They may also be more engaged now and can be retained easier, since the company brought them back to work. The shift in talent sentiment and talent management means that organisations need to be intentional about how they are adapting. Proactivity is important here and leaders need to consider their approach to varying elements of talent management. Key to this will be including the HR team in everything and, if the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that the HR department is essential to finding continuity and cohesion during chaos, taking the position on how decision-making will impact. Nobody could deny that this is a most challenging time, but there are plenty of opportunities to capitalise on the flexibility and agility that has typified the effort to keep operational during this tumultuous time. But with only half (53 percent) of UK workers saying that their organisation went above and beyond expectations during the pandemic, there's clearly some way to go for some. So, as the crisis prevails, HR must step up to the plate. ●

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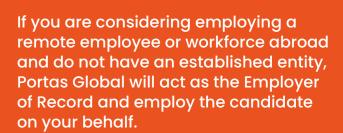
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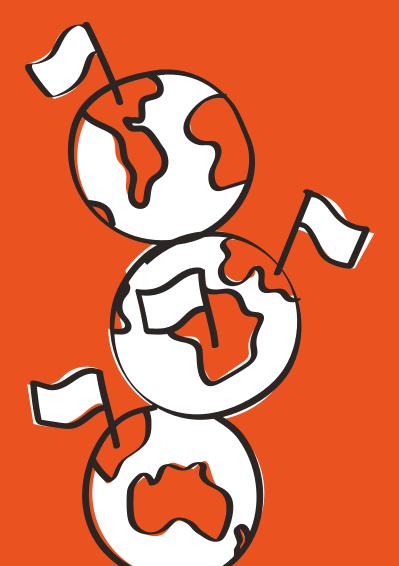
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HEALTH &
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DARK IS A WAY
& LIGHT IS A PLACE*

These are uncertain and volatile times. The fear all around us is insidious and contagious - there are real threats, but there are also imagined threats and sometimes, it's hard to tell the two apart. Are organisations taking the right path to enable employees to stay well, energised, purposeful and feel safe? As the neuroscientist Stephen Porges says; "a quest for safety is the basis for living a successful life."

ARTICLE BY DR NERINA RAMLAKHAN, AUTHOR, PHYSIOLOGIST, SLEEP EXPERT & WORKSHOP FACILITATOR - DR NERINA

To feel safe is a basic physiological need and one that has been affected for many during the pandemic. We've all had to change the way in which we are working, which has brought some advantages, but for many, the boundaries between work and home have now become indistinguishable. "Zoom fatigue" has now become the new repetitive strain injury and many are starting to burn out as a result of constant virtual interaction. So how do organisations emerge from this pandemic intact, resilient and robust? The way I see it is that there are two paths ahead of us: The Sleepwalking option is to batten down the hatches, run on the survival energy of adrenaline, fear and control and just push through, hoping that what worked in the past will work again. On this pathway, the brain runs from the 'negativity bias' in which we are contracted and lacks the ability to find other

ways. We adopt the method of same old-same old, numbly operating with our eyes closed and just doing the same as we've always done… and more of it. The Awakened option is where we all wake up to realisation, that what we're going through is chaotic and scary - let's not delude ourselves - and calls for us to be more human, more authentic and wiser. This is a time in which leaders need to work hard on themselves, to find their inner safety so that they can create environments and cultures in which people feel safe to do their own inner work and emerge thriving, bringing their best selves to work with energy left for a fulfilling personal life.

Although mental health and employee wellbeing have been on the corporate agenda for years, employees have been running in survival mode and many went into the pandemic running on this energy, immune system compromised and disconnected from

the resourceful, virus-combating part of their nervous system. What this pandemic has done is to truly place employee health - physical, mental, emotional and spiritual - on the agenda. It's no longer a "nice to do", it's a "have to do". What is needed is an inside-out approach, in which leaders must courageously do the inner work on themselves, so that they create a culture of safety in the outer world - the organisational family. Leaders who do the work on themselves, create a positive contagion of thriving and safety. The real work lies in choosing to face headlong what needs to be faced, without avoiding, medicating or distracting. Leaders who are prepared to be present with themselves and with whatever arises, can bring the best of themselves to the workplace.

In *The Power of Full Engagement* Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz describe this as

being 'fully engaged' and that; "leaders are the stewards of organisational energy - in companies, organisations and even families. They inspire or demoralise others, first by how effectively they manage their own energy and next by how well they mobilise, focus, invest and renew the collective energy of those they lead." Now, more than ever, leaders need to harness and lead with extraordinary energy. So how do they do this? Start your day with conscious awareness, as research shows that people who start their day with some form of self-awareness practice such as breathwork, journaling or meditation are happier and healthier, are more energised throughout the day and more able to deal with daily stress. At its simplest, you could do a one breath meditation before you lean into your day. Ideally you do this before you even open your eyes. Then you place your hands on your chest and belly, take one deep breath in, exhale and ask yourself 'how am I feeling right now'? Then make your next choice from this place of awareness.

Prioritise physical self-care, this means taking the time to fuel yourself for extraordinary energy with appropriate nutrition, hydration, physical exercise and daily movement, breathwork, rest and sleep, especially when times are tough. Support your own mental/emotional health - know who and what supports you to stay well and put these supports in place when needed. This might mean enlisting the help of a coach, mentor or counsellor. It might mean choosing a few trusted friends with whom you can have honest and authentic conversations about how you are feeling. Cultivate regular practices for strengthening the positivity bias of your brain. I spoke earlier about the negativity bias of the brain and the innate survival tendency of our brains to hold on to negative information. This practice is about consciously choosing to grow and strengthen that other part of the brain that enables creativity, expansion, sees hopeful possibilities and can choose a path of realistic optimism and so consciously choose compassion, kindness and gratitude towards self and others. It takes longer for the brain to register positive experiences than it does to absorb negative ones so, as the neuroscientist Rick Hanson says: "We have to choose to soak in positive experiences," to change our neural circuitry in an enduring way. This means taking time - Hanson recommends at least 20-30 seconds to take time to appreciate the positive experience and savour the experience each time they happen. It could be small things, like enjoying nature or the feeling of a hug, stroking a pet or taking time to smile and chat with colleagues. The important thing is to notice the somatic experience, how it feels in your body and to take time doing so.

Stay vigilant for signs of contracted thinking. To do more than merely survive these times, we're going to need expansive thinking. So, we need to stay alert to negative contracted thinking and how it shows up in the workplace as fear, impatience, intolerance of mistakes, perfectionism and excessive controlling behaviours. As a personal marker,

> EMPLOYEES HAVE BEEN RUNNING IN SURVIVAL MODE AND MANY WENT INTO THE PANDEMIC RUNNING ON THIS ENERGY, IMMUNE SYSTEM COMPROMISED AND DISCONNECTED

sustained, contracted thinking can also show up in the body as teeth grinding or bruxism, insomnia, irritable bowel syndrome, migraines, eczema or psoriasis. I'm aware that I've placed much emphasis on the leader, but my experience, shows that, at the core of it, the leader must be the change. We know this of course, but now is the time for us to know this at a level of depth that we haven't been to before. Leaders with awakened and extraordinary energy will be well placed to be mindful of the need to invest in the energy and inner work of the employee. This means encouraging practices that enable people to restore their energy levels - respecting the work/home boundaries - and encouraging employees to take regular breaks throughout the day and use their annual leave.

Creating cohesion by encouraging authentic and meaningful human-to-human relating in the workplace, means building true connectivity rather than mere interaction. As Sherry Turkle says in her book *Alone Together*: "Technology is seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities - and as it turns out, we are very vulnerable indeed. We are lonely, but fearful of intimacy and digital connections and the sociable robot, may offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other... we'd rather text than talk." Understanding that awakening is uncomfortable and in the process of awakening, people feel stressed, out of their comfort zones and even unwell. This can even show up as symptoms that can look like a mental health problem, if misunderstood or even overly medicated. Awakening is uncomfortable, we feel emotional pain, we feel alone, even when we're not. The caring and enlightened organisation - and leader - knows how to support this vital and necessary perturbation, without the unnecessary psychiatrisation - yes, this is a word - of the normal, but uncomfortable process of crossing the void. This highlights the importance of targeted 'safety net' initiatives such as well-informed occupational health departments, employee assistance programmes, HR professionals and wellness interventions. This is a time for us to be more than just human but awakened humans. Time for us to move away from the relentlessly mental way of being that we've habituated to, to integrate the body, the heart and the emotions with the over-thinking mind in the workplace. In allowing this vital integration, leaders and their organisations will truly move from mere survival to evolved thriving. Organisations that follow the awakened path will emerge with the competitive advantage. ●

*Poem on his birthday by Dylan Thomas

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A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

The pandemic has brought chaos upon all our lives and HR will have been in full-time crisis management mode. But with this crisis not going away any time soon, we must look at more long-term measures to support people through this protracted journey. Now is the time to look at placing preventative measures upstream, as the crisis grips even tighter.

ARTICLE BY SARAH MURPHY, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR ADVICE, INFORMATION AND TRAINING - MENTAL HEALTH UK

A mentally healthy workplace consists of key elements in two different areas - culture and practice and knowledge and skills. These then must be set in a business environment that encourages colleagues to disclose about their mental health, well before reaching crisis point is essential in these stressful times. In this context, culture refers to the attitudes towards mental health and the openness to talk about mental health. This comes from every level of the business, so engaging leadership is key to gaining, whereas forming a mental health steering group of employees at all levels ensures you are listening to a wider set of colleagues. However, this still does not engage everyone and so it is useful to have key touchpoints to rally people. For example, there are several key mental health awareness dates each year, such as; Blue Monday in January and Mental Health Awareness Week in May and providing colleagues with the opportunity to be a part of an open dialogue about mental health is really useful and by marking these dates, you normalise the conversation and encourage all colleagues to be a part of your mentally healthy culture. Practice and culture go hand-in-hand, so to ensure that you have a positive and open mental health culture, you need to implement and encourage this within your HR processes. Are there multiple opportunities and pathways for people to talk about their mental health when they are feeling well, instead of during or after somebody reaches crisis point? Do line managers ask 'how are you?' Do they know about and feel confident using a range of tools? Colleagues need to have clarity on these processes and confidence that they work. So improving your company culture and practice shows you are prioritising mental health in the workplace.

As HR professionals, employee wellbeing is at the forefront of responsibility and practitioners will of course hope that they can recognise good and poor mental health. However, there is a definite lack of consistency which requires the HR team to collaborate with all

> **MOST PEOPLE ARE NOT CONFIDENT OR COMFORTABLE AND SHY AWAY FROM HAVING A CONVERSATION, WHICH COULD BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOMEBODY MANAGING THEIR WELLBEING, OR IT ESCALATING INTO A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS**

colleagues across the business, particularly as more people are working remotely. Here awareness training is important, because it can equip line managers and colleagues in general, with the capacity to spot the signs of poor mental health at the earliest opportunity. Knowing how anxiety alters a teammate's behaviour, how depression could manifest in someone's physical appearance and being able to spot these signs, is something that each of us should and can learn. Yet, even with this knowledge, most people are not confident or comfortable and shy away from having a conversation, which could be the difference between somebody managing their wellbeing, or it escalating into a mental health crisis.

The intention to help is nearly always there, but there are dos and don'ts to having a supportive conversation. A key message is that the person holding the supportive conversation is there to listen primarily and not to advise or problem solve, which does take out some of that initial fear around these conversations. The listener should instead be equipped with the knowledge of where to signpost their teammate - both internally and externally - for professional help. Indeed, the knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent crisis at the earliest opportunities, is the best way to avert serious mental health problems. By focusing on mental health culture, practice, knowledge and skills, your colleagues will thrive and placing emphasis on keeping people well - living their best working lives - instead of solely focusing on crisis management and reacting when people become unwell, pays off every time. By giving your teams the understanding to manage their own mental health, the confidence to have supportive conversations and an environment that encourages them to take the initiative, can prevent crisis and instil the message that everyone's wellbeing is a priority, as we continue through these testing times. ●

FOR FURTHER INFO WWW.MENTALHEALTH-UK.ORG

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

"WHO INVENTED THE SKIP?"*

When lockdown descended, those that rallied to set up social events, such as virtual quizzes, unlocked a dynamic. We waited, pens poised and, as colleagues popped up on screen, we whooped and waved frantically, like Robinson Crusoe catching the attention of a distant ship on the horizon. Zoom fatigue's a thing - we may not care who had a hit with *Ça plane pour moi* in 1978** - but we must never forget those moments.

ARTICLE BY
MIEKE WHALEY
DIRECTOR, PEOPLE & BUSINESS
PARTNER EMEA
MEDIDATA SOLUTIONS

Although we have worked hard to maintain - if not increase - the level of meaningful contact and engagement between dispersed colleagues, mitigating against this protracted crisis, many of us have become bored and even cynical about the importance of social connections which, as we experienced in the earlier stages of the pandemic, go a long way to mitigate against feelings of isolation. Maybe the appeal of a weekly quiz has run its course, but events as simple as virtual coffee meetings or Friday drinks, can be just as effective at uniting employees. Making time to connect with colleagues outside of the demands of the workplace allows more open conversations about our health and wellbeing and shared struggles. This is also an opportunity for employees to connect on shared interests, through employee resource groups, where they can together push initiatives and even change within an organisation.

With a reliable line of communication between teams and departments, it will be easier for colleagues and HR professionals alike, to spot the important warning signs that may hint towards an employee struggling with fatigue or stress. Lack of enthusiasm, withdrawal from connecting with others online, working long or unusual hours, poor timekeeping or complaining of being drained or tired can be difficult to spot in the virtual workplace, but are all vital signs pointing towards workplace burnout. Burnout, fatigue and stress - be it work-related or personal - are common in a society that is far more focused and pressurised than ever - and this was the case even before the pandemic hit. But there is a danger that we equip people with the tools and knowhow to take responsibility for their own wellbeing and stand back and admire our handy work. The fact is, there is always more that can be done, to help employees navigate their way through this time.

Never underestimate the importance of maintaining workplace culture and showing that the company is focused on and prioritising employee wellbeing. Virtual pubs at the end of the week work, because there's less pressure and people feel like they can jump in and drop out, rather than wait for the concluding round of a quiz. But it's really important not to make attendance compulsory, or let them slip into a business agenda, they really need to be work-free zones and aimed at enjoying each other's company. Make this a "fun rule" and people generally comply. There is really strong evidence that these types of virtual gatherings really do bond people, in a completely different way than face-to-face in the office and you can learn more about colleagues in a different way. The virtual platform really does offer up a different dynamic. Talent nights are great, but can cause issues, particularly if some colleagues are gregarious and boisterous whilst others are shy and reticent. But if you can set a happy medium, then a duel between a banjo and a Kazoo can be hilarious and can really diversify and boost the culture. As we have come to understand, in the professional setting, there is a requirement for increased check-ins with staff. Managers and HR teams need to be aware of how their departments are performing, but also how they are feeling, so now is the perfect time to adopt a more continuous performance management system with regular catch-ups. In an environment in which things can change suddenly and on a regular basis, it is so important to ensure that people feel included and in the loop with company updates. The phrase overcommunicate is relevant here and we should never tire of asking how people are and always offer support options.

Even without the drudge of the commute, working from home can still cause fatigue and, part of the problem is that, virtual meetings are so easy to organise and people feel pressured to

attend, leading to meeting overkill. It's often overlooked, but the lack of body language and non-verbal cues to read when in virtual meetings, means that we are required to concentrate much harder to interpret people's conversations online. Therefore, a normal diary of meetings can overwhelm us much easier than before. In fact, having your camera on can sometimes impede communication - there's a pressure to show your face - and the self-awareness that comes with that can easily distract from the discussion. It's just as important to listen closely as it is to see the faces of your colleagues and customers. It's a long-standing observation in the business world that many meetings could have just been an email, but it's actually a vital distinction to make at the moment. Of course, this is all part of the pressure to be on call all the time and it eats away at time and soaks up energy. Ultimately, because what each person needs is different - depending upon their unique situation - employee wellbeing needs to be entirely focused on the individual. Working through burnout doesn't make you a hero, nor will it earn you bonus points and even though many are not in the conventional workplace, they still need to take time out to separate the blurred professional and personal spheres when working from home. It remains just as important to take a break, but taking a breather doesn't have to involve time off or a holiday, so encourage and support people to find things that they can do away from work that provides time to reflect and give the brain a bit of a break. This could be a physical activity, a creative pursuit, learning a new language or a musical instrument.

The UK has a societal pressure to work long hours, but those last items on the to-do list can often wait, especially if the price being paid is mental and physical wellbeing. It's common to feel guilty about the time spent away from the desk, especially for parents and caregivers. This issue is further compounded in the virtual environment as, with internal visibility being more challenging when physically apart, employees often feel they need to show they are always on. We have a habit of basing our own personal value on the output of our work - the longer we work, the more valued we feel. But it's important for employers to show their employees that it's important to step away physically and sign off mentally. Every cloud has a silver lining and that has proven true in this pandemic. The new working environment has raised the profile of issues that you might not have been aware of previously and this crisis has accelerated the mental health conversations and accelerated initiatives. From an HR point of view, it has highlighted the importance of checking in with each other and challenging teams to catch-up outside of work. If you see emails after hours, call it out! Self-awareness of your time and how you use it can help highlight the warning signs in your colleagues. At the end of the day, mental health is the responsibility of everyone - it's not just on you, we should all be looking out for one another in an open and respectful environment.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of an empathetic approach and finding new ways to support each other. A shift in social attitude, a willingness to discuss difficult topics and a push from many organisations to normalise mental health discussions, has seen employee health & wellbeing move even further up the agenda. This provides an opportunity to gain some positive momentum out of a dire situation, to set a determined plan and a positive path through this challenging time and into the future. ●

* Alan Partridge quiz question. Answer: Edwin Walker
** Plastic Bertram

WORKING THROUGH BURNOUT DOESN'T MAKE YOU A HERO, NOR WILL IT EARN YOU BONUS POINTS AND EVEN THOUGH MANY ARE NOT IN THE CONVENTIONAL WORKPLACE, THEY STILL NEED TO TAKE TIME OUT

WE'RE NOT WIRED FOR HIBERNATION

As HR departments recalibrate and adjust to dealing with the increase in remote working on a permanent basis, the effects of the pandemic cannot be ignored, as reports of significant isolation, damage to mental health and well-being percolate through. So, is remote working the long hoped for panacea to work/life balance, or yet another cause for concern?

ARTICLE BY ROSIE EVANS, LEAD BEHAVIOURAL SCIENTIST - COACHHUB

A third of women and a quarter of men in the UK have admitted to experiencing loneliness during the pandemic - and with entire workforces isolated, the impact that this could have on businesses is huge. As a result, short-term, the "nice-to-have" perks, such as gym memberships, restaurant discounts or in-office classes, are being replaced with proactive workforce management strategies. Businesses are rightly focusing more on protecting and boosting the mental, physical and social health of their staff and this means investing in a holistic approach to personal and professional development. Mental wellbeing is not a short-term or temporary consideration. While the pandemic has exacerbated things, burnout and stress have long been a major concern, with numerous side effects that vex. In order to effectively combat the challenges that employees face in both their personal and professional lives, long-term and proactive measures are essential. But reactive measures are for those already behind and they are not only less effective in tackling the cause of problems, they show a business that is already playing catch up, rather than leading the way. But what do these long-term, proactive strategies look like?

Working in isolation has had markedly different impacts on different people. Many have relished the quiet thinking time and have found fewer distractions at home than in an open-plan office. The lack of commute and additional flexibility has also meant that employees have been able to work at times and in ways that are best for them, with many businesses making allowances for an upended daily routine. However, the challenge for businesses is that some employees will have had to contend with far-from-ideal circumstances. Take younger team members may be living in small city apartments - chosen because they were ideally located for their now-empty offices - but not set up for remote home working.

> **YOUNGER TEAM MEMBERS MAY BE LIVING IN SMALL CITY APARTMENTS - CHOSEN BECAUSE THEY WERE IDEALLY LOCATED FOR THEIR NOW-EMPTY OFFICES - BUT NOT SET UP FOR REMOTE HOME WORKING**

Some employees will have undertaken the full-time role of teacher managing home-schooling alongside their existing jobs - thinking that it would be a short-term arrangement - but the reality is, it could easily be long-term consideration in the balance of personal and professional lives. Others will live alone and will have experienced the complete opposite, struggling with isolation and loneliness. The experiences have coexisted in the same companies, the same departments and the same teams. The challenge for businesses is finding a way to manage them all. The development of a strong and authentic company culture should be the first step to creating an effective employee well-being strategy. Committing to a core set of company values should cultivate a sense of shared purpose, as well as setting a precedent for how employees should communicate with each other, as inter-team dynamics can have a huge impact on wellbeing. This culture should be genuine and bottom-up, with staff members encouraged to actively participate in the creation of the working environment they want.

Clearly, health and wellbeing is personal and we have all had to deal with the circumstances that we have faced in different ways and a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to employee well-being actually fits none and so a tailored and employee-led approach is required. With the added layers of technological interaction introduced by remote working and employees separated from their colleagues by a computer screen, the human element becomes crucial. While there's plenty of research to suggest that increased exposure to technology - and the Internet in particular - is one of the drivers behind the proliferation of isolation and mental health problems globally, technology can also help provide the answers, but it must be centred around the personal and human needs of the individual. ●

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PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

DRASTIC CHANGE NEEDS DRASTIC MEASURES

This rapid shift to remote working created ambiguity, removed the semblance of conventional control and hit employee engagement hard. But arguably, it is performance management that is in the biggest quandary. Direction of travel was that PM traditions were resigned to history, but the ink on the blueprint for what was to replace it, was hardly dry when pandemic hit. Could this sudden switch to a virtual setting be a bridge too far?

ARTICLE BY NIKOLAOS LYGKONIS, FOUNDER & CEO - PEOPLEGOAL

There was resistance to change to traditional PM, back when all we had to concern ourselves with was Brexit and there was clear evidence that the old convention was proving resilient against the swinging demolition ball of change. So, under these enforced circumstances, can we move performance management into more positive territory and to serve these times well? PM is, by default, a complex process, so the resistance to change that surrounds it is at least understandable, if unfounded. We know PM can actually harm employee engagement, so why upset the apple cart? Because sticking with old methods that deliver mediocre results is going to send those apples flying down the street anyway - and none more so than in the current climate. Change has been the order of the day for some time, but the pandemic has provided renewed impetus. From here on, pre-existing and rigid models will only serve to limit the potential of both people and profit.

The way we work and interact with our colleagues has also changed dramatically this year. With remote working here to stay for the foreseeable future - and perhaps forever - managers are finding that it often takes more time to coordinate work than to actually complete it. Employees are also taking on additional duties outside of their usual remit and are being asked to learn new skills that were not previously required of them. While on the one hand this presents a new opportunity for learning, it can also create anxiety and even disengagement - both significant blockers for high-performance. These new ways of working must be recognised and fed into performance check-ins, so that employees have a clear view of what is expected from them, what their objectives are and how these are linked to wider organisational goals. Remote performance management also calls for a frequency step change. Home-based employees and their managers need to compensate for a lack of in-person interaction, by scheduling more regular check-ins. This will help to increase their communication and alignment, allowing for any corrective action to be promptly identified and acted upon.

By ensuring clarity and creating open channels of communication, people are instantly more equipped to manage change and avoid performance dips. On top of this, a high degree of trust, transparency and flexibility will be key to surmounting the current quandary - especially in the midst of the world's biggest working from home experiment. When employees are not physically present in the

office - and without the right tools to stay in touch - their efforts and output can become less visible. If this then extends to a scenario where a remote employee is left out of a team meeting or project, trust - a key ingredient for performance success - can begin to wane. Creating a culture of transparency and inclusion, backed up by constant communication and clarity, is the antidote that organisations need here. As for the final pieces of the puzzle? Flexibility, that means giving employees the autonomy to accomplish goals in their own time and space and focusing on "the big picture", as opposed to individual task completion. On the practical side, modern performance management - the kind that really supports employee development and business outcomes - should be centred around well-defined, short-term goals, frequent check-ins and goal-based reviews. Linking these goal-based assessments to employee growth and recognition is also key to bridging the gap between employee effort and positive review outcomes. Employee goals must also focus on the 'how' instead of the 'what'. Winning the World Cup, for example, would require an 'X' number of goals throughout the championship. But instead of focusing on the goal rate, doesn't it make more sense to alter the objective, so that the focus lies in completing 'X' hours of team practice per week? By taking this tack, the goal will remain relevant throughout the championship, regardless of the goal rate in each game.

There is an inextricable link between engagement, productivity and performance - and it states the case for building engagement data into performance management design. So, when it comes to performance, what do you need to understand from an engagement perspective? Whether or not your employees have a clear picture on how to move up in your organisation is paramount. You will also need to gauge whether they feel as though they are gaining enough support to develop and grow. Whether somebody sees themselves being with your company long-term or they have a two-year exit plan is important information. Indeed, employee churn at the two to three year mark, has a strong link with inadequate performance management, so if you're struggling to retain talent at this stage of tenure, you'll want to revisit and rethink your performance processes. Perhaps most fundamentally though, employees need to feel that their manager cares about them - take this out of the equation and the employee will never view performance management as anything other than a tick-box, low-value exercise.

We have talked about the foundations for good performance management, we've delved into the importance of engagement and we've touched on the need to adapt to "new normals". The next piece of the jigsaw? Measurement! Clearly, the antiquated performance metrics of the past have no place in today's global - and increasingly complex - world of work. That said, we also need to change the way we're measuring performance. Failing to redefine

> *WE KNOW PM CAN ACTUALLY HARM EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, SO WHY UPSET THE APPLE CART? BECAUSE STICKING WITH OLD METHODS THAT DELIVER MEDIOCRE RESULTS IS GOING TO SEND THOSE APPLES FLYING DOWN THE STREET ANYWAY*

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Is your organisation changing the way it manages performance?

40% Yes
60% No

what to measure - and equally, what not to measure - can lead to a situation where "John from Finance", works really hard on a project, but his efforts go unnoticed, because his manager is measuring his performance, against goals that no longer align with his current focus. The outcome? John becomes demotivated, is less inclined to go the extra mile and leaves the company soon after.

Adopting a fluid approach and measuring what matters most in performance terms, is arguably the single biggest determining factor in whether an organisation can make the transition from performance quandary to performance success. The priority here is for companies to revamp their data-driven approaches and embrace different ways of measuring performance, beyond just quantitative goals. Here, there are some important questions to ask: Do you measure employee work ethic? What about adaptability, ownership, time management and accountability? Are you measuring remote working skills and competencies, such as the ability to self-start? These behaviour-based metrics are just as important as quantitative ones, so by excluding them from the review process, managers will end up with a blinkered - or even skewed - perception of their employee's performance. Understanding the need to build soft skills into the performance design process is also imperative. Organisations need to be nurturing and measuring the skills that help employees to remain productive in challenging times. Self-efficacy - an employee's ability to meet the challenges ahead of them and complete tasks successfully (Akhtar, 2008) - is especially important in the context of remote work, because many employees have struggled to manage their time and workload effectively without direct supervision. In this way, the current climate is even helping to build the case for soft skill measurement in performance management design.

Solutions must be resilient and adaptable, catering to the many nuances that span different organisations - and indeed even different teams within the same organisation. This is especially critical when it comes to evaluating job performance, as fixed patterns and a one-size-fits-all mentality, will only inhibit performance outcomes. Instead, flexible and configurable performance management systems will become the norm, as HR teams seek solutions that fit with their people's preferred and new ways of working. Ultimately, the purpose of performance management is to develop people and drive high performance. But it has to work for everyone, irrespective of seniority, role or performance output and the modern review model will need to meet all of these variables. ●

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STRANGE DAYS INDEED*

Clearing the cereal bowls off the desk-cum-breakfast bar, as colleagues pop up on the Zoom meeting, striding alongside the existential terror with the same old pressures to deliver and achieve, these are unprecedented circumstances. We've been upskilling in epidemiology, scrambling to meet deliverables, taking part in stand-ups, huddles, pitches, townhalls and debriefs… and marking fractions! It's certainly been one for the memory banks.

ARTICLE BY LIZA HASKELL, INTERIM VP OF PEOPLE AND CULTURE - TIDE

Somewhere within this bizarre milieu, the staples of people management still have to be carried out. So how does one conduct a performance appraisals now? What does PM even mean in the time of coronavirus? What's so important... can't it wait? The reality is, no it can't, but the good news is that performance management doesn't have to be a begrudging grind to complete paperwork, that only serves to demoralise and undermine already anxious and beleaguered colleagues. It's been said by many - and it's patently true - that this new way of working offers an opportunity to switch up outdated practices that weren't serving organisations or colleagues well. So, where to start? Like most things, it all begins with trust. A lot of the problems that people are facing right now are connected to trust… or a lack of it. Working from home means being invisible for much of the day and your contribution may be hidden, or hard to quantify. For many colleagues, this creates a sort of performance vacuum, how can colleagues demonstrate their value, if nobody sees them pushing projects forward, negotiating with clients, managing technology or countless other hidden activities?

During lockdown, many people are feeling the work-from-home guilt, where they feel bad because they are not in the office, attending meetings or simply being seen. People feel bad because they think everyone else is thinking they are not working hard enough and, even when they know that their manager trusts them, it's easy to feel a persistent paranoia. As a result, people often work extra hours to compensate and instead of switching off, they're monitoring emails at all hours, taking calls over lunch and desperately hoping that their contribution is recognised. Trust has always been a big issue for employers and they need to stop asking how they can trust remote workers and look for ways to stop trusting remote workers - that is effectively removing trust from the equation. So how can we stop trust being a factor in a manager's evaluation of a colleague?

> NOW THAT COLLEAGUES CANNOT BE SEEN AND MUCH OF THEIR WORK IS DIFFICULT TO OBSERVE, PERFORMANCE SHOULD BE JUDGED BY OUTPUT, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO PROJECTS AND ORGANISATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Trust is an inherently subjective quality, one that often depends on how much a manager can relate to a particular colleague. This makes trust a deeply unfair component of the performance evaluation. Rather than allowing managers to use some vague gauge of trust to influence their performance reviews, organisations must connect PM to concrete metrics. Now that colleagues cannot be seen and much of their work is difficult to observe, performance should be judged by output, achievements and contributions to projects and organisational objectives. Instinctively, employees know when they're trusted and they value being able to make decisions independently, so much so that many would sacrifice money for freedom. How can managers shift their approach to performance management, without spending years redesigning the process? Perhaps the starting point is to focus on conversations with colleagues - instead of having scripted conversations that are based around a checklist or a form - managers could spend more time gaining confidences. It's an obvious statement but true, that better connections between managers and teams are a powerful way to build trust, to understand priorities and to keep development on track and the technology couldn't be simpler... it's talking!

Managers must partition their own experience of lockdown and keep their minds open to the variety of pandemic experiences that we're all going through... your lockdown life is not mine! Remember that your most talented and valuable people might be having a tough time. You can either find ways to support them, or you can risk losing them. Now, more than ever, your colleagues need support, compassion and understanding, to help them work through a weirdly challenging time. Colleagues are clinging on, so go easy, talk more, have faith and take another deep breath. ●

*John Lennon 1940-1980

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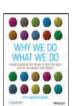
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IT'S BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL

In the twentieth century, when employers began to widely adopt the practice, the employee's role was mainly passive - the appraisal was something being done to them. But over the past few decades, this has changed. As developed nations have switched to knowledge economies, with a high cost of employee churn, the balance between employee and employer has shifted.

ARTICLE BY ROLY WAKTER, FOUNDER - APPRAISD

Employees now expect to play a much more active part in the performance management process, demanding value for themselves - the opportunity to have their voice heard and to give their feedback to managers and senior leaders. Today's employees want an open, honest and ongoing conversation, in which they are seen as an integral part of the business, not a cog in the machine. Major change is difficult for any organisation and the people going through it and the uncertainty surrounding new roles or ways of working is unsettling and creates fear and anxiety. Just as they want to be included and proactive in their own development, employees want an open, honest and inclusive conversation about change too. As we all know, numerous employers will be initiating drastic revisions to their business plans, as a result of the many challenges generated by the pandemic. The general level of confidence in the economy will be weighing heavily on the minds of leaders, as they try to negotiate their way through these uncharted waters. But when an organisation faces substantial change, what happens to the previously important HR programmes to engage, inspire and motivate employees that a great deal of time and budget have been spent on?

At the beginning of 2020, an employer might have been proudly telling their employees and the wider world about their commitment to develop and nurture its employees, considering this to be a prudent investment in the firm's future. But over the past few months, they may well have gone quiet about these initiatives, leaving employees nervously waiting to know their fate and whether they have a future with the company at all. How we handle this drastic turnaround is vital to reassuring employees and preventing all the hard work around employee engagement and development being undone in a stroke. Organisations who have had the most success have had an honest narrative from the start and made it clear that priorities have shifted. Previous plans and objectives may well be put on ice and employees may find their formerly stable reporting lines are under discussion for realignment. Where there is anxiety and trepidation, a performance review that sets goals for the future is a tricky conversation. When people are worrying if the company will even survive, leaders have a huge responsibility to find a balance that maintains confidence and demonstrates momentum in

the face of an arduous journey, peppered with harsh realities.

The message about change hasn't changed, it's invariably unnerving, disruptive and for some, painful, but it is an essential element to thrive and survive. A company may previously have made commitments around people development and growth, but those will have unavoidably changed during this period, requiring a switch of focus to moral and practical support, to help and guide employees for this period, as they put their aspirations on hold. It will require energy and determination to make this an authentic measure for mutual benefit, during these chastened and challenged

WHEN PEOPLE ARE WORRYING IF THE COMPANY WILL EVEN SURVIVE, LEADERS HAVE A HUGE TASK TO FIND BALANCE THAT MAINTAINS CONFIDENCE AND DEMONSTRATES MOMENTUM IN THE FACE OF AN ARDUOUS JOURNEY, PEPPERED WITH HARSH REALITIES

times. Business plans, objectives and priorities may change without notice and so employees need to be ready to adapt and switch priorities when required. While budgets may be strained, the values and principles of the business remain the same and regular communication between managers and employees remain as important as ever. Future vision is also important, reassuring people that when finances allow, more budget and focus will return to people development in the performance management frame.

Now, more than ever before, effective performance management is about being agile and always evolving, depending on circumstances and situations. Setting goals at the beginning of the year and sticking rigidly to them makes no business sense and so adopting a continuous approach can make change far easier to deal with. It pays to start with adapting corporate goals to reflect the new situation, but make sure that you quickly set new short-term goals, perhaps focused on customer retention, smooth running of standard procedures, that reflect the current situation. Set goals that ensure nothing vital slips through the cracks, while employees are

coming to terms with new roles or ways of working. Also a key consideration is to put in-depth and formal year-end review process and ratings to the side. Now is the time for small, frequent check-ins focused on workload and wellbeing. With so many more employees working remotely, it is vital that managers and employees maintain a close connection to ensure no one feels isolated, alienated or forgotten. Allow employees to have check-ins with buddies or mentors - people other than their regular line manager - as this will help provide a different perspective and allow them to discuss topics that may be difficult or uncomfortable to bring up with their line manager.

Of course, change is a constant, but there are key moments when a major re-organisation has happened and people are settled into their roles. At this point, it's time to address the new situation in a positive way and re-energise employees. This is the moment to define the revised aims of the business and how employees fit into these and provide them with a fresh and enticing vision. Even a short-term, six-month vision for the business will deliver a greater sense of purpose, rather than nothing but silence from up top. Restate your commitment to employee development and growth as a worthwhile investment. Budgets may be restricted, but managers will be tasked with listening to and discussing issues and aspirations with empathy and goodwill. If change is to be successful, employees must come with you on that journey. The key message is the business requires everyone to pull together: Employees need to play their part, help by taking care of themselves and each other, taking care with their work and your customers. While managers must take extra time to recognise their team-member achievements, there will be things that they need to do that are unseen, times when they go the extra mile without

anyone noticing. Always thank them in advance for going above and beyond.

Performance management can be a powerful tool for providing clarity and direction to employees, at a time when they are being asked to dig ever deeper for the sake of the business. From a practical point of view, there may be alterations you should make to your approach that will re-engage managers and employees in a way that is sensitive to the past and acknowledges that there may be further uncertainty in the future. These unprecedented times will require many adjustments to performance management of course. For example, take the focus away from ratings and grading in performance reviews and cut out any unnecessary approval workflows or questions. Switch to regular, frequent check-ins or one-to-ones, plus a career conversation every six-or-12 months, to keep employees focused on progression. Start developing a feedback culture - if you haven't done so already - where all employees feel empowered and confident to share constructive and relevant feedback. Move away from annual objectives and adopt a quarterly cadence, perhaps using a framework, like OKRs. At the very least, make objective more meaningful with milestones or action points, tied to clear corporate goals, to ensure everyone is pulling in the same direction. Adapt the tone of voice in templates and forms to be less formal, more pragmatic and human and aimed at making people feel valued. Keep communicating and make sure all employees know what is required of them, know when they are required to act and are comfortable using the systems in place.

The bottom line is, performance management does not need to be an expensive or resource-intensive process, regular feedback and check-ins are far more cost effective than a few days management training. An approach that encourages and supports best practice in people management is priceless and the insights gained from frequent conversations between line managers and employees, not only drives better performance, it encourages greater engagement, fuels development and provides an early warning if things are going off track. ●

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AS THE QUO FLIES...

History is littered with triggers and even catastrophes have sparked changes that people have been hoping for. Of course, the pandemic is one such trigger, where a paradox of chaos and fear has led to an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine the future and build back better.

ARTICLE BY
LUCINDA CARNEY
CEO & FOUNDER
ACTUS SOFTWARE

T hose that fear change the most are those that always stick to the tried-and tested and uphold the status quo above all else - it's usually protectionism writ large - and the potential damage is incalculable. In good times or bad, the very best people managers and leaders are those that constantly wonder if there is a better way and regularly review policies and strategies, to ensure they are aligned with business operations and objectives. They are the ones who raise eyebrows at board meetings, rattle cages and constantly call out current practices that are failing… in short, they make the sticklers feel very uncomfortable. Pre-pandemic, constant change and disruption was already highlighting a capability gap in the skills of line managers, struggling within a framework that creaked like the Mary Rose. What a killer combination and it invariably turned problems into flashpoints and no more so than in performance management, where fusty old Victorian parameters, such as punctuality and presenteeism, gave the illusion of input and productivity. It's taken until 2020 and the disruption of a pandemic to realise this is wrong?

This all leads to how the COVID-19 trigger will both accelerate the performance management revolution and erode outdated and fundamentally archaic structures of working life, which have been upheld, despite clear evidence in favour of flexible working. It follows then that a more dynamic and agile method of managing performance is not a nod to radical thought, it's an absolute imperative. For a remote workforce en masse, great quality management is more crucial than ever. Of course, the manager capability gap was complex, many of the processes were much maligned and even more unsuitable in a virtual environment and, the absolute plumb of them all was the annual performance appraisal, a date marked on the calendar that was looked forward to with all the relish of a trip to the dentist for root canal surgery. No question, it's a tradition that has been derided and openly criticised for years and yet, pre-lockdown, few businesses had successfully made the leap into fresh territory. The parallels with football are uncanny, whereby the best football managers have the perfect blend of man-management, player development, training and overall team tactics, club goals and strategy. Can you imagine a footballer only receiving an appraisal at the end of the season and not after every game? Of course, this analogy falls flat when talking about the new, remote-working world and the growing independence that employees have in their field of work, away from any physical contact or presence with others in the office. However, previously, presenteeism had allowed us to get into the habit of being purely transactional with our people, even under the guise of agile working practises. What was paramount was a false sense of management that failed to appreciate the complexities and multifaceted nuances of contribution and performance, with the annual appraisal's duality of financial reward and/or promotion and punishment stifling any form of continual creativity and collaboration amongst colleagues.

Enter lockdown! The sudden switch to remote working had varying effects on businesses - some people and organisations thrived, while others struggled. The common factor of success was the climate of trust, engendered by the leadership style and between people and performance managers. With the world veering head-first into a new and transformative era and contending with the sheer uncertainty and lack of contact that a pandemic delivers, we have been forced into a newer, open and transparent mindset, actively communicating with employees and managing targets. There is an undeniable, critical link between trust and performance. During lockdown, there was a clear sense of what was and wasn't working

when it comes to successful people management. Unsurprisingly, maintaining energy and morale and staying connected are the most prominent challenges of disbursement and isolation. Amongst a number new syndromes, "lockdown lethargy" has been a well-noted and widely-experienced phenomenon, causing both physical and mental exhaustion, perhaps exacerbated by the immediate shock. These are feelings and challenges that have triggered change and it's noteworthy to see how businesses have adapted to foster people management in this new environment.

Lockdown and the impending threat of it, will eventually diminish and we will move on into a quasi-workforce framework and a hybrid working environment. We won't go back to what we were... not now, so what we will all need is an overarching and fundamental list of components, that seek to enhance performance in 'unprecedented' times. For the sake of clarity, I've grouped them into themes, to represent the most effective, virtual working principles. Number one, is always people first - we must start by being human centric, building trust and developing an understanding of what makes people tick. A low trust culture can lead to a lack of motivation and impact both productivity and job retention, especially in a remote-working environment, when the false pretence of physically seeing people is removed. However, resorting to micromanagement to account for a lack of physical presence is not the answer and only serves to erode this trust - people will perform better when not having to detail their day every step of the way and have a freedom tailored towards their needs. Next is expectations and this needs clarity of priorities, goals and milestones. We place trust in those people who consistently meet our expectations, but this trust cannot be achieved, if those expectations are not clear from the outset. Collaborating with the individual to co-create SMART objectives with clear priorities, goals and milestones, provides both clarity to the individual and a visibility of work that has been completed, without being micromanaged. Third is regular reviews - holding virtual ones is fine but they must be consistent, i.e. performance reviews. Rather than being assessed on how many hours people work in the office and the appearance of "putting in a good shift", the newly-remote world requires an open environment where the metrics of productivity takes precedence over hours on the task. Here, regular reviews enable both parties to collaborate in assessing their objectives and expectations and adjust accordingly, depending on whether they are being met or not. This leads onto feedback & development - it seems obvious, but this is very often swept under the carpet - real-time feedback allows you to continually improve performance, which will only serve to yield greater results.

Fostering a genuine ownership culture enables employees to feel that they are a vital and active component in the company's performance in - hopefully - scoring their goals. There should not only be ownership over the successes - a culture of personal

accountability, where it is safe to make mistakes - is paramount to enabling individuals to improve and grow. Of course, when colleagues are mostly out of sight - save for the virtual meetings - recognition becomes even more key and so supporting celebration and sharing achievements whenever possible, provides memorable sparks in the drudge of time. There is no other stimulus more important to maintaining performance than enabling those being celebrated to bathe in a warm glow of positivity and encouraging the wider team to step up. Coalescing and integrating all the above is the essence of good performance management but, whilst it is crucial to actively forge environments of high trust and performance, there may be occasions where someone still fails to deliver. Exhausting all the options above, it is good to acknowledge when a tough conversation is needed and maintaining an open mind and detailing the facts of the situation - to interrogate the cause of why they are not delivering and how to rectify this. Actualising this continual cycle of management, communication and feedback with effective results is the key to PM in the new virtual world - or a virtual world that is eventually, likely to become a cocktail of in-person and virtual meetings and collaborations. Changes that have been simmering under the surface for years have percolated through, due to these unprecedented circumstances. Surprisingly, whilst many are now making the leap forward, there are still companies who continue to rely on outdated paper methods and static annual appraisal systems. Whilst these people bathe in nostalgia and hold onto their Homburgs in a hooley, progressive, forward-thinking businesses, that relish and even force change, can capitalise at their expense. ●

THE MANAGER CAPABILITY GAP WAS COMPLEX, MANY OF THE PROCESSES WERE MUCH MALIGNED AND EVEN MORE UNSUITABLE IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT AND, THE ABSOLUTE PLUMB OF THEM ALL WAS THE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

FLEXIBLE &
AGILE WORKING

COMMON SENSE
FAILED... BUT A PANDEMIC
NAILED IT!

Pre-pandemic, most businesses were boasting about their
"right-on" flexible working credentials, even though most were paying
a sort of lip-curling service to it in practice. Then when the hot, super
brands such as: Twitter, Shopify and Facebook, flung their flexy cards
on the table, suddenly, it was the only game in town. Then, after years
of drag, denial and derriere sitting, lockdown clamped down its
jaws and the rest will be history.

ARTICLE BY NICK WASHINGTON-JONES, MANAGING DIRECTOR - TACK TMI UK

If you believe the headlines, flexible and remote working has gained almost universal approvement, with businesses, leaders, employees and the technology having all adapted magnificently. The journalists' sharp perceptions have zoned into the big wins, such as; reduced commuting and the positive impact on the environment, flexible hours that enable that much-desired work/life balance and less micro-management. Surely that's it then, case closed! Hang on, not so fast, while there are undoubtedly many benefits, there are many more factors to consider. Not everyone's circumstances are the same and while remote working is the dream ticket for many, for others it could be their worst nightmare -

with the potential for the isolation it can bring. Ultimately humans are social animals who thrive on recognition, interaction and friendship. On the whole we seek to belong to like-minded tribes and often perform most effectively as part of a team. The rise of remote working evidently distances employees from traditional working environments - presenting real challenges in respect of how we can build these social connections.

Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerburg, while fully recognising the many benefits of home working, also highlighted some of these difficulties in a recent memo regarding Facebook staff and their experiences of lockdown: "About 40 percent are interested

in full-time remote work, but more than 50 percent want to go back into the offices as soon as possible. Having kids home from school has been tough for parents and people living on their own have struggled too. It can be hard to find the right work/life balance without a clear boundary between work and home. I'm also concerned about weaker social bonds between colleagues - especially new hires - and there's an open question about whether groups of people are less creative when they're not together." Despite it evidently not being ideal for everyone, it is undoubtedly the likely direction of travel. According to the *Homeworking in the UK: Before and during the 2020 lockdown*, report from the Wales

Institute for Social and Economic Research, nine-out-of-ten employees wish to continue working from home in some capacity following the easing of global lockdown restrictions. While in a recent YouGov study commissioned by *The Independent*, nearly two-thirds (61.4 percent) of employers plan on offering flexible working to their employees following the pandemic. Clearly, in many cases, the pandemic has forced the issue that has been on the table for years and despite the Government's call for people to go back to work - and then advising the reverse - the reality for many businesses is that many employees will remain homeworkers. However, whilst firms have facilitated this shift, has the same attention been paid to leaders and leadership? The burning question is surely, what will good leadership and management need to look like in this brave new virtual world? Importantly too, are our current leaders suitably equipped with the skills to manage remotely?

Given the pace of events, the reality is that many leaders have been thrust into managing remote teams with little support - and potentially no clarity - on the key skills required to do so effectively. While it can be argued that the principles of leadership and management do not change, there are certain skills and capabilities that need to come to the forefront in a virtual world. With teams working remotely and less able to meet up to collaborate, it falls to leaders and managers to address any barriers to effectiveness and nurture those teams and having access to relevant tools to facilitate team working is only one component. Clarity on objectives, roles and responsibilities become even more critical and greater transparency will aid this. More than ever, leaders must ensure their teams are clear on business priorities and goals, as it is this clarity and transparency that will help motivate teams and create a stronger culture of accountability.

Possibly the biggest shift of all for managers is trusting your teams to be accountable. Command and control, as we know, has never been an effective management approach, yet many managers still struggle with trusting their teams to be autonomous and responsible, particularly when they cannot see exactly what they are doing. But presenteeism was never a good measure for productivity, so businesses need to support leaders in understanding that outputs are a far better measure of effectiveness. Failure to make this shift will result in micromanagement and have the opposite effect of demotivating employees - something no business can afford now more than ever. In fact, the previously mentioned *Homeworking UK* report, should provide reassurance to leaders, as it suggests that while a "common fear among employers is that without physical oversight, employees will shirk and productivity will fall, homeworking on the whole in lockdown, did not appear to have a significant effect on productivity levels either way. Two-fifths (40.9 percent) of homeworkers reported that they were able to achieve just as much as they did six months

previously and over a quarter (28.9 percent) stated they were able to achieve more.

Employee wellbeing during the pandemic and beyond, is a particularly complex issue when a workforce is based remotely. Indeed, an ONS survey suggests "almost one-in-five adults (19.2 percent) experienced some form of depression during the coronavirus pandemic, which has doubled from around one-in-ten pre-pandemic." Leaders, therefore, need to demonstrate greater empathy for how employees may be feeling and to become more acutely aware of any employees who may be displaying signs of stress, burnout or even depression - all without the benefit of seeing them face-to-face. It can be as simple as asking, "are you ok?" and striving to recognise signs of potential issues through changes in behaviour or demeanour on calls or video-conferences. Keeping in touch with the whole team, for both business and social reasons, is really important to reducing feelings of isolation. Leaders also need to foster a culture of openness that allows employees to recognise when their workload is becoming unmanageable and feel that they can share that information, without being judged.

While many of the leadership skills remain broadly the same, knowing how to best deploy them virtually is not so simple - a gap which businesses need to address quickly. For many, focus over the last couple of months has been one of continual change and whilst traditionally businesses have always invested heavily in developing their leaders, the blueprint for effective virtual leadership, during a pandemic, is something that no business would have prepared for. This is where HR has a pivotal role to play - recognising potential issues and identifying and implementing training solutions - to address any skills gaps across the business and that starts at the top in these unprecedented times. Even the most capable leaders and managers may not have vast experience in heading up remote operations and, as we know, even the most seasoned leader may either not be aware of their shortcomings or be reluctant to admit to them. We are seeing many organisations in a tailspin, with leaders understandably pre-occupied and failing to spot the development needs of themselves, let alone their team. It is incumbent on HR to drive processes to ensure development programmes meet current needs and communication doesn't break down in this most intense of periods. In fact, it is clear that effective communication underpins each of these key messages. Communication is the key driving force in senior management making sure remote working works, for both employees and the business. How effectively leaders communicate and engage with their teams - both in terms of frequency and clarity - will be the determining factor. ●

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> COMMAND AND CONTROL, AS WE KNOW, HAS NEVER BEEN AN EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT APPROACH, YET MANY MANAGERS STILL STRUGGLE WITH TRUSTING THEIR TEAMS TO BE AUTONOMOUS AND RESPONSIBLE

**@theHRDIRECTOR
TWITTER POLL**

Is flexible working seen as fair and inclusive in your organisation?

54% Yes
46% No

THE CURTAIN RISES

After many tetchy read-throughs, prop failures and half-hearted dress rehearsals, the curtain was finally raised on remote and flexible working. Unfortunately, the theatre was deserted, thanks to a cynical and remorseless phantom. Nevertheless, obtusely, flex and remote have been given the opportunity to go from fringe to mainstream, but there is no guarantee this will be a surefire, box office smash.

ARTICLE BY DAVID REILLY, MANAGING DIRECTOR - LET'S LEARN DIGITAL

A key immediate challenge for many workers now working flexibly is a lack of colleague interaction and team connections. This can be especially challenging for younger workers and those organised around regular team interactions. This crisis has also meant the younger generation starting their working careers in the middle of the worst recession in living memory and without having access to the professional tools and personal development that are gained from being in an office. But many corporate HR leaders have found inventive solutions to this problem, as explained by Head of HR for Zurich Insurance UK Steve Collinson; "while the isolation aspect was a concern for us, we have been pleasantly surprised by our staff's willingness to embrace remote working. We have encouraged socialising through the use of remote tools which have emerged across all departments." Steve also recommends encouragement and not being too prescriptive, which has worked well for Zurich's decentralised work environment.

Adapting to the new flexible demands of HR successfully, is entwined with corporate culture, values and having a clear purpose. But building a long-term culture of flexibility is a continual and exhaustive journey - rather than a sprint - and some organisation cultures, at the outbreak, were simply not set up. Many organisations have a propensity for face-to-face meetings or had not adopted the technology that would enable flexibility. Genevieve Glover, HR Director for Barchester Healthcare explains how they initiated culture change a couple of years ago, which has paid dividends during the pandemic: "Ensuring a company culture, clear vision and values has meant that we are even more focused on putting the quality of care of our residents and patients first to good effect, as measured by the regulator. I am really proud of Barchester staff's collective response during this tough period. The investment 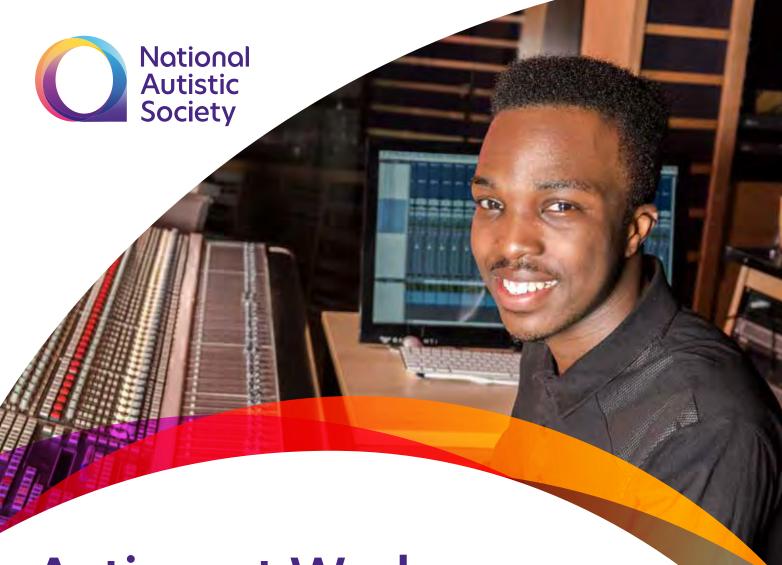in our culture and values prior to the pandemic - combined with the professionalism, hard work and commitment of our staff - meant that during this challenging time, we have continued to 'celebrate life' with our residents and patients."

Some Corporate HR teams have used this time to reinvent themselves and encourage innovation internally. Zurich Insurance's HR team members actively encouraged these conversations and promoted this message throughout the pandemic lockdown. Steve explains; "we have seen some really interesting innovations and tech solutions emerge across the business during the lockdown, which has provided a real positive context for the future, as we emerge out of the Pandemic. We are not being complacent and acknowledge there will be significant operational challenges ahead. During lockdown we carried out research to find out exactly how our 4,500 employees wanted to work when they return. From a mental health perspective, we believe it's imperative to give employees choice and not force them to any one place of work. Overall, we found our employees want the best of all worlds, with a hybrid of both office and home working, leaning slightly more towards home, but not 100 percent."

Research suggests that flexible working is also good for the bottom line of UK employees. Research by Morgan Redwood has shown that companies who provide flexible working to enable an improved work life balance gain 20 percent more from their employees. That 20 percent is realised through reduced sick days off work and increased engagement and productivity. Clearly, corporate HR departments play a pivotal role in supporting people management challenges during the disruption and HR professionals can encourage their organisations to be ready for a more flexible future, by providing insights, sharing good practice and providing constructive support. ●

> BUILDING A LONG-TERM CULTURE OF FLEXIBILITY IS A CONTINUAL AND EXHAUSTIVE JOURNEY - RATHER THAN A SPRINT - AND SOME ORGANISATION CULTURES, AT THE OUTBREAK, WERE SIMPLY NOT SET

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THE UPS & DOWNS OF A FLEXIBLE ROLLER-COASTER

The changes enforced by the pandemic cannot be underestimated, the past eight months of working life has been unrecognisable. Like many people, I have been working from home, my day no longer starts with a 6.00 am alarm and the rush and crush of the morning commutes. I can't say I miss that aspect of normality, but I do miss the friendly social interactions around the office, bouncing ideas and sparking collaboration.

ARTICLE BY JANINE CHAMBERLIN, DIRECTOR - LINKEDIN

For me personally, remote working has been something of a rollercoaster and a huge learning experience. During the height of lockdown, I documented my personal experiences of working from home daily. It had many twists and turns, from enjoying connecting with my team in new and efficient ways and spending more time with my son, to the realisation that the overflowing inbox and back-to-back video calls were at times quite intense. We've all experienced a myriad of emotions during this period as we adjusted to the new, remote normal and I'm relieved to have now found some semblance of balance and a way of working that works for me. With lockdowns coming and going - and now seemingly coming back again - we continue to adapt and remain flexible - and that has been a lifeline for businesses during 2020. As Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft recently said; "we've seen two years' worth of digital transformation in two months." Many companies were able to turn on a dime, shifting their entire workforces and setting them up for successful home working. But this experience exposed employees and business leaders alike to a whole new way of working.

It's taken as read that COVID-19 has been a catalyst for change and while businesses are still considering what the future of work looks like at their organisations, what we've collectively experienced this year means that it is unlikely to go back to the way things were. We've seen first-hand that there can be a different way of working - a way that gives parents and those with dependents in particular - the flexibility they need to balance demanding jobs, with equally demanding personal responsibilities. The pressures on working parents - and specifically working mums - is something that businesses need to be cognisant of. Our latest data finds that the pandemic has had the most severe impact on women and their career progression. During 2020, the hiring of women in the UK followed a U-shaped trajectory, reaching its lowest point in April where it fell to 41.5 percent, before recovering to 45.2 percent in July. For context, in 2019 women accounted for 45.6 percent of hires in the UK. Insights from countries across the world tell a worryingly consistent story, hiring of women falls when lockdown measures are brought in and that working mums are bearing the brunt of childcare and household responsibilities. This data sheds light

on the economic impact of lockdown measures on working women and underscores the importance of flexible working policies from employers. With women juggling ever-increasing work commitments with heightened childcare and household responsibilities, the concern is that, with greater demands on their time and higher levels of stress, working mothers may consider reducing their hours or leaving the workforce entirely.

working from home are clocking up an extra 28 hours of monthly overtime and more than half feel more anxious or stressed. Before offices are branded redundant, it's important to note that appetite for greater flexibility far from signals the end of the office. There are many reasons why physical offices have a purpose. Younger people, in particular, benefit greatly from on the job experience and learning by osmosis - seeing and hearing

working doesn't just refer to remote working, there are a range of different flexible working policies for organisations to consider. These range from job-sharing programmes, staggered start times and flexible hours for those who may need to work part-time. Implementing such policies will ensure flexibility is at the heart of an organisation and foster a more inclusive working environment for all. Companies will reap the benefits from employees that feel understood and looked after. What's clear is that employers have to be open to the idea of 'blended' working environments, which have flexibility, openness and connectedness at their core. Physical offices present so many benefits from a culture, collaboration and creativity perspective, which will be even more valued in the new world of work. Repositioning the physical office as a hub of company culture, where the life and soul of a brand is built and nurtured, is key to ensuring flexible and agile working continues to serve bottom lines, as well as a company's people power.

> ## WE NEED TO CAREFULLY CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF THESE CHANGES. UK WORKERS WHO ARE WORKING FROM HOME ARE CLOCKING UP AN EXTRA 28 HOURS OF MONTHLY OVERTIME AND MORE THAN HALF FEEL MORE ANXIOUS OR STRESSED

Just over half (54 perent) now want to have the opportunity to work from home more regularly when the pandemic is over. Respondents said they had more time for exercise, they were eating more healthily and working from home has made them feel more connected to their family. This appetite for greater flexibility is further reflected by the trends - searches for remote work, which have increased by 60 percent globally since March. In the UK, views of remote jobs are 2.5 times higher and applications for these roles have increased by 189 percent. Business leaders also recognise the need for change. New research from 250 plus C-level executives in the UK found that nearly half (49 percent) of leaders want to give employees the choice to work from home more regularly and 41 percent want to introduce flexible hours to better support those who need it. Almost a third (32 percent) also say they want to invest in virtual interviewing and onboarding experiences to prepare them for the future. Organisations now have the opportunity to rebuild fairer and more inclusive workplaces. Businesses are considering flexible and remote working, job shares and staggered start times. This can help them retain more women and benefit from expanded talent pools which can improve the diversity and skill set of their organisation.

But we need to carefully consider the impact of these changes. UK workers who are

more experienced colleagues in action. We also know this generation views work as having a social benefit, with many making a network of friends to help them through the early years of their career. Culture and collaboration too relies on human interaction. So, what we're likely to see is companies giving employees greater say over how, where and when they work. Employees will decide for themselves when to work from the office and when to work from home, depending on the type of work that needs to be completed and their personal commitments. Offices will evolve into centres of culture, connection and collaboration and a focus on building bonds and equity with colleagues will be a high priority. After all, it is these bonds that have enabled remote working to actually work. With demand for a reimagined way of working, HR professionals now have the opportunity to reshape the future of their organisations and the policies that have defined working life for decades.

Embedding flexibility into the fabric of a company means starting at the very beginning - with recruitment. With many offices still closed, virtual interviewing and onboarding is now an imperative and needs to be seamless to successfully embed new talent into our systems. Making these processes watertight and as comfortable as possible for candidates and the teams they are joining, will make all the difference. Flexible

Flexibility for employees also means embracing the need for continual learning. Our recent *Leading with Learning Report* found that reskilling and upskilling is a top priority for UK CEOs, with nearly two-thirds saying that reskilling is crucial to filling critical skills gaps. Pivoting to increasingly digital processes and new working systems naturally creates room for upskilling and learning, as many of us take on new digitised roles, or rely that bit more on the soft skills needed to ace that pitch through crackling audio, without the aid of normal social cues. We know that more people are learning online than ever before, with soft skills and basic tech skills in high demand. As we rebuild workplaces and economies, we need to ensure we do so in a way that is fair for everyone. The last eight months have been a trial for us all, but organisations across the country now have the opportunity to build back stronger and more resilient businesses. It will be those that place flexibility at the core of their culture that will successfully attract and retain talent and continue to succeed in a post-pandemic world. ●

THREE SCORE & TEN... THEN WORK MORE AGAIN

Consideration of a future work model had already begun pre-Covid-19 in some quarters, for those acknowledging the ageing demographic transformation of our workforce. The traditional three stage life pattern of 'school, work, retire' does not fit with the extension of careers beyond 'normal' retirement age.

ARTICLE BY
EMMA BARTLETT
PARTNER
CHARLES RUSSELL SPEECHLYS LLP

E mployee engagement and career path design has required a change of tack, with tension between flexible working and office-based models never more obvious than now. Technology has enabled - business couldn't have coped if the pandemic had struck ten years ago - so this worldwide working from home experiment will rewrite the way we work. Just as technology and globalisation has transformed the way we live. At the turn of the last century, the predominant occupations were in agriculture and domestic service, but by the end of the 1990s, these comprised only one percent of jobs, with the majority now predominantly professional, managerial and clerical. Artificial intelligence and robotics has started for some time to drive change, but with the pandemic, the turnover of jobs and sectors is predicted to move significantly. New jobs will be required to meet the rapid change in demand and turnover in the labour market and, as we will most likely now work into our 70s and 80s, both businesses and governments need to prepare for the change in the way we work. Prior to the pandemic, there was tension already between the typical way of working and one which would provide more choice and improved work/life balance. Business leaders were starting to recognise that, while pay is a key motivation for job choice, the ability to choose the way we work and career prospects, was also key and, with a longer career, employees will need to improve their skills as careers last longer.

According to the Office of National Statistics research entitled What is the Gender Pay Gap?', for full-time employees up to the age of 39, the gender pay gap is relatively small - women often earn more than their male counterparts between 22-39, but post 40 the gap significantly widens. One principle reason is due to women taking time out to start a family (the "maternity penalty"). Prospects of closing the gender pay gap for women over 40 are not good. As primary care givers, women dominate part-time working roles. Recent research into flexible working shows a tendency for employers to grant flexible working in lower skilled or lower paid roles. The need for flexibility in people's working life has been a major factor, albeit not the only factor, in explaining the gender pay gap, but one that continues as a dominant feature, as working lives grow longer. The Government's response in recent years has been to introduce a package of "family friendly rights", although these rights have not been well used, often because employees do not feel particularly encouraged to utilise them and/or fear damage to career prospects. The right to request flexible working was first introduced in 2003 (amended in 2014) to request flexible working to look after a child or care for a dependant. Flexible working for these purposes includes working an atypical pattern; part time working, changing hours (e.g. early starts and finishes), or compressed hours. The condition that a statutory flexible working request must be made for this purpose of caring for a child or another dependant, was removed i n 2014. However, the right to request is not an absolute one and the legislation balances this against the employer's right to decline for business reasons. Employers are obliged to seriously consider the request and either accept it, propose an alternative, offer a trial or reject it, relying on one of eight statutory defences. Employees are saved from having to assert sex discrimination before their request is taken seriously - as generally was the case pre-2003 - but does not guarantee a right to work flexibly. Paid paternity leave 2003 (amended 2015), unpaid parental leave 1999 (as amended) and shared parental leave in 2015, were further introduced. The rights permit two weeks paid paternity leave, following the birth of a child (or placement of an adopted child), the right to up to four weeks

unpaid leave per annum to care for children under 18 and for women to share their paid and unpaid maternity leave with their partner. However, it would be short-sighted to believe that the desire to work differently is driven solely by the desire or need for both parents to want to share child caring responsibilities.

There is a fundamental need for businesses to move away from the traditional corporate working model, due to the extension of working lives and the more immediate changes to working practices driven by the pandemic. The extension of the working life, predicts Lynda Gratton Professor of Management Practice at London Business School, will result in a 'multi-stage career over time', as working for prolonged period into your 70s and 80s will be too hard, exhausting and boring. It is predicted that, in the first stage of the multi-stage working pattern, you maximise your finances and work long hours, followed by another stage, where there is a balance of work and family and/or a further stage, where life is positioned around jobs that may or may not make a strong financial contribution, but are interesting. The pressure of accepting a limited work model will reduce and we will seek out careers with options. In practice, there are already new stages and changed attitudes to working, as evidenced by the 'millennials' approach to working and a new "teenage" stage of life, that disrupts the traditional pattern of "school… work… retire". In a multi-stage life, age is not an issue and choice becomes more valuable.

Generally, women have transitioned to the multi-stage career as they take various times out of their principal career and frequently return to a different career/work pattern to improve work/life balance. This is presently contributing to the gender pay gap; average pay for men is greater than that for women. In 2016, the gap for all employees in the UK was 18.1 percent. A contributing factor is that a higher proportion of women work part time (41 percent compared to 11 percent of men in 2016) and part time workers earn less per hour, on average, than their full time counterparts. The role of primary care giver for children and other dependants is not the exclusive domain of women and the need to improve work/life balance places pressure on companies to respond to the change. Agile working is a core way of achieving this - the ability to work differently. To date, the demand for a more agile working pattern has been led by women. The need for flexibility continues as caring for ageing dependant's overlaps with a longer working life. Men are also pushing for more flexibility around these new work stages. Consequently, businesses respond through an agile work environment, which promotes this as the norm rather than atypical.

Until 23 March 2020, the conflict between greater choice in working patterns and the corporate need for predictable workplaces was arduous. The pace with which corporates embraced agile working was glacial. Smaller, entrepreneurial businesses have been more light-footed in operating an agile environment. It would be remiss to assume that only smaller companies can embrace agile working as there are examples of large, global companies which have successfully done so and continue to achieve growth and stability in their market, but ability to change requires strong leadership. The gig economy is a driver of agile working, where individuals provide a series of specific services at times and places driven by customers rather than the corporate timetable. There are economic and social benefits of this type of agile working, which can allow individuals to work around other caring, leisure or educational commitments has allowed this economy to thrive as it adapts to changing economic trends. This type of agile working typifies the service industry, but is just one of many models that will develop with agile working.

When the UK experienced its first lockdown in March, those who could work from home started doing exactly that. This period has been described as the biggest, global work from home experiment, which without the rapid advances in technology, would not have been possible. Interestingly, fear that remote/agile working would have a devastating effect on productivity has not, on the whole, materialised. Remote training has been prolific, team working has remained possible and HR functions have refocused attention on employee wellbeing and communication skills training. For the first time, agile working is not unusual - it is the norm. There is a recognition and awareness that we can work differently and with businesses advising staff that their office will reopen next year or in phased stages, permitting extensive remote working, the first step towards choice in work/life balance is being achieved. It is likely that agile working will be here to stay and far easier to implement post-pandemic, as the majority of office workers have expressed a real desire to hold onto it. ●

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN GREATER CHOICE IN WORKING PATTERNS AND THE CORPORATE NEED FOR PREDICTABLE WORKPLACES WAS ARDUOUS. THE PACE WITH WHICH CORPORATES EMBRACED AGILE WORKING WAS GLACIAL

TO THE POINT

HR... THE LAST RESORT

Progress has been made but the stigma surrounding mental health dogmatically persists. There urgently needs a change of focus to ensure people are well supported.

Article by Annabel Jones, HR Director - ADP

Studies, such as *The Five Year Forward View For Mental Health*, have consistently revealed the scale of the problem, that one-in-four people experience mental health issues at some point in their life. The importance of prioritising mental wellbeing cannot be ignored and side-stepped, the impacts on productivity, engagement and most importantly, long-term health are palpably real. Research titled *Workforce View 2020,* revealed that HR departments are seen as the last resort for those suffering from mental health issues - with only 14 percent of UK workers stating that they'd feel comfortable talking to HR about a mental health problem. While HR is not directly responsible for treating mental illness, it is a crucial touchstone in ensuring that people find help. If employees do not feel confident approaching HR about the problems they are experiencing, how can organisations support them and direct them to resources they need?

In research conducted before the coronavirus pandemic began, 68 percent of employees in the UK felt stressed at work at least once a week, pointing to a significant problem amongst the workforce. These numbers are likely to have increased as a result of COVID-19, as social isolation and remote working put a strain on mental health. Much of the socialising that takes place in the physical office, both formal and informal, is difficult to replicate virtually. Additionally, concerns over job security can weigh heavily in times of uncertainty. It is more important than ever for HR to provide guidance and direct employees to vital resources when they are suffering.

Recent years have seen attempts to tackle the taboos around mental health in the workplace, but there is much to be done. That is why HR can play a key role in making mental health resources more accessible, by promoting awareness of the resources available. For organisations that already have support systems and policies in place, signposting how to access these is essential. When mental wellbeing resources are displayed as openly and clearly as any other HR service such as, holiday entitlement, training or benefits, the stigma around using them is reduced. In some businesses, the entire culture around mental health needs to shift and the first steps are starting conversations and raising awareness. However, awareness can only go so far and it is crucial that there is a strong foundation of policy to support it. Employers need to be clear and proactive when it comes to mental health, either instituting their own programmes or leading employees to external sources of expertise.

It is also important for organisations to consider how their working practices may impact employees, as company culture has a significant influence on overall wellbeing. Is there a pressure to work long hours? Do employees feel valued? Are they feeling a sense of purpose? Questions such as these are critical in taking stock of the mental wellbeing. If an organisation's culture is welcoming and open, employees will not only feel more comfortable approaching HR about mental health problems, but also in opening up to their colleagues about potentially stigmatised issues. When people are suffering from mental health issues, it is essential that they have someone to turn to. HR departments should no longer be the last resort, especially when employees may be increasingly isolated from other sources of support. By focusing on open conversations, clear policies and greater awareness, HR can lead the way in dismantling stigma around mental illness. This is no doubt a challenging task - and there is no single, simple solution - but it is an important one and there is no time to waste. ●

At this continued challenging time, HR strategy, solutions and insights are critical to ensure you can deal with '**unknown**'.

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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.

RICHARD PEACHEY

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

DR NIK KOTECHA

Dr Nik Kotecha OBE is an award-winning entrepreneur, business leader, investor, DIT Export Champion, philanthropist and Chief Executive of Morningside Pharmaceuticals Ltd. Since inception in 1991 the business has supplied quality medicines to more than 120 countries internationally, as well as one of the leading manufacturers and suppliers.

KIRSTIN FURBER

Kirstin has 20 years experience across senior HR roles within the media and entertainment industry. Prior to Channel 4, Kirstin was at ClearScore and before that the People Director at BBC Worldwide, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the BBC, employing approximately 1800 employees. Kirstin was also HR Director at Twentieth Century Fox and VP of HR at Discovery Channel.

THE GROWING POTENTIAL FOR DISUPUTES

The world in which we live is increasingly complicated and stressed by many powerful influences, politically, economically and of course with the spectre of the pandemic. Workplaces are also fraught with new sensitivities and complexities. The number of employment rights under which an employee could make a tribunal claim has more than trebled since the 1980s - and now, the muddle of COVID-19, the pressures from movements such as Black Lives Matter and #metoo have brought yet further potential for disputes, activism and disruption. The question is, have grievance and conflict policies kept up.

WORRIED ABOUT BREXIT TRADING UNKNOWNS?

As the famous quote goes 'there are known knowns, known unknowns and also unknowns unknowns'. What is clear to me and my company is that businesses must prepare for every eventuality, and start right now, if they have not done so already. This very much applies as the current Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU continue. We know there are red lines on both sides, though the outcomes are still unknown. In a world of uncertainties, when trying to plot and plan a route forward, Dr Kotecha shine a light to reveal touchpoints and landmarks to watch out for.

BUILDING CULTURE TODAY

The world we live and work in has changed. We used to refer to the phrase 'the future of work' and the catch phrase seems to be, 'the new normal'. This phrase is being met with mixed feelings - personally I hate it! Regardless of what we call it, this is our world, as we adapt to our new circumstances and get ready for what comes next, we know, from experience that things can change very quickly. So, as leaders, what do we need to do to be prepared? It's important to outline what we know for certain. Building a culture for the future is not about legacy and heritage and it is doubtful that even the best of the past will be fully relevant.

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