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CONTENTS

4 Editor's letter

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP: THINK GLOBAL WOMEN

6 How to transform women's careers through allyship

10 A toolkit to empower women & boost career prospects

14 Deconstructing the glass ceiling

18 Men stepping forward

23 Gender equality and allyship: Actions to inspire inclusion in the workplace

GLOBAL MOBILITY

28 Managing migration: A global challenge

32 Rainbow Families: A neglected area in global mobility

36 Split-family and fly-in, fly-out expatriation

40 Permits Foundation News Update

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

42 Financial wellbeing: How employers can help staff to thrive

46 ESG & sustainability agenda: 2024's priorities

50 Talent for growth: Innovation, skills & AI

GLOBAL EDUCATION

54 A class act: Education of the future

58 Learning without limits: King's InterHigh

60 Education for the future

64 Get set for summer

68 AI in Education

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP: TALENT & PERFORMANCE

72 Harnessing AI for best-in-class performance management

75 Cultivating a mindset of wellbeing and optimal performance

78 Combining leadership skills with business acumen

81 Effective leadership strategies

84 Pay & rewards

87 UK growth budget

Spring 2024

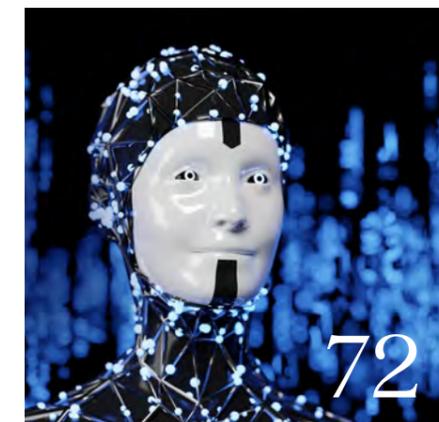


THINK GLOBAL WOMEN:

Deconstructing the glass ceiling



ESG: ESG & sustainability agenda: 2024's priorities



AI: Harnessing AI for performance

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EDITOR'S LETTER



"In companies where men actively promoted gender equality, 96% reported progress."

Allyship is the big theme that came out of our 'Think Global Women: Inspire Inclusion' event, which we held live in London in celebration of International Women's Day. Fifty guests came together to experience a lively, interactive morning of a keynote speech and panel discussion, followed by roundtable conversations, to capture what our international community needs to accelerate equality and inclusion in the workplace.

We have made the key elements of this event available on YouTube so you and your organisation can contribute to best practice guidelines and accelerate change too. We have made it really easy to participate and you will find a host of resources all in one place.

On the global mobility front, David Sapsted shares his insights on the 'trilemma' of balancing economics, human rights and anti-immigration rhetoric. Dr Sue Shortland explores policy issues for rainbow families and the importance of supporting split-family assignees. Marianne Curphey surveys the ESG and sustainability agenda for 2024 and the ongoing importance of financial wellbeing as the cost-of-living crisis continues.

We have some great insights on innovation and AI in the international workplace and schools and education from Ledetta Asfa-Wossen and Sally Robinson. Discover more about high-performance learning and preparing children and young people for their future lives.

We also bring you an exclusive leadership supplement focused on talent and performance. Enjoy our series of interviews with entrepreneurs, CEOs, HR and academics who all share a passion for turbocharging performance. Discover what is important for leaders today ahead of their appearance in a groundbreaking masterclass at Henley Business School in April.

Fiona Murchie,
Managing Editor

Spring 2024
Next issue June 2024

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Above: Author Joy Burnford

How to transform women's careers through allyship

Ahead of her keynote speech at March's Think Global Women event in London, **Joy Burnford** spoke to **Marianne Curphey** about how everyone benefits from greater equality in workplaces – and how to make this a reality.

Much has been done in recent years to develop women's careers and give them training and opportunities to grow their management and leadership potential. Yet overall, many organisations still lack female representation in the boardroom and at senior levels.

Consultant and equality specialist Joy Burnford is on a mission to help companies understand why their efforts to create more inclusive workspaces are faltering, and to give women and men the tools to progress their careers and reach their potential.

Her new book, 'Don't Fix Women: The practical path to gender equality at work', addresses the issue of why some female-led diversity initiatives are not working. It reveals how achieving gender balance at work isn't about 'fixing' women: it's about changing the system.

Joy argues that change is needed at organisation-level to create a truly diverse, modern leadership culture and reap the rewards this brings for people of all genders. The book features interviews and case studies with over 100 senior business leaders and CEOs about what they are doing to accelerate progress towards gender equality. It also includes practical actions to help make change happen.

HALLMARKS OF TRULY INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

"There are three cultural frameworks that I really believe are important for organisations that want to advance gender equality," Joy explains. "These are allyship, flexibility and coaching."

"Flexibility is really important because it helps to create long-term relationships of trust. When managers trust their staff, they can create a happier, more productive workplace. A lot of organisations lose female talent because women leave corporate life to set up on their own to find that flexibility. Coaching can help women overcome imposter syndrome and build their confidence at work."

She argues that to make progress around gender equality, it is important to ensure that men are engaged as allies and not alienated from the gender debate.

As the founder and CEO of Encompass Equality (previously My Confidence Matters), she is a recognised

gender equality trailblazer. With over 25 years' experience as a business leader, non-executive director, podcast host and speaker, Joy helps organisations accelerate their journey towards sustainable gender equality by providing them with strategic advisory services, research and a range of practical solutions that create equitable places to work.

"Unless we get people who are in power to take a stand and think about what they can do to support the women within their organisations, nothing will happen," she says. "In companies where men do play an active role in gender equality, 96% reported progress compared to 30% where they did not."

"Men can often be passionate advocates, but sometimes they're a bit scared about not knowing what to do and how they can really make a difference," she explains. "There is a six-step process, which I describe in my book, that people can use. I am suggesting we put in place measures that will help everybody, not just women. I set out to write a book about how we could help women, but I realised the concepts in the book could help men too."

WHY CHANGE BENEFITS MEN AND WOMEN

Joy quotes feminist writer Gloria Steinem, who said that if men become allies, then they not only free others, but they also free themselves. "In dual careers, there is a balancing act between partners and that is why it is important to consider the tasks in the home if we want to support dual careers," she says. "While allyship is important within organisations, it is also important in the home, because to achieve a balanced and equal playing field men need to pick up more responsibilities in the home.

"For example, networking is absolutely fundamental to career progression for everybody, but often networking events are hosted in the evenings, when it might not be very good for women who've got caring responsibilities to go along to. When I was researching the book, a lot of men said they were also reluctant to go to evening events



"UNLESS WE GET PEOPLE WHO ARE IN POWER TO TAKE A STAND AND THINK ABOUT WHAT THEY CAN DO TO SUPPORT THE WOMEN WITHIN THEIR ORGANISATIONS, NOTHING WILL HAPPEN."

too because of their family responsibilities, so rethinking this would help everyone."

When thinking about opportunities for global experience, she says managers will have greater access to talent if they think more flexibly about potential candidates.

"Don't make assumptions. It's all about personalisation. There's a lot of flexibility now in terms of working in a global role and not necessarily having to travel all the time. It is about removing barriers to try to level the playing field. The same goes for intersectionality. It is about how you could use your privileged position to help others advance in their careers too.

"This is about enabling line managers to have better conversations with their people, because our recent research Why Women Leave has shown the role and support of line managers is really fundamental to retaining women."

The research found that the five key issues for women within organisations were culture, line management, career progression, the day-to-day work itself, and the amount of work. "If you don't get the culture right, and if you don't have great line managers, then you could be losing your female talent," she explains. "Line managers can unlock so much for individuals. Likewise, overwork is a big factor. Often women don't want to say that they're overworking or struggling with too much work because they don't want to seem under-committed or unprofessional."

HOW MANAGERS CAN SUPPORT WOMEN BETTER AT WORK

She likens a woman's career path as climbing up a mountain with a big rucksack full of rocks, some of which are female health challenges, such as menopause, menstruation, miscarriage and maternity.

"Women often have childcare and elder care responsibilities, and all these things combine to slow down their career progression.

"What organisations can think about is how to take some of those rocks from the rucksack. It's also the case that in their career women don't necessarily want to go up, they want to go forward, they want to be inspired, they want to be challenged in their careers, they might want to go round the mountain, they might want to just take a break whilst they're having a really, really bad time, whether that's due to health reasons or caring responsibilities.

"Organisations can recognise that because their staff are here for the long term. They can support them and give them the opportunity to take a step back when things get hard.

"The organisations that do this well understand that people go through different challenges, and it is about being really aware of what those challenges are."

She says that retaining female talent should be a priority for organisations.

"When you do have more women joining, they know they are joining a place where they can thrive and have access to develop and grow into leadership roles. If you have challenges around retention and attraction, then you might recruit great staff only to see them leave. It is worth getting that right because, as I describe in my book, every time a business replaces a salaried employee, it costs on average six to nine months' salary to replace them.

Another key finding in the research, Why Women Leave, is about embedding inclusive leadership within the organisation. "One of the big issues that organisations need to consider is the impact of inclusive leadership and integrating a top-down approach," she explains. "It is about having leaders who think about inclusivity, gender equality and women's careers and develop that as part of their day-to-day role and strategy – not just something that comes up once a year. It should not be siloed into something to consider when you have gender pay gap reporting to do."

To help leaders think about the way they operate, Joy has developed a framework called PACE, which

is passion, accountability, curiosity and empathy. "Those four things are fundamental when it comes to inclusive leadership and should be part of the DNA of an organisation. Leaders need to be accountable, empathetic and have great, curious conversations with their staff and teams."

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR CHANGING THE CULTURE TO BE MORE INCLUSIVE

Joy points to research by the polling company Gallup, which found organisations that worked toward inclusivity and cultural change benefitted from a 33% increase in revenue. Joy believes that while programmes that support and develop women are important and worthwhile, the true benefit of supporting women's careers can only be seen if the culture of the organisation changes too. "It is not about fixing women at work – it is about changing the systems and processes that are already in place in the organisations."

In Don't Fix Women Joy has constructed a matrix that male allies can use to identify how they currently show up as an ally to women and how to progress. She has also identified different types of people in companies and their attitudes to cultural change. The "ostriches" are those who are opposed to change; the "performers" are box-ticking, but don't really believe in what they are doing; and the "apprentices" want to change, but are not sure how. The ideal state is having a workplace full of "champions" who are advocates for equality and inclusion.

"We work with a lot of companies who really believe in doing something positive, but they are not sure what to do. We help people champion equality and bring their peers and their colleagues along with them in order to effect organisational change," she says.

Overall, Joy's message is very positive – companies can change for the better, men as well as women will benefit from equality, and there are clear steps you can take now to transform your workplace for everyone, regardless of race, background or gender. •



A TOOLKIT TO EMPOWER WOMEN & BOOST CAREER PROSPECTS

Amira Kohler, a top HR and change consultant with a wealth of global experience, explains the importance of promoting allyship among men and women, modernising performance management practices and equipping women with the necessary skills and support to succeed in the workplace. **Marianne Curphey** reports.



Individual and organisational allyship are crucial for supporting women in the workplace and building teams that enable women to flourish and grow. Individual allyship involves building networks and sharing experiences, while organisational allyship involves deliberate actions by leaders to promote gender equality.

“If we encourage women to build networks within teams and within organisations, they can share their stories about handling issues that they have come across and the skills they have developed and communication techniques they have mastered,” Amira says.

She adds it is important to encourage women to build networks and share their stories regarding issues such as handling vague, subjective and gender-biased feedback, and representing themselves well during pay negotiations or promotion rounds.

“Allyship requires a level of trust and familiarity and achieving that can be more challenging now that so many employees work remotely or in teams spread across different geographies,” she explains.

Amira specialises in change management, performance management and HR systems implementation and adoption. She is a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). She has held director of performance and change roles for many HR software companies

and consultancies. Her previous roles have included head of talent management at Barclays Bank, people transformation consultant at KPMG and as an HR consultant at British Airways dividing her time between London and New York.

“In order to build networks, trust and familiarity, there needs to be a certain amount of scaffolding put in place in organisations to support women. Some of it is about deliberately creating opportunities for people to come together and share stories and build trust, such as through female empowerment networks or events like the Think Global Women event,” she says.

At the organisational level, leaders can act as allies through deliberate and symbolic acts of support for women. “Men in authority recognising the value of strong, powerful women and communicating the commercial value of gender equality can be incredibly powerful allies and set an example for others,” she says.

“I remember many years ago at a Barclays top talent identification meeting, the male head of private clients sent a very strong message about a female maternity returner. There was a lot of debate about whether the woman would return and could operate at the same high level as before her maternity leave. He stopped the debate and said: ‘She is a strong female performer and she is going on the talent list. And we will all create a mutually supportive environment to ensure that when she returns, she thrives, because it will benefit all of us.’ I suspect 20 years on, we all remember that moment!”

GENDER BIAS IN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Amira says that outdated terminology around performance and annual reviews is holding all employees back – but particularly women.

“The very first challenge is the terminology and premise of the ‘performance appraisal,’ she explains. “A modern, engaging,

“If a manager creates a more trusting relationship where they understand the ‘person inside the employee’, it will lead to greater results for both parties.”



fairer and ultimately more effective approach, which leads to higher performance, is continuous performance management. This features short-term – not annual – objectives and frequent check-ins, rather than an annual appraisal.

“An appraisal sounds like – and usually feels like – the teacher’s report. It is very paternalistic and not very effective. More progressive organisations ensure that feedback is fluid, frequent, real-time and multi-directional from clients, peers, subordinates and colleagues – not just the manager,” she says.

“The legacy of performance management goes back 100 years to Henry Ford’s Model T factory, where efficiency and productivity strides were made. Employees were treated a bit like cogs in a machine; the manager just told the men – and yes, they were all men – what to do and told them to get on with it. It worked a century ago, but that process and mentality has tended to prevail far longer than it should in a modern organisation, which is much more complex and nuanced.”

THE MANAGER AS PERFORMANCE COACH

A modern approach to performance management revolves around a manager and employee building a close, trusting and well-informed relationship where the manager recognises the individual’s strengths, weaknesses, foibles and personal circumstances.

Amira says we need to guide

managers to behave more as coaches, not purely as directive bosses.

“If a manager creates a more trusting relationship where they understand the ‘person inside the employee’, it will lead to greater results for both parties.”

This type of approach benefits everyone, not just women, because we all want to be treated like individuals and we will all inevitably experience life events and hurdles, which affect our advancement. However, there are specific issues facing women that a continuous and transparent performance management process supports:

- Women suffer from gender-biased performance reviews. ‘Harvard Business Review’ (HBR) analysis shows that women are 1.4 times more likely to receive critical subjective feedback than men, as opposed to either positive or critical objective feedback that men get.
- The Harvard research found that women and men receive different feedback for identical behaviour, quoting the example of a female employee’s ‘analysis paralysis’ versus a male peer’s ‘careful thoughtfulness’.
- The HBR analysis found that women also tend to receive more vague feedback than men do, which can be hard to interpret and handle.
- Women tend to underrate themselves and men to overrate themselves. “This needs to be understood in the context of

self-appraisal, when women may well undersell themselves,” Amira explains.

These gender-biased patterns of behaviour can be resolved by organisations implementing gender-neutral, real-time feedback tools, which reduce the bias. It can also be reduced by asking for real-time feedback from a range of observers – clients, colleagues, other managers and subordinates.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD PERFORMANCE DATA

A good performance management system enables the capture and reporting of meaningful performance data. It can provide tangible evidence on important themes such as:

- the spread of performance ratings and whether there’s a gender bias
- whether women consistently underrate themselves compared to men, and what their clients and colleagues say, which might feed into ratings and therefore pay
- the retention of female returners after maternity leave, parental care and other life events
- how well a department and manager are doing at retaining valuable female talent
- patterns regarding the promotion of women versus men, including female returners
- information regarding the gender pay gap/gender retention gap/gender promotion gap etc.

Amira emphasises the importance of collecting performance data throughout the year to ensure a well-informed performance review reflects all the performance information, feedback and data built up over the year. This avoids the manager scabbling together information at the last minute for the performance review, which can lead to omissions, assumptions and bias.

Good empirical performance data can also be used to understand the value of women returning from career breaks, and how critical it is to retain them and ensure a smooth and effective return to the workplace. Making the case for retaining top talent, particularly female talent, in terms of the positive impact on profitability and customer reputation, as well as enhanced profits, could persuade even the most hard-nosed CEO and MD to put in structures and cultures to ensure women remain.

FLEXIBILITY IN WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Flexible working is a huge enabler for female returners to work. Where there is organisational reluctance to embrace flexible working, this can be due to outdated thinking and a lack of creativity and courage, Amira says.

“There are so many flexible working solutions that technology can enable, such as term-time contacts, remote and hybrid working,

part-time and reduced hours, job shares and the offer for people to work non-traditional hours.

“There is a lot of data that proves that losing valuable women through career changes or childcare, eldercare or menopause can be economically detrimental for organisations,” she says.

“From a brand perspective, it is a much better employee value proposition from an employer if women are being cherished and there are opportunities to come back after maternity leave or other career breaks.”

A TOOLKIT FOR EMPOWERMENT

All employees, but particularly women, need to build up their communication skills, resilience, time management skills, negotiation skills, contracting skills and the ability to say “no” firmly and politely.

“Resilience is pivotal, and it is so important to understand how to keep your nerve and your self-esteem intact, despite issues that inevitably will go wrong, whether you are a man or a woman,” Amira says. “For example, you are entitled to cry, but maybe don’t cry in the office.”

Equally, it is important that

we train and upskill managers on tricky areas such as unconscious bias; how to support maternity returners; the implications of menopause; and how to handle sensitive and personal issues such as conversations about ill-health, flexible working requests and stress. This will build a more resilient workforce overall and equip women with the skills they need to thrive.

“This stuff is never easy, but I’d suggest giving managers prompts for these types of conversation, a practical kit bag of dos and don’ts, and explaining that intention and understanding is what matter most,” Amira says. “Good managers make a positive difference every day. These practical aids can help them get better at people management. In turn, that helps us all.”

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Find out more about Performance and Talent Management from Amira Kohler at Turbocharging Performance 18 and 19 April.

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DECONSTRUCTING THE GLASS CEILING

WOMEN'S PATHS TO LEADERSHIP

Women often outperform men in both education and the workplace. Yet when it comes to making it to top leadership positions, a significant gap remains between men's and women's access. There is evidence the 'glass ceiling' still exists, writes **Marianne Curphey**.

Research by Dr Patrizia Kokot-Blamey shows the price of making it to the very top for women. It is often to work like a normative father might; either accepting a household gender-role reversal or outsourcing much of the early-years childcare. She argues this will be too high a price to pay for many women and increasingly also for men.

"If we want more women in top leadership positions, then we need to make it less costly for women to get there," she says. "The cost here is not so much financial, but the regret of leaving very young children, and missing much of their early years, to work."

"The current performance management systems in the UK are designed to reward a worker who has no other responsibilities," she says. "They do not account for the fact that most of us do have some responsibilities, be it family or care of elderly relatives, and women are more likely to seek to accommodate these."

ADDRESSING GENDERED HIERARCHIES

Dr Patrizia Kokot-Blamey is the author of 'Gendered Hierarchies of Dependency', a book which looks at women's career advancement in professional service firms. She is a senior lecturer in organisation studies at Queen Mary, University of London. She also holds a PhD in gender studies from the London School of Economics, and undergraduate and master's degrees in economics from Maastricht University. She writes on women and the professions, fertility and employment, and has published in top journals such as 'Accounting, Organizations and Society' (FT Top 50), and 'Gender, Work and Organizations'.

In her research, she calls on organisations to acknowledge the human life cycle and provide job security during these often-tense transition periods.

For example, during pregnancy and the early years of children's lives, as well as when it comes to the challenges related to looking after elderly parents, ill partners and periods of one's ill health.

"Performance management systems need to be unbiased, but they also need to allow some grace for transition periods such as these," she says. "Line managers are often poorly trained when it comes to applying flexible working policies and managing both women and men who are facing stressful periods in their lives."

The impact of inaction is the continued underemployment of women's talents, which feeds into gender pay and leadership gaps. "Women today are on average better educated than men and often outperform them at work. Yet many women feel compelled to downshift careers and move into jobs that are below their capacity to secure the hours they feel they need to manage already stressful times in their lives. That is very difficult to reverse in its effects."

Her book suggests some policies employers can adopt to level the playing field for women, including:

1. A transparent appraisal process and an appreciation that while performance management assessments are important, they should not be used rigidly, especially during already stressful transition periods that affect men as well as women in different ways. For example, ill health can affect men as well as women, but pregnancy, maternity, or fertility treatment are gendered and can also be unpredictable.

2. Perceived job security is important for mental and physical wellbeing. This is something employers can affect in their day-to-day operations with employees.



Left: Dr Patrizia Kokot-Blamey is the author of 'Gendered Hierarchies of Dependency'



“WERE EMPLOYERS TO REDEFINE FLEXIBILITY TO HELP WOMEN, THIS WOULD ENABLE THEM TO KEEP EXPERIENCED AND HIGHLY SKILLED WOMEN WHOM THEY OFTEN LOSE AT THE PEAK TIMES IN THEIR CAREER.”

3. Workplace flexibility is important to allow those who would otherwise leave or downshift their careers to keep their foot in the door. Such flexibility would benefit all parents. It would also stop highly trained women from leaving employment or taking lower-paid jobs to secure the hours they feel they need to manage periods of transition, for example in the early years of their children’s lives.

HURDLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Dr Kokot-Blamey argues these assessments should have an element of “common sense” built in that allows employees to shift down a gear at work during times of transition and stress. She also explains in her book how career management for women is context dependent.

“In the UK, women’s paths to the top of an organisation are more straightforward than in Germany, where more relationships and close networks are comparatively more important,” she says. “As a result, we can see more women advance to higher positions.

“However, employees in the UK also face more job insecurity because there is less of a safety net and because performance management procedures take a short-term view while careers are long games with many of us working 40 to 45 years.”

In Germany, long-term personal relationships still matter comparatively more in business, while in the UK and US, understanding the career structures in place is more important. Dr Kokot-Blamey says women in the UK often successfully navigate around blockages in career progression by using recruitment agencies to find a better job or secure a promotion.

Yet women in the UK face job insecurity, despite being highly educated and qualified. Dr Kokot-Blamey argues that employers must offer job security to high-performing women to accommodate transition periods.

“In the UK, we can see that women do very well up to middle management, and it is at the very top that the proportion of women tends to drop off. Women are more likely than men to look for more flexible working arrangements to accommodate childcare responsibilities.”

It can be difficult for women to return to employment that matches their experiences and skills after taking time off for caregiving responsibilities, leading to a loss of highly qualified employees for organisations, she says.

Instead, organisations should build in ways for women to step up and balance caregiving responsibilities with work, providing opportunities for recognition and advancement. This might involve giving women more grace during fertility treatment, pregnancy and maternity leave. Performance management systems should be more flexible during these periods, rather than adding to the stress and potentially causing the loss of valuable employees.

“Women are downsizing or downshifting into jobs that are below their capacity due to conscientiousness and a desire to avoid being underperforming or stressed,” she explains. “Were employers to redefine flexibility to help women, this would enable them to keep experienced and highly skilled women whom they often lose at the peak times in their career.”

MAXIMISING INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

Her research has identified key differences in the way women progress within organisations in Germany and the UK. Both systems have their pros and cons, and neither offers a perfect solution to the challenges that women face in their careers. For example, women in the UK often feel they have limited career choices due to the high cost of living, leading to delegation of childcare responsibilities or outsourcing entirely. In Germany, jobs are based on close personal or family ties and women often do not have access to these networks in the way that men do.

Dr Kokot-Blamey believes that for women looking for long-term, international opportunities to boost their careers, choosing a country with a more liberal market economy will enable them to advance more quickly.

“I would say from my research that opportunities are more abundant in countries such as the United States and Australia. Women will find it easier to advance. If you are coming from the UK, you will already understand the structure and the systems in place. In Germany, for example, long-term relationships of trust matter

comparatively more and that’s not easily acquired.”

She notes that how relationships are developed and used can depend on context and this too may influence women’s careers.

“There is a well-known study by Burt and colleagues from 2000 that looks at French and American managers. They could show for example that they were using networks very differently. The French managers were relying on long-term personal relationships that often came from family ties. Then they would add acquaintances from work on top of this.

“American managers were more likely embedded in networks that spanned their careers, mostly work-related, and were more likely to develop friendships within their workplace networks, which is a very different way. In my research, I found that this was also the case.

“In the UK, often women aiming for partnership only had fleeting workplace relationships and mentors who were assigned to them professionally. Whereas in Germany, the women often relied on friendships that had gone back a long time. They would join firms that were run by friends of their families, so long-term established relationships were already in place.”

SPONSORING CAREER PROGRESSION

Dr Kokot-Blamey says job security is hugely important to wellbeing, mental and physical health, and productivity at work. “This is something employers can think about in their organisations, but it is also a policy issue because of higher levels of job insecurity and a lower safety net in the UK,” she explains.

“Even women who are highly educated and skilled feel insecure in their jobs. As they take on more visible and senior roles, they continue to feel vulnerable. In the UK, as in many liberal market economies, there’s a real disconnect between education, training and experience on the one hand and job security on the other. Women who are hugely qualified have a lot of experience and a wide network of professional contacts are conscious of redundancy happening around them, with even those in top positions affected. That shouldn’t be the case.”

In some ways, the focus on performance management systems and appraisal systems, which were designed to enhance equality, diversity and inclusion, can actually work against women, she says. For example, high-performing women might need extra support when they need to shift gears in their careers to accommodate maternity leave and possibly part-time parental work. “Pregnancy and maternity are not gender-neutral events,” she says. “Line managers often do not know how to work these into an appraisal system in a fair way.

“It is important for employers to offer the job security women who are high performers need to temporarily take a slower track if that is what they wish to do,” she says. “The vast majority of us will become parents at some point in our lives and this issue therefore affects the majority of people, particularly women, but also men who are more likely today to take a step back when children arrive than previous generations.”

She says women often downshift in career terms to accommodate the demands of motherhood, but then find the move difficult to reverse.

“It is a shame when we are facing a skills shortage. The human life cycle is relatively predictable, but our workplace assessments do not have this built in. Birth can take a long time to recover from depending on what

happens, and a lot of women are really surprised to find that very young children do not actually easily adapt to childcare settings. What employers can do to help women is not to make this process even more stressful.

“In the UK, we have really embraced performance management systems. There is little scope for common sense here within the systems. Someone who has a track record of consistently performing at a high level is very likely to continue to do so.

“But forcing someone to meet the criteria of a rigid performance management system during a time that is already extremely stressful often only results in losing them. Women downsize and downshift into jobs that are below their capacity because they are conscientious, and they don’t want to be underperforming.”

She also says that while workplace flexibility is important, its definition differs from country to country.

“Flexible working in the UK often means juggling your hours around school hours and school holidays. It’s a bit different in Germany, where part-time work, for example, usually means working half days. This is often not practical in the UK for several reasons, but in both contexts, highly educated, highly skilled women should be able to command some flexibility in their workplace.”

The good news is that progressive firms are recognising the importance of nurturing and supporting their high-performing women.

“In the UK, especially in the larger firms, among the women I interviewed there were women who worked part-time and made it to the role of partner. They were keen to stress that doing that role on a part-time basis was important for them and also to be a role model and example to younger women. They want to show that it can be done, and that motherhood does not mean an exit from senior roles or career progression.” ◉

FIND OUT MORE

DR PATRIZIA KOKOT-BLAMEY,

Queen Mary, University of London

<https://www.qmul.ac.uk/busman/staff/academic/profiles/patrizia-kokot-blamey.html>

You will find a wealth of resources on relocateglobal.com and thinkglobalpeople.com, including Global Mobility Toolkit Factsheets, Mini Factsheets & Podcasts.

“IT IS IMPORTANT FOR EMPLOYERS TO OFFER THE JOB SECURITY WOMEN WHO ARE HIGH PERFORMERS NEED TO TEMPORARILY TAKE A SLOWER TRACK IF THAT IS WHAT THEY WISH TO DO.”



Elizabeth Kelan

MEN STEPPING FORWARD

Why is it that despite organisations' efforts to encourage diversity and inclusion there are still so few women at the very top of organisations? **Marianne Curphey** catches up with **Elisabeth Kelan**, professor of leadership and organisation at Essex Business School, to talk about her groundbreaking book, 'Men Stepping Forward: Leading your organisation on the path to inclusion'.



In the book, which is based on 11 years of research, Professor Kelan argues that the idea of finding a quick fix to help increase the number of women in senior roles is far from straightforward. While many organisations have put a lot of effort into implementing diversity and inclusion programmes, the issue is complex and achieving true gender equality will take longer than expected. She argues that most research and interventions have attempted to “fix the women”.

Instead, the book discusses how men can become changemakers and lead their organisations towards inclusion, becoming involved in creating gender-inclusive cultures. It suggests practical actions, based on the extensive research Professor Kelan conducted while writing the book, for men as leaders and managers to implement and effect

real change.

Elisabeth Kelan, PhD, is a professor of leadership and organisation at Essex Business School, University of Essex. She holds a Leverhulme Trust Major Research Fellowship [MRF-2019-069] to explore the future of work, digitalisation and gender. Her research focuses on women in leadership, men as change agents for gender equality, generations at work, technology in organisations, and diversity, inclusion and belonging.

To establish how men could become change agents, she started by researching CEOs, and finding out what role they played in gender equality. Based on the findings from the CEO study, she identified that men as middle managers are understudies, yet central to gender equality. She undertook further research to establish their influence in making change happen.

WHY SHOULD MEN HELP?

“In my book, I suggest that achieving gender equality in organisations is not only women’s work,” says Professor Kelan. “It requires men too. Men, however, have traditionally been excluded – either implicitly or explicitly – from discussions around gender equality.”

She says many organisations want to achieve gender equality, but only focus on women to achieve this. “The focus was on developing women,” she writes in the book. “While nothing is wrong with this as such, I increasingly felt that cultures of organisations have to change to allow for inclusion to flourish.”

“While for instance, women’s leadership programmes are useful, they only get you so far if you have leaders in the organisation who do not know how to achieve gender equality. The majority of



“Many organisations aim to alter gender relations just like they would tackle other issues; setting targets measuring and taking mediating actions when things do not work out. Putting a change programme for gender in place and expecting it to yield results in the next quarter is highly unrealistic.”

those leaders are going to be men. It therefore makes a lot of sense to help men in leadership roles to understand what they can do for gender equality,” she says.

Her first study was based on CEOs who were supportive of gender equality and had publicly lent their support to create gender equality in their organisation. In other words, they were seen as pushing forward gender relations and were supportive of gender equality in their organisations. With most CEOs being men, the project was largely about what men can do for gender equality.

“During the CEO project, one of the CEOs told me that his ability

to create change in regard to gender equality in the workplace is rather limited. In other areas, you can bring about great change, but with gender equality, it is much more difficult,” she says. “I asked him why that was the case and he responded that this is due to the ‘permafrost of middle management’. In his view, it was difficult, if not impossible, to melt the permafrost of middle management to allow middle managers to change their ways towards more gender-inclusive behaviours. Particularly men, who are the majority in middle management positions, were constructed as difficult to engage.”

This inspired a second piece of

research guided by the question of what men in middle management positions can do to create greater gender equality in the workplace. Professor Kelan worked with a range of organisations to identify middle managers who were perceived as doing gender inclusion well. She found this to be a difficult task because many organisations “struggled to identify a man in a middle management position who they perceived as leading on gender equality”, she says. Eventually, she identified men in middle management positions who walked the talk on gender equality. She job shadowed them to document and analyse how they support gender equality in the work context.

WHO ARE THE BOOK'S MESSAGES AIMED AT?

“My book ‘Men Stepping Forward’ addresses men, particularly those in leadership positions, directly,” she says. “The book is based on my academic research that I conducted for over a decade. However, the book itself is immensely practical. I provide a lot of anecdotes and examples of how men can create inclusion. I also have practical tips and tricks that help men to become changemakers for gender equality.”

In the book, she describes the plethora of initiatives that are designed to develop women leaders. These range from women’s leadership development programmes to coaching to make gender biases more visible. “While all of these activities might be worthwhile, a more holistic and systematic perspective on gender in organisations is required,” she says.

The glass ceiling describes the phenomenon that women have the top of the organisation in sight yet cannot reach it, she writes. However, rather than just facing a glass ceiling, women have to confront a labyrinth of leadership with many twists, turns and dead ends. Yet, unlike other changes leaders attempt to implement in organisations, gender is a profound change process that organisations embark on. This is because achieving gender equality is deeply connected to how societies are structured, she argues. Gender expectations continue to exist and shape society, yet if we fail to acknowledge this, we see change in gender relations as simplistic and uncomplicated.

“Many organisations aim to alter gender relations just like they would tackle other issues; setting targets measuring and taking mediating actions when things do not work out,” she says. While this might work with standard business problems, gender is not a standard business issue, because it harks back to how societies are organised based on gender lines.

“Putting a change programme for gender in place and expecting it to yield results in the next quarter is highly unrealistic,” she writes. “The reason for the slow progressive change despite myriad initiatives is likely to be found in a simplistic understanding of gender. Most organisations focus on the obvious – increasing the number of women – without seriously considering how gender is embedded into the structures of the organisation itself.”

How work is organised, how it is allocated and who gets credit for it is still heavily influenced by perceptions of gender. The most enlightened organisations have started to look at these micro-practices to ensure that women can work on career-advancing projects or get stretch assignments that develop their leadership skills. Others have started to ensure that bias is not creeping into evaluations. However, changing gender patterns takes time. It also requires organisations to not only focus on changing women, but also on changing the system of how organisations work, she says.

WHAT STEPS CAN MEN TAKE?

“In ‘Men Stepping Forward’ I suggest three concrete steps that men can take to become changemakers for gender inclusion,” she says. “First, men need to develop a vision about why they support gender equality. Second, men need to engage in gender equality efforts by for instance explaining to others why gender equality is important and how to achieve it. Third, men need to role model what gender-inclusive leadership looks like to others.

“I suggest that men becoming changemakers for gender equality is a learning journey that is also very personal to each man. The book is designed to support men to figure out how being a changemaker for gender

equality might look for them.”

She argues that changemakers for gender equality can be found anywhere in the organisation, from the CEO right down to frontline service staff. Research has shown that women who are change agents for gender equality are less effective because it is presumed that they are engaging in the change process for instrumental reasons. It was presumed that women are advocates for gender equality because this can advance their own careers.

“Men in contrast are seen as more effective advocates for gender equality for the opposite reasons,” she writes. “Their engagement is seen as altruistic because they do not seek to advance their own career opportunities.” While men can actually advance their careers to being changemakers for gender, the common perception is that men are changemakers for gender equality without experiencing personal gains.

If men engage in gender equality, this might also be a particularly powerful statement because someone from the majority is driving change on behalf of a group that has been disempowered. For this reason, she argues, men therefore can be particularly effective as change agents. It is not enough to focus on women and develop them as leaders. There needs to be a focus on men and how they can help facilitate change. She sets out a framework that can be used to act and think like a change agent for gender equality:

- change agents are individuals who drive change in an organisational context
- change agents are individuals who often work outside of the formal structure and without formal authority to drive change projects
- they work across established boundaries and organisational silos to make change happen
- often they do their work by convincing others to be passionate about the change, but also respect that change takes time
- to be a changemaker, you have to convince others of the importance of gender equality and be passionate about this topic, but also respect that others might take longer to join you on the path.

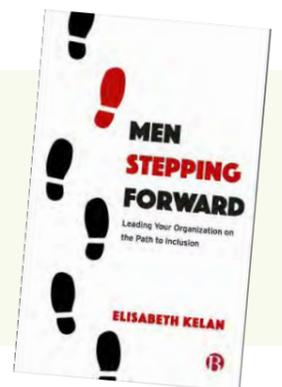
The changemaker framework consists of vision, enabling and modelling:

VISION: Vision is central for leaders because as a follower you are more likely to follow leaders if you see their vision as worthwhile to pursue. The first step is to develop your vision. You need to reflect on why you support gender equality and what gender equality looks like to you. Once you have found your vision, then you need to articulate it

ENABLING: Enabling does not mean that you need to spend most of your days dedicated to gender equality. Your role as a leader is to facilitate an environment where others can act. In some cases, this will involve you driving a new initiative for gender equality. But in others, you might create the biggest impact by lending your weight to what the organisation already does.

MODELLING: The third part of the changemaker framework is modelling because how you behave will influence how others act on gender equality. This could include communicating your vision, telling stories about women who you worked with and who inspired you and finding counter-stereotypical stories. “Your role as a man being a change agent for gender equality means that you need to enable others to follow your path to gender equality,” she says. “The path of the changemaker for gender inclusion might have some surprises. Be prepared for some twists and turns along the way. Some change will be swift, but other change will take more time and patience.”

Copies of Professor Kelan’s book are available at: <https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/men-stepping-forward>





Think Global Women community celebrates International Women's Day

Our live Think Global Women celebration provided plenty of opportunities for guests to share their experiences, observations and practices on the obstacles women face in their global careers and the practical solutions, writes **Ruth Holmes**.

Around 50 guests, including many of the women profiled over the past 12 months in the Think Global People's 40 Outstanding Global Women series, joined speaker Joy Burnford, author of 'Don't Fix Women', and panellists Patrizia Kokot-Blamey, author of 'Gendered Hierarchies of Dependency' and CIPD fellow and performance and talent management leader Amira Kohler at the Institute of Directors to share practical steps on inspiring inclusion and creating ripples of change.

This year was the sixth Relocate Global has held an International Women's Day event. It reflects the Think Global People community's desire for progress on equality and diversity in our global workforces. "We definitely have the determination to continue pushing things on for diversity and inspiring inclusion," said Fiona Murchie, event host and managing editor. "Today is a fabulous way to do this."

The event programme was designed "to ignite new thinking, collaboration and solution-finding" to improve inclusion. Referring to the latest reports on pay parity, Fiona added "the time is right to make sure companies are doing meaningful things." Women's lack of representation means that dealing with the big, shared challenges is much harder, more

expensive and riskier for businesses and societies.

"It is time to move things forward – and for the people across this community of managers and leaders in international roles, global mobility professionals and educators to come together and do this," said Fiona. "By the end of today, we will be well on our way to producing good-practice guidelines to accelerate equality and inspire inclusion."

These action points are set out in the following pages, together with links to the video highlights so you and your organisation can get involved too.

GENDER EQUITY AT WORK

Framing the challenges to achieving gender representation and pay parity in the day's theme of 'inspiring inclusion', keynote speaker Joy Burnford, CEO of Encompass Equality, discussed the importance of allyship and flexibility for effecting cultural change in organisations.

Explaining this means "calling men in, not out", Joy highlighted how "we all have a role in moving the dial and creating systemically conditions that enable women to thrive" and the business benefits on performance and profitability.

After Joy's thought-provoking keynote, panellists Patrizia Kokot-Blamey and Amira Kohler unpacked with panel chair Marianne Curphey

what is one of the most significant obstacles to career advancement women can face in this context: the performance appraisal process and performance management, promotion and progression in global careers. Backing up conversations with data, being aware of bias and adopting ongoing coaching conversations can all help to create the conditions for more women to thrive, they concluded.

OUTSTANDING GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

Next, focused round-table discussions centred on dual careers, wellbeing, global mobility, education and caring. Feedback shared highlighted common themes – including the impact of remote work. We explore these in the following pages and our upcoming best-practice guidelines.

Guests appreciated the relevance of the issues and the forum for collaborative exchange. Among them is Alexandra Lippai of Savills. "It is so important to bring people together who work in similar industries and believe in the same way of working together and fostering the same approach." ◦

Read the full article [here](#).

▶ WATCH THE THINK WOMEN HIGHLIGHTS

Gender equality & allyship: actions to inspire inclusion in the workplace

On 8 March we held a live Think Global Women event in London in Celebration of International Women's Day. We brought together nearly 50 women and men to explore the question 'How can we create a more inclusive workplace?'

Our morning workshop consisted of three parts:

INTERACTIVE KEYNOTE

With **Joy Burnford**, author of bestselling book 'Don't Fix Women: The practical path to gender equality at work'.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Hosted by journalist, **Marianne Curphey** with panellists **Dr Patrizia Kokot-Blamey**, Queen Mary, University of London and **Amira Kohler**, CIPD Fellow.

FEEDBACK FROM FACILITATED ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

We asked delegates to exchange insights on how international organisations are supporting all employees and particular women, to flourish in the fast-changing global workplace. Also to highlight where women are being let down.

Delegates were asked to answer two questions from the perspective of their tables:

- DUAL CAREERS
- GLOBAL MOBILITY
- WOMEN'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING
- ALLYSHIP
- EDUCATION

Questions for the tables:

- WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES FOR WOMEN?
- HOW CAN THESE BE ADDRESSED?



Experience the London event, participate in the interactions and share your feedback with us to accelerate pay parity and inclusive workplaces.

▶ WATCH THE 2024 VIDEOS

- ▶ VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS
- ▶ KEYNOTE VIDEO
- ▶ PANEL VIDEO
- ▶ ROUNDTABLE FEEDBACK

Email events@thinkglobalpeople.com or call Fiona Murchie on +44 (0)1892 891334



Gender equality & allyship

Experience the **Think Global Women: Inspire Inclusion event** held in London for yourself. Watch the videos as an individual or share with your organisation and stakeholders. Facilitate your own discussions and then share your feedback with us. Your views and allyship will help to accelerate pay parity and promote inclusive workplaces around the world.

This is a summary of the feedback from our roundtable discussions on 8 March. We can't wait to hear what ideas and action points you suggest for best practice guidelines.

Email events@thinkglobalpeople.com or call **+44 (0)1892 891334** to discuss how your organisation can get involved.

In this article, we collate the ideas, suggestions and experiences of the many delegates, including global experts who attended the event into a series of action points that employers and organisations can use to enhance inclusivity.

This framework will benefit all employees – men as well as women – to help increase diversity and inclusion and open up greater opportunities for all.

LEADERSHIP REPRESENTATION IN EDUCATION

Women are underrepresented in education leadership roles, especially in international settings. Role models, coaching and encouragement are needed to empower girls and young female leaders and help them see that their future could be in a leadership role. Organisations can help support women's leadership roles by:

- Ensuring that education and teacher training promote gender equality and support female leadership development
- Tailoring strategies such as career coaching to drive forward women's career advancement
- Making sure all employees understand how to upskill to adapt to changing work patterns

IN CONCLUSION

On a global basis there is a shortage of international female leaders and the education sector is no different. Many organisations are having to recruit internally, which can be good for women, but this does not always provide opportunities to the wider potential pool of international talent.

There are misconceptions about certain jurisdictions and geographies, for example, the Middle East and India, where women's leadership is advancing, but the perception is that there are limited opportunities for female leaders.

It is important to provide role models for girls in school and at the youngest age. Managers and organisations can "tap women on the shoulder", encourage younger female leaders to step up, involve girls far more in leadership programmes, and look at teacher education in colleges and universities.

By educating females in the workforce, and encouraging them to strive for female leadership, there will be support for the careers of younger women. For everyone in education, there is a need to drive your career, take responsibility for developing your skillset, and encourage younger women to do the same.

WELLBEING, RESILIENCE & MENTAL HEALTH

Employers should remain vigilant about the effect on mental health and wellbeing of both working from home and the transition back to in-person work post-covid. While some employees have found the ability to work from home very liberating, others suffer from loneliness and a lack of support. Organisations could help foster wellbeing by:

- Implementing wellbeing training policies and promoting mental health first aiders in the workplace
- Offer flexibility in work arrangements to fit individual needs, including the ability to work part-time and job share
- Understanding that women often prioritise others' needs over their own, leading to burnout and health issues
- Many employees suffer from blurred boundaries between work and home life, affecting mental health and productivity.

IN CONCLUSION

Employers and line managers have a responsibility for the welfare of all their staff.

Promoting job sharing, introducing or maintaining flexible work arrangements and prioritising employee wellbeing are key to ensuring that staff are looked after and allowed to do their best work. A happier workforce is likely to be more productive. Wellbeing checks, awareness of mental health issues and taking a genuine interest in your team are essential roles for a line manager.

FLEXIBLE & HYBRID WORKING PRACTICES

Covid has brought positive changes, especially in terms of flexibility and remote work, benefiting both working mothers and fathers. Now that many organisations are starting to insist that staff return to the office, those companies that offer flexible and remote work arrangements are likely to be better able to recruit and retain staff. Organisations could help working parents by:

- Allowing maternity and paternity leave to be split between both parents, rather than limiting the amount of time the father is allowed to take off work
- Introducing flexible working arrangements to prevent burnout, particularly women who are caring for children and elderly parents
- Implementing flexible working hours, respecting personal time and important family commitments
- Highlighting the importance of senior leaders embracing a culture of flexibility, modelling flexible working and advocating for job-sharing opportunities
- Recognising the challenges of balancing dual careers and childcare responsibilities
- Understanding that women often carry the greater mental load of managing childcare and household tasks, which can impact their ability to prepare and perform at their best at work.

IN CONCLUSION

Open discussions between partners and employers can help find flexible arrangements that suit the individual needs of all employees.

Men would also benefit from a workplace culture that is more inclusive and family-friendly and that recognises unsocial working hours are challenging for fathers as well as mothers.



MENOPAUSE AWARENESS

Some organisations have a menopause policy and work hard to raise awareness about menopause through initiatives like menopause cafes and webinars. Others do not, but should be thinking about what policies or procedures they could be introducing. Organisations could help provide menopause support by:

- Creating safe spaces for women around menopause issues
- Providing additional days off where necessary, which could be framed as ‘wellbeing days’ available to all staff so as not to stigmatise women
- Monthly menopause cafes to help answer questions and concerns
- Sessions for men to understand this life stage and how they can support someone they live with through menopause.

IN CONCLUSION

There is often stigma around menopause and women are reluctant to talk about it at work. Educating men and women to understand the pressures and challenges around this time of life can lead to a better understanding. Offering wellbeing days for all staff members means that people can take time off when they need it without embarrassment or compromise.

PAY DISPARITY & PAY EQUALITY

Women experience pay disparities, requiring advocacy and action. Potential strategies include raising cultural awareness and identifying the skills needed for more senior roles. Organisations can help support women’s equality in pay by:

- Recognising the impact of the culture of the organisation and not expecting women to be able to flourish where there is bias and discrimination
- Signalling the need for coaching and career development for women, but being aware that this will not be enough if those women are being held back by cultural or systemic barriers
- Educating line managers to support women better and providing coaching and feedback continuously.

IN CONCLUSION

Salary transparency is essential to avoid bias and unfair remuneration policies or issues.

Women can set up formal and informal networks to gain the skills they need to raise their profile and ask for promotions and pay increases.

Fair pay is an essential component of a robust environmental, social and governance (ESG) policy, which is increasingly required from organisations by regulators, laws, stakeholders and investors.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE & CREATING ALLYSHIP

Effective communication, engagement and role modelling are all essential in promoting allyship and gender equality. Younger women in particular often lack confidence and may not be vocal in meetings. Helping them build confidence with practical assignments and feedback can be invaluable. Organisations could help promote the resilience of their staff by:

- Encouraging supportive environments where individuals are empowered to set and achieve goals, which in turn fosters confidence
- Supporting underrepresented groups and becoming an ally for women by championing their ideas and inputs
- Identifying each individual’s unique skills and abilities and celebrating differences among people to build confidence
- Training line managers to recognise the skills of team members and to give them support and coaching to develop personally and professionally.

Organisations could help foster confidence and allyship by:

- Helping team members set goals and work towards them so that when the project is complete, they have learnt a valuable new skill set
- Giving regular constructive feedback, rather than formal annual performance management reviews, which are historic and backward-looking
- Those who are in a position of privilege could promote allyship by using their voice and influence to support others.

IN CONCLUSION

Organisations should ensure that women are given stretch assignments and projects that enable them to develop career-enhancing skills.

Allyship is a constant, ongoing process, which involves championing others in the workplace. Both men and women can be allies to other women and help them advance and fulfil their potential.

In summary, allyship operates at three levels: at the individual level between colleagues and managers, at the leadership level with line managers and senior staff, and at the organisational level in terms of promoting a culture of inclusion and diversity.

Formal and informal women’s groups can help to promote discussion around the key issues. It is also helpful to have role models and to set goals. In this respect, the support of line managers is critical. The key message here is that helping women helps everyone. A more diverse organisation is more likely to appeal to a younger demographic who will be the talent pipeline of the future and enable the business to thrive and survive any challenging times.



INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY & CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Women face barriers in accessing international leadership positions and a lack of support for spouses during relocations often affects dual-career couples. To take on a senior role, applicants often have to demonstrate that they have experienced an overseas role or have global experience.

Around a third of expatriate assignments initiated by organisations are held by women, but the balance between self-initiated global roles between men and women is 50-50. In other words, women have an appetite for global roles, but may be held back by policies and biases in organisations, even if these are unconsciously implemented. There are also difficulties for couples with dual careers, especially if an employer does not offer support in helping the spouse apply for a visa and find comparable work. Organisations can help support women’s international careers by:

- Advocating for policy changes to support visa applications for spouses
- Increase transparency when choosing candidates for international assignments
- Recognising that for couples with dual careers, an international assignment can bring tensions around the division of childcare and finding a fulfilling job
- If one partner cannot find work as a result of relocation, that can put an emotional and financial strain on the family
- Using the support on the ground from service providers can also be immensely helpful and reassuring to couples and families when they are moving location
- Vertical segregation means that women tend not to be in the senior jobs from which the candidates for overseas assignments are chosen.

IN CONCLUSION

Often there is insufficient support for spouses when relocation is taking place.

Employers need to be transparent about the level of family support they will provide, including help with visa applications.

Organisations could consider providing career support and career counselling to help women push their careers forward.

It can be advantageous for companies to advertise that they want women to take international opportunities because it will widen the diversity pipeline and enhance the reputation and brand. ◉



MANAGING MIGRATION: A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

As policymakers around the world seek to resolve the 'trilemma' of balancing economics, human rights and anti-immigration rhetoric, people keen to work or study abroad face increasingly high barriers to realising their plans. **David Sapsted** reports.

Europe and the US in particular are confronting an unprecedented influx of people who are entering the country for economic reasons through illegal means and without the correct immigration paperwork. The numbers have caused such uproar, particularly among right-of-centre politicians, that new and often extreme immigration restrictions are being imposed.

Illegal immigration is often conflated with legal migration and people seeking asylum, which also hit record highs in countries such as the UK and Australia last year. The result is that the introduction of many of these new restrictions is affecting the ability of countries with the most developed economies to attract the overseas skills they are desperately short of at a time when their populations are ageing and birth rates declining.

A KEY ISSUE GLOBALLY IN A BUMPER ELECTION YEAR

Nowhere is immigration a bigger issue than in the US. Polls are consistently putting it as voters' primary concern, even above the economy and the cost of living. The topic stands to be central ahead of November's presidential elections.

Unfortunately, the number of crossings at the Mexican border threaten to encourage candidates to adopt policies that could threaten legitimate immigration. In March, the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think-tank based in Washington DC, came out with a surprisingly stark condemnation of Donald Trump's proposals, saying they could "cripple the existing immigration system".

The foundation's study warned that Mr Trump's policies "mark a significant divergence from traditional conservative

“POLITICIANS PROMISE TO CUT IMMIGRATION, WHILE KNOWING THEIR SOCIETIES COULD NOT FUNCTION WITHOUT IT.”

LONDON ‘FINANCIAL TIMES’ (FT)

immigration priorities [such as] promoting merit-based immigration, fostering assimilation and enhancing interior enforcement”.

Mr Trump’s proposals include denying federal funding to states that decline to share taxpayer and driving licence information with federal authorities; blocking government financial aid to college students if their state grants access to certain immigrant groups; and suspending updates – and thereby reducing – the eligibility list for temporary visas.

“[Mr Trump’s plan] isn’t simply a refresh of first-term ideas, dusted off and ready to be re-implemented,” said the study. “Rather, it reflects a meticulously orchestrated, comprehensive plan to drive immigration levels to unprecedented lows and increase the federal government’s power to the states’ detriment. These proposals circumvent Congress and the courts and are specifically engineered to dismantle the foundations of our immigration system.”

As the London ‘Financial Times’ (FT) pointed out recently: “Politicians promise to cut immigration, while knowing their societies could not function without it.” The newspaper cited the recently published book, ‘How Migration Really Works’, written by Dutch academic, Hein de Haas. A sociologist who has held posts at Oxford and Amsterdam universities, Prof de Haas says governments face a trilemma as they try to simultaneously

maintain economic openness while respecting foreigners’ human rights and fulfilling their own citizens’ anti-immigration preferences. “One of the three has to go,” he wrote. “The most attractive option for politicians is to suggest they will clamp down on immigration through bold acts of political showmanship that conceal the true nature of immigration policies.”

ARE STRICTER POLICIES THE ANSWER?

Italy has been a prime example of such tactics. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni swept to office in 2022 on the back of a campaign centred on anti-immigration rhetoric. She has since blocked humanitarian groups from rescuing migrants crossing the Mediterranean while creating nearly half a million work permits for non-EU immigrants.

The FT pointed out: “The EU collectively, which fears losing the global competition for high-productivity workers, is similarly trying to attract skilled non-EU migrants with a talent pool scheme aptly nicknamed ‘Tinder for jobs’. But a wave of fervently anti-immigration candidates are high in the polls ahead of the European parliamentary elections this year.”

Ruchir Sharma, who chairs the New York-based philanthropic research organisation, Rockefeller International, says the big risk is that legitimate concerns over illegal immigration spill over to restrict or discourage the flow of people migrating legally.

“The UK recently took steps to lower immigration by more than half to 300,000. Australia just tightened visa rules for students and low-skilled workers. Even Canada, which is raising its quota for permanent immigrants, is moving to limit the influx of temporary workers. France, imposing perhaps the toughest measures, is limiting welfare for foreigners, making it easier to remove migrants and ending automatic citizenship



for children born in France to immigrant parents.”

Mr Sharma maintains that such policies might be good politics “in a world turning weary of outsiders,” but represent questionable economics. “By one recent count, the US would need to let in nearly 4 million migrants a year, every year, to prevent its population growth turning negative in the coming decades.

“And most developed economies are much farther down the road to population decline than the US. Smart politicians will need to find a balance between controlling the chaos of illegal immigration and limiting the economic fallout of anti-immigrant policies.”

IMPACT IN THE UK

In the UK, the government has been preoccupied with people making illegal crossings in small boats across the Channel, its faltering plan to deport people seeking asylum to the UK to Rwanda, and official statistics published late last year showing that net immigration over the last 12 months had reached 745,000.

Facing an ever-louder outcry from right-wingers, Home Secretary James Cleverly announced a range of measures aimed at reducing net migration to 300,000 a year. He increased the minimum salary needed for skilled

workers to enter the UK from £26,200 to £38,700; banned care workers from bringing dependants into the country; and an extension to postgraduate students of the ban, which came into effect in January, on undergraduates bringing family members with them.

The curb on students had an immediate effect on study visas, with the number issued falling by 32% in the last quarter of 2023: down to 78,700 from 116,974 in Q4 a year earlier. Simultaneously in the last quarter, the number of student visa rejections by UK authorities more than doubled to 10,530 compared to Q4 2022.

Vivienne Stern, chief executive of Universities UK, is worried there could be more restrictions on the way in the current, anti-immigrant climate. “We call on all political parties in the run-up to a general election to reassure prospective international students that the UK remains open and the graduate visa is here to stay,” she said. “Any further knee-jerk reforms could have serious consequences for jobs across the country, economic growth and UK higher education institutions.”

Universities are far from the only ones worried by the immigration crackdown, which the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) says will do nothing to solve the nation’s labour shortages

and which Neil Carberry, chief executive of the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, says will stunt growth and unfairly disadvantage the private sector.

One industry particularly concerned over the increase in the skilled worker earnings threshold is the tech industry. Research by Integro Accounting, an accountancy provider to IT contractors, said there was an increase in overseas technology professionals from 39,899 in 2021 to 52,686 in 2022.

Now, Christian Hickmott, managing director at Integro Accounting, fears the anti-immigration measures could seriously harm overseas recruitment: “The UK’s chronic under-production of tech talent is making us increasingly reliant on foreign IT professionals to plug skills gaps. The loss of EU-based talent due to Brexit, together with the pandemic and the off-payroll working rules accelerating the retirement of many IT professionals, has exacerbated the skills crisis in the sector.

“Increasing the salary threshold from £26,200 to £38,700 for work visas will likely exclude some of the tech occupations in which there has been a sharp rise in visas issued over the past year. Many foreign nationals could now be excluded by the raised salary

threshold, particularly for roles outside London.”

But Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has told Parliament: “Let me be crystal clear, the levels of migration are far too high and I am determined to bring them back down to sustainable levels.”

However, Abdeslam Marfouk, an associate researcher at the Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies at the University of Liège, points out: “The alarmist discourse of certain media and politicians has a strong impact on the way European citizens view immigration. It shapes and propagates an image of immigration that is far removed from reality.

“The general public significantly overestimates the demographic weight of the immigrant population living in their country, for example. As a result, many European citizens say that they are in favour of very restrictive immigration policies, especially with regard to certain categories of people.”



RAINBOW FAMILIES

A neglected area in global mobility

Traditional global mobility refers to heterosexual couples and their accompanying children. But today, sexually diverse parents and children make up an increasing proportion of people undertaking international assignments. **Dr Sue Shortland** explains why employers need to consider the special needs of rainbow families.

There is a lack of data on the composition of the labour force in respect of sexually diverse minorities. However, estimates suggest that people who are LGBTQ+ comprise around ten per cent of the workforce. The labour force participation rate of LGBTQ+ individuals is also estimated to be higher than for heterosexuals and thus this group forms a valuable talent pool.

People representing sexual minorities are identified as an underutilised resource in expatriate research. Yet they can provide economic benefits to employers and host countries. Indeed, research shows that greater inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals has positive benefits for economic development.

Research also indicates that family issues often outweigh career concerns when individuals make employment choices. It is unsurprising therefore that LGBTQ+ individuals may opt for safer domestic careers rather than open themselves and their family members up to potential stigma and discrimination abroad. This is wasteful of organisational talent and damaging for the careers of sexually diverse minorities. This can result in vertical segregation and pay gaps for this minority group.

Action to support the inclusion of sexually diverse minorities is also important. This is because heterosexual expatriates may have LGBTQ+ family members and be unable to undertake accompanied

international assignments unless employer support is forthcoming. Rainbow families are therefore an important consideration for employers in widening their international assignee profile.

PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

Social change is leading to greater recognition of the LGBTQ+ community globally. Same-sex marriage and partnerships are recognised in an increasing number of countries. While legal changes and greater social acceptance have reduced direct discrimination, LGBTQ+ individuals and rainbow families still experience considerable prejudice and both covert and overt discriminatory treatment. This is particularly the case for transgender people – both employees and their family members. Disclosure of sexual identity is not a matter of choice for transgender individuals as concealment is unlikely. This will also have ramifications for relocating abroad in terms of passports needing to match gender identity.

WIDENING ASSIGNMENT DIVERSITY

Action to widen assignment diversity has tended to concentrate on the selection and deployment of LGBTQ+ employees. This is unsurprising as it is the workforce that attracts employer focus when considering diversity and inclusion initiatives. However, global mobility involves the whole family. This is why organisations need to broaden

their understanding of the support required to include assignees' family members.

Dual-career couples have been a focus of employer attention for many years, with efforts made by organisations to support working spouses/partners of both heterosexual and same-sex couples. However, family support has tended not to look beyond this and consider accompanying children and potentially other integral family members.

Action needs to be taken to support global rainbow families. However, it must be recognised that this can be fraught with difficulty. For example, disclosure is needed to provide targeted support, but rainbow families may be hesitant or unwilling to disclose family members' sexual identity fearing stigma and discrimination. Even if an individual is willing to disclose their own sexual identity, they may be unwilling to do so in respect of their children.

“ACTION TO WIDEN ASSIGNMENT DIVERSITY HAS TENDED TO CONCENTRATE ON THE SELECTION AND DEPLOYMENT OF LGBTQ+ EMPLOYEES. HOWEVER, GLOBAL MOBILITY INVOLVES THE WHOLE FAMILY.”



“ORGANISATIONS MUST ENSURE THAT THEIR WORKPLACES ARE SAFE AND WELCOMING PLACES TO WORK AND WHERE INDIVIDUALS CAN BE THEIR AUTHENTIC SELVES. THIS IS COMPLEX IN A GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT WHERE LOCAL CULTURAL NORMS AND SOCIETAL ACTIONS ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE HOME COUNTRY.”

SUPPORTING CHILDREN

People work best when they can bring their whole, authentic selves to their employment. Hostile work and community environments are not conducive to effective, efficient and productive employment and family life. There is little reported on how parents who are part of a same-sex relationship can support their children abroad to ensure their safety, security and happiness. There is also little research on how children in rainbow families and those who identify as sexually diverse navigate their international school and community environments. Nonetheless, employers have a duty of care to their employees and accompanying families, and need to offer support even when the nature of their identity is not disclosed.

Children play an important role in parents being able to access resources in the context of global mobility. Friendships and social support, for example, can flow from relationships developed between parents who

build networks through the school community, helping to build their sense of belonging. Support to help global rainbow families become part of social networks can be helpful in developing strong relationships that can underpin feeling welcome.

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Organisations must ensure that their workplaces are safe and welcoming places to work and where individuals can be their authentic selves. This is complex in a global environment where local cultural norms and societal actions are different from the home country. Managing home and host country tensions is difficult. Employers must act within the local legal framework while building an inclusive environment.

Risks must be assessed before rainbow families are relocated, preparatory training given and support systems developed that go beyond the assignee to encompass partners and family members. It is important to address both real and perceived threats.

Policies must be flexible and responsive to address rainbow families’ unique situations and the host country context. Networks and employee resource groups provide valuable sources of support. Assistance in obtaining visas for accompanying family members should also be given.

Assistance may also be needed to access healthcare, education and training locally. Emergency evacuation plans must be in place for the whole family. Besides preparatory support interventions, ongoing support is required too. Help with adjustment and with accessing local resources during the assignment can also be given.

It is important to recognise that families are unique and so a flexible approach is needed to address individual needs. Employers will benefit from understanding the challenges faced by rainbow families and the actions that can make their assignments successful. Sharing of organisational practice is therefore valuable as organisations can learn a lot from each other in managing diversity and inclusion in this context. ●

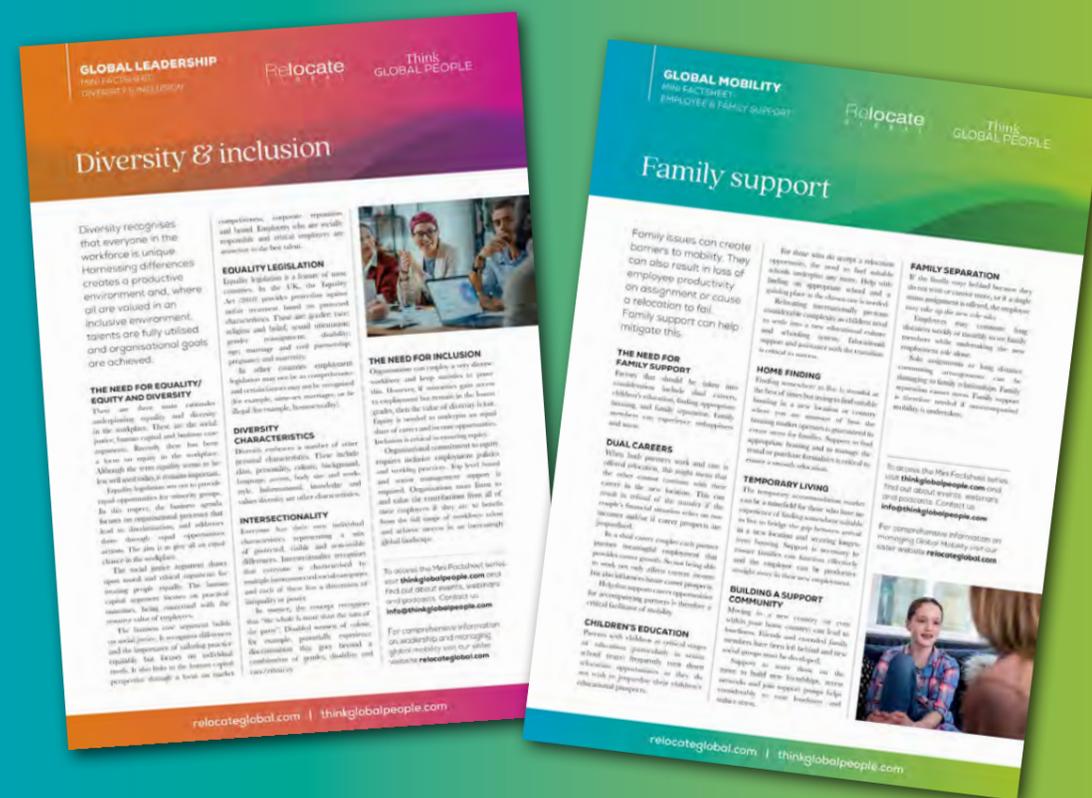


Think
GLOBAL PEOPLE

Relocate
GLOBAL

DOWNLOAD OUR MINI FACTSHEETS

If you are new to Global Mobility or need to help your stakeholder business partners and clients get up to speed with the complexities of managing global people then dip into our new library of Podcasts and download our Mini Factsheets on a wealth of topics. More podcasts and Mini Factsheets will be added throughout 2024.



Explore an extensive range of topics with a series of individual Mini Factsheets in each topic to download including Employee and Family Support; Relocation Policy Design/Implementation; Remote/Hybrid Working; Working Across Cultures; Health and Wellbeing; Diversity & Inclusion; Talent & Career Management.

Download our Mini Factsheets [here](#).

Split-family & fly-in, fly-out expatriation: practical support

Research has consistently shown that employees undertaking non-traditional unaccompanied assignments still require support from their organisations. **Dr Sue Shortland** explains the importance of helping assignees and their families involved in single-status assignments.

Increasing political unrest and the trend towards organisations setting up operations in developing economies have led to greater numbers of families undertaking split expatriation and fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) types of global mobility. The pandemic also resulted in many families being separated for periods far longer than intended before re-unification was possible. Post-pandemic, more individuals are willingly entering into split family/FIFO types of mobility. This may be to maintain dual careers, local risks affecting the deployment of family members to the host location, financial reasons, children's schooling, elder care, and non-assigned family members maintaining extended-family relationships in the home country.

For employers, unaccompanied mobility has less cost attached to it as it involves only the relocation of the assignee, not the whole family. Single-status assignments thus have a number of benefits.

However, split-family expatriation creates considerable stress. Frequent international work-related travel does likewise, both for the assignee and family members. Research indicates that poor work-life balance

can result from individuals being separated from their families. Single-status assignees often elect to work longer hours to combat loneliness and isolation. Frequent international travel also causes work-life balance issues and family disruption from frequent comings and goings.

ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

Organisational support for single-status and FIFO assignments tends to be more limited than that provided for traditional family-accompanied mobility. It tends to focus on only the assignee being moved with little attention paid to family members remaining at home. Yet when families are split apart, the partner who remains at home has to manage all household and work duties alone and support children who have remained in the home country. Organisational support is required both by the assignee, who operates alone in the host country, and by family members left in the home location.

Assignees living alone on single-status assignments suffer from a lack of familial support in the adjustment process. This can affect their performance and productivity.

Hence, they require additional organisational support to gain cultural competence and settle in as they need to achieve these actions without the support that an accompanying family can provide. For example, when assignees go abroad and take children with them, support is often forthcoming through the school community. Assignees going solo have no such support access.

Organisations might address this by going beyond cultural training to provide links to local community support networks and employee resource groups, which can embrace the assignee and provide a source of personal support and friendship.

Introducing assignees to buddy partners and local networking groups can prove to be very valuable in this regard. Support can also be given through interventions such as networking events within the company. Flexibility in terms of time off to attend external networking and support group events is also valuable. Introductions to local services, clubs and events can also help to ease isolation and loneliness. Employees should also have access to counselling services and employee assistance programmes.



“ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT IS REQUIRED BOTH BY THE ASSIGNEE, WHO OPERATES ALONE IN THE HOST COUNTRY, AND BY FAMILY MEMBERS LEFT IN THE HOME LOCATION.”

FAMILY REUNIFICATION

When individuals relocate alone, reconnection with their family becomes extremely important. Organisations might consider additional reunification visits that go beyond the prescribed home-leave policy. It might also be possible for the family to visit the assignee in the host location and support for this can also be considered. Extension of home leave, where the employee spends additional time working in the home country with their family, can also help to maintain family relationships.

Although attention has been paid in the literature to the assignee’s side of the story, little has been given to the effect of separation on the partner and family who remain at home. Support for family members separated from their loved ones can take the form of counselling and access to employee assistance programmes. These services are typically made available to the assignee, but also providing access to family members who remain at home can help ease their sense of isolation.

FIFO WORKING

Specific focus also needs to be given to assignees and families involved in FIFO arrangements. Frequent international travel is both tiring

and stressful to employees. It is also highly disruptive to family relationships. Families report that they settle into a routine without the presence of the assignee only to find that this is disrupted when the assignee returns home for a short period before flying back out to the host location. This is not to say that families do not welcome seeing their loved ones returning home, but routines are altered and sadness can be created when the time comes for the assignee to depart once again.

Relationships are not the same as they were prior to assignment and the efforts couples make to rebuild their routines are hampered by tiredness and jetlag from the assignee’s frequent travel. Employers should consider the pattern of FIFO work to try to minimise disruption as far as possible and exhaustion through overly frequent travel.

Regular patterns of FIFO working tend to work better. Employees who undertake rotational patterns of work, for example, report that they find these to be more compatible with family relationships due to the predictability of the travel pattern. Research has shown that commuter assignments where the pattern of travel abroad is unpredictable are

the most difficult for individuals and families to manage. Organisations should carefully consider the pattern of travel used, marrying this up not only with the needs of the job, but also with family stability.

WORK/FAMILY SPILLOVER EFFECTS

In the case of single-status and FIFO assignments, organisations should also consider the spillover effects across the work-family interface. When individuals are reunited with their families for brief periods, part of the catch-up process will be to discuss what has been happening in the working lives of each partner and the school lives of the children. Spillover of work-related conversations into the relationship reunification can fill considerable amounts of time as partners catch up with each other on work developments. While this is a natural process, it leaves less time for other conversation and relationship building on issues that differ from workplace and employment discussions.

This provides an argument for longer periods of family reunification. Multiple short reunification periods can prove ineffective. This is not only due to the travel time involved compared with actual time spent as family, but also because there is insufficient time for the family members to involve themselves in their own interests and concerns, rather than simply catching up on work and schooling developments. A balance needs to be struck between the reality of the workplace environment and the need for physical presence of the assignee, and time that can realistically be spent at home with family members.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

Employers should also be aware of the negative physical and mental health impacts that single-status and FIFO work arrangements can have. These include fatigue, loneliness, isolation, sadness and even suicide risk. Health issues include poor diet, alcoholism and drug dependency. Physical and mental health issues

can affect both the assignee and the stay-at-home partner.

Efforts must be made to ensure good communication between assignees and their home country-based family members. While this might sound like an unnecessary piece of advice, it is worth bearing in mind that not all remote and developing locations have good internet connection and the ability to make regular video calls is not a given.

Organisations should consider means by which flexibility within the assignment can be introduced to enable families to reunite for sensible periods of time and enable relationship normality to be achieved. This includes ensuring that communication links can be put in place for family contact while the assignee is away from home.

REMOTE WORKING

Remote work has become very popular since the pandemic. Assignees may request to carry out part of their duties outside

of the assignment location; for example to extend home leave and work remotely.

If such remote working is possible in the context of the assignment, this might be considered under a remote working policy. Organisations will need to ensure that compliance issues are considered (tax and immigration, for example). Limits may need to be applied on the amount of time that can be spent away from the host location for operational and compliance reasons. Thought should also be given to equity with local employees and other assignees such that any remote work that is permitted does not have a detrimental effect on staff relationships and leadership capability.

As split-family expatriation becomes more frequently used, the development of policy elements to support assignees and their family members is paramount if employers are to maintain their duty of care to employee and family health, welfare and happiness. ●





PERMITS foundation

NEWS UPDATE

FURTHER INFORMATION

For a host of resources, including 'The International Dual Careers Survey Report 2022', visit permitsfoundation.com

For further details contact Kathleen Travaille, communications manager, contact@permitsfoundation.com

ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENTS IN IRELAND



Permits Foundation is actively working with its network in Ireland and speaking directly with government and parliament representatives to help support direct work access for spouses and partners of intra-company transferees.

In February, the Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment made a promising statement when responding to questions in Parliament:

"...management systems require people to spend a year or two in another country to develop their skills. It is a requirement but, unfortunately, if you cannot bring your spouse with you, that requirement makes Ireland a less attractive place for top talent in those companies. We are actively engaging, as I have mentioned, because this is now having a detrimental effect on our economy."

ADVOCACY IN SOUTH AFRICA



In January, Permits Foundation provided a written submission in response to the Department of Home Affairs White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection. In February, the Department invited further comment, this time on amendments to the Immigration Regulations. More information is available on the South Africa page of Permits Foundations' world map.

PERMITS FOUNDATION CONFERENCE, LONDON, 5 JUNE 2024

Join the Permits Foundation 2024 Conference for an afternoon of speakers, engaging roundtable dialogue and networking hosted by EY. This is a great opportunity for global mobility professionals from a wide range of sectors to get together, share ideas in support of international dual careers and discuss legislative progress around the world. To register your interest, click here or message contact@permitsfoundation.com



GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Permits Foundation participated in the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in Geneva in January. The Business Advisory Group launched three papers by Fragomen, Deloitte and the OECD on digital nomads and hybrid work, climate change and skills mobility partnerships. Permits Foundation is proud to have contributed supporting data on the importance of partner work access. All three GFMD papers are available here.



COMING UP...

Permits Foundation's advocacy focus in Q2-3 will shift to the US, Singapore and India. Please get in touch with the team if you would like to share your country feedback.



Permits Foundation at Think Global Women: Inspire Inclusion Event for IWD2024

We were delighted to welcome Gill Gordon, Chair of the Permits Foundation to our London event on 8 March to facilitate discussion on the Dual Careers table and feedback delegates responses to the questions:

- WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES FOR WOMEN?
- HOW CAN THESE BE ADDRESSED?

We asked delegates to exchange insights on how international organisations are supporting all employees and particular women, to flourish in the fast-changing global workplace. Also to highlight where women are being let down.



BE PART OF THE DISCUSSION

We encourage Permits Foundation members to watch the videos and contribute to this ongoing creation of best practice guidelines and resources we can share across the international business and global mobility community.

WATCH THE 2024 THINK WOMEN VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

Watch the Video Highlights, Keynote, Panel discussion and Feedback [here](#).

To add ideas and action points for best practice guidelines, contact events@thinkglobalpeople.com



FINANCIAL WELLBEING:

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN HELP STAFF TO THRIVE



Money worries and financial pressures are a major cause of stress among families, writes **Marianne Curphey**. As the cost-of-living crisis continues, and as part of an employer's duty of care that also enhances productivity, what can employers do and what workplace schemes offer the greatest ROI?

Underlining the scale of employees' financial worries, Caroline Drake, chief people officer at payroll and HR company, Zellis, says "more than three-quarters (77%) of employees in the UK and Ireland have experienced financial stress over the past year. Research suggests these employees are also five times more likely to take time off work and more than half (54%) say money worries have had a negative impact on their productivity at work. These statistics underline how important financial wellbeing is."

She says that employee demand for support is growing, with 78% of the 2,502 employees surveyed across a range of sectors in the UK and Ireland for the research would quit their job in favour of an employer who prioritises financial wellbeing.

"Despite all the evidence urging organisations to invest, only two in ten UK employers currently offer some form of financial wellbeing policy," she says. "That is expected to change this year as more employers seek to provide discretionary benefits such as private health insurance, leisure and retail discounts, and affordable loans, as well as flexible pay (earned wage access) schemes that enable employees to access a percentage of their earnings before payday. All of these initiatives provide tangible financial support in a tough economic climate."

New research around financial wellbeing from Champion Health's Workplace Health Report 2024, carried out among 4,383 employees also found that employees were under increasing pressure in many aspects of their personal and professional life.

Key findings include:

- financial worries claim the top spot for stress outside of work, surpassing relationship strains
- financial stress soaring from 37% to 41% of employees (percentage experiencing financial pressure)
- 27% report that money worries have impacted their ability to do their job
- male workers bear the brunt, with those experiencing heightened financial pressure at 42%, up from 36% in the previous year
- 56% of people with clinically noticeable symptoms of anxiety and low mood experience financial stress.



“When businesses know and understand what it is that their employees want, they can then start providing bespoke packages to successfully meet their workforce’s needs.”

MATT RUSSELL, CEO OF ZEST

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO TO HELP?

Most employers cannot afford to simply give pay rises or add expensive benefits. Instead, they need to think creatively about how they can provide financial support for employees. Providing financial wellbeing services that are relevant, accessible and informative for all will provide the greatest return on investment through better financial futures, productivity and employee loyalty.

A starting point could be a short message or reminder for employees to review their investments or savings or take a particular action that helps improve their finances, says Sarah Steel, head of financial wellbeing at Cushon, which provides workplace pension and savings schemes.

“With the cost-of-living [crisis] continuing to bite, employers can support employees by ensuring they are armed with the best financial education and tools to help them with financial wellbeing,” she says. “Running employer-led financial education workshops on hot topics such as building financial resilience or understanding tax allowances is helpful, but making recordings available to employees 24/7 means they can access the information at a time and in an environment that suits them.”

Unfortunately, the continuing cost of living pressures could see people looking to reduce their pension contributions. Although this is counterproductive in the long term, in the short term many people may believe they are left with no other option. Reduced pension contributions lead to lower outcomes in retirement, meaning that people may face financial struggles in future. Good quality and engaging education outlining the impact of their decisions is therefore vital in supporting their financial wellbeing and future.

“One approach that can help is pensions salary

sacrifice, which results in extra money in employees’ pay packets, all while still maintaining pension saving,” she says. “There are still too many employers who are not offering this ‘no brainer’ alternative way for employees to contribute to pensions. It offers National Insurance savings for both the employer and the employee. It enables higher rate taxpayers to receive full tax relief through payroll and allows employees to maintain their pension contributions whilst putting some extra pounds into their pay packets each month.”

The employer National Insurance savings can also be used to provide additional support, whether funding financial education programmes or encouraging employees to save into workplace savings schemes.

WHAT BENEFITS DO EMPLOYEES REALLY VALUE?

One problem for employers is that benefits packages are not always used fully or are only valuable to certain groups of employees. An alternative approach is to personalise the package on offer to make it more cost-effective and appropriate to the individual employee.

Matt Russell, CEO of Zest, an employee benefits platform, says his company’s research has found that over half (55%) of all employees want improved financial support from their employer. For younger workers aged 18-34 who are bearing the brunt of the cost-of-living crisis, this number rises to over two-thirds (67%). Yet with many businesses unable to raise salaries in line with inflation, many are still feeling the pressure to support and reward employees.

“Benefits packages can offer a cost-effective solution for employers,” he says. “However, for this to be effective, employers need to ensure that the benefits on offer are personalised to their workforce, and the individual, if they are to provide enhanced value for money for both employer and employee alike.

“When businesses know and understand what it is that their employees want, they can then start providing bespoke packages to successfully meet their workforce’s needs. Keeping this stream of communication open is equally important, targeting employees by age, family status or other factors can help to ensure that they are up to date and fully aware of what is on offer to them, and how they can access this.

“Not only will this boost value for money, but getting benefits packages right can also enhance employee engagement, motivation and productivity. Creating a great

environment to work in with a generous remuneration package undoubtedly supports talent attraction and retention. Our research finds that nearly half of all employees (46%) believe that a good benefits package is the most important thing they look for in employment.”

THE BUSINESS CASE

When it comes to employees posted abroad or on overseas business trips, helping them manage their finances is equally vital. “I do believe that employers play a role in supporting the financial wellbeing of their staff,” says James Parker, co-founder and CEO of LEONID, who has over 25 years of financial, operational and engineering expertise. “The increasing pressure to address the rising cost of living isn’t just about fulfilling a duty of care; it’s about recognising the direct impact on productivity,” he explains.

“It is clear that an employee struggling with financial stress is less likely to perform at their best. That’s why it’s essential for employers to prioritise initiatives that educate and support their workforce, whether through financial wellness programmes, access to resources like counselling services, or facilitating investment opportunities. These measures not only benefit employees personally, but also contribute to a more motivated and productive workforce, ultimately enhancing the company’s bottom line.”

He says that by providing guidance on navigating foreign financial landscapes, understanding tax implications and budgeting for expenses, employers can mitigate stress for their employees. This will help to ensure smooth operations during international assignments and could ultimately help prevent a failed assignment. This proactive approach not only enhances the employee experience, but also minimises the risk of financial disruptions that could impact business outcomes. “Investing in the financial wellbeing of employees isn’t just a gesture of goodwill. It’s a strategic imperative that fosters loyalty, engagement and sustainable success for the company,” he says.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS CAN BE A POWERFUL TOOL FOR RETENTION

As the cost of living rises, employers are facing increasing pressure to retain their staff, who are being enticed by higher salaries elsewhere. While not every business can afford to offer substantial pay increases or bonuses, many organisations can take steps to alleviate financial stress and help their employees manage financial worries.

Research by Pluxee, an employee benefits and engagement company offering personalised packages for 36 million employees, has found that employees can potentially benefit by up to £1,679 through cashback and savings offered by employer-provided schemes. Additionally, investing in benefits such as employee assistance programmes and access to independent financial advice is crucial. These measures not only reduce stress for employees, but also play a vital role in attracting, retaining and engaging talent.

“When thinking about benefit provisions, it is essential to listen to employee needs,” says Graham James, director at Pluxee UK. “Regularly reviewing and enhancing benefit offerings based on employee insights is key. Anonymous employee engagement surveys and

one-to-one conversations provide valuable insights that help decision-makers understand the issues at hand.

“For example, while the leadership team might assume that the primary employee stressor is pay, the reality might be focused on work-life balance. In such cases, offering benefits like annual leave purchase can be a great option, which is not only more affordable for the organisation, but also aligns better with employee needs.”

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES WHO ARE WORKING ABROAD

Working in different countries can be an exciting yet stressful experience for employees, whether that is understanding the differences in working styles, navigating new cultures and languages, finding a great place to live, dealing with taxation and pension schemes, adhering to regional regulations and rules, or truly appreciating the cost of living.

David Deacon, chief people officer at activpayroll, which provides international and multi-country payroll services, says these challenges can slow down how quickly an employee becomes effective and can impact all businesses when they move into uncharted territory.

“My experience in supporting employees and looking after their financial wellbeing is that it helps to think holistically about how to help them, whether that’s with tax planning, immediate expenses or making our policies of financial assistance as efficient as possible,” he says. “Typically, we take big changes in our stride and it’s the small financial worries, day-to-day, that cumulatively take a dramatic toll on our wellbeing.

“My advice to companies moving employees into new territories is always to seek advice from companies that have done the same thing before. It’s the unforeseen surprise that derails things. And think ahead, especially for international tax planning, by getting support from qualified professionals on topics where you do not have direct expertise or experience. Making assumptions about the rules can be expensive and distracting for everyone involved.”

He says that a transparent and forward-thinking approach to supporting employee finances works well, as does helping to manage employee expectations and talking through the figures with them. “We find that talking through every aspect with the employee, including their obligations, our costs, and what they can expect in terms of expenses and experiences, before the work assignment starts helps them to prepare for the swings and roundabouts of working overseas.”

“My experience in supporting employees and looking after their financial wellbeing is that it helps to think holistically about how to help them.”

DAVID DEACON, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, ACTIVPAYROLL

ESG & sustainability agenda: 2024's priorities

If you thought having an environmental, social and governance (ESG) policy for your organisation was a luxury, not a necessity, think again, says **Marianne Curphey**. New laws mean potential new legal, corporate and compliance risks.



First, there is the legal requirement. For example, EU law requires all large companies and listed companies to report on the risks and opportunities arising from social and environmental issues. They also need to quantify the impact of their activities on people and the environment.

The European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) have now been approved and came into force on 1 January 2024. This requires organisations to collect and collate data to fulfil the rules set out in the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

Then there is the opportunity cost: customers, stakeholders and investors want to see evidence that you are fully engaging with the ESG agenda. This is for a variety of reasons. Customers and employees want to see that your organisation stands by its purpose and targets and is not using ESG as an exercise in corporate “greenwashing”.

Investors and stakeholders need to see evidence that you fully appreciate the business risk and economic implications of ESG and that you are future-proofing your business model and strategy to make the most of the opportunities and challenges that will arise.

If your policies on ESG are vague, rooted in the past or merely a box-ticking exercise, then this will become apparent to employees, customers and investors. In order to receive private, stock market or government funding you need a robust ESG strategy that you can defend and back up with quality data and reporting. There is no option now not to engage with ESG, and “going green” can potentially save significant costs and revolutionise your business model.

WHAT ARE THE NEW ESG REPORTING RULES?

“EU laws mandating ESG disclosure for corporations have been in effect since 2014,” says Marcos Taboada Espiño, associate ESG for Holtara, the ESG arm of Apex Group Financial Services, and leader of CSRD initiatives within the team. “Failure to comply not only exposes companies and their board members to economic fines, but also entails implications for reputation and long-term business viability in an increasingly sustainability-focused landscape.”

However, the newly enacted Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, effective as of 2024, intensifies these regulations, placing greater legal responsibilities on

board members concerning the timeliness and adequacy of ESG data provided to the market. Marcos Taboada Espiño says there are enormous opportunities in terms of reputation, brand building, business resilience and compliance that can come as a result of getting to grips with social and environmental issues.

“Traditionally, much emphasis has been placed on the reputational and brand-building benefits of a consistent commitment to ESG,” he says. “However, it is crucial to recognise that ESG is not peripheral to business operations. Instead, it is intrinsic to the business model and essential for strategic planning.”

Indeed, growing public concern and new regulations around environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) have made tracking and reporting on ESG metrics a top business priority for many global organisations, says Pat McCarthy, CRO at Precisely, a software company specialising in data integrity tools.

“In fact, ESG data management and reporting has adopted a whole new meaning in 2024, with the application of the European Union (EU)’s Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), which started on 1 January,” he says. “The CSRD elevates and standardises

“IT IS NO LONGER AN ANNEX TO YOUR STRATEGY. ESG AND SUSTAINABILITY ARE FAST BECOMING THE TRAJECTORY THAT ALL FINANCIAL DECISIONS NEED TO ALIGN WITH.”

JONATHAN JONES, FOUNDER AND CEO OF GREEN IBEX LTD



corporate sustainability like never before, impacting nearly 50,000 companies, including organisations with operations in the EU. The implications are widespread, and sustainability data will now be treated and governed with a similar level of rigour to financials, sales and customer data.”

Jonathan Jones, founder and CEO of Green Ibex Ltd, a climate strategy company, says there are “myriad unpleasant consequences” of not complying with ever-tightening ESG legislation and climate regulation. “Not only are there legal repercussions, but you could be losing market share, too. It is not about compliance anymore – businesses that can’t show sustainability say that they miss out on both private and government funding.”

SHIFTING EMPHASIS FOR GLOBAL COMPANIES

Similar to the traditional approach to business, a well-managed company minimises risks, seizes opportunities and prioritises positive impacts on stakeholders, whether they are consumers or employees, says Marcos Taboada Espiño. ESG adds another dimension to this approach, highlighting how environmental and social factors significantly contribute to business resilience and long-term shareholder value creation while positively impacting society.

“We are witnessing a shift where investors increasingly acknowledge this reality and consumers across various sectors are increasingly willing to pay a premium for

sustainable products or services,” he says. “This convergence presents a compelling catalyst for businesses to embark on their sustainable transformation.”

Pat McCarthy says that in order to create meaningful ESG targets and meet ESG reporting standards, businesses need to implement robust data strategies to ensure the accuracy, consistency and context of their data. “Without this in place, many organisations face challenges with data that lives in silos, is incomplete, unstandardised or lacks the detail required to make it fit for purpose,” he says. This is not sufficient for the thorough level of insight required to comply with ESG policy and monitor outcomes.

“More than ever before, companies require trustworthy data to make confident decisions, set goals and track the progress of sustainability initiatives before communicating this with staff, customers and stakeholders,” he says. “If companies aren’t already investing in the integrity of their data, they are already behind the curve and any new ESG regulations introduced will only continue to widen that gap.”

Marcos Taboada Espiño lists three key components of a successful ESG strategy in terms of communication and implementation:

• **Communication:** Effective internal communication is crucial for sustainability decisions, aligning employees with company values. Employees play a key role as advocates for ESG commitments, necessitating alignment and

bottom-up engagement in decision-making.

• **Credibility:** This is paramount in customer communication amid greenwashing concerns. Honesty in environmental claims is vital and terms like “organic” should be substantiated with data to maintain significance.

• **Data collection:** Compliance with CSRD is a significant challenge due to its extensive scope and rigorous data requirements. Businesses need to understand ESG impact, risks and opportunities, and build sustainability into all the business decisions they make.

The consequences of not having a clear and coordinated ESG policy and monitoring outcomes can be very serious for organisations, he says. Investors may perceive the company as incapable of managing material risks, jeopardising long-term growth and value generation. Employees, especially those from Gen Z or Millennials, increasingly value corporate culture and sustainability commitments and they may become disengaged with the company if it is failing on its promises.

What’s more, consumers are becoming much more aware of the impact that companies make on the environment and may favour other companies that are better aligned with their environmental and social goals. Your stakeholders may view your failure to fully engage with ESG as an indication that your organisation is ill-prepared for the business challenges ahead and your organisation could miss out in funding rounds.

NEW PRIORITIES FOR ESG REPORTING IN 2024

Every company is different. Some are more mature and established than others. However, there are three key areas that every business should prioritise in 2024, regardless of their stage in the sustainability journey, says Marcos Taboada Espiño:

1. Introspection: Understand your business model, purpose and value chain. By reflecting on purpose, risks, opportunities and impacts within your organisation, you can direct resources to maximise positive impacts and create long-term value.

2. Monitoring and data quality: Reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making. ESG is no exception. Robust ESG data monitoring enables accurate assessments, realistic target-setting and efficient progress reviews.

3. True transparency: As regulatory requirements and investor scrutiny increase, transparency through ESG reporting becomes essential. Communication of ESG strategy, commitments and progress is vital for fundraising, brand building and access to capital. Reports should be based on robust methodologies and traceable data to ensure integrity and credibility.

“Data quality will only come with years of sustained effort, but the improvement over the last decade has been exponential,” he says. “Authenticity is key, adhering to recognised reporting standards and fostering honesty in claims.”

Jonathan Jones points to research

from 2023 that shows ESG metrics are now either the only or the primary consideration for business leaders when they make decisions about procurement, product development, employee benefits, selecting energy providers and so on. “It is no longer an annex to your strategy. ESG and sustainability are fast becoming the trajectory that all financial decisions need to align with,” he explains.

In the last 50 years alone, the number of adverse climate events has increased by a factor of five, causing billions of dollars in damages to businesses (as high as £280 billion). This is a very high cost that can easily force a small or medium business to shut down. “On the flip side, businesses can benefit from huge cost savings just by switching energy suppliers, for example,” he says. “It is a very real and tangible benefit. Renewable energy is now more affordable and available, and not exposed to the same price volatility and risks that fossil fuels are subject to.”

He says there are huge reputational and brand-enhancing benefits of going green, and most businesses are aware of that. However, there has been a shift in the industry. If previously, sustainability was in the hands of the marketing team, it now increasingly sits with newly formed sustainability teams whose focus is on real carbon-reduction in the value chain and across operations.

“The KPIs of these teams and individuals are closely tied with the organisation’s ESG targets, so they’re more motivated to deliver transformations. But the next level up, which is even better, is completely cannibalising your business model and replacing it with a better, net-zero model. It is the only way to ensure your business remains resilient and sustainable at the core – by rethinking how you make money in the first place. We’re seeing some examples of this with businesses adopting circular models, but they’re still few and far between.”

He says the top priority should be building the capability in your business so it is resilient for the future. “The clients we work with we encourage to do it right the first time by doing an ‘x-ray’ of their

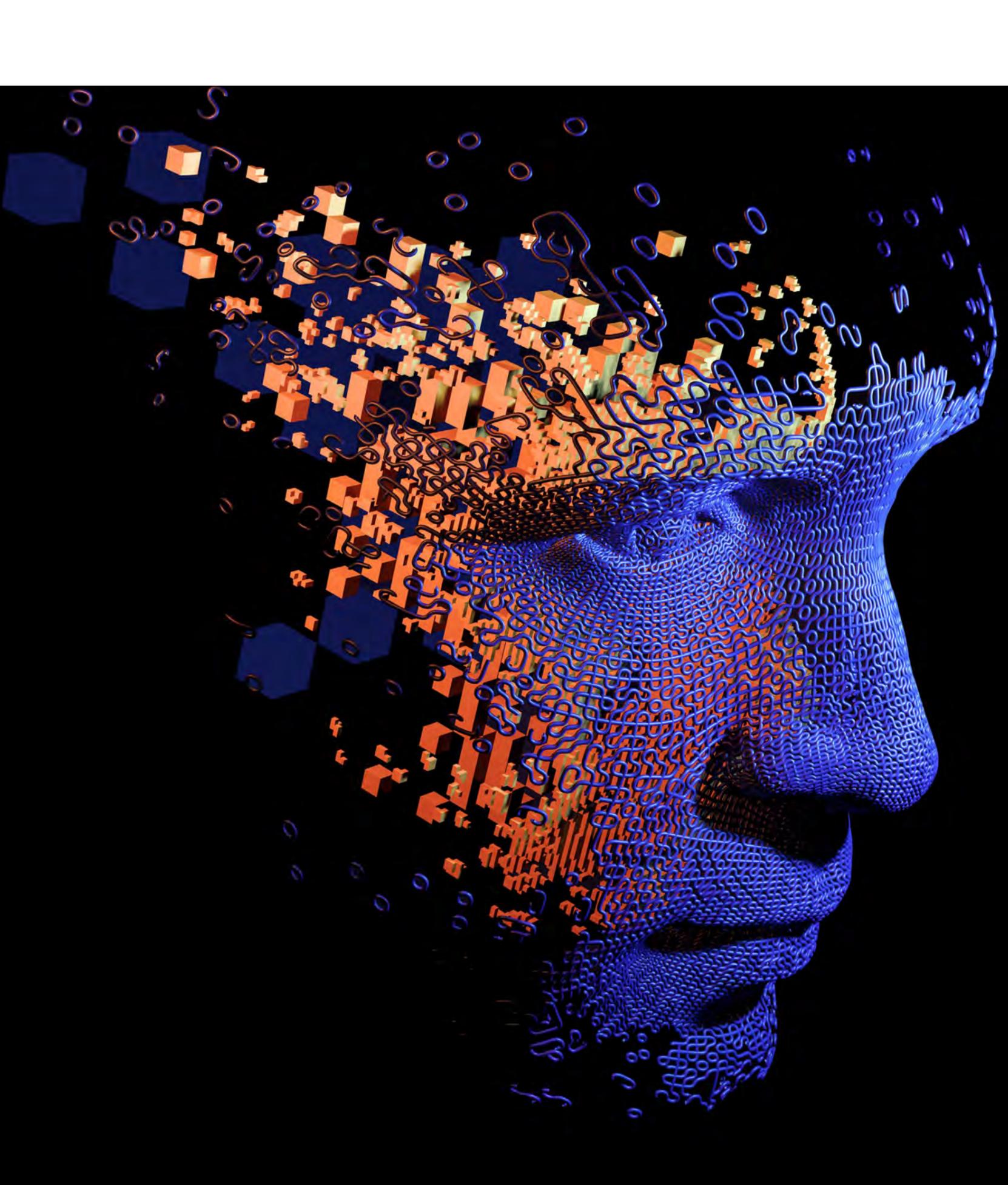
business,” he says. “What is it that you want to achieve? What can you achieve with the resources you have? What are some trade-offs you will have to make? What are some quick wins that will have a big impact you can implement immediately? If you do this heavy lifting at the start and really think strategically about it, you are more likely to have a smoother path to hitting your ESG goals. This also helps prepare people for what’s coming and you get to communicate and get input early on.”

It is important not to underestimate the challenge, however. An important part of a leader’s remit is to communicate the changes to staff and stakeholders. “We all know how tricky an organisational change is to pull off and transitioning to sustainability is, in fact, just that,” he says. “When business leaders recognise that, they’re much more successful and efficient.”

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TALENT FOR GROWTH: INNOVATION, SKILLS & AI

What skills are companies looking for and how can they best attract, recruit, retain and grow talent? **Kian Katanforoosh**, AI lecturer, CEO and founder of skills intelligence platform Workera, explains all to **Ledetta Asfa-Wossen**.

Few people understand the implications of AI on the workforce more than Kian Katanforoosh. The company he set up, Workera, has helped many organisations from Accenture to Siemens augment their workforce. An award-winning Stanford University lecturer, he has also taught AI to over 3 million people along with colleague Andrew Ng.

But a big passion of his has always been equitable learning and skills; and how those skills can be measured to optimise the performance of individuals and the companies they work for. And

so, Workera was born – a skills-development platform that helps organisations understand, develop and mobilise talent.

SPARKING INNOVATION

So, why do organisations need to make better talent decisions? “I think it’s necessary for a lot of reasons. The primary one is innovation and the need for companies to continue developing themselves without being disrupted,” he explains. “An organisation that gets stuck is bound to disappear in the future.”

Several factors underpin innovation. “Making good talent decisions improves the company in

various ways,” says Katanforoosh. “It makes it more innovative, which makes it more likely to launch products and services that are set for the future and serve its customers or users better.

“It also improves the retention of your associates and employees as you’re improving things like productivity and doing a lot more with less. That also gives your company and employees room to focus on the important work. And then it becomes this self-fulfilling prophecy. If you accelerate – you accelerate more. If you slow down – you slow down more.

“In many ways, that’s part

“LOOK TO EMPOWER YOUR EXISTING TALENT AND IF YOU NEED TO HIRE IN, DO IT VERY STRATEGICALLY SO THOSE HIRES WILL CONTINUE TO LIFT AND EMPOWER YOUR EXISTING PEOPLE.”



of what AI is doing right now. It exponentially enhances an organisation that becomes more skills-based and ends up producing more. And because it produces more, it ends up having more in return. It can then continue on this virtuous cycle.”

WHY SKILLS-BASED ORGANISATIONS WIN

For many global companies, the methods used to gain, develop and retain talent haven't really changed much over the years. Yet Katanforoosh recognises how a few organisational changes can make a significant impact in the face of rapid skills changes and the emergence of highly disruptive technologies like generative AI, which are causing people to update skills twice as fast.

“There are so many ways to attract, retain and nurture talent. The first one is to become a skills-based organisation and there's lots of ways to do that,” he enthuses. “What's special about skills-based organisations is that they are fair. They're meritocratic. They retain top talent and steer away people who may not be a fit for the organisation.”

“They help organisations thrive and raise the bar for employees to perform better and employees enjoy performing well. I often use the example of sports teams. Sports was the first industry that demonstrated how skills-based organisations can

really thrive today. If you think for example about Premier League football, the coaches all know the statistics about every single player. They evaluate and analyse the skills of their players to understand their speed, precision, right foot, left foot and so on. Everything is tracked and calculated in a way that they can design the best team to compete against the next opponent.

“And, because they're being tracked, their potential is being unlocked and they perform better. Top players are then attracted to work for the highest performing teams like Manchester City, Arsenal and so on as a result. This same idea is starting to trickle down to more industries, with a twist of course, but it's essentially the same model and has real benefits for both organisations and their employees.”

But how can organisations lock in and grow the talent they have worked so hard to attract and develop? Put simply, measure and manage your employees' skills to drive growth and learning, and incentivise your employees to empower them to grow more.

INCENTIVISE LEARNING

“Self-directed learning is dead,” says Katanforoosh. “That may sound radical, but over the last ten years there has been this general perception that making lots of educational content available to employees is good for them and that they're going to enjoy

it and develop. But we see very few employees engaging with it. Employees are saying it's too easy, too hard or not relevant to their jobs. And if it is of interest, then they're thinking why would I spend 200 hours on a class if it doesn't lead to a promotion or some sort of reward for me?”

Instead, he recommends incentives that come top down with a clear goal and that are rewarded.

This could be an opportunity to work on a new project, access to more tools, getting a mentor or a financial incentive. “My advice is that companies need to multiply the carrots that will motivate people to learn and to do that in a skills-based fashion.”

GROW YOUR EXISTING TALENT

It is common for organisations to think they may not have the talent they need and that's why X or Y is not being achieved. Yet Katanforoosh urges companies to look internally more than externally. Many companies now consider reskilling an essential part of their employee value proposition. Companies like Vodafone, Wipro and Infosys all provide the tools for huge chunks of their existing workforce to reskill and enter a completely new career path within their own organisations.

“In the AI age, most companies cannot compete for talent,” says Katanforoosh. “You cannot

compete with Google. You cannot compete with Meta. You cannot compete with Netflix. You cannot compete with Microsoft. So look internally at your existing people and how you can develop them.

“Look at those who have cultural values that are aligned with your company and help them get to the level of a Google engineer, a Facebook product manager or a Netflix product designer. You are more likely to be successful as an organisation by focusing on your existing talent base and getting the most out of them rather than trying to simply replace them or hire several people in.

“This comes with nuances of course. But look to empower your existing talent and if you need to hire in, do it very strategically so those hires will continue to lift and empower your existing people.” ◉

“THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS TO ATTRACT, RETAIN AND NURTURE TALENT. THE FIRST IS TO BECOME A SKILLS-BASED ORGANISATION.”



**KIAN KATANFOROOSH:
60 SECONDS ON
WHAT TALENT GLOBAL
ORGANISATIONS WANT
AND NEED MOST**

AI and data people would be the first. There are many different levels and personas in that area to consider when trying to build an organisation's capabilities. You have your 'centre of excellence' if you like. These are your highly technical, top-level practitioners who are building the infrastructure and the systems that help the rest of the organisation acquire, query and play with data.

One level down you have AI+X individuals – the 'X' stands for domain expertise. They could be a financial analyst, product designer, manufacturing engineer or aerospace turbine engineer who has a very deep understanding of one technical area outside of AI and who is learning and using AI to enhance and build on their specialist area.

AI fluency is another talent area in demand. These are not technical specialists, but they are interacting with technical individuals on a regular basis. For instance, a project manager or global talent or HR manager who is trying to help hire AI talent for an organisation and needs to know how to talk about AI.

And then you have AI-literacy talent levels. These are people who are not necessarily working with technical practitioners, but who are somehow impacted by AI or have opportunities to increase their productivity with AI. For example, people in customer support who use AI-based tools, or blue-collar workers who may use AI-assisted machines.

The second talent area would be **cybersecurity**. The more prevalent AI becomes, the more risks we're likely to have around cybersecurity. Data governance is a big one.

The third talent need would be around general **software** and broader **digital skills**. We have seen a lot of companies that have a CEO mandate on digitalisation.

And lastly, **soft skills** or **power skills** that uniquely make us human. Roles that are more focused on leadership, critical thinking and so on. Skills in responsible AI are also in demand and becoming more topical.



A CLASS ACT: EDUCATION OF THE FUTURE

Covid turned education on its head and there is a growing movement of educators that feel it's time for a serious overhaul. They champion a future based less around exams and more on the smart use of AI, project-based learning and hybrid teaching. **Sally Robinson** reports.

For Melissa McBride, founder of Sophia High School, the Department for Education's first accredited online school and the disruptEd series of conferences designed to bring changemakers together, the future of education will be hybrid. "Education will not be all online and it won't be all in person. It will sit somewhere in the middle."

The change will be driven by two factors, says education consultant Mark Steed: "The acute teacher recruitment crisis and education following changes in wider societal working patterns." Schools are already looking to alternative methods to cover shortage subjects and there's a significant pool of teachers who would be willing to work flexibly rather than take on a five-day week contract.

Sophia High, the first online school to be admitted into the Independent Schools Association, delivers the national curriculum to 60 children aged 4–16 in over 30 countries via an innovative project-based learning model, which uses a combination of virtual classrooms, immersive collaborative projects and AI-powered personalisation. The school started life as a private tuition service, but pivoted post-pandemic to provide a full curriculum.

Its students come from a variety of backgrounds. 'Sophia provides a rigorous DfE-accredited curriculum that students can pick up and go, which is valuable internationally, but it is also beneficial for children for whom the traditional school system is not working,' says Melissa McBride. Some of these are athletes who need a more flexible learning environment and some are school refusers or have anxiety. Everything is recorded, which enables students who didn't get it the first time to go

back and embed their learning.

Some teaching takes place in immersive spaces with headsets where students take on avatars, which McBride says can be a game changer. "When you don't have a physical campus it's valuable to create a shared social experience," she says. The biggest impact has been on the students' confidence. "There is almost a separation between the self and how you can represent yourself in the immersive space as a safety blanket to practice real-world situations."

Sophia also has an edtech arm that works with schools globally. "We see our role strategically, helping schools manage this transition towards a future that will increasingly be hybrid," says McBride. "Sophia High allows us to show the impact with real students."

Hybrid learning is already gaining pace. Sophia High provides remote teaching for low-demand sixth-form courses at Cognita schools in Spain and in subjects where there is a teacher shortage. Dukes Education, which runs 25 schools and colleges in London and Europe, is launching a hybrid school in September.

Chatsworth Schools will also introduce hybrid learning and new technologies to its existing and new school projects in the UK and internationally, in collaboration with Sophia Technologies.

The hybrid collaboration will roll out from September, initially as a soft launch with Chatsworth Schools' four UK sixth forms, when students will be offered a selection of online subjects along with in-person teaching.

"We are a proudly inclusive school group and we want every one of our children to have the opportunity to learn in the right way for them," says Chatsworth

Schools' CEO and founder, Anita Gleave. "There are children who have anxiety, others who are elite athletes or musicians and some have parents who move around the world for work. To have continuity and to be able to keep learning the same quality curriculum is really important."

The hybrid system also benefits staffing. Specialist subjects can be taught online, which is particularly helpful for international schools with multiple campuses. "It also helps us retain teachers who want more balance in their lives and can work from home," says Gleave.

ALL CHANGE FOR THE CURRICULUM

The physical space where students learn is changing, and so should the curriculum, according to an increasing number of educators. They cite the global teacher crisis, rising levels of absenteeism and the skills required for future jobs as the catalysts for change.

"We need to meet the students where they are at," says Sophia High's Melissa McBride. "Global curriculums are still very assessment-driven and this is where we have a disconnect. We're not preparing children with the skills for the workforce of the future."

A recent report by a House of Lords Committee on the provision of education for 11-16-year-olds reached the same conclusion, referencing "a narrow set of subjects and teaching styles".

Critical thinking, communication skills and mental flexibility are among the most important skills students need, according to the McKinsey DELTAs, which identify the talent needs of the future workforce. Cognitive skills are in the greatest demand, including mental flexibility, self-awareness, digital fluency, adaptability and coping with uncertainty.

It's a story echoed by the 2023 World Economic Forum (WEF) 'Future of Jobs' report, which identifies the top ten skills needed by employers in the next five years: creative and analytical thinking, leadership and social influence and



problem-solving topped the list.

"As educators, if we are not reading this report then we are not doing our job because we don't know what we are educating for," says Dr Sarah Watson, vice principal (academic) at DLD College in London. "We need to think about if our curriculum and systems of learning reflect the job market."

Some independent schools have already changed their curriculum to make it less high-stakes exam-focused. At Bedales in Hampshire, students take five GCSE exams in the core subjects alongside the school's own externally validated Bedales Assessed Courses. These include digital game design, global awareness, outdoor work, and product and fashion design. The school plans to reduce the number of GCSE exams further to just two subjects, English language and maths.

It's a similar story at Latymer Upper School in London. From 2027, students will take two GCSEs alongside the school's own courses, such as "world perspectives", an inter-disciplinary curriculum drawing on geography, politics and economics, which students currently study alongside their GCSE subjects.

The introduction of BTEC qualifications and the IB Diploma's design and technology qualification also move towards addressing the skills students need by providing more vocational A level-standard

qualifications.

The curriculum also needs to plug into the areas young people are interested in, reflected in the rise in popularity of esports, a subject that taps into the digitally savvy student body. In 2020 the esports BTEC was introduced and is now studied in over 150 schools. Contrary to popular opinion, it is a business qualification, not a gaming one. Esports is a huge industry, which will be worth US\$1.5bn next year, more than the music and movie industries combined.

The course incorporates enterprise and entrepreneurship, legal and ethical issues and logistics. "It's contemporary, relevant, fun and engaging and in an industry people are crying out for skills for," says James Fraser-Murison, director of learning at Queen Mary's College, Hampshire, who wrote part of the syllabus. He is also director of Fraser Esports, which delivers the esports BTEC online.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The future is not just about what students learn, but how they learn. DLD College's Dr Sarah Watson is among a body of respected educators who believes project-based learning is the most effective way to develop skills. It encourages critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration and creativity and allows students to become independent learners.

"Project-based learning is vague

and that is absolutely brilliant for preparing an education system when you don't know what the future looks like," says Dr Watson. "It can be used as a framework in lots of different contexts."

Dr Watson also champions the case for an interdisciplinary approach where instead of separating the curriculum into separate subjects, it is based on flexible disciplines that overlap and interact.

"There have not been many world problems that have been solved by one discipline alone," says Watson, who has introduced an interdisciplinary approach at DLD College. Alongside the traditional subjects, students in Year 9 study a compulsory project-based course in digital futures, combining economics, business, science, media and coding.

Fridays are not timetabled and set aside for the school's innovative Urban Schools Project. This structured, inquiry-based programme uses the motto "London is our classroom". Students build their skills by looking at a problem that has arisen from their subject lessons. They work in teams, plan their research methods and test them all over the city. "They have been to the National Theatre looking at sustainable set design and Kew Gardens to look at how and if botany can live on Mars," says Dr Watson.

Teachers help the students to shape the project, analyse the data

and work out where to go next. At the end, they reach a conclusion and review and reflect on their work. "The positive feedback from our students has been very powerful," says Dr Watson.

INCORPORATING AI

The noisiest disruptor in education over the past year has been the advent of generative AI. Chat GPT has been around for just over 12 months, providing easy access to generative AI for everybody for the first time and changing the educational landscape.

A report published last month by the DfE, *Generative AI in Education: educator and expert views*, showed a rapid increase in the number of teachers and students using it. In April 2023, only 17% of primary and secondary teachers had used AI in their roles, but just six months later this had risen to 42%. Students are faster to experiment – with 74% of 16-24-year-olds having used a generative AI tool.

Despite this, only a small percentage of teachers use it every day in their teaching, says Darren Coxon, founder of CoxonAI, which provides advice on using AI in K-12 education.

"Teachers and students have been playing with these tools for the past year, testing their parameters. Now we have reached a collective brick wall where we need to apply the tools to add real value," he says. "Teachers might be using it for lesson plans, resources or reports, but it is not moving the learning on."

AI is useful, but it's not the solution to everything agrees Sophia High's Melissa McBride. "To use it effectively you still need a high level of language, communication and literacy. Those are fundamental skills for the workplace. AI does not replace that, but it accelerates the opportunity."

For now, AI works well as a stimulus for creativity and for one-hit explanations, taking complexity and reframing it so students, whatever their level, can understand, says Darren Coxon. "But it has not got to the point where

it can guide a student, step by step, questioning them and challenging them, in the way a teacher would. It will get there, but not yet."

One of the biggest issues is students do not understand how to use AI because they are not being taught. "Going forward, we need to focus on AI literacy: how it works, how it generates content and how to prompt it. That is critically important for teachers and students to learn so they can become responsible users."

"Students should treat it like an ally that can give them that little bit extra. They may not like or trust it, but they need to understand how it works. If they don't, they are at a disadvantage because there are kids all over the world who are using it.

Where will it take us in future? "Generative AI will get worse before it gets better and we are already seeing that with deep fakes and voice cloning," says Coxon.

The utopian vision is smaller learning communities where the student sits at the centre and draws on different sources of knowledge including AI, the teacher, and other experts. The student moves from passively consuming knowledge to actively being in control of their learning journey. "AI is a great organising intelligence so will be able to map out and personalise that learning journey," says Coxon.

"AI will work in super intelligent ways in the future. It is inevitable." ●

"We need to meet the students where they are at. Global curriculums are still very assessment-driven and this is where we have a disconnect. We're not preparing children with the skills for the workforce of the future."

MELISSA MCBRIDE, FOUNDER OF SOPHIA HIGH SCHOOL

LEARNING WITHOUT LIMITS

How flexible schooling sets mobile students up for success



Students from King's InterHigh
Inset: Catriona Olsen

Travelling the world offers great benefits for young people and their futures. Ironically, one of the most common downsides of moving your family around has long been the challenge of securing a good education. That's why we are seeing so many globetrotting families turn to modern, flexible schooling online. It's setting students up for success in more ways than one, says **Catriona Olsen**, executive head of King's InterHigh.

Finding a quality school is rarely easy for globally mobile families, even when moving to an area with multiple international schools to choose from. The reality is that each move often requires an educational sacrifice, whether that's losing valuable learning time because of waiting lists, having to change curriculums midway through a course, or compromising on your standards for schooling. The challenge becomes even greater when you're moving mid-year, with little notice or to a remote or rural area. Offering the flexibility to learn from anywhere in the world, online schools are finally changing this reality.

Global accessibility is one of the most obvious benefits of flexible learning for families who move around. No matter where you are or where you're moving to next, going online means your child gets to keep the same standard of education, the same curriculum and the same teachers all the way through their school years. Virtual schools also have the flexibility to enrol students as soon as they move and get them into lessons within days.

For so many King's InterHigh students, learning online is a rare opportunity to get a world-class British or IB education that's consistent wherever they go. When Laura returned from Japan to her small town in Brazil, her parents couldn't find anywhere she could continue studying for her IB Diploma. Thankfully, a counsellor from her previous school recommended King's InterHigh, where Laura is now nearing the end of her IB studies and preparing for university abroad.

DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE AND A SENSE OF BELONGING

The benefits of flexible learning go far beyond global accessibility. Geographical diversity, for example, creates a more enriched learning experience. With timetables available across three worldwide time zones and students in over 130 countries, King's InterHigh is a truly international school experience where every student has their own insights. These diverse perspectives bring an incredible richness to the learning experience. Why just read about mountains in geography, for example, when a student could showcase photos of their home in the Alps instead? As students collaborate with their peers, their minds are opened to a new world of understanding that's crucial for success in an increasingly globalised workforce.

This level of connection is just as important outside the classroom. School is about more than just the academic experience. Friendships are another common struggle for students who frequently move around. Not only does flexible online learning reduce that sense of isolation and rootlessness by allowing students to keep the same supportive community of friends with every move, but also that flexibility often affords even greater social opportunity. Take King's InterHigh student Alexander, for example. He spends his downtime between classes as part of a youth football team in his current home of Dubai. Without rigid schedules that keep students at their desks all day, there's more time to hang out with fellow expats, absorb language and culture from local children, or even meet up with nearby families who are also studying online.

Combined with the numerous online clubs and events we run at King's InterHigh each term, there's no shortage of ways to make friends and build networks for life. One of our earliest students, Dr Kieran Bjergstrom, still keeps in touch with his King's InterHigh friends a decade after graduating.

FLEXIBILITY AND CHOICE FOR EVERY STUDENT

The word 'flexible' doesn't just apply to location or timetables. It also applies to the way school works. At an online school, students can communicate in many ways like talking in safe online text chats, for example, or the virtual reality 'playgrounds' learners enjoy at King's InterHigh. Students who are shy, anxious, or have additional needs can also use these methods to participate in the classroom.

No child is left behind, including in their academic progress. For some, the highlight of flexible learning is the ability to revisit material, for example. Students can watch recordings of any of their lessons at any time.

This means they can study challenging topics until they stick, while maintaining all the benefits of their live, collaborative and interactive online classes. Everyone has their strengths and learns best at a different pace; when school is flexible enough to meet each young person's needs, every student gets the guidance and structure they need to personally succeed.

Online school students continue to prove that a flexible education like this can have an incredible impact on achievement and future success. Alumnus Thomas loved King's InterHigh in part because he was able to keep up with his love of mountain running between classes. Armed with that school-life balance, he achieved four A*s at A level, going on to the University of Cambridge. Achievement doesn't have to be synonymous with the high-pressure, high-stress environment that often comes to mind. More time for leisure or self-care and more support to learn at your pace all help to equip students with the motivation and confidence to study hard and excel.

Of course, with the flexibility to accommodate any need or goal, students can also use that extra time in their day to take up even more pursuits. From training to internships, the activities students need to take up to get a head start on their dreams often clash with school hours. Whether a learner wants to take part in sports competitions or shadow a doctor as a medicine degree aspirant, flexible learning empowers young people to take any opportunity that comes their way, without their education suffering. And, in a world where competition for coveted aspirations is only growing stronger, that ability to advance and get ahead is of significant benefit.

Ultimately, a flexible education is an education without limitations. The ability to study top qualifications from anywhere, master your learning, maintain your wellbeing and pursue your passions is a recipe for any student's success and an opportunity we're delighted to be able to offer King's InterHigh's families around the world. ●

www.kingsinterhigh.co.uk

Below:
Student from
King's InterHigh

“Ultimately, a flexible education is an education without limitations.”



Educating for the future: tomorrow's students today



Student from Truro Girls School

Inset below: Professor Deborah Eyre



Everyone is aware that schooling is not just about now, but also about preparing children and young people for their future lives, writes **Professor Deborah Eyre**, founder and chair of High Performance Learning.

When it comes to schooling everyone has an opinion. Parents want their child to leave school with the qualifications they will need to give them entry into a successful adult life. Universities want students who can think for themselves, work hard and navigate their course with aplomb. Employers want new graduates who demonstrate teachability, a positive attitude, enterprising outlook, emotional intelligence, strong communication and team skills.

There is a significant degree of consensus regarding the kind of individual a school needs to develop if those individuals are to thrive in their future lives and enable us all in society to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Global trends such as digitalisation, artificial intelligence (AI) and the climate emergency are already demonstrating that the traditional, passive approach to learning is now inadequate and that schools need to work differently if they are to respond to changes in society. There is a growing recognition of the need to rethink the goals of education to bring them into alignment.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has responded to this agenda by producing its Learning Compass 2030. This follows collaboration among government representatives, academic experts, school leaders, teachers and students. Their graphic neatly articulates future needs for any intelligent school or education system.





Above: Scholars International School

However, while thinking among global thought-leaders is advanced, the level of change required is only just starting to impact thinking among leaders in schools.

Large-scale local employers are beginning to demonstrate that they no longer need low-level skills that can now be done by machine learning. Instead, they need all their employees to be able to think at high levels and to demonstrate a higher level of competence in the core skills of numeracy and literacy, in addition to demonstrating the values, attitudes and attributes of a good employee. The traditional labour market need for unskilled workers is disappearing. Instead, schools are having to consider how to move from some students achieving at high levels to almost all students achieving at high levels. Not easy and maybe, in the minds of some, not possible.

Historically, schools have been slow to react to changes in society. Traditionally, schooling is teacher-centric. The teacher transmits knowledge to students through lectures, readings or other forms of presentation. This traditional approach is still at the core of most schooling. Perversely, the advent of digital tools such as the interactive

whiteboard has served to reinforce it. It has made it easier for the teacher to project from laptop to screen and create interesting and engaging presentations in advance of the lesson to support the transfer of knowledge.

Now, school-based education (K-12) across the world is struggling to move from these very traditional approaches to learning to operate in a way that better meets the needs of both their students and other stakeholder groups. It is a significant shift in culture and practice that is required and it takes strong leadership to lead that change. Very few of even the best schools have yet made this transition. The need is recognized. Indeed, it is frequently mentioned in the school mission statement, but the will and capacity to make the change is, as yet, only evident in a small number of the most forward-looking schools.

MOVING SCHOOLS TO THE FUTURE STARTS WITH BELIEF

At High Performance Learning (HPL) we are actively supporting schools that want to make this change. Schools that want to normalise high performance and

educate students in a way that makes that possible.

These schools are developing student agency in a way that is positive and productive, rather than stressful and rigid, and developing in them the values, attitudes and skills needed to thrive in university and beyond. Students in these schools are articulate, high attaining, enterprising and socially responsible. Most of all, they are quietly confident, collaborative and keen to embrace new ideas.

Making this change starts with belief. Did you know that in the last 25 years our understanding of human capability has changed beyond all recognition? In the west, we all used to believe that some people had more cognitive potential than others and that inevitably there would be high and low achievers in any classroom or school.

When that belief operates in school, individual children and young people often have their potential measured. An algorithm will then predict how they are likely to do in end-of-school exams taken five or so years later. Unsurprisingly, this is usually accurate. But it is not accurate because it was inevitable, rather because, as we know from psychology studies like the famous Pygmalion in The Classroom (Rosenthal, 1968), what teachers believe a child is capable of will determine how well they actually do. So, teacher belief is crucial to student success.

In most schools, success is rationed by teachers whose belief system is outdated and pernicious. Hence, if we want all children and young people to perform highly, teachers – and employers and university lecturers – need to believe it is possible. Crucially, they need to instill that belief in every child or young person so that they will persist when things go wrong.

The evidence that it is theoretically possible comes from neuroscience. It is proven that the brain is exquisitely plastic and that we can, and are, creating new neural pathways all the time. So, if we want more children and young people to attain highly, then we need to give them the opportunities that develop and strengthen the

requisite neural pathways. We need to build brains, not think that each brain has finite potential.

For employers, the encouraging data relates to our capacity to develop new neural pathways at any stage, but the two more fertile stages are during compulsory schooling, so school is where the magic should happen for most.

Helping an institution to establish this culture is all about them taking action that signals their belief. This whole approach improves student self-esteem and encourages teachability because students know that they have the capability to improve and so they are minded to do what it takes to get there. This is education done ‘with the student’ not ‘to them’ and it creates a positive, dynamic and optimistic environment. Small shifts make a big difference, but only when the culture pervades the whole institution.

CREATING LEARNERS THE WORLD NEEDS

If the goals for education are to create children and young people who can thrive in the more complex and fast-changing modern world, then as the OECD suggests education must focus on systematically developing values, attitudes and skills as much as knowledge acquisition.

Interestingly, the research on successful learners shows that cognitive success is about balancing values, attitudes and skills alongside knowledge. It is not an either-or, but a combination of the two. For a learner to achieve success, they need to master not just advanced ways of thinking, but also the necessary values, attitudes and skills. We need to stop thinking about them as separate and instead see them as interwoven.

What we all know is that this level of change does not happen without a plan. School leaders who want these competencies to be a significant feature need a way to move from ambition to day-to-day reality. HPL helps schools adopt a framework where these competencies are acknowledged as being important; where they are prominent and evident in day-

to-day teaching; and where they are talked about by teachers and students. They are the universal language of teaching and learning. Students from an early age understand what each competency means. They see the importance of mastering the values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and they believe that, over time, mastery is possible for them.

In short, the pathway for schools to move into this new world is established and over 100 schools in 23 countries are proving that it can be done.

HPL schools are creating the students of the future by:

- Securing a consistent culture of high expectations
- Building cognitive and lifetime success
- Galvanising students, parents and educators.

Education will be great when all schools work this way. Meanwhile, it is important to support the trailblazers. ●

“IF WE WANT MORE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO ATTAIN HIGHLY, THEN WE NEED TO GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT DEVELOP AND STRENGTHEN THE REQUISITE NEURAL PATHWAYS. WE NEED TO BUILD BRAINS, NOT THINK THAT EACH BRAIN HAS FINITE POTENTIAL.”



GET SET FOR SUMMER

Make global connections, boost academics and learn new skills: summer schools can widen horizons on every level. From activity-rich fun environments to more academic pre-university experiences, there's a course for every student, says **Sally Robinson**.

Students from Epsom College in Malaysia



Summer schools are increasing in popularity for good reason. Academically, students get to learn in a more relaxed environment and experience different teaching methods, such as critical thinking or collaborative project-based work, which are great preparation for university.

“Socially, they offer a fantastic experience to meet other children from all over the world,” says the Tutor Group’s James Gordon, who advises parents on summer options. “Camp friendships can be life-long and open a world of international opportunities. They also provide an opportunity to try new things and gain independence.”

With so many available, choosing the right summer school can be tricky. Narrowing down the objective makes it easier: is it to explore a new academic subject area like STEAM; to socialise and make new friends; or to learn or improve a language?

Geographical location is also a factor. The idea of spending summer in a different country sounds exciting, but it can also be challenging for students who have spent limited time away from home.

Parents and students should do their due diligence on suitable courses, including finding out who the teachers are and what expertise they have. It’s also important to check the pastoral care and who is providing it. Well-established summer camps often have a good level of returning students – and teachers – and this is an indicator of quality.

“Red flags to look out for include too many inexperienced staff, no consideration of the nationality ratios and a lack of high-quality facilities,” says the Tutor Group’s James Gordon.

Good staff cost money, says David Hawkins, director of

university application specialist the University Guys. “Some expensive camps have high levels of pastoral support and good staff ratios, which actually make them good value.”

UNIVERSITY TASTERS

Pre-university summer schools are increasingly popular for students aged 16–19 who want to learn more about a particular subject before committing to study it at university. They can also be a good chance to explore a subject that is not taught in school, such as medicine or engineering.

Some of the more academically focused courses can be a serious financial investment, costing upwards of £6,000 for a two-week residential. Is it worth it? “It depends on the goal,” says the University Guys’ David Hawkins. “If it’s to have content for a UCAS application or to learn what life is like at a university, then yes, that can be worth it.”

Many UK universities, including Kings College and Warwick, offer residential courses so students can experience living in halls of residence and be exposed to a different way of teaching.

Pre-university summer schools are particularly popular for students interested in STEM. Imperial College in London runs a residential pre-university STEM programme at its Global Summer School, offering life sciences, engineering, medicine and physics to 16 and 17 year olds.

The London International Youth Science Forum (LIYSF) operates a 15-day summer camp in the UK for 500 students from 70 countries aged 16–21. Held at Imperial College, it includes lectures from leading scientists, plus seminars, debates and discussions.

For students interested in law, the London School of Economics is well known for its summer legal

courses. Classes are delivered by LSE lecturers and based on LSE undergraduate courses.

More vocational courses, such as fashion and photography, are held at Nottingham Trent University, which hosts summer courses for 15–17 year olds.

For students looking for an international US experience, Harvard Summer School has courses for high-school students, plus a two-week residential pre-college school designed to familiarise students with campus life.

Amsterdam University is becoming an increasingly popular choice for international students. Its two-week summer school offers a choice of five pre-university programmes, including business innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainable thinking.

THE WORLD OF WORK

For 16–18 year olds with a clear career direction, summer courses that offer an insight into a particular profession, such as law or medicine, are increasingly popular.

InvestIN Education has delivered immersive residential summer programmes to a mix of UK and international students since 2012. Held at UCL, they provide a deep dive into 15 of the world’s most desirable careers with the most popular being medicine, law, engineering, investment banking and psychology. The practical, professional-led career experiences are delivered by industry experts and incorporate hands-on work experience.

“We have created the ultimate work experience so students can step into the shoes of a professional and visualise what their dream career is actually like,” says Caitlin Brennan, InvestIN’s business operations director.

Bucksmore Education holds summer courses at d’Overbroecks boarding school in Oxfordshire and





Student from British International School, Phuket

King's College, London. It provides tasters for students aged 13–17 aspiring to occupations including architect, AI and computer scientist and business entrepreneur. “Our young professionals programme is unique in providing an externally certified capstone project students can add to their super-curricula portfolio ahead of their university application,” says Bucksmore’s Rhian Jenkins.

There are some excellent programmes out there, but they need to be examined carefully, cautions David Hawkins. “Don’t assume that brand name means best quality, or that because a course is in a particular city it has any affiliation to that university.”

ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT

The UK’s private schools, including Eton, Canford in Dorset and Marlborough, have their own eco-system of summer programmes, often hosted by commercial operations.

Sevenoaks School, one of the top performing schools in the country, offers its own summer ‘academic enrichment’ course for 11–17 year olds, incorporating four modules: critical thinking, social leadership, creativity and digital skills.

For a fully-rounded experience combining learning, creative enrichment and adventure, ISSOS is one of the longest-running summer

school providers. Its three-week residential take place at St Andrews University in Scotland, Cambridge University and Yale in the US, for students aged 13–18. Places of any one nationality are limited to 10% to guarantee an international experience. “Academic classes are taught by highly qualified teaching staff who are all experienced working professionals in their subject areas and many come back every year,” says marketing manager Caitlin Hanlin.

For an American-style summer camp with a focus on making friends and having fun, Camp Cooper runs one- and two-week camps in Scotland for 7–17 year olds. Campers choose from a range of options including tennis, art, outdoor adventure, tennis and filmmaking.

FROM FILM TO FOOTBALL – SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Tech is an increasingly popular focus at summer camps that gives students the chance to learn new skills, such as software design and basic coding, that might not be taught in school.

At Techcamp, courses are designed and run by engineers and students get to take home their custom-built projects. These long-established residential and non-residential courses in Oxford, London and Winchester include coding, engineering, 3D game

design, drone racing, Python AI and VR design. FunTech offers residential and day camps where students can study game coding, cyber security and game design.

For students who prefer musical theatre, drama, singing and dance there are some exciting options including West End Stage held at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, which is led by West End professionals and culminates in a performance at Her Majesty’s Theatre. The Guildford School of Acting at the University of Surrey summer camps include acting, singing, voice and dance taught by GSA conservatoire tutors. Aspiring filmmakers get to make their own film at the Young Film Academy’s hands-on residential summer camp at Culford School in Suffolk.

Learning or improving a language is one of the traditional reasons for attending a summer school. For an immersive experience the Sorbonne University in Paris offers two-week French courses taught by academics from the university and Malaga University runs four-week intensives in Spanish over the summer. In the UK, UCL offers two-week summer intensive language classes in Arabic, French, Italian, German, Japanese, Mandarin and Spanish.

THE SWISS TRADITION

Switzerland has a tradition of running dynamic, well-organised summer schools, often with an emphasis on team building and outdoor activity. Many are held at the country’s network of elite boarding schools, providing great facilities amid spectacular Alpine scenery. Le Rosey has been running camps for 40 years and provides a mix of sporting, academic and artistic activities at its campuses on Lake Geneva and in the mountains at Gstaad. Brillantmont welcomes students from 30 countries with nationality quotas to ensure diversity. Its programmes include French or English classes in the morning and sports in the afternoon. At the College du Leman between Lake Geneva and mountains, students devise their own summer programme choosing from languages to business and technology. ●

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING A SUMMER SCHOOL?

“Summer@BISP is about having fun while learning essential skills. Our programme encourages students to make the most of their summer. Currently we offer three tracks: Adventure Sports, Football and English, with all students spending the afternoons on teambuilding and recreational activities.”

SIMON MEREDITH, HEADMASTER
BRITISH SCHOOL IN PHUKET

“Summer schools can be a great way of expanding a pupil’s reading and engagement with their degree subject of choice. I would advise students to choose those experiences which are primarily academic in their nature and to remember that it’s what they’ve learnt on the course, not just the simple fact that they’ve attended it, that will carry weight in a UCAS application. Keeping notes or an academic diary throughout the summer course is always a good idea.”

ALICIA LUBA, OXBRIDGE APPLICATIONS

“The Epsom British Summer School offers an array of advantages for students keen on mastering the English language. Through its immersive and intensive programs, attendees dive into a world where language learning becomes an exciting adventure. The concentrated nature of the courses ensures that students undergo rapid language acquisition, honing their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in a relatively short span.”

EPSOM COLLEGE IN MALAYSIA

WHAT IS YOUR SCHOOL OFFERING AND WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT YOUR PROGRAMME?

“Each of our courses is carefully designed for a specific age range to meet their academic and developmental needs. From play-based learning for younger students through to immersive career and university preparation for older teenagers, we hand-pick locations and build our programmes in-house to maximise the learning experience. Our courses take place in some of the most iconic academic locations in the UK, including Eton College, Oxford, and Cambridge.”

WILL FINLAYSON, DIRECTOR,
SUMMER BOARDING COURSES,
DUKES EDUCATION

FIND OUT MORE

Read more online in the Guide to International Education & Schools 2023/24



Students from Dukes Education



AI IN EDUCATION

Educators need to shape the use of AI in education, as with every benefit AI brings comes with it a risk. **Ledetta Asfa-Wossen** reports on a recent Westminster Education Forum.

Educators, tech companies and policymakers gathered to discuss the use of AI across education and ways for navigating a clearer path forward.

Labour MP Dawn Butler and vice chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for AI set the tone by urging delegates to look at how they manage the risks and rewards of AI.

“We’re not going to be able to stop the advancement of AI. What we do have to take responsibility for are the guardrails around that. Where we allow it to be and what we allow AI to do. And in reverse of that, what we don’t allow and what we say is unacceptable.”

Butler remarked that teachers will be as critical as they have always been. Schools will need to teach fundamental ethics and key human skills, particularly around consent and critical thinking, even more so in an AI age and have a deep understanding of bias.

In a thought-provoking opener, Sir Anthony Seldon, emeritus professor at the University of Buckingham and author of ‘The Fourth Education Revolution’, asked delegates whether AI would liberate or infantilise humanity. Seldon listed some ongoing concerns, namely the need for a common language when it comes to AI. He also warned educators to not be too trustful of tech companies and that educators need to work closely with them to better shape these tools.

“We need to understand how broad AI goes. For example, does it include virtual reality with its powerful impact on social sciences and physical sciences? What does AI include and not include? What are the benefits? Are they just inside the class or also outside of it? We need a common language and we are getting there. But we’re not there yet,” he added.

Seldon called for the need to be precise about what it is we are saying about AI, regardless of where you sit on the topic, and that arguments for and against are often unclear.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AI

While it was clear from discussions that parameters are needed as AI use grows, some speakers noted the powerful benefits it can have. Mental health support was one area, particularly for younger age groups that might benefit from personalised support tools, as well as developments that are helping to achieve quicker mental illness diagnosis.

When used appropriately, generative AI was noted to have the ability to reduce workload for teachers. Sam Illingworth, associate professor at Edinburgh Napier University, listed some opportunities for AI in education, but stressed the importance of involving students in the process and understanding how students use AI and why they use it.

Other opportunities included delivering more personalised education by tailoring learning experiences to individual student profiles and abilities. The potential for AI to further enhance classroom interaction and overcome language barriers in multicultural classrooms was also marked as a plus. Not to mention administration efficiencies that can allow teachers to focus more on learning design or having more time for creativity.

Emma Darcy of Denbigh High School gave some examples of how AI is helping to improve school attendance and educational attainment. She noted that AI literacy and capability can’t be reserved only for IT professionals or tech subjects. Darcy gave an interesting example of how even an RE teacher discussing the soul would need to understand AI to sufficiently teach ideas around religion, ethics and philosophy.

Darcy further stressed that the use of AI varies in each context and is often subtler than we think. “There are a number of good tools that use AI integrated in them. It doesn’t necessarily mean it’s an AI lesson. More, that we’re using tools that use AI, like scheduling tools or Canva, that can help with lesson planning and learning, rather than explicitly talking to a high level



about large language models.”

Looking at the current adoption of AI in education, RM Technology’s Mel Parker, a former headteacher, shared how students are using AI.

“Sixty-six percent of teachers believe they are receiving work that uses AI,” she said. According to Parker, a fifth of students use AI to do all their schoolwork, while 68% of students also felt they were getting better results using AI. However, one in ten teachers surveyed also found it hard to detect whether students were using AI in their classwork.

Parker also discussed that there is still some guilt associated with using AI among students, regardless of the positive benefits it can have. Four in ten students felt guilty about their use of AI. Even though AI can help teachers generate learning materials, create more interactive learning and help reduce repetitive administrative tasks, guilt was also recorded among schoolteachers for using AI tools in their work.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Along with some of the benefits of AI use were a host of concerns. Some panellists discussed the challenges around assessment and ongoing issues around cheating and plagiarism.

Data, security and privacy were also key concerns for schools when using AI tools. Parker noted it was important that sensitive data should not be used in public models and that schools and educators need support in configuring AI tools for safe and secure use. Perhaps more

pressingly she noted, “schools need to be more aware than ever of what data they store where and who in particular has access to it.”

Sam Illingworth expressed other challenges with AI. In particular, the risk of exacerbating educational inequalities due to varying levels of access to advanced technology. He warned attendees of the inherent biases of AI and the potential for it to shape the curriculum and perpetuate stereotypes.

Academic integrity was a common thread on the day and the need to understand the impact of AI-generated content on assessments. There was also growing uncertainty about how students view AI as educational aids and threats to overall integrity.

Sonja Hall, principal education official at teachers’ union the NASUWT, added that it must not be presumed that AI will reduce workloads and benefit all teachers or students because for many the outcome can vary and depends on several additional factors.

She also echoed thoughts from Seldon that AI or edtech benefits are often made by tech companies and so must be analysed more.

While Priya Lakhani, founder of Century Tech and co-founder of The Institute of Ethical AI in Education spoke on how students need to not only understand AI for productivity, learning and work, but they also need an understanding of: how AI models work, how to question the data sets that information is modelled on, how that data is used, and how to verify information and identify bias.

BACK TO BASICS

The bulk of sessions indicated that more work lies ahead, particularly around basic processes and structures to implement, manage and regulate the use of AI in education.

“We don’t really have a national picture of what is happening with AI in our schools and colleges across the UK,” said Professor Rose Luckin. “We need to benchmark it. Once we know where we are and get an accurate picture of what is happening, we can get correctly involved and build our voice. Then we can provide better support and build the capacity for AI so it can be used as effectively and safely as possible for the benefit of everyone.”

Luckin noted that AI can be a powerful tool, but that firm frameworks are essential to help institutions effectively develop AI capability in schools. Her advice to educators, educational institutions and other organisations looking to implement AI?

FIVE STEPS TO INTRODUCING AI IN ORGANISATIONS

- 1) Start with a clear vision and understand your values. Really think about how AI is going to help you achieve this faster, better and in a more impactful way.
- 2) Focus on governance and ethics: what are the parameters in your organisation and where AI is going to be used?
- 3) Keep the process iterative and learn as you go.
- 4) Think about your whole technology and data infrastructure: what do you need to use AI effectively; do you need to build it; and how?
- 5) Lastly, look at your staff capability; how exactly are you going to build that as well as what specific AI use you need capability for.

There’s a long road ahead. But both delegates and speakers seemed to agree that while collaboration among educators, tech and government is vital, educators should steam ahead to lead and shape what AI looks like in education. And time is of the essence. ●

TALENT & PERFORMANCE

Talent and performance are at the heart of great leadership. In this special supplement of interviews, entrepreneurs, CEOs, HR and academics share how to support people – and drive high performance – through positive performance management, new technology, and cultures that prioritise wellbeing, inclusion and fair pay, to align with employees’ diverse needs.



HARNESSING AI FOR BEST-IN-CLASS PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Entrepreneur and HR expert **Stuart Hearn** built a successful business from scratch by focusing on continuous employee feedback and putting people first. He explains to **Marianne Curphey** how harnessing the enthusiasm of your staff can lead to stand-out performance and a highly creative workplace.



Stuart Hearn

What will the future of work look like? HR tech entrepreneur, board advisor and startup mentor Stuart Hearn believes that technology and AI will have a significant impact on organisations and human performance.

Stuart founded Clear Review, a performance management company that enables more meaningful and continuous employee feedback. He is a performance management specialist with 20 years' HR experience, both as an HR director and consultant. He highlights the need to adapt to rapid changes and shift towards valuing skills over qualifications.

"AI is going to make huge changes in the future of work, for good or bad," he says. "As organisations and employees, we need to be able to get to grips with what that means. A key implication will be that skills will become more important than qualifications. The idea of going to university and studying one subject that sets you up for life will be less relevant."

He points to the generation of workers who have now retired and who may have had one or two careers. Yet today's school leavers are forecast to have 18 different jobs and six different careers. "That is a fundamental shift. So how do we continually deal with reskilling people and understanding what people's skills are?"

Another key change will be the impact on wellbeing and mental overload. As information grows at a faster and faster rate, how do we deal with that? How can we stay healthy when many of us have an "always on" mentality?

HOW CAN AI POSITIVELY IMPACT OUR WORKING LIVES?

Stuart acknowledges the transformative potential of AI in shaping the future of work. What is important, he says, is asking fundamental questions about why and how AI is used, advocating for ethical considerations and being careful about how we measure its effects.

"If we are going to measure the impact, positive or negative, of AI then we need to go and ask some fundamental questions. What is the 'why' behind it; why do we want it; and what do we expect that to achieve?" he says. "At the moment, there is a danger that not enough people are asking those questions. Are we asking why we want it? Is it effective? Is it making our lives better?"

"That is a really important question that people need to bear in mind. As human resources leaders, we need to have that in mind when we make decisions for the future. From an ethical point of view, do we want to reduce workload so we can get rid of people's jobs? Or do we want to get AI to do the things that we actually find impossible or very difficult or too tedious to do so that we can focus on the more creative things?"

Stuart believes AI can be leveraged positively if we can use it to enhance organisational processes while being mindful of the ethical implications it presents.

"As humans, we are going to have to be stronger about demanding what we do and don't want AI to do. We are in charge of AI. When you listen to AI leaders, they talk about it being inevitable as though we have to just accept that this is going to happen. I don't



“Technology is not replacing us as human beings. It is enabling us to be more effective and have better human interactions.”

actually agree with that. I think we need regulation and thankfully regulation is starting to happen.”

He argues that as buyers and consumers of AI, we need to be clear to the vendors and product creators about what we expect from their products, including the ethical use of AI and putting up guardrails to limit the damage it might do.

“AI does have the ability to do some fantastic things that we as human beings simply can’t do,” he says. “Or to do things that we find too overwhelming to do. For example, we have so much information and data and there is some really exciting new technology in the HR space coming through that utilises AI. I’m lucky enough to be involved with a venture capital fund that invests specifically in technologies in the future of work, so I get to see some of these things very early on.”

One such technology is designed to help senior leaders cut through the noise and truly understand what is going on in their organisation. It enables them to make more informed decisions around strategy and planning. “Where that gets really interesting is if we take that beyond senior leaders and open up the technology to everyone,” he

says. “That way, AI could decipher and summarise the meeting notes, read all the emails, analyse the chat and succinctly tell us what is going on and what we really need to focus our time and energy on.”

“In other words, technology is not replacing us as human beings. It is enabling us to be more effective and have better human interactions. We spend less time reading meeting notes and more time actually talking to people, making decisions, adding ideas and coming up with strategies.”

BETTER PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT METRICS

When it comes to performance management, Stuart advocates for continuous and open feedback, highlighting its importance in driving improvement and employee engagement. “I created Clear Review based around managing performance in a way that actually improves people’s performance, rather than just getting data to work out what we should pay people. It focuses on objectives that are shorter term, rather than 12-month objectives, which go out of date by the time we get to the end of them.”

Stuart argues that the model where employees meet with a manager to discuss their progress once or twice a year is outdated and ineffectual, leaving the employee without a sense of direction or focus.

“Now I think continuous feedback is becoming the de facto way of managing performance, which is good. It is nice to know that we had an influence in actually changing organisations. Everybody needs to know how they are doing. If you do not know how to improve, or if you are told how you could improve several months later, then that is a wasted opportunity.

“Whereas if you are getting feedback as you go along, you can actually do something about it. Generally, people perform well, but if feedback is saved up for a meeting once or twice a year, that meeting tends to focus just on the things that could be improved. If I’m getting regular feedback, eight out of ten of those pieces of feedback are probably quite good. I’m much more likely to take negative feedback on board and take it less personally because I’ve had lots of good feedback in-between.”

CREATING A SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE-CENTRIC ORGANISATION

Stuart emphasises the need for organisations to regularly assess their processes and align them with core values to foster innovation and success.

“As things speed up, what works one day won’t necessarily work two years later, or as the business changes,” he says. “One of the things that we applied really well at Clear Review was making sure we were values focused. So, the things that never changed were our values. We set those up quite early on and were clear about what we were going to live by.

“The result is a truly values-based organisation. Over the five to six years before we were acquired almost nobody left. We had a huge number of people who wanted to come and work for us because of how we treated people and the way we lived those values was so different and refreshing to people coming into the workplace, especially the younger people coming in.”

He says that it was a kind of experiment to see if you create a people-first organisation, which genuinely values people, does it make you more successful?

“The answer is yes, it does,” he explains. “We grew incredibly quickly, and we were acquired very successfully at the end of it, so it felt like we proved our thesis around what it is like to run a company in that way.

“A lot of organisations think it’s going to be too expensive or that it is too tricky, but we proved this approach to business leads to higher performance and people end up being a lot happier. We describe it as a ‘call to action organisation’ because everyone was so passionate about the work that we did. Our staff told us they had never worked in a company like it where everyone is super engaged in what they do.”

Overall, Stuart paints a picture of the dynamic nature of work in the face of technological advancements and the importance of ethical considerations, continuous learning and adaptability in performance management in order to create a positive workplace culture. Putting people first yields results and businesses can benefit from harnessing their enthusiasm. ◉



CULTIVATING A MINDSET OF WELLBEING & OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE

Helping managers consider what contributes to their mental wellbeing supports both their individual performance and that of the organisation. Ahead of April’s Turbocharging Performance masterclass, **Marianne Curphey** spoke to workplace wellness consultant **LaBarron Burwell** to find out how we can create more positive and empathetic workplace cultures.



LaBarron Burwell



“Mental hygiene puts power into people’s hands and it builds self-efficacy. It gives people the understanding that they can positively influence their life through small iterative steps.”

Leaders face great pressure and responsibility to manage teams, make key decisions and steer an organisation through difficult times or periods of high growth. Yet they are often under-trained in managing their own wellbeing, particularly their mental wellbeing.

Guiding managers to think more about cultivating small, but regular, practices that contribute to their mental resilience can have a beneficial effect. It can help them to perform at an optimal level, inform the conversations and interactions they have with their staff and team members, and ultimately feed into a more positive and empathetic workplace culture.

That’s the message from LaBarron Burwell, a consultant who specialises in advising businesses on how to integrate wellness initiatives to drive performance and growth. He argues that daily practices to bolster our mental health, which he describes as “mental hygiene”, can lead to greater personal resilience. Within leadership roles it can also lead to better employee engagement, productivity and overall organisational culture.

His background includes work with both large public sector entities, such as NASA HQ, and private sector tech start-ups such as CodeLock Inc. He provides insights and solutions that drive performance and growth for clients and that promote a culture of wellbeing in the workplace.

MENTAL HYGIENE & ITS IMPORTANCE

LaBarron says mental hygiene is crucial for maintaining overall mental wellbeing. Simple practices to help cultivate mental equanimity include: learning to breathe deeply, taking time to go outside and take a break from work, scheduling calls with friends and physical exercises like push-ups.

“Mental hygiene is definitely something now that is more important because these days we are connecting with people through screens,” he says. “We are conducting all our personal and professional activities on our mobile phones and we all put a lot of pressure on ourselves.

“Constant screen time, unrealistic comparisons and social pressure can negatively impact mental wellbeing and taking that pause can help realign those thoughts. Mental hygiene is a simple entry point to mental health.”

Taking regular breaks to pause and reflect can help individuals and leaders regain clarity and perspective. Practising being present and mindful helps to promote good mental health, he says. Like brushing your teeth for oral hygiene, you can establish daily practices for mental hygiene. This can include activities like deep breathing, yoga, or taking short breaks to refresh your mind and come back to a calmer mental state.

LEADERS SETTING THE BEST EXAMPLE

“If you are a leader in an organisation and you’re not having a good day and you are distant – maybe you are angry, grouchy and not enthusiastic – then this has a trickle-down effect to your team and your employees,” he says.

“I think everyone struggles to be present at work. In leadership roles and positions where you are responsible for other people and for performance, then you face pressure and need to be the best you can for your staff. Yet people in leadership roles are severely under-trained. When they are promoted into a management role they learn the function of their job, but they are not always trained in managing and getting the best out of people.”

HOW ORGANISATIONS CAN BENEFIT TOO

Implementing mental hygiene practices within organisations can lead to a positive shift in culture. This might involve creating employee-centric programmes, which add real value to staff, like offering mental health resources and fostering open communication and empathy within leadership.

“You can offer all these employee perks, for example you can have a gym at work, but if staff feel they can’t really use them because they only have 45 minutes for lunch, then it has no value,” he explains.

Employers that implement effective benefits are often persuaded to do so because it affects their bottom line and improves productivity. LaBarron says organisations could enhance their offering by giving staff mental health days or extra time off to spend with their family and introducing more training programmes for mental health and resilience.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY AND ENHANCING COMMUNICATION

LaBarron’s work involves speaking one-to-one to people from different organisations. He has noticed a number of common themes that surface regularly in conversation.

Many individuals struggle with feeling isolated or unsupported in both personal and professional settings. Building a sense of community and improving communication channels within organisations can address these issues and improve overall wellbeing.

“Mental hygiene is not a new phenomenon,” he says. “It is about the everyday things and daily practices we can

do to improve our mental strength, clarity and cognition.

“We have seen anxiety and depression skyrocket after the pandemic and yet there is still a stigma on mental health, especially in the black and brown community, and for men. Mental hygiene is a great entry point for mindfulness and for better mental health and talking therapies and medication if needed.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

LaBarron emphasises the importance of emotional resilience, which he describes as “being able to feel emotions, but not let them dominate your day or your life”.

“Just because you are sad, it doesn’t mean you’re not going to do other things that help and that are going to benefit you and your life,” he says. “Just because you are angry at somebody doesn’t mean you’re going to do things to damage your life or the lives of others around you.”

At the Turbocharging Performance masterclass, LaBarron will be explaining to attendees how to assemble a mental hygiene toolkit with the skills and practices unique to you, which will help you better navigate your personal and professional life.

“Mental hygiene is an entry point for mental health,” he says. “Mental hygiene puts power into people’s hands and it builds self-efficacy. It gives people the understanding that they can positively influence their life through small iterative steps. It shows the small, regular, but powerful actions and initiatives you can do, say and act on, on a daily basis, to take a person towards better mental wellbeing and greater emotional resilience.”

REGISTER NOW

Learn more from LaBarron Burwell and other leading experts and peers in an international masterclass. **‘Turbocharging Performance: People-powered leadership to maximise talent’** focuses on applying new strategies and techniques to turbocharge performance and optimise valuable talent.

Venue: Henley Business School on **Thursday 18 and Friday 19 April 2024**. (Registration, keynote speaker and dinner from 5pm, Wednesday 17 April.)

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BOOK NOW

Combining leadership skills with business acumen

Emma Loisel, Board Director, business owner and Investor in high growth ventures, explains to Marianne Curphey why talent management needs to show tangible business results and how HR teams need to learn to speak the language of investors.



Emma Loisel

Emma is Co-Founder and Chair of Volcano Coffee Works, an independent speciality coffee roastery providing freshly roasted coffee to cafes and restaurants. She has worked at KPMG, been on the board of NZ Growth Capital Partners, and served as COO of The Exchange Lab.

HOW TO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF INVESTORS

HR and investment can often be seen as separate silos with little dialogue between the two. However, Emma believes that the two functions need to work together in order to quantify results and get the best out of a business.

“The challenge with businesses is that performance is often measured by the top line profit and the bottom line,” she explains. “That is how investors measure performance and the rate of growth. The challenge for businesses is that the only things that deliver those two metrics are people and product, particularly people.”

For example, when making your case to increase staffing levels or headcount, investors will want to know how you are going to measure the output of additional staff members in terms of revenue generated. She argues that unless you have methodologies and processes in place to demonstrate how the team have added value, that is going to be difficult to achieve.

“It comes down to some basic processes around clear role descriptions, KPIs and objectives,” she says. “This needs to be succinct and measurable so that you can demonstrate to the board what is driving the revenue, profitability and the return on investment they can expect to see.”

“There is often a disconnect within business where HR is seen to be about people, and performance is seen as a top line financial target,” she says.

In fact, where you get performance really working in a business is when you marry those two together, she suggests, and the key is to collect the right type of data and use it effectively.

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS IN TERMS OF PEOPLE AND INVESTMENT

She says that a common but not particularly useful form of data use is to track revenue and present your findings to staff on a regular basis.

“I’ve seen businesses track revenue and profit, and then every quarter they tell their people the results around revenue and profits. Every quarter, the people either happy or depressed because they have either hit the target or not, but they don’t know what to do in between.”

Instead, business leaders should have key objectives which will act as levers for growth, she says.

“Objectives and key results (OKRs) are really powerful because as a business leader you can know

if you meet them, you will generate the profit that the investors. In addition, your staff can see the actual outputs they need to do in order to be successful. You measure their success on the output of those objectives which will drive the revenue.”

She says that in business it is necessary to have “a constant blend of people and numbers” in order to be successful, and that when HR is hived off from the rest of the business it loses its ability to help drive corporate performance.

BUILDING TEAMS & DEVELOPING TALENT

Emma emphasises the importance of building effective teams and developing employees within organisations, while making a business case to investors.

“Investors don’t buy the people you employ, but rather they have to see the output of their performance,” she explains. “The investors do a mathematical calculation based on return on investment (ROI) which is based on profit, growth and revenue. You need to demonstrate to them that you have a highly efficient, highly effective team. You do that through getting the numbers right and using the HR function to develop and support the people.”

She argues for integrating HR practices with broader business goals and financial metrics, so that HR is fully aligned with the company’s performance objectives. In this way, HR can demonstrate the value of investing in people to executives and investors via figures that show return on investment, performance metrics, and quantifying success.

“There is a real mismatch in the sense that talent management is about managing the future of the talent. When investors invest they do so on historic data, although they will also take into account future data,” she says. “For investors, the talent is irrelevant. For the business, we need to develop talent for succession

“THERE IS OFTEN A DISCONNECT WITHIN BUSINESS WHERE HR IS SEEN TO BE ABOUT PEOPLE, AND PERFORMANCE IS SEEN AS A TOP LINE FINANCIAL TARGET. IN FACT, WHERE YOU GET PERFORMANCE REALLY WORKING IN A BUSINESS IS WHEN YOU MARRY THOSE TWO TOGETHER.”



planning and creating the managers of the future. So it is about how to bring those two worlds together and demonstrate to investors in a very financially astute way the tangible benefits of managing and developing your existing and future talent.”

BLENDING THE BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT AND PEOPLE

When demonstrating value and ROI to investors, it is important to show that you have a strategy for managing talent effectively in order to drive business success. The focus of the leadership team should not just be on making the workplace a pleasant place to work because a great work environment will not deliver results unless staff understand what is expected of them and how to hit their targets.

“The interesting thing is that I have seen loads of companies throw so much money at wellbeing. They think that this will make the business a lovely, flexible place to work. Yet even with gyms and perks and free meals people are still miserable. That is because the people don’t have clear roles, they cannot visualise themselves progressing and they can’t see where their future is going to be. Maybe they have a boss who doesn’t listen and doesn’t give constructive feedback. If you do not have these defined roles and structures then no amount of wellness benefits will make them happy.”

CHALLENGES IN TALENT MANAGEMENT

In this context, identifying rising stars and ensuring their growth within the organisation, as well as addressing personal and situational barriers to career advancement, are crucial.

Emma highlights the importance of flexible HR policies tailored to individual needs, including examples of accommodating parental leave and personal circumstances to retain talent.

“That to me is where HR should be adding value,” she says. “HR should focus on providing structure and support for managers to handle HR functions effectively within their teams. In Volcano Coffee Works Emma is pioneering the use of technology with a new “cultural calculator” which will be used for assessing and improving organisational culture.

THE PROS AND CONS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

Emma has encouraged staff to work flexibly but believes that the business as a whole and the people who work there benefit from time in the office together.

“There is a process at the moment going on where Gen Zs think they want something more than they really do. I think there’s this real push on flexibility that is a hangover from COVID, but actually when you give people too much time alone at home they are actually not happy. I had a situation when I came back from New Zealand everyone was working from home and they were not thriving. So I just cancelled all home working for a time and encouraged them to get back to the office.

“Now they do generally work from home a day a week, but it not the same day each week and it needs to be of benefit to the company (they can focus on a specific output) or for personal reasons (they are home for a delivery). As they grow in their careers, I realised that actually being together is really important for their growth.”

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF HR IN BUSINESS SUCCESS

Emma says having great teams and recruiting the right people is central to growing and sustaining a business.

“Building really, really resilient and robust teams is really key to the success of a corporation,” she says. “People think it’s about product, but you can have a great product and a business that doesn’t work. I would much rather invest in the company that has an ordinary product and great people, than a great product and ordinary people any day.”

Combining HR with business acumen can yield great results, she says.

“HR is so integral to an organisation that it is wrong to see it as a separate department. It is absolutely integral to what drives a business forward and contributes to its success.” ♦

ABOUT EMMA LOISEL

Emma began her career as a Criminologist before moving to the City of London as the Business Manager of KPMG Consulting UK, followed by Chief Operations Officer of Metrius, a Creative Consulting agency start-up under the KPMG umbrella. In 2003 Emma became the Chief Operations Officer of two internet based businesses, Atlas Europe and Mediabrokers. As Managing Director, she managed the businesses through a two year earn-out, achieving maximum value at exit. Emma then spent five years focussed on Angel Investing, providing Board and advisory services to her investment businesses and others. She returned to an executive role at The Exchangelab, a business she sold with her founders to WPP in 2015. She set up Volcano Coffee Works in 2010.



EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES



Global HR expert **Angus MacGregor** shares insights with **Marianne Curphey** into effective leadership practices, talent management strategies, and the challenges leaders face in nurturing talent and fostering diversity within large organisations and corporates.

In his wide-ranging career, first as a lawyer and then in top Legal and HR executive roles, Angus MacGregor has experienced many different cultures, geographies, and leadership styles. This wealth of experience has demonstrated to him the importance of leading with humility and empathy, particularly in the post-COVID era where employee well-being and individual focus are paramount.

“I work with the leadership of MUFG in Japan; I am on the board in Europe, and I have worked with a lot of CEOs, bankers, lawyers and supporting services and I have seen a lot of different leadership styles,” he says.

“One size doesn’t fit all

when it comes to heading up an organisation. I have seen brilliant leadership which is leading with humility and empathy. That used to be thought of as “new school”, but post COVID it is really the only approach.”

He says there has been a shift towards the employee becoming even more important within an organisation, having more choice and rights.

“As a consequence, a leader needs to be quite individual in their focus when dealing with their team,” he says. “People have become more demanding of their leaders.”

He sees leadership as a two-way relationship: making a personal connection with your team and understanding how they wish to

be led.

“Finding out what leadership looks like for a set of people that you are leading is important,” he says. “Having a conversation and being inviting feedback about what the team expects from a leader is not a weakness. It is about treating your employees like a customer and client. That is not weak leadership- it is supportive, builds followship and empowers your team.”

Delegating appropriately to the right people and building great teams is important, he says, but always remember that as a leader you are accountable and responsible. This requires you to really understand the market and the culture, but also to make some tough decisions.



“THE PERFECT TEAM IS AN ECLECTIC, INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE TEAM. LEADERS MUST VALUE INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY, AND IN ITS BROADEST SENSE, DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT.”

“Your job is to make decisions. You can’t please everybody all the time. You take all the inputs; you listen very carefully asking good questions about people’s thoughts and feelings. This might feel as though you are breaking some boundaries, so you must be careful, but if you don’t have some form of personal connection, I think you don’t lead as well.

“It’s a fine line and your judgement must be good, so as a leader you must work on your judgement skills. You don’t get always get it right, and in the end, you have got to make decisions and stick with it. People want consistency, and they want decisive leadership.”

HOW TO BUILD EFFECTIVE TEAMS

In terms of talent management, he emphasises the importance of picking and developing the right teams and for leaders to create teams which are diverse and inclusive.

“The perfect team is an eclectic, inclusive and diverse team,” he says. “Leaders must value inclusivity and diversity, and in its broadest sense, diversity of thought. To get that you need different demographics and that is a challenge to recruit right across all the spheres of diversity. It is also about getting the balance right between long tenure members of staff and new people with different experiences.

“Leaders need to have to have relationships with groups of people who are much younger,” he says. “The voice of the youth is very different from what it was 25 years ago.”

If you are a recruiting for a global key position, the cultural fit and values must chime with the vision of the organisation.

“If you were to hire someone who is very capable, can make a lot of money but doesn’t have the right fit with the firm then that can become very toxic. Other staff members might feel resentful and undervalued and that can be disruptive to the coherence of the team.”

Diversity of thought in leadership teams leads to better results and creativity and ultimately is beneficial to the bottom line in an organisation, he says.

“It’s been proven that diverse leadership teams are more productive, more capable, and more creative. If I have teams work for me then I will try to pick as diverse a group as possible. I just like the interaction and the different thinking.

“I try to value everybody’s contribution and get everybody to speak up. That way you get more ideas on the table, and it gives a leader more options. Instead of a binary decision, a leader might garner six or seven good options through this process.”

WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE IN ORGANISATIONS?

People still want to be paid well and fairly for their efforts at work, but they also look to organisations to provide more. A key priority is career path development, the ability to build skills, an attractive workplace community and a digitally advanced culture.

Also, near the top of people’s requirements is for an organisation to be clear about its Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) goals, he says.

“When I first started my working life, the contract with employees was much simpler: come in, work long hours, and fulfil your role. It is now very much more demanding to meet the needs of talent because people have options, and the best people can and do leave. There is a skills shortage and aside from pay, it is about trying to create an environment of psychological safety. You are looking to provide care for your employee in terms of their wellbeing, career, finances, and health.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Angus advocates for continuous performance management, focusing on past performance, future goals, and individual development plans, using coaching skills to provide feedback effectively.

“It is about continuously monitoring and providing feedback, so that when you do have a more formal meeting you can divide your time between past performance, personal development, and future plans.

“The “old school” approach was to have a performance management meeting annually and spend 90% of it on past performance, neglecting development and career progression.”

Instead, he argues for real-time feedback which helps employees understand what is required of them and how they can improve.

“You have got to give some feedback and you have got to do it pretty quickly,” he says. “It is

important to establish a culture where you can give feedback regularly and it is not taken badly. Feedback is the breakfast of champions, but it takes a while to build up the relationship and the trust needed to give and receive that feedback.

“Sometimes you recruit talented junior people who have come out of good universities and have never received negative feedback or failed an essay. It can be hard for them to be told that they didn’t perform well on a task.”

To do this as a leader, he advocates learning coaching skills and developing your ability to listen, so that you can create personal relationships of trust with your team.

He identifies two key skills which can make a real and tangible difference to your leadership:

FOCUS: As a leader, when you are talking to someone ensure that your focus is entirely on them.

“The ability to switch off from other problems and distractions and turn on active listening is a valuable skill. This way, the team member really feels heard, and as a leader you can get to the heart of what the problem is and come up with an appropriate and meaningful solution.

“That is incredible in a leadership situation because I have had a lot of experiences with leaders where I’ve tried to come to them with something that’s urgent and they’re too busy, and you get fobbed off. To be able to give somebody that focussed attention is quite rare and remarkable,” he says.

It is about getting your team to work with you to find an appropriate solution. In other words, the role of a leader is to listen and help people think, rather than give orders without consultation.

DECISIVENESS: If you have something on your “to do” list, make sure you action it if it is important or urgent.

“Don’t delay making a decision because it is difficult or the consequences are uncomfortable,” he says. “The best leaders recognise the importance of making decisions and getting things done.”

IN SUMMARY: TIPS FOR LEADERS

- Build inclusive teams
- Have ongoing conversations on performance and development
- Focus on the individual with active listening skills and help them think through solutions
- Be decisive once you have all the inputs and face up and action the difficult decisions that come with a leadership role

“IT’S BEEN PROVEN THAT DIVERSE LEADERSHIP TEAMS ARE MORE PRODUCTIVE, MORE CAPABLE, AND MORE CREATIVE.”

ABOUT ANGUS MACGREGOR

Angus is Head of Global HR at MUFG Bank, International Head of HR MUFG Securities and was Interim CHRO in APAC, based in Tokyo, Japan. His previous roles at MUFG were Deputy General Manager Human Resources GHR and International Head of HR for Securities business. He worked on accelerating the global integration of the MUFG businesses with HR, business, and support function leaders.

He was Group HR Director at Eversheds Sutherland in London and Global Head of Legal HR at Deutsche Bank. He held senior roles at Barclays Bank, including group head of HR legal, HR director for the group centre and HR director for Barclays Global Commercial Bank. As chief of staff to Barclays Group HR director, with group responsibility for employee relations and health and safety, he had a leading role in several major group-wide projects. He is also a qualified lawyer.

PAY & REWARDS

A high-performance approach

Employers are responding to the cost-of-living crisis, pay inequalities, low economic growth and severe skills shortages with new solutions for talent, reward and performance management. Independent pay and rewards expert **Dr Duncan Brown** explains how – and why it is important. **Ruth Holmes** reports.



Dr Duncan Brown is a leading commentator on reward issues and one of the UK's top ten most influential HR thinkers. Co-author of the best-selling 'A Handbook of Reward Management,' he is currently a visiting professor at the University of Greenwich and

principal associate at IES.

In his three decades as a pay expert, consultant and academic, Dr Brown has seen first-hand the impact of technology, demographic change, economic shocks and the shift in value creation from manufacturing to services, technology, knowledge and skills.

He has advised employers, HR, government and teaches students on how to calibrate pay and rewards for high employer performance and employee engagement. This includes addressing the increasing divide between the wealthiest and poorest – and therefore wellbeing and social cohesion – the ongoing impact of developments since the 2008 financial crisis on real wages, and the current hot topics of pay equity and transparency.

"I think Covid had a massive impact," says Dr Brown on the question of why now is the time to talk about fit-for-purpose approaches to performance management and reward. "The pandemic made employers rediscover that looking after people and giving them security is pretty important. It might be at the bottom of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, but everything depends on it. If your employees are worried about putting food on the table after sustained cuts to real incomes, then they can't perform. This is major. Doing a standard pay and benefits review, or looking at what our competitors do, is not going to address it."

"For me, we are at a key decision point," says Dr Brown. "I'm really pleased and proud that two-thirds of employers did something different through Covid and in the cost-of-living crisis. Having argued inflation is nothing to do with us, we only worry about maximising profits and returns to our shareholders and minimising wage costs; and that financial wellbeing is for banks and employees to deal with, HR leaders and boards.

"The question now is are we going to go back to the 2010s approach of maximum employee flexibility and minimum cost, or are we going to say we are going to invest in people and achieve higher returns and value added from growing a higher skilled, better rewarded and more engaged workforce?"

"The employment market is staying very tight and that is forcing these investments. If you can't recruit people however much you are paying, then you have no alternative but to 'grow your own'. These are the

real choices employers are facing: recruit or develop in-house, cut employee costs or invest for future higher value-added?

"Are you going to take the high road to high performance, or try the cost-focused short-cut that gave us throughout the 2010s stagnant productivity, growing in-work poverty and widening inequality and some of the lowest levels of employee engagement in Europe?"

THE HIGH ROAD TO ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

The role of HR and reward expertise remains vital in answering the central question he will be discussing with peers at the upcoming Turbocharging Performance masterclass at Henley Business School in April. This is the question of "how do we leverage high performance in an economy that is stuck in a low-productivity, high-inflation bubble and now recession?"

"We are HR and we decide this stuff, even if it is the results of lots of micro decisions," he says. "We are the ones who decide what to pay and what contracts we offer. We are the ones who decide on risks around what terms and conditions. We implement those zero-hours contracts and non-disclosure agreements and ironically named and ineffective supposedly performance-related pay systems.

"What I want to do is challenge people with some of the assumptions around thinking that lowering pay costs under the guise of flexibility is a good thing. Do you publish pay ranges with job ads; are you banning salary history discussions during recruitment; are you using zero-hours contracts?"

"The answers to these questions help to really understand why companies are doing what they do, and whether that's in the long-term interest of their company's performance. I want to challenge people and present what I believe the high-performance model really is; it's not high executive supposedly-performance-related pay and a minimum wage workforce."

"The employment market is staying very tight and that is forcing these investments. If you can't recruit people however much you are paying, then you have no alternative but to 'grow your own'."



“It’s a really interesting time right now for reward and performance management for high performance, especially as voluntary attrition remains high. Most employees can secure higher pay increases by moving employers rather than staying and performing for their existing one.”

LEVERAGING REWARDS IN HIGH-PERFORMANCE CULTURES

Managing HR budgets, forecasting and workforce planning are fundamentally important issues in a world where people and skills are the source of competitive advantage. New technologies – and how we introduce and embed them – offer scope for more informed decision-making in the quest for high performance and how we can best balance people and performance.

These are all highly relevant issues for public and private sector employers, particularly those grappling with the question of how to create a fair and productive workplace where a range of contracts have been introduced for flexibility as well as cost containment. Skills shortages are endemic and while government has a key role here, employers recognise that they are not investing enough in upskilling and reskilling their workforce for the future.

“The employment model that a lot of employers have been using since 2010 has really damaged the performance of the economy and a lot of companies,” says Dr Brown. “Now is an interesting time to look at this because Covid showed that things like cutting your sick pay policy is a pretty dumb idea, for example. But lots of companies did it in the 2010s. Or worse, having your executives sitting at home during Covid nice and safe with private medical policies while your frontline key workers are at risk of dying from Covid but have no medical benefits or cover.”

Fairness has always been a central consideration in the pay and rewards arena, albeit one tempered by prevailing attitudes to competition for talent. Market-focused pay and incentivisation has contributed to record pay gaps

between top executives and the wider workforce, as well as unconscious bias playing into gender, race and disability pay gaps and therefore lifetime earnings and life chances. How does Dr Brown see the link between talent and reward today and in future?

“A lot of HR leaders are focusing more on internal talent pipelines because they have no choice,” he says. “Employers can pay what they like, but if there aren’t workers out there, then you have to grow and train them yourself. Performance management not surprisingly is now pivoting back towards what it was when I started in HR, which was about growing your people, developing their strengths rather than punishing their failings in pay. Performance appraisals used to be held six months away from your pay review precisely to avoid a focus on pay and focus more on growing people.”

A JOINED-UP APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

A core aspect of the high-performance approach is recognising the importance of talent retention. This includes creating the conditions for people at all life stages to engage and perform through good management, continuous feedback and supportive workplace cultures.

It is an approach in this cost-conscious era that makes the most sense, says Dr Brown. “Around 20% of women leave employment within five years of having a child. Yet most sectors and employers have skills shortages, even though there are still almost a million vacancies while the economy is flatlining.”

The obvious danger of such a narrow – and short-term – focus on the salary budgets is that it overlooks and underestimates the actual cost of employee turnover, both in financial terms and long-term performance and productivity. “We just don’t join this up at the moment,” says Dr Brown. This includes making sure pay, benefits and total rewards are relevant, offer value for employees as well as employers, and are communicated effectively.

“What HR does is survey and look at what other employers are doing. It’s potentially expensive to get an outside provider in, so companies often wait for government or their competitors to act so then they have no choice but to do the same. Yet the actual cost of losing 20% of people isn’t counted and when it is, it is massively underestimated.” But attitudes have shifted since the pandemic, with the major progress on menopause policies and benefits for example showing that many employers see the importance of better supporting their female workforce.

Looking to the future, Dr Brown sees the pendulum swinging back to more skills-based pay as organisations grow their own talent, especially around the introduction of AI. There is also much more awareness around pay equity – a priority for HR directors – and transparency.

“It’s a really interesting time right now for reward and performance management for high performance, especially as voluntary attrition remains high,” says Dr Brown. “Most employees can secure higher pay increases by moving employers rather than staying and performing for their existing one.” Creating the conditions for people to stay, flourish and perform is therefore a cost-effective and long-term investment. It pays off economically, socially and personally. ●



06/03/2024. The Prime Minister Rishi Sunak hosts cabinet before the Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt unveils the Budget to parliament. Picture by Simon Walker / No 10 Downing Street

UK ‘GROWTH BUDGET’ LEAVES BUSINESSES UNIMPRESSED

The UK’s last spring Budget before a general election was unveiled in early March by Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt, who described it as “a plan to grow the economy; for better public services; and to make work pay”.

Most business leaders, however, remained unimpressed. One leading tech entrepreneur warned that the government seemed to be ignoring the fact the industry needed to continue to attract talent from overseas because of continuing skills shortages in the UK.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) criticised the Budget for doing “very little” to tackle skills shortages at a time when there are still almost a million vacancies in the jobs market.

For his part, Mr Hunt pointed out that UK growth had been higher than any other large European economy in recent years. Latest projections from the Office

for Budget Responsibility (OBR), published in conjunction with the Budget, forecast 0.8% growth this year and 1.9% in 2025. The OBR also predicted that inflation would fall below the government’s 2% target in the coming months.

The Chancellor’s main Budget announcement centred on a 2% reduction in National Insurance payments taken from employees’ wages. He also undertook to abolish tax breaks enjoyed by non-domiciled residents (so-called ‘non-doms’ who are not required to pay UK tax on overseas earnings) and to extend the windfall tax on energy companies’ profits from March 2028 to 2029. Business and first-class airline passengers will also face paying higher taxes on their tickets.

Among other announcements

were plans for the government to spend £160 million on buying a site in North Wales for the new Wylfa nuclear plant; and a £360 million investment in manufacturing R&D. “We are sticking with our plan by backing the industries of the future with millions of pounds of investment to make the UK a world leader in manufacturing, securing the highly skilled jobs of the future and delivering the long-term change our country needs to deliver a brighter future for Britain,” said Mr Hunt.

But Ben Willmott, head of public policy at the CIPD, said the government’s focus on boosting R&D and growth in the tech and green energy sectors was too narrow. “This Budget sorely lacked a broad economic strategy to improve living



“There is a real and urgent need for a workforce plan for the UK to raise employer investment in skills and support workers’ wellbeing and participation in the labour market.”

BEN WILLMOTT, HEAD OF PUBLIC POLICY, CIPD

standards and boost productivity across the economy including in sectors like retail, hospitality, transport, logistics and social care, which employ millions of people,” he said. “There is a real and urgent need for a workforce plan for the UK to raise employer investment in skills and support workers’ wellbeing and participation in the labour market.

“There was also very little to address skills and tackle the hard-to-fill vacancies facing many employers. The government is right to prioritise improving public sector productivity. However, there needs to be a complementary focus on improving people management and workforce skills if new technology is to be adopted effectively to improve the delivery of public services.”

DELIVERING MEANINGFUL GROWTH

Roger Barker, policy director at the Institute of Directors (IoD), said that while the Budget had largely delivered “a stable and credible policy framework for business”, there was little in it that could be regarded as a game-changer for firms.

“It fell short of delivering a comprehensive plan for sustainable growth and investment,” he maintained. “The net fiscal giveaway of £13.9 billion, or 0.5 per cent of GDP, in 2024/25 may, at the margin, help lift the economy out of its mild recession before an election later this year. However, business still faces the prospect of an economy that is unlikely to experience meaningful growth for some time – despite the slightly more optimistic growth forecasts from the OBR.”

But Mr Barker did believe that the Chancellor’s pledge to extend the full ‘expensing’ tax benefits to include the leasing of assets would be helpful, particularly to SMEs. He added: “The Chancellor rightly acknowledged that skills and labour shortages are a major problem for many UK enterprises. Although cuts to national insurance and boosts to child benefit provision may attract some people back into the workforce, the Budget offered little to address the economy’s deep-seated skills gaps. This was a major omission and business will be looking to a future government to urgently address this issue.”

Shevaun Haviland, director-general of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said the Budget was always set to deliver less for business than last year’s Autumn Statement, although she said the changes to National Insurance “will provide some momentum”. But she added: “Beyond this, there were no major announcements to help shift the dial on conditions for business. The clock is now ticking to the general election – and this Budget could be the last fiscal event before voters go to the polls.”

Rain Newton-Smith, chief executive of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), believed the cut in employees’ National Insurance contributions and making childcare benefits available to householders earning £60,000 a year (up from

£50,000) would “incentivise work at a time when access to labour represents a major obstacle to business growth”.

NEW INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Mr Hunt also reiterated last week’s announcement that defined contribution pension schemes will be required to publicly disclose how much they have invested in UK companies. Chris Hayward, policy chairman of the City of London Corporation, described the Budget and its new savings vehicles as a “much-needed shot in the arm” for capital markets in the UK.

“These measures will drive greater performance and secure better returns for hard-working British savers,” he said. “The pension reforms unveiled by the Chancellor are integral to unlocking the full potential of investment in high-growth British businesses seeking to start and scale in the UK and internationally. Additionally, increased retail investment through the newly announced British ISA will further bolster participation in UK markets.”

During his speech to the House of Commons, Mr Hunt also revealed that AstraZeneca planned to invest £650 million in the UK to expand their footprint on the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and fund the building of a vaccine manufacturing hub in Liverpool. Russ Shaw, founder of Global Tech Advocates, commented that while it was “reassuring” to hear the Chancellor emphasise his desire to help UK tech entrepreneurs, Mr Hunt seemed oblivious of the importance of overseas workers to the sector.

“While the Chancellor was right to identify technology investment as a key way to enhance the productivity of Britain’s public services, his desire for the UK to become the world’s next Silicon Valley seems incompatible with his vision of a ‘high skill economy not dependent on migration’,” Mr Shaw said. “So much of Silicon Valley’s early success was built on opening the door to the brightest and best the global talent market has to offer. Overseas workers have a vital role to play right now in plugging the nationwide skills gaps currently hampering the sector’s growth.” •

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