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With 70 years’ experience of leadership, organisational development, human resources and coaching, we provide executive education and research to many of the world’s leading companies and organisations.

We offer tailored development programmes, qualifications accredited by the University of Sussex, management consultancy, coaching and training courses. Our research services provide a unique combination of research, consultancy and development expertise for organisations who are investigating ways of improving their effectiveness and intelligence.

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Roffey Park funds its own research programme with the aim of meeting one of its charitable objectives: namely to conduct and publish research in support of the health and welfare of people at work. Our research improves the world of work and organisational performance by sharing knowledge of good practice in people management, leadership and organisational development.

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THE MANAGEMENT AGENDA 2017

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of Roffey Park’s 2017 Management Agenda Survey. The survey has been running for twenty years and aims to highlight the views of managers on aspects of organisational life. It is a key barometer of working life and is regularly featured by both the national media and trade press, as well as professional management journals.

This year’s survey focuses on how ready managers think their organisations are for some of the anticipated changes in the world of work. For example, the future workforce is anticipated to be more female, older, multi-cultural and in essence more diverse than it is today. How prepared are organisations for this change? This report attempts to answer this question amongst others. In addition to looking at preparedness for future challenges, we have compared results in this year’s survey with those from twenty years ago, in Roffey Park’s inaugural Management Agenda. The comparisons paint an interesting picture of what has changed, and what indeed, has stayed the same.

Nearly 700 UK managers from both inside and outside HR and of varying levels of seniority responded to this year’s survey. The survey canvasses the views of managers drawn from a broad range of industrial sectors and from organisations both large and small. Details on the profile of respondents, and the organisations they work for, can be found in Appendix 1. Information on how the research was conducted can be found in Appendix 2.

The report is structured as follows:

Executive Summary
Chapter 1 – Organisational Context
Chapter 2 – Organisational change and resilience
Chapter 3 – Spotlight – what is it like to be a manager in 2017?
Chapter 4 – Workplace stress and mental health
Chapter 5 – Impact of digital and the workforce
Chapter 6 – Diversity
Chapter 7 – HR
Final Thoughts

Rather than present an exhaustive account of the data collected in this year’s survey, we have chosen to focus on aspects of the data that appear most interesting and which, we hope, in their combination provide an engaging and informative view of the challenges and perspectives of today’s managers.
Introducing the authors

Dan Lucy, MSc, BSc, BPsS, MABP

Dan is a psychologist with expertise in organisational consulting and research. Dan has been conducting research on leadership and organisational development for over 10 years. He is experienced in a wide range of qualitative research methods including critical incident interviews, repertory grid, appreciative inquiry, and focus groups.

Julia Wellbelove, BSc, MSc. C.Psychol

Julia is a Chartered Psychologist and Senior Researcher at Roffey Park. She has 20 years of experience of designing and delivering bespoke assessment & development solutions, coaching and competency development. After completing her MSc in Occupational Psychology in 1998 Julia worked as a consultant before joining the BBC. She has a strong track record of providing research-led solutions to clients and is an experienced interviewer and focus group facilitator.

Meysam Poorkavoos BSc, MSc, PhD

Meysam is an experienced researcher with strong knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research methods. His main areas of interest are around innovation, resilience, interpersonal trust and compassionate leadership. Some of Meysam's recent work with clients include design and delivery of 360 degree feedback and employee attitude surveys. Before joining the research team at Roffey Park, Meysam worked as a university lecturer delivering a variety of management courses.

Carol Hatcher

Carol is an experienced qualitative researcher, and has worked across a breadth of organisations including those in the NHS, further education, financial and legal sectors. Most recently she has co-authored Roffey Park's work into what builds and sustains trusting relationships at work. She has contributed to The Management Agenda research for the last 10 years and has a particular interest in how mobile technology is impacting our working lives.
Executive Summary

In this year’s Management Agenda, we have looked at how ready managers feel their organisation is to respond to some of the anticipated challenges in the world of work. The future workforce is anticipated to be more female, older, multi-cultural and in essence more diverse than it is today. In the face of these changing demographics and the challenges they bring, we have sought to understand the gap between where organisations are and where they need to be. With ever-increasing technological advances, ways of working are also changing, but are they changing fast enough? And what, if any, are the barriers to change? We have also taken the opportunity in this year’s Agenda to glance back at the results of Roffey Park’s inaugural survey from twenty years ago, and ask ourselves what has changed and what, indeed, has stayed the same. From this, we have identified ten key paradoxes.

Brexit: could senior leaders do more to alleviate underlying anxiety?

Nearly one-third of managers believe that Brexit will have a negative impact on their organisation’s prospects for growth. In conversations about Brexit with managers, we heard how the predominant message from senior leaders was ‘crack on’ and ‘business as usual’. Whilst this may represent a pragmatic response given the uncertainty about what Brexit will actually look like and what it will mean, a significant minority of managers feel that not enough has been done by senior leaders to communicate about Brexit. Even if senior leaders do not have all the answers, there seems to be a desire for a space to discuss it, and this may help alleviate any underlying anxieties.

The growth of change capability is being outstripped by the rate of change

The percentage of managers saying they feel supported to cope with change has declined from twenty years ago. This is in spite of significant investment in leadership development and an ongoing, prominent discourse about how best to manage change well. What explains this apparent contradiction? In our view, leadership capability, including the ability to manage change, has grown substantially over the last twenty years. What, perhaps, has shifted, is the rate of change experienced by managers. In other words, the contradiction may best be explained by saying that the rate of change has outstripped managers’ growing capability to manage it.

Whilst the VUCA world requires leaders to feel empowered and to be constantly innovating, they appear to be stuck in firefighting mode

There is a consensus that for organisations to be successful now and into the future they must develop the capacity to be agile, to anticipate changing customer needs, and respond flexibly to social, economic, technological and environmental change. This requires greater empowerment and for leadership to be seen as a process not a position, and for leadership to be distributed throughout organisations in support of constant innovation and change. Professor John Morris articulated a model that argued managers are involved in three basic activities – keeping things going, putting things right and doing new things. Our data suggests that managers themselves think they are spending far too much time firefighting, and not enough time doing new things. This represents a key challenge for organisations’ agility and ability to respond effectively to the ever-changing context in which they operate.

There is a need to move beyond acceptance of diversity to harnessing its full potential

It appears that managers are more likely to think that their organisation is effective at attracting diverse talent into their organisation than they are convinced by the capability of managers to make the most of that diversity. Given the wide array of benefits that diversity can offer if fully harnessed, there is a real need to equip managers to be more capable of handling and harnessing difference.

More diverse senior leadership teams are needed to help make this a reality

Our data identifies a second diversity paradox: whilst there is a widespread view that organisations are accepting of diversity, only a minority believe that there is sufficient diversity within senior management teams. Greater diversity at senior leadership team level is essential for a whole host of reasons, from improving decision-making to developing a better understanding of customer needs and helping to ensure a diverse pipeline of talent. Harnessing the full potential of diversity cannot be achieved if there is little change at the top.

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Making the most of technology depends on people

With the ever-accelerating rate of developments in communications technology, people are increasingly able and wanting to work wherever and whenever they want. Whilst nearly one in two managers think their organisation has the infrastructure to support such ways of working, the majority do not believe their organisation’s managers have the capabilities to make it work. In other words, the limiting factor in adopting new ways of working appears not to be technology, but people, and in particular the capability of managers to engage employees however they choose to work.

UK productivity stagnates, but we all seem to be working harder

Twenty years ago, economists and commentators predicted that due to ever-evolving technology, productivity would increase and we would all be working shorter hours. Yet, fast forward twenty years, and it appears that whilst UK productivity stagnates, we all seem to be working harder. Across a range of measures (e.g. working through the lunch hour, taking work home, working 50+ hours per week, working at weekends), we appear to be doing more than we did twenty years ago. Evidence suggests that working shorter hours is more productive. So, it seems we are working harder not smarter.

More to do on mental health in the workplace

The recent focus on this issue by, amongst others, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, is welcome. Our evidence would suggest that whilst the majority say they are comfortable discussing mental health issues with their colleagues, they are less convinced with how open and accepting their organisation’s culture is of mental health issues. This is incredibly important when we consider the links between stress and mental health, and our evidence that people seem to be working ever harder and cite workload as their main source of workplace stress.

Despite the growth of talent management as a specialisation, getting it right continues to be a challenge for many

Talent management has been around since the 1990s. Despite its growth as a specialisation within the HR function, and the proliferation of models and frameworks, two-fifths of HR managers still regard their approach to talent management as weak. A further one in two regard their approach as only ‘adequate’. What explains this apparent contradiction? It could be that with increasing specialisation, talent management has become a world of its own, divorced a little too much from the world of leaders in the business. It could also reflect a need for something new. Whatever the reasons, there is a real need for HR to consult leaders in the business about what talent means and looks like in their neck of the woods rather than rely too much on off-the-shelf models that whilst relevant to all may be profoundly relevant to no-one.

Despite the original intention of performance management to engage and motivate, it seems that for many HR managers it is not working

There has been much talk recently about the reinvention of performance management with notable names dropping annual performance reviews in favour of more frequent conversations. Whilst our data suggests that only a minority are adopting this approach, it seems that there is a need to reinvent performance management. Only two-fifths of HR managers think their approach to performance management helps engage employees or drive performance. It is not apparent from our data why this is, but our view would be that there has been too much focus on process and procedure at the expense of developing the capability of managers to hold effective and engaging conversations with their staff. A good conversation can overcome a bad process; a great process cannot overcome a bad conversation.

It seems, then, that whilst our survey has captured many organisations that feel they are adapting well to meet the anticipated changes in the nature of work (and the workforce), there are many that feel there is much to do. There are also appear relatively recent developments, such as the Gig Economy, where a much smaller number feel they are well prepared. And there is, of course, Brexit, and who knows what that will bring. One thing is for certain is that change will continue apace, and how organisations respond, particularly in terms of their people, will continue to be not only a fascinating question, but one which will also define who prospers and who falls by the wayside.
Managers may be paying insufficient attention to Brexit, and in particular the anxiety felt by staff

Given the shock of the referendum result and the ensuing uncertainty around what the precise terms of any deal will look like, it is perhaps surprising that the majority of managers do not anticipate a positive or negative impact of Brexit. 54 per cent of managers surveyed were neutral about the impact of Brexit on their organisation in terms of its growth prospects. More than two-thirds were neutral about its impact on productivity (69%), and employee engagement (67%). This may reflect a healthy (or unhealthy depending on how you look at it) degree of managerial confidence in the resilience of their respective organisations. Indeed, nearly two-thirds (60%) agree that their organisation is resilient in adapting to and learning from new challenges in its environment.

Of those managers expressing a view one way or the other about Brexit, on balance views are negative. Roughly one-third (30%) of managers anticipate a negative impact on their organisation’s prospects for growth; one-fifth (17%) anticipate a negative impact on productivity and one-fifth (21%) a negative impact on employee engagement. In comparison, roughly one in ten anticipate a positive impact in each of these three areas (14%, 11% and 10% for growth prospects, productivity and employee engagement respectively). In our conversations with managers the overriding message from senior leaders about Brexit is “business as usual.” There is a question here about whether or not senior leaders are like the proverbial swan, keen to project an appearance of calm whilst underneath the water there is frantic activity and perhaps anxiety. 32 per cent of managers feel that senior management in their organisation has not done enough to communicate about Brexit.
Adopting new technology is the most common business opportunity identified by managers

Making the most of new technology is perceived by two-thirds (62%) of managers as the key opportunity in the current business environment. There is, however, a world of difference, between knowing that an opportunity exists and making the most of it. Going digital means greater collaboration, shifts in leadership and culture as well as simply the adoption of new technology. Leadership focused on empowerment, experimentation, and collaboration is what is required to really ‘act digital’ rather than just ‘do digital’. Networked teams and cultures of openness and transparency as opposed to rigid hierarchies and restricted information flows are what is needed to really succeed in the digital era.

One-third of managers see the loss of key staff as a threat to the business

Just over one-third of managers see the loss of key staff as a current threat in their business environment. The argument could be made that this is surprisingly low given the rhetoric around the War for Talent. It also conflicts with other findings from this year’s Agenda. For example, 65 per cent of HR managers identify the retention of key employees as a ‘live’ people challenge, more than two-fifths (41%) regard their approach to talent management as ‘weak’, and more than one in two HR managers (52%) rate their succession planning processes in a similar way. Fears over loss of key staff combined with less positive views about talent management appear more prevalent in the public compared with the private sector, suggesting the gap between what is needed and what is available is greatest in this part of the economy.

17% of managers think Brexit will have a negative impact on productivity

21% of managers believe that Brexit will have a negative (or very negative) impact on employee engagement
More flexibility is needed to respond effectively to the changing business context

Roughly one-third (34%) of managers regard their organisation’s lack of flexibility as a threat to its continued survival and success. Organisational flexibility encompasses multiple issues of design, structure, culture, but ultimately conveys the image of a more responsive and networked organisation. Notions of flexibility are tied up with notions of resilience, and it seems that a significant minority may not see their organisation as resilient largely because it lacks the ability to respond flexibly and organise in ways to make this a reality. Lack of flexibility could also refer to an organisation’s ability to scale up and down as demand dictates, possibly drawing on workers in the Gig economy. The Gig economy whilst still relatively small in extent offers the prospect of greater flexibility, yet only one in ten managers (13%) report that their organisation is prepared for the challenges associated with it, such as balancing flexibility with reputational concerns.

A gig economy is one in which a significant proportion of organisational work is performed by casual, independent workers working on short-term engagements.

Employment growth expectations remain positive in the private sector

Each year, we calculate the Employment Growth Index (EGI). This is the proportion of HR managers who expect an increase in the size of their workforce minus those who anticipate a decrease. The overall EGI has dropped from +15 last year to +7 this year. Whilst employment expectations in the private sector remain positive, they are less positive than last year, particularly so in the Production and Manufacturing sector. This no doubt reflects some of the uncertainties surrounding Brexit and its implications. In comparison, the public sector workforce continues to decline but at a slower pace than in previous years.

Employment Growth Index

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Commentary on Organisational Context

Michael Jenkins
Chief Executive, Roffey Park

BREXIT

Whether it was shock or elation that people felt on the morning of 24 June 2016, there was a shared feeling that nothing was going to be quite the same again. It is this feeling more than any other that gives the label to the period we are currently living though – and that is “uncertainty”.

The American politician Donald Rumsfeld famously purloined the phrase “known knowns and known unknowns” from the work of two American psychologists, Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham who were responsible for creating (in 1955) a tool (which we sometimes use in our programmes at Roffey Park) known as Johari Window. This tool focuses on the idea of “unknown unknowns” and is used to help individuals gain insights into parts of their personality which (to them) are hidden. The phrase “unknown unknowns” is often used in project management to describe phenomena that are effectively risks that come from unforeseen quarters: they differ from risks that are broadly known (“known unknowns”).

Brexit today is a known unknown; the UK is leaving the European Union but under what circumstances exactly, no one really knows right now. And in the absence of “facts” about Brexit, a reasonable reaction might be to “keep calm and carry on”. The Management Agenda data on attitudes to Brexit underscore this vagueness and the anxiety arising from it. Perhaps the dearth of reliable information for senior leaders to share means they have little to say and therefore end up saying little or nothing (which only serves to feed anxiety). And as the implications of Brexit become clearer, it is likely that for many people, the unease will become palpable, while for others, the tumultuous changes ahead will be energising and exciting. A “known known” therefore is that leading organisations through the years to come – is going to be full of surprises (and not all of them pleasant).
Will the impact of Brexit be positive or negative on ...?

- **Positive**: 14%
- **Negative**: 30%
- **Neither positive nor negative**: 56%

**Your Organisation's Prospects for Growth**

- **Positive**: 13%
- **Negative**: 17%
- **Neither positive nor negative**: 69%

**Productivity in Your Organisation**

- **Positive**: 11%
- **Negative**: 21%
- **Neither positive nor negative**: 67%

**Employee Engagement**

- **Positive**: 11%
- **Negative**: 21%
- **Neither positive nor negative**: 67%

Senior leadership in my organisation have done enough to communicate with employees about the potential impact of Brexit

- **Agree**: 41%
- **Disagree**: 32%
- **Neither agree nor disagree**: 27%

**Top 3 Threats**

- **Competitor strength (56%)**
- **Government influence/regulations (46%)**
- **Changing customer needs (41%)**

**Top 3 Opportunities**

- **New technology (53%)**
- **Growth of business (53%)**
- **Emerging markets and services (51%)**
Organisational Change and Resilience

PARADOX

Despite significant investment in leadership development and building the capacity to manage change, the proportion of managers feeling supported by their organisations in coping with change has declined from twenty years ago.

The challenges of managing organisational change effectively are well-known and managers responding to the Management Agenda through the years tell us it is one of their main challenges. So, how well do managers, and employees more broadly, feel supported by their organisation? And what more can organisations do to help support employees in change? These were two questions we were interested in exploring further. We also wanted to get a sense of how resilient organisations were in the eyes of their employees, and what factors were seen as hampering or supporting enhanced levels of adaptability to change.

Roughly one in two (53%) of respondents to our survey felt well supported by their organisation in adapting to change. Just over one-quarter (28%) felt unsupported. Managers in the public sector report a different experience with one-third (34%) saying they do not feel supported through change. Comparing these results with those from the Management Agenda in 1998 (twenty years ago), it seems that things have become slightly worse. Back then, 59 per cent of respondents felt that they were supported by their organisation through change. That leaves, in both cases, more than two-fifths not feeling adequately supported. It seems that doing change well continues to be a real challenge. There is a declining trend in feelings of support with decreasing seniority. In other words, more senior managers feel better supported than more junior ones. To illustrate, 65 per cent of Board Directors report feeling supported in coping with change compared with 47 per cent of junior managers.

What is perhaps most frustrating is that only one in two (52%) of those in roles dedicated to people issues (HR, OD) felt supported through change. If anyone should feel equipped and in a role where they can positively influence the level of support, both through specific activities and effective modelling, then it is those in HR and OD roles.
Where employees do feel supported, they commonly reference open communication and the effective involvement of staff during change. Open communication is the most commonly reported way in which respondents felt supported in both this year’s Management Agenda and that of twenty years ago. Our own research has highlighted 8 C’s of effective communication (see graphic below) that can support managers in maintaining trust during turbulent periods of change.

The second most common form of support reported this year was involvement of staff, and the third the provision of development opportunities. This last form of support recognises the value of equipping both managers and wider employees with the ability to manage their own reactions to change.

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**8 C’s of trustworthy communication in change**

- **CLEAR**
  - Across the organisation senior leaders need to provide a CLEAR rationale for change

- **CONSULTED**
  - Staff need to be CONSULTED with to ensure they feel fully involved and listened to

- **CONTINUES**
  - Change agents need to ensure the frequency of communications CONTINUES over time

- **CONSISTENT AND CONGRUENT**
  - Messages need to be CONSISTENT and CONGRUENT across the business

- **CONTENT**
  - Leaders need to ensure that the CONTENT of messages contain real substance about how the change will affect people

- **CONVERSATIONS**
  - Encouraging staff to take part in CONVERSATIONS about the change which are open and two-way

- **CONFIDENCE**
  - Ensuring messages are delivered by senior, trusted individuals so staff have CONFIDENCE in the source

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Open communication is the most common way in which employees feel helped in coping with change.
We also asked respondents to identify in their own words the one thing that they would most value in helping them cope with change. What emerged from respondents’ own words was the felt need for greater clarity, consistency and timeliness in communication about change. More broadly, there was a real desire to be involved early on in a change process and to have a sense of transparency and openness in the way change is handled.

What one thing would you most value from your organisation to help you cope with change?

“More transparency about why decisions are made and more empathy around how change can affect people”
Training and development manager, aerospace sector

“More honest communication”
HR director, food and beverage sector

“A more visible leadership encouraging more conversation”
Head of internal communication, private health services

“More insight on how to deal with it (change) personally and with teams”
Communication manager, food and beverage sector

“The same thing as always, communication and an open, safe environment for questioning and clarity”
L&D advisor, consultancy
Are organisations moving towards more open and empowered ways of working?

It has become commonplace to refer to the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) times we live in and the subsequent need for organisations to be better at anticipating and responding to changes in the social, political, economic and environmental context. What this means in practice is more flexible and networked organisations, more empowered ways of working where organisations are driven not by the command and control of the few, but by a clear sense of purpose and values and leadership of the many. We asked our respondents to say to what extent their organisation was moving, and needed to move, in this direction. The responses identified a largely shared view of where organisations are, where they need to move to, and the gap between the two. Overall, more than four-fifths (82%) of respondents to our survey felt their organisation needed to adopt ways of working that empowered staff, and enabled leadership and decision-making to be dispersed throughout the organisation driven by a clear sense of purpose and values. 58 per cent of respondents felt their organisation was moving in this direction. This leaves a clear gap for more than one-fifth of survey respondents. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the view from below is much less rosy than that from the top. Junior managers are more likely to say that their organisation should move towards empowering staff (92% of junior managers compared with 81% of senior managers), and much less likely than senior managers to report that that change is actually happening (54% compared with 60%).

Organisational resilience is defined as the ‘ability of organisations to absorb the stress that arises from challenges and not only recover functioning to a ‘normal’ level, but also learn and grow from the adversity and emerge stronger than before’. Roughly two-thirds (60%) of our respondents regarded their organisation as resilient in adapting to and learning from new challenges in its environment. This seems like a fairly positive result. Underpinning this view appeared to be a variety of factors from an outward-looking, future focus, to a clear purpose and empowering leadership. In contrast, one-fifth (20%) of respondents did not feel their organisation was resilient citing top-down, bureaucratic decision-making, risk-averse and perfectionist tendencies, and an inward-looking, siloed mentality. Employees from smaller organisations tended to have a more positive view of their organisation’s resilience (73% of respondents from SMEs saying their organisation was resilient compared to 59% of respondents from larger organisations), perhaps as a result of greater flexibility and closer relationships within smaller firms.

Commentary on Organisational Change and Resilience

Old patterns continue to play out regarding change in organisations, but for those wishing to retain their staff and succeed in these turbulent times, it might serve to buck the trend. This research suggests that about half of staff feel supported by their organisation in change and this story worsens if you are more junior. Furthermore, HR and OD staff, who might be better equipped to handle these challenges, score similarly.

Employees’ responses to this predicament mirror advice we see the world over. In short, communicate openly and regularly in order to manage anxiety and uncertainty and to build trust, recognition and value amongst staff. Perhaps it is advice worth taking, but many leaders have doubtful answers to these tips: “I don’t know any more than them! What I do know would only make things worse if I shared it! And anyway, I barely have the time to keep up with the rest of the day job.” Appropriate leadership responses during change are clearly more subtle and contextual than the tips summarised above, but it seems that the human touch in keeping people on side matters more than ever, and is often not achieved.

Many organisations are recognising that another part of being resilient and change-ready is to empower people to take more responsibility and act with more authority, rather than attempting to control all strategic responses from the top. In my own work, those that I see succeeding in this understand that it requires ongoing attention to culture more than endless changes of structure, although design plays a part. But there is a gap for many, between the recognition that such changes may be needed, and whether that change is actually happening!

Change, then, continues to be a pressing and intractable challenge for many organisations.
My organisation is helping me to cope with change

Management Agenda 2017

- 53% of Board Directors agree
- 54% of Senior Managers agree

Management Agenda 1998

- 59% of Middle Managers agree
- 47% of Junior Managers agree

Top three ways in which organisations are helping employees cope with change

Management Agenda 2017

1. Open communication
2. Involving staff in change
3. Development opportunities

Management Agenda 1998

1. Open communication
2. Training
3. Active support

To what extent do you agree or disagree that your organisation is resilient in adapting to and learning from new challenges in its environment?

- 52% agree
- 20% neither agree nor disagree
- 8% strongly agree
- 20% disagree

What factors contribute to your organisation’s capacity for resilience?

- Entrepreneurial/experimental
- Empowered
- Future-focussed
- Optimistic
- Constructive conflict/challenge

- Open
- Clarity of purpose
- Outward-looking
- Networked
Spotlight – What is it like to be a manager in 2017?

In the main a positive picture

The majority of managers painted a positive picture of being managers in organisations today. They reported having space to be creative (77%) and feeling valued (63%). Our respondents also feel excited about the future (61%), perhaps because they also report being able to influence the strategy and direction of their organisation (52%).

Nearly three quarters (72%) were comfortable with their organisation’s investment in their development. Roughly one quarter feel frightened for the future; feel pressured and under fire, and feel exhausted by change (24%, 26%, 24% respectively). Yet, half do not feel these emotions (55%, 52%, 51% respectively).

The picture in the Public Sector is less positive

A less positive picture emerges if we compare managers in the public sector to managers in general. 10 per cent fewer public sector managers felt they were central to the success of their organisation (52% compared to 62% in the whole sample), 9 per cent fewer felt valued and supported (54% vs. 63%), 12 per cent fewer felt able to influence the strategy of their organisation (40% vs. 52%), and 9 per cent fewer felt excited about the future (52% vs. 61%).

31% of public sector managers feel frightened for the future, 34% feel pressured and under fire and 32% feel exhausted by change.

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It’s good to be a manager in a not-for-profit organisation

An even more positive picture, when compared to the whole management population, is reported for not-for-profit managers. There were a number of indicators that were significantly more positive, these included 69 per cent of not-for-profit managers feeling central to the success of their organisation (vs. 62% overall), and nearly three quarters (72%) feeling valued and supported (vs. 63% overall), and able to influence the strategy and direction of their organisation. Only 6 per cent believed that they were unable to contribute new ideas, with a huge proportion, 87 per cent feeling able to. Similarly, only a tiny proportion (10%) felt guilty investing in their own development.

Directors and senior managers are positive about the future

100 per cent of Board Directors and 74 per cent of senior managers report feeling central to the success of their organisation. Similar proportions (98% and 77%) feel responsible for its success and able to influence strategy (95% and 66%). Given these findings it is not surprising that the large majority of senior leaders also feel excited about the future (86% of Directors and 68% of senior managers), whilst only a fifth of senior managers (20%) and 14 per cent of Directors report feeling frightened for the future.

The picture becomes less rosy as you descend levels of management

There is a clear trend evident in our data which illustrates that the lower down the managerial hierarchy you are, the less positive you feel across all indicators including:

- How central you feel to the success of your organisation
- How frightened you feel for the future
- How responsible you feel for the success of your organisation
- How able you feel to influence the strategy and direction of the organisation
- How excited you feel about the future.

This is a real concern given the need for organisations operating in a VUCA world to empower their workforce and equip it with the capabilities and motivation to respond flexibly and innovate constantly.

The disempowerment of middle managers is a concern

Middle managers are a crucial link in any organisation. They translate strategic priorities into operational action and provide the link between senior management and the rest of the organisation. It is of concern then, that only one in two hold favourable views of their place and influence within the organisational hierarchy. It is, perhaps, no surprise that if they feel this way, junior managers hold even less positive views.

The picture for junior managers is a stressful one

Only half (50%) of junior managers feel central to the success of their organisation and only two fifths (42%) feel responsible for the success of their organisation (compared to 100% and 98% respectively for Board Directors). Yet they feel as valued as senior managers and more so than middle managers. They are the most likely group of managers to feel frightened about the future and least likely to be excited about the future. They are most likely to feel pressured and under fire, whilst only a fifth feel able to influence the strategy and direction of their organisation. It is a stressful place to be.
Management or leadership?

We used the model developed by Professor John Morris to explore whether the managers in our survey are leading or managing more. The model argues that managers are involved in three basic activities — keeping things going, putting things right and doing new things. How managers spend their time gives us an indication of whether they have primarily a management or leadership focus.

From our sample we can see that the majority of our sample feel they are spending about the right amount of time keeping things going (53%) and putting things right (49%), yet too little time doing new things (66%).

We found that at every level from Director through to junior manager the majority felt that they were spending too little time doing new things. Is this an indication that our sample is made up of managers rather than leaders who do not have enough time to be visionary or create a sense of direction for their teams of organisations?

In the public sector we found many of our respondents were firefighting — that is, whilst the majority of respondents felt they spend the right amount of time keeping things going (54%), a significant minority felt that they are spending too much time putting things right (48%) and too little time doing new things (72%).

In the not-for-profit sector we have managers who are operational and want to be strategic - the majority (50%) told us they spend too much time keeping things going, and too little time doing new things (72%).

Managers and leaders from small organisations (of up to 50 staff) are the only group where the majority (54%) believe they have the right amount of time to do new things. They also report spending the right balance of time on keeping things going and putting things right. So it appears that as organisations grow leaders become pulled into either firefighting or operational tasks and it becomes harder for them to hold onto the leadership focus of doing new things, whether that be planning for the future, being creative or encouraging others to be innovative. Clearly leaders need to ensure that they prioritise time for these activities which are critical for organisations if they want to remain relevant and competitive.

Where is time being spent - managing internal or external relationships?

In most organisations managers are required to work collaboratively, often without the traditional ‘hierarchical power’. Typically, in order to deliver, they need to persuade and influence in all directions, up, down, across and externally. Asked in Roffey Park’s research whether they spent the right amount of time managing these different relationships we found that nearly one third (28%) felt they spent too much time managing their bosses and 45 percent felt they spent too little time maintaining and developing relationships with clients and stakeholders. So have we identified a frustration of the pull of internal politics against the need to focus on the external world?

2 51% of Board Directors, 64% of senior managers, 70% of middle managers and 71% of junior managers reported spending too little time doing new things.
45 per cent of managers say they spend too little time maintaining and developing relationships with clients and stakeholders

We also noticed a difference between the responses of those who have an HR/OD role within an organisation and those who don’t. HR/OD professionals are much more likely to feel that they spend the right amount of time maintaining and developing relationships with clients and stakeholders (49 per cent) than non-HR/OD professionals do (33 per cent). This is possibly a reflection of the business partnering models in operation in many organisations where HR/OD professionals are client-facing or embedded in their internal clients part of the business.

Jobs with autonomy, variety and making a difference provide the most satisfaction today, as they did 20 years ago.

Meaningful work matters

Looking over a period of 20 years we can see that what motivates us at work remains pretty stable, with ‘autonomy’, ‘variety’ and ‘making a difference’ all coming in the top four major satisfactions in 1998 and 2017. It is also evident that ‘making a difference’ has become more prominent as a satisfaction over the period. Interestingly, ‘working in a high performing team’ has tumbled down the list of major satisfactions over that period, coming ninth out of eleven, whilst ‘developing others’ has moved further up the list from sixth to third. It is likely that the larger sample size of the 2017 survey with a much greater proportion of managers is having an impact, however it could also be a reflection of society and organisational reward processes becoming more individualistic? Are organisations more likely to pay attention to leadership skills, for example development of others, than they are on senior leaders collaborating with peers?
Whilst many dissatisfactions of a role remain the same today as they were 20 years ago, namely work overload, bureaucracy and frustration with management - we notice that ‘politics within the organisation’, which barely featured in the list in 1998 (joint 12th), is now the top dissatisfaction for managers today.

The top major dissatisfaction for junior, middle and senior managers is politics within the organisation
Commentary on Spotlight on a Manager

There is clear evidence in the data to suggest that middle and senior managers are actually feeling excited about the future and this should provide the vital energy that organisations will need to move forward. There is a marked difference, though, between the private and public sector with managers in the latter feeling more restricted and less positive. There is also evidence that the satisfaction of managers in the not-for-profit sector is particularly high and this all seems to be connected with ‘purpose’ and ‘making a difference’. This is not surprising, though, as following the financial crisis of 2007 there was an emergent need for people to find more personal purpose at work than just material success. So the question has to be how can commercial organisations provide an employee value proposition that attends to ‘purpose’?

There is also evidence that continues to cast the middle manager in the role of fixer and firefighter. Whilst this managerial focus may protect matters relating to quality and logistics, the cost of this preoccupation may be felt in the lack of time spent on innovation and development. A cycle then continues leading to the disengagement reported in The Management Agenda 2017 – middle managers are spinning plates and do not have enough time to make a difference.

The key variable here seems to be influence - can middle managers have an impact on organisational decisions and strategic roadmaps for the coming year? The survey suggests that junior managers in particular are feeling disenfranchised at the moment and experiencing higher stress - probably because of their lack of ability to influence (perceived or not).

The ability to influence is strongly associated with engagement at the moment. At times of complexity, uncertainty and change the distribution of power within organisations is affected - senior managers may suck up the power while they try to enforce necessary changes, workers on the ground then feel less engaged whilst the middle managers are being squeezed from both sides. As a result the middle manager will often make a choice, either siding with leadership (and being an advocate of their decisions) or siding with the workers on the ground (and judging those at the top negatively).

So the call seems to be that organisations need to look after the middles at the moment - give them what power we can to influence their units, invest in their development, protect time for innovation and really make sure that communications systems are working well - so that all employees know where they are going, and why.

Benedict Eccles
Senior Consultant, Roffey Park
I feel central to the success of my organisation

I feel frightened for the future

I feel responsible for the success of my organisation

I feel able to influence the strategy and direction of my organisation

I feel excited about the future

I feel valued and supported

NUMBERS THAT AGREED TO EACH STATEMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Board Directors</th>
<th>Senior Managers</th>
<th>Middle Managers</th>
<th>Junior Managers</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel central to the success of my organisation</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel frightened for the future</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel responsible for the success of my organisation</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel able to influence the strategy and direction of my organisation</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel excited about the future</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel valued and supported</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>68%</td>
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</table>
Workplace Stress and Mental Health

PARADOX

UK productivity continues to stagnate whilst evidence suggests that working shorter hours is more productive. Yet on every measure of working outside contracted hours, we are working longer than twenty years ago.

Whilst nearly two-thirds of respondents feel comfortable discussing mental health issues with colleagues, they feel less positive that their organisation’s culture is open and accepting of mental health issues.

We are constantly bombarded with reports in the media telling us how stressed people are at work. Certain professions, such as teaching, social work and the police are considered high stress professions, yet it appears that many other occupations are also feeling the pain. Where does this pressure come from? People we speak to in organisations talk about the ever constant drive to deliver more with less and the pressure to achieve higher productivity levels.

Professor John McLeod of Abertay University, Dundee, who conducted a piece of research for the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, said: ‘This [workplace stress] is not just a minor worry any more. It can be a serious crisis in people’s lives.’ He also believes that stress is no longer confined to managers and it now affects both office and manual workers.

In our survey we asked people whether they felt, ‘very stressed’, ‘mildly stressed’ or ‘not stressed at all’? Given the pervasive dialogue we were surprised by the findings. Nearly a fifth, 17 per cent, told us that they were not stressed at all. This is a cause for cautious celebration. Twenty years ago, in our 1998 Management Agenda, only nine per cent of respondents felt this way. So does this mean that organisations have become better at managing pressure at work, resulting perhaps in lower stress levels? Workplace counselling is certainly more of a feature in benefits packages of organisations now than it was twenty years ago.

17% report not being stressed at all

Are you most or least likely to be experiencing stress?

Our survey found that the person least likely to be experiencing stress (highest ‘not stressed’) is a junior manager, aged 30-34 years old, working for very small (<50 people) private sector organisations. The person most likely to be experiencing stress was a Director or senior manager, aged between 35-50 years old in a small to medium sized production and manufacturing organisation. This finding that people in their 40s are most likely to be experiencing stressful working lives is consistent with our findings 20 years ago.
How are stress levels changing?

We explored how stress levels were perceived to have changed over the last year. An interesting result was that whilst junior managers are the least likely to report feeling very stressed, they are the most likely level of managers to report that stress levels have increased in the last year (50% of junior managers report an increase in stress levels compared with 43% of middle and 46% of senior managers). Perhaps this is a reflection on the career paths of these individuals who have most likely recently taken their first steps into management. Organisations therefore need to be focusing on how they can support new managers as they make these transitions. Management development initiatives such as first 100 days coaching or providing mentors are a few of the ways organisations can do this. We also noted that the proportion of respondents reporting an increase in stress in the past year was highest for those employees in the 20-29 age group (65% of employees in the 20-29 age group reported increased stress levels compared with 44% of 30-34 year olds, 49% of 35-39 year olds, 47% of 40-49 year olds, and 39% of 50-59 year olds). This is a concern given the importance of this age gap both now and in the future.

Causes of stress and the impact

The findings of this survey are consistent with those 20 years ago. The top cause of stress remains increasing workload. This finding is also consistent across sectors and across age groups. The second highest cause of stress for all the management groups is ‘poor strategic direction from the top’. This combination of pressure from workload and lack of direction undoubtedly creates a highly stressful environment. Also uncertainty has an impact on productivity. It can create a sense of powerlessness and lack of control, making people reluctant to choose a course of action. Managers who focus on setting a clear sense of purpose and vision, translated into clear goals, will therefore be likely to not only reduce employee stress levels but also impact on productivity levels in the organisation (Lynn & Kalay, 2015).

We find some differences when we look at the causes of stress from a managerial level perspective. Across the management groups, excluding junior managers, we see a broad range of variables causing stress. However, for junior managers, there is a clear single cause of stress and this is increasing workload. These findings lead us to question whether junior managers are reporting increasing stress levels because the responsibility for doing more with less is being pushed down to them? If this is the case, we encourage middle managers to do more to support them. Areas for suggested focus are: reducing uncertainty where possible by providing clarity of vision and goals; creating opportunities for more autonomy so they have a perceived sense of control over their environment; and fostering good working relationships so there are high levels of support and low levels of conflict.

People are working longer hours, when perhaps they shouldn’t be

Twenty years ago 24 per cent of our respondents were taking work home. Now 50 per cent of managers are doing so. In fact, on every measure of extra time outside their core hours that managers spend on work on a regular basis, the numbers have increased. More people are working weekends, through their lunch hour, and over 50+ hours a week. A massive 84 per cent of respondents work through their lunch hour.

Extra time spent working on a regular basis...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Work through lunch hour</th>
<th>Work at weekends</th>
<th>Take work home in the evening</th>
<th>Work a 50+ hour week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research evidence (for example, Pencavel, 2014) is building to clearly show that working more hours actually reduces productivity. Working longer is not the answer. In fact, working less hours has been found to have no effect on output. Perhaps encouraging organisations and people to reduce their working hours is a step too far for many, although this approach has been shown to lead to less mistakes, accidents, and lower levels of sickness in organisations such as the NHS. An alternative approach, that we recommend organisations take, is to increase awareness amongst managers and employees more generally about the impact of working excessive hours, and the benefits of managing personal energy levels consistent with building resilience. Organisations need to select and develop managers who can drive productivity and performance, but who recognise that this is not simply about driving people to work ever longer hours but about being alive to individual needs and showing due care and concern.

Let’s talk about mental health

A report published by the government (Department of Health, 2014) found that mental health problems are responsible for more than 70 million days lost from work in the UK each year, making it a priority for organisations to tackle mental health issues sensitively.

To explore this further we asked how comfortable people were when discussing their mental health with colleagues and managers. Our results indicated that the majority, almost two-thirds (63%), of people were comfortable talking to their colleagues, and whilst nearly a third (30%) indicated that they were not comfortable discussing mental health issues with their manager, over half (56%) were.

Clearly it is an important step for organisations to ensure that they actively support and encourage people to talk about mental health issues and our findings give rise to optimism in this regard. However, the figures were less positive when we asked people about the culture of their organisation and whether it was one that was open and accepting of mental health issues, just under half (47%) agreed and one-fifth (19%) disagreed. We see this pattern of results, that individuals (i.e. colleagues and managers) are perceived more open than the culture of the organisation, repeated across the sectors and managerial levels. So organisations need to ensure that structures, processes and values reinforce a culture that is characterised by compassion, respect, trust, honesty and fairness.

3 Department of Health (2014). Chief Medical Officer annual report: public mental health
Commentary on Workplace Stress and Mental Health

We are entering a period where open discussion of workplace stress and mental health is gaining traction and momentum. For too long, UK society has found it more straightforward to talk about physical manifestations of ill-health and to a certain extent this tendency is understandable. But that does not make it excusable. Support for people with mental health issues is in need of urgent attention: the professionals who struggle to provide critical care are unsung heroes who need the more active involvement of ordinary people in the workplace.

What this means in practice is three key things. First, we need to do more to normalise discussion of mental health in the workplace. Our Management Agenda has some encouraging data to suggest that workers in peer groups are willing to discuss their issues amongst themselves. But the data also suggests that they are not so keen to bring up the subject with their bosses. This indicates that while we look to be on the right track – and that there is a great deal of goodwill to try to help – managers could do more to make themselves available and open to their reports who might want to discuss what are very sensitive and personal matters.

Second, we need to encourage organisations to get behind the established mental health charities more than ever before and to add their voice, and resources, to new initiatives such as those championed by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge together with Prince Harry, namely the Heads Together campaign (which seeks to address in particular the mental health needs of younger members of our society and the newest entrants to the UK workforce).

Third, we need a sea-change in the way that mental health is viewed. Good work is being done in the area of cognitive diversity (which looks at different thought and problem-solving processes) which (logically) implies a growing need for us to reframe how we work with, and find work for, people who see the world in a very different way to the majority of the population. Many of these potentially “fully paid-up” members of our workforce have undiscovered talent, which only the most innovative and open-minded of companies are beginning to recognise in areas such as complex problem-solving and data analytics. So let us continue to address the serious issues inherent in mental health - but let us also not disregard the significant opportunities it represents for UK organisations who are willing to jettison prejudice and reach out more.
**WORKPLACE STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH IN A SNAPSHOT**

**Least likely person to experience stress**
- Junior manager
- Aged 30-34 years old
- Working in a very small organisation
- In the private sector

**Most likely person to experience stress**
- Director or senior manager
- Aged 35-50 years old
- Working in a small to medium sized organisation
- In the production and manufacturing sector

**Causes of stress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Agenda 2017</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing workload</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor strategic direction from the top</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office politics</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased responsibility</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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</table>

**Mental Health**

- I (would) feel comfortable discussing mental health issues with colleagues: 63% (Agree), 13% (Don’t know), 24% (Disagree)
- I (would) feel comfortable talking about mental health issues with my manager: 56% (Agree), 14% (Don’t know), 30% (Disagree)
- The culture of my organisation is open about and accepting of mental health issues: 47% (Agree), 29% (Don’t know), 24% (Disagree)
Impact of Digital and the Flexible Workforce

PARADOX

With the ever-accelerating rate of developments in communications technology, people are increasingly able and wanting to work wherever and whenever they want. Whilst nearly one in two managers think their organisation has the infrastructure to support such ways of working, the majority do not believe their organisation’s managers have the capabilities to make it work.

Are organisations doing enough to build a culture in support of the flexible workforce?

With increasing globalisation, and the ever-accelerating rate of developments in communications technology, flexible ways of working are becoming commonplace, and are set to increase. But as technology pervades and jobs become more fluid and less secure, are organisations and their managers ready?

It’s estimated that there are around 1.3 billion virtual workers globally. And with mobile internet set to overtake desktop usage – jobs are being done on the move, at any time of day, in almost any location – developing the skills of a virtual workforce is critical. It is encouraging then that the majority of managers (59%) feel that their organisation’s practices and culture enables them to work wherever and whenever they want, so long as work is delivered as expected. This view prevails across all sectors, but most notably in the not-for-profit sector (65%), and smaller organisations (up to 50 employees) where an encouraging 77 per cent of managers feel that they reap the benefits of their firm’s flexible approach. That said, a significant minority (31%) still feel that their organisation is not doing enough to enable a culture that supports working flexibly.

59% of employees agree that their organisation’s culture and practices enable them to work wherever and whenever they want.

31% disagree that this is the case.

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1 The Future of Work: Jobs and Skills in 2030: UK Commission for Employment and Skills
Organisations support flexible working, but are senior leaders walking the talk?

There is a flip-side to a culture that supports employees working wherever and whenever they want, and that is the potential blurring of boundaries between work and home and the ability of individuals to effectively manage that boundary. What a good work-life balance is varies considerably between one individual and another. For some managers, work and life blend seamlessly together, and for some, balance means rigorous boundaries between the two. It may be that the greatest challenge ahead is in embracing the advantages of technology as an enabler for flexible working without disrupting the individual’s felt sense of good balance between work and life. So, how supported do managers feel in managing their own work-life balance, and what kind of signals are they receiving from those at the top of organisations?

The majority (61%) feel that their organisation’s culture supports work-life balance. Roughly one in five (22%) disagree that it does. Where does culture stem from, if not from the words and actions of senior leaders? From this perspective, things appear less positive. Less than one-third of managers (31%) view senior leaders as role-modeling work-life balance (50% of managers feel that senior leaders in their organisations do not role-model work-life balance). This is important for all sorts of reasons, not least of which the message it conveys about what it is you might need to do to rise through the organisation and what behaviours are truly valued. Such messages play a role in people’s thoughts and decisions about what their future possibilities might be in an organisation, and influence the future diversity of talent pipelines.

50 per cent of managers feel that senior leaders in their organisation do not role-model work-life balance
Workforce increasingly virtual, but managers are ill-equipped

Defined as geographically dispersed or remote, and most often relying on technology to work collaboratively, virtual teams are on the rise. 31 per cent of managers surveyed felt that their organisation was prepared for the current and anticipated increase in virtual working. 48 per cent disagreed. Technology appears an issue with less than one in two managers (46%) saying their organisation has the technology infrastructure in place. Perhaps more an issue is the perceived capability of managers to effectively lead and manage virtual teams. More than half (53%) think managers in their organisation lack the skills to manage virtually (this declines to one in five, 21%, in the public sector).

Roffey Park's work in this area\(^2\) has shown not only that virtual management is difficult to do well, but also that success depends much more on the extent to which people find new ways of collaborating to achieve organisational goals than on the supporting technology and how well it is used. This, combined with the increasing number of virtual workers presents a strong argument for paying attention to developing, and learning how best to deploy, the particular skills of the virtual manager.


WHAT DOES A CULTURE THAT SUPPORTS VIRTUAL WORKING LOOK LIKE?

Roffey Park’s research into virtual teams defines a culture supportive to virtual working as:

- Focusing on the achievement of outcomes, not just activity
- Supporting worker autonomy
- Valuing diversity
- Advocating a facilitative leadership style

WHAT MAKES A GOOD VIRTUAL MANAGER?

And that the most essential skills for virtual managers are:

- An ability to build rapport and relationships quickly, and sustain them
- Flexible use of technology, careful not to swamp people with data
- Having an outcome-based approach to performance management
- An excellent listener who spots underlying messages and process messages
- A significant commitment to coaching and developing others
Is your organisation doing the right things to attract ‘digital natives’?

Younger respondents to our survey (up to 29 years old) have significantly more positive views on their organisation’s readiness for the anticipated increase in virtual working. 45 per cent of those in the 20-29 age group felt their organisation was ready, compared with roughly one-third in other age groups (29% of 30-34 year olds; 30% of 35-39 year olds; 32% of 40-49 year olds; and 28% of 50-59 year olds). The reasons for this are unclear. It may be that younger workers are choosing to work in organisations and industries that are more prepared, or it may be that their perspective is more consistent with that of a more junior employee who may instinctively carry out their tasks virtually and do not face the same challenges and tensions as someone in a more senior position. Whatever the reason, this younger ‘digital native’ talent is characteristically social, mobile and agile by comparison to their predecessors and may well have a new and different definition of what constitutes a desirable employer. Technology is how they work, play and communicate. Digital natives are likely to be hyper-connected and expecting fast results or answers. Does your organisation do enough to be attractive to this group?

There are practices and cultures which it could pay to develop, in order to attract and retain this younger, tech-savvy workforce. One example of this is ‘reverse mentoring’ a practice adopted by organisations including Microsoft in order to help drive the digital agenda. Digital natives, relatively new to the world of work and with different social behaviours, coach senior leaders on what the workplace should look like, what drives younger talent, and how best to move forward.

Majority of organisations are not prepared for the Gig Economy

63 per cent of managers responding to our survey said that their organisation was not prepared for the challenges of the Gig Economy. In comparison, just over one in ten (12%) felt their organisation was prepared. The employment status and rights of so-called ‘Gig workers’ is a live and controversial issue, and debate is ongoing about whether it represents greater freedom and choice for workers and employers, or alternatively a form of modern slavery. As such, the Gig Economy represents a real legal and reputational minefield for employers and HR, and it is perhaps not surprising to hear that the majority feel unprepared.

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63 per cent of managers say their organisation is not prepared for the Gig Economy

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3 This percentage is based on a small sample size and should be interpreted with caution.
Commentary on Impact of Digital and the Flexible Workforce

Our Management Agenda 2017 research data illustrates both patterns that we are familiar with, such as the impact of technology, generational challenges, the blurring of lines between work and life and the central importance of culture, and a sharpening connection of key facets that organisations ignore at their peril.

The pain I hear from clients and people in organisations struggling to make sense of what digital means to them both individually and organisationally is palpable, and there is still a tremendous need to get beneath the rhetoric and understand what is really going on with leaders and managers who are dealing with this on a day-to-day basis.

Do definitions matter? Well yes and no because rhetoric is driven by the fear and anxiety of remaining relevant, both as individual leaders and organisations as a whole. But this isn’t about defining the worlds “digital” or “agile”, it’s about getting under the skin of what this really means for your organisational strategy beyond the nuts and bolts of technology.

What’s the impact of artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation to our organisation? Whilst we may think this is the cornerstone of science fiction movies, it is here now and you need to pay attention to it. If you are a senior or middle manager or you have a career based on skill that are grounded in seeking patterns or crunching data, your days may be numbered.

Is your organisational culture going to be affected? Without question, technology and digital – however you define it – is transforming the social processes in your organisations. The need to for culture change has never been greater – do it or get left behind.

What does this all mean for leaders? Culture change starts with your leadership population. If they model the behavioural change needed, they will become key influencers and your culture will evolve. Crucially this requires genuine collaboration, one that involves robust debate and constructive conflict and a culture that embraces challenge upwards. Is your organisation up to this challenge?

And what’s the role that HR have in all of this? HR leaders need to have more than a superficial understanding of digital and technology and its implications to their organisations. Without this, they are unable to feel confident in challenging those leaders who demand change without being willing to change themselves first, and organisations need to give them the mandate to do this. Above all, as AI and automation grows and the population of managers and leaders decline, they may need to reinvent themselves as the need for traditional HR declines.

Finally, it would be very easy to dismiss the findings that reflect differences in views on such things as virtual learning as a “generational thing”. From punk rock to virtual reality younger generations have always challenged their older peers, but our findings reveal the extent to which perception is not reality. Rather than simply dismissing the under 30’s, a little less fear and patronising combined with listening and a valuing of difference would go a long way.
With increasing globalisation, and the ever-accelerating rate of developments in communications technology, flexible ways of working are becoming commonplace, and are set to increase. But as technology pervades and jobs become more fluid, are organisations and their managers ready?

Is greater use of technology blurring the boundaries between work and home life? How sensitive are organisations to the implications of this for work-life balance, or work-life blend?
Diversity

PARADOX

Whilst the majority of managers believe that their organisation is effective at attracting and recruiting diverse talent, they are less convinced by the ability of their managers to work effectively with that diversity.

Whilst the vast majority of managers think their organisation is accepting of difference, only one in five think there is sufficient diversity in the senior leadership team in their organisation.

In ‘The Future of Work: Jobs and Skills in 2030’, the UK workforce in 2030 is predicted, on current trends, to be more multi-generational, older, international and female. In the same report, employers are urged to take action to prepare for increasing workforce diversity, culturally and generationally (over the next decade the number of economically active people aged 65 and over is projected to increase by one third). We asked managers to give us their views on how well their organisation is prepared to meet the challenges of this future workplace.

The vast majority of managers believe their organisation is accepting of difference

79 per cent of managers say that their organisation is accepting of difference. This figure rises to 89 per cent of managers in the not-for-profit sector, and 98 per cent of Board Directors. Whilst there are differences, the perception of the vast majority is that organisations are accepting of difference, irrespective of level of management, age, gender or generation.

Managers want to see more diversity in their senior leadership teams

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of managers do not think that there is sufficient diversity in the senior leadership team in their organisation. Only one-fifth (21%) of managers say there is sufficient diversity in their senior leadership team. Managers who are female (20%), work in HR (18%), in a senior manager/director role (20%), and working in the not-for-profit or public sector (18%) are least likely to say that there is sufficient diversity. Managers not working in HR (28%) and those in the private sector (25%) are more positive about the profile of their leadership team, but the percentage agreeing that there is sufficient diversity is still low.

The business benefits of diversity, and in particular a diverse senior leadership team, include improved customer orientation (an enhanced ability to connect with the customer’s perspective), greater employee satisfaction, better decision making and innovation, and advantages in attracting and retaining talent. Whilst 60 per cent of HR professionals say that increasing diversity in senior leadership is a challenge today, it ranks 8th in the list of current people challenges identified. There appears scope, then, for HR professionals to take advantage of the opportunity that increased senior team diversity offers.

63% of managers believe there is insufficient diversity in the senior leadership team in their organisation

2 Diversity Matters (2015), McKinsey & Company
About one-half of managers feel more could be done to ensure the effective attraction, recruitment and retention of staff from diverse backgrounds

One half of managers (51%) say their organisation is effective at attracting, recruiting and retaining individuals from diverse backgrounds. One quarter (27%) disagree. Middle managers (44%), those working in the public sector (43%) and those in HR (47%) tend to be less likely to think that their organisation is effective at attracting, recruiting and retaining individuals from diverse backgrounds. The growing research literature around the application of behavioural design principles can offer practical ways forward here. The argument goes that attempting to de-bias minds has proved difficult and expensive, an alternative and quicker approach is to design processes to tackle the unconscious bias that exists in all of us.

Managers could be better equipped to work with diverse types of people

Roughly two in five (43%) managers agree that ‘managers in my organisation are skilled at working with diverse groups of people’. 28 per cent disagree with this statement. Managers not working in HR (52%) and those in the not-for-profit sector are more likely to be positive on this issue, with 57 per cent saying managers in their organisation are skilled in this regard. If these perceptions are true, the consequence could be significant untapped potential in organisations.

Managers need to be better equipped to harness the potential that diversity offers

3 ‘What Works: Gender Equality by design’ (2016), Iris Bohnet
One-third of managers think their colleagues can manage effectively in different cultures

Given that the workforce in 2030 is predicted to be more international, it is interesting to note that only 35 per cent of managers agree that ‘managers in my organisation are equipped with the skills to manage in different cultures’. This figure rises to 47 per cent for managers in the not-for-profit sector. Whilst this may, to some extent, reflect the nature of roles held, there may be an argument for organisations to get ahead of the curve and take steps to enhance the cultural agility of their workforce.

One quarter of managers say their organisation is NOT prepared to meet the challenges associated with the changing demographics of the workforce

43 per cent of managers agree that their organisation is prepared to meet the anticipated challenges associated with the changing demographics of the workforce. More than one quarter (28%) disagree. Managers working in large organisations (29% compared with 16% of managers in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)), HR roles (30% compared with 24% in non-HR roles), and those in the public sector (36%) are more likely to believe that their organisation is unprepared. Women are more likely than men to believe their organisation is unprepared (32% compared to 21%). Interestingly, managers in the 20-34 age group (Gen Y) (57%) are more likely to believe their organisation is unprepared compared to managers in the 40-59 age groups (Gen X) (41%). It may be that managers in their 40s and 50s are anticipating working longer than they might have previously expected and are asking themselves how flexibly their organisation might respond to their needs.

Developing cultural agility is likely to become more and more important as the future workplace emerges

43 per cent of managers predict increased inter-generational conflict as a consequence of changing workforce demographics

43 per cent of managers believe there will be more inter-generational conflict in the workplace as a result of changing workforce demographics. 30 per cent disagree and 27 per cent are undecided. Managers in their twenties (Gen Y) (62%) are most likely to anticipate increased conflict, compared with those in their 60s (Boomers) (26%) who are least likely to predict an increase in conflict. Whilst the reasons for this are unclear, there is much organisations can gain from encouraging mutually beneficial exchange between different age groups and generations, for example through the practice of (reverse) mentoring.
Commentary on Diversity

The vast majority of managers responding to the Management Agenda 2017 survey say their organisation is accepting of difference (79%) and two-thirds want to see more diversity in their senior leadership teams. So far so good, it would seem. But I’m inclined to ask some deeper questions. Such as – what is the experience of those who aren’t part of the majority group, who are under-represented at management levels whether on the basis of their gender, ethnicity or another demographic? This might reveal more sobering results. And there is a world of difference between ‘acceptance’ of diversity and the liberation of diversity for both individual and organisational benefit. Most people I know who have experienced marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion would appreciate a little more than ‘tolerance’ or ‘acceptance’.

As a white, middle-class straight man living in the UK, I can’t know directly what it’s like to live with a sense that my gender, ethnicity or sexuality is a focus of someone else’s unconscious bias and limits my opportunities. I don’t think I need to feel guilty about that – I am who I am. But it should keep me humble and curious enough to listen and learn from those with very different life experiences to my own.

And herein lies the rub: desiring more diversity at senior leadership levels is all very well, but if we are to go beyond tokenism - honouring difference and encouraging its expression will inevitably mean a bumpier ride. It will mean conflicting views and opinions. It will mean robust debate and disagreement as people contribute from very different perspectives. Not many management teams I encounter do this very well. Managing organisations is about managing a tension between the need for conformity and the need for divergence from the norm. It would seem that our increasingly complex and unpredictable world needs a more collaborative way of discerning a way forward and a greater need for divergent views to be heard. Our need to move beyond mere acceptance towards harnessing the full potential of diversity may never have been greater.
The UK workforce in 2030 is predicted, on current trends, to be more multi-generational, older, international and female.

- **My organisation is effective at attracting, recruiting and retaining diverse talent**
  - 51% agree
  - 27% disagree

- **In my organisation managers are equipped to work with diverse types of people**
  - 43% agree
  - 28% disagree

- **My organisation is accepting of difference**
  - 79% agree

- **There is sufficient diversity in the senior leadership team in my organisation**
  - 21% agree

60% of HR professionals say increasing the diversity in their organisation’s senior leadership team is a current people challenge.

- **My organisation is prepared to meet the challenges associated with the changing demographics of the workforce**
  - 43% agree
  - 28% disagree

- **There will be more inter-generational conflict as a consequence of changing demographics**
  - 43% agree
  - 30% disagree
Is the annual performance review dead?

81% of HR managers report that yearly performance reviews are still used in their organisation, and that there are no plans to scrap them.

Despite much coverage in the press about leading organisations ditching the annual performance review in favour of more frequent reviews, the vast majority of HR managers surveyed report that they continue to be used in their organisation and that there are no plans to scrap them. That said, there is clearly a desire to improve the approach to, or execution of, performance management. Roughly one in five (19%) rate their approach to performance management as weak, and a further two-thirds (63%) see room for improvement rating their approach as adequate. Multiple failings with annual performance reviews have been highlighted. These include simplifying performance by attempting to capture it with a single number or rating, lack of correlation with business results and the perception that the whole process is far too bureaucratic and time-consuming. More frequent feedback, possibly after each project is completed or, in some cases, after each meeting is favoured as an alternative. Whatever the process or the frequency of feedback, performance management in whatever guise it takes will not engage employees if managers do not have the capability to hold meaningful, constructive, and motivating conversations with those they work with. The focus of current debate seems to be predominantly about process rather than managerial capability, and that is an oversight.

76% of HR managers say that employee engagement and morale is a current people challenge, yet only 39% say that their approach to performance management helps engage employees.

PARADOX

Talent management has been around since the 1990s. Yet two-fifths of HR professionals still consider their approach to talent management ‘weak’.

Similarly, performance management has been a core HR practice for many years, yet only two-fifths believe it helps drive employee engagement.

The importance of this is perhaps underlined by the fact that three-quarters (76%) of HR managers see employee engagement as a key current people challenge, yet only two-fifths (39%) of HR managers feel their performance management approach is helping to drive that engagement.
What is going wrong with talent management?

Ever since the War for Talent was published in the 1990s, talent management has grown to become a core HR discipline. Multiple models and approaches to talent management are now commonly known amongst the HR community, and yet our survey suggests that the vast majority of HR managers see room for improvement in their approach. Nearly one in two (47%) regard their approach as ‘adequate’, whilst two-fifths (41%) would go as far as to say their approach is ‘weak’. Only one in ten (12%) appear completely happy with their approach, regarding it as ‘excellent’. It is not clear what is going on here, or what distinguishes those self-rating as excellent compared with those with a less rosy view. Whatever the causes, with 65 per cent of HR managers reporting the retention of key employees as a key challenge, there appears an urgent need to improve the focus and effectiveness of talent management in many organisations, as well as be able to demonstrate that effectiveness to the wider business. Talent management should be seen as an opportunity to engage with the business, defining talent requirements in the eyes of business leaders themselves.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of HR managers also see room for improvement with respect to their organisation’s approach to succession planning. More than one in two (52%) regard their approach as weak with a further two-fifths (40%) seeing it as adequate. Ensuring that the right people have the right opportunities at the right time is critical to good succession planning, and it seems HR thinks it could be doing more to make that a reality. Linking talent management with succession planning is clearly essential to any joined-up system ensuring the sustainability of key people capabilities.

Whilst 65% of HR managers are concerned about the retention of key employees, the vast majority regard their approach to talent management as adequate (47%) or weak (41%)
Leadership: a perennial issue?

87% of HR managers identify developing appropriate leadership and management styles as a key people challenge.

Use of analytics appears to be still in its infancy in HR

44% of HR managers consider their use of analytics as adequate. Nearly one in two (47%) consider their analytics capability weak.

Over the last few years, there has been a growing conversation about extending analytics to HR, and the value that this can offer. The term analytics derives from the advent of big data and the potential value from mining data that has grown in volume, velocity and variety. For most HR professionals, the real challenge may not be ‘big data’, but developing the capability to use data to inform and evidence decisions and impact. This means knowing what data you have and how to make best use of it, and how to augment that with additional data that furthers insight and makes a practical impact on the effective use of limited resources. From this year’s survey, it appears that only a few (7%) rate their use of analytics as excellent, whilst nearly one in two (47%) consider it weak. Building capability in this area can help HR to transform its data assets into insight, complementing professional judgment and experience to focus resources and deliver real business impact.

When asked about their current people challenges, the most commonly identified issue was that of developing appropriate leadership and management styles. 87 per cent of HR managers identified this as a key issue. Not far behind in the list of challenges was that of changing the culture, identified by 75 per cent of HR managers. These two go hand-in-hand – you will not change the culture unless you change the leadership. How leadership needs to change is likely to differ according to the organisational context and environment. That said, there are indications in this research that greater empowerment and decentralisation of decisions, and greater collaboration are two shared elements of the desired leadership approach. 82 per cent of HR managers agree that their organisation needs to move towards adopting ways of working that empower staff, enable leadership and decision-making to be dispersed throughout their organisation, and for decisions to be driven by a clear sense of purpose and values. The desired way ahead seems clear for the majority, and indeed more than half of HR managers (60%) see their organisation moving in this direction, yet there appears a gap between the desired and current state of affairs.
These results echo conversations (and in some cases rants) I have with HR practitioners at all levels and in all sectors. It goes something like this …

We’re struggling to attract the people we need … and when we do recruit them we’re struggling to retain and engage them given the pace of change and financial constraints … and so many of our managers don’t help, by being under so much pressure that decent conversations with their people go to the bottom of the list … so we end up putting in lots of processes like ratings and nine-box grids to make sure something rather than nothing happens … but everyone hates them and we’re not sure they really do what we need them to.

So how to start to shift such a situation?

Firstly this is a business challenge. If HR are not (much as I hate the phrase) “at the table” with senior leaders from across the organisation debating strategy and people, and therefore what everyone needs to do to engage people, then they need to create some alliances that will get them into that position.

Secondly it is time to kill some sacred cows. Organisations I have spoken to who have scrapped annual performance ratings (after a lot of careful thought and with a lot of support for their managers) speak of the huge improvement of the quality of the conversation between employee and manager.

And thirdly HR need to get to grips with analytics, to find ways to exploit data already in existence that will replace the need for ratings and grids. Let’s make sure that analytics doesn’t end up in the same situation as finance, with many in HR feeling it is ok to say “I don’t do numbers” when it is absolutely key.
HR IN A SNAPSHOT

Has, or is, your organisation planning to stop annual performance reviews?

Annual reviews have been scrapped in my organisation

5%

Annual reviews have not been scrapped in my organisation, and there are no plans to do so

9%

81%

2%

My organisation is planning to scrap annual performance reviews

We have never had annual performance reviews in my organisation

Do you agree or disagree that your current approach to performance management helps drive ...?

How would you rate the capability of your HR function with respect to its approach to performance management?

HIGH PERFORMANCE

Agree

39%

Neither Agree nor Disagree

29%

Disagree

32%

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Agree

40%

Neither Agree nor Disagree

30%

Disagree

30%

How would you rate the capability of your HR function with respect to its approach to talent management?

Talent Management

Excellent

12%

Adequate

47%

Weak

41%

Succession planning

Excellent

6%

Adequate

40%

Weak

52%

How would you rate the capability of your HR function with respect to its use of analytics?

How would you rate the capability of your HR function with respect to its use of analytics?
Final thoughts

Looking across the data from this year’s Agenda, we would suggest three key things that organisations and leaders need to focus on:

1. **Leadership development that reflects the nature of the challenges faced**

   The term VUCA is now commonplace. In a sense, widespread use can mask the profound change that it represents for effective leadership and organisations. What is evident from this year’s Agenda is a picture of managers struggling with adapting to this new reality. Feeling stuck in firefighting mode, grappling with organisational politics and making change work are all prominent in this year’s data. So, what to do? Organisations have invested substantially in leadership development, and in many cases, may not be seeing the return on investment they would like to. This is not, in itself, a reason to stop. It takes time for efforts to bear fruition. It is also important, though, that organisations take steps to ensure that the development they offer models the leadership challenges faced by leaders. So, for example, if one of the issues for leaders is leading in conditions of uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity, the leadership programme cannot be one with a prescribed structure and outcomes. Learning participants need to wrestle with the uncertainty of learning as part of the process.

2. **HR needs to hold process lightly, and re-engage with its core purpose of motivating people**

   Making core HR practices such as talent and performance management effective still appear to be a challenge for many. To some degree, the purpose of these practices has become consumed by process. In their origins, they were fundamentally about making the most of people recognising that in a knowledge economy, people were the main source of competitive advantage. It seems that with increasing specialisation has come more and more process, and less and less capability. At the heart of effective talent and performance management is managerial capability to engage and motivate, irrespective of process. Going forwards, the balance between process and capability needs a rethink.

3. **Meeting the challenges of the future workplace – a challenge of leadership**

   It is clear from this year’s Agenda that many feel unprepared for the changing world of work, from a more diverse workforce to ‘anytime, anywhere’ ways of working. Whether the change is demographics, technology or social values, it is the implication of these changes on the way people need to work that is most fundamental, and difficult to change. Enhancing the capability of leaders, and organisations, to truly value diversity in all its forms, to manage on the basis of outcome and not activity, and to develop social processes which are less top-down and more collaborative and fluid are all changes that need to happen to ensure organisations remain competitive. Ultimately, this is a responsibility of true leadership. In other words, leadership will not so much be evident by virtue of position but through the actions of those who seek to shift the status quo.
Appendix 1: Respondent profile

This year’s Management Agenda is based on the responses of 808 managers and non-managers from organisations of a range of sectors and sizes. The characteristics of the individuals who completed the survey and the type of organisation they work for are presented here.

Respondent Characteristics

64 per cent of respondents were female and 36 per cent were male.

77 per cent of the managers responded to the survey worked in a role dedicated to people management and development (e.g. HR generalist or specialist, OD, L&D, Talent and etc). The majority of these people were female (65 per cent were female, 35 per cent were male).
Respondent Organisation Characteristics

Respondents to the survey worked for a range of organisations of different sizes and sectors. Figures 4 and 5 show breakdowns of respondents’ organisations by employee size and broad industrial sector. Table 1 shows a more detailed breakdown by industrial sector.

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Table 1
Appendix 2: How we designed and conducted the research

The Management Agenda survey is now in its 20th year and is updated annually through a consultation exercise conducted with Roffey Park consultants. Additionally, this year, we undertook 7 in-depth interviews which were used to inform the questionnaire design and the final report. We interviewed managers from different sectors and asked them about what being a leader in the current climate of change and uncertainty really felt like for them. We also asked them about the biggest business challenges being faced by their organisation and the people implications of these challenges.

This year’s survey consisted of 45 multiple choice, closed and open ended questions in five sections: HR issues and challenges, context and climate, diversity, impact of digital and the flexible workforce, and human potential and its development. Questions in the HR section could only be answered by HR professionals and the rest of the questions could be answered by all the respondents including non-managers. This provided some insight into non-managers’ views on some of the issues as well as managers and allowed us to compare the results between managers and non-managers.

An online version of the survey was produced and the survey was live from 13 October 2016 until 16 November 2016. An email invitation with a link to the survey was sent to a list of previous Management Agenda respondents and an external data base of UK managers and non-managers.

A link to the survey was also available on Roffey Park’s website and E-News. The incentive for completing the survey was a free copy of the final report and entry into a free prize draw of an Apple watch.
Related Reading

- The leader as storyteller: engaging hearts and minds? £10
- Living in a Matrix £10
- Building Resilience - Five Key Capabilities £10
- Compassionate Leadership: What is it and why do organisations need more of it? Free of charge
- Transformative Coaching £10
- An employee perspective on organisational trust during change £10
- Is the Nine Box Grid all about being in the Top Right? £10
- The Lived Experience of Trust £10
- Leading for innovation £10
Now in its 20th year, Roffey Park’s Management Agenda is the definitive barometer of managers’ views on working life. Regularly featured in newspapers and professional journals, the research is widely recognised as one of the most important and reliable indicators of emerging workplace issues in the UK.

Based on the views of 700 managers working in organisations from a wide range of sectors and of different sizes, this year’s research report covers how things have changed (or stayed the same) since Roffey Park’s inaugural Management Agenda in 1998. It also reports manager views on how well their organisations are placed to respond to anticipated changes in the world of work, from increasing diversity to new developments in technology. The report presents the views of managers from all levels of seniority and those in both HR and non-HR roles.

This research should appeal to a wide audience, from board members through to HR, OD and managers in the wider business. It should also be of interest to anyone with responsibility for developing effective people management strategies, OD initiatives, and healthy organisations.