

# IMAGINE 2019

INSIGHT INTO THE REGIONAL MARKETPLACE

## THE FUTURE OF WORK

Changing behaviours, technology and working practices



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### FEEDBACK

We would be delighted to hear your comments on this edition of **IMAGINE**.



# WELCOME

WELCOME TO THE SIXTEENTH EDITION OF IMAGINE, NIGEL WRIGHT'S ANNUAL IN-HOUSE MAGAZINE FOR THE NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND, CUMBRIA AND NORTH YORKSHIRE.

We continue to assist clients with a range of talent challenges including those linked to acquisition and investment, office moves, turn-around projects, business and digital transformation and SME scale-up.

Our mission, as ever, is to act as an extension of our clients in the market, helping them build capability and achieve growth through talent acquisition.

Whether we're recruiting at Board Level or building capability within Finance & Accountancy, Human Resources, Information Technology, Manufacturing & Engineering, Marketing, Sales and Supply Chain & Procurement, Nigel Wright continues to deliver sustainable results that produce long term value.

In this issue, we consider which professional skills are in demand, reveal some great ideas for building your employer brand, and discuss the effect of automation in the workplace.

Interviews are also found throughout the magazine: senior executives share insights into transformational change, manufacturing excellence and digital innovation across many of our key sectors.

We hope you enjoy the latest edition of Imagine Magazine and would welcome feedback on any of its content.

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Image: Ben Duffy - Atlantic Campaigns

# EAT, SLEEP, ROW, REPEAT.

## TEAM TYNE INNOVATION ACHIEVES A WORLD RECORD

On 23rd January 2019, Team Tyne Innovation, a four-person rowing crew comprising ex-Reece Group CEO, Phil Kite, project manager, Claire Hughes, retired detective inspector, Steve Sidaway, and former fireman turned plumber, Alan Huntly, became the fastest mixed four-person crew to complete the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, the world's toughest rowing race.

Though, despite each person rowing 12 hours per day for 42 days, covering 3,000 miles of open ocean, skipper Phil told Nigel Wright how he still considers the 18-month journey to the start line as the biggest challenge he faced.

Aged 53, Phil Kite rowed for the first time “on a perfect day with blue skies and flat water” at Tyne Amateur Rowing Club. A family friend had persuaded him to give it a go, after Reece Group. Despite 15 years of doing “no physical challenges beyond cutting the grass,” pretty soon Phil became addicted, often hitting the blades five days per week. Around the same time, an Atlantic rower asked to store their boat at Reece Group’s Armstrong Works site in Newcastle. As he passed it each day, a new-found enthusiasm for exercise and tacit

need to “do something completely different,” led Phil to conceive his audacious plan.

Phil stepped down as CEO of Reece Group in 2017 and focused his efforts on entering the Talisker Whisky Challenge – a 3,000-mile multi-team race across the Atlantic Ocean. A competence in rowing is not a prerequisite to enter the Talisker Whisky Challenge, but it helps. Teams also have to provide their own Atlantic standard boat and additional safety equipment, which can cost up to £100,000.



Phil Kite, Team Tyne Innovation

In April 2017, Team Tyne Innovation was born. Its aim was to demonstrate that an innovative spirit is ‘alive and kicking’ in the North East, by showcasing innovation generated by the region’s businesses, colleges and universities.

As well as using “a living exhibit” of North East products and services to facilitate

their journey across the ocean, the team set themselves an additional fundraising target for its three chosen charities: St. Oswald's Hospice, Daft as a Brush Cancer Patient Care and The Stroke Association. That summer, Phil and his crewmates began organising a series of events to get local businesses interested in supporting their efforts, with equipment, their time and fundraising.

“The reality of rowing 12 hours a day – two hours on and two hours off throughout the days and nights – was a physical shock to my system.

Early attempts to row on water were scuppered by poor weather conditions. And it wasn't until May 2018 when the crew first took their boat out for a day at Derwent Reservoir.

Further expeditions ensued in Derwent and Kielder. And in July, with five training months remaining, Team Tyne Innovation spent a weekend rowing off the Northumberland Coast. On the first day they left from Amble harbour and enjoyed a trip around Coquet Island in heavy rain, thunder and lightning. However, crew illness and force 5 weather on day two, meant the team required the assistance of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) to get back to shore.

With only weeks remaining until the start of the race on 12th December, Team Tyne Innovation faced its ultimate test when two crew members withdrew. Phil remembers a fraught phone call with remaining crewmate, Claire Hughes, as the two debated whether they should continue.

Conducting a more comprehensive selection process would have been ideal, says Phil, but with only a small pool of people willing and able to take part, it's difficult to find the right mix. Thankfully, Phil and Claire found Steve Sidaway and Alan Huntly through an ocean rowing network, who brought varying degrees of competitiveness, practical skills and humour to the team:

“We were one of several teams that experienced recruitment problems before they got to the start line, as personal circumstances changed. By this stage, it was clear selecting Claire was one of the best decisions I'd made. Not only did she offer a wide-ranging skill set, including project management and experience of other outdoor exploits, her inclusion created a positive environment. Having four male egos could have made things uncomfortable, especially as neither of us knew each other that well. We were very lucky because it worked in the end, but it might not have.”

Team Tyne Innovation left La Gomera harbour in The Canary Islands at 11a.m. on Wednesday 12th December. It was the last time they saw any of the other 27 competing boats for the duration of their expedition. Phil feels that the exhilaration of getting to the start line with a boat, the necessary equipment and (eventually) a crew; achieving the fundraising aims and fulfilling an objective which had occupied his mind every day for almost two years, did have an impact when it came to the race.

Despite completing all the necessary training, Phil says he was not fully prepared for what they faced once on the ocean. This was most likely exasperated by the stress of the last few weeks and the challenges of the new team dynamics. Having led the project over a two year period, he noted how getting to the start line felt like he had already achieved his main goal. It led to some difficult conversations early on, as he explains:

“The reality of rowing 12 hours a day – two hours on and two hours off throughout the days and nights – was a physical shock to my system. A combination of a lack of sleep and not eating and drinking enough meant during the first week, I didn't feel I was performing as I should have been. I have a strong personality and am used to leading people. I was disappointed with myself and knew I had



Claire Hughes



# IMAGINE

to get a grip. It turned out that was easier said than done.”

Supporting his crew with their own challenges helped Phil gradually adjust. Some people found rowing at night problematic early on. One person was burned by boiling water too, while another had an abscess on their heel – cutting away dead skin and scrubbing the wound with a brush was required to bleed away the infection.

Once these issues were resolved, the crew settled into a routine of “eat, sleep, row, repeat.” A rotation system ensured one hour of each person’s two-hour shift at the blades was spent with someone different – an overlap, which “helped us to gel better,” says Phil.

The crew faced a few emergency situations, the most serious were associated with the auto steer ram disconnecting from the rudder, which caused the boat to spin out of control in the rolling waves. The first instance occurred at night when Phil was asleep in the bow cabin. He had no idea there’d been a major problem until he was on his next shift.

The rudder problem occurred on several occasions, but Phil says he felt a lack of fear throughout the journey. In a strange way this reinforced his view that getting to the start line was a bigger challenge overall:

“Despite the danger, I never felt worried. All the basic safety systems were in place, so I assumed the boat would be fine and we’d find our way. We were never ready to give up, either. Of course, it’s not fun rowing for two hours in 100-degree heat without taking a break. The first row of the day is tough too because you know there are ten more hours of rowing ahead. There was no backing out. Out of 42 days rowing, we only missed a combined four hours at the blades overall, which is nothing.”

It’s even more impressive given the physical strains the crew endured. As well as those already described, back pains, rear abrasions, blisters, calluses, tongue sores and ‘claw-hands’ were also each shared amongst the four. Sleep deprivation caused some to hallucinate too – a crew member thought they were rowing around a Swiss lake at one point, rather than on the ocean.

However, the humour and intrigue provided by Alan and Steve as well as other “lighter moments” made for an overall enjoyable experience. The crew saw whales, flying fish and other sea life, and even had a low-flying bird collide with the boat on one occasion. Christmas Day saw them don Santa hats and jump into the sea. And both Phil and Claire celebrated birthdays, with Phil creating a ‘Colin the Caterpillar’ cake from a Snickers bar to share with the team.

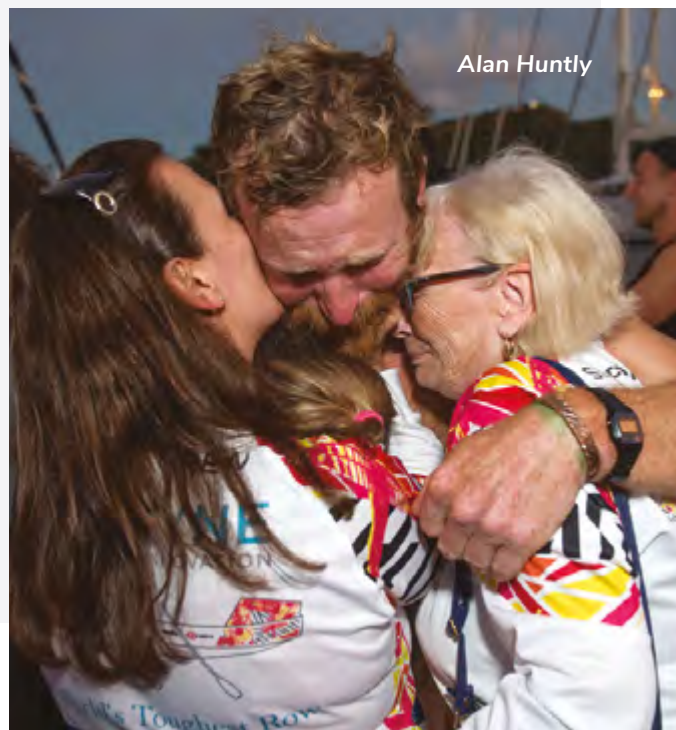
An American yacht travelling to Antigua stopped to chat for a while and the crew hailed a passing Indian cargo vessel on their VHF radio – “The captain couldn’t believe we were rowing the Atlantic,” said Phil.

The intention from the start, Phil states, was to cross the Atlantic safely. Team Tyne Innovation was one of the oldest crews and expectations were that they’d finish in the bottom half of the competitors. At the start, race organisers had also informed teams to expect 15% slower times than the previous year, as fewer winds were anticipated. A 50+ day row was a realistic target to aim for, says Phil. “Our mindset going into the race was never competitive.”

However, within a few hours of the race start the team had overtaken two other boats and as a result immediately became competitive. And just over two weeks in, race organisers confirmed Team Tyne Innovation was on track to break the previous record



Steve Sidaway



Alan Huntly

“Team Tyne Innovation had beaten the record for a four-person mixed crew by 14 days, after rowing for 42 days, 10 hours and 26 minutes.

set for a four-person mixed crew. The focus now, says Phil, was getting to Antigua as quickly as possible and creating a new “hard to beat” record.

During the final week, another boat had started catching Team Tyne Innovation. The crew became frustrated that their increased efforts – including rowing as a three person crew on night shift – weren’t making a difference until they

realised that a build-up of seaweed on the boat’s rudder was slowing them down. Once this was removed, they powered on and even found time for an unscheduled stop to celebrate, before rowing the last few miles:

“On the final morning, we were still 16 miles ahead of the boat trying to catch us, which was a relief. We knew if we maintained three-mile hours, we’d beat them. Alan emerged from the cabin with a bottle of champagne. It was annoying in some ways to discover we’d been carrying this heavy bottle, but of course we each had a glass. Antigua came into view

with around 20 miles remaining – we were relieved we’d made it. We rowed into the harbour and passed the finish line around 5:30 pm, just as the sun was setting – the timing was perfect.”

Team Tyne Innovation had beaten the record for a four-person mixed crew by 14 days, after rowing for 42 days, 10 hours and 26 minutes.

Weeks after returning home and the fanfare of the achievement having died down, Phil often asks himself, “Was that it?”

He admits to feeling “incredibly lucky” to have rowed across the Atlantic but emphasised the team’s story is one of how “average people can achieve great things.” He now urges anyone with dreams of accomplishing something not to let life pass them by. “I’m no different to anyone else,” he says. “You’ve got to make the most of things, work hard and surpass your ambitions. I’m a world record holder at this moment in time. That’s an amazing feeling.”

The team have each experienced “snakes and ladders” emotions as they’ve readjusted to normal life, with some even signing up for other endurance challenges. Phil, however, is still considering his options.



## HOW CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR IS ACCELERATING AUGMENTED REALITY

HOLLIS APPROACHED THE BODY. THAT WASN'T THERE. BUT WAS. ALBERTO WAS FOLLOWING HER WITH THE LAPTOP, CAREFUL OF THE CABLE.



This is the moment in William Gibson's 2007 novel, *Spook Country*, when the characters approach the body of actor, River Phoenix, lying on the L.A. street where he died. River Phoenix's death occurred some 14 years earlier, but Hollis and Alberto are seeing him as he was then, thanks to GPS-triggered augmented-reality (AR) headsets. Phoenix's death is the latest piece of 'locative art' appearing around the city, a trend which journalist, Hollis, has been asked to investigate.

Reading about augmented reality a decade ago in Gibson's novel was, at the time, eye opening. Although the fictional novel is set in 'present day' 2007, these technologies, of course, weren't widely available to the public then. In fact, the first ever iPhone was only released two months before the book. But Gibson is renowned for being on the ball with his predictions. Cyberspace is a word he

coined in 1982 and in *Pattern Recognition* — a prequel to *Spook Country* published in 2003 — a series of video clips sent over the internet which gains a cult following perfectly described the imminent rise of vlogging, itself facilitated by the launch of YouTube in 2005.

But while only a two-year gap existed between *Pattern Recognition* and YouTube, we've had to wait much longer for the proliferation of augmented reality technology outlined in *Spook Country*. Yes, some similar devices have existed for several years. Computer scientist Ivan Sutherland developed the first Head-Up Display (HUD) capable of overlaying graphics on real-world surroundings in 1968. And tech like this has been adopted in military, space and aeronautical scenarios since — the term 'augmented reality' was coined by a Boeing engineer in 1990. Like in the novel, there's been AR art such as the 1994 theatre





“ Things shifted rapidly, though, with the release of Pokémon Go in 2016, hunting for Pokémon via phone screens.

production, Dance in Cyberspace. Advertisers and some brands have got in on the act too, with various AR campaigns and product tie-ins

(see timeline). Even the iPhone 3G, released in 2008, gave people access to ARToolKit software for the first time, but still, AR technology wasn't ubiquitous. It never became a part of consumer culture. Hope that Google would change that was dashed in 2015 when its Google Glass prototype was discontinued.

Things shifted rapidly, though, with the release of Pokémon Go in 2016. Before Niantic's AR mobile gaming app, which places players in their own neighbourhoods hunting for Pokémon seen and 'caught' via phone screens, consumers had little awareness of

the potential capabilities of AR. By the end of its first year, the app had been downloaded more than 500 million times. It seemed fancy headsets and glasses weren't required, and instead, the simple marrying up of AR with smart phones was the key to get markets moving, providing consumers with immersive experiences that resembled those in Spook Country, but without the laptop and cable – even better! Referring to Pokémon Go, Gibson himself tweeted: "I always wondered what a mainstream augmented reality hit product would look like. Now at last I know."

Since 2016, more brands and retailers have begun making significant investments in AR technologies to capitalise on what Euromonitor labelled a 'Top 10 Global Consumer trend.' Its report focused on the ability for AR to offer 'try before you buy online shopping experiences' that would bring 'the benefits of in-store shopping into the home.' This, Euromonitor reveals, will lead to better online

Below is an indicative list of AR campaigns, product tie-ins and apps released by major consumer brands and retailers during the last decade.



# IMAGINE

conversion — specifically of those consumers buying big ticket items like furniture, as well as clothes and footwear often lost at the point of sale because investment in these items requires a degree of visual confirmation that the products look right on the body or in the home.

The rise of AR also comes at a time when there's a heightened rejection of 'intrusive' and 'manipulative' marketing techniques. Like how Pokémon Go puts players 'into' the game, the vehicle of AR has revealed to shoppers that they too can enjoy a greater interaction and personalised experiences with brands, products and retailers — in and outside of the store — rather than being subjected to traditional 'one way' messaging. Indeed, personalisation is one of the 51 ecommerce trends for 2018 identified by Growcode, and AR also fits well with other key developments such as Live Video Streaming, Guided Selling and Visual Search also acknowledged as things brands and stores need to start doing to reengage consumers frustrated by old advertising techniques. Collectively, these tools create opportunities for companies to launch 'experiential marketing' campaigns which seek to position consumers as active participants in the buying journey — the perfect stage for AR to shine.

Those brands and retailers that have entered the AR game seem wise to do so, with various reports indicating a high demand for AR technologies to become embedded in purchasing journeys. As referenced by Euromonitor, in 2017 management consultancy LEK found 80% of consumers were interested in using AR to visualise products in their home. Furthermore,

Retail Perceptions — a global consultancy specialising in the retail industry — discovered that 40% of shoppers will pay more for a product if they could first experience it via AR. In its 2016 survey, 61% of respondents also indicated they would prefer to shop in stores that offered AR experiences. Demand is so high, in fact, that UK tech firm Digital Bridge found that 87% of shoppers expected brands and retailers to have developed an AR tool by the end of 2018, for use across 900 million AR-enabled smartphones.

According to Euromonitor, two key pieces of innovation are helping brands and retailers realise their AR potential. Apple's AR development platform for iOS, ARKit, released in September 2017, has enabled developers to build high-detail AR experiences using Apple devices, as well as improve earlier releases of apps on older platforms and offer them to a wider range of smart phone users. Then, in March 2018, the Android equivalent, ARCore, appeared which has also become the operating platform for several AR apps.

Analysts have confirmed the AR market will be worth \$11.14 billion in 2018, yet those companies utilising the technology are still in the minority and primarily 'big firms' — Deloitte revealed around 90% of companies with revenues between \$100 million and \$1 billion are now utilising AR. With the market now truly scalable and expected to grow to \$60.55 billion by 2023, we should expect AR to become an integral part of the shopping experience over the next few years.

“AR has revealed to shoppers that they too can enjoy a greater interaction and personalised experiences with brands, products and retailers.









# EX-MCLAREN ENGINEER RELISHING CHALLENGE AT THE FOREFRONT OF AUTOMATION

**Q. You've recently joined Tharsus as Head of Design (Engineering). Tell us about your career to date and any highlights.**

**A.** Yes, I joined Tharsus in July having previously worked for McLaren for 8 years with roles like Chief Engineer for the 675LT. Prior to that I worked for Bentley developing Powertrain Systems for cars like the GT Supersport and Mulsanne under the watchful eye of the VW Audi group. So yeah, over 11 years in the automotive industry was a great way to start my career.

**Q. Wow, McLaren seems like it must have been a great place to work, what key skills did you develop there?**

**A.** In my last role at McLaren I was Senior Manager within Vehicle Engineering focusing on all McLaren Future Projects. This required recruitment and management of a team of highly skilled engineers and technicians. This role allowed me to develop a departmental strategy in line with the company business plan and set a vision for some very exciting projects. So my key skills in recent years have

been focussed on leadership. Working at McLaren also honed my engineering skills as I worked alongside some world class people.

**Q. Now you've joined Tharsus as Head of Design, why did you make that change?**

**A.** I'm passionate about building new products and that's what Tharsus do very well. The challenge of building automated machines or robots is only going to get bigger and more complex and Tharsus is at the forefront of that challenge. It's demonstrated through its work with its customers that the products it develops can be commercial game changers.

**Q. Were you actively seeking a move back to the North East?**

**A.** I'm originally from the North East so moving here was an easy part of the decision making process. Having lived away for a number of years, like many people originally from the region, you reach an age when life changes and children enter your world and the draw of coming back to where your



parents live is pretty compelling. But who wouldn't want to live in the North East, right! With the countryside and work-life balance there is a lot going for the region. I know it's clichéd, but the difference compared to a 3-4 hour commute is huge.

**Q. Why should other people consider joining the company?**

**A.** Tharsus has grown significantly in the last few years. It's now the largest privately owned employer in Northumberland. With the growth comes the opportunity to work on emerging technology products and deliver solutions for some of the biggest and most innovative companies in the world. The problems we're asked to solve are at the cutting edge of technology with a real focus on automation. It's the focus on automation that is growing across the globe as more companies look to develop in this area and Tharsus is brilliantly positioned to help them.

**Q. Generally, what's your perspective on engineering careers in the region? You started yours outside of the North East. Are things better now than they were 10 years ago?**

**A.** When I left the region there was no industry. There just weren't the roles there are now. So yeah, engineering in the North East is certainly getting stronger and it seems like it's coming of age currently. I recently described it as being like 'Silicon Valley' to our Head of Marketing, by which I meant it seems like there are some cutting edge companies doing some very interesting stuff compared to when I left the region originally.

**Q. What are your key priorities and objectives at Tharsus?**

**A.** The main priority at Tharsus is to grow the engineering team and find brilliant people to join us. We're looking for people with the right attitude and behaviours. We want people who are willing to learn and try new things. With a diverse range of customers the problems we solve for them are similarly different. We're looking for people who can be flexible and are adaptable to the needs of our customers.

**Q. Is this a new role, or have you inherited a team? How will your team support the Tharsus business?**

**A.** Tharsus already had an engineering

team before I joined. There are some very talented individuals here and I'm lucky to have inherited a good bunch of people with some great skills. My key focus is to ensure that the people we have, and those we bring into the business, see a career path and how Tharsus can help them develop in an exciting environment. It's one of the things that drew me to Tharsus. It's evident to see that a lot of emphasis is placed on helping people develop and progress.



Rob Thompson

**Q. How will you transition your skills and experience into Tharsus?**

**A.** The role at Tharsus requires very similar skills to those I've used in previous roles. Product Lifecycles take the same shape no matter whether the product is a supercar or a robotic arm or autonomous machine. The challenges around designing and engineering a workable product are the same.

**Q. What technologies and methodologies are you most looking forward to working with?**

**A.** I'm really excited about the future of autonomy. Tharsus is positioned to help many companies overcome their challenges in this world and the chance to work with leading edge technology and develop products that are changing industries and businesses is what really appeals.

**Q. What does success look like after year one?**

**A.** Success for me looks like a high functioning team operating at capacity solving the complex problems brought to us by our clients. Ultimately it's about a raft of new and exciting product going out the door to Tharsus customers, helping them to disrupt and grow their markets.

# GREAT IDEAS FOR BUILDING YOUR EMPLOYER BRAND

## THE PROBLEM WITH WORK

**“The daily routine of most adults is so heavy and artificial that we are closed off to much of the world.”**  
 Ursula Le Guin, 1929 - 2018

Work – the thing we spend much of our time doing – is having a bad time of it these days. As research suggests a growing disillusionment with jobs as well as employers is emerging. But what’s gone wrong? Why has the nature of work become such a contentious issue? And how can companies attract and retain talent or re-engage and

re-energise employees, and make them love their jobs again? From Boreout to Burnout, in this paper, we look at some of the criticisms of working life and consider how companies are changing to meet the needs of the modern workforce.

With employment figures surging across Europe, you could argue we’re living through a golden age of work. In the developed world there are more people than ever with jobs. Education is now wholly focused on training employability, regardless of the subject being studied. And being employed is widely considered a ‘moral duty’ as it means contributing to the expansion of the free market, the worthiest of causes since economists pronounced the ‘End of History’ some 26 years ago.

### Losing purpose

But in researching modern working life, it doesn’t take long to stumble upon an ever-growing list of discrepancies between the promise of employment and the actual experience of it. For many, work lacks meaning and for some, the activities of employers appear ethically spurious. Its benefits are not distributed fairly either, and it’s also bad for your health. In 2015, a YouGov poll found 37% of British workers consider their job meaningless, with a further 13% saying they weren’t sure if it was or not – that’s basically half of the UK workforce with no sense of purpose in what they do for a living. Deloitte’s 2017 ‘global ethics’ survey revealed only 40% of North American executives believe their company is ethically ‘strong’, while the UK’s Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) found 50% of British workers are unconvinced their employer is committed to ethical behaviours.



### Pay gap

Regarding benefits, the gender pay gap is widely publicised and an increasing scourge for employers wanting to appear committed to fairness and equality. But perhaps the most outlandish inconsistencies reported today are the chasms that exist between executive and workers’ pay. In the 2017 Bloomberg Global CEO Index, for example, CEOs in the USA were shown to earn 265 times more than the average American worker, while the UK (201), the Netherlands (171), Spain (143), and Germany (136) also featured in the top ten worst offending countries.

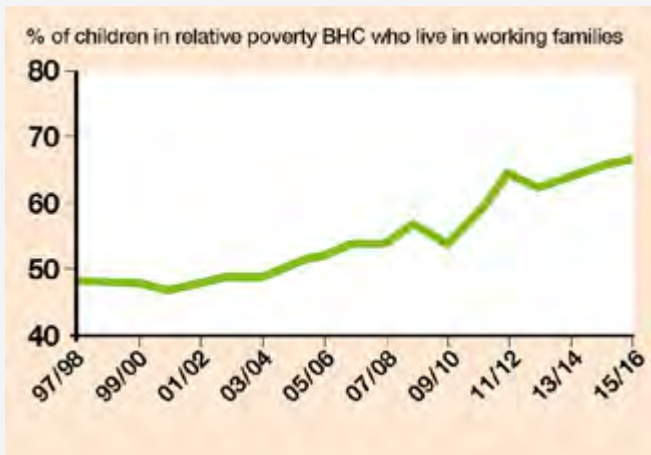
Rank	Economy	Pay Ratio	CEO Pay, \$ Million	GDP p.c. PPP 2017/2016
1	United States	265	\$14.25	\$53,800
2	India	229	1.46	6,372
3	UK	201	7.95	39,545
4	South Africa	180	2.21	12,270
5	Netherlands	171	8.24	48,177
6	Switzerland	152	8.5	55,952
7	Canada	149	6.49	43,469
8	Spain	143	4.89	34,245
9	Germany	136	6.17	45,341
10	China	127	1.87	14,713

Furthermore, the rise of the gig economy and zero-hour contracts, comprising over five million people in Europe, while making overall employment statistics appear strong, isolates a large swath of the workforce from basic rights such as sick pay, minimum wage and unfair dismissal enjoyed by those with secure jobs and permanent contracts. And another discouraging statistic which undermines the role of work is that having a job no longer guarantees a life free from poverty. In the UK,





for example, 67% of children living in poverty are from 'working homes.'



### State of mind

The most prominent gripe against modern working life, though, is that work is bad for your health. Mental health, in particular, is a major concern for employers. The World Health Organisation (WHO) says one in four people are affected by mental illness, and in the UK 15% of workers experience mental health issues at work, while 13% of all sick days are now attributed to mental health related problems.

While ongoing socio-economic, geopolitical, demographic, environmental and technological factors undoubtedly exasperate individual anxieties, the issues outlined above concerning pay, precarity, lack of meaning and distrust at work surely augment personal health problems.

It's easy to link low income and insecurity to poor mental health. The Royal College of Paediatrics recently confirmed higher rates of stress of those living in 'poor' working households. In recent years, though, researchers have made curious observations about how working life negatively impacts even educated and comparatively affluent workers who are secure in their jobs.

In their 2008 book Boreout! Peter Werder and Philippe Rothlin described a condition they say is found in most modern office environments, where bored employees perceive there is no meaning in their jobs, develop work-avoidance strategies that simultaneously give the impression they are busy and in demand. These include taking longer to complete tasks and faking enthusiasm and effort by staying late and skipping lunch. This is far from fun, though, as Boreout sufferers claim extreme anxiety and stress through fear of being found out.

Burnout is another stigma associated with working life today. In the European Working Conditions Survey, 33% of EU based workers say working at high speed to meet

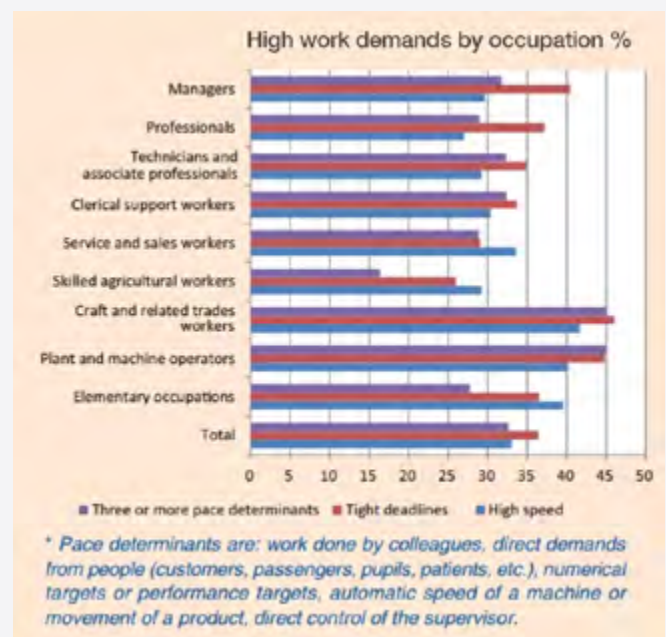
tight deadlines is normal. The same percentage also claim frequent interruptions prevent them from getting work done. The report confirms that intensive and disruptive working styles have negative consequences on mental health, with 14% saying work is a constant worry, while over 25% report psychological strain through trying to hide or suppress the fact they're struggling to cope.



### Switched on

Even for those that don't suffer (or don't believe they suffer) from health problems associated with modern working life – the European Working Conditions Survey confirms some people find intensive work rewarding or interesting – there is still a private cost to choosing or engaging in this 'always on' lifestyle.

In the UK, for example, 75% of workers admit they can't help responding to work emails at home because



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technology enables them to, with 37% in another study claiming it makes them more productive. However, according to clinical psychologist Professor Vicki Culpin, this behaviour of staying connected to our technologies throughout the night causes people to sleep poorly because it limits the brain's ability to fully 'switch off.' High levels of sleeplessness and 'poor sleep' she says exposes people to greater risks of catching colds, as well as suffering (in extreme cases) depression, dementia, strokes and heart attacks.

While social media, news and entertainment are part of the problem, Culpin, in her forthcoming book, *The Business of Sleep*, argues that presenteeism and long-hour working cultures are the biggest culprits. Unawareness of the health implications of poor sleep, she adds, is rife and Culpin labels our era the 'age of foolishness' where one-upmanship at work, despite its promise of short term financial gains, has no long-term benefits on individual well-being.

What else? The European Working Conditions Survey further reveals workers are usually too tired do household jobs (21%), can't commit enough time to their families or adequately look after children (11%), or undertake care responsibilities for sick or elderly relatives (3%). Commuting times are increasing across Europe and long commutes are a direct cause of unhappiness amongst workers. And, certainly, for younger generations, work is seemingly never-ending too, with average retirement ages slowing creeping up throughout the continent.

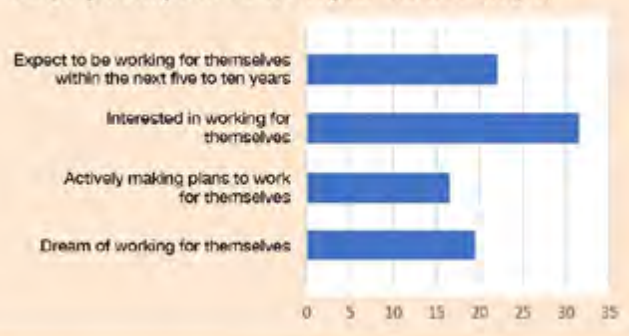
## Alternative approaches

So, yes, work is up against it. And mounting dissatisfaction caused by the reasons discussed above is taking its toll on employers. As referenced at the start of this article, talent is dropping out of the workforce at a high rate, as more people are lured away from the trappings of a traditional career and towards the perceived dignity of self-employment – better health and well-being, greater autonomy, the opportunity to do meaningful or ethical work, or where the fruits of their efforts are fairly rewarded.

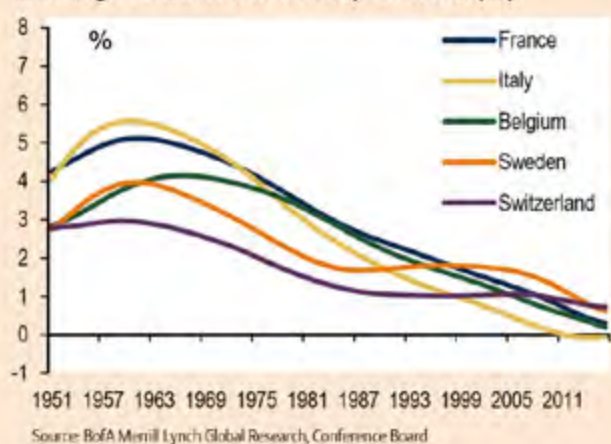
Perhaps more alarming, however, is the ongoing decline in productivity across the developed world. It seems despite efforts to normalise intensive working patterns, overall output per worker remains comparatively poor to what it has been in the past, with no indication it will recover.

To meet these challenges head on, things clearly need to change. And in some instances, they already are, with companies reporting favourable results for retention and productivity after acknowledging these issues and finding ways to make working life more meaningful, ethical, fair and healthier for their people.

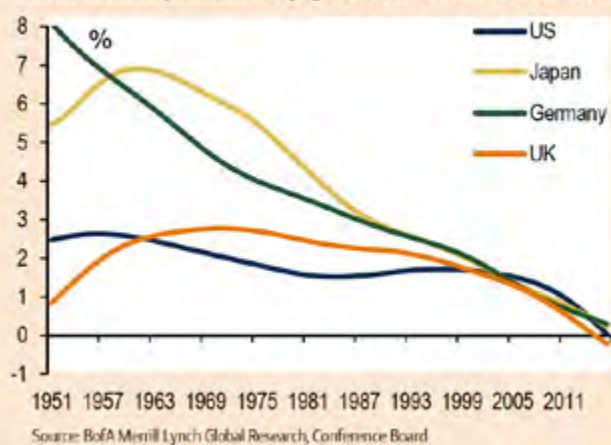
## Employment plans of 18-54 year-olds in UK (%)



## ...through much of the developed world (%)



## Trend labour productivity growth has slowed markedly



## What good practices look like

Companies suffer if employees have little pride in their work, or where they believe their job lacks meaning or that it somehow makes them complicit in unethical behaviours. If the rewards are unfair or if it has a negative impact on their health – whether they realise it or not – their productivity and morale, too, will decline over time. Employers must, therefore, work hard to instil a sense of pride in their personnel through embedding



a workplace culture that promotes purpose, personal growth, health and well-being.

The first stage in achieving this is to define exactly what the company stands for, as well as what it means to work there. Otherwise known as 'the brand' and 'employment brand,' these two factors should always match up through clear consistencies in how they're marketed and implemented.

Messages and initiatives play critical roles in engaging and uniting current employees behind the brand and its vision, as well as in attracting new people into the business through raising awareness of a company's employment brand in the market. The aim should always be to try to emphasise how your brand is different and encapsulate the type of people you want the business to be associated with – what does good look like? Which qualities from your current employees do you seek to emphasise above others?

Employee engagement surveys and conducting audits of the talent attraction, engagement and retention processes can help tease out what these things are. Cross functional involvement in establishing brand and employer brand messages is essential, as is appointing designated employee advocacy leaders to facilitate the process and embed cultural change.

Valuing everybody and giving direction and purpose through learning and development programmes is usually an easy win. Conceiving benefits and rewards that match the brand's ethos, linking brand building strategies with other processes – e.g. customer service – as well as aligning the organisation with perceived 'positive impact' causes, such as charitable or environmental activities, will also ensure success.

Being open to and creative around flexible working helps people meet personal obligations and responsibilities, avoid stressful commutes, provides empowerment by giving them greater control over their working lives, and ultimately, reduces stress.

In terms of the proactive elements involved in attracting talent, refining recruitment systems so that all candidates – whether successful in their job application or not – enjoy positive recruitment experiences,

is a must. And many companies now participate in talent community building, utilising ongoing networking and other marketing touch points to ensure their brand remains 'top-of-mind' for prospective candidates. So when the company is ready to launch a recruitment campaign, it's already one step ahead of its competition, in a tight talent market.

Positive and in-depth onboarding processes, too, help retain the momentum of recruitment campaigns and ensure no inconsistencies between perception and reality emerge.

If employees are engaged, then they'll want to help and it's wise for companies to enlist the support of staff in brand and employer brand building activities. We've already mentioned using employee advocacy leaders to roll out internal initiatives and spread positive messages, but in the digital age, providing access to and training people to leverage digital channels is equally significant. Whether it's promoting products and services, raising brand awareness or highlighting how much they enjoy their jobs, giving employees the freedom and tools to participate in brand building online is a smart move.

Sending regular company updates and content sharing suggestions, utilising videos and infographics and testing employees' knowledge to ensure consistent and accurate messages, can maximise results. And the more channels collectively utilised, the greater exposure and impact gained.

To see what some of our clients have been doing to meet the needs of the modern workforce, please visit [nigelwright.com](http://nigelwright.com)'s News & Insights and download the full report, where you can access several case studies from various industry perspectives.







# PEOPLE STRATEGY CHARTS COURSE FOR NORTH P&I'S FUTURE

ESTABLISHED IN 1860, NEWCASTLE HEADQUARTERED NORTH P&I CLUB (NORTH) IS A WORLD LEADING MARINE MUTUAL LIABILITY INSURER.

From capsizing vessels and cyber-terrorism to stowaways and kidnapping, it provides insurance cover and loss prevention services to circa 5,000 ships worldwide, and, for the first time in the Club's 159-year history, total entered tonnage has exceeded 200 million gross tonnes. Together with its subsidiary Sunderland Marine - a leading insurer of fishing vessels, small craft and aquaculture risks - North now employs almost 400 people across the UK, Europe, Asia-Pacific and the USA.

A successful global company, going from strength to strength, Global People Director, Dawn Robinson tells Nigel Wright how delivering HR transformation without a major "change catalyst" has been the hardest challenge of her 30-year career.

Dawn joined North in 2017, following three years at Nomad Digital where she'd led a successful cultural change programme across the UK, EMEA, US and Australia. Following Nomad's sale to Alstom, she wanted to remain in the North East and was intrigued by an exciting approach from a business "practically next door" that she'd never heard of:

"I used to walk past North's building every day but didn't really appreciate what went on there. North's not so well known in the region as most of its business comes from overseas, but the website was great – people were a prominent feature

“ Delivering HR transformation without a major “change catalyst” has been the hardest challenge of her 30-year career.



“North’s priorities to address leadership and development, as well as ongoing change and global engagement, suited her previous international experience and skill-set.

and there was an immediate warmth and personal touch about the organisation. It was a global role too, and once I’d met the CEO and my team, I knew I wanted to be part of it.”

North provides specialist Protection and Indemnity

insurance, otherwise known as P&I insurance, to shipowners, operators and managers around the world. In addition to P&I, it also offers Freight, Demurrage and Defence insurance (“FD&D”), a discretionary legal costs insurance that protects its Members’ interests and assets. As a mutual Club, North is owned by and run for the benefit of its members, who can influence strategy and direction. It was a different stakeholder context to any Dawn had previously worked in. However, North’s priorities to address leadership and development, as well as ongoing change and global engagement, suited her previous international experience and skill-set.

The business was in the process of diversifying. It had acquired Sunderland

Marine in 2014 and enhanced its capabilities and expertise within its specialist loss prevention team. The inhouse FD&D team, the largest in the industry, launched a new product offering in 2018 and this strategy has boosted membership numbers and revenues.

Development was key, says Dawn, to ensure North’s leaders were equipped for its next phase of evolution and growth. However, with no obvious change “triggers”, the immediate challenge was convincing North’s people that, despite the business’s success, they needed to keep moving with the times:

“Early on I presented to North’s leaders on the ways in which HR can influence people and get them to take responsibility for change. There was bemusement and a reluctance at first. I was from outside the sector, which is rare. And people had become used to HR following directives, rather than asking questions and influencing budgets. Acknowledging this and the fact that Maritime can be a slow-moving industry was important, to ensure the pace of change occurred at a manageable speed.”

With CEO Paul Jennings’ backing, Dawn worked closely with the leadership community during the first few months. Paul wanted simple and visual objectives, she explained, and collectively, with the Leadership Team, they re-defined the Club’s purpose, vision and the key strategic goals to be achieved by 2023. This approach led to the creation of ten top priority initiatives that would facilitate the Club’s success during the next five years.

From this process, Dawn conceived a People Road-Map and set expectations for the next three years.

Year one, she explained, was about addressing basic processes and policies, as well as putting a strategy and framework in place. This included transitioning the HR team into a ‘business partnering’ function across North’s global office network. She created a preferred supplier list of recruiters too, ensuring North only works with agencies that truly understand its proposition. Training modules for resourcing were introduced alongside hiring specialist roles in IT and marketing. A restructure within the marketing team also gave Dawn access to a communications specialist to assist with internal engagement.



Dawn Robinson

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These may be considered basic steps in other industries, Dawn highlighted, but for North, it was a whole new way of working:

“The HR Team here continues to grow and I’m proud of how they’ve enhanced their learning and evolved into true Business Partners. Along with the Pay and Reward team, we’re becoming more strategic and proactive in our

approach. Our international offices feel less isolated from the Newcastle headquarters. A CIO who I hired is improving North’s cyber security and data protection, while the digital presentation of our marketing materials is more professional and consistent, using simple and clear visuals and information that is easier to understand.”

Leadership development has been the focus in year two. Dawn notes how several of North’s employees – including underwriters, lawyers, insurers and claims experts – are regarded as some of the best minds in the industry, offering unmatched technical expertise on the complex cases the business deals with. Many typically have legal backgrounds, though few may have experienced leadership training as part of their learning and development.

Consistent behaviours, tools and materials would help to “unlock North’s true potential,” says Dawn, and further “steady our ship through ongoing turbulent waters in the industry.”

Working with training partner Roffey Park, leadership development kicked-off with a bespoke two-day programme of blended learning. Called Navigating North, it focused on leadership from a personal, people and business context and provided a balance of theory, pragmatic tools and opportunities for ongoing 360-degree feedback. As well as equipping leaders with the tools, skills and experiences they need to lead and motivate their people, the programme also helped North develop a behavioural framework – True North – that ensures leaders adhere to the same standards, service, quality and performance wherever they’re based.

According to Dawn, the structure and delivery of the course was as powerful as the content. By mixing focus groups with local and global leaders from different operational areas of the business, it enhanced informal networking and cultural diversity, while reinforcing a “One North” mentality.

Moving forward, a Roffey Park specialist will continue working with each leader on their feedback and development interventions, which will further embed the required behaviours

“Consistent behaviours, tools and materials would help to “unlock North’s true potential”.







and expectations and help identify other development needs. Furthermore, a recent global leadership event offered “closure” to the experience by getting each leader to talk through their learnings and changes they’ve made, as well as the impact it had on their teams:

“Navigating North and True North have had a huge impact on the way our leaders work together. Engagement has increased throughout the business too and we’re now aligning True North to all people practices in a collective way – shaping questions for recruitment, performance reviews and many other processes. It feels like we have a common purpose. There’s a strong ethos for caring and doing the right thing – an upbeat personality seems to be the order of the day.”

Dawn confirmed that planning for the next chapter in North’s transformation journey is now underway. Taking the learnings from the leadership development programme, a new initiative called Magnetic North will focus on ‘Development for All’ North employees. Enhancing learning and development across the business featured highly in a recent people survey, says Dawn. And although it’s still a work in progress, over the next 12-18 months it will evolve into a personalised and localised offering.

Linked to this is North’s efforts to hire junior solicitors and paralegals and train them internally. This is a new approach by the business, confirmed Dawn, as North previously recruited “ready-made” specialists because of the complexity of its cases. She added:

“Development for everyone is a key focus moving forward. Magnetic North will become a great success story to add to our recent leadership programme. It’s global and different from what we’ve tried in the past. Throughout, HR will work alongside the staff liaison committee and executive team to ensure alignment with our priority initiatives. We’re already getting some great results

and I expect they’ll get even better – so watch this space.”

As the second largest P&I Club, North does attract talent through the strength of its brand and

from referrals within the sector. However, it acknowledges that more needs doing to raise awareness about employment opportunities at the business, particularly in the North East.

Humility is definitely an aspect of the culture, says Dawn. Compared to other Clubs, North doesn’t celebrate success in an overt way. In recent years, however, it has gained a reputation for its CSR activities – donating £700k to local health, education, environment and social deprivation causes in nine years – as well as award-winning Health and Wellbeing initiatives such as group meditation and yoga at work, free fruit and an allowance for gym and sporting club memberships.

In addition to emphasising North’s benefits, Dawn confirmed the business is working on improving its public profile to better reflect the company today amidst changing markets. It will do this by rejuvenating communication of its core values and conveying the strength and quality of North’s people. The next evolution of North’s brand will also introduce a new vision and brand to drive a greater sense of unity across the business.

She added: “The brand has served us well, but because we’re diversifying it’s time for a refresh. It’s almost there, and we’re hoping that it will be revealed very soon.

Maintaining a great service and retaining fantastic people, whilst offering quality with humility, is the “magnetic force that draws new members and employees to us,” says Dawn. Moving forward, her priorities over the next 12 months are working on the people Road-Map, focusing on development and enhancing collaboration across North. Helping her CEO continue making a difference is important too. Ongoing diversification of the business is important, she notes. Though by ensuring he feels confident, has all the required support mechanisms in place and a competent leadership around him is critical to North’s ongoing success:

“We want North to be the Club that everyone wants to join”, she says. “And it’s my job, along with my team and our leaders, to create the right environment so that the vision can be realised.”

“ It feels like we have a common purpose. There’s a strong ethos for caring and doing the right thing.

## NEW RESEARCH POINTS TO TRADITIONAL ATTITUDES OF MILLENNIALS

IN ITS RECENT GLOBAL CONSUMER TRENDS SURVEY, EUROMONITOR PAINTS A FAMILIAR PICTURE OF MILLENNIAL BEHAVIOUR.

Some of the soundbites include the generation born between 1982 and 1999's tendency for 'flexible, adaptable and personalised experiences,' its denial of brand loyalty and an unwillingness to start a family or buy a home until much later in life. It also points towards an intuitive grasp of technology as a factor which makes Millennials natural or 'adaptive' entrepreneurs – selling, communicating, networking and crowdfunding their way to success.

Fundamentally, it claims, they 'reject traditional jobs' and 9-5 lifestyles, instead seeking out roles 'they can build themselves and align with their personal interests and passions.' All the while, they enact these plans without a need for a reliable income, downplaying too, any incentives for potential financial gain. From the statistics which accompany the report, the message from Millennials seems very clear – 59% expect to be self-employed during their career, with only 11% stating financial security is important.

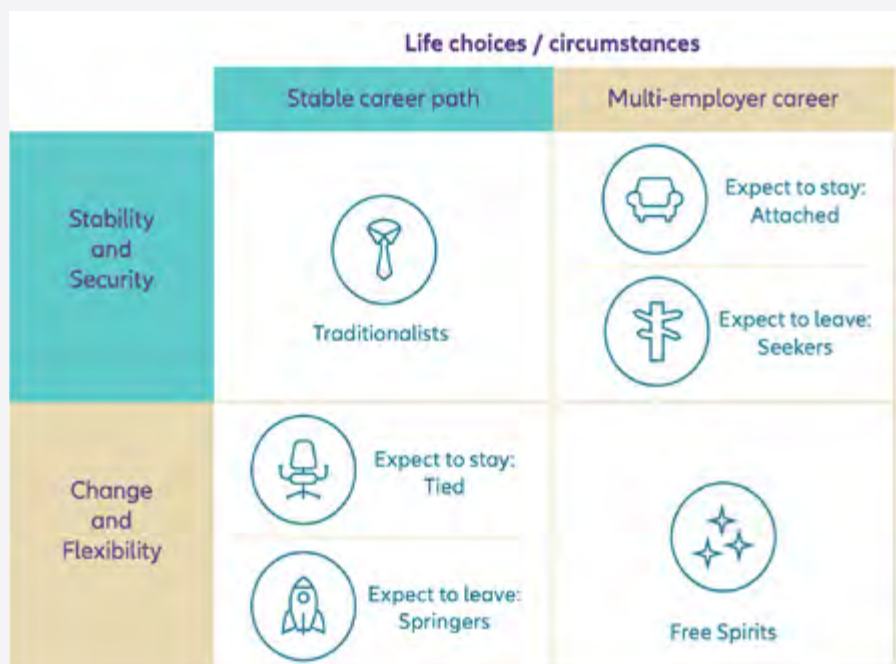
Is this an accurate portrayal of an entire generation, though? Certainly, some of these findings do match with the attitudes shared by large numbers of Millennials across Europe. But, even on an anecdotal level, we recognise that many of these pronouncements may seem

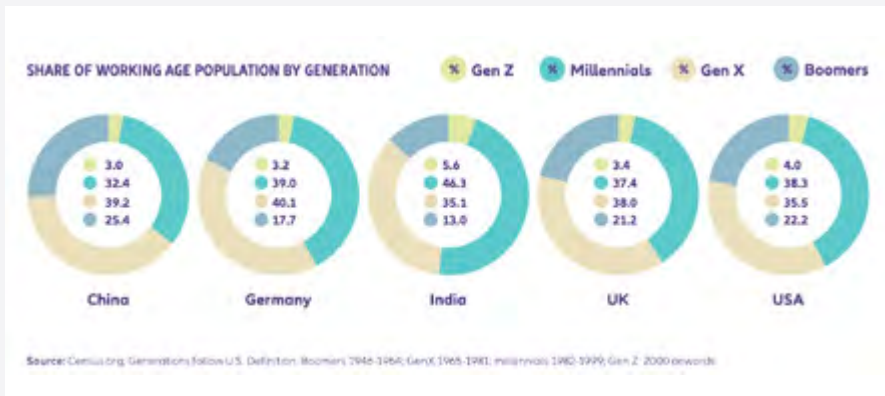
a little overstated or even untrue when overlaid on Millennial friends and colleagues.

These were some of the doubts raised by researchers at global financial services firm Allianz when they sought to offer a critical eye to the Millennial debate, peering a little closer at the trend and unearthing some surprising – though perhaps more agreeable insights – in their Millennials: Work, Life And Satisfaction 2017 report. Based on interviews with over 5,000 currently employed 18-35-

year olds across Germany, the UK, the US, China and India, rather than a generation made up of free spirits who embrace flexibility and freedom, with a desire to create their own ultimately 'self-employed' futures, the Millennials in Allianz's study are more complex. The report, in fact, finds six distinct categories highlighting a broad spectrum of attitudes and desires.

While there are 'Free Spirits', as described above, Allianz also points toward young workers who have restlessly changed employers





during their careers, but who do so in the hope they will eventually find a job that satisfies them, and a company that will offer long term security. Termed Seekers, they share a platform with the Attached group who have gone through a similar experience but who now believe they've resolved their search and found a degree of contentment at work.

On the other hand, there are Millennials who have defied the stereotypical 'flighty' label and instead worked for the same business for several years. These workers are not happy, though, and intend to one day leave their employer for another, better suited company. While some are Tied to their employer through necessity, with no clear plan of escape, others are described as Springers who are confident their existing employment predicament is just a stepping stone to a happier scenario soon. A final category is the Traditionalists, who, like their name suggests, chose a deliberate career path with one employer, with whom they intend to develop and 'climb the ladder' over a long period of time.

What the research reveals is that the two largest categories by a significant margin are Traditionalists (35%) followed by Seekers (27%).

And across all categories, the overall conclusion is that, first and foremost, Millennials favour the stability and security offered by permanent positions over the flexibility and freedom associated with self-employment. Only 16%, overall, matched the Free Sprit category.

The research should give businesses food for thought when developing strategies which seek to introduce Millennial talent into the workforce. But before we consider the nuances of Allianz's findings, let's first look at some of the broad conclusions reported about this emerging generation.

According to Allianz, there are two billion Millennials (119 million in Europe) in the world today and by 2020 one third of the global workforce will consist of those born after 1982. Furthermore, despite the perception that those within the 18-35 age bracket are largely worried about their future, the report confirms that when it comes to careers, most are optimistic about their prospects. Generally, too, they envisage a better future for themselves, with over 80% expecting their lives to improve, despite an overwhelming acceptance that they will work far longer than previous generations.

**“ Millennials demand a sense of purpose associated with acquiring and using skills, doing work which is linked to socially responsible activities.**

While the Allianz report reveals a yearning for stability and security at work, it does undoubtedly confirm a restlessness amongst Millennials who seem happy to move around in their search for 'the right thing', even if that right thing is another permanent job. Over 40% indicated that their current employment situation wasn't ideal. It seems that what Millennials demand from a state of permanence in their employment is a sense of purpose associated with acquiring (80%) and using skills (82%), doing work which is linked to socially responsible activities, as well as enough time outside of work to do other things (82%).

Even so, and again in contrast to the widely accepted view of Millennials' attitudes to work, there is a consistent desire across different countries for a job which offers opportunities for advancement (74%) and is challenging (66%), as well as for gaining high status at work and an income which matches it (69%). These factors increase again, of course, when associated with respondents who match the Traditionalist category. When it comes to excelling through doing occasional overtime, though, the willingness is comparatively low (61%) and fits with the fact that only 57% of Millennials in the study consider work a central part of their life.

Although seemingly shunning the Free Sprit ethos of self-employment, Millennials in the Allianz study are mainly supportive of remote working (64%) saying it allows for greater flexibility in their working lives. Furthermore, while usually considered a collaborative and social bunch, when it comes to working in an open plan office – which is favoured by most modern organisations today – only 48% believe those environments are good for communication, while 52% state the open plan model is bad for concentration. And though Millennials are prone to travelling



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the world, moving abroad to boost their careers only appealed to half of the respondents.

Finally, when asked about how the world of work will change and evolve, there was a high level of agreement from respondents that the pressure to perform at work would increase (70%), and that roles would become more demanding (71%). Machines and computers too, Millennials expect, would play a greater role in working life (73%). Where Millennials were more sceptical about the future was with regards to flexibility and pay. Only 57% believe the hours of work will become more flexible, while as few as 48% see overall remuneration and earning power improving.

So, what about when we look at specific countries? Across several factors, Millennials from across the world showed differing and, in some cases, more extreme variations of the trends unearthed by Allianz.

Firstly, the Millennial workforce is currently more dominant in India (46%) than elsewhere. Only a third (32%) of Chinese workers represent the 18-35-year old generation, with the number slightly higher in Germany (39%), the USA (38%) and the UK (37%). There are also more Indian Millennials who fall into the Seeker category (40%) than there are in other countries, with those in Traditional careers most likely found in China (45%) and Germany (34%).

While most Millennials prefer the security and stability of permanent employment, respondents in the USA (78%) and India (75%) were generally more in favour of this career path compared to the those from China (68%), the UK (68%) and Germany (65%). Within Europe, although there are considerably more Traditionalists in Germany than in the UK (27%), the number of Free Sprits in those countries was largely the same (16%; 17%).

Opportunities to progress in their careers tend to be more important to Millennials outside of Europe, particularly for those in the USA (79%); with China (76%) and India (76%) close behind. Percentages then



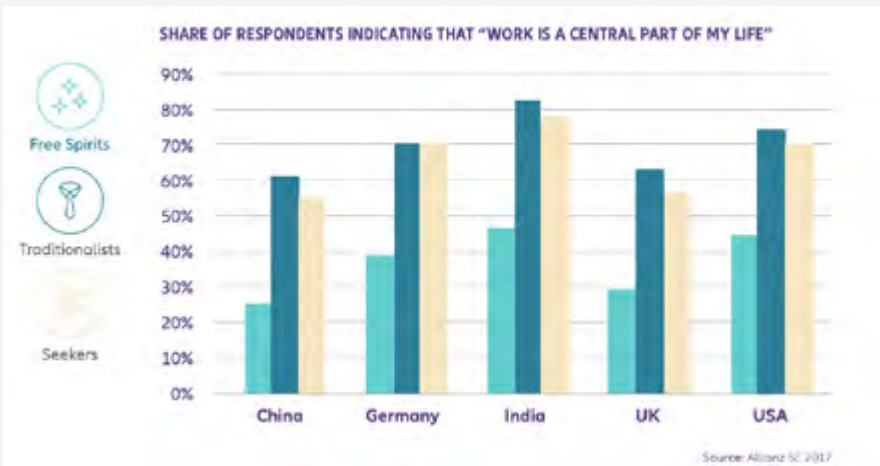
“ Regarding gaining employment that leaves time for other things outside of work, Millennials in Germany and the USA consider this a deal breaker.

fall marginally in Germany (72%) and the UK (69%). When it comes to finding challenging work, however, Germans (76%) are way ahead. And apart from Indian Millennials (73%), the need for challenge is much reduced elsewhere: (USA 65%, UK 60% and China (55%). Work also plays a far more central role in the lives of Millennials in India (65%), the USA (62%) and Germany (60%) than it does for those in the UK (49%) and China (47%).

Finding meaning at work through acquiring new skills is a lower concern for Chinese (75%) and UK (74%) Millennials than it is for those in Germany (85%), India (83%) and the USA (82%). Respondents in China are also less motivated by the chance to utilise specific skills and expertise in their jobs (74%) unlike their peers in Germany 90%; USA 88% and India (83%). Regarding gaining employment that leaves time for other things outside of work, Millennials in Germany (90%) and the USA (90%) consider this a deal breaker, as opposed to in China (69%) where the separation of work and life is less prominent. However, the Chinese are more confident that flexible hours will become more prevalent during the next 10 years (66%) compared to respondents in Germany (52%), the USA (57%) and the UK (48%).

Gaining status and an income which matches it is important to a clear majority of Indian Millennials (80%). Germans too (76%) aim for a degree of prestige in their working lives. This appears much less relevant, though, for those in the UK (60%); with Chinese (65%) and US (66%) Millennials also showing lower scores. Yet, if these are the things Germans and Indians crave, they also demonstrate better awareness through their expectations that work will become more demanding (76%; 72%) and that there'll be more pressure to perform (72%; 72%).

A message which may prove challenging for businesses trying to capitalise on Millennial talent is that, bar India, across each of the other countries, Millennials appear to have a low work ethic. In the report, this is measured by a willingness to do overtime if it means excelling in your role. While Indian Millennials (72%), in the main, are willing to commit to overtime, this attitude is much less prominent elsewhere, with only half of Chinese 18-35-year olds, 56% of Germans and 59% of those in the UK saying the same. The picture is slightly better for those in Traditionalist careers with 89% of Indian Traditionalists, 76% of those in the US and 70% in the UK considering overtime a prerequisite to doing your



best. The number, however, falls to 64% in Germany.

Perhaps linked to this is expectations concerning pay. While 61% of Indian Millennials expect earnings to go up over the next 10 years, just over half of US Millennials, 40% of UK Millennials and as little as 24% of German Millennials believe wages will rise.

Other differences between German Millennials and their Western peers emerge when analysing data concerning the work environment. While the jury tends to be out on whether open plan offices are good for productivity and communication, Germans seem adamant that the open plan model is a bad idea. Only 24% support it compared to 48% in the UK and the USA. German 18-35-year olds are also more sceptical about remote working, generally seeing it as leading to increased working hours (54%) rather than providing flexibility (46%). In the UK (62%) and the USA (74%) on the other hand, the association of remote work and flexibility is strong.

In Asia, remote working as being indicative of greater flexibility is generally agreed across China (67%) and India (70%). Open plan offices too tend to gain more favour with Chinese (62%) and Indian (57%) Millennials compared to their peers in the West. Perhaps as

expected, the prospect of moving abroad to boost their careers seems more popular with Indian (61%) and to a lesser extent Chinese (54%) respondents than it did to 18-35-year olds in the USA (51%), the UK (49%) and Germany (30%).

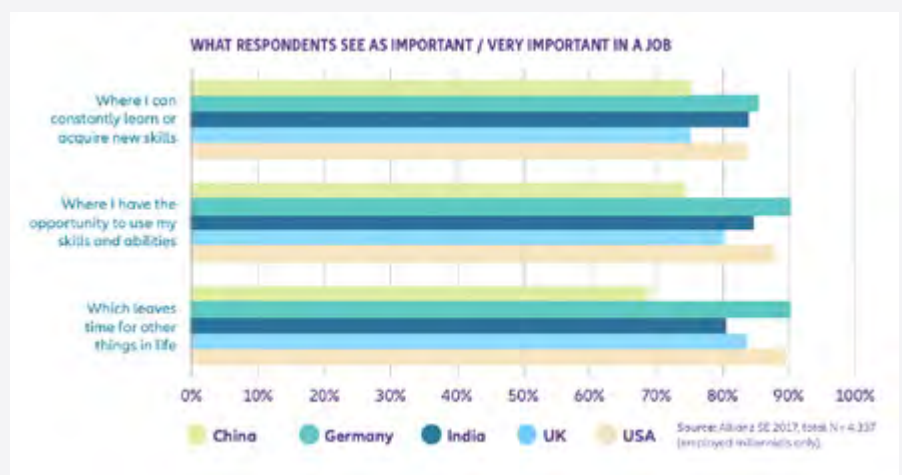
The Allianz report's main take-away message for businesses is to avoid automatically assuming all Millennials are the same, especially playing-down perceptions that they're a generation of Free Spirits uninterested in stability, structure, security and status, and instead focusing on exploring needs on an individual basis. While Millennials do change jobs more frequently, their needs aren't too dissimilar to the generations before them, and their flightiness when it comes to employment is likely facilitated by broader volatile social and economic

conditions, as much as a need to find an environment that meets their wishes.

But the power is in the hands of Millennials, who aren't afraid to move around until they find the perfect employer, with the onus on businesses to offer environments and incentives that will make them stay – be it money, security, opportunities to learn, etc. The 59% who expect to be self-employed in Euromonitor's study may allude to this through a belief that self-employment means taking control and creating their own futures, versus being subject to an employer's whims or fluctuating fortunes, which never quite live up to expectations.

For employers, there's lots to digest here, but some quick conclusions could be as follows: Millennials want stable and secure careers, they're ambitious and keen to learn, they want opportunities to progress, do challenging work and, in the main, be rewarded with status and a salary which matches it. Yes, they may shun overtime to enjoy life outside of work, but what sort of culture do you want to create anyway? And could you create compromise by surprising your Millennials with unexpected financial gains?

We'll leave the rest of the thinking up to you...



## PEOPLE AND MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT THE KEY TO GROWTH

EIGHT YEARS SINCE JOINING NIGEL WRIGHT, RICHARD MORGAN'S SIGHTS ARE STILL FIRMLY FOCUSED ON EXPANDING THE REGIONAL BUSINESS OF THE NORTH EAST'S LARGEST RECRUITER, WHILE DEVELOPING HIS OWN SUCCESSFUL CAREER AT THE FIRM.



Right from the start of his Nigel Wright journey, Richard notes, he was told if he consistently proved himself, he'd enjoy a rewarding career. And throughout his time at the business, moving through the ranks from Consultant right up to Associate Director, he's been challenged to achieve more with his efforts recognised, helping him realise his ambitions.

Things haven't always been plane sailing, though, as Richard recalls. Two major issues were prevalent which stifled Nigel Wright's ability to take a leap in growth. Firstly, although several experienced people were intuitively doing the right things, without an adequate training programme in place, tacit knowledge and skills were not being transferred down through the business.

And secondly, the company, Richard noted, was too tolerant of underperformers, carrying them along and allowing their negativity to impact the mood of the office. Everything changed, however, when Paul Wilson was appointed CEO in 2014.

Straight away, according to Richard, Paul Wilson recognised and rewarded talented, engaged people in the firm by pushing responsibility downward. His message was clear: take on responsibility and thrive or shun it and don't. It was exactly the career challenge Richard and many of his peers were determined to undertake. Five years on, the results speak for themselves. Following three record years, the Net Fee Income of Nigel Wright's regional business has grown well into double percentage figures for the last three years. This, Richard says, is testament to the leadership which now runs right throughout the business:

"Those on the regional leadership team have each developed their careers during the last four years and evolved into director level roles together. As a group, we've focused on creating training programmes and we now have an outstanding development programme up to senior management level. Yes, we have high expectations around performance, but the right support is in place along with the knowledge, experience and capability distilled across the leadership team to get individuals up to the next level."

Furthermore, Richard highlighted, helping underperformers move on quicker has made working life better for everyone, and leaders now recognise and reward successful behaviours, boosting levels of engagement, while ensuring that all consultants are clear, from day one, of the service and performance they're expected to deliver.





The beginning of its 2016-17 financial year marked a milestone for Nigel Wright. The regional leadership team had evolved to the point that the group were ready to set a coherent and ambitious five-year plan — aiming to double the revenue of the regional business by 2022. Launching a new office in Wynyard was a key part of this, as was building capability into its temporary recruitment practice while establishing a presence in Cumbria and North Yorkshire. Underpinning all these activities, however, was commitment to invest significant time into developing the next generation of managers, as Richard explains:

“This was the immediate action point we focused on at the start of our five-year plan. We knew if we didn’t have this robust layer of talent, we would stem our growth at a critical time. Regional management capability would also be a major factor in us growing ahead of our competition. The first phase was identifying who we wanted in our management development programme. Then, we created a programme which allowed people to learn on the job, complemented by formal training delivered by internal and external trainers. 18 months on and we have several new managers, plus others coming

through the ranks. Their success has undoubtedly contributed to our recent growth.”

Having spent the last 12 months building the confidence of new managers, the next step, Richard says, is to expand their teams. This pattern of progression, he highlighted,

is present across Nigel Wright’s regional business, covering all discipline areas. Some senior hires were introduced to the business too, to fast-track Nigel Wright’s expansion into the temp recruitment market, but Richard says those who have held management roles elsewhere are enjoying accelerated learning on the firm’s management training programme and on-the-job support:

“Management jobs at Nigel Wright are different to those of our competitors. We

“Leaders now recognise and reward successful behaviours, boosting levels of engagement, while ensuring that all consultants are clear, from day one, of the service and performance they’re expected to deliver.”



Wynyard office, Teesside

give responsibility early on in specific areas of business planning, recruitment, people engagement and development as well as market insight. On several occasions during the last year I’ve pushed my management team over a cliff edge with the challenges they’ve faced, expanding their comfort zone, but always being there to catch them at the bottom.”

Richard is confident that current and future managers will allow the business to grow rapidly over the next few years. Furthermore, he added, having people progress through the firm drives engagement and raises productivity. Instead of performance plateauing during the previous year while waiting for new managers to reach their potential, Nigel Wright’s regional growth trajectory surpassed expectations. Delighted with the results of these early training endeavours, Richard believes the real return on investment will be during the next five years. Between now and 2022, he noted, training will become more sophisticated

# IMAGINE

making Nigel Wright even more impactful in the market, further setting it apart from competitors.

With a unique proposition offering scale and reach to outgun big recruiters, but also quality service, close relationships and market expertise to compete with boutique suppliers, Nigel Wright has enjoyed several new client wins in a buoyant 24 months. Significantly, Richard highlighted, larger clients are working with Nigel Wright across multiple areas of their business, enjoying a consistency of service. Some big multi-discipline project wins include HC-One, Nobia, Gentoo, Formica, TMD Friction, ZyroFisher and Engie – all, according to Richard, are a success and ongoing. Another recent example Richard was keen to highlight was appointing a new FD for Barbour, he explains:

“Barbour were attracted by our unique proposition – knowledge and expertise in the finance discipline combined with international networks across the European consumer industry. I, as Director for Finance Recruitment, teamed up with the Director for our consumer industry practice in the North, to deliver this assignment. We also liaised with colleagues across our international network of offices, receiving several referrals for good candidates. The successful candidate was an individual working for Amazon in Luxembourg seeking to relocate to the North East. Identifying him is testament to our networks and collaborative approach.”

This ‘one team’ culture, Richard says, shines through in Nigel Wright’s service. Rather than adopting an “everyman for himself” approach indicative of recruitment agencies in general, consultants at the firm are trained in service delivery and leaders reinforce building sustainable relationships and competing on value not price. He added: “We’ll consider clients’ problems and find the best way to solve them. Our structure, too, helps us win work at all levels. Each discipline area has a

manager or director with networks up to Board level. We don’t need a generic executive search team, but rather all our director level search is delivered by discipline and sector experts. This sets us apart from competitors.”

Nigel Wright is on the up, but Richard says the business isn’t complacent. The market is the best it’s been during his recruitment career and, in these conditions, expansion should be a foregone conclusion. But only through hard work and ongoing commitment to developing people, while introducing new talent to the business, bringing with it drive and ambition, will guarantee results and help Nigel Wright achieve its five-year plan.

In conclusion, Richard notes that the most significant thing Nigel Wright offers is a career and not just a job, as well as a happy working life. Culturally, too, Nigel Wright has worked hard to ease the burden of what is a “tough profession.” Initiatives such as uniting the back-office staff with recruitment teams and offering flexible working so employees can better fit careers around their lives have made for a happier working environment. In Richard’s words:

“We listen to our people and have leaders setting the right tone. I enjoy coming to work and being surrounded by intelligent, high calibre, ambitious colleagues who share the same values as me. It’s not a chore coming to work and to see people enjoying themselves is refreshing. When we get together as a company or in our teams to celebrate, people are not simply showing their faces. They genuinely enjoy spending time with colleagues. That’s really powerful.”

“The regional leadership team had evolved to the point that the group were ready to set a coherent and ambitious five-year plan – aiming to double the revenue of the regional business by 2022.”



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gentoo



TMD FRICTION  
A NISSHINBO GROUP COMPANY



Barbour



# 9 MAJOR ECOMMERCE TRENDS IMPACTING THE WORLD OF WORK

ECOMMERCE CONTINUES TO DRIVE GROWTH IN THE CONSUMER INDUSTRY, WITH THE EUROPEAN SECTOR VALUED AT €602 BILLION LAST YEAR. SEVERAL REPORTS INDICATE THE MAIN AND INTRIGUING ECOMMERCE TRENDS ACROSS EUROPEAN CONSUMER MARKETS.

We've reviewed those and established nine major themes which we discuss in the following article, as well as offering our assessment of how impactful they are, and will be, on future skills, jobs and employment.

## Augmented and Virtual Reality

The proliferation of high-tech smart phones has facilitated the rapid use of augmented reality and virtual reality (AR/VR) within the consumer sector. Whether it's developing applications which offer consumers immersive experiences or those which overlay digital elements onto the real world, brands and retailers are acquiring skills and capabilities to capitalise on this trend. An estimated \$2.5 billion could be added to the global economy thanks to AR/VR as technology goes mainstream. Immersive in-store and online experiences are already in demand, with consumers indicating a preference to try on clothes and makeup, visualise products and decorate their homes using AR/VR before purchasing. Packaging, too, will become integrated into the AR/VR toolkit as more companies innovate their offerings. And smart phones aren't the only place where consumers can benefit from developments in the AR/VR arena. Global sales of



actual AR/VR headsets are expected to increase by 52% by 2022 as devices improve.

## Automated Service

In the reports we've reviewed, two areas stand out as being instrumental for maintaining competitiveness in the ecommerce space – speed and service. Web performance is particularly important today. With consumers too busy and impatient for sites to load, the merest second can mean the difference between losing a customer or making a sale. Furthermore, younger shoppers are no longer satisfied with limits to when they can buy things online. Ecommerce sites need 24/7 availability, including customer service, to ensure those spontaneous purchases get over the line. A big trend in the consumer industry is the increasing automation of customer service. The compound annual growth rate of chatbots is 24%, with some studies indicating over fifty percent of online shoppers prefer accessing apps rather than using email, phone or contact forms when making enquiries. Social media, email marketing and even SMS campaigns are getting the chatbot treatment too, as brands seek to capitalise on the speed and efficiency offered by improved automation tools.



## Faster Purchases

Directly related to improving usability through speed and automation is the growing consumer demand for faster online checkouts. Significantly, desktop computers have taken a back seat on the purchasing journey, as confidence in spending via smart phones grows. Apps too are the preferred buying gateway as opposed to mobile sites, with statistics indicating conversation rates are higher when consumers buy via apps compared to when they visit ecommerce stores. Overall, an anticipated 40% of global ecommerce revenue will be generated via smart phones during 2018. How you pay is changing too. 10 mobile payment platforms are now available including PayPal, Android Pay and Apple Pay. And with cryptocurrencies entering the mainstream, several ecommerce platforms are also supporting Bitcoin, the world's largest cryptocurrency. Another significant development is the growth in 'one click' payment options since Amazon's patent expired in 2017. Email is one channel where brands and retailers are hoping to leverage one click tools, being as it's still the simplest way to communicate with potential customers.

## Getting close...

Email and SMS are great for messaging, but they can still be a passive exercise with often limited returns. And yes, while apps are popular, consumers are still required to download them first and sign up for offers and services. What brands really want is to 'hang out' with consumers, showcasing their products, and if possible, making sales too. Brands and retailers are therefore creating a seamless mix of advertising, services and sales via social media while ensuring customers don't feel like they're being sold to. For example, Pinterest and Instagram developers are creating tools which allow people to click on items (such as clothing) and reveal product details, as well as options of where to purchase those products. Building communities and having meaningful conversations with consumers is another major driver behind social media investment. Snapchat is currently 'on trend' in that regard. Around \$172 billion of marketing spend will be directed at unlocking the potential of the app in 2018.

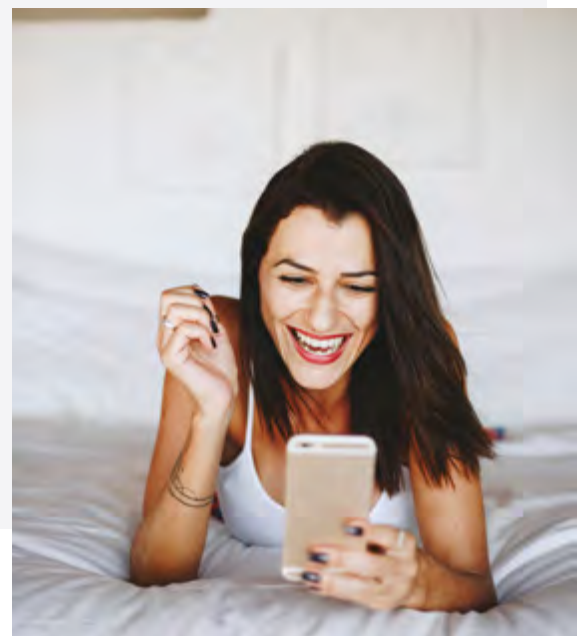
## ...and Personal

The proliferation of social media has brought with it an acute focus on the individual. Accessing Twitter, Facebook or Instagram will reveal a multitude of calls to 'look at me' from users. Marketers have responded appropriately by getting more personal with messages, with 96% stating that drawing on someone's unique tastes and needs augments relationships. Some reports recommend tailored pricing and price optimisation for successful personalised campaigns, while others point to the need for greater collaboration with customers, allowing people to actively participate in the product creation process and mould items to their needs. Diversity too is more pronounced, as brands seek to represent people from all social, cultural and marginalised groups in their advertising. Fundamentally, mapping customer journeys will enable brands and retailers to offer the most intimate communications and experiences. Machine learning is already helping to improve product recommendations and personalise conversions, and we should expect more ecommerce sites to embed this technology over the next few years.

## Ropo and Voice Search

Although the tools and techniques outlined above are aimed at making purchasing easier and faster online, consumers aren't as impulsive as brands and retailers would like to think. Research is still a major component of the shopping journey, as 85% of consumers indicate they research items before purchasing online. It's important to note, too, that for many sectors, traditional brick and mortar stores still play a vital role. For example, using an AR app to 'virtually' try

“Machine learning is already helping to improve product recommendations and personalise conversions, and we should expect more ecommerce sites to embed this technology over the next few years.”





on a dress is helpful, but still, the ultimate test for most people is seeing the item in-store before buying it. A trend which emerged over a decade ago, therefore, is increasingly relevant today. ROPO (Research Online, Purchase Offline) empowers consumers and provides retailers with useful conversion rate data. There's a new element too, which requires consideration. The launch of Amazon Echo and Google Home has seen voice activated search take off during the last year. An estimated 24% of consumers own such a device, with over 40% of millennials now using voice search when shopping online. Rethinking content to match how consumers search online is of paramount importance.

### Slick (Moving) Images

While mirroring potential customer speaking styles in written content is increasingly a method for attracting voice-activated searches to ecommerce sites, it seems video and animation is the best way to keep them engaged and embed marketing messages. What's apparent is that in-depth over-thought content isn't required. Simple animated iconography and motion will capture most consumers' attentions and relaying the key points will ensure 95% of content viewed is retained. If investment in video isn't possible on your budget, not to worry. Another factor, according to reports, which helps draw customers to products and services is original photography. In all aspects of the sale, 'impersonal' messaging is out. Old-style stock images can easily turn people away from websites, while images which add transparency and personality to brands amplify commercial opportunities. Experimenting with GIFs, slide shows and other creative tools is also on the rise as are big bold colours and simple interfaces.

### Seamless Touch Points

To leverage consumer inquisitiveness, brands

and retailers need to bolster their content by identifying and combining all on and offline pre, during and post purchase touch points.

Otherwise known as an omnichannel strategy, platform, device and store integration is now a major trend. Consumers are already naturally inclined to an omnichannel approach, jumping from TV, to phone, to tablet, to other screens, to advertising billboards, to stores and so on. Brands and retailers that continue isolating customers based on a perceived channel preference risk falling behind.

Developing all channels and creating a holistic experience across them is key. Popular examples of how brands are making omnichannel strategies work through seamlessly linking on and offline efforts include loyalty schemes and pop-up events, app based in-store promotions, film and TV tie-ins and leveraging sponsorship opportunities as well as user generated 'free' content supported by a selection of 'paid for' advertising touch points.

### Super Fast Delivery

Website and app loading speed is undoubtedly a critical factor for keeping customers engaged online but demands for faster delivery times is another prominent trend. Amazon has typically led the way with 'one click' ordering and its next day delivery service available for Prime users. It's no surprise the business has doubled the number of packing robots in its factories in recent years as up to 96% of all customers now indicate 24 hour delivery is what they expect.

An emerging trend, however, is same-day delivery with some reports highlighting how brands are partnering with start-ups and using physical stores as distribution centres to stay ahead of the competition. Logistics and shipping will be a key battle ground and we should expect ecommerce businesses to make further investments in this area in the coming years.

“ Logistics and shipping will be a key battle ground and we should expect ecommerce businesses to make further investments in this area in the coming years.

## Impact on Skills, Jobs and Employment

Where to start...? Well, it's perhaps no surprise to learn that specialists in video, animation, mobile applications and AR/VR, are in high demand. One fruitful place to identify this talent is the burgeoning video games industry which is expected to grow significantly over the next few years.

AR/VR technologies could also change the way we work, such as through virtual meetings, training simulations and collaborative opportunities. Even hiring practices are turning to virtual reality to spice up the selection process. In 2017 car maker Jaguar developed a VR app that challenged users to solve code breaking puzzles and progress through the hiring stages. And virtual office tours are allowing prospective hires to get a feel for the environment and culture they're joining.

What else...? Well, the rise of chatbots, machine learning, automation and robotics will certainly impact the employment market. McKinsey estimates that around 60% of occupations could experience 30% or more of their 'constituent activities' being automated over the next 10 years. Automation is already taking its slice of low level jobs, with virtual assistants now dealing with customer queries and social media posts, as well as everyday data processing tasks. By 2020, Gartner suggests around 85% of questions asked online will be answered by machines. The overall net loss of administrative jobs worldwide is likely to have risen to 5.1 million within the next two years.

The key to eradicating the net-loss gap is making sure workers have the right skills to succeed. Technological change

will result in a wide range of traditional 'core skills' becoming obsolete and all industries will be impacted by this.

There will still be core skills though, and according to the above-mentioned report, those skills will probably be more multifaceted and specialised. The WTO provides a useful insight into what some of these desirable qualities of the future will be. Its research gives importance to data analysis and technical sales skills, as well as experts who can understand and commercialise complex products and services. Furthermore, research by Indeed confirmed that the demand for AI specialists has tripled during the last three years.

In addition to 'scarcity skills' such as science, technology, mathematics, programming and software development, academics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) argue how a demand for creative expertise will also rise. Yes, designers and developers are important, but equally is film making, illustration, 3D art and storytelling. The Pew Research Centre also states that creativity will be a major asset for workers during the next decade, but adds factors like critical thinking, teaching, persuasion, empathy and judgement to the mix too – basically any 'uniquely human' adroitness difficult to automate.

It's corporate environments in the main that will experience the most change. As more mundane jobs are automated, employees in every discipline will engage in 'higher level' tasks and take on greater responsibility for creative thinking, leadership, analytics and problem solving. Furthermore, we've already highlighted writing and storytelling as being an integral component of modern workforces, but as search becomes more idiosyncratic and voice activated, businesses will seek people with knowledge of SEO and content marketing to attract and engage customers. Though this does mean competition for the best available talent will increase, and undoubtedly, until training of adequate skills catches up with demand, an emerging skills gap will prove challenging for employers.

**In-demand skills and attributes within eCommerce:**

**3D artists**

**AI specialists**

**Analytics**

**App developers**

**AR/VR**

**Automation**

**Blockchain**

**Critical Thinking**

**Digital marketing**

**Digital product developers**

**Email marketing**

**Empathy**

**Filmmakers**

**Judgement**

**Leadership**

**Persuasion**

**Photography**

**Problem solving**

**Programming**

**SEO**

**Social media**

**Software development**

**Teaching**

**Technical sales skills**

**UI/UX designers**

**Video game designers**

**Web design**

**Writing**





# SHARP GROWTH ACCELERATES EXPANSION AT RAZORBLUE

FIVE OFFICES, 80 EMPLOYEES AND SEVERAL MULTIMILLION POUND CONTRACTS ARE ACHIEVEMENTS DAN KITCHEN NEVER ENVISAGED WHEN HE ESTABLISHED RAZORBLUE AGED 17.

Thirteen years on, the IT services provider, which specialises in Cloud, Connectivity and Communications solutions recently acquired Manchester based J-Media IT Managed Services, taking on board 10 new team members as it continues its expansion across the North. Dan tells Nigel Wright what makes the business unique in a competitive market while discussing his views on leadership, culture and technology.

razorblue was launched in 2006 when Dan, a technology enthusiast and self-taught infrastructure engineer, quit college after three months to pursue full-time employment. He grew the company incrementally for a few years, moving it out of his family home and into a local business centre. In 2009, he met another freelancer with similar interests and ambitions, who became Dan's business partner. The firm then relocated to its Catterick headquarters as demand and headcount increased.

By 2015, razorblue had more than doubled its size, winning various big contracts and

opening new offices in London and Leeds. After his co-director's departure that year, Dan became CEO, where previously he'd fulfilled a Technical Director role. He established an operational Board and appointed long-serving employees to the management team. Stepping into a leadership role, however, brought new challenges as Dan explains:

"My focus had always been on the engineering side – designing, building and maintaining the business's core network and cloud platform. As MD, I had to adapt quickly and become an expert in other areas. People management, in particular, has been my biggest challenge. The key is creating an environment of mutual respect while maintaining a no blame and non-hierarchical culture."

“The key is creating an environment of mutual respect while maintaining a no blame and non-hierarchical culture.”

razorblue will always favour cultural fit over and above skills, says Dan. During interviews, he constantly asks himself whether prospective candidates will get along with employees. A genuine interest in technology is also something Dan looks for when hiring. All employees, he says, enjoy “tinkering” with new software at home. Even those in the business’s 10 person Account Management team have technical backgrounds, with most offering over 15 years “high-level” engineering or product management experience. According to Dan, this is one of several differentiators between the firm and its competitors.

A zero outsourcing policy is another aspect which helps the company stand out from the crowd. A typical IT solutions provider, Dan explains, will use various suppliers for connectivity, cloud services, telephony software, etc. When something goes wrong, however, suppliers often try to attribute blame on each other, leaving customers “trapped” and without a quick solution. razorblue’s approach involves

leveraging a national network, enabling it to provide connectivity anywhere. The firm also has its own cloud platform and data centres, giving it end to end visibility:

“Our products and services aren’t unique, but these aspects of our approach continue to give us an edge in the market. And while many of our competitors focus on selling, razorblue’s technically-trained Account Management team provides value added services and give honest strategic advice. It’s a true partnership.”

Since 2015, a “shift change” in performance has seen razorblue achieve consistent year-on-year growth. Digitisation is creating demand across all the firm’s products and services. Clients, Dan says, find the “complete IT support solution” and partnership approach attractive. The business was delighted to mark its 10 year anniversary in 2016 by opening a new office in Teesside. While the move has enabled Dan and his teams to acquire new clients in the area, the biggest impact he says has been on attracting talent. Teesside University has proven a valuable “hunting

“ A zero outsourcing policy is another aspect which helps the company stand out from the crowd.



Dan Kitchen



ground” and employees now travel from Teesside as well as Durham, North Yorkshire and Sunderland.

Despite the region being a “great catchment area” with ideal motorway links to razorblue’s other offices in Catterick and Leeds, Dan admits skill shortages sometimes cause issues for the business. A key problem is the lack of network engineering talent in the region and the subsequent knock effect this has had on salaries. He would like to see more efforts from schools, colleges and apprenticeship providers to offer learning programmes in this critical area.

Dan is assured, however, that if razorblue hires enthusiastic people with good basic knowledge, they will soon become experts in their field. With customer expectations rising all the time, the business’s client engagement approach guarantees “resilience” and offers a great development route for employees. Rather than using dedicated client teams, for example, the company pools resources, whereby staff work across different accounts and gain an understanding of a range of issues while researching, testing, buying and deploying solutions.

Furthermore, any technology the business sells to clients is trialled in-house first. All 80 employees act as a “test bed” for new tools, which provides unique training opportunities, as people learn by using rather than through instruction, as Dan explains:

“Our guys like to play around with technology, so training is usually hands-on and informal. People are given a project to work on and told to ask if they need help. We prefer that approach because it means employees must understand new products first and conceive their own solutions before recommending them to clients. Only by immersing yourself in technology, can you truly understand how it works.”

Artificial Intelligence is the latest trend being monitored by razorblue. Dan says much of the innovation in this area is still at a developmental stage, but a few tools are potential investment targets for the business. One is an emotional text recognition software platform, which Dan and the teams are testing in-house. With over 300 customers across its core network and cloud platform, all using different technologies and deployment methods, the company’s operation is complex.



Teams receive around 2,000 email support cases for clients each week, and Dan hopes AI will help them offer a better service:

“We’re genuinely asking ourselves ‘can we make our service better by adding intelligent tools?’ This software, for example, creates a weighting based on emotional text characteristics. So, if emails contain words like ‘disappointing,’ ‘affecting,’ ‘problem,’ etc. they are flagged as important, while others receive a lower priority rating. This should increase customer satisfaction. I expect we’ll soon deploy these kinds of solutions to clients too.”

razorblue is currently delivering a nine-month strategy – short because of the constantly evolving technology industry. The J-Media IT Managed Services acquisition represents a “big step” and a new era for the firm and Dan says the business now has imminent plans to move into larger premises in Teesside to support its growth.

He added: “Revenue is up nearly 40% on last year, which I’m delighted with, and our Net Promoter Score has also increased. All these achievements are a testament to the amazing and hardworking teams we have here. It’s because of them, I’m confident for the future.”



razorblue  
IT Solutions for Business

“We’re genuinely asking ourselves ‘can we make our service better by adding intelligent tools?’”



# TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILITY DRIVE NIGEL WRIGHT'S SUCCESS

BEN DEBNAM STARTED HIS NIGEL WRIGHT CAREER DURING THE RECESSION AND HAD TO LEARN FAST AND FOCUS HIS ATTENTION ON ACQUIRING THE SKILLS NEEDED TO SURVIVE.

Within four years, and aged only 26, he became a manager for the first time. Now entering his tenth year at the business, he notes how he still learns something new each day, and that the constant challenges and opportunities presented to him are the reasons why he remains committed to developing his career at the Group.

Nigel Wright takes recruitment careers seriously, says Ben. Each person's career path and development opportunities at the business are varied. Furthermore, to drive high performance, managers are given the necessary autonomy to achieve their goals and a culture of transparency and accountability amongst the

**“This is a rare way of working amongst leaders in recruitment and is a key differentiator between Nigel Wright and its competitors.**

management team means everyone collaborates, shares ideas and facilitates each other's successes. This is a rare way of working amongst leaders in recruitment, according to Ben, and he sees it as a key differentiator between Nigel Wright and its competitors:

“Competitiveness often breeds contempt rather than collaboration, but that simply isn't the case at Nigel Wright. Trust and honesty are important and key attributes of our leadership group. We all make mistakes. I've made plenty myself, but to learn from your mistakes, you must be accountable and share what you've learnt with others.”



Only one member of the current leadership team was hired externally, whereas the others, including Ben, all started their Nigel Wright careers as consultants, and have enjoyed climbing the ladder. They are proof, says Ben, that you can succeed at Nigel Wright if you commit to learning the right skills and behaviours.

Ben was promoted again in 2017 and is now an Associate Director. He inherited responsibility for Nigel Wright's regional IT recruitment team in addition to the Sales and Marketing team he's led since 2014. Adapting his approach has been essential as he continues to learn how to succeed within ever more complex parameters: “Getting people to understand their team's vision and how it relates to your plan is important. Everyone

# IMAGINE

must be clear of their expectations and know of the available support to maximise their performance. Information should be transparent too. Sales people are difficult to manage, but if you establish an environment of openness, trust and collaboration then you will engage people, generate new ideas to drive performance, and help everyone achieve their goals.”

Ben’s first year managing the IT recruitment team was focused on understanding the dynamics of the industry and the different disciplines, while observing the team and formulating ways he could develop and modify how it operates. The team, he says, are trusted and respected in the market with an unrivalled knowledge and expertise in the IT sector. Where he saw an opportunity, however, was in repositioning the team to better serve the evolving market, as well as developing a scalable management structure:

“More and more roles within IT are becoming specialised, and many of the roles recruited now didn’t exist five years ago. Establishing three specialist teams – Software, Infrastructure and Contracts – with managers in each area, has allowed us to achieve 100% headcount growth over the last 12 months. We have also retained a huge amount of expertise. Our IT consultants, on average, have worked in recruitment for over 10 years, which gives our clients and candidates a dedicated and knowledge-driven service.”

Ben noted how his current team members have up to 25 years’ recruitment experience but managing those more experienced than himself is something he’s always done. Again, trust is important, he says, as is giving senior consultants the necessary autonomy they require, but also knowing the right moment to offer advice and guidance when they need it: “You’re a mentor and a coach, as much as you are a manager. Some team members I speak to everyday, while others require less input. It all comes down to being flexible depending on individual needs.”

Interestingly, Ben highlighted how managing the ‘millennial’ generation has been challenging during the last few years. Because living costs are so high, over 25% of under 34 year olds still live with their parents. And even if it’s easier to save when living in the family home, for many young people the security of owning their own home







may always be out of reach. This breeds a transient workforce, according to Ben, which makes retaining talent difficult:

“Graduates are more fluid in their careers than previous generations and because finding stability at work is less important, providing employees with meaningful working lives, as well as recognising the impact people make at work, is imperative. Gone are the days of dictatorial managers. You need to take

people on a journey – communicating why they’re at work, what they’re here to do, and ensuring they feel part of a team.”

The impact of millennials in the workplace, for Ben, has been bringing poor management practices to the fore. Poor managers are found out and

called out by the new generation entering the workforce, he says, and millennials will leave a job without a concrete backup plan if they’re not enjoying it. Structure, learning and communication have therefore become critical to a leader’s success.

Culture too plays an important part in engaging millennials. During the last two years, Nigel Wright has launched several

initiatives to bring its culture in line with modern workplace trends. These include working from home, or during different hours of the day, to meet personal needs. Last year the business also updated its holiday benefits, rewarding employees an extra day’s holiday for every year worked, increasing annual leave to up to 30 days, as well as a four week paid sabbatical for every five years’ service. Recruitment consultants rarely gained these types of benefits, according to Ben, but in an environment of trust and transparency, they actually facilitate engagement and drive performance:

“We set high standards for our consultants, but our expectations of when, where or how they fulfil their roles are now freer. That has been the biggest culture shift at Nigel Wright during the last few years. Technology helps, of course, and setting clear objectives is important too. Building trust over time gives you the confidence that people will do the right thing to meet their targets, and work in a way that complements the needs of their team. That’s incredibly empowering and it shows that we trust and respect our people.”

**“ Millennials will leave a job without a concrete backup plan if they’re not enjoying it. Structure, learning and communication have therefore become critical to a leader’s success.**



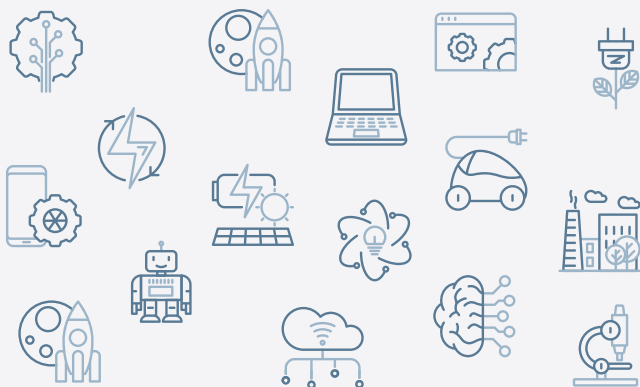
## AUTOMATION AND ITS IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT

AUTOMATION WILL INCREASINGLY IMPACT THE WORLD OF WORK DURING THE NEXT FEW YEARS. THIS IS ALREADY FELT IN SOME INDUSTRIES, AND DIFFERENT COUNTRIES ARE EXPERIENCING THE EFFECTS MORE SO THAN OTHERS. DISCUSSIONS OF HOW AUTOMATION WILL ALTER WORKING LIFE, HOWEVER, ARE ALWAYS LOADED WITH 'MAYBE' STATEMENTS.

Studies highlight varying degrees of job losses or job creation, yet scenarios are dependent on factors that will facilitate positive or negative change. It's not a simple case of the 'jobs we have now' experiencing gains or decreases either. Yes, automation could create demand for existing goods and services, but it may also lead to new industries and new jobs. Job 'designs' too could evolve once new technologies are embedded, and, if progress is positive, there may even be more work to go around – or not, depending on what action is taken to offset disruption.

Predicting the future is not a science. Differences of opinion vary. So we've reviewed research on automation and its potential impact on employment. We summarise our findings below, including the steps required by governments and employers to ensure positive rather than negative disruption. But first...

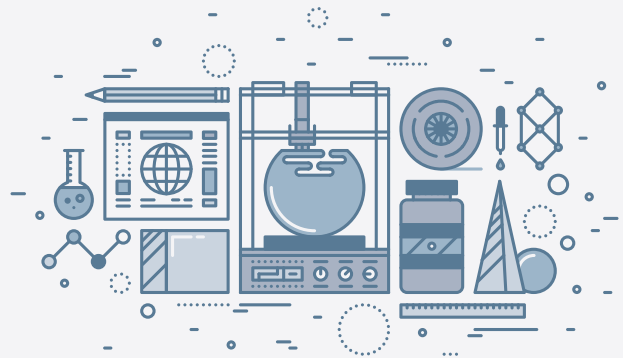
### Different Types of Automation



When people think about automation and work, they often imagine robots operating within a manufacturing environment. A key factor to understand, however, is that automation and robotics are two distinctly different things. Yes, crossovers exist between the two, but to appreciate the nuances of the technology, it's a good idea to keep them separate in your mind.

“Change is coming, and as the technology becomes more prevalent and embedded within different sectors of the economy.

Automation is the term used when describing a process or task performed by software or a machine, usually undertaken by a human. It can be mechanical or virtual; simple or complicated. Robotics, on the other hand, is a branch of engineering focused on designing and building robots. While robots may automate some tasks, in the



main, they have little to do with automation outside of industrial settings. And even within manufacturing facilities, other types of machines are used which don't come under the robotics banner.



### Industrial Automation (IA)

There's various uses for robots and other automated machines in industrial settings. 3D printing is an obvious example, as are autonomous vehicles for logistics. But also, specific machines are used in



hazardous environments including ‘cobots’ which work alongside humans, assisting with heavy lifting and other potentially dangerous tasks.

Software automation also plays an increasingly critical role in the working lives of humans and there are variations worth considering.

**Business Process Automation (BPA)**



This involves an organisation taking all its basic non-manufacturing processes and seeking ways to improve efficiency by automatising them. Various software tools are used across areas such as HR, accounts and contract management – essentially creating a back-office function but without people.

**Robotic Process Automation (RPA)**

Unrelated to (mechanical) robotics, RPA is the term given to higher level automation, where software is used in certain circumstances to augment process performance and perform complex tasks. Rather than being an aspect of a BPA solution, it fulfils a primary function in one critical area such as customer order processing. A one off investment, rather than business overhaul.

**Intelligent Process Automation (IPA)**

Whereas RPA is adherent to pre-set rules, IPA software uses artificial intelligence (AI) to learn how to mimic human computer interactions and deliver intelligent outcomes. Another component of IPS is machine

learning, a type of AI that enables computers to adapt, change and even test different approaches based on data retrieval.



**What the impact studies tell us**

As the MIT Technology Review discovered when it analysed several reports published between 2013 and 2017, little consistency or agreement exists on how many jobs will be lost or created due to automation, worldwide, during the next few years.

Report	Pub.	Lost (million)	Gained (million)	By when
Gartner	2017	1.8	2.3	2020
Metra Martech	2013	-	1.0 – 2.0	2020
International Federation of Robotics	2013	1.9	3.5	2021
McKinsey	2017	0.4 – 0.8	0.6 – 0.9	2030
Thomas Frey* *Writer & Futurist	2012	2.0	-	2030

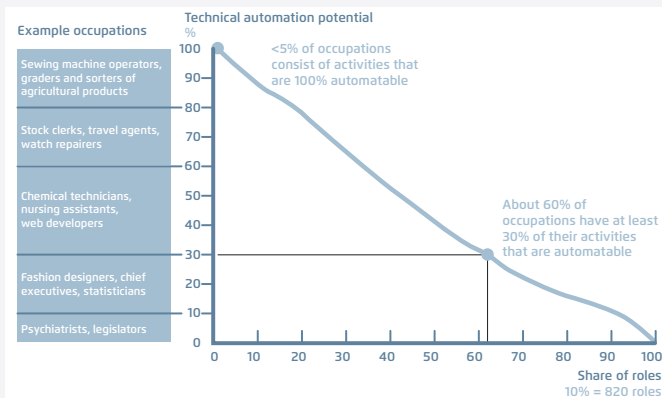
Although some of the studies in the table are close when it comes to predictions up to 2020-2021, jumping ahead a decade the numbers become incomprehensibly bigger. To think that only 1.8 million jobs will go within the next two years, and ten years later that figure increases by half a million or more, is difficult to accept. But, change is coming, and as the technology described in the previous section becomes more prevalent and embedded within different sectors of the economy – the UK Government discusses decreasing cost of AI licensing models and sensors, as well as rising labour costs as propelling development of and investment in automaton – it could be far reaching and rapid.

What’s more useful are the studies that take a nuanced view of the components of jobs and how they may be affected. A new report by OECD published in March 2018, considers the impact across 32 countries. While it claims one in two jobs will be influenced by automation, the risk of replacement varies, with only 14% of jobs (66 million workers) being highly (70%+) automatable. 32%, on the other hand, have a 50%-70% risk of changing due to automation. The median job within the study has a 48% chance of being partly automated.



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The 2017 McKinsey study also assesses degrees of automation and revealed a now well documented statistic. 60% of occupations have at least 30% of constituent work activities that can be automated. It further states that although half of all jobs have the technical potential to become automated based on currently available technologies, due to social, economic and technical factors, the rate of adoption will be varied and slow. However, over 200 million global workers will need to switch occupational categories by 2030 and most likely re-train because of role changes.



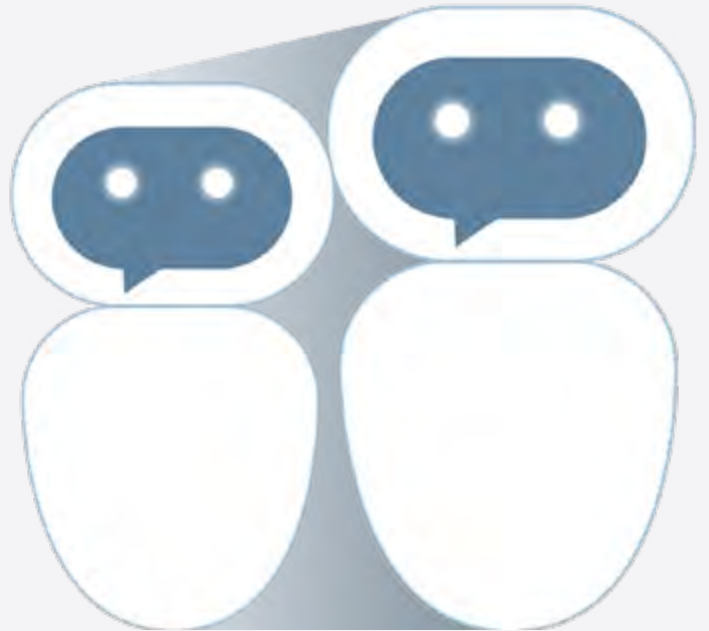
Different countries, too, will feel the impact more than others. According to the OECD jobs in Anglo-Saxon, Nordic countries and the Netherlands are less at risk than jobs in Eastern and Southern European countries. In a European context, when analysing McKinsey's research across Spain, Netherlands, France, Norway, UK, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden, between 20%-26% of workers will be displaced. The UK is lowest, and Germany is highest on that scale.

## Jobs under threat

Jobs in the manufacturing industry and agriculture, as well as various low-level service sector roles are the most automatable. A UK Government briefing document provides several examples of developments in this area including German manufacturers using robotic arms for loading and lifting, as well as automated factories and warehouses such as those used by adidas and Ocado, where goods are moved and packed by machines. Amazon, too, has doubled the number of packing robots in its factories in recent years. Within agricultural settings, machines can harvest and sow crops as well as perform more delicate roles like fruit picking.

Outside of manufacturing, low-level administrative functions will most likely decline in the short term. Data entry, analysis and office support occupations in addition to some customer interaction, will be the first to go. In its briefing paper, the UK Government highlight how technology could help businesses manage increased workloads and deliver faster and more accurate services. Chatbots – an example of IPA technology – are a tool

## Chatbots: 24% compound annual growth



already entering mainstream business practice. The compound annual growth rate of chatbots is 24%, with some studies indicating over 50% of online shoppers prefer accessing apps rather than using email, phone or contact forms when making enquiries.

Other software automation is helping law firms conduct document searches, assist publishers such as the Associated Press to write earnings reports, process mortgage applications for lenders, and even offer short-term market predictions for traders. All experience better and faster outcomes than if humans had done the work, according to the UK Government. Areas where technology is available but falls short of human expertise includes text and speech translation and sales. Outside of the office, McKinsey also reveal developments in software that could replace workers within the travel and leisure industry, banking, food service and cleaning. Transport too will see widespread changes when autonomous vehicles are good enough to replace people.

A useful table in the OECD report highlights the mean probability of automation for different sectors of the economy. While it is lower-level and skilled roles which score most highly, it's interesting that industries and professions such as teaching, medicine, accounting and ICT are also at risk of changing and evolving due to technological advances. Innovation in automation software capable of social and cognitive intelligence, perception and manipulation, is moving at a rapid pace, according to the report.



### Gains to be made

As we saw in the table above, all impact reports, whether making short or long term predications, agree that a net gain in jobs is likely thanks to automation. Most refer to past technological progress as proof of how employment will adapt. Using the personal computer as a basis for its estimations, McKinsey's study shows how 15+ million new jobs were created in the US since 1980, despite the PC replacing certain functions. It also discusses how previous technological revolutions have led to increased leisure time, facilitating the rise of new industries such as entertainment, sport and DIY and the jobs within them.

The process is twofold, however, with a demand for existing jobs also expected to rise. OECD use a similar example explaining how US bank teller numbers increased thanks to ATMs. Fewer tellers meant branch operation costs went down, but urban bank branches have subsequently increased by 43% during the last 30 years, meaning more tellers exist now than before ATMs.



As the UK Government briefings on the impact of automation on jobs claim, technological innovation never leads to long-term unemployment, but rather types of employment within professions change as specific tasks evolve and new tasks emerge. Research also indicates that roles tend to become more intensive. Bank tellers,

for example, now deliver several of what McKinsey calls 'value added services' which never existed before. Other occupations where analytical and social skills are required have also grown in line with a greater intensity in performing critical tasks associated with those roles. According to the OECD, scientists across different disciplines are more numerous and more productive now thanks to computer software taking on time consuming data work, enabling experts to engage in theory and methodology development, interpretation, writing and communication.

With regards to completely new jobs, McKinsey say by 2030 8%-9% of roles won't be familiar to us today. It's certain sectors, too, that will experience increases coinciding with automation, as well as other social and economic trends driving growth and changes in employment.

First, the obvious area where new occupations will emerge will be within automation and robotics itself. This industry alone could be worth up to \$11 trillion globally by 2025. Sub sectors such as autonomous vehicles could account for £51 billion in the UK alone. Other industries expected to become hives for new types of employment include the wider service sector, such as financial and management services as well as healthcare and education.



For healthcare, McKinsey offer the most in-depth insight into how that sector will evolve. The primary driver they see behind imminent healthcare worker demand is our aging populations. By 2030, an estimated 300 million more people aged over 65 years means a greater need for caring services. Automation won't necessarily replace workers in this sector because the inherent skills required are difficult to automate, while lower wages means the industry remains a low priority for innovation. Employment at the top will rise too, however, in occupations like doctors, nurses and health technicians whose specialist skills are in demand.

Another facilitator for job growth is consumption. Driven by an emerging middle class in previously undeveloped regions of the world, by 2030 consumer spending will have increased by \$23 trillion during the previous decade and a half. McKinsey estimates 300+ million new jobs will emerge in occupations producing goods and services, as well as across the whole supporting infrastructure of the consumer industry. Difficult to automate jobs

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include everything from engineering, building and plumbing to accountants, analysts, IT professionals and other technology specialists. Generic functions such as management, and skills and competencies like digital, creativity, entrepreneurship, empathy, persuasion, negotiation and perception will also be in demand and integral to new occupations that emerge.

In a London Business School backed study in 2016 which revealed 100 jobs of the future, it's interesting to note how climate change, energy efficiency and space exploration are other areas facilitating the creation of new and previously unheard of jobs. Some stand-out titles from the list include: Vertical Farmer, Insect-based Food Developer, Drowned City Specialist, Solar Flight Specialist and Spaceport Designer.

## Underlying concerns

In 2018, several indicators show that employment is moving in the right direction, despite the march of automation. The OECD confirms that US employment has risen 6% in the last 10 years, and a recent report by the European Commission showed similar trends in Europe. An additional 3.5 million people were working across the region between 2016 and 2017, while incomes also went up and levels of poverty decreased. Current momentum in the jobs market suggests the EU will reach its target of a 75% employment rate by 2020.



Regardless, worries that things are on the cusp of turning bad endure. A recent UK survey, for example, revealed 37% (circa 10 million workers) fear employment circumstances will change for the worse over the next decade due to automation. While some fearmongering can be attributed to dramatic media coverage, some genuine concerns of how things may pan out exist. One is that the transition period will be protracted, leading to a conflagration of inequality. European income inequality rises still, and as most new jobs require specialist knowledge and higher education, those at the top of the wage tree could experience pay increases, while demand for low-paid, easily automatable labour declines.

Furthermore, significant employment increases in the past have relied on productivity gains driven by automation and other technological advances. While the Eurozone is making gains in productivity, figures are only reaching pre-recession levels now, and only in some, but not all, states. All the while the trend globally suggests productivity has been in decline for several years and is unlikely to ever reach levels recorded in the past. So much so, only 50% of experts surveyed in

2014 believed automation would continue to create jobs at a similar or faster rate than it displaces them. And if 'not enough jobs' is one side of the coin, McKinsey take another track suggesting it's a dearth of workers due to several demographical factors such as aging, that will cause major problems. Other concerns flagged in UK Government research include over-regulation stifling innovation, as well as automation encouraging re-shoring of manufacturing to Europe. The latter posing potential negative effects on the global economy.

## Solutions: Education and training

The general agreement within impact research is the overwhelming need for employers and Governments to invest in training and developing key skills. This will both offset disruption, as well as facilitate the transition into an automated future.

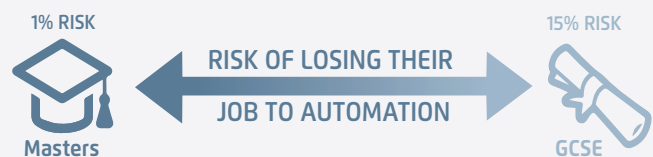
Research points to three interrelated strands to upskilling requirements:

### 1. Training specialist skills

Training specialist skills, particularly those within the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) family, is essential. These skills will enable people to gain employment within the burgeoning automation sector, but also help people transition into roles where they're working more closely with, and being assisted by, automated software and devices. It's part of what McKinsey call a mass redeployment of labour, training people to become adaptable so they can fulfil roles where the task or purpose changes due to automation. Careers, too, will become more varied as employment evolves.

### 2. Boosting levels of education

A 2016 OECD study confirmed that those with higher degrees such as a Masters or PhD, were least likely to lose their job to automation. Less than 1% of highly educated workers were at risk versus 15% of workers whose highest qualification was up to secondary school level. Higher educational attainment, whether that's professional training or some form of tertiary education, is critical.



### 3. Skills and attributes

A third strand is the types of skills and attributes gained through this upskilling process. Yes, STEM is one aspect, but not everyone has an aptitude in those areas. Instead, training in activities that require social and emotional





skills, higher cognitive capabilities and creativity will take precedence. Academics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Center for Digital Business indicate writing, NPD and even art may be useful skills to have. The Pew Research Center further states that developing any 'uniquely human' and therefore difficult to automate adroitness, should be encouraged.

The need for training differs between countries. McKinsey highlight how the percentage of workers that would need to learn new skills or upgrade their education was considerably higher in Japan, than it was in the USA and Germany. Access to education and training is also better in some countries. Across OECD countries, however, a widespread issue is poor participation in training schemes, and education in general, by workers most at risk of automation. It recommends boosting adult learning initiatives outside of the workplace as a key policy for Governments over the next few years.

European Commission documents point to 'Skills Agenda for Europe' and EU funding, as providing a strong foundation for equipping people in Europe with better skills at all levels. It also notes facilitating better cooperation between member states, training providers and companies as a key component of its strategy. Similarly, the UK Government is expanding training funding in automation technology, as well as seeking ways to leverage training programmes that enable humans to 'retain an advantage' over automation technologies.

**Solutions: Beyond skills and education**

There are other initiatives which could help offset the

disruption caused by automation. Some of these are being pursued while others remain at the conceptual stage as policy makers and investors work out how to deliver outcomes. On the policy side, they include promoting work sharing, as well as various tax reforms aimed at increasing capital, business or consumption taxes while reducing taxes on labour. Another more contentious solution is for countries to introduce a universal basic income. This was already trialled in Finland in 2017, and is widely debated by European policy makers.

With regards to investment, McKinsey identify three areas where they believe heightened investment will create a demand for work. The first is infrastructure and specifically construction. 80 million to 200 million jobs could be created according to estimations, helping offset the displacement of workers in other sectors. Housing shortages is one main driver for investment and the range of jobs the sector supports are broad and includes architects and engineers, skilled trades people, construction workers, machinery operators and other lower skilled positions.

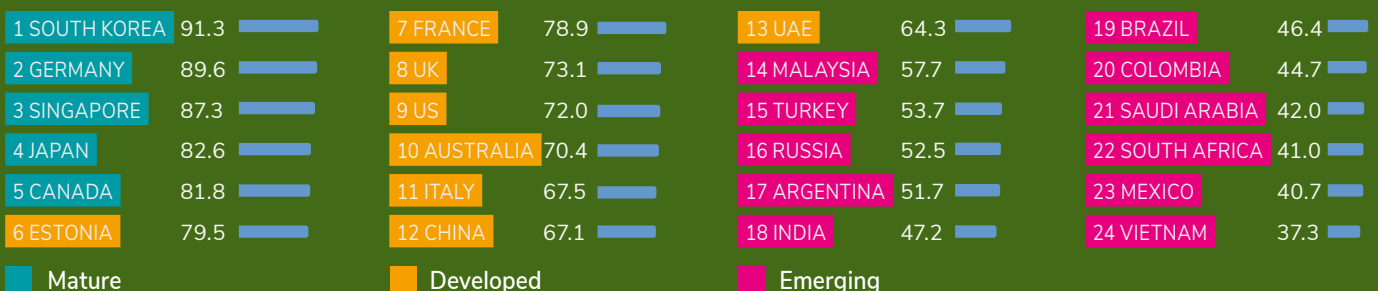
Energy is another sector where investment is needed and where the positive knock-on effect for employment would be welcomed amidst rising automation. Climate change is an obvious catalyst for innovation and, according to McKinsey, giving a boost to industries supporting renewable energy and energy efficiency could create up to 20 million jobs by 2030. Finally, another contentious solution is the marketisation of previously unpaid domestic work including childcare, early childhood education, cleaning, cooking and gardening. Up to 90 million new jobs could be created in this scenario, according to the report.

**Who's prepared?**

In conclusion, we found a recent Economist backed study helpful in assessing which countries were most prepared for the imminent automation revolution. Going beyond skills and training, the study also considers various other factors such as a country's innovation environment, as well as education and labour market policies. Out of the 25 countries assessed, it's encouraging that Germany, France and the UK make the top ten, while perhaps surprising that the USA is only ninth on the list.

To find out more, visit [www.automationreadiness.eiu.com](http://www.automationreadiness.eiu.com).

**Overall Index: ranks and scores**





# GREGGS' INGREDIENTS FOR DIVERSE CAREER PATHS

“DOING THE RIGHT THING BY ITS PEOPLE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF GREGGS’ CULTURE,” SAYS RETAIL OPERATIONS AND PEOPLE DIRECTOR, ROISIN CURRIE, WHO JOINED THE £1 BILLION BAKERY IN 2010 FOLLOWING A 20-YEAR CAREER AT ASDA.



Roisin Currie

As custodian of the people agenda for the last 10 years, Roisin has delivered transformational programmes during a period which has seen Greggs’ profits and reputation as an employer, soar. Here, she tells Nigel Wright about the people initiatives underpinning the business’s success, as well as Greggs’ mission to understand the “secret sauce” of its culture.

Roger Whiteside’s appointment as CEO in 2013 marked a new era of growth at

“When a business undergoes a significant period of change, regular communication helps reassure employees, as well as acknowledge their needs within the context of transformation.”



Greggs. The agility and efficiency afforded by centralising its operations during the previous decade were maximised to meet the pace of changing consumer tastes. Roisin explained that when a business undergoes a significant period of change, regular communication helps reassure employees, as well as acknowledge their needs within the context of transformation.

An immediate requirement identified during the communication process was for Greggs to offer clearer career development routes, along with relevant skills training.

Career Pathways was launched to train the competencies people needed to progress into various management roles at Greggs. Roisin highlights how the programme offered people four "ladders" to climb: Aspiring Leaders; Developing Leaders, Influential Leaders and Strategic Leaders – for the first time, Greggs had a clear career plan so employees could see how to progress from their current role all the way into management and beyond.

As the foundation for all training at Greggs, Aspiring Leaders remains Roisin's favourite as she explains:

"If you've got the basic skills and desire to become a manager, then you'll be considered for the Aspiring Leadership course. A focus of the course, however, is dispelling some of the myths around management. Often, the assumption is that you need to know all sorts of things when you're a manager, yet many basic leadership skills are about understanding yourself better. Aspiring Leaders helps people understand 'the authentic you,' so they can determine their strengths, as well as the skills and behaviours they need to become effective leaders."

Aspiring Leaders who gain management positions can then apply to join Developing Leaders once they're ready to manage bigger teams and more complex areas of the organisation. The Influential Leaders ladder then offers prospective senior managers decision-making training and teaches them how to "influence upwards, across and downwards in order to make things happen." Strategic Leaders – the final stage of Greggs' Career Pathways developed in collaboration with Northumbria University – is for potential directors to prove they've "got what it takes to lead from the top."

Roisin and her team also tailored specific training programmes for employees outside of the functional areas of the business. Future

“Aspiring Leaders helps people understand ‘the authentic you,’ so they can determine their strengths, as well as the skills and behaviours they need to become effective leaders.







“Creating an internal network is really powerful. To progress within any business, it’s important to seek help and advice from other people.”

Leaders, for example, is designed for Greggs’ retail teams who demonstrate management potential, while the Brilliant Programme, launched in 2015, is a similar initiative for Managers within Greggs’ shops. In the retail division, Roisin explains, all employees first complete Basic Ingredients and Health and Safety training, after which they can undertake Spread of Knowledge, an additional course that gives them a broader skill set. People who progress to Spread of Knowledge within two years of joining Greggs, she says, are often those who end up on the Future Leaders and the Brilliant Programmes.

Furthermore, Striving for Excellence teaches Greggs’ supply chain teams how to operate within the new bakery supply chain following the on-going restructure programme.

Roisin emphasised the importance of those undertaking training at Greggs to leverage the invaluable networking opportunities it affords. This is particularly the case during advanced leadership programmes where individuals from across different areas of the business are brought together in small learning groups. “Creating an internal network is really powerful,” she says. “To progress within any business, it’s important to seek help and advice from other people. It’s great for Greggs too, because it helps break down silos – the fewer silos in a business the better.”

Gender diversity has also been a major priority for Greggs during the last decade. A Women’s Career Development Working Party was established in 2012, which

regularly engages with employees across the business to identify ways to improve gender equality. Outcomes have included Greggs embracing an informal approach to flexible working, as well as encouraging “women sponsors” who motivate women to apply for internal vacancies. “It’s about giving people a work-life balance and the confidence in their own abilities and achievements,” says Roisin.

Another new initiative being explored is offering adequate ‘back to work’ preparation for women on maternity leave. Roisin explains how fewer women progress to the top of organisations because prolonged absence during maternity leave often persuades them to pursue a different career trajectory or leave the workforce entirely. Greggs’ “maternity returners” initiative includes intervening before women return to work, alleviating any concerns that they may have and ensuring the transition is as easy as possible. A 12-month “reverse mentoring” trial where Roger was mentored by someone who had recently returned from maternity leave, helped inform the project, said Roisin.

In 2018, Greggs launched its Women’s Career Development Program. This was the culmination of efforts to ensure more women move up through the business. “Greggs must reflect the diversity of its customer base,” Roisin explains. “Gender diversity cannot be solved simply by appointing people into key



positions. You need to create development opportunities at all levels of the organisation.”

All those who join the Women's Career Development Programme usually complete a Career Pathways ladder, then undertake the additional development modules tailored for women. The programme, Roisin notes, was created for women at all levels who demonstrate the potential to achieve more. Women initially worked in small groups to identify their individual and collective development needs. Roisin and her team then worked

with them to create the modules based on those perceived requirements. “It was very important they built the foundations of the course themselves, rather than us assuming we knew what they needed,” she said.

Roisin hopes that providing career development opportunities, sponsorship and guidance for maternity returners will help create a pipeline of talented female managers and directors over the next few years.

In addition to its work on improving gender equality – efforts which led to Roger Whiteside receiving an OBE in January – Greggs also recently launched a search for its “secret sauce.” The business has a strong culture built over many years, says Roisin, but to amplify and nurture it, as well as ensure all 22,000 employees understand the critical roles they play in “keeping the business alive,” defining exactly what the culture signifies is essential.

During 2018, Greggs conducted several listening groups with employees who provided personal insights into the business's culture. A whole cross-section of Greggs' colleagues were interviewed, says Roisin, including those that have been with the business over 40 years, as well as people who joined within the last three months. Listening group data were then complemented with responses to an annual employee survey where all 22,000 employees were asked to share their views.

“We're currently focused on identifying specific issues and areas of improvement – including sending a snap poll to all employees asking them to select specific changes they would like to see.”

Preliminary results were presented at Greggs' 2019 annual conference, though data collection and analysis will continue with the overall findings revealed in 2020: “We've outlined some basic themes and it's been great to see so many positive attributes associated with our culture. We're currently focused on identifying specific issues and areas of improvement – including sending a snap poll to all employees asking them to select specific changes they would like to see.”

If Greggs wishes to continue its successful journey it must “remain adaptable, listen to its customers, recognise trends and respond appropriately,” says Roisin. Over the next 12 months, she hopes the business becomes more representative of all demographics by offering long-term career opportunities and initiatives that allow everyone to succeed, regardless of their gender. Defining Greggs' secret sauce and how to communicate it effectively is critical to this process.

She added: “The more people understand the perspectives of others through talking, listening and acknowledging how they feel, the closer we'll get to achieving true diversity, enabling us to make impactful changes.”



## DELIVERING A CONSULTANCY SERVICE TO DEVELOP CAREERS

LISA TAYLOR JOINED NIGEL WRIGHT IN 2012, HAVING SPENT THE PREVIOUS DECADE AND A HALF AT A NATIONAL COMPETITOR. DURING THAT TIME, SHE'D BECOME A SUCCESSFUL FINANCIAL SERVICES, PUBLIC AND NOT FOR PROFIT SECTORS RECRUITER, HIRING EXECUTIVE AND DIRECTOR LEVEL FINANCE TALENT FOR NORTH EAST AND SCOTTISH BASED FIRMS.



Accustomed to a certain culture and way of working, leaving a business after 15 years was difficult. She knew that whatever she did next would have to represent a completely different challenge.

Her options at Nigel Wright were varied but finding something that she was personally interested in was key, as she explains: "Recruitment is a process. It takes a certain resilience, commitment and determination to perform the same tasks well, day in day out. More importantly, though, is having an interest in the disciplines and sectors in which you are recruiting. Only a genuine interest will allow you to build the knowledge and expertise to add real value to clients."

Engineering and Manufacturing fit the bill for Lisa, who highlights how it's an area which also requires

a higher level of knowledge and expertise to the other professional disciplines. As well as there being several niche specialist areas including production, quality, design, health and safety, maintenance and continuous improvement, Lisa notes how these functions are different depending on the sector. Whether its chemicals, food and drink, life sciences or oil and gas, few transferable disciplines exist, which means you need to understand the nuances – i.e. product design, technology, equipment, etc. – of each to engage candidates and meet the expectations of clients. "People don't appreciate how interesting and complex Engineering and Manufacturing is. There's always more to learn. Whereas in finance it's more or less the same."

Coming from a purely recruitment background, Lisa immediately started adding value to the Engineering and Manufacturing division. This included embedding a more process orientated approach to recruitment, as well as prioritising business development alongside Nigel Wright's commitment to delivering specialist consultative services. Within two years, she was managing the team.

Since the 2014 appointment of Paul Wilson as CEO, Lisa, together with a new breed of managers, has been helping transform Nigel Wright. Training and development have been key priorities.

Despite recruitment now being attractive to graduates, as well as those seeking a career change, Lisa notes how people don't understand how difficult the job is. To help those new to recruitment "get up the curve" quicker, Nigel Wright has developed unique internal training programmes, which ensure people learn and do all aspects of the job from the start. A clear development pathway with seven levels from graduate up to Board Director also helps focus people's goals. "We set high, but not unrealistic standards, and support





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people's growth through regular coaching and mentoring. Training is then reviewed and refreshed every 12 months, based on business needs relating to our growth."

Another area which has seen significant improvement since 2014, is business development. And it's this tool in particular, where Lisa has added the most value. She explained how Nigel Wright has always focused on delivering a quality consultative service – i.e. one which values knowledge, expertise, and quality of service over a sales or price driven approach – and works hard to help consultants understand the positive impact delivering a consultancy service can have on clients. However, historically, it has relied too much on the passive strength of its brand to win work. Technological advancements in recent years, which have made it easier for people to set up recruitment businesses, means the market is saturated. "With so much competition, being proactive about selling your proposition is essential."

Previously, new consultants weren't expected to participate in any business development activities until after one year in the job.

This, as Lisa explains, is no longer the case: "Business development is one-third of a recruitment consultant's job, so it should be a priority from day one, to the point where doing it becomes second nature. However, with clients' receiving several calls and emails every day from multiple agencies, it's difficult to stand out without being too pushy. Our hands-on training helps makes business development less daunting for those who haven't done it before while ensuring that it's conducted in respectful ways that don't harm our brand."

“Nigel Wright has always focused on delivering a quality consultative service – i.e. one which values knowledge, expertise and quality of service over a sales or price driven approach.”

Lisa was appointed Associate Director for Engineering, Manufacturing and Supply Chain in 2017, as recognition for her success. She's continued developing her team's proposition, with a particular focus on creating expertise across different functional areas and sectors. When hiring consultants, for example, she ensures that if they weren't previously







employed within Engineering, Manufacturing, Supply Chain or in recruitment, that they have a genuine interest in one of those fields. Then, unlike other Nigel Wright teams, consultants aren't given a geographical focus but instead recruit within one specialist discipline area and sector, deepening their interest and expertise and adding real value to customers.

With many of Nigel Wright's competitors using generalist consultants recruiting across several operations disciplines, as well as sectors, this model is different and attractive to clients, as she explains:

"Usually, you only get one chance to make an impression with a client or candidate. Therefore, identifying, engaging and attracting talent in a candidate-short market across every sector and discipline isn't the best way to guarantee success. Expertise matters. I try to challenge the mentality of consultants, so they add value to clients by advising from a place of knowledge. While the job may be routine, the interest lies in discovering a new business or invention and understanding how talent acquisition can play a role in its growth and development."

Gaining a new discipline as well as people to her remit, was another way to stretch her skills, while better leveraging her previous knowledge and networks in the not for profit sector. With Supply Chain sitting at either end of manufacturing, the move has also created opportunities for more "progressive ways" to solve clients' problems, while gaining deeper knowledge still of different industries. "I get frustrated if I'm doing the same thing for too long," she said, "At Nigel Wright, there are always opportunities to do more, learn new disciplines and work with like-minded people who share the same values."

As Associate Director for Engineering, Manufacturing and Supply Chain, Lisa has changed the team's specific approach to business development too. Recruiters, she says, often expect instantaneous results following business development activity. Senior decision makers within the wider operations discipline, however, are often averse to sales calls and networking. This means a longer-term approach is required, which entails developing consultants' abilities to build relationships with people over time, rather than focusing on quick-wins. Research, she says, indicates at least six

points of contact before the likelihood of a sale: "Patience is important. Consultants must understand that it's worth investing the time."

An added value from this business development strategy had been an increase in cross-selling between hers and other Nigel Wright teams. Because of Engineering, Manufacturing and Supply Chain's specialised nuances and the team structure to mirror those, Lisa says her consultants naturally cross-sell opportunities and benefit from delivering quality of service on repeat work. And, as long-term trust is established, they "earn the right" to seek introductions to other areas of clients' businesses, benefiting colleagues in other teams:

"It's a conscious strategy and one which has led to more and better work for the whole of Nigel Wright. Many of the manufacturing clients we partner with are large companies, with up to eight different departments in addition to 1000s of employees working in operations. It's only right, therefore, that we leverage our business development skills and build in-depth relationships with key people who can influence the rest of the business on our behalf, once we've demonstrated our ability to deliver a great service."

During the next 12 months, Lisa intends to hire more consultants, as well as continue developing people into management roles. She added: "management structure will enable functional specialists to drive greater value for clients, gain important people management experience and springboard the team's next phase of growth."

**“A longer-term approach is required, which entails developing consultants' abilities to build relationships with people over time.”**





## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING: KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR 2020



WITH WORKERS HINTING THAT ACCESS TO PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IS OFTEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN A PAY RISE, IT'S CLEAR THAT HELPING EMPLOYEES WITH PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING SHOULD BE A FOCUS FOR COMPANIES IN 2019.

### Vision and purpose

There's a variety of reasons to undertake personal development planning. As well as facilitating career progression and promotion, a personal development plan can also reveal opportunities for a career change or define narrower goals such as focusing on improving one or a few specialist skills.

A personal development plan should always start with employees reflecting on the purpose or direction of their career. Often referred to as a Personal Vision, this is really a subjective view of 'what success looks like' to the individual. Often, when determining their personal vision, employees are asked to consider those whose careers or achievements they would like to emulate – people who influence their thinking or inspire

them to action. It could be past or current colleagues, people in the public eye, historical or even fictional characters, depending on what your perception of success is.

Following this stage, employees can determine what their strengths are and identify areas of improvement regarding their purpose or direction.

“It's not easy for everyone to list their strengths and identify skills and knowledge gaps.”

### Tools and actions for employees

It's not easy for everyone to list their strengths and identify skills and knowledge gaps. Completing some simple exercises first to get you thinking more clearly will help.



“Personal development isn't always about 'upward movement,' but rather a way to facilitate continuous momentum until you reach your full potential.

The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) refers to various tools including self-assessment tests, benchmarking exercises and personal diagnostics. Structured people find these materials

useful for outlining objectives and measuring success over time.

If you're struggling to identify the skills or knowledge you wish to gain or improve upon, job descriptions can be a useful resource here, as they always refer to specific skills and competencies needed to undertake a certain role. You can take each skill and competency involved in the role you're either currently undertaking, or the one you aspire to do, and compare them with your own abilities, as you perceive them.

Personal development scorecards can also provide employees with tangible learning objectives. By using weightings for each skill area, they help people map their development in a numerical way and set clear targets (e.g. will attain Level 5 in 6 months). Furthermore, scoring methods can ensure learning objectives include an element of challenge but remain attainable.

Employees can then create a detailed plan of action focused on improving relevant skills and knowledge to maximise effectiveness during an agreed time period.

#### How employers should help

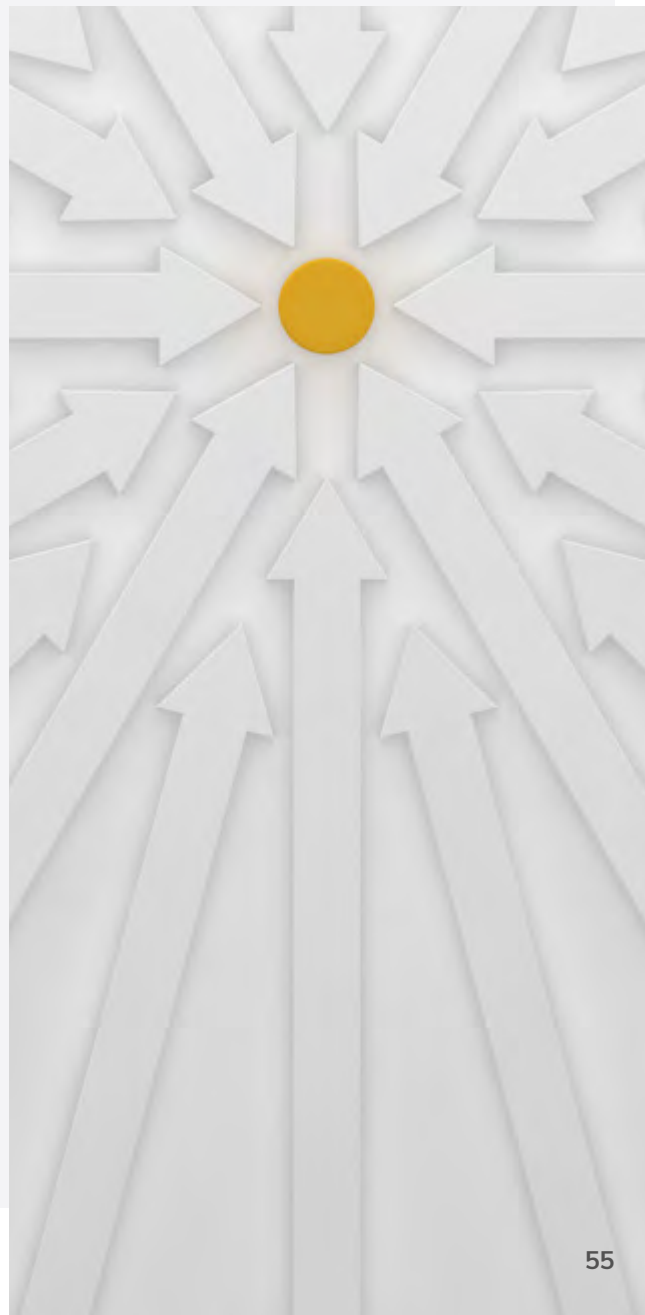
Employers have a key part to play in the personal development planning process. Ensuring development plans are aligned with organisational needs is an obvious goal, however, managers should also use personal development planning sessions to help employees frame their development in a way that will have a positive impact on their attitude and motivation.

Companies should, for example, encourage employees to consider where they're positioned within the context of their chosen discipline or area of expertise. The CMI makes a critical point, stating personal development isn't always about 'upward movement,' but rather a way to facilitate continuous momentum until you reach your full potential.

Getting employees to visualise their careers and gain a clearer sense of where or how they can develop will create a meaningful personal development planning process.

Furthermore, employers who really care about their people will encourage personal development planning activities that focus on honing strengths, as well as in areas where employees have a genuine interest. Too many personal development plans can waste employees' and managers' time by emphasising generic and often irrelevant learning opportunities.

The CMI suggests tailoring personal development so that it's aligned with an individual's values, and considers factors like private life, money and mobility constraints, as well as learning styles; again to bolster motivation and ultimately ensure success.



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Finally, and perhaps, crucially, companies that benefit the most from personal development planning are ones where leaders are tasked to deliver regular and constructive feedback. Recent research points to the benefit of being transparent about someone's weaknesses and getting employees to 'take ownership of their flaws' to facilitate growth.

## Where and how to learn

Returning to the research referenced at the beginning of this article, employees increasingly demand time off during working hours to complete training courses, as well as financial support in paying for training. However, formal 'training' and 'education' are only components of the wider personal development industry.

In addition to professional qualifications and other formal routes to skill acquisition, companies should also look broadly at how they can prioritise continuous development for all employees, across multiple areas.

One useful way to integrate this into personal development planning is to think about how learning occurs. L&D consultancy 70:20:10, for example, highlight 'experience and practice,' 'conversation,' 'observation,' 'help and assistance' and 'reflection' as the five basic categories. This approach also shifts the emphasis away from training and development and instead reveals opportunities for performance improvement in the 'daily flow of work.'

Being creative around on-the-job training can lead to great results. Gartner, for example, demonstrated how employees who had been connected to relevant experts within their own business to learn a skill, became better performers overall. The CMI recommends shadowing, job rotation, secondment, attachment, mentoring, delegation, counselling and coaching as 'best practice' methods to consider.

Of course, the third method for developing skills is to leverage self-learning opportunities if and when they arise. Independent study is a great way to keep abreast of trends and developments in your discipline area. E-learning is on the rise, and with so many free resources, reviewing your personal development plan and making the time to engage with relevant content as part of your working day, or at home, is a sensible move.

Other avenues include networking events, 'out-of-hours' workshops, or clubs and groups attended by others with the same or similar skills and career objectives. Even authoring papers, presenting at conferences and being a mentor are ways to stretch your knowledge and skills in the workplace.

Forbes recommends personal development techniques such as reading widely, personal reflection and observation, as ways to accomplish more and not lose focus on broader personal development goals.

## Importance of challenging yourself

In our recent European-wide salary survey, only 6% of respondents indicated their company had allowed employees to take study leave for external training during the last year. However, what's revealing is that less than a third said the opportunity to gain new skills would persuade them to change jobs. Instead, 57% of respondents highlighted how it was the chance to engage in 'new challenges' that was appealing.

With regards to your personal development plan, anything that stretches your capabilities and puts you outside of your comfort zone will guarantee progress. Even if you fail to meet your personal development objectives, efforts to integrate challenges into your working life – whether they're formal or informal, work based or independent – are the perfect way to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to your employer. And, if you're seeking new employment, taking a detailed and challenging personal development plan to interviews, would certainly put you in good stead for the job.

“Independent study is a great way to keep abreast of trends and developments in your discipline area, making the time to engage with relevant content as part of your working day, or at home, is a sensible move.”





# CUMBRIA FIRM CREDITS CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION TO RECENT SUCCESS

SINCE ITS HUMBLE 19TH CENTURY BEGINNINGS, BURNESIDE PAPER MANUFACTURER JAMES CROPPER HAS CONTINUED TO CHANGE AND EVOLVE TO MEET CONSUMER AND INDUSTRIAL DEMANDS.



David Nicholson

Books and envelopes played a key role in its early success, but a focus on innovation, diversifying its product range and investing in 'cutting edge' technologies and techniques have ensured continuous growth amidst the gradual decline of UK paper manufacturing.

“ James Cropper has released untapped ambition and potential by improving employee engagement while learning to better communicate its proposition.

Located on the River Kent near Kendal in South Cumbria, great products and a reputation for maintaining strong relationships is evident throughout James Cropper's history. During the 2000s, however, amidst an increasingly competitive global

marketplace, limited internal and external communication and a lack of PR activity was beginning to harm the business. Group HR Director, David Nicholson, tells Nigel Wright how, in the last decade, James Cropper has released untapped ambition and potential by improving employee engagement while learning to better communicate its proposition.

Joining as HR Manager in 2009, according to David, during his first few years at James Cropper it became clear that an over-reliance on established customer relationships was a problem. Opportunities were being missed and a key issue was that the business didn't do enough to promote itself externally. This changed in 2012, however, when a restructure and new leadership team triggered a transformation programme.

New CEO, Phil Wild, understood the challenges James Cropper faced and launched a strategy focused on dual investment in Paper and Technical Fibre Products – the company's two core divisions. People development was a critical part of the transformation programme. As Head of HR, David introduced external consultants to help develop leadership skills. Training commercial skills was

also a priority to boost sales, market development and marketability via social media and getting closer to existing and potential customers at events and exhibitions.

The current senior leadership team which have been in place since 2015 are now completely focused on raising the profile of the brand. David – who became Group HR Director in 2015 – and other senior leaders regularly participate in external communications activities, including via social media, as well as appearing at events and on TV and radio to talk about the business: "A few years ago, our brand building activities were limited," he says. "Now we often appear on TV including the BBC, ITV and Sky as well as overseas TV channels, and we're very active across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. It's had a positive effect in many ways."

James Copper certainly has lots to talk about. Another key aspect of the company's transformation programme was establishing a new technology and innovation directorate,

“Another key aspect of the company's transformation programme was establishing a new technology and innovation directorate.





“ This is “closed loop recycling” at its best.

focused on finding ways to diversify the business. A small group of employees were selected to look at new products and markets, M&A, partnerships and joint ventures. The company’s newest division, Colourform, was a direct product of this venture. Innovation also became one of seven “leadership competencies” at James Cropper, with “continuous improvement” now included in all job profiles at the business.

Several initiatives have since been launched which have put the business “on the map.” For example, James Cropper is now one of only two companies in the UK that offer a coffee cup recycling service. Through its reclaimed fibre facility, opened by The Queen in 2013, the business has partnered with restaurant brands to help them reduce waste. Coffee cups are collected in Selfridges, Costa, Starbucks and McDonalds’ restaurants and sent to Burneside, where plastic is stripped from the inside of each cup so that the paper material can be recycled. Selfridges’ paper bags are one outcome of this process – David says this is “closed loop recycling” at its best:

“It’s a fantastic story and a worthy cause, which also gives us a technological advantage over other organisations. We currently process around 1.5 tonnes of material per hour, which equates to 10 million paper cups per week. Crucially, the quality of the paper is indistinguishable from paper products made from virgin pulp, making it a popular choice amongst brands and retailers seeking high standards of sustainability.”

Resulting from this, James Cropper now boasts an enviable list of high profile customers. As well as being the sole provider of paper packaging to Swarovski, the business’s “Tailor Made” reclaimed fibre and post-consumer waste solutions are also utilised by Louis Vuitton, Burberry, Mulberry, Calvin Klein and Chanel. Its achievements in this area were recently recognised at the 2018 Packaging News Awards, where James Cropper won Luxury Packaging Supplier of the year.

A new James Cropper division called Colourform™, launched in 2017, also uses pulp from the recycling process. Colourform™ combines the business’s expertise in colour and paper to create plastic-free packaging





made from 100% renewable natural wood fibre. Rather than producing flat sheets and rolls of paper, technology at James Cropper's world-class Burneside plant enables the business to mould shapes with a high-quality finish in any colour. While other companies offer a similar process, James Copper's colour expertise and huge colour range give it a unique advantage over competitors.

"It's perfect timing", says David, as lots of businesses are seeking alternatives to single-use plastics: "We're absolutely in the right area with the right technology. There's tremendous attention on what we're doing here and it's generated lots of interest in our overall proposition. Our message to potential customers is instead of using plastic packaging inserts, invest in Colourform™. It could be a smartphone box or a range of cosmetics or perfumes – our technology produces moulded fibre trays which can be recycled along with other paper packaging."

In addition to developing "brand building" skills and enhancing commercial expertise across the organisation, employee engagement has become a big factor in James

Cropper's recent growth and success. The HR team has introduced lots of initiatives during the last 10 years which have led to better employee relations. A 2013 employee survey was the catalyst for much of the change and improvements made. Since then, employee communication has increased and forms a regular part of HR's activities, as he explains:

"HR plays a vital role in communicating change and strategy. But it's important to ensure a two-way process so that employees get a chance to take part in discussions and give their views on what's going on. The employee survey is a fantastic vehicle for finding out what people think. There's a negative perception that it only reveals people's views and feelings in a narrow moment in time. Even if that is the case, you still get lots of value from snapshot perspectives. There are always surprises, but it often helps confirm what you thought anyway."

Some of the outcomes of the internal communications process include the business working more closely with Trade Unions; new and improved bonus schemes, an annual



employee award ceremony, investment in training and career development, phased retirement programmes and a more joined-up and “collaborative” leadership team.

A combination of brand building and employee engagement has had a positive effect on recruitment, according to David. Despite a tight market, he says James Cropper’s heightened employer brand is helping the business hire top talent. A recent campaign for a Global Sales Director, for example, received 130 applicants – an “unthinkable number eight years ago.”

Furthermore, James Cropper’s Technical Fibre Products division, which manufactures leading-edge fibres for hi-tech fire protection, thermal insulation and fuel cell applications, now employs several PhD qualified people. The business recruits PhD graduates from various universities including Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Newcastle, York, Lancaster and Glasgow, keen to continue their research work in the company’s laboratories. “We’re on people’s radar far more than we used to be,” says David. “For me, this symbolises the journey we’ve been on.”

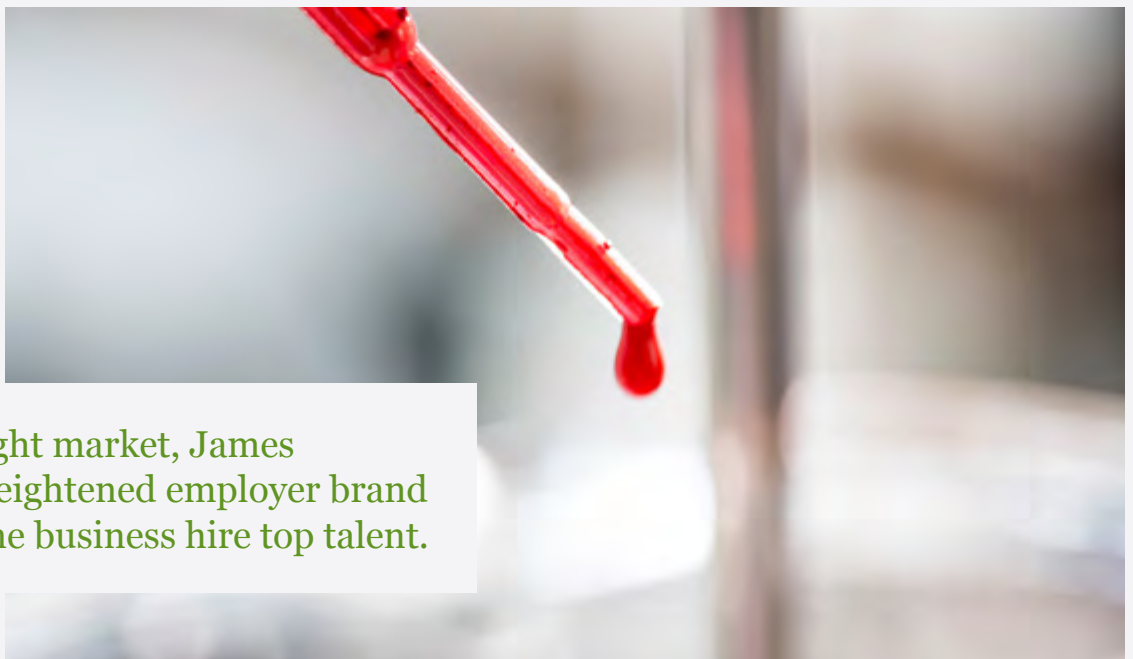
The business has increased apprenticeship opportunities too and enjoys a healthy balance of bringing new people into the organisation versus developing younger employees and helping them move up the ranks. Thirty-three apprentices – a mixture of new and existing employees – now work at

James Cropper within admin, IT, accountancy, engineering and papermaking. It’s a diverse range, David says, and again compared to eight years ago when fewer than six apprentices were employed at the business, it signals positive progress is being made.

David confirmed James Cropper has added 120 people to its operations during the last six years. 560 staff are now employed at the Burneside plant and 40 are spread across locations in the UK, Europe, USA and China. Employees have also indicated an overall increase in positive sentiments towards the business. Those who trust, respect and feel supported by management, for example, has risen by 30% in four years.

James Cropper has come a long way since Phil Wild’s appointment, says David. Looking ahead, he noted his excitement for HR to continue supporting the organisation on its transformation journey:

“People no longer perceive James Cropper as a ‘paper mill out in the sticks,’ but rather an ambitious business and an interesting place to work, located in a great part of the world. There’s still a lot we can achieve, though, and HR can play a massive part in helping James Cropper build on its recent success. I want to be in a position where this department is winning on all fronts in terms of facilitating our growth. My message is clear: as the business moves forward, we must always consider the needs of our people first.”



“Despite a tight market, James Cropper’s heightened employer brand is helping the business hire top talent.”

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## CIPD NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND HR&D AWARDS 2019

Over 450 professionals from across the North East gathered at the new Eagles Community Arena in June to celebrate the 13th annual North East of England CIPD HR&D Awards. Nigel Wright was once again Associate Sponsor of the event, which recognised the achievements of some of the region's brightest and best employers.

Among the employers recognised were Tesco Underwriting, who won HR&D Team of the Year. The Excellence in People Development award went to Greggs plc and housing association, Home Group, received the award for Excellence in Employability & Diversity.

Nigel Wright's Managing Consultant, Sue O'Donovan, said: "Our role as a judge at these awards gives us the opportunity to hear some amazing success stories and the obstacles people have overcome to make a real difference to their organisations, their colleagues and their customers. As ever, the judging process was competitive and selecting winners was tough due to the high quality of entries across all categories. There is such pride in what HR teams are achieving throughout the region."

### THE WINNERS:

Excellence in Health & Wellness - **Aioi Nissay Dowa Europe**

Excellence in Resourcing & Talent Management - **Nissan Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd**

Excellence in Organisational Development - **Connect Health Ltd**

Excellence in Supporting Armed Forces Talent - **Caterpillar Peterlee**

HR&D Excellence in SMEs - **Bazaar Group**

Excellence in Employability & Diversity - **Home Group**

Excellence in People Development - **Greggs Plc**

HR&D Team of the Year - **Tesco Underwriting**

Inspirational Practitioner Award 2019 - **Kelly Angus**









## NIGEL WRIGHT REVEALS ITS RESPONSE TO CHANGING ATTITUDES TO WORK



“ORGANISATIONS THAT REFUSE TO ADAPT THEIR TOOLS, INVEST IN THE ACQUISITION AS WELL AS TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS, AND COMPLETELY RETHINK THEIR ENVIRONMENT, RISK BEING LEFT BEHIND.” SOUNDS LIKE PRETTY SOUND ADVICE, WHO OFFERED IT? OH... WE DID. LAST YEAR.

Published on September 20th in an article titled ‘Work is changing: what does it mean for talent attraction and management?’ we urged companies to align their talent acquisition and retention strategies to the modern world – acknowledging the changing nature of work, as well as the pressures of modern life and how they impact the wants and needs of today’s talent.

The piece is indicative of literature still ‘doing the rounds’ in the world of HR and management consultancy and, as any article purporting expertise, it made Nigel Wright itself appear ‘on the ball’ in this area. But were we? Maybe. We were certainly trying - that’s for sure - though, at the time, it was more a case of ‘Do as We Say, Not as We Do.’ Twelve months on, however, things have changed and we’re now able to reveal solutions that have worked for us. First, a recap of the social and work-related factors driving companies to reimagine their approach to culture, training and talent management.

Insecurities have been paramount during the last ten years. As the world still recovers from the great recession, other endless

socio-economic, geopolitical, demographic and environmental upheavals and events, underpinned by rapid technological advancement, still exasperate individual anxieties. Even now, during an apparent growth spurt for the world economy, as extreme poverty continues to fall and North America and much of Western Europe enjoy record rates of employment, a sense of uncertainty continues to pervade our social and working lives.

The recent World Mental Health Day was a timely reminder that although many people may appear to be thriving, they’re in fact barely making it through the day. In the UK, for example, one in four people are affected by mental illness and annual prescriptions for mental health related drugs have doubled during the last 10 years. While the factors listed above are likely to be part of the problem, it’s also not uncommon for people to refer to everyday life as being too frantic — amplified perhaps by a perceived need to feel

“ It’s also not uncommon for people to refer to everyday life as being too frantic.



constantly connected via email, phone, social media etc. Overstimulation, psychologists say, which leads to mental foginess and prevents us from being our best.

Amidst this environment, however, a backlash is taking place. Historically fixed attributes of work (hours, location, contracts) are being challenged as people try to claw back, if anything, the required headspace to cope with contemporary life as described. Working hours have been in decline across Europe for years and a recent report by PwC highlighted growing demands from workers to be released from the 'constraints' on 9-5 employment. Similarly, research by Dell has revealed how remote or home working is on the rise, while a move towards specialist and portfolio freelance work is dismantling traditional career paths and removing people from the talent pool.

These changes also coincide with a new breed of employee — the millennial. This 'Google generation' want instant access to a better career and they want it all too: A salary with perks, constant reassurance and praise, stability as well as flexibility, and a job and working life that gives them purpose. Recent research from Gallup confirms, however, that millennials are in fact the driving force of workplace changes, leading the charge across organisations by demanding the things it turns out everyone, regardless of their age, desires.

Working life isn't what it used to be and working life will continue to evolve. The challenges outlined above are faced by all companies and with talent being hard to find, especially with high employment, surely people investment is more important than ever before?

It is well documented how modern organisations are adapting to the new world of work by creating 'enriching environments' in an effort to make their talent want to stay. While factors like attractive remuneration and

benefits packages remain important, initiatives that support personal growth, health and wellbeing and workplace culture, for example, that encourage genuine

“There is acknowledgement, however, that not all businesses are the same, and different approaches are needed in different contexts.



feelings of respect and dignity among staff, are become more important. Embedding company values and aligning organisations with perceived 'positive impact' causes, such as those linked to charitable or environmental affairs, also helps to boost beneficial reciprocity through tying people into a larger common purpose.

There is acknowledgement, however, that not all businesses are the same, and different approaches are needed in different contexts. That is exactly the attitude Nigel Wright took when seeking to embrace change, using an approach of genuine engagement, rather than cautious distrust. Starting with informal group discussions with millennial employees, we began to conceive solutions that worked for us, rather than following what other companies were doing. These conversations were then backed up with data from a formal annual employee survey giving us a broader insight of the needs and wants of our whole organisation.

Learning and development was the most popular request from millennials as well as from people at all levels in our 2016-17 employee survey. Furthermore, and perhaps unsurprisingly, our people generally wanted more money and more time off.



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Starting with training, we wanted to recognise our internal strengths and utilise them in coaching, rather than outsourcing the problem. Now, all new starters at Nigel Wright receive 100 hours of formal training and development from managers and directors in their first six months. This is supplemented by on-the-job mentoring and coaching. Furthermore, all new managers across the group attend sessions at our North East HQ — the centre of excellence for employee training and development at Nigel Wright — and senior employees from the North East business visit other offices (e.g. London) to deliver training to the UK and international teams.



Yes, money and other perks are important but they need to be associated with the right behaviours. At Nigel Wright, hard work, good service and achieving results get rewarded. All our consultants enjoy uncapped bonuses based on effective efforts to win work and deliver it. Other perks are on offer too including our high flyers scheme — where each quarter a group of ‘Top Billers’ take a day off to enjoy a paid-for trip to a city where one of our 9 offices is located. ‘Top Trumps’ is also available to those below senior or management level, where successful consultants are treated to food and drink at the company’s expense.

Finally, in addressing the requests for more flexibility and time off we decided to broaden permission for informal working arrangements. All employees are now able to work from home and leave early or start later, to fit with personal commitments. Other formal flexible working patterns exist too. With regards to time off, an extra day off per year is now offered for every year’s service completed, up to five years. Employees can also ‘cash in’ any additional holidays above 25 days if they wish. For those loyal employees who complete five years’ service, they can enjoy a paid month-long sabbatical, to use in addition to their 30 day allowance, and do something they couldn’t otherwise do while working a full-time job. This benefit is repeated again for all subsequent five year anniversaries.

The 2013 Trust Barometer report, published by global PR firm Edelman, confirmed that public trust in the opinions of employees far outweighs that of a company’s PR department, CEO, or Founder. A combination of understanding the changing nature of work and the pressures of modern day life, together with listening to our employees and acting to satisfy their wants and needs – within a context that matches our ambitions and vision as a business – ensures that Nigel Wright staff tell great stories about their time here and encourage others to consider a rewarding career with us too.

“In addressing the requests for more flexibility and time off we decided to broaden permission for informal working arrangements.



# PROFESSIONAL SKILLS: 6 TO FOCUS ON IN 2020

NIGEL WRIGHT'S ANNUAL UK AND EUROPEAN SALARY SURVEYS REVEAL THAT, DURING THE LAST FIVE YEARS, THE REQUIREMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE HAS DECLINED IN VALUE AS A PREREQUISITE FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAREER.

Instead, professional skills such as resilience, communication, flexibility, adaptability and self-sufficiency are more prominently featured.

As such, we decided to investigate professional skills trends to discover what's in demand by employers in 2019.

## Professional skills are important

Professional skills can't be taught. Sometimes they're intuitive, but most often they're refined through experience. Regardless of your profession, however, developing professional skills is an essential part of your working life, right up until retirement. Often referred to as intangible or 'soft' skills, they can add significant value to your employer, as well as your personal brand.

However, with combinations of professional skills being a qualification for most jobs, they're often not included in job descriptions. Therefore, it's important to monitor professional skills trends and see which areas you need to brush up on, to bolster your career trajectory.

Luckily, there's plenty of resources available which reveal what the most in-demand professional skills are as well as providing examples of how to hone these skills, by adopting certain behaviours.



## The trends and where to look

LinkedIn is, of course, an excellent resource for networking and career development. The site also has a recruitment portal, where companies post thousands of jobs every day, outlining desired skills and capabilities across every conceivable discipline. Its latest 'Top Skills' list collates this data and highlights those skills most in demand for 2019. Very much like our own research, it's professional skills that feature highly. Creativity, Persuasion, Collaboration, Adaptability and Time Management are the five core professional skills job seekers are advised to master during the next 12 months.

“Creativity, Persuasion, Collaboration, Adaptability and Time Management are the five core professional skills job seekers are advised to master.”

In its 2018 'The Future of Jobs Report,' The World Economic Forum (WEF) also recently outlined ten professional skills that it says will be prerequisite to succeed in many professions by 2020. Creativity is featured again, alongside Critical thinking,

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People management, Coordinating with others, Emotional intelligence, Judgement and decision making, Service orientation, Negotiation and Cognitive flexibility.

In both reports, the 'growing prominence' of professional skills is a result of improvements in AI and robotics, making some traditional functions obsolete. The argument is that by enhancing your competency in these distinctly 'human' attributes, you will remain attractive to employers. Though, while the WEF urges you to make '2019 your human year,' LinkedIn's advice is more pragmatic, suggesting strengthening professional skills is always an astute career move, as 'they never go out of style.'

Taking the findings of these two reports, as well as our own research and that of comparable and complementary traits, we have created a definitive list of six desirable professional skills. Below, we review each one and discuss associated qualities which can further strengthen your ability to excel in these areas.

## Creativity

Creativity is the skill to master, but what does it mean? The WEF posits four types of work integral to any profession: Creative, Skilled, Rote, Robotic. They argue that 'creative work' is the most valuable of the four. Any professional, it states, can offer 'creative' solutions that can give employers the edge in a competitive market, regardless of the specifics of their job.

How then, do you become creative? Well, generating ideas is one obvious way. Often people write down any idea that comes into their head or set themselves targets to conceive a certain number of ideas each day or week. Some commentators denounce organisations that don't encourage idea generation as part of their regular activities. And it's true that organisations of the future need 'ideas' people to navigate the changing and increasingly competitive landscape.

“ We have created a definitive list of six desirable professional skills.

Innovation is a way to achieve winning outcomes from idea generation. This requires taking a set of ideas and formulating an original concept or solution. It can take practice and a process of trial and error to become truly original or innovative, but, again, refining this skill will make you a critical asset to any company.

Analytical thinking is also a more specialised skill linked to the creative mindset. While anyone one can make suggestions and improvements 'off the top of their head,' analytical thinking requires a period of study first – researching and analysing information and using your findings to address work-related issues and problems.

Furthermore, creative people are usually those that show initiative, by demonstrating a willingness to take on responsibilities and challenges.







### Leadership

'But aren't certain types of people better suited to leadership roles?' you may ask. Well, according to our research, anyone seeking to improve their arsenal of professional skills would do well to develop some leadership traits.

When investigating professional skills trends, the concept of strong leadership is now much broader than 'people management or 'running a team.' Yes, some studies argue that these things are still important. A temperament for conflict resolution, motivating, mentoring, coaching, improving processes or taking ownership of delivering team outcomes, is critical for any business – and in demand. However, there are other behaviours you can master which demonstrate 'leadership' regardless of your position or responsibilities within an organisation.

Neither LinkedIn nor the WEF list 'Leadership' in their professional skills reports. However, WEF does include People Management

on its list, and also highlights Negotiation, Judgement, Decision Making, and Social Influence as being integral to future employability. LinkedIn too includes Persuasion and Collaboration in its 'Top Skills' list. Alongside Negotiation, Judgement, Decision Making

and Social Influence, if improved upon, these professional skills will contribute to a rounded leadership profile.

Culture can help people develop leadership skills. Within organisations that practice 'open leadership,' for example, decision making is democratised and pushed down to the lowest levels. At Accolade Wines, for instance, things move at pace when employees take ownership of decision making, without fear of repercussions.

Some even argue that all professional skills are in fact leadership skills, and to label them otherwise confuses our 'perception and understanding' of what leadership means.

“ There are behaviours you can master which demonstrate 'leadership' regardless of your position or responsibilities within an organisation.



### Emotional Intelligence

While not included on LinkedIn's top professional skills report, our research has flagged emotional intelligence and its associated attributes as being important for today's job seekers.

Emotional intelligence is included in WEF's research as a key 'human' skill which will only grow in prominence during the next few years. The report states that emotional intelligence means showing sensitivity to others' needs and feelings. A helpful, pleasant, cooperative and good-natured demeanour at work is also encouraged. While some may think these are personality-dependent qualities, the WEF states everyone can emphasise innate human characteristics like these in the workplace.

Often referred to as Interpersonal Skills, work environments which encourage these traits, benefit from high engagement, interaction and a sense of shared responsibility, as employees unite to achieve common goals. Cultural awareness plays a key part here too. Diversity and inclusion remain priorities for HR departments, and as organisations become more diverse and inclusive, the greater role cultural awareness will play in ensuring organisational effectiveness.

Research also points towards the importance of being perceptive to others' emotions and needs. People who demonstrate a high degree of perceptiveness will relate well to others, understand why they behave in certain ways, and respond accordingly.

# IMAGINE



Making connections is important for your growth. And anyone – regardless of whether they're an introvert or extrovert – can connect with people in a meaningful way.

Another component of Emotional Intelligence is self-awareness. Those who lack self-awareness often end up in careers they hate. Self-awareness can also diminish over time, as people lose sight of their strengths and preferences. A good way to improve self-awareness is to proactively seek and act upon feedback and let it influence your personal development.

## Communication

Being an 'Excellent communicator' has remained one of the top three professional skills to have for the last five years, according to respondents of our annual salary survey. Any company in any profession benefits from employing strong communicators. Whether they're experts in written, verbal, or nonverbal communication, the impact across sales, marketing or operations disciplines is always clear.

However, expertise in these areas isn't always necessary to contribute from a communications perspective. The WEF, for example, discuss the importance of 'Service Orientation' as a desirable professional skill in today's business world. Those who actively seek ways to help people, it says, are

always effective communicators who speak up during meetings and share information with colleagues.

Specialised elements of communication, though, are valuable. Whether that's giving presentations, writing reports, tenders, copy or speeches; or briefing suppliers, clients and other teams – these are all professional skills you can invest in and improve over time.

## Adaptability

LinkedIn describes adaptability as an 'essential tool' in today's ever-changing world. In many ways, this professional skill is similar to emotional intelligence, as it requires you to understand different perspectives and adjust your activities and actions accordingly.

Certainly, according to respondents to Nigel Wright's annual salary survey, Adaptability and Flexibility are the two main professional skills they associate with a successful career.

Likewise, the WEF refers to Cognitive Flexibility, Resilience and Stress Tolerance in its 'The Future of Jobs' report and suggests various behaviours worth adopting at work. They include maintaining composure, keeping your emotions in check and controlling anger.

“ Any company in any profession benefits from employing strong communicators.



With regards to Stress Tolerance, it advises employees to learn to accept criticism and practice dealing calmly with difficult situations. 'Coping well under pressure' is something respondents to Nigel Wright's annual salary survey say is a critical 'soft skill' to develop over time.

Cognitive Flexibility also means tailoring your communication style. Whether that's when addressing customers, your team or people at different levels in an organisation, demonstrating a degree of customisation in your approach is valued by today's employers.

### Time management

Time Management is perhaps a surprising inclusion in LinkedIn's Top Professional Skills list. Surely, there are more important skills, you may ask? Well, according to LinkedIn, once mastered, this will actually accelerate your development in other areas.

The driver behind rising demand for time conscious employees is the many distractions that now exist in modern workplaces. Open plan offices, emails, phones, social media, etc. – a combination of these factors, evidence suggests, prevents 'meaningful work' and productive meetings from taking place, which can impact the bottom line.

The WEF, too, highlight the importance of 'Focus' in the panorama of future skills. With roles becoming more multifaceted,

completing a variety of tasks and attending several meetings per day is the norm, and requires exceptional organisational skills and time management to avoid delays. It suggests practicing note taking, speed reading and reading intelligently, as a way of improving your focus.

Collaboration is a good business practice, but within these challenging parameters, cultivating a degree of self-sufficiency and independence can help you navigate your working life. Self-sufficiency and independence are in fact the professional skills that have experienced the largest increases in popularity in our annual salary surveys, during the last five years.

By becoming more focused and a master of your time, your future employability will improve. According to the WEF, it will show you as reliable, responsible, and dependable, and associate you with professional values like integrity and honesty.

### Final thoughts

Integrating all or some of these professional skills on CVs, cover letters and online profiles, is highly recommended. Try to find examples of how you have demonstrated these skills in your personal and professional life.

“By becoming more focused and a master of your time, your future employability will improve.”





# IMAGINE







# NORTH EAST ACCOUNTANCY AWARDS 2019

The thirteenth annual North East Accountancy Awards in 2019 was another great success.

Hundreds of accountants, other finance professionals and their colleagues gathered at the Newcastle Gateshead Hilton Hotel to celebrate the achievements of the region's top financial businesses and individuals.

The event highlights the quality and achievements of the North East Finance community and the positive impact they have within their business and in supporting clients. As always, the awards are a tremendous opportunity to recognise the outstanding commitment of those working within the North East accountancy and finance sector.

Among this year's winners was Paul Gibson from ZyroFisher who won Finance Director of the Year. The Business Finance Team of the Year award went to Hitachi Rail and The Lakes Distillery's Nigel Mills received the John Wall Award for Outstanding Achievement.

Nigel Wright has been the main sponsor of the North East Accountancy Awards for over a decade. Associate Director, Richard Morgan, said:

"These awards are now the standout event in the North East finance community's social calendar. We were delighted that this year received a record number of nominations, a testament to the credibility of the event. Nigel Wright is proud to be associated with the Accountancy Awards – they provide organisations with opportunities to recognise the success of their talent and to stand out as an aspirational employer."

## THE WINNERS:

Accounting Technician of the Year – **Ross Patterson, IAM Property**

Rising Star Tax Adviser of the Year – **Andy Jacott, Deloitte**

Rising Star Accountant of the Year – **Lucy Glister-Byers, Newcastle City Council**

Accountant of the Year – **Nick Wilson, Robson Laidler**

Finance Director of the Year – **Paul Gibson, ZyroFisher**

Tax Team of the Year – **Deloitte**

Business Finance Team of the Year – **Hitachi Rail Ltd**

Public Services Finance Team of the Year – **Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**

Corporate Finance Deal of the Year – **KPMG – Advisor to the Royal Institute of British Architects on its partnership with Lloyds Development Capital to support the growth of subsidiary NBS**

Accountancy Firm of the Year (Under 50 employees) – **Leathers the Accountants**

Accountancy Firm of the Year (Between 51-200 employees) – **Bailey Group**

Accountancy Firm of the Year (Over 200 employees) – **Deloitte**

John Wall Award for Outstanding Achievement – **Nigel Mills CBE**



# North East Accountancy Awards 2019



# HOUSING GROUP ATTRIBUTES CULTURE TO GENDER PAY SUCCESS



Heather Ashton

TEESSIDE HEADQUARTERED HOUSING ASSOCIATION AND DEVELOPER THIRTEEN WAS DELIGHTED TO REPORT FAVOURABLE RESULTS WHEN IT REVEALED ITS LATEST GENDER PAY DATA IN MARCH.

The landlord, which manages around 34,000 properties, reduced the average difference between male and female employee hourly earnings by 2.5%, having gone from 7% down to 4.43%. Its median pay gap also fell to 0.0%.

“The emphasis is to make every day a great day at work.”

Executive Director Heather Ashton tells Nigel Wright that rather than there being a “magic formula” for achieving success, the results indicate how several factors integral to Thirteen’s culture and ethos encourage equality across the organisation.

Since joining Fabrick Housing Group in a role which encompasses responsibility for finance, IT, HR, research, policy, performance and





governance, Heather has been instrumental in the organisation's transformation during the last decade. This has included supporting negotiations with investors and regulators when Fabrick merged with Vela Group to create Thirteen in 2014, as well as integrating new systems and back office support following restructures and acquisitions.

Despite some tough periods, such as the implementation of a 1% housing association rent reduction in 2015, and when the organisation has been forced to drive efficiencies, Heather says Thirteen has remained a positive place to work.

As well as offering attractive packages to employees, the organisation works hard to support its people. The emphasis is to make "every day a great day at work," she says, and employees are asked to play a part in creating a rewarding environment. Given the housing sector attracts those who want to make a difference and give back to their communities, attributes like 'pride' and 'caring' are prominently featured. Though, Heather notes a degree of action and commercial thinking is needed in the sector and Thirteen tries to reinforce these behaviours too, through its considerate, smart and progressive values:

"We're considerate in our behaviour, but we need to be smart in our approach and progressive too – always moving things

forward. Led by our service directors and senior managers, the Be Thirteen campaign provided our people with a range of tools and techniques to help them reflect on how they are displaying Thirteen's values and ensure they live and breathe them every day. It's facilitated collaboration across the business and stretched people, as well as helping them understand their role and the impact it has on those in different service areas."

Heather acknowledges that Thirteen's transformation over the last few years has created some insecurity and anxiety at the organisation. Directors and managers were proactive about addressing this, she says, and have worked closely with their teams to alleviate any concerns. The organisation is committed to engaging mental health advocates, who act as a "first point of contact" for colleagues who may need additional support. A 'Simply Health' package also gives employees access to a range of benefits including counselling services, free prescriptions and discounted gym membership.

Another initiative Thirteen hopes will further enhance its culture is agile working, which the organisation has been trialling during the

**“Thirteen's transformation over the last few years has created some insecurity and anxiety.**



# IMAGINE



“ The organisation emphasises that “work is something you do, not where you go,” and is accelerating the rollout of laptops to “empower people”.

last 12 months. “This isn’t just about making savings to pour back into services,” says Heather, but rather about encouraging more collaborative, efficient and effective work by giving people a choice of where and how they do it. The organisation emphasises that “work is something you do, not where you go,” and is accelerating the rollout of laptops, tablets and mobile devices to “empower people to make their own choices about how to meet business and customer needs.” This approach also helps employees manage a healthier work-life balance by allowing them to work at home or in a location nearer to where they live, as well as at times outside of the traditional 9-5 working day.

Heather noted, however, that agile working isn’t about abandoning physical offices altogether. Often employees must be office based, and Thirteen’s Middlesbrough headquarters will play a vital role in showcasing what an agile work culture looks like. The ‘Right Space, Right Place’ programme, for example, encourages ‘hot-desking’ and offers a range of different spaces for people to choose how they wish to work, including “collaborative” and “confidential” areas. “We want our teams to interact and network with parts of the organisation they wouldn’t ordinarily interact with,” says Heather. “Customer satisfaction, in particular, is a big driver of this. And opening up the conversation between employees we expect will help us better serve our customers.”

What’s all this got to do with gender pay? Well, in Heather’s view, efforts to create a

considerate, smart and progressive culture and make ‘every day a great day at work’ has attracted equal amounts of male and female talent. Thirteen’s 1,600 person workforce is currently split 50.1% men and women 49.9%. And, crucially, staff within the top two pay quartiles are “fairly balanced,” which has had the most impact on the organisation’s gender pay data.

Heather says while Thirteen takes pride in its gender pay results, it won’t become complacent about its success. Over the next 12 months, the organisation will scrutinise data collected over the last two years and consider all equality, talent management, pay and reward, recruitment and retention processes and policies with the aim of identifying and tackling gender imbalances in the workforce: “Taking a positive approach to our gender pay continues to send a powerful message to staff. Currently, a lot of our thinking around gender pay is anecdotal, but we recognise additional learning is required to ensure we don’t take backwards steps.”

A key reason for Thirteen Group’s 4.43% gender pay gap is that within the lowest pay quartile, the organisation employs more women than men, while more men are employed in the second lowest quartile. It’s a difficult issue to resolve, says Heather, as the lowest paid roles at Thirteen are mainly cleaning jobs usually undertaken by women.





Trade roles held by men dominate the second lowest paid quartile. Heather says that despite encouraging women to apply for trade apprenticeships, men and women generally gravitate towards certain jobs, regardless of efforts to inspire people to consider different careers.

Thirteen doesn't plan to tackle this intrinsic inequality more so than it already does but will give greater prominence to facilitating "general equality" through promoting its overall employer proposition. Increased marketing efforts to showcase what it's like to work at Thirteen Group are already underway. This includes filming employees undertaking vacant roles, so prospective candidates get a better sense of the "day in the life" of someone in that job. Thirteen has used videos to attract people from outside of the housing sector for its critical Neighbourhood Coordinator positions, as Heather explains:

"There are 90 Neighbourhood Coordinators at Thirteen – men and women – each responsible for around 300 homes. They are instrumental in building relationships with customers and offering help and support. Often, it's difficult to bring to life what's involved in a job through a written job description. Our videos show existing Neighbourhood Coordinators out on their patch giving an overview of their role and talking about their experiences – it's proven to be a powerful recruitment tool."

Heather highlighted that since creating the Neighbourhood Coordinator roles in 2018, several women who have worked at Thirteen

for many years have also gained those positions. She says there's a clear career path associated with these opportunities and already people are demonstrating the ability to step-up into management roles. However, Heather noted that Thirteen doesn't prioritise female-only succession planning like other companies but has various development initiatives that "promote equal opportunities across the organisation."

A Rising Stars programme, for example, includes a mixture of men and women nominated for development opportunities. This enables talented people to get involved in "critical projects" and gain broad exposure to Thirteen's operations. Furthermore, last year two Thirteen employees – a man and woman – were selected for GEM, a graduate progression scheme for the housing sector run by Incommunities. And six staff members are currently undertaking higher-level apprenticeships: "We've got a good track record of developing female talent," says Heather, "though our aim is to help as many people as we can progress in their careers."

She added: "We continue to ensure everybody here is recognised for the value that they bring regardless of gender. A valued workforce is more likely to be high performing and productive, which supports our aims and values, making Thirteen an attractive place to work."

“Taking a positive approach to our gender pay continues to send a powerful message to staff.”







## CHALLENGING BIAS IN HIRING PRACTICES by Desmond O'Brien, Nigel Wright Group

### Creating positive change

The recent publication of the gender pay gap in the UK stimulated an important discussion



around bias. The way the recruitment industry uses the report's information is critical to creating equal opportunities. There are a few simple ways we can influence positive change throughout a hiring process and I would like to focus on the two most obvious forms of bias I come across – gender and age discrimination.

### Gender bias

As a starting point on gender bias, let's prioritise. This isn't entirely about equality in numbers, nor should it be. What we want (I hope) is to create an environment where people have equal opportunities. What people choose to do with those opportunities should be up to the individuals involved and we should see this reflected in disproportionate numbers on both sides.

Without unpacking the full psychology of an unconscious bias, we can extract some basic premises, most obviously that a bias-free environment strips away any form of potential discrimination. What it should not do then, by definition, is work toward a quota of any kind. If we are forced into situations where we must have 50% of either gender for the sake of parity, we are moving away from equal opportunities – not towards them.



“If we challenge the way we promote, hire, and assess talent, we will achieve greater levels of equality.

We should have equal pay for equal work. No one can reasonably dispute that. Equal pay for unequal work, however, creates more problems than it solves, and if companies are to be assessed on their pay gaps it should be done in the context of an organisation's history of hiring practices and promotions. Those behaviours will be far more reflective of an equal opportunity playing field than analysing a medium or a mean. Numbers allow us to formulate hypotheses, but further analysis is required for us to draw conclusions. If an employer outsources a service function that it finds is predominantly made up of one gender, their overall salary numbers may appear to improve, but their action does not benefit the company or its employees.

Such analysis takes time and it is complicated, which is why we need to draw the conversation back to behaviours. If we challenge the way we promote, hire, and assess talent, we will achieve greater levels of equality.

As for the gender pay gap survey, what can we do with these numbers? First off, look at them. The full report is accessible on the UK government's website and every recruiter can look up any business in the UK with more than 250 staff. Too few will take time to look at the report and as a result they will miss an opportunity to challenge (or encourage) what the information says about their clients. Awareness is only the first step toward challenging an unconscious bias, but it is a vital one.

#### Age discrimination

On the topic of age discrimination, which is seemingly one of the few acceptable ways to dismiss potential talent, we are faced with an equally difficult challenge. I meet people with 20-30 years of

experience on a regular basis, most of whom have progressed consistently in their careers. Those people, when made redundant due to reasons outside of their control, are the most difficult individuals to place into organisations. They are neglected because of their age and because of assumptions that are problematic.

So how can we challenge our clients when they talk about “runway” or “culture fit” before they even meet someone? Is it as simple as asking if their concern is that the candidate is too old? Many might find this uncomfortably challenging, but isn't that the point? If a business wants to reject a candidate because of cultural fit, shouldn't they have to meet them first? If a business wants to reject someone because of “runway”, shouldn't they be challenged to assess progression potential? Most importantly, should we not, as recruiters, find it incumbent upon ourselves to challenge these practices?

As the recruitment industry becomes less transactional and more consultative, we have more of an opportunity, regardless of our seniority in our own organisations, to challenge the behaviours of our clients. We should facilitate environments for interviewers that focus on ability and potential – not quotas.

Achievable targets and modest legislation are necessary components of this discussion, but they miss the real issue. If we eliminate discriminatory behaviours, we have no need for legislation at all. I don't begin to suggest we are anywhere near that point yet, but if the recruitment industry adopts a more challenging mentality toward biases in hiring practices we will get there much sooner.

“We should facilitate environments for interviewers that focus on ability and potential – not quotas.



# IMAGINE

## NORTH EAST MARKETING AWARDS 2019

Following its hugely successful inaugural year, the second North East Marketing Awards took place in October 2019 with 350 marketers attending the black-tie event at Newcastle's Discovery Museum.

Marketing industry leaders enjoyed a fantastic night where individuals and businesses were recognised for excellence within the fields of brand development, research, digital and campaign management. Numerous industry sectors operating across the North East were represented by both in-house teams and agencies.

A competitive nominations pool for all 15 categories demonstrated the strength of the region's creative talent. Categories reflected the breadth of specialisms and roles within the profession. This meant people across the career span - from Rising Star of the Year to Outstanding Achievement - enjoyed success.

### THE WINNERS:

Rising Star of the Year (In-house)  
**Anthony McDermott, St Benedict's Hospice**

Rising Star of the Year (Agency)  
**Will Larkin, The Twist Group**

Marketer of the Year  
**Jonathan Alcock, Parkdean Resorts**

Marketing Director of the Year  
**Paul Wilkinson, J Barbour & Sons**

Digital Campaign of the Year  
**Narrative -  
Campaign: Hello Future (NCOP)**

Integrated Campaign of the Year (In-House)  
**Nexus -  
Campaign: Spice Girls Concert**

Integrated Campaign of the Year (Agency)  
**Narrative -  
Campaign: BSW Timber**

Not for Profit Campaign of the Year  
North East Autism Society  
**Campaign: World Autism  
Acceptance Week**

Brand Creation of the Year  
**Narrative -  
Brand: Rebrand of County Durham  
Housing Group to Believe**

Product Launch of the Year  
**Fentimans - Product:  
Fentimans Botanical Collective**

In-House Marketing Team of the Year  
**Miller UK**

Small Agency of the Year (Under 20 employees)  
**Crystallised**

Digital Marketing Agency of the Year  
**Shout Digital**

Integrated Marketing Agency of the Year  
**Drummond Central**

Outstanding Achievement Award  
**Steve Parkin, Mayborn Group**

Nigel Wright Recruitment was involved in establishing the North East Marketing Awards and we are proud to help celebrate the successes of the marketing community.

Marketing Director, Justin Barlow, said:

"We're proud to see the North East Marketing Awards grow in its second year. An even broader range of nominations were submitted from organisations of all sizes. There's been a fantastic level of interest from in-house teams and agencies from across the region. Our business is all about supporting clients in attracting the best marketing



talent and grow their teams in the North East. We're delighted to help celebrate everyone's creativity and success. We look forward to doing so again at next year's event."

North East  
**Marketing Awards**  
2019







## OUR UNIQUE PROPOSITION

NIGEL WRIGHT RECRUITMENT IS THE LEADING AND LARGEST, MULTI-DISCIPLINE REGIONAL RECRUITMENT BUSINESS SPECIALISING IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND.

We have deep expertise across every discipline and have been the preferred talent partner for the last 30 years. We have significant experience in bringing together high-calibre candidates and local/global organisations for individual assignments and as part of a long-term account. Also, our depth and breadth for handling large scale, transformational recruitment projects are extensive, demonstrating we have the capacity and capabilities required to provide clients with excellent service levels whilst helping achieve their objectives.

Our clients trust us to quickly attract the highest calibre and most suitable candidates first time.

### 1. We access candidates that others can't:

- We know our market with 40 North East consultants, 1,000 weekly market conversations and 4,000 candidate meetings a year
- Our one-team approach means we share information and candidates
- We have the most extensive networks that are other people's headhunts

### 2. Our customers believe we enhance their employer brand:

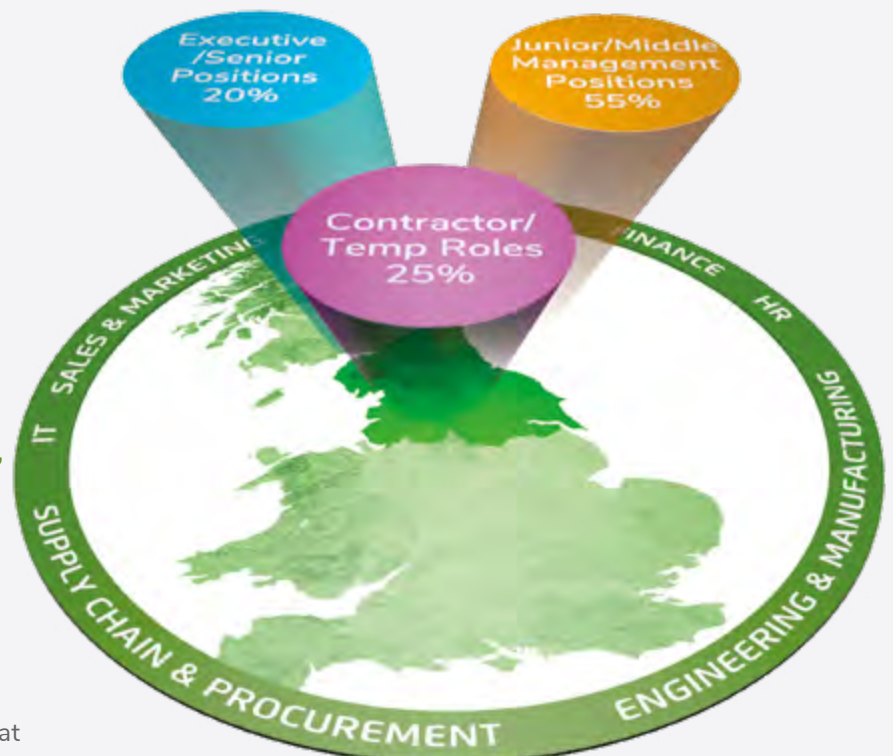
- Our market expertise is unrivalled after 30 years and with 300 years' regional experience between our consultants
- We understand our clients and tell their stories accurately to attract the right candidates
- We produce market leading candidate attraction campaigns with world class marketing

### 3. We control the process and manage risk, allowing you to focus on your day job:

- We take a thorough consultative brief and then deliver on our promises
- We openly communicate internally and externally so clients' and candidates' expectations are met
- We are fully GDPR compliant to ensure that our clients comply too

### 4. We deliver sustainable results that produce long term value:

- We provide service excellence assurance – consistently
- We create greater value than our competitors with an open market perception survey ranking us above all competitors across relationships, service, knowledge, quality and capability.



**IF THE IDEAL  
CANDIDATE  
ISN'T IN YOUR  
NETWORK,  
CHANCES  
ARE THEY'RE  
IN OURS**

**Nigel Wright brings together high-calibre candidates  
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