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## Reflection – and looking ahead



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Gordon McFarlane welcomes you to the PPMA conference and looks forward to the next 12 months



**By Gordon McFarlane, PPMA President**

We're preparing to celebrate another great year at our annual conference, thinking about some fantastic individual and team achievements, and recognising our stars now and stars of the future. I'm delighted that the PPMA continues to go from strength to strength, with membership increasing, and much of the conference sold out. It's the board's responsibility to ensure that our offer remains current and topical, and also value for money, but we also really value feedback from our members. Our talent programmes have been hugely popular, and I've been privileged to meet and work with some fantastic individuals and groups throughout the year.

Rather than have an individual theme at the conference, we've gone for a mix of inspiring and thought provoking speakers

and interactive breakout sessions, and we've focused on really relevant topics. We've got sessions on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); individual and organisational resilience; hybrid working; physical and mental wellbeing; compassionate leadership; the integrated care system; menopause awareness; our responsibilities for care leavers, and also technology and HR.

Looking forward, these topics are going to remain absolutely relevant. As a profession working in the public sector, we face many ongoing challenges. Many people are talking about our workforce challenges in stark terms – 'being in crisis', 'on a cliff edge' etc. NHS staff shortages also hit the headlines recently, with similar terms being used.

In the context of the cost of living, inflation is forecast to drop but is currently still high (the February spike was 'unexpected') – and this puts continued pressure on our workforce. As a result, turnover remains high for many organisations, and many areas continue to

be extremely challenging in terms of recruitment and retention.

We continue to lobby Government for national commitment and action around recruitment campaigns (eg by profession), as well as wider marketing of the benefits of working in local government (see the #lovelocalgov campaign).

***Hard though it is in the context of short-term priorities and immediate challenges, we do need to focus on the longer term***

The national employee relations climate remains challenging, and although some pay bodies are now settling disputes, our own pay negotiations are becoming protracted, and staff face further delays in 2023-24 before agreement is reached and money reaches payslips.

We need to have a continued focus on EDI. As always, there's lots of positive work

going on, but the context of recent Metropolitan Police events shines a light on us all, and we should examine our practice, strive to continually improve, and to make EDI work a clear priority.

Hard though it is in the context of short-term priorities and immediate challenges, we do need to focus on the longer term, whether this is workforce and succession planning in general, or considering where our future talent will come from. Linked to this is how technology will change roles, not just for us in HR, but across our organisations.

Finally, we should continue to think about organisational culture – all the individual aspects of our organisations that blend together to create unique cultures, and help to influence why people want to work with us.

As I said a year ago at our last conference, the next 12 months is full of challenges for us as a profession, but these are exciting times, with lots of opportunities for HR professionals to get their teeth into. ●●●●●



## INSIDE:



- **Stephen Moir's busy year in the hot seat**
- **Marie Mettam is PPMA Peer of the Year**



# A busy year in the hot seat

Past PPMA President Stephen Moir has recently celebrated his first anniversary as Chief Executive at Cambridgeshire CC and took time out to reflect on how his experience in HR has shaped his approach in the top job

## Can you share the highlights of your career journey which has brought you to your position as chief executive?

I have spent all of my working life (apart from a very brief period in financial services) in the public sector covering local government, the NHS, and policing. I can't say that I had any grand plan and my earliest ambitions were about reaching the position of personnel manager by the age of 40. I was very lucky to achieve that ambition early and after that it has been about taking opportunities that provided me with interesting work, with good people and working in places where I want to be. And I believed I could make a difference. This is the third time I have worked for Cambridgeshire – the first time in the 1990s working for the police service, then working as a director for the county council and now having returned as chief executive.

Working as a director for more than 15 years in a range of roles, with people as a core theme, and learning from various leaders gave me the confidence to decide I wanted to test myself as a chief executive. I have a strong connection to place and community with Cambridgeshire,

and I felt a sense of unfinished business when I left my role as a corporate director in 2011, which encouraged me to return. So, it has been a combination of ambition, opportunity and good luck that's the best way to describe it.

## The most effective leaders invest time in continuous learning and development – how have you managed to do this?

Learning for life is one of the most important things anyone can do, no matter what job they do. For me, there is no substitute for being curious – curious about people, organisations, places, which provides a richness of learning. I been fortunate enough to have benefited from leadership development programmes, and on the job learning from things going wrong is an underrated skill as there is much we can benefit from when things don't go as planned.

I have also learned so much from working alongside great role models and coaching and mentoring, both formally and informally. Importantly, learning from my professional networks such as the PPMA, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and – more recently – Solace have all been highly influential in my career. Working alongside people who have a strong values base and a belief in public service, such as Irene Lucas (my chief executive at South Tyneside Council), also made a real impact. Irene had the courage to take a chance on me at an early stage in my career and to appoint me to my first HRD role. I am forever grateful for the opportunity I was given, it was a real accelerator for my subsequent career.

## What have you learned about yourself since taking on the challenges of chief executive?

I have surprised myself by discovering I could have tried to take on the challenge at an earlier stage in my career. I learned that all of the experience I've gained across a broad range of organisations equipped me with a wide perspective on how to tackle various challenges as a leader.

I also recognised having a strong connection to the 'place' and communities makes a difference. The importance of human behaviour, relationships, and working with others is so crucial to achieving the best possible outcomes. As a HR professional these are qualities I'd like to think I've developed over the years and stands me in good stead for my current role.

## How has your experience as an HR professional shaped your approach to taking on the role as chief executive?

I benefited from a varied career in HR which enabled me to experience how different parts of the public sector operates. However, it was experience in organisational development, culture change and employee relations that stand out as the most valuable. The combination of experience and understanding of the mechanics of organisational behaviour, values and design stand me in good stead today.

I believe my roots in HR are in part why I place people at the heart of decision making, whether from the view point of our residents, communities or employees. I see huge benefits in developing positive connections with our partners across all sectors. I make use of the technological developments that we now have at our disposal to connect with large numbers of people easier and quicker. However, I also spend time meeting people face to face and hear about their experiences about how it feels to work in the council or the services they receive. This is so important as it sets the tone for the rest of my organisation.

## What can we do to build organisational resilience?



By **Perry Timms**, Founder and Chief Energy Officer at PTHR, and *HR Magazine's* 'HR's Most Influential Thinker 2022', and **Kirsten Buck**, Chief Impact & Culture Officer – PTHR, and Co-Chair of BLocal Scotland

At the forthcoming PPMA Conference, we will be presenting the topic 'How to build organisational resilience and appreciate the systems of work'.

Firstly, what is organisational resilience and secondly, how do we all appreciate the systems of work more in order to achieve that outcome?

Perhaps most importantly though, why should we build more organisational resilience anyway? Isn't this the domain of the executive leadership team? This article looks at these questions without giving the entire game away ahead of the presentation!

Organisational resilience is (and yes we conferred with the AI chatbox 'ChatGPT') the ability of an entire enterprise to respond effectively to unexpected events, crises and challenges.

In itself, organisational resilience is a phenomenon more than it is any change programme or repeatable sequence of activities.

Phenomena are hard things to tackle and appreciate because they can be abstract concepts. However, we can codify our thinking and thereby commit to actions that bring this thinking into being and doing.

Things like preparedness, decision-making protocols, awareness raising and mitigating and coordinated procedural responses. All scoped through a range of scenarios and things like business continuity and disaster recovery.

What it requires – and this will be covered in our talk – is futures thinking. Note the plurality. No singular future but a range of potential futures. That helps us explore possibilities based on experiences, research and deductive reasoning for complex situations.

So we'll define organisational resilience in our presentation as the capabilities needed to weather (unpredictable and predictable) storms and maintain the duty of care, support, levels of performance and positive impact of an enterprise's continued operation. All this, looking after its people, property, processes and services.

When it comes to the appreciation of the systems of work, how do we do that more than we already perceive we do? Via deliberate focus and understanding of how things get done.

By not sleepwalking through our work in habitual routines, but being alive to what's going on, why, when, how, with whom, for whom, and using what. To achieve a stated or adapted goal and outcome.

By looking at our processes and

procedures, the channelling of energy, clarity on our principles for how we work and make the pressing and more crucial decisions on courses of action, plus our

Ultimately, it is our people who matter – we are a people-to-people business and need a workforce who have the right focus on outcomes, comprised of people who want to work together in and for a place, where they feel safe to deliver their best work on behalf of our residents. What we do as a council and the local communities we serve, is wholly reliant on people – we are only as good as the people around us, who deserve to be well.

**What do you expect from your HR function?**

HR are the people experts, I trust them to develop the most appropriate solutions to enable us to deliver our priorities, based on a strategic steer provided by the corporate leadership team. My wants and needs from the HR team are to ensure the basic services are delivered well – operationally, I expect to see a continued shift away from a focus on transactional HR to a service that proactively supports the organisation’s development and transformation.

A team made up of HR and OD professionals who can challenge when necessary, speak truth to the leadership community and are one step ahead of the challenges facing the council such as skills, capabilities, talent development that will enable us to succeed and deliver for our communities.

**How do you find time and space to be future focused?**

We create time to discuss such challenges as a senior leadership community and we also ensure this is also considered with my fellow chief executives across the county and the region. We engage with our county councillors on future planning and recently facilitated a workshop with them to consider how do we address the current skills gaps by growing our own talent and being competitive in a challenging labour market.

On a personal level I always ensure I take time out for myself and one way I do this is by keeping a journal that allows me to reflect on what is happening and what needs to change to challenge our own behaviour and performance.



**What values are important to you and your leadership community?**

The starting point for me is about understanding why we are here and that is to improve the quality of life of our most vulnerable residents and tackling inequalities in society. This requires us all as public servants to place a sense of compassion and empathy at the heart of what we do. If these qualities are absent, it is easy to overlook that at the end of every decision we make and everything we do is a person.

We need to actively listen, learn and be fascinated by the people we serve and be responsive to individual lived experience. Treating people with civility and kindness makes a tangible difference to their wellbeing and how they feel about themselves, as well as the organisation

they work for. This is an ongoing journey we always need focus upon.

I am proud about the work we have achieved in partnership with district council colleagues in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers to Cambridgeshire. Being compassionate does not mean being weak – it means you have to lean into the tough decisions, in the right way, seeking outcomes that recognise the humanity of our work. Or as I used to say in the NHS, positive engagement of colleagues saves lives, it’s that important.

**How do you see technology enabling you to deliver against your ambitions?**

Our digital literacy as a county is improving and our residents expect to be able to engage with the council in a time and place of their choosing rather than being channelled in a way that best suits just the council. Technology will help us with this. Robotics and AI will enable us to deliver our transactional tasks quicker and more responsively. The wider emerging technologies will support us being more efficient and effective, helping to free time up to redesign roles and apply human skill and judgement in areas where it is needed most for example social workers.

Our leadership team needs to ensure we use technology to be data driven, insight led, and evidence-based in the way we drive public policy and decision making. As a predominantly rural county, digital connectivity is so important to us in terms of skills, learning, inclusivity and where we need to be as a society – however it is a key enabler, but not a means to an end in its own right.

**What do you wish your legacy to be?**

‘I left it better than I found it’ – it’s as simple as that. We have huge differential in life experience and outcomes in Cambridgeshire in terms of health, poverty, skills, employment, and deprivation. However long my tenure is with Cambridgeshire, I will strive every day to ensure I leave it in a place that is better than when I arrived. ●●●●●



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Why do we all share a stake in building organisational resilience then?

Without us all – coalescing to a state of applied effort – we’re either over-relying on leadership direction or we’re ignoring the potential dangers and issues around us. And in protecting ourselves, our colleagues, customers and the communities we serve, we need to be at one in creating organisational resilience for our futures and our continued positive impact.

Our talk will show how the collective and deliberate application of our capabilities, skills and creativity builds organisational resilience; but that this has to be channelled with a spirit of togetherness, accountability and clarity. With this spirit, a regenerative culture can emerge.

Author Bruce Daisley talks less about individual resilience and more about fortitude – that we draw strength from each other, especially at times of adversity and in facing complex challenges.

We’ll share how we believe this starts with us individually, gathers strength collectively and ultimately becomes a phenomenon of our own making.

And in times of turbulence (now a regular occurrence) we need organisational resilience as a forcefield more than ever, to look out for ourselves and what matters most.

We look forward to sharing that with you as a critical part of how we do things in the ‘turbulent 20s’. ●●●●●

focus and prioritisation, to do what matters.

What matters may change as we enter into complex and unexpected situations

but nonetheless, how we know what matters is down to assessing the situation we’re in and appreciating and then utilising the systems of work we

have available to us. Using novel and emergent techniques, we apply creative thinking to adapt those systems. In real-time.



# View from the peer



Marie Mettam (3rd from left) celebrates her win

## Marie Mettam, Strategic HR Business Partner at Lincolnshire CC, discusses her PPMA Peer of the Year achievement for 2022-23

In March I felt humbled but enormously proud to have been recognised as PPMA's latest Peer of the Year. The 'Peer into the Future' six month development programme has been one of the best I have had the privilege of attending. Aimed at aspiring HR directors, the modular, strategic programme combines theory, leading practice and real world practical input. This comes from senior leaders across both public and private sector organisations.

The programme covered a vast array of cutting edge topics, including sessions on compassionate leadership; the power of technology in enhancing modern work and the importance of data and evidence. Hearing from inspirational leaders like Althea Loderick (Chief Executive of Southwark LBC), Angela O'Connor (CEO of The HR Lounge) and Dawar Hashmi (Director, Executive Search at Penna) to name but a few, was both inspirational and motivational.

The talent programme has broadened my horizons and expanded my line of sight beyond my day to day role. This has given me more confidence and self-belief as a senior HR professional. It enhanced my leadership skills by opening my eyes to new ways of thinking, including current and future trends, both in business and HR.

### *We are not alone in the challenges we face but there is such a lot we can learn from each other*

It also enabled me to meet a fabulous network of top class HR leaders whose insight and experience I already value enormously. Together, we share people-related ideas and find creative and innovative solutions to the taxing HR and OD issues facing our organisations. Collectively, we are stronger and can support the local government authorities we work for, across the UK, to thrive and be the best of the best.

I strongly believe in the ethos of public service and have been a public sector employee for the last 20 years. I am keen to further develop my HR leadership skills and continue to contribute to the hugely important delivery of local government services in communities across the UK. Peer has given me both the learning and networking opportunities to do just that.



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As Peer of the Year I not only gain a three-day pass to this year's PPMA Conference but am also given the privilege of becoming a member of the PPMA extended board. I have no doubt this will offer me further networking and learning opportunities, all of which will enhance my own current and future career. Peer has given me given me more confidence to value my worth both professionally and personally and the motivation to explore every opportunity that comes my way.

The reflective learning tools have already helped me move forward with more self-awareness. One to one coaching, 360 degree feedback, personal brand support and CV development were all offered as part of Peer.

The last six months have taught me HR and OD professionals across the UK are very willing to engage if you simply reach out and ask. My working life will be both enriched and improved through the network of people Peer has introduced me to, be they HR colleagues, thought leaders, public and private sector subject matter experts, or chief executives. On a

personal level, taking part in the programme has given me the added bonus of gaining several new friends from all across the UK.

I believe my organisation, Lincolnshire CC, will also benefit from the shared learning and networking chances. We are not alone in the challenges we face but there is such a lot we can learn from each other.

PPMA continuously strives to enhance, promote and raise the standards of people management and organisation development within public services. The Peer into the Future Programme is an excellent example of this.

I would highly recommend this talent programme to any public sector strategic HR/OD professionals who are aspiring HR directors. The experience and opportunities it gives you are second to none. If you are thinking about applying for next year's cohort but are a little nervous, my advice to you? Feel the fear and do it anyway!

You will not regret it. ●●●●●●●●





(l-r) Nikki Gray and Leatham Green of Oracle, Richard Coombes of Deloitte, Lucy Adams of Disruptive HR and Henry Watson of the Cabinet Office

# Summit Series 2023 launched!

Oracle, in collaboration with Deloitte, launched its 2023 Summit Series at the iconic Design Museum in March, attended by public sector leaders from across the UK.

The Spring Summit provided the opportunity for public sector leaders to connect and learn from thought leaders such as Lucy Adams, CEO of Disruptive HR, and industry specialists Richard Coombes, Partner at Deloitte, and Henry Watson, Director of HR Transformation at The Cabinet Office.

Over the past three years, employees have experienced autonomy and empowerment that has changed forever the psychological contract of work, and there is no going back.

In order to respond to this emerging modern workplace Richard Coombes encouraged delegates to 'think big, act fast, and start small' and Lucy Adams highlighted the importance of treating employees as

adults, customers and humans.

Emerging expectations and new norms of the workforce require leaders to find new solutions to the many business challenges currently faced – many of which existed prior to the pandemic – such as the skills shortage, and without trying out different solutions this skills gap is set to widen even further.

The time is now to be brave, bold and different in how we address such challenges and the Summit Series seeks to highlight how the right combination of human ingenuity, creativity coupled with technology can deliver successful and transformational outcomes for local residents, communities and employees alike.

The second summit in the series will take place on 15 June (*venue to be confirmed at time of press*) and you can reserve your place by emailing [leatham.green@oracle.com](mailto:leatham.green@oracle.com). 🌈🌈🌈



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# My journey

**Janet Atkin, Assistant Director of HR services at Cambridgeshire CC, discusses her career so far**

**Share something of your career journey that brought you to your current role?**

I did business studies at polytechnic and I knew then that I wanted to work in HR in some way. A couple of years after leaving college, I took my first role in HR within local government, then moved into the housing sector. A move to Cambridge and a brief period with a mental health charity then brought me to Cambridgeshire CC 21 years ago. I still find that incredible as I certainly didn't plan on staying this long! I have been so lucky to work with amazingly talented and committed people during this time and together we have lived and worked through so much change.

I have been fortunate to have had lots of opportunities through the years, including providing professional HR support via a shared service arrangement across three councils and two years working as an HR business partner for another authority we were contracted to support. This allowed me to learn and grow as an HR professional and to move into management and now a leadership role across a broader range of services.

I have been in my current role for two years and am still loving working here at the council two decades after I started.

Now we are facing a new chapter of challenges with a new corporate leadership team that shares and supports the ambition my management team and I have, which is great. Challenges like the recruitment and skills shortage may not be new but the context and the breadth of challenge most certainly is. This is what excites me as it needs a different approach to respond to today's agenda, so being open to new ways of working and willing to acquire new skills is key to future success.

**What is your secret of success?**

The success I have achieved in my career to date is based a great deal on my willingness to be open to feedback, new ideas and always enthusiastic about taking on a new challenge. I have always been curious about how we can improve what we do to keep whatever service I am part of, or leading, fresh and relevant, and I am fortunate to work with lots of great people who are just as keen to



do so. This is so important in today's volatile climate.

**What are you most proud of?**

I am fortunate to have a fantastic team of people who do great work all the time so there is much to be proud of, but I am most proud of how we responded to the pandemic and shaped a wellbeing offer very quickly to respond to the unprecedented challenges facing our workforce – especially around mental and emotional health.

To deliver on this I brought together colleagues from different teams and disciplines to pool their expertise and make things happen as quickly as we could – it was a brilliant example of working in collaboration, at pace, trusting in colleagues and being willing to try out new ideas and ways of working – and it really paid off. We started with a fairly limited offer and now hear really good feedback from both new and existing colleagues about the wellbeing offer that we have continued to enhance and develop, and how that makes people feel about the council as an employer.

Technology has without doubt been a game changer in this regard and has

brought us many benefits such as enhancing our ability to connect more easily with people from all parts of the workforce on a level that we have never been able to do before.

We look optimistically at our recent reduction in the level of sickness absence levels for stress and anxiety, and as a result of the new approach to mental, emotional and physical

wellbeing, colleagues are now tapping into support resources at a much earlier stage enabling us to cope much better with the everyday challenges of work and life. Life is challenging for most people in so many different ways these days that anything we can do to provide practical help is really important to me.

**What is the biggest challenge you are currently experiencing across the council?**

Like most employers, it is all about recruitment – this challenge is facing every service area and professional community of the council on a scale that I have never experienced before.

Consequently, we have had to review our approach to the way we seek to retain our existing workforce as well as what we do to attract new colleagues to join us and remain competitive in the marketplace. We always prided ourselves that we could offer great flexibility as part of our recruitment strategy and this is no longer a differentiator – this is an expectation post-covid, so we have to be better at selling the variety of opportunities we can offer. The scope to move around and develop your career and enhance skills – this is something that sets us apart and we need to shout loud about this and promote local government as a great place to work.

We are currently revising our people strategy and that has a strong focus on developing our own talent across the council, especially through the apprenticeship programme. Of course, we need to appeal to everyone who is active in the employment market, but younger workers are a key area for us to target for the future and this will be another key area of focus.

The recruitment and retention challenges are clearly going to be around for a while, so we need to take a different approach in the way we both market ourselves as a great place to work, and also how we grow and develop our own skilled and talented workforce for today and tomorrow.

**What is it like to work for a chief executive who used to be the HRD in your council?**

Refreshing. It is brilliant to work alongside a leader who has a full





appreciation of the role of HR and especially OD and its criticality in delivering culture change and transformation for the council. I feel very fortunate the great work that my teams do is valued and recognised as critical to the council's future success and a key enabler to the delivery of the council's ambitions.

People items are now consistently high on the agenda at a leadership level – there is a sharp focus on what action needs to be taken to make the council a great place to work. There is also an absolute commitment to being a compassionate and inclusive employer led from the front by Stephen Moir and running through everything that we do, which is incredibly positive and inspiring for us in HR.

**How is technology changing the way you are delivering your HR and OD services?**

It has certainly helped to ensure we are better at getting the basics right and it is now timely to consider how it can support further business transformation. This is not just about what we do in HR but how we connect with all other enabling functions across the council such as finance, IT and procurement and technology is a key enabler to future success.

**What difference do you want your team to have made by the end of 2023?**

This is a tough one to answer, but if I can only pick one, it would have to be related to recruitment. It's a key risk for every part of the council and success for the team must be to know that we have put effective measures in place which reduce this risk especially for our critical services, and that those service leads have more confidence that we are making headway with the challenge.

Everyone is facing the same problem, so we need to be more creative and look for new solutions to make a difference. It's this type of challenge that makes HR such a brilliant profession to work in and I am confident we will succeed. 🌈



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**By Andi Britt, IBM Senior Partner and Talent Transformation Leader, IBM Consulting**

If the pandemic didn't put people and workforce management near the top of the company's agenda, then the imminent recession certainly will. The corporate disruption of the last few years has forced all organisations, in public and private sector, to think again about the size, shape and skills of its human capital – and to ask hard questions about how its people and talent will be able to adapt to a more volatile and uncertain economic and competitive environment.

That's why HR professionals might be now more critical than ever to an organisation's success; they need to come prepared with answers as to how the business will be able to adapt to the new economic realities, the digital revolution and the changing expectations of a workforce that has got used to working from home.

In IBM's research study *Accelerating the journey to HR 3.0* we identified five competencies, drawn from interviews with more than 500 HR leaders, that HR professionals need to bring to the organisation to help navigate the journey ahead.

**Employee experience is everything**

Employees today expect their interactions at work to be as intuitive and hassle-free as using their iPhone. Gone are the days of designing complex people processes that cater for every eventuality; instead HR needs to strip out complexity, remove unnecessary approvals and make HR processes simpler.

**Transparency is a given**

In a world where tweets go viral and corporate reputations can be damaged within 24 hours, HR has to work out how to make

the employer/employee conversation open, genuine and two-way. HR needs to shape an engagement culture where people can voice their views internally, before they voice their discontent on Glassdoor.

**Being agile (or 'speed') is the new business competency**

When a company's competitive advantage can be eroded overnight by a high tech start up or internet giant with a smarter way of making money, then HR needs to help the organisation develop the discipline, mindset and willingness to do things fast. HR needs to re-wire the organisation and its people management systems so that experimentation and rapid iteration become the default way of working.

**Skills are the new business currency**

As businesses adapt to new market conditions, changing customer expectations and the limitless possibilities afforded by new technologies, such as AI and automation, the skills of their employees will need to evolve too. HR professionals will need to be smarter at predicting what skills are needed, measuring what skills are available and then planning how to bridge the gap.

**Workforce insights**

HR is becoming more a science than an art; today's HR professionals need to be able to analyse the rich datasets offered by their HR systems to make smarter decisions on whom to hire, whom to reward, where to reskill and how to retain.

Will HR be up to the task? In our research study 70% of business leaders felt that the HR function needed to reinvent itself. Our findings reveal this is not an attempt to dismiss the contribution made by HR, but an urgent plea for help from the top for HR professionals to play their part in transforming the business. It's time for HR to take the wheel. 🌈



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# Leadership skills for thriving in a hybrid workplace



By **Juliette Alban-Metcalf**  
– Chartered Occupational  
Psychologist and CEO of Real  
World Group

The virtually overnight shift to hybrid working for local government organisations caused by the pandemic has created an extremely steep learning curve.

Among the various successes and failures, one of the biggest areas of hybrid working that organisations continue to struggle with is leadership of hybrid teams, with employees expressing dissatisfaction with the current situation and leaders feeling ill.

The root of the issue is that organisations don't yet know what effective hybrid leadership looks like. Even though it isn't actually that new (just much more widespread) it has been chronically under-researched. They are having to rely on trial-and-error, conjecture and opinion, rather than being able to access good-quality evidence on which to base practice.

At Real World Group, we are trying to generate that evidence by conducting ground-breaking research into what characterises effective leadership of hybrid teams, and much of the data has been gathered in local government. Here's a summary of some key things we've learned so far that effective leaders of hybrid teams do.

## Manage by outputs

Successful hybrid leaders are able to manage their team by outputs rather than requiring visibility, monitoring employees' work process or mandating specific hours. They are as relaxed as possible about when people work as long

as it doesn't interfere with workflow and coordination with others. They try to allow team members to decide when they will be in the office based on what works best for them and their activities – as long as it also works well for the wider team.

## Try to embed fairness

Fairness covers a range of issues from ensuring people are in the office when they are needed by the team to not doing things that are unreasonable when they work from home that distract from efficient work. It also relates to giving enough of their focus to those people who they may come across less often in the course of their day-to-day work or when they are in the office, and ensuring that everyone gets regular updates, not just those they happen to interact with more.

## Empower their team regarding ways of working

Successful hybrid leaders allow their team to make their own rules about how best to coordinate in a hybrid pattern. They draw upon the unique knowledge their team has about what works best for them to shape how they can be as efficient and effective as possible in managing dependencies so that the team isn't hindered by not being together all the time.

They invite discussion about which meetings it is essential that individuals attend and which are not a good use of their time. They also ask their team whether their own presence in meetings is valuable, or whether the team would run them even better on their own.

## Support efforts to make work more efficient

Effective hybrid leaders ensure that the meetings their

team holds with each other and their stakeholders are well prepared for, inclusive (such as not dominated by those people who are in-person at the time) and that they make good use of supporting technology.

They also help their team members avoid meeting overload by encouraging them to attend the right meetings rather than all meetings, and encourage them to leave sufficient gaps between meetings so they can have a break.

## Proactively build connections with their team

Another key finding has been that the most effective leaders of hybrid teams proactively build connections between themselves and their individual team members. They behave in appropriately relaxed and 'human' ways with their colleagues – rather than all interactions being formal or about work.

They make themselves more accessible by sharing their diaries and returning calls in a timely manner. They avoid using email where a different form of communication is better, and actively reach out to keep in touch with people about both work and their wellbeing.

Related to this, they also create opportunities for team members to strengthen the quality of their connection with each other – which has significant benefits for all aspects of team performance.

It is fair to say that many of the behaviours described above are what we need for effective in-person teams too, and have done for many years. Today, the leadership challenges created by the shift to hybrid working offer all local authorities the burning platform needed to prioritise a focus on truly great leadership so that their communities and their own people can thrive. 