

HRD

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ROUNDTABLE

THE FUTURE OF HR:
AS THE DIGITAL ERA
RE-DEFINES THE WORLD,
DRIVE CHANGE OR BE
CHANGED - SHAPE
OR BE SHAPED

KIM HEALEY, PEOPLE DIRECTOR - EVERTON FOOTBALL CLUB

{ THE HUMAN LEAGUE }

“DO WE NEED MORE FEMALE REPRESENTATIVES
ACROSS FOOTBALL? YES, WE DO”

ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

ENGAGEMENT Data cannot and will never tell the full story. In analytics, are we in danger of worshipping a false god?

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT Knowledge, democratically shared, so that critical information is not locked in silos, or people's heads

DIGITISING HR It's not automation, self-service or industrial efficiency, it's about personalisation, on an unprecedented scale

THE FUTURE OF WORK We are, by our own volition, creating technology that could evolve without us. Question is, can we coexist?



FROM MUSHROOM SYNDROME TO HOTHOUSE FLOWERS

In a traditional command and control environment, it served a purpose for knowledge to be accessible only to the privileged few. But now, organisational structures must support and promote creativity at every level and not simply focus on efficiency; we need original thinking rather than implementation. Knowledge must be democratically shared and built upon, so that critical information is not locked in silos or, worse still, locked in people's heads.



ARTICLE BY JOHN WILLIAMS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE - THE AGILE BUSINESS CONSORTIUM

In times past, only those empowered to make decisions needed to understand the full picture. But in today's workplace, information needs to be readily available so that decisions can be made swiftly by those closest to the challenges that need to be addressed. Knowledge-sharing, rather than knowledge-ownership, needs to be the norm, avoiding a dangerous loss of intellectual assets when change causes knowledge to walk out of the door. For a business to be adaptive and responsive to the impacts of the environment in which it operates, decisions need to be made while they still have the power to be effective. We live in a fast-moving world, with less time to submit suggestions for approval up the ladder. High

performing organisations now look more like networks than hierarchies, with structural connections reflecting patterns of collaboration, rather than reporting lines. Organisations need to consider knowledge and knowledge flow as a collective resource. Mark Newman, CEO of The Morphix Company, suggests that organisations need to explicitly codify knowledge as part of their business architecture: "We need to look at where knowledge sits in the organisation, and design this intentionally to support strategic agility. Too often, business architecture is accidental or exists purely on a legacy basis. Organisations should support and improve knowledge transfer as an imperative to maintain agility. How employees understand the

connection between strategy and their own activities will affect how they respond to change. There needs to be a shared view that fosters alignment and consensus. Knowledge is acquired through learning and organisations must develop learning processes to stay competitive and sustain performance."

Our Consortium research, in collaboration with the University of Central Lancashire and the Open University, studied knowledge sharing in a multinational organisation operating in the UK, USA and India. The study took place in 2016 and focused on practices such as: ease-of-knowledge sharing and motivation for knowledge sharing. It revealed the degree to which organisations rely on informal networks to

sustain knowledge flow. It found that, informal discussions are the most common way of sharing knowledge within project teams and with company colleagues; that meetings are the most common way of sharing knowledge with the customer and that knowledge sharing is easier within project teams than with company colleagues or customers. A particularly compelling revelation was that staff are motivated to share knowledge because they want to, rather than because the company asks them to, and the more agile practices staff use, the easier they find knowledge sharing with team members. Equally, the more agile practices staff use, the more frequently they share knowledge within teams and with customers. Knowledge sharing and creating a knowledge flow through an organisation is not something that comes naturally. It must be built into the culture and systems, and carefully nurtured. This is essential because effective collaboration cannot happen without it, and collaborative working is more adaptive, responsive and creative within a constantly shifting environment.

It should be a key function of HR to foster collaboration, break down siloed departmental working and create a culture where consolidated knowledge and creativity can be aligned behind organisational challenges. Agile thinking can help, along with customer delight firmly at the heart of the business, and empowering employees to develop and grow to deliver that. In an agile culture, knowledge is in the ownership of the collective and ceases to be a badge that represents power and influence. By contrast, when individuals and departments are in competition with each other, jockeying for position and status, knowledge will always be hoarded and held close. It makes sense that working in a transparent way makes knowledge sharing easier. Where there is transparency, communication becomes part of day-to-day operations. When everyone has access to the same information, formal meetings are no longer needed to transfer knowledge, and stakeholders can see for themselves.

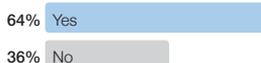
At our recent conference, Dr Nicola Millard, Head of Customer Insights & Futures at BT, remarked that “Email is a terrible collaborative tool”. It was an attention-catching statement about an almost universal communication platform. Of course, there are today many other options, but email remains the most prevalent communication tool, even if it may not be the ‘best’. Research from Connected Commons suggests most managers now spend 85 percent or more of their work time on email, in meetings, and on the phone. Email dominates because it is a universal currency - everyone has email. Compare that with the frustration of looking for information that you know has been sent, but could be sitting on any one of a variety of options such as Skype, Slack, Trello, Asana and so on. Email, however, falls down on categorising knowledge, whereas other platforms can group communications around topics, and invite feedback directly into the issue where it is needed. As a consequence,


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 LANDSCAPING
 COMPANY
 CLEVERLY ADDED
 NO PATHS UNTIL
 THE GRASS
 HAD BEEN
 WORN WHERE
 PEOPLE WERE
 WALKING. THEY
 THEN ADDED
 THE PATHS TO
 FOLLOW THESE
 UNOFFICIAL
 ROUTES.
 SIMILARLY,
 ORGANISATIONS
 CAN FIND OUT
 WHERE THE
 UNOFFICIAL
 KNOWLEDGE
 FLOW IS
 DIRECTED



 @theHRDIRECTOR
 TWITTER POLL

Do you feel confident about sharing knowledge in your organisation?



organisations really do need to dedicate more focus to identifying knowledge sharing paths.

Collaborative technology is developing fast and improving by the day, and knowledge can now be visualised and shared for virtual teams almost as easily as for those that are co-located. Teams distributed across the globe can now access and comment, in real-time, on the same information held on project boards, and instant chat tools. Mark Newman designs organisational infrastructure to support business agility and he champions the value of knowledge-sharing technology for distributed teams: “Allow critical information to be clarified, and provides a collaborative process, where ideas can be critiqued and improved. Where the infrastructure is in place, knowledge is less likely to be ‘lost’. It becomes accessible to all and prevents resources being wasted through people constantly reinventing the wheel”. Much can be achieved by noticing the informal routes that knowledge follows.

Some years ago, building work at Newcastle University involved new landscaping of the surrounding areas. The landscaping company cleverly added no paths until the grass had been worn where people were walking. They then added the paths to follow these unofficial routes. Similarly, organisations can find out where the unofficial knowledge flow is directed, which can be used to create an effective new system. This becomes more complex when teams are split across regions and unofficial face-to-face contact is less frequent or completely absent. Technology is still limited and very binary; either you’re online or you’re not, and you can very easily lose that valuable balance of formal and informal communication, the incidental chatter at the water cooler that, not only passes on useful information, but creates social bonds and trust. The success of collaboration has much to do with the ability to step into the shoes of others and appreciate their perspective. It is the informal connections that develop this, making real-time text transmissions of thoughts and ideas invaluable. Breathing the same air will always bond people in a way that virtual contact never can, but much can be done through transparent working practices and maintaining a conscious focus on sharing and capturing knowledge.

Innovation is the key to business success in a world that moves fast, and where competitive advantage can only be achieved by exploring new ideas. Successful organisations are the ones aware that great ideas can come from anywhere, and so they put the systems in place to gather ideas and knowledge, regardless of the status of its source. HR has a key role in creating an effective route plan to drive that innovation. ●

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