

Unique People

UP



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Summer 2019 – Issue 7

In this issue:

The truth about AI

IAN HOAD

Ian Hoad, Divisional Chairman, (Yorkshire
& North East), Keepmoat Homes talks
us through his career to date



with Theresa Spencer

An interview with the Financial Director
of Ring Automotive and the challenges
which arise with the role



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Welcome to the Summer Newsletter

Hello and welcome to the new edition of Unique People magazine, and once again it's been quite an interesting few months since our last publication!

Of course there's the big news: Boris is now our Prime Minister. He's pledged to go all guns blazing to achieve Brexit, Noel-Edmonds-style deal or no deal, and the UK economy reportedly shrunk by 0.2% in Q2.

A mixed bag indeed, however it does appear that despite the uncertainty nationwide, wages in the UK are actually on the rise, with the Recruitment & Employment Confederation reporting a regular pay increase of 1.7% - so things aren't all doom and gloom.

Another topic which is already very prominent in the world of business and set to be even more so in the near future is the rise of Artificial Intelligence, whether it's worth the hype as it stands today and the reality of how much it's actually affecting employment.

Finally, we talk to Ian Hoad (Divisional Chairman for Keepmoat Homes) about his career to date and the qualities he believes make for a successful leader, and Theresa Spencer (Finance Director at Ring Automotive) about driving

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In this issue, we take a look at some of the hot topics and key trends facing businesses at the minute.

One of these being the ex-taboo subject which has taken the media by storm in recent years: Mental Health. We look at what companies are doing to support those with mental health issues, how much progress has been made in raising awareness of it and what the future holds for those fighting to take it further.

financial performance, and her predictions for the next 12 months.

I hope you continue to find Unique People an interesting read. As always, we are happy to receive recommendations about what it is you as the reader would like to see in our future issues, so please get in touch with those ideas or feedback you might have.

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Current talent trends

Artificial Intelligence

From chatbots, to Computer Assisted Technology (CAT), AI is making an impact in HR and is high on every organisations agenda.



A PwC survey suggests, 'only 2% of UK CEOs have introduced AI initiatives on a wide scale and 36% have no plans to pursue any AI initiatives in the next three years.' However, this is not stopping us discussing what the future of work might look like, and we are already starting to see a shift from conversations around machine versus man, as organisations start to see new roles developing as AI evolves. With this in mind predicting employee performance and ability to adapt will become significant with newly developed tools able to support employers.

Mind the skills gap

If there's one thing that surveys and reports around the Industrial Revolution 4.0 have highlighted, it's the skills gap that currently exists in the market.

Whilst employment is at an all-time high, some roles are still going unfilled for many months. And significantly, it's not just in areas like engineering where roles are changing as technology starts to revolutionise



Around 85% of candidates failed to include the most desirable skill of 'adaptability' on their CV

traditional practices; a recent report highlighted the most difficult role to fill was that of an 'Optometrist with employers struggling to fill almost 69% of vacancies.'

However, it's also how you present your skills on paper, around 85% of candidates failed to include the most

desirable skill of 'adaptability' on their CV. If recent articles are anything to go by, we'll certainly see more talk about the increasing number of, and different types of skills that employees are now looking for; and what employers and employees can do to ensure they have access to the best training to up-skill and develop.



Employee engagement and well-being

Employee well-being will certainly continue to be a key conversation point in organisations throughout 2019.

A recent Twitter, 'Time to Change' post, saw almost a quarter of people (24%) say they could now start a conversation about mental health at work. Alongside this, many companies are looking at new initiatives for work-life balance – flexi working, investment in health programs and ways to use technology to help teams stay connected, but not overly connected, to work.

The Rise of Social Capital

As companies seek to gain insights into what drives individual, team and organisational performance and productivity, there is a growing focus on maximising the value of the organisation's social capital – namely how individuals and teams are connected within the enterprise. This has seen a rapid growth in companies using **Organisational Network Analysis (ONA)** to map relationships, identify key influencers, highlight employees at risk of burnout, and get insights on performance and support innovation amongst other uses.



The rise of flexible working

An ever-growing number of employees want to work remotely or have greater flexibility in terms of work hours. In fact, a 2018 study by Powwownow found that 75% of UK employees wanted the option of working flexibly.



And this trend is certain to increase in 2019. A survey by XpertHR found that requests from employees for more flexible working have increased dramatically over the last two years and will continue to rise this year. Technology has made it easier than ever to enable remote working. Staff can now access all documents and systems through the cloud, so are no longer reliant on office-based devices, and many organisations are turning to hot desking. Firms that embrace the demand for flexible working will also reap rewards, as remote working improves work-life balance and leads to healthier, happier and more productive employees. For HR, the main challenge will be to convince leaders with long-held beliefs that flexible working will lead to employees exploiting their new-found freedom, resulting in a drop in productivity.

Big Data

From GDPR to people analytics, 'Big Data' and how your organisation uses that information matters.

Psychometric assessments is certainly one way HR teams can use data to have a positive impact on the recruitment process, helping to reduce the risk of a 'bad hire', predicting future success and reducing staff turnover.

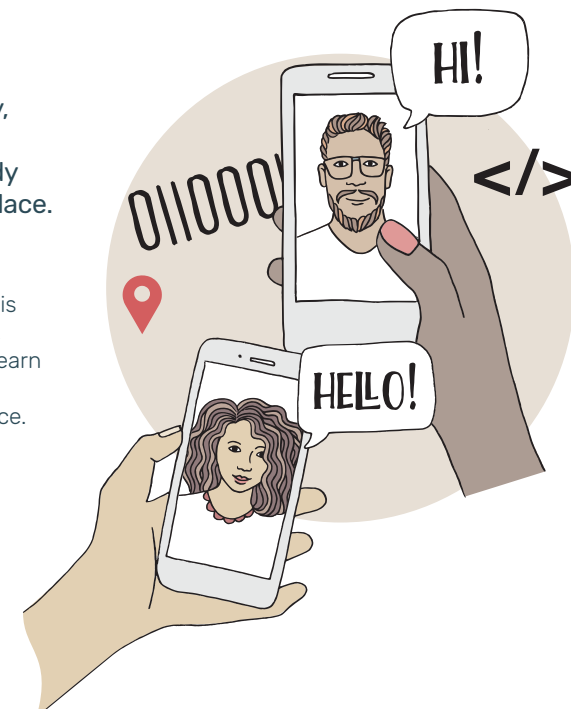


Generation Z

Entrenched in technology, the oldest members of 'Generation Z' have already begun to enter the workplace.

In 2019 we can expect to see new discussions around how employers can best support this new workforce. Socially aware, culturally conscious, ready to learn – but think digital learning, and searching for a work-life balance.

The question seems to be: **Is your organisation ready for Gen Z?**



THE TRUTH ABOUT AI

Everywhere you look, there are statistics, articles, and posts on LinkedIn about the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and how the apparent favoured use of robots will eventually create a mass-displacement of jobs for UK employees.

In short, it only seems to be doom and gloom, but is that really what's happening? How are employees really being affected?

PA Consulting recently performed a survey, asking HR professionals how they approach AI and automation, and the findings make for very interesting reading. As a starting point, not all organisations have even started to invest in AI and automation, with only around 32% of UK organisations investing in new technology in the last 5 years.

This is split fairly evenly between those which use technology for cognitive tasks e.g. algorithms in chat bots (22%), and those which use technology for physical tasks (20%).

Those that have begun investing however, have already realised various benefits. Over half said they have seen an improvement in the quality of services they provide (52%). And over a third (37%) have realised reduced costs. Finally, over a third (34%) have seen their revenue increase, following investment in AI and automation.

For those organisations that are introducing new technology, it's important to note that automation isn't only reducing jobs, it's also creating them too. 43% of those who introduced AI and technology report that jobs

have been created, whilst slightly fewer reported that jobs have been lost (40%). Overall, 35% of employers saw more jobs as a result, whilst a quarter (25%) saw fewer jobs.

Job quality and well-being is also being affected by the introduction of AI, but not in the way you'd expect. Employees report that they are actually spending more time learning and creating - 43% of the employees surveyed said they were spending more time learning new things, whilst only 6% were spending less time. Time spent doing monotonous tasks has also reduced drastically. Half of employees we surveyed (50%) said that they were spending less time doing monotonous tasks, allowing more time for training, development, and leading to much more job satisfaction.

So what can we draw from these findings? Put simply, the relationship between technology and the human workforce is a complex one, and is not going to be as easy to navigate as some would believe. Though technology may change the way we work, employers have the careful decision as to when, how, and even if they are going to utilise it. The application of technology at work is by no means an inevitability.

Nigel Brewster,
Partner, Brewster
McBride



For a productive and effective implementation of automation and AI, the following could be useful points to consider:

- Focus on job quality as an outcome measure to ensure AI and automation is appropriate and meaningful for those involved.
- Foster an innovation culture that adapts and accepts AI and automation and empowers employees to use new technologies.
- Consult your employees on technology decisions, allowing them to shape the decisions that impact the work that they do.
- Ensure all employees affected are offered learning and development opportunities to up-skill as necessary.





with Ian Hoad

Ian joined Keepmoat Homes in 2009 and moved from The Midlands to Yorkshire in 2010. With an impressive track record in the housing industry working at a senior level, he has served as Operations Director and then the Regional Managing Director of Keepmoat Homes Yorkshire One region.

Q Please talk us through the early part of your career.

A I started my career in the house building industry back in 1996 as a Technical Trainee and have been with Keepmoat Homes since 2009, as Regional Development Manager in the Midlands region. After 12 months, I moved to the Yorkshire region where I've held a variety of roles including Operations Director, Regional Managing Director and now Divisional Chairman of the Yorkshire and North East regions.

Although my role now is a long way from that of the Technical Trainee I once was, the skills I've learnt and experiences I've had across my varied career in the house building industry have placed me in good stead for the challenge of being a Divisional Chairman.

Q What would you say are the key leadership tools and strategies needed for leading a significant region of a 'top 10' national house builder business?

A Right now, for our business, the best strategy is always having the right people in the right roles with a shared vision. At Keepmoat Homes we're fortunate to have a fantastic Chief Executive Officer and an Executive Team with a plethora of experience who have shared with all the regional teams a vision for the company and its future.

This openness from the senior levels of the organisation ensures that everyone within the business understands what they are working to achieve. It also helps support a culture of collaboration that means, as a national house builder, we learn from the successes and challenges of each of our regions to create a way forward that has quality at its core.

Continues overleaf →





with Ian Hoad

Q What do you think has been the biggest challenge in your career so far, and how did you overcome it?

A The biggest challenge I've faced so far is also probably one of the proudest moments in my career; helping split our Yorkshire business and launching our Yorkshire One (West) region in 2016.

The setting up of a new region is always wrought with challenges and in this case splitting an established region is no different. As a 'new region' we knew we needed the land pipeline to ensure we could continue to deliver quality new homes for our future customers but we also needed to ensure we had the right people in place to make that happen. Now as much as I'd love to say I overcame all of the challenges a new region faces by sheer force of nature, I can't. We achieved our goals and tackled our challenges because we worked as a team and I was supported in the whole process by colleagues from across the business ranging from the Chief Executive Officer to other Regional Directors and members of Keepmoat's shared services team.

As a result of this I always find two of our business' core values to be important during a challenge; that is to be 'collaborative' and 'creative'. Collaborative because as a business leader, whether you're a Manager, Director, Managing Director, Chairman or Chief Executive Officer, it's important to remember that everyone in the business plays their part and that we must work together to deliver the very best results. And creative because when facing a challenge you need to be flexible, resourceful and importantly open to listening and learning from all corners in order to achieve a solution that delivers the outcome you want and need.

I'm pleased to say that now the region is delivering approximately 550 new homes a year across some truly fantastic developments, which includes part of Leeds City Council's Brownfield Land Programme and the creation of 295 homes in Bradford as part of the New Bolton Woods Urban Village.



30,000
homes & counting



Over 60
locations across the UK



Over 90
years of homebuilding

Q What do you think is the most challenging thing about being a Divisional Chairman in the current economic and political climate?

A A big challenge for every house builder in any economic or political environment is always land acquisition, as we must always be looking to the future, and this can obviously be significantly impacted by economic and political conditions. However for a Divisional Chairman, the challenge is to always ensure that we have the right people in the right roles and that they feel empowered to get on and do the job of delivering quality, new homes for our customers. At present I'm lucky that the teams we've built up across my division have a good mix, which includes experience within the industry and young talent that is keen to develop and progress, but all share the passion to deliver the types of new homes which we can be proud of and which our customers can enjoy.

Q What are the challenges you foresee over the next three years, potentially factoring a negative Brexit scenario?

A I think to appreciate the potential challenges the future holds it's important to focus on the fact that my role is to ensure that the three regions within my division deliver the ambitions of our Executive Team – delivering quality new homes that provide our customers with the chance to get on the property ladder. Therefore looking ahead to the next three years, I don't think the core of that role will change, however I am looking ahead and planning for the potential impact that upcoming reforms to Help to Buy could have. At present over 70% of our homes are sold to first time buyers with many utilising Help to Buy support, therefore

it's important that we stay on top of any potential reforms so we can make sure that we are able to offer the correct advice and support to our customers.

Looking at the impact of Brexit, there are some commonly discussed topics, such as the impact on workforce and consumer confidence that as a business we're tracking and obviously need to be aware of. For me, our average selling price of £156,000 provides us with a market differentiator, which I think will remain an attractive opportunity for customers looking to get a quality new home. While tackling the challenge of an aging workforce is something as a business we are always seeking to do, whether it's through promoting the career opportunities that are available within the industry at schools, to supporting local further education providers such as colleges and universities through work experience programmes and apprenticeships.

It is important that, as a leading UK home builder, we support the industry to bring in new talent and that we promote the opportunities for progression that exist. For example, recently Dan Crew was promoted to the role of Regional Managing Director for our Yorkshire Two (East) region; Dan had previously been the Land and Partnerships Director, but he started his career with Keepmoat Homes a decade ago as a Land Co-ordinator. Stories such as his, and I suppose also my own of rising from Technical Trainee to Divisional Chairman are important to share to show people at the start of their careers there are opportunities beyond their current roles and to people considering a career that this is a rewarding profession to be a part of.



Q What qualities do you think you need to be a successful Divisional Chairman and leader of a house builder division in today's current climate?

A I think the qualities needed to be successful as a Divisional Chairman are really just the same as the values which Keepmoat Homes is run by.

I believe that being straightforward, passionate, open to collaboration and teamwork, and being resourceful so that any challenges are approached creatively in order to deliver positive solutions.

I believe that these traits enable you not only to get the best out of yourself but also to inspire and get the best

out of your teams. Which in roles from Site Manager to Regional Director is important. House building is a people industry, we must always remember that at the end of the day we are responsible for delivering places that will be called 'home'.



Q What do you predict are the key developments in the house building sector in the next five years, for example, the Help to Buy scheme ends in 2023?

A Four years is a long time, and with Help to Buy reforms in 2021 before the launch of a potential new scheme in 2023, I believe this will force all house builders to become even more customer focused. Within our business this customer focus ethos is being led from all areas from our Chief Executive Officer and Executive Team to every regional team and site team. As I mentioned earlier, it's crucial we don't take for granted the role we have in delivering quality homes.

The country's need for quality housing will also see an increase in the use of modern methods of construction, from timber frame construction to modular factory built homes, we

will see further investment in the processes. Within our business we have been working with Ilke Homes since its inception to ensure that we are at forefront of embracing modular technology. We worked with them to shape house designs to meet the needs of our customers and have already successfully brought modular homes to a number of our sites, in particular in my division we have brought units to our development in Hull – which recently won a Constructing Excellence Yorkshire and Humber award. Looking to the future we will also be bringing 202 modular units to the upcoming second phase of our Carr Lodge development in Doncaster, which equates to roughly 43% of the total development.

Modular, offsite construction offers a number of benefits to the industry. Not only does it bring additionality into the sector, which we all know is

regularly challenged to deliver more good quality homes, faster. Offsite construction also supports the skills challenge that was mentioned earlier, as working in a clean, dry and warm factory offers a more appealing career than traditional site conditions, it also means that inclement weather becomes less of a cause for delay.

Finally, I believe that modern methods of construction and the use of modular construction will only further support the industry's customer focus. The use of the latest precision engineering, high levels of quality assurance backed by the same NHBC Build Mark warranty that traditional homes offer and the high levels of both thermal and sound insulation; means that these new homes offer the benefits of potentially lower running costs and less aftercare maintenance to their owners.

Finding your voice at work

Enabling employee 'voice' is extremely important and benefits both the employer and employee. Ensuring employees feel comfortable vocalising their thoughts, opinions and experiences allows employees to influence matters that they deem important.

CIPD research shows that this helps give meaning to their work, ensuring a good quality of working life. This is not to forget the positive organisational benefits this can bring, such as improving engagement and reducing absenteeism. Organisations benefit from encouraging their employees to speak up and feel comfortable sharing creative ideas. Unfortunately, CIPD research on good work and job quality indicates that enabling staff to speak up is far from being a pillar of all UK jobs. Too often it seems, those who wish to bring up difficult topics are being silenced. Perhaps more worryingly, we tend to silence ourselves instead of speaking up and feeling empowered to do so without fear of reprimand.

Researchers Megan Reitz and John Higgins, of Hult International Business School, used first and second-hand person surveys to explore speaking up in the workplace and enabling others to do so. Their work focused specifically on sexual harassment at work, but it's important to note that this subject fits in a much wider debate concerning many other difficult topics, and the act of silencing of ourselves and others. A number of themes emerge from Reitz and Higgins' work, particularly concerning the behaviour of leaders when faced with issues such as sexual harassment. Firstly, whether because of their role, personality or social circle, leaders may find that people think twice about speaking up to them with serious concerns.

Most good leaders will believe themselves to be open and friendly, but often don't understand how daunting it may actually be to approach them. Simply being higher up the ranks can isolate a leader from the rest

of their workforce. This may result in people bringing forward sanitised, false versions of reality to their managers. Worse still, all of us are guilty of keeping a 'circle of trust' with those you will speak honestly, in all aspects of life. This is particularly true of leaders. Outwardly projecting an attitude of 'everyone's voice must be heard' is somewhat undermined when a leader has a small number of people they prefer to listen to.

“ Most good leaders will believe themselves to be open and friendly, but often don't understand how daunting it may actually be to approach them. ”

Problems exist not only for those whose responsibility it is to encourage others to speak up, but also for those who wish to voice their concerns about topics such as sexual harassment. Reitz and Higgins uncovered five key themes which are relevant when discussing how to make more informed decisions about speaking up.

The first is conviction, meaning a person's belief in the value of their opinion. Workers lower down the organisational hierarchy often lack assurance over whether they have the right to speak up, or if there is value to what they say.

Individuals also tend to associate speaking up with a high level of risk. Concerns about being fired, shamed or losing reputation as a result of whistleblowing often prevent employees from saying anything.

Political awareness also affects the likelihood of an individual speaking out. Employees are aware of the games played in an organisation and the

political consequences of voicing serious concerns over behaviour. Many avoid disturbing agendas in order to maintain the company's status quo.

Similarly, social awareness of labels often prevents speaking up. A man who wants to make his voice heard might come across labels such as 'men can't be victims of sexual harassment'. Similarly, the label of 'young female' might have little influence without making allegiances

with someone further up the hierarchy.

Finally, judgement, or a lack thereof, often influences how/if an employee opens up about an issue. Bringing up a difficult subject involves knowing what to say, who to say it to, and when and how to say it. It requires confidence, conviction and a great deal of thought. Even then, it can easily backfire.

So, there are a number of difficulties we face when attempting to speak up about sensitive or challenging issues, and encouraging others to do so. It's clear that responsibility for facilitating open and honest communication does not fall solely on the shoulders of those who wish to voice concerns to a leader. Indeed, as well as leaders, HR has a responsibility to foster an environment in which difficult subjects are spoken about openly and without judgement.

**based on an article by CIPD.*



Neil Edwards,
Client Director,
Brewster Partners



Hot on the heels of her recent success as the winner of the 'Finance Deal of the Year Award' at the 2019 YFL Awards, Theresa Spencer already has an impressive CV and a Finance career spanning a number of different sectors. We talk to her about the challenges of being a Finance Director and her recent experiences at Ring Automotive.

Q Please talk us through your career to date and how you became Finance Director at Ring Automotive.

A I started my finance career in audit in Sheffield with what is now PWC. Once I qualified, I moved into industry and spent a total of seven years in London and Cambridge working in progressive Controllship roles in the Entertainment and Pharmaceutical sectors. In 2001, I moved back north, taking a European role in Doncaster with Fellowes, a global office products business. I spent 13 years with Fellowes in senior finance roles, including several years leading the Commercial Finance function reporting into the European President. This experience was particularly

valuable as it developed my commercial acumen and empathy, and sparked the keen interest I now have in business strategy and commercial performance. I subsequently felt ready to stretch my boundaries a bit further and moved into a CFO role with Parseq, a services business based in Rotherham. This was a private equity backed business and I quickly realised I enjoyed the pace and challenge within that dynamic. I was approached to join Ring in 2016 and it didn't take me long to conclude that Ring had great potential, was a perfect cultural fit for me and was backed by a very smart and supportive investor. It has been a great journey so far and, following the recent acquisition by Osram, is set to take a new exciting turn.

Continues overleaf →

Winner of over

190

product awards

More than

6,000

product lines

Offices in Leeds, Paris, Shenzhen and manufacturing

worldwide

Delivering to more than

3,000

customers in over 60 countries worldwide

Dispatching over

30

million bulbs per year



Winner of the
Finance Deal of the Year
at the 2019 Yorkshire Finance Leaders Awards



with Theresa Spencer

Q What do you think has been your biggest challenge in your career so far, and how did you overcome it?

A The biggest challenge for me so far was moving into my first CFO role at Parseq. It was also my first experience of working in a private equity environment. From day one I felt like I had suddenly been propelled into the real, raw world of running an SME. Most things I did in the early days I had never done before e.g. refinancing, acquisitions, managing covenants and investor relationships. It was both exhilarating and terrifying in equal measures. I relied heavily on my network throughout the learning curve – you can always find someone who has done it before! I asked loads of possibly stupid questions (without apology) and followed my instincts. I also ensured I was supported by a great FC and team, and we tackled the learnings together. Looking back, it was a critical personal growth stage for me and one I will always be glad I embraced.

Q What do you think is the most challenging thing about being a Finance Director in the current economic and political climate?

A For me the current level of uncertainty within the economic and political landscape is unprecedented and brings a whole new level of challenge for Finance Directors and indeed all business leaders. Risk management is a critical part of the FD role and trying to prepare your business for a variety of high impact scenarios that are highly speculative is difficult, time consuming and potentially costly.

Q What would you say are the key tools and strategies for driving forward financial performance in a business?

A It is critical to understand the quality of your top line sales and what the main drivers of your profitability are. Low margin “vanity” sales with high cost to serve will drain a business, particularly if the sales are not repeatable. Good quality MI which helps to highlight the variation in underlying sustainability is essential. I would also say that having routine and regular forward forecasting disciplines is important. The earlier you can identify what may lie ahead, the more time you have to act and mitigate. This only works, however, if projections are based more on reality than false hope!



Q How do you anticipate your role will change and develop over the next 12 months?

A The next 12-18 months will be a very exciting time for Ring, following the acquisition by Osram in May '19. There will be significant focus on integration activities and realisation of growth synergies. Ring will have a much bigger role to play in developing and executing a non-bulb product strategy that can support global expansion for the combined Osram/ Ring business. The FD will need to support and facilitate this. The financial and trading profile of the business will undoubtedly change as part of this. The FD will need to ensure the balance of investment and return is tightly managed and that the new profile is strong and sustainable.



Q What qualities do you think you need to be a successful FD and leader of a team?

A I think empathy and emotional intelligence are key to optimising as an FD and as a leader. Understanding and recognising different characters, behaviours, dynamics, environments and then adjusting your own approach to maximise your level of influence can really make a difference. You also need to be adept at surrounding yourself with experts, setting the agenda and then delivering through the people. As you progress you can't be the expert on everything, and you can't do it all yourself. You do, however, need to know enough to spot at a high level when something is not right. Not an easy balance but very important! When it comes to your team it's about being clear on expectations but also listening and supporting. There will be many different individuals who are motivated in different ways. If you manage them in a 'one size fits all' manner, you won't unlock their full potential.



Q How do you feel the roles of FD's and CFO's have changed over the last 5 years?

A In my experience there has definitely been a shift towards financial leaders playing a more commercial and strategic role in business. It is no longer sufficient to just be the gatekeeper ensuring the past is reported accurately. An FD who has empathy for the trading side of a business can offer a unique perspective on strategic direction and investment opportunities. I feel there is increasing headroom for well-rounded FD's, especially those with strong levels of emotional intelligence, to play a part in business leadership.

Q What do you predict are the key developments and trends we will see in your sector in the next 12 months?

A Customers in the Automotive Aftermarket are continuing to consolidate which will put increasing pressure on suppliers. There is also a growing on line market which is making it more difficult for traditional players to compete and maintain market share. The need to continually and consistently innovate, with quality, at speed will become more critical. However, as the arena of connected cars, electric vehicles, autonomous driving develops I would expect new opportunities for relevant solutions to emerge.



Ring is dedicated to helping motorists, technicians and commercial vehicle specialists get more from vehicles. We are constantly innovating to bring high performance, ground-breaking technology to motorists and professionals alike.



Our heritage is in high specification lighting and trade products. We understand that professionals need products that perform to an exceptional standard and that can take the pace in a tough working environment. We design our inspection lighting, battery tools and commercial vehicle components with professionals in mind, and test them extensively to make sure they'll perform under any circumstances.

What we've learnt in our trade products, we have put into our products for motorists. Whether it's a battery charger, dash cam, vehicle bulb or a tyre inflator, we make our products to solve the problems that motorists face - and help them enjoy better, safer driving.

Ring Carnation is our specialist division, that combines power management, vehicle lighting and safety systems to create a unique vehicle conversion package. This includes genesis™, the premier power management system for specialist vehicle applications.

Mental Health:

How much progress have we made?

Stress at work. Mental health awareness. Health and well-being. These are all phrases commonly banded around in the world of HR leaders and senior management teams, and has been a focus for a number of years now.

But how effective are organisations in creating mentally healthy workplaces for people? How much progress has been made, and where do we need to focus attention to improve mental well-being?

The CIPD have recently published their annual Health and well-being at work report with Simplyhealth. Completed by over 1,000 professionals in organisations covering 3.2 million employees, it provides a valuable window into the world of work and the state of people's well-being.

The findings reflect employers' growing recognition of their essential role in improving the health of people at work, and things are actually looking quite positive. Most respondents (86%) report their organisation is taking some action to manage employee mental health.

The top five approaches are:

- 61%** of employers implement a phased return to work and/or other reasonable adjustments
- 60%** of employers are increasing awareness of mental health issues across the workforce
- 48%** of employees have access to a counselling service
- 54%** Offering an employee assistance programme
- 40%** of companies are training managers to support staff with mental health

Sarah Metcalfe,
Research Associate
Brewster McBride



Whilst this is really good to see, there are some key challenges to overcome. Overall, nearly three-fifths have seen an increase in the number of reported common mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, among employees in the last 12 months. An increasing proportion of organisations include mental ill health among their main causes of short and long-term absence, with mental ill health the main cause of long-term absence.

“Overall, nearly three-fifths have seen an increase in the number of reported common mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, among employees in the last 12 months.”

Although most organisations are taking some action to manage employee mental health at work, just half of respondents believe their organisation is effective at supporting staff with mental ill health or that it actively promotes good mental well-being. Just two-fifths agree that staff are well informed about organisational support for mental health and even fewer agree that staff are well informed about mental health risks and symptoms.

The findings also show that just under a third of organisations agree that senior leaders encourage a focus on mental well-being through their actions

and behaviour. Just two-fifths provide managers with the training needed to support staff with mental ill health, although again this is a positive increase on previous years.

So the results are mixed, things are moving in the right direction, but there is a real need to make sure that employee mental health is being taken seriously at operational level, and integrated into line manager training and advice.

Those in senior management positions need to lead by example when it comes to fostering healthy, positive behaviours and communication around mental health, and be seen to be investing in training and strategies to help create a more supportive culture. The consequences if they don't could have a detrimental impact on productivity, absenteeism and (most importantly), the health and well-being of their employees.





Finding Unique People

Brewster McBride are specialists in the identification and attraction of Senior Managers, Directors, CEO's, Non-Executives and Trustees.

Working collaboratively with our clients, we take the time to understand their culture, their values, and exactly what they are looking for from a new senior hire. We are confident that our extensive network of senior executives, online resources and bespoke approach enables us to provide our clients with the highest quality service available.

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